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**Image Making: Representations of  
Women in the Art and Career of Safeya  
Binzagr from 1968 to 2000**

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**Doctor of Philosophy**

**University of Sussex**

**September 2014**

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

EIMAN ELGIBREEN DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IMAGE MAKING: REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN IN THE ART AND  
CAREER OF SAFEYA BINZAGR FROM 1968 TO 2000Summary

This thesis examines a selection of work by the Saudi female artist Safeya Binzagr (b.1940) from the years 1968 to 2000. It is argued that in order to claim agency for Saudi women and fight negative stereotypes Binzagr focused in her work on highlighting their authoritative traditional roles in the pre-oil society. Binzagr changed their status in the cultural discourse by producing images that compensate for the lack of visual representations of Saudi women, and also she perpetuated the influence of these images by placing them in a museum that functions as an education centre.

The thesis examines how space segregation and the conservative nature of Saudi society neither limited the artist's sense of control, nor forced her to overtly conflict with its norms. The first and second chapters highlight the cultural significance of Saudi society during the period in question and how it shaped Binzagr's work and career plans. The third chapter analyses Binzagr's representations of domestic life in old Jeddah, and how in her work she gave women an authoritative position over men. The fourth and fifth chapters examine the socio-religious boundaries of image making and explore how Binzagr's style and subject matter helped her breach this prohibition. Moreover, they demonstrate how Binzagr's sense of authority over her cultural heritage drove her to intervene and amend images of Saudi women in Orientalist photography.

The sixth chapter highlights the artist's relationship to the 'home'. It examines how family, ethnicity and class were used strategically to expand her audience group leading her to establish the first and only art museum in Saudi Arabia. Finally, the thesis concludes with a re-ordering of the crucial stages that shaped her career and style, and suggests that as an important part of , Saudi heritage religious based debates for Binzagr were an influential tool for negotiation.

**Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been, and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another university for the award of any other degree.

Eiman Elgibreen

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## Acknowledgements

This research would never have been completed without the generous joint scholarship of the Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University in Riyadh, and the Saudi Arabian Cultural Bureau in London. I would like to thank them for giving me this priceless opportunity and providing the financial resources to cover my tuition fees, living and travel costs. Their support has been complemented by the much-appreciated guidance of my supervisor, Dr Meaghan Clarke, who has given me unlimited academic support and encouragement to reach my goal. I also want to thank Dr Alice Correia for supervising my work during Dr Clarke's maternity leave and for keeping me on track, and Dr Francesco Ventrella for his valuable notes and suggestions for my thesis. My gratitude also goes to Fiona Allan and the entire staff of the University of Sussex for their continuous assistance and for answering my never-ending inquiries. You made my PhD journey a pleasant experience.

I would like to thank the staff at the King Abdulaziz Public Library in Riyadh, and Dr Saleh Khattab from the Saudi Ministry of Culture for understanding the obstacles of studying abroad, and for providing me with copies of some essential out-of-print and limited-edition source material. In addition, I must thank the Tate Britain library and archive in London, as well as the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C. for giving me permission to use their material on Binzagr's exhibitions. I would also like to thank the Royal Geographical Society in London, Central St Martin's archive and *ARTFORUM* for providing the necessary material, also Fahdah Alblushi and Aljoharah Alubied for writing and revising the interviews transcript.

Most importantly, I would like to thank Ms Safeya Binzagr for opening her doors and her heart since the first time we met, for giving me access to her most intimate memories and objects, and for dedicating so much of her time to meet me and answer my queries. Thank you for the trust and confidence you have shown in me – it is a true honour which I will always cherish. Words of gratitude go to the staff of Darat Safeya Binzagr in Jeddah, especially Kawthar Alfarhan, for sending the material I needed and for making sure that all my enquiries reached Ms Binzagr. This research has also benefitted from the knowledge and generous help of the historian Ahmad Badeeb. In addition to answering all my questions in detail, he provided more than one hundred of his informative articles about the cultural heritage and people of Jeddah.

Last but not least, I would like to express my gratitude to my parents for embedding their dreams in us, and for making my sisters and me believe at an early age that God created girls smarter than boys because they were destined to hold a PhD. Special thanks to my father for lending me material from his personal archive; and to him and my mother for reviewing my information about Saudi Arabia during the 1960s and 70s. Our long discussions helped me greatly to link gaps and reach conclusions. I would also like to thank my three sisters for reading my work, correcting my linguistic mistakes, and discussing my ideas whenever I felt trapped. Finally, I would like to thank my three brothers for travelling back and forth between Saudi and the UK to bring more source material for my research, and more brotherly love for my soul. To all the people mentioned above, thank you.



## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 A case study of a Saudi woman artist

This thesis, 'Image Making: Representations of Women in the Art and Career of Safeya Binzagr from 1968 to 2000', seeks to demonstrate how the Saudi female artist Safeya Binzagr exerted change through art in the conservative society of Saudi Arabia. During this period, image making in Saudi culture was considered sinful,<sup>1</sup> girls' education was a problematic issue, and women were not expected to have a professional career. What makes Safeya Binzagr a significant case is that she established a respectable position in Saudi Arabia, and changed the status of Saudi women in the collective memories of Saudis through her art career, without clashing with society's socio-religious norms. The role of this study is to demonstrate how she achieved this.

Safeya Binzagr, who was born in Jeddah (1940), made a historical breakthrough in 1970 when she became the first female artist to have a solo exhibition in Saudi Arabia.<sup>2</sup> This accomplishment came after her participation with her fellow artist Mounirah Mosly<sup>3</sup> in a joint exhibition in Jeddah in 1968.<sup>4</sup> The exhibition was also

<sup>1</sup> See: "باب عذاب المصورين يوم القيامة"، صحيح البخاري، تحقيق محمد زهير ناصر الناصر (بيروت: دار طوق النجاة، 2001)، 176؛ أنظر أيضاً نفس الجزء، نسخة مصورة عن السلطانية بإضافة ترقيم محمد فؤاد عبد الباقي، ج.7، الأحاديث رقم. 51-5950، 176؛ أنظر أيضاً نفس الجزء، الأحاديث رقم. 5963-5952؛ "باب بيع التصاوير التي ليس فيها روح، وما يكره من ذلك"، المرجع السابق، ج.3، رقم. 2225، 82؛ "باب تحريم تصوير صورة الحيوان وتحريم اتخاذ ما فيه صورة غير ممتنة"، صحيح مسلم، تحقيق محمد فؤاد عبد الباقي (بيروت: دار الكتب العلمية، 1992)، ج.3، الأحاديث رقم. 2104-2112، 1672-1663.

<sup>2</sup> محمد الرصيص، تاريخ الفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية (الرياض: وزارة الثقافة والإعلام وكالة الوزارة للشئون الثقافية، 2010)، 48.

<sup>3</sup> The English spelling of the artist's name, Mounirah Mosly, changes in some of Binzagr's publication. Therefore, this thesis uses the same spelling used in the artist's official website:

<http://www.mounirahmosly.com/>

<sup>4</sup> Safeya Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia: An Artist's View of the Past* (Lausanne and Geneva: Three Continents Publishers, Arabian Resource Management S.A., 1979), 9.

considered a historical breakthrough for both Binzagr and Mosly, since it was the first-ever public exhibition of female artists in the history of Saudi Arabia.<sup>5</sup>

Binzagr is known for her paintings of historical subjects from the pre-oil society<sup>6</sup> in Saudi Arabia: old cultural ceremonies and domestic life in the Arabian Peninsula<sup>7</sup> during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with a special focus on the heritage of Jeddah. Her success has continued since her debut in 1968. One of her many later accomplishments is establishing a private art museum in Jeddah under her name, Darat Safeya Binzagr. The admission is free for the public to see the entire collection of Binzagr's paintings, drawings, historical objects and costumes she used

<sup>5</sup> عبدالرحمن السليمان، *مسيرة الفن التشكيلي السعودي*، الثانية (الرياض: وزارة الثقافة والإعلام، وكالة الوزارة للشؤون الثقافية، 2012)، 83.

<sup>6</sup> Pre-oil society is a widely used term in history, anthropology, and socio economic scholarly work to describe the Gulf state societies, including Saudi Arabia, during the pre-modern era, and before the influx of the oil revenues in the 1950s. The main socio-political character of the pre-oil era was the 'rulership of shaikhdoms'. This included: 'the ruling families, the tribes and tribal guards, the merchants, the governors', and their 'small-scale societies' which consisted of tribes and villages rather than modern states. Moreover, pre-oil societies had limited resources, basic and traditional industries, small populations, and relied on local goods. See: James Onley and Sulayman Khalaf, 'Shaikhly Authority in the Pre-oil Gulf: An Historical–Anthropological Study', *History and Anthropology* 17, no. 3 (1 September 2006): 189, 191–92. See also: Steffen Hertog, *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats: Oil and the State in Saudi Arabia* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2010), 6, 14; Donald Powell Cole and Soraya Altorki, *Was Arabia Tribal?: A Reinterpretation of the Pre-Oil Society* (Arizona: Middle East Studies Association of North America, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> The Arabian Peninsula is a geological term that is widely used by the key Saudi historians, such as Hamad Al-Jasser, to refer to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region in the pre-modern era. The Arabian Peninsula consists of four regions: Najd and Hijaz, which creates two important regions of Saudi Arabia today; the Southern region, which is now divided between Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Oman; and finally, the Eastern region, which is also divided between Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Arabian Gulf countries. Therefore, it is suggested here that this name became popular in Saudi history for geopolitical reasons. It highlights the sovereignty of Saudi Arabia in the Arabian Peninsula since it controls 80% of its territory, and has the capacity to comprise all the different dynasties that ruled during the pre-modern era when almost every town was ruled by a different tribe or family until the Saud dynasty (rulers of Al-Diriyah town) was able to unite them all under the Saudi flag. See: حمد الجاسر، *رحالة غربيون في بلادنا عرض موجز لرحلات بعض الغربيين في قلب الجزيرة و شمالها مع ضميمة لها صلة بالرحلات* (الرياض: دار اليمامة للبحث والترجمة والنشر، 1996); Wayne H Bowen, *The History of Saudi Arabia* (Westport: Greenwood, 2008), 2, 59; Alexei Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, Kindle Edition (London: Saqi Books, 2013); James Wynbrandt, *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2004), 2. See also: David George Hogarth, *The Penetration of Arabia: A Record of the Development of Western Knowledge Concerning the Arabian Peninsula* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), for a historiography analysis of Western travel literature on the Arabian Peninsula; and for more recent works see: J.E. Peterson, 'The Arabian Peninsula in Modern Times: A Historiographical Survey of Recent Publications', *Journal of Arabian Studies: Arabia, the Gulf, and the Red Sea* 4, no. 2 (3 July 2014): 244–74.

earlier in her career as prototypes for her paintings.<sup>8</sup> In addition, she received many awards as her career progressed. These include: a recognition award from United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for works contributing to the protection of national heritage,<sup>9</sup> and a medallion of recognition for her creative accomplishments on the level of the GCC states –the Cooperation Council for the Arab State of the Gulf (GCC).<sup>10</sup>

The problem of this study is not, therefore, that Binzagr has not received formal recognition, either by awards or by documenting her precedence, but that art historians have lacked a frame of reference in which to place her work. There is no formal or content analysis of Binzagr's work, or for its cultural influence in shaping the image of women in the collective memory of the audience in their studies. Her work is often considered, and presented, as a scientific illustration of the past although she drew on primarily oral history and historic artefacts.<sup>11</sup> Hence her role has been acknowledged as preserving the cultural history of Saudi Arabia. However, the main argument of this study is that Binzagr's renderings of the pre-oil Saudi society act as powerful representations of herself, as well as of other Saudi women. She used art and writing to negotiate many sensitive subjects and change the viewpoints without showing overt resistance to the social norms. Her style and subject matter, as well as her family were strategically implemented in order to push the socio-religious boundaries of image

<sup>8</sup> See: Safeya Binzagr, ed., *A Three-Decade Journey with Saudi Heritage* (Jeddah: Darat Safeya Binzagr, 1999), which was printed on the occasion of establishing the museum.

<sup>9</sup> Safeya Binzagr, Second personal interview, interview by Eiman Elgibreen, Tape recording, 3 August 2010, Darat Safeya Binzagr, Jeddah, Transcript (Appendix 2): 'أنا وأخويا حق البيئة دا، رحنا للأردن يونس، ' هذا فيه برضوا ترشحت لأنه أنا أعتبر كحمية للتراث [attend] the environment event for UNEP. I was nominated for it because my work was considered a protection for national heritage'.

<sup>10</sup> حسين الحربي، 'وزراء الثقافة في دول مجلس التعاون الخليجية يعقدون اجتماعهم التاسع عشر ويكرمون المبدعين'، صحيفة الشرق، 3 أكتوبر 2013، العدد 669، قسم ثقافة <http://www.alsharq.net.sa/2013/10/03/960348>.

<sup>11</sup> See: محمد علي مغربي، ملامح الحياة الاجتماعية في الحجاز في القرن الرابع عشر للهجرة، الكتاب العربي السعودي؛ 55 (جدة: 1982، تهامة)، where Binzagr's work is used as illustrations; In سهيل سالم الحربي، التصوير التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية (الرياض: مؤسسة الفن النقي، 2003)، 96. Al-Harbi adds that some scholars wanted Binzagr to paint certain traditional scenes for their book, but does not state whether she responded to their request.

making, and use these images to restore Saudi women's agency by making it observable. However, the meaning of agency in this thesis comprises more than the observable actions of the painted women. It includes the artist's motivation, intention, and determination to change their image in art and in cultural history. Also, the use of the term here covers more forms other than decision making; it includes 'bargaining and negotiation, deception and manipulation',<sup>12</sup> as well as 'more intangible, cognitive processes of reflection and analysis'.<sup>13</sup> Which were exercised by the artist as an individual, and by the women she painted as collectivities.

The current research considers Saudi women's role, as presented in Binzagr's work, in two eras: the late nineteenth and early twentieth century which is the era Binzagr depicted, and the second half of the twentieth century in which she lived. She focused on presenting particular scenes and settings of the life of traditional Saudi women in an attempt to demonstrate how they performed their authority within the hierarchy of their traditional society. These women were observant of the socio-religious norms and expectations of the pre-modern and pre-oil society by staying home and veiled in public. However, Binzagr shows the extended dimension of segregated space by reminding the audience of its active social life, and the hierarchy and multitude of roles within it. This helped her in many ways to negotiate current issues resulting from the new oil-society which eliminated many traditional aspects of women's lives, such as going to the local Islamic teacher to learn reading and writing or making some money by selling goods at women's morning gatherings; yet did not allow them to enjoy the newly developed options, such as studying at modern schools or working in paid occupations. Therefore, Binzagr's work achieves more than preserving heritage – it maintains a certain status for women in the collective memory of Saudis.

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<sup>12</sup> Naila Kabeer, 'Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment', *Development and Change* 30, no. 3 (1 July 1999): 438.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Treating her work as illustrations rather than impressions dismisses the new perspective it offers on traditional gender roles and the pre-oil society of Saudi Arabia. Consequently, the main aim of this study is to analyse Binzagr's art, decisions and career choices, in order to demonstrate the nature and degree of her influence, and how she adapted to her situation and managed to break through. This thesis also suggests that the means of empowerment Binzagr has used overlaps with her representation of agency. In other words, the solutions or methods she has developed to overcome obstacles later become a representation, or evidence, of that achievement.

There are many complicated factors that hindered the acknowledgement of Binzagr's influence, but these mainly relate to two issues mentioned above: Binzagr's works are often understood as images of traditional and conservative domestic life that has no agency; and the quantity and quality of historical writing and art criticism in Saudi Arabia which affected the way her work is perceived by Saudis as will be examined in the literature review. However, the lack of recognition of traditional women's roles is a general problem in history regardless of their geographical and cultural location. In the introduction to her book, *Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History*, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich suggests a few important factors that explain the tendency to dismiss traditional female roles in history as unimportant, and therefore less visible. One of these is historians' way of considering what is worthy of being remembered and appreciated. Although some historians acknowledge the importance of women's contributions in the domestic sphere, many still 'assume that domestic roles haven't changed much over the centuries' and remained in a general state.<sup>14</sup> According to Ulrich, this assumption not only limits women, but limits the subject of history in general, which is why she emphasises that 'good historians' should go beyond

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<sup>14</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History* (USA: Vintage Books, 2008), xxi.

examining the actions of prominent people and major events.<sup>15</sup> She explains that it is part of the historian's role to follow broad changes in human behaviour, such as 'falling death rates or transatlantic migration',<sup>16</sup> and that domestic roles and other general states should be considered a significant part of a society's history. However, this is not an easy task. As Ulrich acknowledges, even a good historian can fail this task because of the scarcity of detailed records about women. Many women were illiterate in previous centuries,<sup>17</sup> and their histories, if written, were done so from the perspective of a different person. Therefore, Binzagr's work is particularly significant for offering a closer understanding of traditional Saudi women's perspective of themselves and their roles. The majority of her work draws on stories she heard from an older generation of women describing their lives in the past,<sup>18</sup> which is an aspect of Binzagr's work that has yet to be considered. Ulrich also stresses that written history can never be an innocent representation of the past; it is 'what later generations choose to remember'.<sup>19</sup> This supports the suggestion that Binzagr's work represent her agency. It is selective rather than objective, thus should be considered as an expression of her beliefs and perceptions about the past, rather than a scientific and detached recording.

It is important, however, to realise that appreciating the representation of agency in Binzagr's work requires a clear understanding of the cultural significance of women's roles in 'third-world' countries.<sup>20</sup> This makes the scholarly work of certain postcolonial

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., xxi–xxii.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., xxii.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 10.

<sup>19</sup> Ulrich, *Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History*, xxii.

<sup>20</sup> See: Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism', in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres (USA: Indiana University Press, 1991), 4, where the term 'third world' was used to refer to underdeveloped as well as developing countries. However, since this use usually associates issues of women in the third world with political and economic crises, it is important to state clearly that this particular reference is not intended in this thesis. The issues that Saudi women have faced during Binzagr's time of being active, from 1968 onwards, are more associated with the conflicts of the

feminists useful in drawing attention to the problematic results inherent in the generalisation and historical reduction of some feminist cross-cultural studies.

According to Chandra Talpade Mohanty, the problem of many feminist writings is that they ‘discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing/representing a composite, singular “third-world woman” – an image which appears arbitrarily constructed’.<sup>21</sup> The complicated structure of many third-world countries, including Saudi Arabia, makes it impossible to deal with women’s issues there without considering their precise ideological context, at least in terms of examining how this has affected women’s social, cultural and religious ideology, and vice versa. It is also necessary to consider these cultural practices within their historical moment, because similar practices in the Islamic world may have had different meanings in different historical times.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, class, race and ethnicity can all influence women’s situation within the same place, and it is therefore important to avoid treating third-world women as a coherent group.<sup>23</sup>

This tendency towards generalisation does not mean that feminist cross-cultural studies have no value. It is mentioned only to clarify that Binzagr’s case is not necessarily similar to those of other Arab or Middle Eastern women artists. In fact, Mohanty stresses that such comparative studies reveal ‘the connection between the local and the universal’.<sup>24</sup> However, this cannot be achieved immediately, such as linking

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country’s modernisation leap. Therefore, Saudi Arabia here is considered a third-world country for its vastly developing state.

<sup>21</sup> Chandra Talpade Mohanty, ‘Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses’, *Feminist Review*, no. 30 (1 October 1988): 62–63.

<sup>22</sup> See: Ibid., 75; Frantz Fanon, ‘Algeria Unveiled’, in *Veil: Veiling, Representation, and Contemporary Art*, ed. David A Bailey and Gilane Tawadros (London: Institute of International Arts (inIVA) in association with Modern Art Oxford, 2003), 72–87, for examples on the various meanings of the veil in different countries at the same time, or in the same country at different times.

<sup>23</sup> Mohanty, ‘Under Western Eyes’, 72.

<sup>24</sup> Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “‘Under Western Eyes’ Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles’, in *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, ed. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 226.

Saudi with Arab women, or Arab with Western women; and, indeed, not unless the differences are stressed in order to see the connection more clearly.<sup>25</sup> The importance of such a distinction is to assist studies that aim to improve the situation of oppressed women without depriving the rest of third-world women of their historical and political influence.<sup>26</sup>

Saba Mahmood brings to attention an important point that must be taken into consideration when examining Binzagr's work. Mahmood notes that political, civil, and economic equality claims in Saudi Arabia 'remain stubbornly elusive'.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, Binzagr's work cannot be interpreted in light of a certain political or social movement, and her motives should not be understood as a feminist project. This study will examine this situation and demonstrate the conditions that shaped Binzagr's work and the reasons for her career choices. These reasons are not entirely gender related, some are a result of the identity crisis caused by the rapid change of the Saudi economy and ideology since the 1960s. Other are related to the artist's personal experience growing up in diaspora, and her dissatisfaction with the image of Saudi culture in general, and women in particular in global discourse as a result of the lack of visual records about people's life in pre-oil society in Saudi Arabia.

## 1.2 Literature review

The purpose of this literature review is to demonstrate how art scholars frame Binzagr's work and accomplishments locally and internationally, in order to highlight the gap that the current study seeks to bridge. In Saudi, as a consequence of the lack of educational

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 225–226.

<sup>26</sup> Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes', 79.

<sup>27</sup> Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012), xix.



institutions that offer a degree in art history and academic art criticism, scholarly works in these two fields hardly exist. In fact, until 2008, the only available option for Saudis to earn an academic degree in art was from art-education departments and institutes in the country.<sup>28</sup> As a result, all studies that mention Safeya Binzagr were produced by scholars of art education to serve the purposes of their field. Depending on their aims, these can be divided into two main categories: the first are general surveys of the history of art in Saudi Arabia, while the second are general surveys of the main sources of visual inspiration in Saudi art. The latter follow the manner of the former in terms of research structure. For example, the first edition of *مسيرة الفن التشكيلي السعودي*, 'The Journey of Saudi Plastic Arts', by Abdulrahman Al-Soliman, published in 2000,<sup>29</sup> which was reissued with some additions and corrections in 2012,<sup>30</sup> is the most cited work about Saudi art and shaped the canon for art scholarly work in Saudi Arabia. Both editions of the book contain a general survey on the history of art practice in Saudi Arabia, but are more of a history of Saudi art education than of fine art. Al-Soliman focuses on the role of the state's early art-education institutes and colleges in shaping the development of art in the country. In addition, he lists early state and private exhibitions, art groups and societies, followed by short biographies of 130 artists in the first edition,<sup>31</sup> and 161 artists in the second.<sup>32</sup> In 2010, a new study which has a similar structure, but with elaborated details and analysis of the state's role, appeared and became the second most cited study about Saudi art. This is *تاريخ الفن التشكيلي في المملكة*

<sup>28</sup> See 38–34، *السليمان، مسيرة الفن التشكيلي السعودي*، 11–12؛ الرصيصة، *تاريخ الفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية*، 38–34.

<sup>29</sup> See: عبد الرحمن السليمان، *مسيرة الفن التشكيلي السعودي* (الرياض: الرئاسة العامة لرعاية الشباب، الإدارة العامة للنشاطات الثقافية، 2000).

<sup>30</sup> See: 2012، *السليمان، مسيرة الفن التشكيلي السعودي*.

<sup>31</sup> See: 2000، *السليمان، مسيرة الفن التشكيلي*.

<sup>32</sup> See: 2012، *السليمان، مسيرة الفن التشكيلي السعودي*.

العربية السعودية, 'The History of Plastic Arts in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia', by Muhammad Alrosais.<sup>33</sup>

In both studies Binzagr's short biography and a few images of her work are included. The importance of these two studies, although hardly accessible,<sup>34</sup> is that they are the only ones available that offer primary material. The authors gathered their information from the artists themselves and from exhibition catalogues collected since the 1960s. However, the two studies could not escape minor errors as a result of the large scope of artists covered. For instance, Al-Soliman's first edition includes Binzagr with the first generation of artists who were sent by the government in the 1960s to earn a formal degree in art.<sup>35</sup> And although this information is deleted in the second edition, the author does not mention in his preface that it contains corrections, saying only that it contains updated information and more artists' biographies.<sup>36</sup> Similar errors are found in Alrosais' study, where the birthdates of many female artists whom Alrosais categorises as fourth generation are wrong by at least eight years. To name a few: Maha Al-Senan, Adwa'a Bint Yazeed, Masoda Qurban, and Salwa Al-Hogail, currently in their mid-forties and fifties,<sup>37</sup> are cited by Alrosais as having been born between 1977 and 1979.<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, neither study offers a close reading of any artist's work, including Binzagr's, although each artist is illustrated with examples of their work. Both scholars also limit Binzagr's accomplishment to exhibiting her work as early as 1968, and her

<sup>33</sup> الرصيص، تاريخ الفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية.

<sup>34</sup> The two books are not for sale. They were commissioned by the General Presidency of Youth Welfare in Saudi Arabia, and the Saudi Ministry of Culture and Information, for different occasions, and can only be obtained by personal contact with the officials of the Ministry of Culture and Information in Saudi Arabia.

<sup>35</sup> 14. Binzagr earned her first formal degree at her own expense in 1978.

<sup>36</sup> See: 8. الرصيص، مسيرة الفن التشكيلي السعودي.

<sup>37</sup> The mentioned names are acquaintances of the current scholar from her work as lecturer at Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University in Riyadh, and 'Mawhibah' summer programme for the gifted in the arts (2005-2006), as well as her career as an artist since 2003.

<sup>38</sup> See: 267. الرصيص، تاريخ الفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية.

role as an activist in recording and preserving Saudi heritage.<sup>39</sup> With the exception of *التصوير التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية*, 'Painting in Saudi Arabia', by Suhail Al-harbi,<sup>40</sup> up to this date, scholars who mention Binzagr follow the structure of Al-Soliman's book: starting with a general overview of the emergence and development of Saudi art followed by artists' biographies. An example of this is *Past is Prologue* by Aya Aliriza and Raneem Farsi, published in 2014 to mark the inauguration of an initiative to promote Saudi art by the Saudi Art Council in Jeddah, called "21-39", which uses one of Binzagr's works as a cover.<sup>41</sup> This volume cannot be described as an exhibition catalogue since it does not have many images or close readings, but it also cannot be regarded as book of any sort since it only lists artists' names and short biographies cited in Al-Soliman and Alrosais's studies. The problem of *Past is Prologue* is not only that it offers no new material about the artists' work, its title suggests that the role of artists such as Binzagr has ended, although the majority are still actively involved in Saudi art. Moreover, the scope of artists in the book seems confusing and incoherent, and provides no explanation for readers. For example, Abdullah Hammas and Ali Al-Tukhais are considered second- and third-generation Saudi artists, yet are included in this volume.

On the international level of academic publication, the first generation of Saudi women artists is rarely mentioned in studies about Arab women artists, as a result of the relatively recent development of fine art practice in Saudi compared with other Arab countries. And on the rare occasion when they are mentioned, gaps occur. Again, this can be attributed to the lack of Saudi scholarly work for foreign researchers to rely on. For instance, *Forces of Change: Artists of the Arab World*, which is an edited book by

<sup>39</sup> السليمان، *مسيرة الفن التشكيلي*، 2000م، 92-93؛ السليمان، *مسيرة الفن التشكيلي السعودي*، 2012م، 103-104؛ الرصيص، *تاريخ الفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية*، 230-231.

<sup>40</sup> الحربي، *التصوير التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية*. This is the only traced study that actually discuss Binzagr's paintings instead of her biography and links the discussion to the images. However, only one page was written about Binzagr, since the focus of the study are the main sources of inspiration of Saudi painters.

<sup>41</sup> Aya Aliriza and Raneem Farsi, *Past Is Prologue* (Jeddah: The Saudi Art Council, 2014).

Salwa Mikdadi Nashashibi published on the occasion of an exhibition at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C.,<sup>42</sup> is one of these rare books. However, although Binzagr was invited to participate in the same exhibition with her colleague Mounirah Mosly,<sup>43</sup> she is not mentioned in the four essays in the book that discuss the role of Arab women artists in their countries.

Another example of inaccurate international accounts of Binzagr is an essay by Salwa Nashashibi, entitled 'Elements of empowerment: support system in art practice', in *Contemporary Arab Women's Art: Dialogue of the Present*, published by the Women's Art Library in 1999. Nashashibi limits the role of Binzagr and Mosly to being the first educated and practising women artists: 'In Saudi Arabia, where women are still veiled in public and where strict codes enforce segregation of the sexes, artists hold two exhibition openings: the first, official one for men and the second for women'.<sup>44</sup> This is a direct quote from a former study by her colleague Wijdan Ali.<sup>45</sup> Citing this statement with no further attempt to explain the changes Binzagr and Mosly have made, or their style and their subject matter, reflects a prejudice based on the general assumption about the situation of women in Saudi Arabia. This is not the only generalisation Nashashibi makes in her essay. She also assumes that Saudi Arabia, similar to many Arab countries,

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<sup>42</sup> Salwa Mikdadi Nashashibi, ed., *Forces of Change: Artists in the Arab World* (California; Washington D.C.: The international Council for Women in the Arts; The National Museum of Women in the Arts, 1994).

<sup>43</sup> See: Safeya Binzagr, First personal interview, interview by Eiman Elgibreen, Tape recording, 2 August 2010, Darat Safeya Binzagr, Jeddah, Transcript (Appendix 1): 'أنا جاتني دعوتين من متحف أمريكا عشان أروح ' عرض الجبرين: 'الناشيونال ميوزيم أوف وومن إن ذا آرتس' قصدك؟ بن زقر: إيه، وعندي جوابات لكن كان فيه ظروف عندي، والدي أعرض. Translation: 'I received two invitations from the museum in America to show my work. Elgibreen: You mean the National Museum of Women in the Arts? Binzagr: Yes, and I have letters but I could not go, my father was in hospital in Switzerland and I could not leave them [her family]'. Although Binzagr could not participate in the exhibition, the current scholar was able to trace the catalogues of Binzagr's first exhibition with Mosly in Jeddah (1968); and her second solo-exhibition in Dhahran (1976), in the library and archive of the National Museum of Women in the Arts, which indicates awareness of her role with Mosly; see: (Appendix 1-2).

<sup>44</sup> Salwa Nashashibi, 'Elements of Empowerment: Support System in Art Practice', in *Contemporary Arab Women's Art: Dialogues of the Present*, ed. Fran Lloyd (London: Women's Art Library, 1999), 90.

<sup>45</sup> This is: Wijdan Ali, *Modern Islamic Art: Development and Continuity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997).

was a French colony, and states that in 1924 French became the formal language alongside Arabic.<sup>46</sup>

In general, no academic case study on a Saudi woman artist exists, and only two studies are available by art-education scholars of a selected group of women artists: ‘The Effect of Culture on Artistic Vision in Saudi Contemporary Painting and the Role of Women in this Field’, by Maha Al-Senan;<sup>47</sup> and ‘Cultural and Environmental Effects of Painting on Saudi Woman Artists in Saudi Arabia’, by Elham Jan.<sup>48</sup> Both texts are MPhil dissertations in art education. The second is hard to access since it was produced at Halwan University in Cairo and has never been published, however the first was divided and published in three volumes extracted directly from the dissertation.<sup>49</sup> Similar to many scholars in Saudi, Al-Senan, in both her dissertation and the three books, could not escape the effect of Al-Solaiman’s study. She limits the role of the early generation of Saudi women artists to their precedent in exhibiting their work, without further explanation of the obstacles that made this achievement worthy of recognition. The socio-cultural situation of Saudi women artists especially of the early generation remains vague, and the challenges they faced, whether related to gender roles and society’s expectations, or to the nature of their unestablished careers, have not been examined. Unfortunately, Al-Senan’s studies do not fulfil their declared aim of examining the work of Binzagr and the rest of the chosen artists: there is no close reading of the artists’ work, only a description of their general style, and there is no

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<sup>46</sup> Nashashibi, ‘Elements of Empowerment: Support System in Art Practice’, 89. Saudi Arabia has never been occupied or ruled by any Western country, and Arabic was the only formal language during the first half of the twentieth century.

<sup>47</sup> Maha Al-Senan, ‘The Effect of Culture on the Artistic Vision in Saudi Contemporary Painting and the Role of Women in This Field’ (MPhil diss., College of Home Economics and Art Education, 2001).

<sup>48</sup> Elham Jan, ‘Cultural and Environmental Effects of Painting on Saudi Woman Artists in Saudi Arabia’ (MPhil diss, Halwan University, Art Education Department, 2003).

<sup>49</sup> مها السنان، أساليب معاصرة في التصوير التشكيلي السعودي (الرياض: المؤلفة، 2007)؛ مها السنان، المرأة والفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية (الرياض: المؤلفة، 2007)؛ مها السنان، مؤثرات الرؤية في التصوير التشكيلي السعودي المعاصر (الرياض: المؤلفة، 2007).

commentary by the scholar or direct reference to the images of Binzagr's work in the context. In fact, many of the images do not include the title in the caption. Moreover, every paragraph about Binzagr is quoted or cited from her second book,<sup>50</sup> and from Al-Soliman's first edition,<sup>51</sup> although Al-Senan declares in her research that she interviewed Binzagr and sent her a questionnaire, and includes an unanswered sample of this questionnaire in her appendices.<sup>52</sup>

Literature on Saudi art reveals a tendency to focus on two main aspects of Saudi art and artists: short artist biographies and the state's role in establishing and developing Saudi art. This is a rather problematic style of writing if no other in depth studies are made, because short biographies provide neither appreciation for the work, nor discuss the social and cultural context in which they were produced. In addition, the focus on the state's role marginalises the efforts of artists as individuals, both men and women, in shaping the development of art. More importantly, these studies only consider the logistic obstacles faced by the first generation of Saudi artists, such as the lack of art schools and galleries, and dismiss many pressing ideological barriers. One of these is how they managed to change public attitudes towards representational art, which was prohibited by religious belief.<sup>53</sup> Another important issue ignored by scholars although Saudi artists are still struggling with it, is the weakness of the Saudi art market and consumers' lack of trust in art in general as an investment, which is related to their attitude towards art practice.

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<sup>50</sup> That is, Binzagr, *A Three-Decade Journey with Saudi Heritage*.

<sup>51</sup> See Al-Senan, 'The Effect of Culture on the Artistic Vision in Saudi Contemporary Painting and the Role of Women in This Field', 141–146; السنان، المرأة والفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية، 30–37؛ السنان، أساليب معاصرة في التصوير التشكيلي السعودي، 39–46.

<sup>52</sup> Al-Senan, 'The Effect of Culture on the Artistic Vision in Saudi Contemporary Painting and the Role of Women in This Field', 169–170, 271–272.

<sup>53</sup> See: (Chapter 4).

There were also other problems for the first generation of women artists related to gender roles, such as inequality in work and education opportunities, and lack of communication with their audience on account of gender segregation. For example, Binzagr could not attend the openings of all her exhibitions in Saudi until 1976, when she exhibited her work in a private facility owned by the Saudi Arabian Oil Company (Aramco).<sup>54</sup> On these occasions, she was represented by her father, four brothers, and sometimes male colleagues (see Figure 1). This makes her an interesting case for examination, in order to understand how such support systems can help a female artist turn discriminatory situations in her favour. The analysis of Binzagr's visual art will hopefully demonstrate different modalities of women's agency in the pre-oil society of Saudi Arabia. Moreover, analyzing Binzagr's career choices, which include her style, subject matter and publication, within the socio-political context of the time of production will demonstrate how these modalities developed and/or changed from past to present.

### **1.3 Scope, methodology and source material**

It will be of great value to shift the focus of research on Saudi artists, specifically women, from their historic precedent to the cultural and artistic contribution they made to the visual culture of their country. This study therefore examines one artist in particular, Safeya Binzagr, to avoid generalisation and provide clearer understanding. It takes into consideration other aspects of the artist's life, such as class and cultural ideology, in conjunction with changes in the socio-cultural context of Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the focus will be on Binzagr's work from her debut in 1968 to the formal

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<sup>54</sup> Safeya Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia: An Artist's View of the Past* (Lausanne and Geneva: Three Continents Publishers, Arabian Resource Management S.A., 1979), 11. The company, Aramco, was formerly known as the Arabian American Oil Company.

inauguration of her museum in the year 2000. This choice was made to avoid the new challenges that changed the Saudi society after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 the following year. The global pressure on Saudi Arabia, after revealing that the majority of the suspects were Saudis, created a new identity crisis for its nationals. The government was forced to revise and make serious changes in the media discourse and school curriculums resulting a disruption of its recently developed identity of the 1960s to the 1990s.<sup>55</sup>

The current scholar's ten years of experience, working as an artist herself in Saudi Arabia, gave her a fuller understanding of the situation of Saudi women artists – their obstacles, attitudes and reactions to social norms. However, this study will only shed light on the career of Binzagr in order to highlight her success in inducing socio-cultural change.<sup>56</sup>

This study depends on formal and contextual analysis as a methodology to demonstrate Binzagr's representations of women. The analysis will cover four areas: firstly, a selected group of Binzagr's works of art published in her first and second books, consisting mainly of paintings, drawings and prints made from 1968 to the late 1990s, although other rare and/or unpublished work is referred to whenever necessary, such as the *Preliminary Studies and Sketches* collection in her museum, Darat Safeya Binzagr. The work in focus from the first book is from the *Marriage, Traditional Dress, Old Architecture, Religion, Daily Life*, and *Desert Life* collections;<sup>57</sup> work selected from

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<sup>55</sup> See: Michaela Prokop, 'Saudi Arabia: The Politics of Education', *International Affairs* 79, no. 1 (1 January 2003): 77–89.

<sup>56</sup> Moreover, the current scholar's deep understanding of the ideology and culture of Saudi Arabia, having been born and raised there, along with knowledge of its language, will hopefully offer the reader a better insight into the culture by explaining many hidden meanings in Binzagr's work.

<sup>57</sup> See Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*.



the second book includes examples from the *Motherhood* series, and from the *Daily Activities, Markets, Trades and Occupations* collection.<sup>58</sup>

The second area of focus is Binzagr's written statements in her exhibition catalogues and two books. Texts written by her sister Olfet Binzagr in the first book, and by Dr Muhammad A. Fadhl in the second, are also considered because they were approved by Binzagr and therefore reflect her perception of herself and her culture.

The third area of examination is Binzagr's career choices, decisions and projects. These include training methods and courses, exhibitions, marketing methods, and the function of her museum inaugurated in the year 2000.

The fourth and most important area of analysis is the artist's opinions and answers in her interviews with the current scholar. These took place in two different stages during the research. The first three interviews were conducted in the Darat Safeya Binzagr museum in Jeddah, in August 2010, where the artist answered many questions about her biography and paintings. The scholar spent four mornings with the artist, three of which were recorded on tape,<sup>59</sup> while the final day was designated for photographing details of certain paintings and some of the unpublished work. In January 2013, a fourth interview with the artist was carried out in the same place, but this time, although the scholar spent three full days discussing and revising certain information with the artist, only snippets of the conversation were recorded on tape when documentation was necessary.<sup>60</sup> The aim of this visit was to collect more material including photographs. Finally, the scholar met the artist three times in informal meetings to get more updated

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<sup>58</sup> See: Safeya Binzagr, 'Mission of Safeya Binzagr's Darah', in *A Three-Decade Journey with Saudi Heritage*, ed. Safeya Binzagr (Jeddah: Darat Safeya Binzagr, 1999), 103.

<sup>59</sup> (Appendices 1-3).

<sup>60</sup> (Appendix 4).

information about her latest projects.<sup>61</sup> The last meeting was crucial to this study as it allowed the artist to read the final thesis draft and give her opinion on many of the scholar's interpretations of her work. This gave the scholar an opportunity to confirm the points of agreement, and clarify their different opinion whenever they disagreed offering the reader a varied perspectives on the artist's work.

The primary source material for this study is the interviews, the artist's books and her museum Darat Safeya Binzagr in Jeddah. Material was also gathered from the Tate Britain library and archive, Central St Martin's archive in London, and the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C. There are also resources from three Orientalist photography collections: firstly, Snouck Hurgronje's three-volume album, combined and printed in one book, entitled *Makkah a Hundred Years Ago, or, C. Snouck Hurgronje's Remarkable Albums*;<sup>62</sup> secondly, Comtess de Croix-Mesnil's photos from the *Femmes d'Orient* album in the Victoria and Albert Museum; and thirdly, the Gerald de Gaury album at the Royal Geographical Society picture library. Material about the socio-cultural history of Jeddah was gathered from two main sources: historical books and anthropological research on the society of Jeddah, and correspondence with the social historian of Jeddah, Ahmad Badeeb. Badeeb explained the relation between Binzagr and her family to many other important figures in Jeddah in a letter responding to the current scholar's questions, and also sent information in the form of a full draft of his unpublished book, *جدة: إنها حقاً عائلة محترمة*, '*Jeddah: It is Truly a Respectable Family*', which consists of more than one hundred articles written for

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<sup>61</sup> These meetings were held at Scott's Restaurant in London on 10 June, 2013; at 34 Restaurant on 21 October, 2013; and at the Grosvenor House Hotel on 8 June, 2014.

<sup>62</sup> Chirstsaan Snouck Hurgronje, *Makkah a Hundred Years Ago, Or, C. Snouck Hurgronje's Remarkable Albums*, ed. Angelo Pesce, New edition (London: Immel Publishing, 1986).

seminars during the last decade. The articles cited in this thesis, in addition to Badeeb's letter, are included in the Appendices.<sup>63</sup>

#### **1.4 Summary of chapters**

It is important to summarise the six chapters of this study following this introduction, so the reader can envisage the progress of the subject. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 lays the ground for the analysis by introducing the reader to Safeya Binzagr and the cultural history of Saudi Arabia, specifically Jeddah. The main argument of this chapter is that Binzagr's work is actually a response to an identity crisis in Saudi during the 1960s and 70s. This was a result of the drastic cultural change brought by the oil boom, which replaced many aspects of tangible and intangible Saudi heritage with imported lifestyles. It is argued that the cultural gap it created made Saudis very sensitive about any attempt of criticism towards their hybrid lifestyle, and created nostalgia for the past. In addition, this overview explains some obstacles that were dismissed by Saudi scholars as a result of the identity crisis, and ignored the role of Binzagr and many other influential Saudis in changing their culture. Some issues related to popular theoretical approaches in gender studies will also be discussed in order to demonstrate how the cultural significance of certain concepts, such as the meaning of domestic space in Saudi Arabia, can make these concepts insufficient in the examination of Binzagr's work.

Chapter 3 argues that segregation and domesticity did not limit women's authority in Jeddah, nor their economic and aesthetic experience, and that the borders between the public and the private in Jeddah are not fixed. This is demonstrated through

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<sup>63</sup> (Appendices 9–14).

the analysis of Binzagr's depictions of women in both urban and Bedouin society in Jeddah, and how their roles change depending on the system of their cultural group. The analysis of Binzagr's ceremonial scenes will consider the cultural context and meaning of the rituals and the symbolic objects, such as the bride's slippers, to reveal how it was used culturally and artistically to signify women's agency. In addition, this chapter argues that Binzagr controlled her representation of the male figure which made the female appear more authoritative and influential.

Chapters 4 and 5 explore how Binzagr developed an approach to painting that made her human figures less threatening to the audience's religious beliefs and win admiration for her work. The examination follows the development of her style in conjunction with the shift in the boundaries that took place in image making in Saudi Arabia, and how she implemented hybridity and fantasy to serve this purpose. It also considers how her interest in portraiture changed from the late 1960s to the 80s, to become a tool for defending the less fortunate of the workers who occupy traditional trades and threatened by the oil boom. Chapter 5 will explore her use of portraits of public figures to create a social network with certain people and negotiate their support for her career. It will also consider her use of female images painted from imagination and after Orientalist photography as representations of the nation's wealth. It will be suggested that her sense of authority over the subject drove her to adjust them whenever needed and make them appear more significant.

Chapter 6 analyses the strategic ways in which Binzagr persuaded her audience and negotiated their support for her work using self-representation methods that accord with the expectations of each group. It argues that her family were her first audience and winning their support was her guarantee to gain the support of the public and expand her audience group. Branding and marketing, as well as self-fashioning are also

discussed as part of these strategies. In addition, the importance of the ‘home’ as a concept and as performance in Binzagr’s career is explored through the analysis of the function of her museum. Darat Safeya Binzagr, the museum she inaugurated in 2000, is discussed as the ultimate representation of Binzagr’s agency enabling her to evoke images and spaces from the past giving her the opportunity to recreate a cultural history of Saudi Arabia and present women as the face of the nation.

Finally, Chapter 7 concludes with a re-ordering of crucial stages and turning points in Binzagr’s career, that religious based debates are the most influential tool of negotiation in Saudi Arabia. It helped her push the boundaries and develop her art career regardless of the conservative nature of the society. The Appendices include transcripts of the four recorded interviews,<sup>64</sup> catalogues from her exhibitions of 1968, 1973, 1976 and 1980,<sup>65</sup> and a letter and five articles by Ahmad Badeeb.<sup>66</sup> The last are included because they are unpublished sources and not easily available. The images referred to in this research are printed in a separate catalogue.

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<sup>64</sup> (Appendices 1–4).

<sup>65</sup> (Appendices 5–8).

<sup>66</sup> (Appendices 9–14).

## Chapter 2: Cultural, theoretical and conceptual matters

### 2.1 Introduction

In her book on Victorian women artists, Deborah Cherry raises an important issue by asking the question: ‘Why look at women’s art?’<sup>67</sup> Cherry’s question brings to attention that interest in women’s art often goes beyond the surface of their paintings. She addresses the fact that women’s art, especially from societies where women are historically less visible, is interesting as a source of information about their situations during that era,<sup>68</sup> or at least, provides a reflection of women artists’ views on their societies. Therefore, examining the work of a woman artist is often a twofold process: examining the artist’s life conditions, and those of the women she painted.

However, the case of Binzagr is further complicated as the majority of her work is about a different period than her own. Until the 1980s, her work focused on showing the domestic life, costumes and traditions of the pre-oil society of Jeddah. Therefore, approaching her work requires a clear understanding of both periods: Jeddah in both the 1960s–70s and the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This helps to reveal an important aspect of Binzagr’s art that has long been overlooked by her audience, and has never been declared by the artist. It is suggested here that although the subjects of Binzagr’s art represent an older era, the impulse for making them emerges from her present time. Analysis will reveal that Binzagr’s paintings often include signifiers of certain debates and happenings in Saudi Arabia during the 1960s and 70s onwards.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Deborah Cherry, *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 1.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> See: (Chapter 5).

Binzagr enjoys a prestigious status in Saudi Arabia today, which makes one wonder why she is still unknown internationally, although she had several solo exhibitions and was invited to take part in group shows abroad.<sup>70</sup> There are many reasons for this, such as her decision to abstain from selling her work after 1973,<sup>71</sup> which limited her chances of expanding her reputation by participating in commercial exhibitions and decreased collectors' interest in her work. Yet this does not explain the consistent rise of her reputation in Saudi where conditions remained similar. The importance of Binzagr's work is that it answers a pressing demand in Saudi Arabia since the 1960s and accounts for her current popularity. Rather than a documentation of a dying cultural heritage, as many scholars have described it based on the artist's declared aims,<sup>72</sup> Binzagr's work functioned as a reassurance in the opposition to the identity crisis Saudis were facing in the 1960s. However, the traditions and values she defended in her work clashed with Western attitudes on the consequences of these roles creating another limitation to her international popularity, especially during the feminist waves of the 1970s and 80s when Binzagr was trying to break into the Western art scene. She was very defensive about any attempts to question women's choices in Saudi. Here she describes her responses to the foreign audience every time she showed them her work:

They consider me an odd case, and ask if my mother is not a Saudi woman [hinting that a foreign element had an influence on Binzagr]. In return, I insist that I am not the only [ambitious] women in Saudi and ask them to look for themselves and see other examples. I keep telling them that the first womb transplant operation in Saudi was carried by a woman, the first Saudi pharmacy professor was a woman, Dr. Islam, not a man [...] Even if the mother is illiterate,

<sup>70</sup> Such as her solo-exhibitions in: Woodstock Gallery in London (1973), Patrick Seale Gallery in London (1980), Galerie Drouant in Paris (1980), and Galerie d'Art du Vieux Chêne –Bourgeries in Geneva (1980). See (Appendix 7 and 8).

<sup>71</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview: 'بن زفر: من 73 أنا وقفت البيع، من معرضي الثاني'. Translation: 'Binzagr: Since 1973 I stopped selling [my work], since my second exhibition'.

<sup>72</sup> See Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 9–11; Muhammad A. Fadhl, 'Works of Safeya Binzagr', in *A Three-Decade Journey with Saudi Heritage*, ed. Safeya Binzagr (Jeddah: Darat Safeya Binzagr, 1999), 45; الرصيص، تاريخ الفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية، 231؛ السليمان، مسيرة الفن التشكيلي السعودي، 103.

she can push her children forward. My mother was illiterate, but she sacrificed her life and left her home [in Jeddah] to join us [in Cairo] and support us. She never stood in our way and she did not go to school because this was her choice, to marry at a young age, but she had an artistic taste.<sup>73</sup>

Binzagr's subjects and strong positive opinions about women's situation in Saudi did not cater to public expectations abroad. She explains that she has never been interested in attending a feminist talk, and refuses to be described as a feminist,<sup>74</sup> because she resents the way they judge Saudi women:

They always have to ask first if my mother is foreigner or something like that [...] I respond: why? Do you think that when God was creating the human species he ran out of clay<sup>75</sup> and could not complete the creation of women from our region? [Do you think] that she [Saudi women] is disabled? [...] incapable of being creative? Incapable of defending herself? When they start speaking on behalf of Saudi women, I say: who assigned you to speak [on behalf of them]? Show me a Saudi woman, a woman with a genuine sense of Saudi identity who has ever asked anyone to help claim her rights back? Why? Do you think we do not have a tongue? This is my response to these people.<sup>76</sup>

Binzagr constantly insists that it has never been her intention to show women more authoritative than men, and that she only shows them in their traditional roles as they appear in Saudi culture.<sup>77</sup> She strongly reject any attempt to interpret her work as a representation of women's agency including the current thesis.<sup>78</sup> This rejection can be understood as the artist's method for eliminating any attempt to feed negative

<sup>73</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview: 'لما ببجوا يعتبروني شاذة أنه جايز أمني أجنبية قلت لهم : لا وأنا مو الوحيدة، أنتو يعني زي ؟ [...] أنتوا دوروا. أنتوا عندكم في ناس قلت دحينه اللي ماسكينه على الست السعودية المسكينة، أنتي عارفة مين ولأهم عليها إنها مسكينة؟ [...] أنتوا دوروا. أنتوا عندكم في ناس قلت لهم في وحدة سعودية اللي زرعت أول رحم سعودية، أول 'فر مشيه' في السعوديه عندها برفسور سعوديه، ماهو راجل، ست. هنا أول برفسوره 'فر مشيه' ست د. إسلام ماخذاها راجل [...] فهذا السبب أنه العائله حتى لو الأم، أنا أمني ما تقرأ ولا تكتب لكنها [...] راحت وسابت البيت وغيره وقعدوا ... يعني مش أنه مثلاً ما هي متعلمة أن أحنا وقفت في طريقنا لا، هذي رغبة يعني مثلاً أمني عشان أتزوجت 'صغيرة وما مدا... لكن كانت يعني تحس بالناحية الفنية'.

<sup>74</sup> Binzagr, Second personal interview: 'لا، ولا حضرتهن، ولا أنا فمست'. Translation: 'No, I never attended a talk and I was never a feminist'.

<sup>75</sup> Muslims believe that humans are made from clay.

<sup>76</sup> Safeya Binzagr, Third personal interview, interview by Eiman Elgibreen, Tape recording, 5 August 2010, Darat Safeya Binzagr, Jeddah, Transcript (Appendix 3): 'الجبرين: قد حسيتي أنك لما بتورين الأعمال للأجانب ؟ : [...] أنتي بتعرضي بس أعمالك وحابتها ما كنتي مهتمة؟ بن زفر: لا ، لما بيقولوا لي أول شيء أنتي لازم أنك قاعدة بتدافعي عن هويتك؟ وإلا كنتي بتعرضي بس أعمالك وحابتها ما كنتي مهتمة؟ بن زفر: لا ، لما بيقولوا لي أول شيء أنتي لازم أمك أجنبية والا غيره [...] بن زفر: قلت لهم : ليه؟ لما ربنا خلقنا.. خلق الخليقة خلصت العجينة فضلت الحاجة البسيطة أداها للسعودية للمرأة في منطقتنا؟!... إنها عاجزة !! [...] عاجزة عن أنها تبدع، عاجزة تدافع عن نفسها، لما يدافعوا ؟، أقول لهم مين وكل؟ أية وحده للمرأة في منطقتنا؟!... إنها عاجزة !! [...] عاجزة عن أنها تبدع، عاجزة تدافع عن نفسها، لما يدافع عنها ! ليه ماعندنا لسان؟! هذا ردي ليهم !!!'.

<sup>77</sup> Safeya Binzagr, Seventh personal interview, interview by Eiman Elgibreen, 8 June 2014, Grosvenor House Hotel, London.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.



stereotypes about Saudi Arabia in any way. However, her opinion should not exhaust other interpretations of her work once it has been grounded on the same base of her inspiration; that is, Saudi cultural heritage. Therefore, the following pages will explain some of the cultural differences and historical events that inspired Binzagr to make her work. This account will start with a general look at Binzagr's journey before establishing her career, and at the city of Jeddah before and after Binzagr was born. The identity crises mentioned requires analysis of the factors that led to them and how this affected art in Saudi Arabia. Understanding these issues is important for understanding Binzagr's view of Saudi cultural heritage and the history and culture of Saudi Arabia, which are completely different to those of Britain and many other countries in the Arab world.

Light will also be shed on why popular theoretical approaches in gender studies relating to women's ability to exert change cannot be applied easily when looking at Binzagr's work. This is crucial in order to trace and appreciate culturally specific models of agency used in Binzagr's work. Finally, new ways of looking at domestic women and their sources of empowerment will be explained before moving forward to use them in the analysis of Binzagr's work in the following chapters.

## **2.2 Safeya Binzagr: cultural and historical background**

Safeya Binzagr was born in 1940 in the city of Jeddah, which has a unique geographical location and history.<sup>79</sup> Jeddah is located in the Hijaz province, very close to the two holy Islamic cities of Mecca and Madinah.<sup>80</sup> The city was therefore subjected to many foreign elements over the years, such as rule by Islamic states from outside the Arabian

<sup>79</sup> Safeya Binzagr, 'Who Am I?', in *A Three-Decade Journey with Saudi Heritage*, ed. Safeya Binzagr (Jeddah: Darat Safeya Binzagr, 1999), 27.

<sup>80</sup> 11 عبد القدوس الأنصاري، موسوعة تاريخ مدينة جدة، المجلد الأول، الطبعة الثالثة (القاهرة: دار مصر للطباعة، 1982)، 11.

Peninsula, including the Mamluks in Egypt (1252–1526) who influenced the architectural design of the city, and the Ottomans in two different periods, 1526–1809 and 1840–1917,<sup>81</sup> who influenced the costumes and customs of the people of Jeddah. In addition, Jeddah is the most important harbour on the Red Sea for ships crossing the old Silk Road, and the only port for pilgrims coming by sea from around the world to Mecca.<sup>82</sup> Jeddah, then, has long been, and remains, a multicultural city. The exchange of goods and services with foreigners by its merchants and sailors, and with pilgrims from China, Indonesia, Pakistan, Yemen, Egypt, South Africa, Syria, Morocco and many other countries who decided to settle in Jeddah and Mecca after performing their Hajj journey, enriched the cultural weave of the city.

Binzagr's family were merchant themselves, which provided them with a good level of income and a prestigious class.<sup>83</sup> In 1947, the head of the family, Binzagr's uncle, decided to send his nieces and nephews with their mother and grandmother to Egypt in order to receive formal education after studying at the local Islamic teacher's house,<sup>84</sup> while he and Binzagr's father stayed in Jeddah to provide a sustainable livelihood.<sup>85</sup> People of Jeddah had long struggled to establish a stable educational

<sup>81</sup> (محمد طرابلسي، جدة.. حكاية مدينة، الطبعة الثانية (جدة: مكتبة كنوز المعرفة، 2008). The cited dates have been changed by the current scholar to maintain consistency in this research with Gregorian Calendar years rather than Islamic Calendar years, as shown in the original source.

<sup>82</sup> الأنصاري، موسوعة تاريخ مدينة جدة، المجلد الأول: 15.

<sup>83</sup> Muhammad Traboulsy says that the Binzagr's are one of the most prestigious households in Jeddah, and describes them as a pillar of Jeddah's economy.

<sup>84</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview: 'أُتربوا عمي وأبوي كنظام أول عايشين في بيت واحد. عمي ماعنده أولاد فكان هو رئيس العائلة، عمي كان رئيس العائلة [...] فهو اللي كان اللي بيمشّي... كان من... يعني... من نعمة ربنا أنها عائلته مفتحة [...] بيدوا الفرصة'. Translation: 'By father and uncle were raised according to the old traditions; living in one house. My uncle did not have any children and he was the head of the family [...] so his orders had to be followed. It was a blessing that we had an open minded family [...] they gave their boys and girls equal opportunities'.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.: 'أحنا أنتقلنا على القاهرة عشان التعليم [...] لكن أحنا أنتقلنا لمناسبة، يعني كنت أنا رحيت أصلاً لعلاج اللوز، أرسلوني أسوي' لوز بالقاهرة [...] بعد كذا جت العائلة وكان عمي عنده النية يدخلنا أحنا البنات، قيده إخواني الأولاد راحوا القاهرة، على طول خلص زفاف أختي وراح مقدم لنا في المدارس هناك، طبعا ٨ سنين دخلنا لكنه كنا رحنا عند الفقيه فترة بسيطة قبلها [...] الجبرين: وكنتي 'تدرسين في المدرسة داخلي والا؟ بن زقر: لا خارجي لأنه كان يعني عشان ما نفقد العائلة، العائلة كلها أنتقلت'. Translation: 'We moved to Cairo for the purpose of education [...] I went first to treat my tonsils, they [her family] sent me to have a surgery to remove my tonsils in Cairo [...] then the whole family came, and my uncle had the intention to submit us, the girls, [to school] because the boys were already there in Cairo [studying]. Instantly, after my sister's wedding, he applied to admit us to school [in Cairo]. Of course, at the age of

system. This started after their campaign against the Ottoman rulers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and was considered a symbol of resistance. According to Abdul Kuddos Al-Ansari, a historian from Jeddah, during the second Ottoman period (1840–1917) Ottoman Turkish was the formal language in the Hijaz region used for all educational subjects including Arabic grammar.<sup>86</sup> This was perceived by the masses as an attempt by the Ottoman rulers to deprive Arabs of their cultural heritage and limit their political influence.<sup>87</sup> Therefore, a few figures in Jeddah, mostly merchants, started to establish their own private schools to keep Arabic heritage alive, though these were mainly for boys, such as Al-Falah School established in 1905.<sup>88</sup> This school, in particular, represented an important symbol of political resistance to Turkish hegemony over the region.<sup>89</sup> However, such schools could not answer the demands of the citizens of Jeddah, and their limited number meant that few students were accepted. Moreover, the curriculum they offered did not qualify graduates to continue their higher education abroad because it was not validated and authorised by the state.<sup>90</sup> The lack of formal schools in Jeddah continued after the end of the Ottomans rule until the 1950s, because of the unstable political situation during this transitional period and the lack of

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eight we started school, but we studied before at the local Islamic teacher's house for a brief period [...] Elgibreen: Did you go to a boarding or normal school? Binzagr: No, [I went to] normal school and my entire family moved [to Cairo] so we would not miss them'.

<sup>86</sup> الأنصاري، موسوعة تاريخ مدينة جدة، المجلد الأول: 191–192.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.; see also: خلف الوديعاني، الدولة العثمانية والغزو الفكري حتى عام 1327هـ/1909م، الطبعة الثانية، سلسلة الرسائل، 481–480، الجامعية الموصى بطباعتها (مكة المكرمة: معهد البحوث العلمية جامعة أم القرى، 2003).

<sup>88</sup> 454–446، الأنصاري، موسوعة تاريخ مدينة جدة، المجلد الأول: 192–201؛ طرابلسي، جدة.. حكاية مدينة، 454–446. The Founder of Al-Falah School, Muhammad Zeinl, went through a long journey to make sure that this school continues its mission. He collected donations from the elite families in Jeddah and had to travel all the way to India to collect more money.

<sup>89</sup> 456–454، طرابلسي، حكاية مدينة، 454–456. The Founder of Al-Falah School and many of its graduates started a mission to establish similar institutions in many countries under Ottoman rule, or occupied by foreign elements, in the Arab Gulf states, India, Indonesia, Yemen, Zanzibar, Somalia, Ethiopia, Philippines, Malaysia and many other countries to keep Arabic and Islamic heritage alive among Muslim communities. This effort faced some troubles, especially in the Gulf region, from British forces there.

<sup>90</sup> Soraya Altorki, *Women in Saudi Arabia: Ideology and Behavior among the Elite* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 9. According to Soraya Altorki, these private schools remained informal until 1954, when the Saudi government transformed them into formal public schools, provided certificates and exempted students from paying tuition fees.

stable funding.<sup>91</sup> These conditions started a trend in Jeddah among upper-class families for sending their children to study abroad from a young age, particularly to Egypt, to obtain a degree; the Binzagr were one of many who followed this trend.<sup>92</sup>

Education played an important role in shaping the lives of many Saudis during the 1960s–80s. As well as driving upper-class youth to travel and live in expatriation for long periods of time, it enabled those who graduated from local schools to climb the social scale and become influential figures in the country after the establishment of Saudi Arabia (1932).<sup>93</sup> Binzagr was one of those affected by the lack of formal schools in Saudi, as from 1931 to 1960 girls' schools in Jeddah were still informal.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, after graduating from high school in Egypt in 1960,<sup>95</sup> she studied for a year at a finishing school at Kent, then for two years at another in Surrey.<sup>96</sup> Consequently, Binzagr had to stay abroad for 16 years, without returning to Jeddah even once until 1963.<sup>97</sup> This long expatriation shaped Binzagr's personality in ways that became apparent later when she moved back to Jeddah to begin her career. For instance, her family was keen to keep the children in touch with their heritage during the years abroad creating an anxiety about losing their identity. This in return sparked their love of Saudi heritage, but the person who had the most influence over Binzagr was her older

<sup>91</sup> الأنصاري، موسوعة تاريخ مدينة جدة، المجلد الأول: 202–203.

<sup>92</sup> إليه هذا زي كذا. بس اللي بأقول لهم مو عائلتنا بس ' : Binzagr, First personal interview: طرابلسي، جدة.. حكاية مدينة، 454. Translation: 'Yes, it was like this, but what I used to say is that it was not our family only, many other families did'.

<sup>93</sup> Mordechai Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Society, Government and the Gulf Crisis*, 6th ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 51, 90. Mordechai Abir, *Saudi Arabia: Society, Government and the Gulf Crisis*, 6th ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 51, 90. When the government of Saudi Arabia established formal schools and universities, the early generation of graduates were assigned to high-ranking positions in new state offices, because of the urgent need to build the country's infrastructure and the lack of trust in foreigners to hold certain jobs as a result of the highly disturbed political climate; see also: طرابلسي، جدة.. حكاية مدينة، 461؛ الأنصاري، موسوعة تاريخ مدينة جدة، المجلد الأول: 194–195.

<sup>94</sup> Altorki, *Women in Saudi Arabia*, 9.

<sup>95</sup> الرصيص، تاريخ الفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية، 230.

<sup>96</sup> Safeya Binzagr, Fourth personal interview, interview by Eiman Elgibreen, Tape recording, 7 January 2013, Darat Safeya Binzagr, Jeddah, Transcript (Appendix 4): 'كانت في 'سوري'، أول وحدة كانت في 'كنت'. ' : الجبرين: كم قعدتني؟ بن زقر: أول وحدة قعدت سنة، وفي 'سوري' قعدت سنتين. Translation: 'It was in Surrey, the first one was in Kent. Elgibreen: How much time did you spend there? Binzagr: I spent a year in the first, and two years in Surrey'.

<sup>97</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 9.

sister Soraya. Soraya was already married and settled in Jeddah when the family moved to Cairo, and whenever she visited she would tell stories about Jeddah traditions and customs.<sup>98</sup> Later on, when she started her career, Soraya became one of Binzagr's main sources of information.<sup>99</sup> The family's stories created a nostalgia that remained after Binzagr returned to Jeddah, because modernity had drastically changed the way people were living. The artist explains how disappointed she was in 1963, when she discovered that most of these customs and lifestyles had disappeared and that what survived was also on its way to extinction.<sup>100</sup>

However, these social changes also came with new benefits for the younger generation of Saudi women. Binzagr's family, like many of the elite in Jeddah, were eager for their daughter to join the family business, and her father prepared an office for her in his company so she could take care of his secretarial work, which had been part of her training in finishing school.<sup>101</sup> Binzagr remembers how rumours started to spread quickly about her going to the company although she had just arrived from England.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 10; Binzagr, 'Who Am I?', 41; Binzagr, First personal interview: 'أنا هذي الأشياء الحاجات كلها مو معقولة عاصرتها، أنا عرفتها بالبحث. أختي ماشاء الله الكبيرة كانت من اللي يحبوا التراث، كانت هي... [اللي علمتني] جاز لو عشت [في جدة] كنت عاصرتها وشفتها [...] أنا لما جيت اللبس هذا ما كان بيتلبس'. Translation: "It is impossible that I witnessed all these things, I learned about it through research. My older sister, God bless, loved heritage and she was.. [the one who taught me] Perhaps if I lived [in Jeddah] I would have seen these things [...] These costumes were no longer in fashion when I came back'.

<sup>99</sup> Binzagr, Second personal interview: 'كانت مرت خالي هي وأختي ودولا اللي بيدوا .. المصادر حقني'. Translation: 'My maternal uncle's wife and my sister were the ones who gave me.. [the information], they were my source'.

<sup>100</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 9.

<sup>101</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview: 'بس أنا جيت طبعاً بيتنا في البلد قريب من المكتب، في هذا الوقت ما بدي أنزل المكتب، فكانوا يطلعوا لي الاوراق (ترجمة، آلة كاتبة) لأنني تعلمت ففعدت زي أقل من سنتين وبالفعل أول أسبوع جيت الهرج أنه نزلوني المكتب، أنه شغلها في المكتب، وأنا لسي يا دوبي يعني محد سمع عني يمكن زي المثل اللي بيقول: (فيران البيت ما سمعوا عنها) فيه المكان 'أترتب. الجبرين: بس متوقعين أنك بتكملي الشغل؟ بن زقر: كان بيطلع لي الشغل، بس أنا مليت'. Translation: 'Of course, when I returned our house was in downtown, close to the company, but at that time I did not want to go to the office so they sent me the papers [that I needed to work on] for translation or typing because I had already learned that. So, this lasted for less than two years, and sure enough during the first week after I returned people were making rumours about me going to office although I was still at home but it was like what they used to say in the old days "the mice of the house have not heard the news", however, an office was already prepared for me in the company. Elgibreen: But everyone was expecting you to continue your work in the family business? Binzagr: They used to send the work to my home, but I was bored'.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

People were both excited and expectant for her to join the business.<sup>103</sup> At the time, girls' schools were still a problematic issue, and many families were unhappy about girls receiving a non-traditional education.<sup>104</sup> Similarly, the idea of women working in a business was still radical in many parts of the country. However, since the people of Jeddah had already formed their own educational system before the establishment of Saudi Arabia, and had sent their daughters abroad, Jeddah was also ahead of the rest of the country in pioneering women's right to work. According to Binzagr, the first generation of women from elite families in Jeddah who were educated abroad were also the first to work in and run Saudi universities.<sup>105</sup> Interestingly, though, Binzagr decided not to work in the family business. Instead, she helped her father from home and started to write articles about art for *Albilad*, the first Saudi newspaper, and to publish some of her early drawings.<sup>106</sup> Although Binzagr considers this amateur work,<sup>107</sup> it was one of the earliest, if not the very first, art-history article to be published in the country. Her work for *Albilad* was also important in sparking her desire to become an artist.<sup>108</sup> After 18 months of publishing articles, Binzagr decided to move back to Cairo to study art,<sup>109</sup> and took private lessons for almost two years from Sabri Abdulghani, a university

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> See: Amani Hamdan, 'Women and Education in Saudi Arabia: Challenges and Achievements', *International Education Journal* 6, no. 1 (2005): 42–64.

<sup>105</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview: 'أساس الجامعات اللي أسسوا الجامعات البنات اللي هم العوائل اللي خرجت علمت بناتها'. Translation: 'The girls who were funded by their families to study abroad were the ones who built the infrastructure of the [Saudi] Universities, many families not just us'.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.: 'في هذا الوقت ما بدى أنزل المكتب [...] كان بيطلع لي الشغل، بس أنا مليت لأنه مو هذا الشي، صحيح كنت بكتب ساعات'. Translation: 'At that time I did not want to go to the office [...] they used to send the work to my home, but I was bored because this was not the thing [I aspired to do], sometimes I used to write art articles, some were translated, some were.. [mine], publish some drawings, but these were weak, in the *Albilad* [newspapers]'.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.: 'في ذلك الوقت ما كانوا بيكتبوا ولا باسم مستعار ولا بيطلعوا باسم مستعار، فبعدما خلصت مليت قولي على 64م. كانت لسي'. Translation: 'At that time they [Saudi women] did not [have to] use a pseudonym in their writing or any other profession, so after I finished – say about 1964– I was bored and the family were still there [in Egypt] so I wanted to apply to a place [an art institution]'.

<sup>109</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 9.

professor at the Fine Art College in Cairo.<sup>110</sup> It was at this time that she met her friend Mounirah Mosly, who was studying at the same college.<sup>111</sup>

After she returned to Jeddah for the second time, realising that she was serious about her decision, her family built an additional half-storey for her to use as a studio, and she soon agreed with Mosly that they should curate a joint exhibition.<sup>112</sup> The lack of galleries in Jeddah forced them to exhibit their work in a newly established girls' school called *دار التربية الحديثة*, 'Dar Al-Tarbieah Al-Hadeethah'.<sup>113</sup> This decision can be interpreted as a strong statement on their part about girls' education, which was still a subject of debate in Saudi.<sup>114</sup> Each artist showed her work in a separate room in the school, which is why Binzagr believes there were two solo exhibitions happening at the same time.<sup>115</sup>

What makes Binzagr and Mosly's first exhibition of 1968 extraordinary is that it came only three years after the first registered exhibition in Saudi Arabia<sup>116</sup> –

<sup>110</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview: 'فطبعًا عن طريق ناس أعرفهم يعرفهم عاد دلوني على منيرة وأختارت لي أستاذ هو ' [...] اسمه صبري عبدالغني [...] المهم أخذت السنيتين، سنتين لا شوية، ورجعت [...] 'يدرس [...]'. Translation: 'I met Mounirah through some friends and she referred me to a professor [...] called Sabri Abdulghani. I spent [with him] about two years, or probably less than two, and then I went back [to Jeddah]'.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.: 'جينًا فكرنا في حكاية المعرض أنا من يوم ماجيت على طول بنوا لي نص دور في البيت'. Translation: 'When we came back [Mounirah and Binzagr] we thought about the exhibition, so my family built half-story at our house [to use as a studio]'.

<sup>113</sup> الرصيص، *تاريخ الفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية*، 44.

<sup>114</sup> See: (Chapter 5).

<sup>115</sup> Binzagr wants to give credit to her friend Mosly, because it is generally believed that Binzagr was the first female artist to curate a solo exhibition in Saudi, and that this was her 1970 show in Dar Al-Hanan in Jeddah.

<sup>116</sup> According to Binzagr, Saudi artists held an exhibition in the 1950s at City Bank in Jeddah. One was Mohammed Racim, and the other was called Falaly and was originally from Mecca. However, it is hard to trace more information about these artists, except in a book about the history of Jeddah first published in 1963 by the Jeddah historian Abdul Kuddus Al-Ansari, who mentions an artist in Jeddah called Muhammad Racim. See: Binzagr, Second personal interview. دحين لكن أول كان فيه، أنا سويت بحث عشان أعرف [...] أقيم معرض في الخمسينات [...] محمد راسم. الجبرين: كنت بسالك عنه ولا أحد بيبي يتكلم عنه. بن زقر: محمد راسم لأنه... أنا أعرفه لأنه فيه الصلة، ماشفت له غير أسكتش عملة بورترية [...] رحت ماخلت سألت في السفارة، أنا أعرف الشخص ولده متزوج بنت خالي لكن من أم ثانية، قاموا جابوا لي 'كالاندر' مرسومة، هذا محمد راسم إيراني [...] لكن مو هو. الجبرين: أه، أنا أحسب أصله، قالوا لك أصله إيراني. بن زقر: لا لا، محمد راسم فيه واحد لما جابوا لي 'كالاندر' قالوا لي: هذا محمد راسم قلت... بعدين طليت مو هو، هذا محمد راسم إيراني، هذا محمد راسم الله أعلم، ما أدري، يعني مظهر له، هو ذكره معاه سعودييين ثانيين أنه أقيم المعرض في 'سيتي بانك'، اتصلت بناس في 'سيتي بانك' أنه يشوفوا لي بالسفارة الأمريكية، مافيه أرشيف للمعرض هذا. الجبرين: أنا سمعت أنه في الهولندي و أستغربت لأنه كان موجود في ذاك الوقت!! بن زقر: لا لا، في 'سيتي بانك' والمعلومة أخذوها مني أنا لما أنتشرت ثاني [...] لكن بجانب محمد راسم

Abdulhalim Radwi's show of 1965, in Jeddah.<sup>117</sup> It is rare for pioneer women artists to achieve recognition and support for their very first exhibition, and even more rare to find an example of a male and female artists starting at almost the same time which is why Binzagr refuses to adopt any feminist claim. Binzagr suggests that she could have started with a solo exhibition, but that getting support from another woman artist would make it 'easier to work towards public recognition.'<sup>118</sup> Interestingly, although the custom of gender segregation prevented both artists from attending the opening, their exhibition was a huge success and was attended by high-profile people including royalty, diplomats and fellow artists such as Abdulhalim Radwi,<sup>119</sup> who was happy to volunteer and explain the paintings for the guests of honour (Figure 1). The responses towards this event reveal Jeddah's progressive attitude towards the changes brought by the younger generation, especially women, regardless of traditional customs.

The following year, Binzagr participated in a group exhibition at King Abdulaziz University.<sup>120</sup> Then, in 1970, she curated her first solo exhibition in a leading girls' school – دار الحنان, 'Dar Al-Hanan'.<sup>121</sup> By 1973, Binzagr was ready for her first international exposure and held her first international solo show at the Woodstock Gallery in London.<sup>122</sup> Subsequently, she decided to stop selling her work and to focus on different traditional subjects representing Saudi Arabia before the production of oil.<sup>123</sup> This was one of the most important decisions she took in her career. It enabled

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فيه واحد برضو قديم اسمه الفلالي في مكة، هذا شغلة كذا يعني برضو بسيط، بيرسم شعبيات؟ الأنصاري، موسوعة تاريخ مدينة جدة، المجلد الأول: 496.

<sup>117</sup> الرصيص، تاريخ الفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية، 44.

<sup>118</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 9.

<sup>119</sup> Olfet Binzagr, 'An Historical Perspective', in *Saudi Arabia: An Artist's View of the Past*, by Safeya Binzagr (Lausanne and Geneva: Three Continents Publishers, Arabian Resource Management S.A., 1979), 20; Binzagr, 'Who Am I?', 33; 45. الرصيص، تاريخ الفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية، 45.

<sup>120</sup> Safeya Binzagr, 'Safeya's Profile: Exhibitions', HTML, *Darat Safeya Binzagr Website*, (2008), [http://daratsb.com/eng/profile/main\\_e\\_profile\\_8.php](http://daratsb.com/eng/profile/main_e_profile_8.php).

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.; 45. الرصيص، تاريخ الفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية، 45.

<sup>122</sup> *An Exhibition of Paintings by Safeya Binzagr* (London: Woodstock Gallery, 1973), (Appendix 7).

<sup>123</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview: 'من 73 أنا وقفت البيع [...] بس السبب فيه وقفت البيع، إبتدت اللوحة تصير مجموعة'. Translation: 'Binzagr: Since 1973 I [يعني إبتديت مثلاً مجموعة الزفاف بالحنان كانت العكس] فكرة اللوحة سبقت المجموعة



her to conserve a large collection of work worthy of a museum of its own for permanent public display.<sup>124</sup> According to Binzagr, she made the decision when she realised that her work represented a series of scenes from particular subjects, such as traditional weddings,<sup>125</sup> and that it would be more valuable for it to be held in a single collection.<sup>126</sup> She was also receiving requests from scholars and members of the public to use her work to help them document the past.<sup>127</sup> This demand was not something she could ignore, so she decided to quit selling her work and make it available for them.

### 2.3 Art, oil and identity crisis

The growing demand for traditional subjects in the 1970s was caused by the identity crisis Saudis started to feel as the result of drastic social, political and economic change.<sup>128</sup> According to Abdullah Alghathami, by the mid-1980s, a strong wave of anti-modern and anti-Western feeling that had overrun the country reached its climax,<sup>129</sup> to

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stopped selling [...] but why did I stop? Because the painting started to become a collection, for example when I started the Marriage Series with Al-Henna it was the opposite [the idea of making the painting came before the series].

<sup>124</sup> Which she did in the year 2000, see (Chapter 6).

<sup>125</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview: ‘لما إبتديت أدخل في المجموعة [...] ولما جيت أسوي كتابي فيه لوحة من اللوحات ‘ ماعندي صورتها، عند عائلته طلبت منهم أصولها قالوا والله مانعرف فيها لأنه أحنأ غيرنا الديكور فقلت هذي حكاية لما أشيل منها صفحة أقطعها ما تقرأين [...] فأنا مثلاً أيش العايد بالفائدة المادية، الحمد لله أنا أقدر مستغنية مادياً فأنا ليه أبيعها أنا في السبعينيات فيه واحد بيدرس تلفزيون عمل ماجستير على مجموعة الزفاف، أنا من زمان بيتعمل رسائل على ده، طيب أنا هذي المجموعة [...] وثيقة أستفاد بيها واحد، أنا أفرقها بدوري من بيت لبيت أيش الفائدة؟ قلت يوم أجمعها تكون سهلة في الكتاب اللي حيقراها حيسفاد منها فنياً، اللي حيسفاد منها إجتماعياً اللي حيسفاد منها معمارياً بصرياً بأي أستفاد، طبعاً الوقت أخذ فترة طويلة [...] and I wanted to make my book there was a missing photograph of a painting that I do not own any more, I asked the family who owned it to allow me to take a picture but they said they do not know where it was; they changed their home decoration. So I thought to myself: this is a story and when I remove a page no one can read it [...] I do not need the profits, thank God, I am financially independent so why do I sell my work?. In the seventies there was a scholar of media and film, he did his master [dissertation] on my Marriage Series, scholars have always been interested in my work, so this series [...] is a document that was useful to someone how can I divide it between houses [of buyers] ? So I decided to gather it in a book to make accessible for everyone regardless of their subject of interest, and of course this took a long time to make possible’.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> See: Mai Yamani, *Cradle of Islam: The Hijaz and the Quest for an Arabian Identity*, 2nd ed. (London: I.B.Tauris, 2009); Mai Yamani, *Changed Identities: The Challenge of the New Generation in Saudi Arabia* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, Middle East Programme, 2000).

<sup>129</sup> عبدالله الغذامي، *حكاية الحداثة في المملكة العربية السعودية*، الطبعة الثالثة (الدار البيضاء وبيروت: المركز الثقافي العربي، 2005)، 33–32.

the extent that for a while the Saudi Ministry of Information had to ban the use of the word 'حديث', 'modernity', in television and newspapers to avoid agitating the public.<sup>130</sup>

At the beginning of this era of change, and as a result of the country's new oil wealth, there was no noticeable intellectual or cultural resistance to modernity. In the 1950s and 60s Saudis who had had exposure to other cultures through their travels and/or education were happy to ride the wave of change and adopt new trends and lifestyles.<sup>131</sup> They built modern concrete residences next to the old brick and mud traditional houses, and drove town cars over unpaved roads instead of their old pickup trucks.<sup>132</sup> They became the new bourgeois whereas their relatives and neighbours who did not attend the newly established formal schools were still living a very traditional lifestyle. However, people soon started to feel caught between their past and present.<sup>133</sup> The inhabitants of rural areas and certain social groups in the city could not obtain the new goods and machinery imported after the oil wealth. Their inability to gain an academic and/or technical training deprived them from joining the new work force, and they could not work at their families' old trades such as farming since their products and services were no longer required after being replaced with modern machinery and imported labour.<sup>134</sup>

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>131</sup> See ثريا التركي، أبو بكر باقادر، وآمال طنطاوي، جدة أم الرخا والشدّة: تحولات الحياة الأسرية بين فترتين (القاهرة: دار الشروق، 2006)، 29–42، for socio-anthropological analysis for the change in the lives of Saudis particularly in Jeddah from the 1950s to 1970s and how it affected their new identities; see also منصور العساف، 'التغيّر الاجتماعي.. خمسة عقود مضت من دون توثيق!، جريدة الرياض، 10 يناير 2013، العدد 16271، قسم تحقيقات وتقارير، <http://www.alriyadh.com/2013/01/10/article800233.html>.

<sup>132</sup> The historian Robert Lacey description of the controversial lifestyle of the Saudi king at the time, King Saud (ruled 1953–64), represent an exaggerated version of Saudis' contradictory lifestyle. See: Robert Lacey, *The Kingdom*, 2nd ed. (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1982), 299–309.

<sup>133</sup> Tim Niblock, *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 39–40.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

People suffered from what Homi Bhabha calls ‘cultural uncertainty’,<sup>135</sup> a state

Binzagr tries to describe to explain the aim of her work:

The past is appealing and enchanting, but you cannot live it now. Progress demands a new life-style, with its nylon material, electric lights, tall building. We need all this in our time. You get used to it and cannot live without it. It is better to live with the modern than to spoil the beauty of the old by trying to mix the modern with it. If you are in-between the old and the new, you are lost. Appreciation and acceptance of new realities are necessary for the progress and the future of Saudi Arabia. My work does not intend to bring back the past, but to treasure it, so that future generations may take pleasure in and benefit from it.<sup>136</sup>

Bhabha explains ‘cultural uncertainty’<sup>137</sup> as a state of being forced ‘to live on the cusp, [and] to deal with two contradictory things at the same time, without either transcending or repressing that contradiction.’<sup>138</sup> The progress of change was faster than Saudis’ ability to reconcile their traditional and modern lifestyles. As Bhabha explains, this creates a conflicted situation that often happens when ‘two contradictory and independent attitudes inhabit the same place, one takes account of reality, the other is under the influence of instincts’.<sup>139</sup>

Binzagr herself experienced these contradictory beliefs and emotions when she discovered that Jeddah had changed forever. Change was no longer an optional decision restricted to one aspect of upper-class people when deciding to live abroad, it became inevitable for all. Binzagr’s traditional themes were therefore an answer to her own feeling of loss after expatriation, as much as an answer to her generation’s demand to conserve their heritage.

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<sup>135</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 51.

<sup>136</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 10–11.

<sup>137</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 51.

<sup>138</sup> W.J.T Mitchell, ‘Translator Translated: Interview with Cultural Theorist Homi Bhabha’, *Artforum International* 33, no. 7 (1 March 1995): 82.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

The year 1973, when Binzagr decided to stop selling her work, is identified as the beginning of the oil boom, when oil revenues started to rise significantly.<sup>140</sup>

According to Anthony H. Cordesman, the boom ‘transformed Saudi Arabia into a heavily urbanized welfare state’.<sup>141</sup> As a result, Saudis needed to adjust their cultural existence and create a new identity, but why did Binzagr and many of her generation show an interest in repeating the past?

In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha suggests that repeating the past by representing it in different forms is an attempt to establish authority over unfamiliar situations.<sup>142</sup> Visual images, fashion, intellectual movements such as anti-modernism and other responses to modernity in Saudi Arabia are different attempts to represent the past, but for the sake of establishing a more stable present. 'It is the problem of how, in signifying the present, something comes to be repeated, relocated and transitioned in the name of tradition, in the guise of a pastness',<sup>143</sup> and these representations of the past do not necessarily have to be a 'faithful sign of the historical memory but a strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic'.<sup>144</sup> This is particularly true in Binzagr's case, as she declares that she painted customs and traditions she never lived by, or even saw in practice.<sup>145</sup> Binzagr depended entirely on descriptions she read or heard from other people.<sup>146</sup> As she wrote in her first book, her work represents her

ثريا التركي، أبو بكر باقادر، وآمال طنطاوي، *جدة أم الرخا والشدّة: تحولات الحياة الأسرية بين فترتين* (القاهرة: دار الشروق، 2006)، 28؛ سهيل سالم الحربي، *التصوير التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية* (الرياض: مؤسسة الفن النقي، 2003)، 25.

<sup>141</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, *Saudi Arabia Enters the Twenty-First Century* (USA: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003), 4.

<sup>142</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 51.

143 Ibid.

144 Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview: 'أنا هذي الأشياء الحاجات كلها مو معقولة عاصرتها، أنا عرفتها بالبحث [...] جازب لو 'عشت [في جدة] كنت عاصرتها وشفتها about it through research [...] Perhaps if I lived [in Jeddah] I would have seen these things'.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

personal impression of the past.<sup>147</sup> Therefore, her paintings are not historically accurate depictions, although some scholars have treated them as such.<sup>148</sup>

There was also a rising political conflict between Saudi Arabia and some non-Arab countries that reached its climax in the 1970s, and made images of desert life and Saudi heritage a sign of power and resistance.<sup>149</sup> Therefore, repeating the past was an expression for that. Bhabha explains that repetition 'negates our sense of the origins of the struggle. It undermines our sense of the homogenizing effects of cultural symbols and icons, by questioning our sense of the authority of cultural synthesis in general'.<sup>150</sup> But the question here is how much heritage is available for Saudis to repeat?

The heritage of many parts of Saudi Arabia is intangible and hard to reach. Islamic doctrine in the region has for a long time prevented people from making human images.<sup>151</sup> In addition, the unforgiving weather conditions forced many to migrate from one place to another in search of a livelihood,<sup>152</sup> which meant that migrants could not make or keep many objects. Consequently, literature, poetry, narration and oral history were the most popular forms of art in the Arabian Peninsula and acted as a substitute for the visual arts.<sup>153</sup> This reality created an important problem for Binzagr and every other artist who was interested in representing the past. There was not enough visual sources to rely on.

In general, the lack of visual representations of the past deprived Saudis of reassurance about losing their memories and cultural identity; creating new visual

<sup>147</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 11. Binzagr concluded her introduction to her first book with a special dedication saying: 'To the artist everywhere I offer my impressions in the hope that through them I may penetrate to his Soul'.

<sup>148</sup> Such as: مغربي، ملامح الحياة الاجتماعية في الحجاز في القرن الرابع عشر للهجرة.

<sup>149</sup> See: (Chapter 5)

<sup>150</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 51.

<sup>151</sup> See: (Chapter 4).

<sup>152</sup> Binzagr, 'An Historical Perspective', 18.

<sup>153</sup> See: عبدالعزيز علي القويحي، تراث الأجداد: دراسة لجوانب مختلفة من تاريخ مآثوراتنا الشعبية، الجزء 1، الطبعة الثالثة (الرياض: المؤلف، 2009)، 21-40.

images might therefore reduce this tension. However, making images of living creatures would also contradict the desire to hold on to traditional Islamic heritage which rejects image making.<sup>154</sup> Thus, it could be argued that the visual arts were part of the solution and the problem at the same time. This complicated situation may explain why the few scholars who have written about the history of art in Saudi Arabia avoid discussing this aspect of artists' struggle.<sup>155</sup> These writers have tended to list the small traditional crafts and historic artefacts as the style of preference in the past with no reference to the sources that shaped this style.<sup>156</sup> They also attribute the change in art forms and rise of modern art in Saudi to the government decision to add art to the school curriculum.<sup>157</sup> This might be true if the prohibition of image making was a state law, but in fact it was a general attitude on the part of the public, and a government decision to introduce art education would not be sufficient to change attitudes, unless, artists have played a role in negotiating and changing this situation.

Al-Senan goes further and attributes the scarcity of art practice before 1954 to Saudi Arabia's cultural isolation.<sup>158</sup> This claim is somewhat inaccurate because, since the eighth century, the Hijaz region has been visited annually by people from around the world for pilgrimage, and since ancient times it has been an important location on the

<sup>154</sup> According to Islamic doctrine, making any image of a living creature is considered a sin, but human images are the most prohibited because they can lead to idolatry. See: "باب عذاب المصورين يوم القيامة"، في: *صحيح البخاري*، جزء 7، الأحاديث رقم 5950-51، 176؛ أنظر أيضاً نفس الجزء، الأحاديث رقم 5952-5963؛ "باب بيع التصاوير التي ليس فيها روح، وما يكره من ذلك"، المرجع السابق، ج. 3، رقم 2225، 82؛ "باب تحريم تصوير صورة الحيوان وتحريم اتخاذ ما فيه صورة غير ممتحنة"، في *صحيح مسلم*، ج. 3، الأحاديث رقم 2104-2112، 1663-1672.

<sup>155</sup> See: Al-Senan, 'The Effect of Culture on the Artistic Vision in Saudi Contemporary Painting and the Role of Women in This Field'; Jan, 'Cultural and Environmental Effects of Painting on Saudi Woman Artists in Saudi Arabia'; *السنان، المرأة والفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية: الحربي، التصوير التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية*.

<sup>156</sup> See: *الرصيد، تاريخ الفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية*، 16-17؛ *السليمان، مسيرة الفن التشكيلي السعودي*، 9؛ *السنان، مؤثرات أساليب معاصرة في التصوير التشكيلي السعودي*، 10؛ *السنان، المرأة والفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية*، 12؛ *السنان، مؤثرات الرؤية في التصوير التشكيلي السعودي المعاصر*، 10؛ *الحربي، التصوير التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية*، 3.

<sup>157</sup> See: *الرصيد، تاريخ الفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية*، 16-17؛ *السليمان، مسيرة الفن التشكيلي السعودي*، 9؛ *السنان، مؤثرات أساليب معاصرة في التصوير التشكيلي السعودي*، 10؛ *السنان، المرأة والفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية*، 12؛ *السنان، مؤثرات الرؤية في التصوير التشكيلي السعودي المعاصر*، 10؛ *الحربي، التصوير التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية*، 3. Suhail Al-Harbi believes that oil wealth changed people attitudes towards art practices hence it flourished in the country.

<sup>158</sup> *السنان، المرأة والفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية*، 12.

old Silk Road.<sup>159</sup> These writers have no obvious reason to avoid discussing the question since they were all active in an era when art was accepted.<sup>160</sup> Yet all avoid mentioning the Islamic rejection of human images and its effects on shaping the development and nature of Saudi art.<sup>161</sup> The only Saudi scholar who has ever discussed this issue is Olfet Binzagr, when she wrote a chapter for her sister's first book.<sup>162</sup>

One possible reason for scholars' negligence is that they wanted to avoid stirring a debate that has been settled for some time, as documenting the fact might encourage religious authorities to campaign afresh to warn people from image making. However, it could be argued that origin of this negligence lies in the very problem of identity crisis. Saudis, in general, are either religious, or realise that Islam represents a strong part of their cultural identity. Hence Saudi intellectuals who were able to find a balance between their religious beliefs and secular lifestyle remain sensitive about scrutiny and judgment. They are also discouraged by global discourse and the media from discussing religious debates in writing, and therefore from documenting their history. Saudi Arabia is not well represented in global discourse, and raising any sensitive issue can feed negative stereotypes about the country. Moreover, Saudi scholars have learned by experience that negotiating subjects of women and religion in Saudi Arabia is often

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<sup>159</sup> See: Xinru Liu, *The Silk Road in World History* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 36.

<sup>160</sup> A similar case of negligence in writing the history of modern Saudi literature has been observed and discussed by Alghathami in his book *حكاية الحداثة في المملكة العربية السعودية*, 'The Story of Modernity in Saudi Arabia'. When he wanted to write this book, his fellow scholars refused to collaborate, claiming that Saudis would not be ready for such material: 30–19.

<sup>161</sup> *حكاية الحداثة في المملكة العربية السعودية*, الغذامي، *التصوير التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية*، 201، 216، 218. In his statistical study, Suhail Al-Harbi, came to the conclusion that 61.9% of the representational arts produced in Saudi from 1967 to the year 2000 depict traditional subjects – old houses, villages and traditional daily-life objects. Human images, on the other hand, represented 37.1%, and images of other living creatures 12.7%; both witnessed a remarkable drop in their rate after 1976. Unfortunately, Al-Harbi's study does not explain the reason for this difference in percentage and its relation to historical changes. He also gives no explanation for abstract art being the dominant style in Saudi Arabia, because his study only focuses on representational painting.

<sup>162</sup> Binzagr, 'An Historical Perspective', 18.

taken out of context and used against them in political and economic arguments.<sup>163</sup> This has made them believe that it can be used to exert political pressure and control the oil reserve in the country.<sup>164</sup> For them, oil is a mixed blessing. In fact, the prominent Saudi scholar, Ghazi Alqusaibi, dedicated an entire book to warn Saudis from foreign cultural and intellectual invasion, although he lived the majority of his life abroad and adopted a Western lifestyle.<sup>165</sup> The history of Saudi Arabia has been summarised in global discourse as two brief historical moments: the rise of Islam and the discovery of oil. This narrow frame has deprived Saudis, to an extent, from having noticeable presence in written history since the seventh century when the capital of the Islamic empire moved outside the Arabian Peninsula and until the discovery of oil.<sup>166</sup> They also fear losing their agency, and their historical presence again, once the oil reserve is exhausted, since both events –the rise of Islam and the discovery of oil– are acts of God.<sup>167</sup> This sense of worthlessness is reinforced by the tendency in foreign studies about Saudi Arabia to join together notions of valuable and invaluable, fullness and emptiness, such as by linking oil, gold, wealth, fortune and authority with ideas about desert, sand and myth.<sup>168</sup>

<sup>163</sup> See for example: Michael L Ross, 'Does Oil Hinder Democracy?', *World Politics* 53, no. 3 (2001): 325–61; Michael Ross, 'Oil, Islam, and Woman', *American Political Science Review* 102, no. 1 (February 2008): 1–17.

<sup>164</sup> Titles suggesting that Saudi Arabian wealth belongs to another country create constant anxiety in Saudi Arabia. See for example: Robert Vitalis, *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2007); Rachel Bronson, *Thicker than Oil: America's Uneasy Partnership with Saudi Arabia* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>165</sup> See: غازي عبدالرحمن القصيبي، *الغزو الثقافي ومقالات أخرى* (بيروت؛ عمان، الأردن: المؤسسة العربية للدراسات والنشر؛ دار النشر، 1991). Ghazi Alqusaibi was a famous writer, poet and public figure in Saudi Arabia. He was at school in Bahrain, then obtained Bachelor and Master degrees in the US and a Doctorate from London University. He also worked for a long period as Saudi ambassador in Bahrain and in London.

<sup>166</sup> See Chapter 4 in: عبدالحكيم كعبي، *موسوعة التاريخ الإسلامي: عصر الخلفاء الراشدين* (عمان: دار أسامة للنشر والتوزيع، 2003), for more about the political struggle of the people of Hijaz during the seventh century to claim back the Islamic capital.

<sup>167</sup> After the rise of Saudi power as a result of the oil embargo action of 1973, 'sceptical questioners' suggested to King Faisal of Saudi Arabia at the time that 'oil wealth had, perhaps, played just as large a role as God in the 1970s renaissance of Islam' referring to his recent success in uniting the word of Arab and Muslim countries as a result of other forces. See: Lacey, *The Kingdom*, 420.

<sup>168</sup> See for example: Matthew R Simmons, *Twilight in the Desert: The Coming Saudi Oil Shock and the World Economy* (Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2005); Anthony Cave Brown, *Oil, God, and Gold: The Story of Aramco and the Saudi Kings* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999); Jahangir Amuzegar, 'Oil





does, and believes that working within certain boundaries is inevitable for both.<sup>171</sup>

Therefore, Western and Eurocentric gender studies are not useful for appreciating the representations of women's agency in Binzagr's work since these studies were designed for, and tested on, a different ideological system.

Cultural differences can substantially affect the way a particular circumstance is perceived. For example, during Binzagr's visit to France for her Galerie Drouant exhibition in Paris (1980), she was surprised when a group of French female artists told her that in order to get good press reviews they had to conceal their gender identity by hiding their first names.<sup>172</sup> She was somewhat offended that they advised her to do the same,<sup>173</sup> and found it difficult to believe that this could still happen in Paris in 1980.<sup>174</sup> It is important to note that though her class provided her with certain privileges, enabling her to study art and support her career, this should not be used as an argument to undermine her achievement and her opinions about her culture.<sup>175</sup> In the 1980s in Saudi, artists of both sexes were still struggling to overcome the lack of training and exhibiting opportunities, as there was not any art colleges, tutors, galleries, even art suppliers to buy their basic material from.<sup>176</sup> More importantly, both male and female artists were challenged to get public recognition and to overcome the religious and social obstacles related to the field.<sup>177</sup> Therefore, Binzagr felt privileged that her struggle in the art world was mostly related to technical, instead of gender, issues.

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.: 'أنا في الثمانين لما رحنا هناك عملوا لي غداء مع فنانات فرنسيات، كان مهمهم يقول لك عشان يجوني الـ 'ريفيو' الصحفيين'. Translation: 'In the 1980s, when I went there [to Paris] they [Gallery Duron in Paris] arranged a lunch meeting with some French female artists, they were mostly concerned about attracting the press to write a good review so they hid that I was a female because they believed that the press would not attend and write about me [if they knew that I am a woman]'.  
<sup>173</sup> Ibid.; Binzagr, Seventh personal interview.

<sup>174</sup> Binzagr, Second personal interview: 'إذا هذا بفرنسا في الثمانينات!'. Translation: 'Imagine, this was in France in the 1980s!'.  
<sup>175</sup> See: (Chapter 6).

<sup>176</sup> See: 81–30، الرصيص، تاريخ الفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية،  
<sup>177</sup> See: (Chapter 4).

Comparative examples indicate that her dedication and planning for ways of self-presentation and work promotion are the main reason for her success. Her class and subject matter were tools she implemented to serve her plans, but was not an assurance for her success. For example, her colleague Fawzia Abdullateef (b.1947) comes from an upper-class, and painted many subjects similar to those of Binzagr, yet her work does not have the same popularity in Saudi.<sup>178</sup> Another example is Abdulhalim Radwi (1939–2006), who established a private museum after Binzagr. However, Radwi's museum was closed shortly after his death because he lacked a clear vision for its future.<sup>179</sup> According to Alrosais, Radwi's museum was actually a house he owned cluttered with his art collection, and was only open by appointment because he never hired staff,<sup>180</sup> whereas Binzagr's plans covered all such issues before establishing her museum.<sup>181</sup> Binzagr studied and understood her audience as well as her trade, thus she was able to plan effectively and reach her goals.

She refuses to be called a feminist because she understands that this title will force her to choose and defend one model of women's lifestyle over the other, and she could never do it because she saw and admired conflicted models of women's agency in different cultures: Saudi Arabia, Egypt and England. Her case also does not fit well with prominent Muslim feminist scholarship for the same reasons that makes Western feminism unsuitable. Despite their important observations, Muslim feminists cannot avoid judgment based on criterion that does not accommodate other models of women's agency. This problem lies in the methodology of their argument which focus on defending their model by proving that it is 'right' or 'best'. This forces them to reject any other model that clashes with their own. For example, although Mernissi and

<sup>178</sup> See: 129، مسيرة الفن التشكيلي السعودي، السليمان.

<sup>179</sup> الرصيص، تاريخ الفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية، 116.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> See: (Chapter 6).

Ahmed have both sought to demonstrate that Islam does not degrade women, each forces her version of religious interpretation over the reader as the ‘true’ version of Islam. Mernissi argues that all forms of veiling are not a religious order,<sup>182</sup> whereas Ahmed accepts one form of the veil and argues that the rest are wrong and demeaning.<sup>183</sup> They both denounce domesticity, restricting agency to the public sphere, and particularly deny Saudi, Iranian, and Pakistani women any social or historical significance based on the scholars’ political stance towards the governments of these countries.<sup>184</sup> Muslim feminist rejection of other modalities in Arab and Muslim countries, such as Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Gulf states, can be explained as a result of an anxiety of losing their newly structured postcolonial identity; an identity that they worked hard to re-establish, understand, justify, and familiarize

<sup>182</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women’s Rights in Islam*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 180–188; see also: Fatima Mernissi, *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2002); فاطمة المرنيسي، *الخوف من الحداثة: الإسلام والديمقراطية*، ترجمة محمد ديبات، الطبعة الثانية (دمشق: دار الجندي للنشر والتوزيع، 2010).

<sup>183</sup> Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1992), 231–232.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 231–232, 241–242; نهلة بيضون، الطبعة الثالثة (الدار)، فاطمة المرنيسي، هل أنتم محصنون ضد الحرير؟، 33–34؛ المرنيسي، *الخوف من الحداثة*، 189–191. The statements of both Mernissi and Ahmed affect their academic credibility. They use strong and demeaning vocabulary to judge Saudi women and culture without grounding their argument on field work or any kind of objective methodology. They rely entirely on the state law of modesty dress and gender segregation as enough evidence of women’s ‘oppression’, ‘powerlessness’ and unified menial position even though they both fail to justify the high rate of Saudi females in higher education institutions. Consequently, they refuse to give them any credit as long as they refuse to show overt rejection towards these laws. For example, Ahmed is disappointed that Saudi women could not claim their right to vote, ignoring the fact that both men and women in Saudi do not have that right because there is not any form of political elections in the country. On the other hand, Mernissi only understands Saudi women’s desire to seek higher education as an excuse to escape the ‘harem’ of the ‘oil princes’. What both have missed in their studies is that work environment and most public places in Saudi Arabia are also segregated. Gender seclusion is a shared situation in schools, colleges, markets, hospitals, gyms and many other places of both sexes. Moreover, Saudi women have not fight the order of modesty dress yet, because they are not subjected directly to gender discriminative situations. The segregation allows them to function away from the male control. For example, in work environment they perform under the leadership of a woman an equally important role to that of their male colleagues. Indeed there are other boundaries and denied rights that require more attention and negotiation, however these do not exhaust Saudi women’s agency and transformation in many fields of humanity. The Iraqi scholar Louay Bahry who carried a study in Saudi Arabia in 1982, and followed the progress of women’s rights from the 1960s was able to acknowledge the important role of Saudi women during that period. See: Louay Bahry, ‘The New Saudi Woman: Modernizing in an Islamic Framework’, *Middle East Journal* 36, no. 4 (1 October 1982): 502–15. More recently scholars have questioned Mernissi’s approach, see: Katherine Bullock, *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical and Modern Stereotypes*, 2nd ed. (London: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2007), 136–182.

themselves and the rest of the world with. The belief of Muslim feminists that something has to be ‘right’ and consequently everything else is wrong, means that the existence of new hybrid forms of Islamic and Arab cultures that developed under other influences threaten their own, and therefore, had to be rejected.

Scholars who noticed this problem of judgment tried to expand the meaning and models of agency by examining unacknowledged cases. For example, Saba Mahmood regardless of her secular orientation demonstrates the impact of women’s piety movement in the mosques of Cairo, Egypt. Mahmood argues that the focus in feminist scholarship over ‘politically subversive form of agency’ led to the negligence of ‘other modalities of agency whose meaning and effect are not captured within the logic of subversion and resignification of hegemonic terms of discourse.’<sup>185</sup> She explains that although ‘acts of resistance’ to sources of domination represent an important model, they ‘do not exhaust’ the entire ‘field of human action’.<sup>186</sup> She also notes that the number of religious people who have conflicting opinions regarding the religious principles of the piety movement is almost equal to those who approve it.<sup>187</sup> In other words, the influence of one religious opinion does not exhaust that of the other. Similarly, Reina Lewis demonstrates how the veil –like many religious and cultural practices– ‘cannot be contained within a single truth, experience or understanding’, because it change according to its historical moment and location.<sup>188</sup>

It is therefore important when examining Binzagr’s work to abandon established feminists’ perspectives on domesticity and gender based segregation, and to try to see her culture from her own viewpoint to understand how a woman can negotiate the

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<sup>185</sup> Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 153.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., x.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., xvi.

<sup>188</sup> Reina Lewis, ‘Preface’, in *Veil: Veiling, Representation, and Contemporary Art*, ed. David A Bailey and Gilane Tawadros (London: Institute of International Arts (inIVA) in association with Modern Art Oxford, 2003), 10, 14.

hierarchies of her society and make radical changes without feeling oppressed. What matters is her notion of agency.

Assessing the status of Arab women in general is still an unresolved debate. Many Arab, or Arab-based, scholars are not satisfied with the way Arab women are represented by scholarship. Cynthia Nelson, for example, in her study about the unacknowledged role of Middle Eastern women, argues that ‘women can and do exercise a greater deal of agency in spheres of social life than has heretofore been appreciated’.<sup>189</sup> Nelson wanted to challenge the idea of reducing the social world to private and public spheres, with power being restricted to the public domain, by using Middle Eastern society as an example.<sup>190</sup> According to her, the status of Middle Eastern women has been underestimated because ‘Western social scientists have imposed their own cultural categories onto the experiential world of the Middle East’.<sup>191</sup> As a consequence, there is a sense of urgency to adopt a new approach more suitable for Arabic society and ideology, though this is hard to accomplish. Soha Abdel Kader stresses the importance of developing a grand theory to enable scholars to understand the general position of Arab women,<sup>192</sup> but admits that it is difficult since ‘there is too little comparable data on Arab women’.<sup>193</sup>

Even less data exists on Saudi than Arab women, because most scholarly interest in Saudi Arabia focuses on economic and political issues where women were

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<sup>189</sup> Cynthia Nelson, ‘Public and Private Politics: Women in the Middle Eastern World’, *American Ethnologist* 1, no. 3 (1974): 554.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 551; see also: Caroline B. Brettell and Carolyn F. Sargent, eds., ‘III Domestic Worlds And Public Worlds’, in *Gender in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, 4th ed. (London: Pearson Education, 2005), 83–84.

<sup>191</sup> Nelson, ‘Public and Private Politics’, 552.

<sup>192</sup> Soha Abdel Kader, ‘The Role of Women in the History of the Arab State’, in *Retrieving Women’s History: Changing Perceptions of the Role of Women in Politics and Society*, ed. S. Jay Kleinberg (Oxford: Berg Publishers; UNESCO, 1988), 90.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

historically less apparent.<sup>194</sup> Even if scholars were to attempt to provide data on Saudi women, it would probably be deficient and unrepresentative. The strict gender segregation system prevents foreign scholars, especially men, from observing the lives of Saudi women in a normal environment.<sup>195</sup> Religious women must maintain their veil of choice in the presence of an observer, and it would be difficult to convince non-religious Saudi women to provide pictures or personal information for publication as they have to observe cultural norms.<sup>196</sup>

As Abdel Kader argues, this lack of data is not just a result of the scarcity of studies, but also of the complexity of Arab society. The vast scale and long rich history of Arab countries maximise scholarly demands and discourage scholars from pursuing a theoretical perspective.<sup>197</sup> Arab societies, including Jeddah, are preoccupied with parallel social systems. For example, the status of women varies from Bedouin to urban societies, and from the urban elite to the peasant.<sup>198</sup> Hence Abdel Kader adds that a thorough understanding of the status of Arab women necessitates examination of their role within three socio-conceptual spaces: the family, the social and reproductive arenas, and the ideologies of the Arab world.<sup>199</sup>

This raises another important issue related to the public/private debate in gender studies. Interestingly, Arab societies have a different spatial system than those in the West, which can vary from one social group to another within the same society. In other words, among urban and Bedouin societies a public space can be transformed into a

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<sup>194</sup> This does not mean that Saudi women had no political or economic role in Saudi history, but highlights the fact that their roles have not been documented as much as they should. An example of that is the role of Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman in helping her brother, King Abdullaziz, regain the Saudi capital Riyadh. See: دلال الحربي، *نساء شهيرات من نجد* (الرياض: دار الملك عبدالعزيز، 1998)، 148–155؛ دلال الحربي، 'نورة بنت عبدالرحمن بن فيصل آل سعود'، *مجلة الدارة*، عدد تذكاري، 24، 3، 4 (1998): 91–107.

<sup>195</sup> See: Peter Lienhardt, 'Some Social Aspects of the Trucial States', in *The Arabian Peninsula: Society and Politics*, ed. Derek Hopwood (London: Allen and Unwin, 1972), 220.

<sup>196</sup> See: Olivia Arthur, *Jeddah Diary* (London: Fishbar, 2012), 4–5.

<sup>197</sup> Abdel Kader, 'The Role of Women in the History of the Arab State', 90.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Abdel Kader, 'The Role of Women in the History of the Arab State', 91.

private one, and vice versa. The borders between public and private can be disrupted, meaning that spatial systems are not useful when studying power division in the Arab world. Domesticity in Jeddah and many other Arabic cities exceeds the borders of the house. For example, the Bedouin home, the tent, is located in the middle of an open space, and there is no door to shield women or separate them from the exterior world. Moreover, their social roles are different from those of women in urban societies. Bedouin women in Jeddah share responsibility with men for providing a livelihood. They work outdoors, either alone, as illustrated in *Bedouin Landscape* (1971) by Binzagr (Figure 2), or side by side with men, as in *Pasture* (1968), where Binzagr shows women and men herding sheep (Figure 3), or *Watermelon* (1968), where they are seen sitting on the road selling crops (Figure 4).<sup>200</sup>

Furthermore, the need for mobility forced women to invent a mobile domestic space – the veil – when they travel short distances. Privileged women also concealed themselves, especially when travelling for long distances, in a *howdah*, which is a tented camel saddle that can also be put on the ground at night for use as a private space for women to sleep.<sup>201</sup> This gave domestic spaces interesting diversity.

Moreover, the uses and forms of the veil were never fixed,<sup>202</sup> and served purposes other than maintaining women's modesty. For instance, in Jeddah, the veil signified the marital status of urban women but the economic and social status of Bedouin women.<sup>203</sup> According to the customs of some urban tribes of the Hijaz, which were practised until the rise of Islam, the veil was also used to differentiate between

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<sup>200</sup> See: (Chapter 3).

<sup>201</sup> See: Arthur E. Robinson, 'The Mahmal of the Moslem Pilgrimage', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (New Series)* 63, no. 01 (1931): 117–27, for another important use of the *howdah*. Since women represent the honour of their tribe, the *howdah* became a signifier of the sacred. Therefore, it was also used to carry the annual dress of the Ka'aba in Mecca in an extravagant ceremony.

<sup>202</sup> See: Reina Lewis, 'Veils and Sales: Muslims and the Spaces of Postcolonial Fashion Retail', *Fashion Theory* 11, no. 4 (December 2007): 428.

<sup>203</sup> See: (Chapter 3).



mistress and slave.<sup>204</sup> These examples show the complicated nature of social and spatial systems and their undefined boundaries in Arab societies, which makes it difficult to apply Western theories when studying Binzagr's work.

## 2.5 Sources of experience and spaces of productivity: ways of looking

In order to expand the meaning and modalities of agency and accept Binzagr representations, the notions related to sources of knowledge, and spaces of productivity and transformation should be analyzed and returned to its wider meaning. The emphasis on girls' education as a source of knowledge, and paid work as a space for transformation shows one aspect of women's empowerment. Access to effective sources of empowerment is strongly related to the access to any source of experience that can aid women with knowledge and deep understanding for their society, hence learn an effective language to use for negotiation. In fact, spaces of productivity which vary depending on the expectations and values of that society are all potential spaces for transformation; they allow women a space to show the value of their role regardless if it was paid work or not. This is important in order to build women's confidence as they earn the appreciation of their society for the fulfilment of their duties, hence it encourages them to claim authority and exert change. Thus, marriage, aging and migration even from the family to the marital house should be considered as important sources of women's experience and knowledge. This explains the rise of women's status and influence in traditional societies as they grow older.<sup>205</sup>

<sup>204</sup> 18: (يناير 1989) رقم 13، المأثورات الشعبية 1، see also: Godfrey Rolles Driver, John C. Miles, and Sir John Charles Miles, *The Assyrian Laws* (Aalen/ Germany: Scientia Verlag, 1975), 128, 204.

<sup>205</sup> This idea is clearer to anthropological scholars since they conduct their work based on observation of human behaviour in indigenous societies that have similarities with that of Binzagr. See, for example, the work of Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere: Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, 'Women, Culture, and Society: A Theoretical Overview', in *Woman, Culture, and Society*, ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, Louise Lamphere, and Joan Bamberger (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 17–42; Louise

Therefore, evaluating Binzagr's actions by looking at the changes she prompted is more useful for understanding her role than looking at her resistance to social norms. This approach also draws attention to the socio-economic roles performed by traditional women in Binzagr's work,<sup>206</sup> and shows how the artist made women appear more important than men by giving their images greater interest. For example, *Morning Visit* (1986) shows two women sitting in a front room filled with rich colours and patterns (Figure 5). The room is furnished with traditional red Arabic-style seats and a large expensive Persian rug and is connected to another that appears less furnished and embellished. Two women can be seen sitting in the room, talking and leaning comfortably on the Arabic-style seats. The woman on the right has her legs crossed in a confident, relaxed pose, while the other sits with one leg over the seat. The back room shows two more women, presumably their maids,<sup>207</sup> who appear occupied making pots of tea and coffee. The woman in a printed pink dress approaches the front room carrying a tray between her hands, with her head leaning modestly forward and watching carefully the tray in her hands. It is therefore a scene that involves two classes of

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Lamphere, 'Strategies, Cooperation, and Conflict Among Women in Domestic Groups', in *Woman, Culture and Society*, ed. Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 97–113; Louise Lamphere, 'The Domestic Sphere of Women and the Public World of Men: The Strengths and Limitations of an Anthropological Dichotomy', in *Gender in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed. Caroline B. Brettell and Carolyn F. Sargent, 4th ed. (London: Pearson Education, 2005), 86–95.

<sup>206</sup> (Chapter 3).

<sup>207</sup> It is more likely that the servants and maids in Binzagr work were actually representations of slaves given that these figures mostly appeared in her work on the upper-class life in the pre-oil society of the Hijaz. However, since she refused to confirm or deny this fact, when she was interviewed, this thesis will abstain from describing these figures as the family's slave. The labels: slave, servant, or maid for the female were used interchangeably in Saudi culture before the abolishment of slavery in 1962. This is because many slaves after being manumitted by their master's will either chose to continue to work at his house as servants, or remained in touch and offered some of their services for the master's family for free. It was common that a slave carries the name of his master after manumission, and live close by, or at his house to start their own family. According to Alexei Vassiliev 'Most slaves were found around the centre of the slave trade, in Hijaz, where every relatively well-off family would expect to buy a slave. Outside Hijaz, only rich families owned them.' They mainly 'acted as servants, guards and housekeepers'. What signified servants and maids in Saudi Arabia during the era depicted in Binzagr's work, is that they were mainly originated from Africa or local Arabs although the latter were rare. While from the 1960s onwards, African and local Arab house labour started to extinct, and were replaced by imported labour of other ethnic groups, but mostly were South Asians. Therefore, both slaves and servants in Saudi Arabia before 1962 were signifiers of socio-economic power. For more about the status of slaves and freedmen, and the hierarchy of social class in Saudi Arabia before and after the 1960s, see: Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia*, locations 1110, 1132–1160.

women: the upper and working class, and Binzagr stresses the authority of the women in the foreground by presenting their servants in the same scene. This representation of class is reinforced by the rich details of the surroundings. By contrast, in *Chatting* (1991) (Figure 6) Binzagr depicts two men seated in similar postures but in a setting that creates a very different impression of their socio-economic status: they sit on a wooden bench covered with a rather cheap rug next to a plain wall with a simple wooden-shuttered window. Unlike the extended view in *Morning Visit*, *Chatting* uses a more typical perspective, which narrows the depth of the scene and prevents the spectator from seeing beyond the wall. The wooden window provides a link between the two scenes: according to Binzagr, the two women and their maids are behind this window.<sup>208</sup> For her, domestic spaces in Jeddah are more significant and elaborately decorated than public spaces, which lack luxurious details, and she maintains that had she shown these men indoors she would have given them a richer setting.<sup>209</sup>

However, it could be argued that making the choice of depicting these settings is an attempt to control the image of men and women in visual memory. Although Binzagr did not live this traditional life, changing the way such women are perceived empowers both: the female subjects and the artist, since the latter belongs to the same society.

<sup>208</sup> Binzagr, Third personal interview: 'إنني عارفة ببيكون يعني.. يا.. مثلاً زي هذا... تحسي الشباك، الداخل جوا لكن هو برا، برا فيه نقشف ما فيه يعني، لو هو جوا حيكون منفرد.. الجبرين: ليه برا نقشف و جوا فيه غنى؟ بن زقر: لأنه برا في الشارع في الطريق لكن لو هو جوا قاعد مثلاً من جوا الشباك المجلس حيكون مفروش، مش حيكون بطريقة فوق ببيكون برضو مفروش سجاجيد، لكن هما قاعدين الشباك وراهم، يعني خارجين قاعدين في الحوش قاعدين في برا، فدا السبب أنه الشيء.. ما فيه.. ما فيه سجاد، ما فيه الفرش ما فيه الحاجات دي'. Translation: 'You know, it was.. like this one [referring to *Chatting*], you feel that the person who is sitting inside [behind] window is outside. The exterior settings [in old Jeddah] were poor, there was not [anything special about it] but if it was an interior setting [referring to *Chatting*] it would have been unique. Elgibreen: why the exterior of their houses used to be that poor while the inside was very luxurious? Binzagr: because it [the men's seating area] was outside, in the street, in the road, but if they sat inside, for example behind that window, the guest room would have been furnished, not like the above [referring to *Chatting*] it would have rugs and things. However, these are sitting in front of the window [referring to the two men in *Chatting*], which means they were outside in the front yard, and this is why there was not any rugs, there was not any furniture or anything of that sort. But if they were inside and not in front of the window it would have been different'.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

Cultural awareness is very important for understanding certain elements in Binzagr's work. For example, the veil, one of the most debated issues in women's rights, which is often seen as a symbol of oppression and sometimes as a symbol of political resistance,<sup>210</sup> is used in Binzagr's work for a completely different reason. According to the artist, the main purpose for painting *Morning Visit* (Figure 5) was to represent a social convention that uses the veil to send a message.<sup>211</sup> The woman on the left wears a black skirt over her dress, which is part of her outer garment, while she is depicted wearing her black face cover lifted over her head. This was understood as a sign to the hostess that the guest would not be staying long and there was no need to prepare lunch.<sup>212</sup> In the past women used to visit each other without appointment, so to spare the hostess the embarrassment of having to ask if her guest was staying for lunch they developed their own sign language. Asking the guest such a question was considered rude in Saudi culture, because it gave an impression that the hostess was anticipating the guest's departure. It was also important for the hostess to know if her guest was not staying long so she could hurry her maids to serve tea and coffee.

Cultural awareness is also important for understanding how Binzagr controlled the presentation of her work to send the same message to her audience. Since Binzagr was working between two cultures, she was careful about the translation of her titles.

<sup>210</sup> See: Lewis, 'Preface', 10–14; Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes', 75; Fanon, 'Algeria Unveiled', 72–78; see also: Leila Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence from the Middle East to America* (USA: Yale University Press, 2011); Fatima Mernissi, 'Women in Muslim History: Traditional Perspectives and New Strategies', in *Retrieving Women's History: Changing Perceptions of the Role of Women in Politics and Society*, ed. S. Jay Kleinberg (Oxford; Paris: Berg Publishers; UNESCO, 1988), 338–55.

<sup>211</sup> Binzagr, Third personal interview: ' [...] في هرجة صبحية عارفة فيه رمز عرف لحالة، لما تيجي الزائرة في الصبح [...] مستعجلة بس جايه تشرب فنجان شاهي وإلا قهوة، ماتفصح كل القنعة حقتها، تشيل راس الملاية وتقع، تفهم صاحبة البيت أنه هدي جاية زيارة قصيرة ماهي قاعده للغداء، فهذي الرمزية من الحاجات اللي تسمعيها أنه من العادات الحلوة حتى لو هي جات من غير ميعاد. Translation: 'Morning Visit represents a cultural convention for a special case; when the visitor come in the morning [...] and in a hurry, she is only going to stay for tea or coffee, she does not take off her entire outer garment, only the upper part is removed and this way the hostess understand that she is there for a short visit and cannot have lunch. This sign was one of beautiful customs we learned about which women used to follow when they come without a previous appointment'.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

For instance, the titles of *Morning Visit* and *Chatting* (Figures 5 and 6) in Arabic differ slightly in meaning from their English titles. *Morning Visit* is called in Arabic هرجة صبحية, which literally means ‘Morning Chat’, whereas *Chatting* in Arabic is هرجة راس, which means ‘Head Talk’.<sup>213</sup> The term هرجة راس, or ‘Head Talk’, is widely used in Arabic as a reference for short, urgent and private one-to-one conversations. Arguably, Binzagr understood that the luxury of morning visits and domestic entertaining, which for Saudis signify the economic independence and social authority of women, might be interpreted by a Western audience as a sign of women’s laziness.<sup>214</sup> Thus she tried to lessen the significance of the male subject by changing the title to mean a simple chat that gave no indication of social position. This manipulation of audience perception makes the examination of Binzagr’s work more interesting.

## 2.6 Conclusion

The previous chapter showed how Binzagr grew up in unique conditions, having been born in an era when formal education was not accessible for girls in many parts of the country. Her family’s ambition to give their children a better future gave Binzagr the opportunity to live in, and learn from, other cultures. However, her 16 years of expatriation between Egypt and England nurtured a nostalgia for Saudi heritage. Hence she focused on painting scenes from the past to compensate for her feeling of loss. The drastic changes that occurred in the late 1960s and the 70s as a result of the oil boom affected many Saudis’ sense of stability and increased demand for Binzagr’s traditional subjects, especially since there were few visual representations of the past to satisfy

<sup>213</sup> صفية بن زقر، رحلة ثلاثة عقود مع التراث السعودي (جدة: المؤلفة، 1999)، 40، 56. Binzagr, Third personal interview: ‘هرجة راس: لما يكون فيه.. يبغوا يهرجوا زي عندكم حقت...’ [التمثليات، أديني كلمة راس أبغى أقعد أنا وأنت لوحدنا].

Translation: ‘Head talk: is when there.. when they want to talk [...] like in tv drama when they say: “give me your word, we need to talk in private”.’

<sup>214</sup> See: Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 150–3, for a similar debate about Oriental women.

people's appetite for their lost heritage. Moreover, restricting Saudi history in global discourse to two historical events, the rise of Islam and discovery of oil, denies its citizens their presence in written history and significantly affects how they write their history. This problem deprived Binzagr and many other Saudi artists of acknowledgement of their role in exerting cultural change, especially their success in pushing the boundaries of image making.

The explanation of these unique conditions makes it clear that traditional theoretical approaches cannot be applied easily to Binzagr's work, particularly when examining gender in relation to spatial division. Domestic space in Jeddah does not have a fixed meaning, and the politics of domestic space are culturally specific. The custom of the veil also complicates the boundaries between private and the public, since it represents a mobile home that maintains the privacy of women in public areas. In addition, public spaces can be transformed into private spaces, and the tendency in gender studies to associate public space with power therefore becomes inappropriate. As a consequence, the ways of looking at sources of empowerment and spaces of transformation must expand and consider any source of life experience and any space of productivity. Binzagr's own explanations and her exposure to other cultures supports the argument that women can have different sense of agency based on their sense of identity and their personal experience. This idea will become clearer after the analysis of her domestic scenes in the next chapter.

## Chapter 3: Domestic Space

### 3.1 Introduction

The meaning of space is complex since it changes from one field of knowledge to another.<sup>215</sup> Space is ‘infused with human meanings’,<sup>216</sup> and by the personal and collective experiences of its occupiers.<sup>217</sup> People’s experience of space can therefore affect their sense and conception of their identity,<sup>218</sup> which explains why people may develop different feelings towards the same space. This means that domestic and segregated spaces, or any other form of space, are open to new interpretations as long as they concur with people’s personal experience.

Spatial experience is also affected by the politics of space, which differs from one culture to another. For example, according to the traditions of Jeddah in the 1970s, males were completely excluded from female gatherings and formal events after puberty, but were allowed to gather with certain female relatives on informal occasions.<sup>219</sup> Women, on the other hand, were allowed into public spaces used mainly by men, but had to observe the codes of modesty dress.<sup>220</sup> Analysis of Binzagr’s work will therefore demonstrate the significance of domestic space in Saudi culture, specifically in Jeddah, to explain why Binzagr developed a positive view of these places. It will also reveal how Binzagr created images of segregated spaces that favoured women. However, examining domestic space as a field of empowerment

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<sup>215</sup> See: John Agnew, ‘Space and Place’, in *The SAGE Handbook of Geographical Knowledge*, ed. David N. Livingstone and John Agnew (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2011), 316–330.

<sup>216</sup> Helen Couclelis et al., ‘Location, Place, Region, and Space’, in *Geography’s Inner Worlds: Pervasive Themes in Contemporary American Geography* (USA: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 230; see also: David Harvey, ‘Space as a Keyword’, in *David Harvey: A Critical Reader*, ed. Noel Castree and Derek Gregory (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006), 281–84.

<sup>217</sup> See: Yi-Fu Tuan, ‘Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective’, in *Philosophy in Geography*, ed. Stephen Gale and Gunnar Olsson, First Edition (New York: Springer, 1979), 387–427.

<sup>218</sup> Agnew, ‘Space and Place’, 324–325.

<sup>219</sup> Altorki, *Women in Saudi Arabia*, 29–49. Alorki gives a more detailed description of how codes of modesty and the politics of space changed in Jeddah from the late nineteenth century to the early 1980s.

<sup>220</sup> See: Ibid., 36–39, for more information on the politics of the veil in Jeddah.

cannot be clear-cut. Binzagr's work will show how power relations in segregated spaces are often affected by other factors, such as class, race and cultural group, and it is therefore important to explore the influence of these aspects on gender power play in domestic space.

Since 1968 Binzagr has produced many series on domestic life. The majority represent traditional rituals and ceremonial events in Jeddah, one of which is the *Marriage Series*.<sup>221</sup> This collection is one of her most famous and continued to grow until the 1990s as she discovered new material about traditional wedding costumes and rituals.<sup>222</sup> The rich cultural context of the *Marriage Series* makes it an interesting case study for examining her feeling towards traditional models of women's agency in domestic and segregated spaces. As James Duncan and David Ley explain, any vision of the spatial world can never be innocent or without purpose, because the world is already coded according to systems of representation.<sup>223</sup> However, understanding the artist's personal perspective is not enough – there are other symbolic meanings embedded in these ceremonies and rituals, and it is important to understand them from a cultural perspective. Roland Barthes, in his famous article 'Rhetoric of the image', draws attention to the importance of cultural connotations in representation,<sup>224</sup>

<sup>221</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 10, 25; Binzagr, 'Mission of Safeya Binzagr's Darah', 89. the first book showed this collection under the name Marriage Series, then in the second book the name changed to Nuptials Series.

<sup>222</sup> In: Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 10, Binzagr states that the *Marriage Series* was completed by 1976. However, in the 1990s she decided to produce more scenes to add it to her museum collection, such as *Al-Rabeya* (1998), which depicts a bride from the Najd region sitting on the ground next to a fully covered woman in black; and *Annasasat* (n.d), which depicts three women wearing a black and white traditional costume with golden embroidery and a headpiece. Both paintings are currently on display in the first gallery at Darat Safeya Binzagr Museum (see Figure 7); in Binzagr, Third personal interview: 'حاجة من نفسي كذا طلعت، حتى ليه أنا حطيت اللوحة دي متأخرة وجنبيهم؟ لأنه لما سويت البحث عرفت أنه أهل العريس بيجوا لابسين كده، موزي هدا اللبس، فأناسويت الشبه حق اللبس وحطيت جنبه', Binzagr mentions that after she painted *Al-Nassah* (1975) she discovered through research that the female members of the groom's family wear a special costume. She decided to paint *Anassasat* (n.d) to hang next to *Al-Nassah* (1975) in order to enrich information about this subject.

<sup>223</sup> James S. Duncan and David Ley, *Place/Culture/Representation* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), 4.

<sup>224</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Rhetoric of The Image', in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 136.



explaining that images can generate a second level of meaning that is closely connected to the concept of ideology. Images can therefore be affected by the ‘conceptual frameworks and value systems of society’.<sup>225</sup>

According to Barthes, images have ‘a very close communication with culture, knowledge, history’.<sup>226</sup> Hence interpretation and appreciation of the cultural meanings in the *Marriage Series* depend on how familiar the viewer is with the culture of Jeddah, and specifically on his/her ability to take three factors into consideration: firstly, the way traditional women of Jeddah felt towards their private spaces and defined their experience, which is where socio-anthropology studies become useful; secondly, the way the artist perceives and depicts the experiences of these women, by examining her comments on this subject and analysing her paintings; thirdly, the willingness of the viewer to accept and even adopt a new perspective when evaluating the experience of both painter and subject. This strategy will reveal not only Binzagr’s perception of some aspects of women’s power in relation to segregated spaces, but also that of the society of women represented since these paintings are all reflections of cultural practices.

These arguments will offer a new reading of domestic space as represented in Binzagr’s work, based on the ideology of Jeddah during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which is the era represented in the paintings not the era in which the artist lived. It is important to note that any information elicited from analysis of the paintings does not mean that it applies to all women of that era in Jeddah, but explains Binzagr’s view of the women she painted who consisted mostly of upper-class urban and Bedouin women. It is also important to emphasise that Binzagr’s demonstration of women’s transforming role in her paintings does not deny the authority of the men, or

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<sup>225</sup> Stuart Hall, ‘The Work of Representation’, in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 1997), 39.

<sup>226</sup> Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1997), 92.

vice versa. As Michelle Rosaldo explains, ‘acknowledging the universal fact of male authority’ does not deny the importance of women.<sup>227</sup>

### 3.2 *The Slipper Carrier: representing domestic space*

*The Slipper carrier* (1969) is one of the rare paintings in the *Marriage Series* that depicts a ceremony in a public space (Figure 8).<sup>228</sup> The subject of the painting is the old custom of sending the *الكنبش*, ‘Dabash’ – the bride’s trousseau – to her future house in a festive procession.<sup>229</sup> This was popular from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century.<sup>230</sup>

*The Slipper Carrier* (Figure 8) depicts a group of male figures of different ages walking in the street with three carriages behind them, which carry some chests, mirrors, a lantern and two water jugs. Three of the figures carry small objects and a pair of slippers on trays covered with a sheer fabric; one carries a potted plant and another bears a sword on top of a book, also covered with sheer material, in this case red. These men are usually hired especially to perform this task, and some are craftsmen who have made the bride’s new furniture,<sup>231</sup> which is shown on top of the carriages. The purpose of this festive parade around the city was to exhibit the bride’s trousseau, and when it reached her new house children helped unload the carriages, while the craftsmen installed and arranged the furniture in place.<sup>232</sup> The procession represented an important transitional stage in the life of women, when they moved from one house to another to begin a new role. In Jeddah, men never left the family house, even after marriage, with

<sup>227</sup> Rosaldo, ‘Women, Culture, and Society: A Theoretical Overview’, 21.

<sup>228</sup> *The Slipper Carrier* (1969) and *The Chanter* (1972) are the only two paintings in the series that depict an outdoor scene.

<sup>229</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 28; 63–362، حكاية مدنية، طرابلسي، جدة..

<sup>230</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 28; 63–362، حكاية مدنية، طرابلسي، جدة..

<sup>231</sup> 363، حكاية مدنية، طرابلسي، جدة..

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 362–63; Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 28.

each son expected to continue living in an apartment attached to the family house.<sup>233</sup>

The house therefore consisted of many stories in order to fit the extended family, and continued to grow depending on the number of families sharing it and the economic status of the head member.<sup>234</sup> Thus middle and upper-class women in Jeddah acted as family delegates when they moved into the new marital home, and based on how good they are treated they could decide with their families to either cut or continue their alliance with the in-laws.<sup>235</sup> As a prelude to this role, the groom had to give his bride a female slave for use as a personal maid before the wedding as a sign of her new status and the reputation of her family.<sup>236</sup> He was also expected to send many other items specially made for her.<sup>237</sup> These gifts were usually small objects of adornment, such as an expensive trinket box for holding the bride's dowry, some incense burners, small expensive perfume bottles hung over a silver tree that looked like a chandlery, silver kohl containers and engraved silver lids to cover drinking-water jugs.<sup>238</sup> These were lavishly decorated with, or made of, gold or silver and wrapped in silk cloth,<sup>239</sup> and were

<sup>233</sup> See: 110 حكاية مدنية، جدة.. طرابلسي، جدة؛ 250 أم الرخا والشدة، طرابلسي، جدة.

<sup>234</sup> See: 12–110، 106، 96 حكاية مدنية، جدة.. طرابلسي، جدة.

<sup>235</sup> In: Soraya Altorki, 'Family Organization and Women's Power in Urban Saudi Arabian Society', *Journal of Anthropological Research* 33, no. 3 (Autumn 1977): 283, Altorki explains another aspect of women agency related to the process of marriage. The bride was initially chosen by the mother of the groom based on her behaviour in a special meeting. Thus, as the woman ages, the impact of her social role grows and she continues to affect the decisions of her husband and son in creating new social alliances and networks with other families based on the information she provides. See also: Mai Ahmad Zaki Yamani, 'Birth and Behaviour in a Hospital in Saudi Arabia', *Bulletin (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)* Vol. 13, no. No. 2 (1986): 169–176, for more explanation on the wifyan title, or 'faithful ones', of women of Jeddah who could cut connections between two families if these women failed to fulfil the duties of this role.

<sup>236</sup> الأنصاري، موسوعة تاريخ مدينة جدة، المجلد الأول: 248.

<sup>237</sup> Binzagr museum contains many of these objects including a small face towel embroidered with solid gold hammered strips made for the bride's trousseau. See: Binzagr, Third personal interview 'يعني بيدخلها من بيت العريس يجيه، مثلاً حققت الكلونيا، على حسب إمكانيات العائلة، شجرة فيها عطورات، صندوق فيه المهر، مباخر، روس شزاب، ففيه حاجات يعني [...] هذي قديمة، منشقة، كانوا لما يجوا أيام الإملاك يقدموا بعد دا العصير و...، عصير بيت والا كده، يقوموا يمسحوا فمهم و [...] الا كده [...] فكانت في يد العروسة يسو لها دا'. Translation: '[Binzagr referring to the content of a glass display in her museum] the groom's family used to send things like perfume bottles depending on their budget, [some send] a metal tree stand with perfume bottles, the dowry in a box, incense burners, special lids for drinking jugs, there were certain things you know [...] this is an old towel, they used to use it to wipe their faces after they drink juice or something like that in the matrimony party [...] so they used to make it for the bride to keep it in her hand'.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> 353 حكاية مدنية، طرابلسي، جدة.. حكاية مدنية، 353.

largely expected from the groom to the extent that families did not have to specifically ask for them during the engagement period. According to the historian Muhammad Trabulsi, the gifts went by the name *ما يليق بالبنات*, which means ‘what suits girls’ with no further explanation in order to test the courtesy of the groom’s family.<sup>240</sup> The family of the bride spent even more on special gifts for their daughter for her daily use, to symbolise their love and care. For example, Binzagr remembers that a family in Jeddah once made a solid silver rope for their daughter on which to hang her night garment and lingerie after being washed.<sup>241</sup> In addition, families used to compete to make the procession caravan look as long as possible, by distributing the objects into small groups over as many carriages as they could afford to rent.<sup>242</sup> Binzagr deliberately creates an illusion of continuity by painting the third carriage as if approaching the viewer, which appears to hide more behind it.

A pair of wooden slippers inlaid with gold or silver, as well as the bridal chest, were the most important components of the bride's procession in old Jeddah,<sup>243</sup> and were usually carried on a special pillow, or on trays made of silver or decorated wood, for public display.<sup>244</sup> Binzagr shows them all on trays in the painting. What makes *The Slipper Carrier* interesting is that although the bride is visually absent from the scene she nonetheless appears the most authoritative figure, which the artist has emphasised by focusing on certain moments and objects and by showing the male figures under her command. In addition, she chose to name the painting after the slipper carrier instead of

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

241 Binzagr, Third personal interview: ‘حسب التفانين [...] يرسلوا لها المكحلة، يرسلوا لها مبخره، يرسلوا لها مشقرة فيه ناس .. الخشب هذي اللي بتشد الشعر [ملقط الشعر]، بيبعلوا لها..فيه وحده أهلها عملوا لها حبل غسيل، عارفه تنشر عليه قميص النوم وغيره، فضة’. Translation: ‘depending on what was in fashion at the time [...] they send [with her trousseau] a [n embellished] kohl bottle, an incense burner, eyebrow tweezers, some people.. you know wooden tweezers? The one they used to pull facial hair? They used to make her one. Once, there was a family who made a rope for their daughter to hang her laundry on; her night garment and other things, it was made of silver’.

<sup>242</sup> طرابلسي، جدة.. حكاية مدينة، 362

<sup>243</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 28; Binzagr, Seventh personal interview; 63–362، جدة.. حكاية مدينة، 63–362.

<sup>244</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 28; 362، جدة.. حكاية مدينة،

by the renowned name of the procession, which is *التبش* or ‘the Dubbash’. Carrying the slippers was considered the most humiliating task in the procession; children used to follow the slipper carrier and tease him for his lack of shame by clapping and singing a special song,<sup>245</sup> which would attract the attention of people in their houses to look at the procession. Binzagr does something similar to her audience by naming the painting after the slipper carrier. It is clear that the people of Jeddah were aware of the stigma of carrying the slippers around the town but this never discouraged them from continuing the practice. The wedding was an occasion where the bride was entitled to be celebrated in all possible ways, and the celebration would last at least three days and nights in addition to other ceremonies that took place before and after the wedding.<sup>246</sup>

However, Binzagr did not rely on just the title of the painting to attract attention to the slippers. They are also made visible by their central position and sheer green cover (Figure 9), instead of being covered with the usual piece of velvet,<sup>247</sup> cashmere or silk,<sup>248</sup> that definitely would not allow for a similar visibility. Although this tradition had been practised in other Ottoman provinces since the eighteenth century,<sup>249</sup> it is still difficult to understand the attention given to the slippers in Jeddah. The only logical explanation is that expensive slippers signified a higher class. During his travels to the Arabian Peninsula, the eighteenth-century German Orientalist, Carsten Niebuhr, observed that only women of the upper classes could afford slippers,<sup>250</sup> while women of

<sup>245</sup> 363 حكاية مدينة، جدة.. طرابلسي، جدة. According to Trabulsi the lyrics of the song are: ‘أبو القرحاف.. جاكم، شابل ‘. Translation: ‘The man with sandals, here he comes. Carrying slippers, here he comes. Walking barefoot, here he comes. Having no shame, here he comes’.

<sup>246</sup> See: 49–245: المجلد الأول: جدة، موسوعة تاريخ مدينة جدة، for more information about the customs and traditions of the other nights in Jeddah.

<sup>247</sup> 362 حكاية مدينة، جدة.. طرابلسي، جدة.

<sup>248</sup> 149 أمل المصري، أزياء المرأة في العصر العثماني (القاهرة: دار الآفاق العربية، 1999).

<sup>249</sup> Ibid. According to Amaal Almasri, during the Ottoman rule in Egypt, it was a custom to carry a silver inlaid slippers over a silver tray in the bride’s dowry procession.

<sup>250</sup> Carsten Niebuhr, *Travels through Arabia and Other Countries in the East Performed by M. Niebuhr... With Notes by the Translator; and Illustrated with Engravings and Maps*, trans. Robert Heron, (Reprint) first published in 1774, vol. 2, Social Sciences (Edinburgh, London: Eighteenth century collections online print edition (ECCO), 2012), 190.

the middle class used to wear sandals rather than slippers.<sup>251</sup> This was probably due to the cost of their craftsmanship since sandals were made of leather, whereas these slippers were inlaid with gold or silver.

Certain Islamic texts might also explain the inclusion of the slippers and other objects in the bride's procession, and consequently in Binzagr's painting. The slippers can be interpreted as a symbol of the bride's hidden charm, which she was supposed to keep concealed in front of foreign men. According to the famous verse that gives the order of modesty in the Muslim holy book, the *Qur'an*, women must never attract attention to their hidden adornments: 'And let them not stamp their feet to make known what they conceal of their adornment.'<sup>252</sup> The prominent Islamic scholars, *Ulama*, in the early Islamic period agreed that the order referred to the ankle bracelet.<sup>253</sup> Later, the verse was interpreted as an order for women to neutralise their sexual power over foreign men by concealing any means of seduction, especially high heels and perfumes.<sup>254</sup> This last meaning was practised in Jeddah by women using a small perfume container, which they carried with them and were only allowed to use when they reached the wedding place.<sup>255</sup> The slippers in question were also high heels, therefore it could be argued that women were discouraged from wearing them in public.

As a consequence, it is suggested here that the wedding became a legitimate occasion for respectable women to embrace their femininity and enjoy their adornment in the marital house. And as a reward for young women's devotion, families spent a

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.; according to Binzagr, middle class people used to wear another form of wooden slippers with a leather strap and were sometimes inlaid with pewter. Source: Binzagr, Seventh personal interview.

<sup>252</sup> 'Surah An-Nur', in *The Holy Qur'an*, Verse 31: (وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ مِنْ زِينَتِهِنَّ وَثُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا ) (أيها المؤمنون لعلكم تفلحون).

<sup>253</sup> See: المحلي جلال الدين محمد بن أحمد و جلال الدين عبدالرحمن بن أبي بكر السيوطي، تفسير الجلالين، الأولى (القاهرة: مكتبة النهضة الحديثة)، 462، (1933).

<sup>254</sup> See: محمد ناصر الدين الألباني، سلسلة الهدى والنور، شريط تسجيلي دعوي، رقم 1 من 901، ب.ت؛ عبدالعزيز بن باز وآخرون، 'حكم لبس الكعب العالي للمرأة ووضع المناكير: فتوى رقم 1678 وتاريخ 1397/10/13 هـ'، مجلة البحوث الإسلامية، العدد التاسع (1984): 65؛ يحيى بن شرف بن مري النووي، 'باب استعمال المسك وأنه أطيب الطيب: الحديث رقم 2254'، في المنهاج: شرح صحيح مسلم بن الحجاج، الجزء 15، الطبعة الثانية (بيروت: دار إحياء التراث العربي، 1962)، 10.

<sup>255</sup> الأنصاري، موسوعة تاريخ مدينة جدة، المجلد الأول: 260.

fortune on objects for daily use, which were paraded in public to show their gratitude and celebrate their daughter's chastity. Binzagr shows a book, which she explains is a copy of the *Qur'an*, in the front of the procession (Figure 8).<sup>256</sup> This works as a reminder of Muslim women's right to enjoy their adornment in the presence of their kinsmen, which has long been protected by their religion. In addition, locating the *Qur'an* at the front of the procession in the painting reflects its position as the main guidance and arbitrator in the social system of Jeddah. The sword on top of the book is described by Binzagr 'as a symbol of strength',<sup>257</sup> and can be interpreted as a reminder of the power the book has over everyone, protecting the bride's reputation and forcing others to respect her. This interpretation is supported by the two other trays in the painting filled with small trinkets, including small bottles that look like incense burners and perfume holders (Figure 8), and the pot plant which Binzagr says signifies 'a wish for a good life'.<sup>258</sup> The fact that there was another important ceremony in the wedding called *بسك الخخال*, 'the closure of the ankle bracelet', which Binzagr depicted in *The Ankle Bracelet* (1972–75), further emphasises this interpretation.

The scene not only suggest a celebration of women's right to embrace their femininity on certain occasions, as a popular cultural practice it also provides visual evidence of their socio-economic efficiency and authority. The painting, and the actual ceremony, are both about collective economic and moral power: the power of the class that the bride derives from her family's socio-economic status, and the power of virtue that entitles her to enjoy this position and bring honour to her family. In addition, cultural solidarity was an important aspect of people's lives in Jeddah, and weddings were the best occasion to celebrate communal solidarity. This is the context in which

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<sup>256</sup> See: Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 28.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

Olfet Binzagr, the artist's sister, presented the *Marriage Series*.<sup>259</sup> For instance, neighbours and relatives offered their services to help with the preparation of the wedding and the trousseau. If the bride was poor, they used to lend her jewellery, china and furniture to use for the wedding party.<sup>260</sup> Although these objects were usually returned after the wedding, they still acted as a signifier of the bride's power since they represented the number of people willing to help her in good times and bad.<sup>261</sup>

Binzagr's painting shows an interesting relationship between women's bodies and domestic space in Jeddah that is worth examining. *The Slipper Carrier* is a male-dominated scene, however, close examination reveals a number of female figures dwelling in different forms of domestic space represented in the scene. These women are identified by the colour of their dresses since men conventionally wore white.<sup>262</sup> In addition, the social status of each woman is identifiable from her style of dress. The women highest in status in *The Slipper Carrier* are the four standing behind the lattice windows of their houses, who are shown in colourful red and green dresses with uncovered faces. The high level of the windows, as well as the shutters, provided the required level of privacy (see Figures 10–13). However, when the shutters are absent as in the other three windows, one on the far right building and the other two on the far left, the lower part of the women's faces are covered. All three women behind the shutters appear to be watching the procession; the two on the left wear red and blue dresses, while the one in the far right window wears yellow (see Figures 14–16). In both cases, these women can enjoy wearing colourful dresses because they are not exposed directly to the gaze of passers-by. The two women walking in the street in the

<sup>259</sup> See: Binzagr, 'An Historical Perspective', 21–22.

<sup>260</sup> طرابلسي، جدة... حكاية مدينة، 58–375.

<sup>261</sup> Some people used to write poems in honour of the bride and the groom and give it to the wedding chanter, who was responsible for entertaining the male party. Other services could also be offered to the groom from his community. See: Ibid., 358–60.

<sup>262</sup> See: الأنصاري، موسوعة تاريخ مدينة جدة، المجلد الأول: 63–260.



background, on the other hand, are fully covered in black, because no border of the home is there to protect their privacy (Figures 14 and 17). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Jeddah, home confinement was not only a requirement of modesty for women, it was also a signifier of socio-economic power; only upper-class urban women could afford to stay home and hire someone to do their chores outside.<sup>263</sup> Less privileged women had to maintain their privacy when going out by wearing different forms of the veil, which worked as a mobile home.<sup>264</sup> In other words, the more the borders of the home were removed, the more women covered their bodies.

Binzagr was alert to these minor differences when she painted these women. The women in the houses, unveiled or partially veiled, come second in status after the bride. They are the main audience of the procession, so are painted facing the viewer, whereas the two women walking down the street and completely covered in their black cloaks, the *Quna'a Turki* or Turkish mask,<sup>265</sup> represent the lower class. They are obliged to leave their houses so cannot enjoy watching the parade (Figures 14 and 17). The painting also demonstrates how the veil complicated the borders between private and public space in Jeddah, and offers other ways to examine gender power play.

Binzagr has inserted certain architectural elements into the scene to demonstrate the wealth and class of the women peeking from the windows. These are the two styles of windows in traditional Jeddah houses,<sup>266</sup> which indicated the family's socio-economic status (see Figures 18–19). The first was called *روشان*, 'rushaan', and was the

<sup>263</sup> العزي، 'البطولة: نشأتها وتطورها'، 18.

<sup>264</sup> Describing the veil as a mobile home was inspired by an interview with an Afghani woman in: Lila Abu-Lughod, 'Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism', *American Anthropologist* Vol. 104, no. 3 (September 2002): 783.

<sup>265</sup> Binzagr, Seventh personal interview.

<sup>266</sup> Binzagr, Third personal interview: 'عندك فيه نوعين من.. فيه عندك رواشين، والرواشين يكون لها هذا اللي خارج من برا، وفيه اللي يكون زي كذا.. طيق وتطلع وتنزل، فإنه لا... يعني بتفتحها بتدخل هواء [...] بتدخل هواء لأنها شبك [...] هما سموها 'مشرية وبيقولوا روشان'. Translation: 'There are two styles...[windows], there is the rushaan and this has the prominent part from the outside, and there is like this one [pointing to the small windows in The Slipper Carrier] windows that move up and down, you can open it to let the air come in [...] it is a regular window this is why it allows the breeze to come in [...] they call it mashrabiya and some call it rushaan'.

largest, most expensive and decorative window of the two traditional styles.<sup>267</sup> Most of the wood used for building in Jeddah used to be imported from South Asia,<sup>268</sup> only rich people could afford to build the lavishly decorated rushaan. The rushaan window took the shape of a large wooden box attached to the exterior wall of the house,<sup>269</sup> and acted as a form of closed balcony in which women could sit and watch the streets without being seen.<sup>270</sup> It varied in size, but the more prominent the rushaan the better as it allowed more cool air to enter the house.<sup>271</sup> The second style of window was called طاقة وشيش 'taga-wa-sheesh', which took the shape of a regular window with plain wooden shutters that could be opened by moving them upwards, and sometimes inwards.<sup>272</sup> These windows were used more by middle to lower-class families as they were smaller in size, less decorative and less expensive.<sup>273</sup> Interestingly, the smallest and least expensive window style, taga-wa-sheesh, is only shown once in *The Slipper Carrier* (Figure 5), whereas the windows in the background buildings are the first style, the rushaan (Figure 8). This indicates that these houses belong to wealthy families, which in turn signifies the artist's desire to link authority to her class – the upper class of the urban society of Jeddah. Moreover, wealthy families in Jeddah used to build more than

<sup>267</sup> 123 حكاية مدينة، جدة.. طرابلسي، it was also called مشربية 'mashrabiya', which literally means a place for drinking in other Arab countries because it contained a special place to hold clay water jugs to keep them cool and ready for drinking. See: Sameer Akbar, 'The Diminishing Role of Windows from Traditional to Modern: The Case of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia', *FORUM Ejournal* 3, no. 1 (2000): 16–17.

<sup>268</sup> 99 حكاية مدينة، جدة.. طرابلسي.

<sup>269</sup> Binzagr, Third personal interview: 'لا هذي برضو زي الصندوق من برا زي.. هما سموها مشربية وبيقولوا روشن. 'الروشان بيكون طالع على برا أو روشن مركب يعني فيه طاقة من جوا لما تفتحها فيه هذا الصندوق بس بيمنع أنه الناس يشوفوا. Translation: 'No, this is also like a box from outside, they call it mashrabiya and they also say rushaan. The rushaan used to be prominent from the outside, or complicated rushaans which means it had a regular window that can be opened from the inside [taga-wa-sheesh] and then this box which does not prevent people from looking [to the outside]'.  
<sup>270</sup> 122 حكاية مدينة، جدة.. طرابلسي.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 123; Binzagr, Third personal interview: 'لكن أنتي تفتحي طاقتك من 'جوا لكن فيه هو خارج لبرا، ودانما الأدوار السفلية فيها حقت المقاعد فيها كذا، لأنه لما يكون فيه حر يفتحو الطيق لأنه يطلع كذا وينزل. Translation: 'Elgibreen: you see them but they cannot see you. Binzagr: [yes] but you can also open your window from the inside, although it has the prominent part, and the lower stories which had the seating areas always had this style of windows, because in the hot seasons people can open the windows with the shutters that moves up and down'.  
<sup>273</sup> 123 حكاية مدينة، جدة.. طرابلسي.

two stories in their houses.<sup>274</sup> This also appears in the painting since all the houses exceed the second floor and extend beyond the borders of the painting.

The relation between women's socio-economic status and the house is not fixed in Binzagr's work, but changes depending on the cultural group represented. For example, in Bedouin society, staying home did not represent the highest level of authority as it did in urban society in Jeddah. Unlike urban houses, Bedouin tents do not provide conclusive segregation between private and public space, as the face mask is the only border separating women from men in desert life. Binzagr therefore identified authoritative Bedouin women by focusing attention on their face masks in different ways.<sup>275</sup> These women are shown to be most influential when depicted working outside. Since Bedouin women are expected by their society to be the main contributors of livelihood, they were entitled to the same level of authority and respect when meeting that expectation.<sup>276</sup> For example, the *Sleeping Shepherd* (1976) shows three women wearing red face masks embellished with coins (Figure 20). They are carrying firewood and gazing down at a male figure lying on the ground. In the distance a tent is used to represent the home these women have left to find fuel for cooking and heating. Meanwhile, the herd can be seen abandoned in the background by the sleeping shepherd, to indicate his laziness and uselessness. The scene reflects a sense of contempt for the shepherd and a desire to claim admiration for the women, a meaning that is emphasised by the arrangement of the entire setting, which shows women as dominant in the scene. They surpass the man in number and position as they stand at a

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>275</sup> In: Carsten Niebuhr, *Travels through Arabia and Other Countries in the East Performed by M. Niebuhr... With Notes by the Translator; and Illustrated with Engravings and Maps*, trans. Robert Heron, (Reprint) first published in 1774, vol. 1, Social Sciences (Edinburgh, London: Eighteenth century collections online print edition (ECCO), 2012), 91, Niebuhr mentioned that embellishing the face mask was common in other Arab regions. He also mentioned how important the ankle bracelet was for women's adornment.

<sup>276</sup> See: Thierry Mauger and Danielle Mauger, 'Everyday Life in a Camp', in *In The Shadow of the Black Tents* (Jeddah: Tihama, 1986), 31.

higher level, surrounding the shepherd from all three sides and leaving the front unblocked to engage the viewer in the scene. The colours of the painting, apart from the women's face masks, belts and the lower edge of one woman's sleeve, are muted, and contrast with the red colour of the face masks and belts. Choosing a sensual colour such as red to highlight these details reflects the confidence of the women who wear it. In general, the painting illustrates the context that entitles Bedouin men and women to authority and respect.

Binzagr never included paintings of Bedouin women in the *Marriage Series*, but did show them in a number of scenes of unparalleled freedom: dating or dancing with men while protecting their reputation by wearing the veil. These paintings can be considered equivalents to the marriage scenes that celebrate the urban woman's right to embrace her femininity. For instance, *Rendezvous* (1976) is a series of two paintings telling the story of a Bedouin woman meeting her lover. The first scene (Figure 21) shows the couple sitting together under the tree, while the woman in a flirtatious pose fixes her gaze on a man. The second scene (Figure 22) shows the woman walking fully veiled after the meeting,<sup>277</sup> meanwhile the man sits on the ground playing his flute. A preliminary study of the first painting reveals more of the woman's sense of confidence and flirtation (Figure 23). Notably, Binzagr took great care in drawing the details of the woman's face although she knew it would eventually be covered by the mask. Again, similar to *The Sleeping Shepherd*, the woman's face mask and trousers are red, reflecting the artist's eagerness to show the confidence of the Bedouin woman in contrast to the male figure whose facial details were obscured. Interestingly, the veil in this painting reduces the threat of the subject. As well as muting the strong facial

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<sup>277</sup> According to the artist, her intention was to show a farewell scene where the woman is supposedly glancing back at the man while walking away from him. However, this does not appear in the painting as the woman is facing forward. Source: Binzagr, Seventh personal interview.

expression of the female figure, it signified her demureness and allowed the artist to get away with such a provocative view of Bedouin life in a conservative country like Saudi Arabia.

Likewise, the women in *Algais* (1981) are shown fully veiled while dancing with men (Figure 24). They hold sticks in their hands, which indicates a form of power parade in Bedouin and urban tradition. According to Mahmud Zanati, Bedouin women in different Arab countries often carry some sort of weapon when they join men to dance.<sup>278</sup> This can be a sword or a stick to warn whoever might think of denouncing their reputation in any way of their ability to take revenge.<sup>279</sup> However, the men in the *Algais* dance are actually women dressed in male costumes to represent certain authoritative figures of their town including: the mayor, governor, and the guards of the neighbourhood.<sup>280</sup> This masquerade party was common in both urban and Bedouin community in Jeddah, but more popular at Mecca, to celebrate Eid festival.<sup>281</sup>

These examples illustrate that segregation of space does not necessarily result in segregation of power or authority. The procession was not invented by Binzagr to empower the image of the women of Jeddah, but choosing to preserve it in visual memory reflects the artist's desire to recover the collective authority of these women through referencing traditions that gave them a legitimate right to parade their agency. Since these significant occasions of empowerment are culturally embedded, Binzagr's representations of female authority becomes less threatening for her society. Moreover, the fact that the custom of sending the trousseau in a procession had existed for some time reflects a social desire to empower the presence of women on certain occasions,

<sup>278</sup> محمود سلام زناتي، قصة السفور والنقاب: واختلاط وانفصال الجنسين عند العرب (القاهرة: دار البستاني للنشر والتوزيع، 2002)، 21–120.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Binzagr, Seventh personal interview.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

when their physical presence was culturally denied. This is reminiscent of Binzagr's own experience when her talent was often celebrated in her absence, such as at the opening of her first exhibition (Figure 1). Interestingly, the photograph shows the Emir of Mecca smiling next to *Bedouin Dance* (1968), which illustrates a group of women dancing (Figure 25). This scene would have been considered scandalous if they were real women. Therefore it could be said that the analysis of *The Slipper Carrier*, which shows how some women were able to maintain their influence despite segregation, reflects the artist's perception of herself since she worked in a similar situation.

### 3.3 Women and spatial experience

Studying domestic space as a potential space of empowerment has been relatively hindered in the field of art history as a result of some of the work of early feminist art historians. An example of this is Griselda Pollock's famous article 'Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity'.<sup>282</sup> Pollock argues that domestic space in nineteenth-century Paris restricted both aesthetic experience and the economic independence of the women who lived in these spaces.<sup>283</sup> The profoundness of Pollock's argument has had a significant influence on the work of other scholars and her article is regularly referenced by art historians who study domestic subjects.<sup>284</sup> However, other scholars such as Clarissa Campbell Orr have been able to explain how women can influence the public sphere regardless of gender-based segregation.<sup>285</sup> Victorian women, for example, led diverse lives as travellers and emigrants in addition to being housewives. In order to appreciate

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<sup>282</sup> Griselda Pollock, 'Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity', in *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art*, 7th ed. (London: Routledge, 2010), 70–127.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 70–127.

<sup>284</sup> See for example: Cherry, *Painting Women*; Whitney Chadwick, 'Separate but Unequal: Woman's Sphere and the New Art', in *Women, Art and Society*, 3rd Revised edition (New York: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2002), 228–51.

<sup>285</sup> Clarissa Campbell Orr, 'Introduction', in *Women in the Victorian Art World*, ed. Clarissa Campbell Orr (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 4.

their influence, historians are required to acknowledge how women in these societies “accepted, negotiated, contested, or ignored” the options available to them.<sup>286</sup> Orr encourages historians to look at the range of activities women practised while performing conventional roles such as philanthropy and social work, which eventually helped deliver radical achievements including the abolition of slavery.<sup>287</sup>

In general, there is a tendency to treat domestic space as having a fixed meaning of subordination and powerlessness, and interpretation of women’s art was often based on this presumption.<sup>288</sup> Such a tendency drove Frances Borzello to wonder:

Since every recent history book has stressed how women, until the early twentieth century, were denied the same opportunity as men, how did they find the time, the space, the permission, psychological daring, to learn and then practise as artists?<sup>289</sup>

The points Borzello raises in her question are actually the essence of women artist’s spatial experience: what was their spatial system like? And how did they respond to it? Attempts to scrutinise the artistic creations of conservative women as an expression, or a result, of oppression undermine the artistic value of their work. It may make the reader sympathise with them and the obstacles they faced, but will never add to the aesthetic value of their art or demand that viewers appreciate it for itself. By encouraging such treatment of the subject, the link between femininity and lack of creativity is perpetuated. This is why it was suggested that the analysis of their work should examine the other sources of experience they had, and the spaces that allowed them to show the value of their roles, gain confidence and make a difference.

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>288</sup> Pollock, ‘Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity’, 81–92. For example, the focal point and shallow perspective of some of Marry Cassatt and Berthe Morisot’s work were interpreted as a result of the artists’ home confinement.

<sup>289</sup> Frances Borzello, ‘Behind the Image’, in *Mirror Mirror: Self-Portraits by Women Artists*, ed. Liz Rideal (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 2001), 20.

The veil, the harem and domestic space are all forms of spatial organisation.<sup>290</sup> However, views on them vary depending on artists' individual experience, and analysis of their work must therefore take this aspect into consideration. For example, a number of Western Orientalists acknowledged, and sometimes admired, the use of the veil as a protector of the female's reputation. For some female Orientalists, such as Lady Montagu (1689–1762)<sup>291</sup> or Grace Ellison (d. 1935), it was a dress of social and sexual freedom.<sup>292</sup> Similarly, Demetra Vaka Brown (1877–1946) followed Montagu in seeing 'aspects of value in the female-run spaces of domestic life in the Arab or Turkish city'.<sup>293</sup> While, Zeyneb Hanoum (1913) saw some aspects of the Ottoman harem in Europe, she was unhappy about the Ladies' Gallery in Britain's parliament and described it as 'the harem of the Government!'.<sup>294</sup> To her, it looked similar to the Turkish harem, even the use of the lattice-style windows.<sup>295</sup> These examples encourage examination of two dimensions of Binzagr's work: the artist's perception of the economic freedom of traditional women in Jeddah, and her aesthetic response towards domestic spaces.

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<sup>290</sup> See: Irvin Cemil Schick, 'The Harem as Gendered Space and the Spatial Reproduction of Gender', in *Harem Histories : Envisioning Places and Living Spaces*, ed. Marilyn Booth (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2010), 72.

<sup>291</sup> See: Christine Riding, 'Travellers and Sitters: The Orientalist Portrait', in *The Lure of the East*, ed. Nicholas Tromans (London: Tate Britain, 2008), 57.

<sup>292</sup> See: Reina Lewis, 'On Veiling, Vision and Voyage', *Interventions* 1, no. 4 (1999): 501, 504.

<sup>293</sup> See: Marilyn Booth, ed., *Harem Histories : Envisioning Places and Living Spaces* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2010), 8. See also: Reina Lewis and Nancy Micklewright, eds., *Gender, Modernity and Liberty Middle Eastern and Western Women's Writings: A Critical Sourcebook* (London ; New York: I.B.Tauris, 2006), 134–141.

<sup>294</sup> Booth, *Harem Histories*, 2; Lewis and Micklewright, *Gender, Modernity and Liberty*, 154.

<sup>295</sup> Booth, *Harem Histories*, 2.



### 3.3.1 Spaces of economic freedom

Conventionally, women in the Arabian Peninsula have full authority over their assets.

As early as the eighteenth century, Niebuhr noted that although Arabian women were fully covered with the veil,

[they] enjoy a great deal of liberty, and often a great deal of power, in their families. They continue mistresses of their dowries, and of the annual income which these afford during their marriage, and, in the case of divorce, all their own property is reserved to them.<sup>296</sup>

This can be seen in a rather unique painting by Binzagr called *Shaving Ceremony* (1975), in which the artist presents the mother of the groom as the most authoritative figure in the room (Figure 26). She is shown rewarding the barber while he shaves her son by inserting a golden coin into his turban.<sup>297</sup> The mother stands in a higher position than both the barber and her son, whereas the rest of the space is dominated by seven female figures holding traditional drums and surrounding the two male figures to watch the procedure. Interestingly for such a conservative society, it was the mother of the groom who performed this authoritative role and who was in charge of giving the barber his wage, not the groom or his father.<sup>298</sup> She was also in charge of choosing a bride for her son. Until the 1980s, a Saudi man was not allowed to see his bride until the wedding night.<sup>299</sup> He had to trust his mother to choose the woman with whom he would spend the rest of his life. Moreover, the barber in the painting seems to be accustomed to being paid by a woman, which signifies that women were accepted as having a certain financial authority in Jeddah. Thus the financial freedom of women was more

<sup>296</sup> Niebuhr, *Travels through Arabia and Other Countries in the East Performed by M. Niebuhr... With Notes by the Translator; and Illustrated with Engravings and Maps*, 2012, 2:173.

<sup>297</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 33.

<sup>298</sup> According to the artist, in some occasions when the barber was paid by the groom or his father, the mother of the groom would still give him an amount of money as a tip to express her joy. Source: Binzagr, Seventh personal interview.

<sup>299</sup> الأنصاري، موسوعة تاريخ مدينة جدة، المجلد الأول: 249.

influenced by the availability of a *social* system that guaranteed women full authority over their assets than by a *spatial* system that promised to eliminate the boundaries between different spheres.

Space is generally organised to accord with the needs of humans, not vice versa. Therefore domestic space has the potential to be a place of economic freedom for women when they want it, especially in conservative societies. If it is assumed that gender segregation enables men to dominate the market economy, then women have an equal opportunity to do the same as suppliers and consumers. The market economy is usually driven by the dynamics of supply and demand, which is ‘the conceptual meeting place between sellers and buyers’; if the supply is higher than demand for a certain commodity prices will drop, but if it is lower than demand prices will rise.<sup>300</sup> Therefore, saleswomen, for example, have a better opportunity than salesmen to increase their income in a conservative society because space segregation raises demand for their goods and services, since these saleswomen can reach a wider range of prospective clients.<sup>301</sup> Moreover, conservative women often prefer to deal with a female than a male agent, even if the female is less qualified, in order to avoid having their behaviour, gestures, body language and reputation observed when dealing with a man.<sup>302</sup> This gives

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<sup>300</sup> See: Steven Kates, *Free Market Economics: An Introduction for the General Reader* (UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2011), 88–89.

<sup>301</sup> Although she examines Muslim society now, the observations of Lewis about how Muslim women of the emergent Islamic bourgeoisie in the Arabian Gulf countries, UK, and the US, force some retailers to change their marketing methods in order to reach this niche market is similar to what is described above about how sellers in the traditional society of Jeddah were forced to use the services of saleswomen in order to reach female consumers. See: Lewis, ‘Veils and Sales: Muslims and the Spaces of Postcolonial Fashion Retail’; Reina Lewis, ‘Marketing Muslim Lifestyle: A New Media Genre’, *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 6, no. 3 (2010): 58–90; Reina Lewis, ‘Hijab on the Shop Floor: Muslims in Fashion Retail in Britain’, in *Islamic Fashion and Anti-Fashion: New Perspectives from Europe and North America*, ed. Emma Tarlo and Annelies Moors (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 181–200.

<sup>302</sup> For example, Reina Lewis observes that Muslim women, and other women of faith, prefer to shop online because it serves to ‘de-territorialize and de-materialize’ the shopping experience, and provides the required privacy since no one can see what they look like and what they buy. The internet – similar to the saleswoman – functions as a channel between market and client. It links retailers to these women, and helps women exchange information and personal experiences through blogs and forums. See: Reina Lewis, ‘Modest Dressing: Faith-Based Fashion and Internet Retail’, *Modest Dressing* (presented at the

them unmatched bodily freedom making the experience more comfortable. For example, conservative women would often seek the services of a nurse or a midwife over a male doctor.<sup>303</sup> This gave the nurse and/or midwife an opportunity not only to increase their income, but to pressure society to give women access to additional sources of training. Such situations were often how conservative women succeeded in using social norms to argue for their rights and exert change.

Hence working women in private/domestic spaces could control public space. For example, in the business sector saleswomen could control the flow of goods owned by male merchants, and the currency owned by clients, from the market to the household and vice versa. Whether for convenience, or for conservativeness, some female clients would ask the saleswoman to play the role of mediator. The saleswoman might then be offered an additional commission to provide other services, such as buying goods from other merchants, or referring them to the best place to get a particular product. Such women took control of certain merchandise and its prices, and some would even go further to maintain their economic position by hiding their sources.<sup>304</sup> This, of course, depended greatly on how protected the financial rights of other women in these conservative societies were.

The confidence gained by some of these women is reflected in a number of Binzagr's works. For example, *Al Dalalah*, 'The Saleswoman' (1984), shows a

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Modest Dressing Conference, London: University of the Arts London Research Projects, 2010), 3, 16–17; see also: Reina Lewis, ed., *Modest Fashion: Styling Bodies, Mediating Faith* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2013).

<sup>303</sup> A similar case is found in: Demetra Vaka Brown, *A Child of the Orient* (London: John Lane, 1914), 193, where she explains that she 'wanted to become a doctor in order to minister to the Turkish women, who at the time would rather die than see a man doctor'.

<sup>304</sup> See: Susan Porter Benson, "'The Customers Ain't God': The Work Culture of Department-Store Saleswomen, 1890-1940", in *Working-Class America: Essays on Labor, Community, and American Society*, ed. Michael H. Frisch and Daniel J. Walkowitz (USA: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 202–203, for a similar case about saleswomen in segregated all-women shops in America. In her study, Benson, demonstrates how saleswomen created solidarity and subversive groups that influenced retailers' businesses. 'True to their sense of skills saleswomen become unofficial consumer authorities, but, equally true to their sense of independence, they used their authority both to encourage and to subvert their employer's interests'.

saleswoman dressed in a yellow blouse who occupies the central space of the room/painting (Figure 27). Her status is emphasised by this central position, as well as by her comparatively larger size. This exaggerated scale reflects the artist's sense of the seller's self-confidence. The vividly coloured dresses of the women contrast with the dark colour of their cloaks when they go outside, which increases the visual pleasure when contemplating this domestic scene. The decoration of the rugs and seats, the depth of the room, and the extended space signified by the open door, all indicate a certain level of comfort. Interestingly, one woman is depicted sitting in the middle wearing nothing but her undergarments, an act that could never be seen in public but that reflects the client's sense of self-confidence and physical comfort in this private space. It also signifies the casualness of the relationship between these women and the seller, something that is difficult to develop in a more conservative setting with a salesman. Moreover, the scene demonstrates how such relationships develop. There are signs that such a shopping experience often extends for a period of time. The woman in the upper-right corner is preparing tea on a portable traditional fireplace and boiler, a *mankal* and *samovar*, to make sure that she does not miss any part of their conversation while preparing tea. Apparently, the saleswoman at a certain place of the relationship is no longer a stranger, but a friend of the family who can visit, have tea and offer her services during the process. This experience was rarely developed by conservative women in an open public space, even if the seller was a woman, as in public space the conservative woman could not control the gaze of passers-by, as a result the client would not feel as comfortable even if she wore a veil. Wearing modest clothing could certainly help reduce the feeling of discomfort, but wearing it for a long time could also deprive her of her femininity. Thus the existence of segregated spaces was highly important for conservative women. It was the only place that provided a suitable

environment for them to dress up and feel feminine without the guilt of being immodest. To a woman with this belief, domestic space could be a space of comfort and freedom.

It could therefore be said that segregated spaces in Jeddah have the potential of enabling women to enhance not only their economic position but also allow them to raise their socio-political status. Working women had access to the most private spaces of their clients, their houses, which added a personal dimension to their services and allowed them to establish deeper relationships with their clients and expand their social networks through them. They became their consultant in different matters and the bearers of their secrets about various concerns. This eventually made them very effective agents of change in their societies, because they could ask their influential clients for different favours in the name of this friendship.

Another example of the authoritative status of working women as dominant of the trade can be seen in *Al-Nasbah* (1976). The subject of this painting is the traditional wedding music band that performed in Jeddah during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Figure 28), and shows the prestige the singer and band enjoyed with the family hosting the wedding party. The singer and musicians, being the only possible option for entertainment on this special occasion, would be pampered by the hostess. According to Binzagr, the wedding hostess had to prepare everything for the singer to put her in the right mood;<sup>305</sup> if she was happy everyone would be happy. As soon as the singer arrived, she would receive compliments from the guests on her talent, and the band was offered a higher seat so they could be seen by everyone. Tea, coffee, sweets, and *shisha* – traditional tobacco pipe – were a must to set their mood.<sup>306</sup> As a special reward for the singer, it was also a custom in Jeddah for the hostess to offer a special gift consisting of a large wedding candle on a special stand and a tray filled with gifts,

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<sup>305</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 40.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

such as perfumes and sweets.<sup>307</sup> In order to emphasise the scale of the candle, Binzagr shows the tea and coffee cups and pots in miniature (Figure 28), which are barely recognisable on the right behind the candle. This is arguably the artist's way of emphasising the band's presence in the scene. In addition, the woman on the left, smoking a pipe with one hand and warming the drum over the burning coal with the other, was known by traditional women as *النقيبة*, which means 'captain'.<sup>308</sup> Binzagr explains that women used to call her this because she was responsible for doing multiple tasks for the band,<sup>309</sup> and refers to her as 'the lady-in-waiting'.<sup>310</sup> She serves coffee and tea, and warms the drums for the musicians.<sup>311</sup> Thus women in the traditional society of Jeddah, although self-employed in private spaces, were able to earn official titles from other women that indicated their rank.

### 3.3.2 Spaces of aesthetic experience

When comparing Binzagr's paintings of parallel scenes of men and women celebrating the same ceremonial event, it is noticeable that the women's space on certain occasions, which is often inside the house, is aesthetically richer than the men's, which is often

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> Binzagr, Third personal interview: 'هذي ما هي من أهم ناس في الدا [...] هذي النقيبة، يسموها النقيبة هي تكون تلم لهم وتحط لهم وتسخن وغيره، لكنها برضو لابسه ومتصلحه. دحينه مافي شي اسمه نقيبة يجيبوا لهم وحده اللي تسوي لهم وتصب لهم الشاهي ويسموها الشغالة، ساعات تلاقيها فلبينية ساعات تلاقيها منهم من الفرقة، لكنها برضو في الكار تعرف تطبل، تعرف تغني، تعرف...، تاخذ نصيبها من اللي يدوها هو على حسب... [...] أنا رسمتهم كفرقة.. يعني ما أعرف المغنيات فجايز إنهم بيمسكوا... حتى المغنية بتمسك..، يعني هدولا زي المشجعات وإن طلبوا كلهم'. Translation: 'This woman was not the leading figure in the band, [...] this is the captain, they used to call her captain because she is responsible for gathering the band's things [money and instruments] and preparing and heating [their drums], but she also used to dress up and take care of her image. Nowadays, there is no longer such thing as captains. They [bands] hire a woman to help them and prepare tea and they call her a maid, sometimes this woman is from the Philippines [imported labourer] and sometimes she is a member of the band [a local] but she also knows the [principles of the] trade: she knows how to play the drums, how to sing, and take her share of whatever the band makes in accordance to how much help she offered [...] I painted them as a band, so I really cannot tell which one is the singer. However, it is possible that the singer used to hold [the drums], in other words, all these women function as cheerleaders even if they all had [another main role to do] to play the drums'.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

<sup>310</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 40.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

located in the outside areas of the same house. For example, the dress colours, details and embellishments in *The Ankle Bracelet* (1972–75) are more elaborate than in *The Chanter* (1972) (Figures 29 and 32), although both scenes depict the last ritual in the wedding before the couples meet each other for the first time.<sup>312</sup> This difference is related to the nature of the city and its culture. From the nineteenth century up to the 1970s, aesthetic experience in Jeddah was found mainly in material culture rather than nature. The hot, damp climate of Jeddah,<sup>313</sup> and the scarcity of water sources led to a lack of green landscapes and outdoor activities.<sup>314</sup> In addition, the shallow shore and thick coral reef surrounding Jeddah decreased opportunities for enjoying beach activities.<sup>315</sup> Thus embroidery and vividly coloured clothing, traditional market displays, rugs and furniture, the lanterns of Ramadan, and theatrical performances of social ceremonies and religious rituals, compensated for the scarcity of aesthetically interesting natural resources.<sup>316</sup> Since these cultural resources were often based in the confines of the house, in addition to the fact that only women had access to segregated spaces, it is possible that Binzagr and other female artists in the conservative society of Jeddah had a better chance than men to rejuvenate their aesthetic inspiration. When Binzagr started her career in her home-based studio in the late 1960s,<sup>317</sup> the house was still in its original condition – a typical traditional Jeddian house, except that it had

<sup>312</sup> See: Ibid., 34, 36.

<sup>313</sup> See: John Lewis Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia: Comprehending an Account of Those Territories in Hadjaz Which the Mohammedans Regard as Sacred*, ed. William Ouseley, Reprint, first published (1829), vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 295; الأنصاري، موسوعة تاريخ مدينة جدة، المجلد الأول: 19، 295.

<sup>314</sup> الأنصاري، موسوعة تاريخ مدينة جدة، المجلد الأول: 15، 20، 591؛ طرابلسي، جدة.. حكاية مدينة، 18، 135، 145.

<sup>315</sup> الأنصاري، موسوعة تاريخ مدينة جدة، المجلد الأول: 18–19؛ طرابلسي، جدة.. حكاية مدينة، 159؛ وهيب كابلي، الحرفيون في مدينة جدة في القرن الرابع عشر الهجري، الطبعة الثالثة (جدة: المؤلف، 2004)، 82–83.

<sup>316</sup> This idea was inspired by an essay written by Salwa Nashashibi, Laura Nader, and Etel Adnan. See: Salwa Mikdadi Nashashibi, Laura Nader, and Etel Adnan, 'Arab Women Artists: Forces of Change', in *Forces of Change: Artists in the Arab World*, ed. Salwa Nashashibi (California; Washington D.C.: The international Council for Women in the Arts; The National Museum of Women in the Arts, 1994), 13.

<sup>317</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview.

electricity and air conditioning.<sup>318</sup> Moreover, many of the customs and traditions she represented were in the process of disappearing, but had not vanished entirely;<sup>319</sup> some traditional celebrations such as the Henna night were still celebrated, but had been slightly changed and modernised.<sup>320</sup> According to Binzagr, before the 1970s, she attended few celebrations in the Bedouin community of Jeddah. Her sister and uncle's wife took her to watch the *Algaïs* dance and take pictures as a reference for her painting which she made later in 1981 (Figure 24).<sup>321</sup> This suggests that Binzagr's aesthetic experience was enriched, and she highly inspired by her knowledge of spaces similar to those she painted. Her contemporary male artists, however, were detached from this important source of inspiration. Artists such as Dia'a Aziz (b. 1947), who were interested in painting similar subjects, had to depend entirely on vague childhood memories.<sup>322</sup>

The politics of domestic space in Jeddah were significant and carefully organised.<sup>323</sup> In general, neither sex in Jeddah was able to enjoy public leisure places, such as theatres, bars, casinos and circuses, as the conservative nature of the city during

<sup>318</sup> Binzagr, Second personal interview: 'الناس خرجوا من جدة القديمة وراحوا للبيوت، يعني إحنا بيتنا من اللي أتحدث من 'جوا، سوا له دشات وحمامات ده، دخلت فيه الكهرباء و فيه مكيف ودا مدة ما، هما كانوا ساكنين فيه، بس فيه عوائل خلاص خرجوا برا، انتشئت البغدادية و الشرفية و الهنداوية وإبتدوا الناس يخرجوا برا'. Translation: 'People left their old houses in Jeddah, but we did not. We updated the interior: added some showers and bathrooms, installed electricity and air-conditions at that time. Meanwhile, some families left for good; when the new neighbourhoods called Al-Bughdadiyah, Al-Sharafeiah, and Alhidawiyah were founded people started to move out'.

<sup>319</sup> See: Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 9.

<sup>320</sup> See: Binzagr, 'An Historical Perspective', 22.

<sup>321</sup> Binzagr, Second personal interview: 'بمعني أنا مثلاً لغاية السبعينات أواخر السبعينات كنت أطلع.. كانوا ساكنين بيت خالي ' كذا في الرويس [...] كان فيه البدوان ساكنين حوالهم سوا القيس في العيد، كنت مع مرت خالي، كانت مرت خالي [...] تاخذني توديني القيس، نروح نحضر القيس، نروح نحضر... تسوي لي 'سيتنيق' الجلسة وغيره عنها بالبيت أجي و أصور ودا'. Translation: 'For example, until the 1970s, I used to go [to traditional occasions]. My maternal; uncle's house was in Al-Ruwais [a Bedouin land that was transformed during the period of modernisation to an urban neighbourhood] and was surrounded by Bedouin neighbours, so when they had an Algais dance in the Eid holiday, I went with my uncle's wife [...] She used to take me with her to attend Algais and other occasions, and prepare a setting including the seating area and everything in her house sometimes so I could come and take pictures for reference'.

<sup>322</sup> See: 36–135، *مسيرة الفن التشكيلي السعودي*، السليمان، for more information about Dia'a Aziz. He is one of the few Saudi male artists of the first generation who produced similar subjects to some of Binzagr's painting. For example, he painted the traditional washing day, traditional children's street games, craftsmen and street vendors.

<sup>323</sup> 112–108، *طرابلسي، جدة.. حكاية مدينة*.



the two periods in question did not allow for such places.<sup>324</sup> The most common place available was the coffee house. However, according to the Orientalist traveller, John Lewis Burckhardt (1784–1817), the coffee houses of Jeddah during the nineteenth century were filthy in comparison with those he saw in Damascus,<sup>325</sup> and he never witnessed entertainment such as storytellers at these coffee houses, contrary to those in Egypt and Syria.<sup>326</sup> This made these places uninspiring for the imagination, which meant that women did not miss out by not being allowed into them. Burckhardt also noticed that ‘respectable merchants [of Jeddah] are never seen in a coffee house; but those of the third class, and sea-faring people, make it their constant resort.’<sup>327</sup> Eating in the town’s cafes, since restaurants did not exist until the second half of the twentieth century, was considered improper for such respectable men.<sup>328</sup> Traditionally, the urban men and women of the middle and upper-middle classes took tea, coffee and tobacco separately, either indoors or by the side of the house,<sup>329</sup> as in *Tea Party* (1986) and *Folklore* (1969) (Figures 35 and 36).<sup>330</sup> The area outside the house, the *mirkaz*, where men used to sit to smoke and enjoy a casual coffee gathering, was a high wooden bench,<sup>331</sup> similar to that in *Chatting* (Figure 6). This allowed women who gathered for tea by the *rushaan* window to see and hear these men. *Tea Party* (1968) shows women sitting by the window in the house (Figure 35), while *The Chanter* (1972), although it depicts a formal event (Figure 32), shows how women were able to access these spaces

<sup>324</sup> الأنصاري، موسوعة تاريخ مدينة جدة، المجلد الأول: 244؛ طرابلسي، جدة.. حكاية مدينة، 196، 413–15.

<sup>325</sup> Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia 2 Volume Paperback Set*, 1:50.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

<sup>328</sup> Mai Yamani, *Cradle of Islam: The Hijaz and the Quest for an Arabian Identity* (London: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2004), p. 146.

<sup>329</sup> طرابلسي، جدة.. حكاية مدينة، 202–206.

<sup>330</sup> Men were painted inside the house in *Folklore* (Figure 36) for a special reason that will be explained shortly. For a similar female subject see *Music* (Figure 156)

<sup>331</sup> Binzagr, Seventh personal interview: The *mirkaz* was also a popular place for the mayor of the city to sit and remain approachable by the people to answer their needs. However, the *maga'ad* was a reception room for men located at the entrance of the house and furnished with carpets and Arabic style seats to be used for formal occasions.

of men's gatherings (Figures 33 and 34). It was the special architectural design of Jeddah houses, in addition to the city's conservative traditions, that gave women such unparalleled access.

In addition, singing and playing stringed musical instruments were occasionally practised for leisure in informal gatherings.<sup>332</sup> However, since the majority of people used to believe these were forbidden by their faith,<sup>333</sup> music was often played privately by both sexes at home.<sup>334</sup> This is why in *Folklore* the men are sitting inside the house (Figure 36). In *Al-Henna* (1969) Binzagr also shows a woman sitting in the middle of the bride-to-be bedroom playing the *oud*, an Arabian stringed musical instrument (Figure 37). This is because Henna night was a private celebration attended only by the bride's close friends and relatives to celebrate her preparation for the official wedding night.<sup>335</sup> They would sing, play music and drink fruit and almond punch made especially for the occasion, and help her family prepare the house for the wedding, while the bride had her hair and hands dyed with henna.<sup>336</sup> Thus Binzagr uses some of the seven main colours of traditional women's dresses in this painting to express the joyful mood of such gatherings.<sup>337</sup>

<sup>332</sup> طرابلسي، جدة.. حكاية مدينة، 417.

<sup>333</sup> كابللي، الحرفيون في مدينة جدة في القرن الرابع عشر الهجري، 134.

<sup>334</sup> طرابلسي، جدة.. حكاية مدينة، 19-417.

<sup>335</sup> See: Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 30; Binzagr, Third personal interview: 'يوم الحناء، يحطوها وراء الستارة وكانوا يزبنوها، مايدخل لها إلا اللي يزينها، صاحباتها، وهما أصلاً زمان مفهوم الحناء كان يوم شغل، الأهل يجوا يغنوا يطبلوا، لكن يحضروا كل شيء للفرح، لكن دحين الحناء صارت حفلة وصارت ثوب بالآلافات وصارت سهرة وصارت غيره'. Translation: 'On the Henna day, people used to put her [the bride] behind a decorated curtains, and no one can go in but her closest friends who were responsible for grooming her. Traditionally, the concept of the Henna day was a day of labour; her [the bride's] family used to gather, sing, and play the drums while preparing everything for the wedding day, but nowadays the Henna became a party and a dress that costs thousands of Riyals, and took place in the evening. It changed'.

<sup>336</sup> See: Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 30; Binzagr, Third personal interview.

<sup>337</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview: 'أنا اللي بحطه، أيش اللي بيمشي جنب أيش و بالشكل دا.. فهو توظيف الشيء في اللوحة أنا صحيح مثلاً بيلبسوا سبعة ألوان في الثياب هذي لكن توظيفها في اللوحة مين بيحطه'. Translation: 'It is true that they traditionally used to wear their dresses in seven colours, but who was able to employ this to serve the subject? I am. It is me who arrange these colours in the composition to look coordinated and took other elements into consideration. What counts is the employment of the elements in the painting'.

In contrast, chanting, dancing and playing the drums were allowed and were common activities at formal social occasions and on Ramadan nights.<sup>338</sup> The setting of these formal parties was arranged so women occupied the higher floors, while men celebrated on the ground floor or just outside the house if it lacked space to cater for segregated parties.<sup>339</sup> Once again women had a chance to experience both parties, whereas it was impossible and prohibited for men to enter women's spaces. Thus it was more a case of parallel domestic spaces in Jeddah rather than a public/domestic dichotomy.

This cultural setting is one of the many reasons why Binzagr was able to depict spaces of amusement in Jeddah for both men and women, and domestic space did not therefore limit her aesthetic experience. However, it should be stated that this portrait of a visually nourishing domestic interior in Jeddah is incomplete because the full spatial experience of religious societies consists of two spaces: the physical and the spiritual. The spiritual beliefs of Muslims play an important role in organising physical space. Muslims believe that life on earth is a temporary stage to test their faith. Based on their performance, they may reach the eternal space of heaven.<sup>340</sup> This space is described in Islamic doctrines as unimaginable,<sup>341</sup> which makes it worthy of sacrifice in the secular world. However, Muslims have different opinion regarding the measurements of modesty and this opinion has long been subject to change, but those who believed in gender segregation, such as those who Binzagr is trying to represent in her work, were not bothered by it. They consider their life incomplete until they have reached this ultimate space. Thus, they spent their lives trying to elevate their spiritual experience by

<sup>338</sup> طرابلسي، جدة.. حكاية مدينة، 26-421؛ كابل، الحرفيون في مدينة جدة في القرن الرابع عشر الهجري، 53-152.

<sup>339</sup> طرابلسي، جدة.. حكاية مدينة، 110؛ الأنصاري، موسوعة تاريخ مدينة جدة، المجلد الأول: 246.

<sup>340</sup> See: 'Aal-Imran', in *The Holy Qur'an*, Verses. 14-15.

<sup>341</sup> النيسابوري مسلم بن الحجاج أبو الحسن القشيري، " 51: كتاب الجنة وصفة ونعيم أهلها، الحديث 2824: أعددت لعبادي الصالحين ما لا عين رأت..."، في صحيح مسلم، تحقيق عبد الباقي محمد فؤاد، الجزء الرابع (القاهرة: دار إحياء الكتب العربية، 1374هـ)، ص. 2174.

controlling the senses, and preventing themselves from answering their sensual desires to remain focused on this goal. This suggests that the segregation of space, and the modesty of dress forced on both sexes,<sup>342</sup> provide a means for controlling what is valuable for the Muslims who support that believe.<sup>343</sup> The difference in people's opinion regarding this issue explains why some people feel oppressed by segregation, while others defend it. Faith in conservative societies creates a third dimension that is worthy of consideration when examining life experience in general.

### 3.4 Controlling gender images

The selected moments of ceremonial events and traditional rituals that Binzagr painted highlight the unacknowledged agency of elite urban women in Jeddah. However, it is worth noting that this is not the only method the artist used. Since the beginning of her career in 1968 until the late 1980s, Binzagr often adjusted other elements in these scenes to assert her sense of these women's significance.

One of the first methods the artist uses is her tendency to marginalise the male figure. Although she denies doing it deliberately,<sup>344</sup> Binzagr often conceals the faces of adult males, and unrealistically miniaturised the scale of the young male figures which make them look less significant in the presence of women. For example, in *Al-Nassah* (1975), a scene of the first official meeting of a couple on their wedding night,<sup>345</sup> the groom was expected to be given as much attention as the bride, but instead she

<sup>342</sup> See: 63–252: المجلد الأول، الموسوعة تاريخ مدينة جدة، الأنصاري، for more details on the different forms of dress worn in Jeddah by both sexes from the nineteenth century to the 1980s.

<sup>343</sup> See: David Morley, 'Bounded Realms: Household, Family, Community, and Nation', in *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media and the Politics of Place*, ed. Hamid Naficy, 1st ed. (New York; London: Routledge, 1999), 151–68, for examples from other societies on the use of domestic space to protect family values.

<sup>344</sup> Binzagr, Seventh personal interview.

<sup>345</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 38.

concealed his face (Figure 38). The artist explains that she only painted the couples the way they used to sit facing each other.<sup>346</sup> However, the angle of the view she chose does not show much of the groom's face; he is painted from behind sitting on a chair with his back to the viewer. There are two other male figures in the scene that have received similar marginalisation: the one standing closest to the groom also appears from the back, while the second, who is seen hiding next to the woman in green and facing the audience, is hardly recognisable on account of his tiny size (see Figure 39). These two young boys are supposedly relatives of the groom.<sup>347</sup> In contrast, the young girl on the left side of the groom faces the viewer and has a rather realistic proportion to the rest of the figures (Figure 38). It was traditional in Jeddah to dress a young girl in a similar costume and headdress, and ask her to walk in the formal wedding procession.<sup>348</sup>

This approach can also be seen in *Al-Rahmani* (1973–1975), which depicts the rituals performed on the seventh day after a baby's birth to officially give it a name during a special set of ceremonies (Figure 40).<sup>349</sup> The painting features five male figures who are miniature in scale in comparison with the females. Two of these male figures are standing on the left side, two others are hidden behind the pair of young women on the right, and a very tiny fifth male stands next to the female in the green dress facing the viewer. Interestingly, *Al-Rahmani* originally had a sixth young male figure standing in the foreground with his back to the viewer, but the artist deleted him two years after

<sup>346</sup> Binzagr, Seventh personal interview.

<sup>347</sup> Binzagr, Third personal interview: 'الجبرين: هذا مين يكون عادة؟ من الولد؟ بن زقر: أولاد... هذي وحدة أمها وولدها [...] أصله عادة لما بيجي العريس بيدخلوا معاه أهله [...] مو أهلها إلا إذا كان أمها حتكشف عليه person usually? Who is that boy? Binzagr: boys, [for example] a guest who brought her son with her [...] anyhow, traditionally, when the groom enters [to meet his bride in the women's space], his family used to come along with him, not her family unless her mother was allowed to uncover her face in front of him [in other words, these boys are more likely to be relatives of the groom]'.  
<sup>348</sup> Ibid.: 'وعادة هذي البنات الصغيرة يلبسوا بنت ويجيبوها معاها تدخل بزفة برضو وتدخل لها المعاشر وكله [...] كذا يسووها زفة'. Translation: 'Usually, they dress a young girl [referring to the girl in the Al-Nassah] and bring her in the ceremony with the bride, and they bring the gift trays in [...] it was a special procession for the dressed girl'.

<sup>349</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 42.

completing the painting because she felt he was blocking the view.<sup>350</sup> Instead, she painted a water pipe in his place for the old woman on the left side.<sup>351</sup>

The second noticeable method Binzagr uses to lessen the status of her male figures is to depict them under the command of a female, as in *The Slipper Carrier* (Figure 8) and *Shaving Ceremony* (Figure 26), as discussed previously. *The Ankle Bracelet* (1972–75) provides a unique example of this (Figure 29). Here Binzagr captures the moment when a young male relative of the bride fastens her last piece of adornment to signify that she is ready to meet her future husband.<sup>352</sup> The female-dominated space, the position of the male figure leaning on the ground about the feet of the seated bride (see Figure 30), the relatively empty foreground, and the number of the figures standing, all make this male figure seem vulnerable and less significant. The only other figure that has been marginalised in the painting is the female sitting on the floor wearing yellow. The difference between her dress style and skin colour and those of the rest of the women indicate that she is the bride's servant or a slave the groom has sent as a gift.<sup>353</sup> Although the male figure in *The Ankle Bracelet* belongs to an elite family, he is placed in a similar position to the servant regardless of the artist rejection of any attempt to interpret the male figures in her work as being marginalised.<sup>354</sup>

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>351</sup> Binzagr, Third personal interview: 'الجبرين: وين كان الولد اللي...؟ إيوه هنا باين! والله ماكان قاسم الصورة بس أنتي كنتي...'. Translation: 'Elgibreen: where is the boy that was.. [erased] oh, yes, I can see him here! But I do not think he is dividing the composition, you probably.. Binzagr: It did not make me comfortable, which is why I added this water pipe instead'.

<sup>352</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 34; Binzagr, Third personal interview: 'الجبرين: لما رسمتي... كان من ضمن الشرح يا...'. Translation: 'Elgibreen: when you made this work [The Ankle Bracelet] there was in the description that one of her brothers, her younger brother..? Binzagr: usually, her younger brother, or her cousin because they were not allowed to women's spaces. Elgibreen: [you mean] the older brothers? Binzagr: Yes, the older, but if there is not any boy [to fulfil this task] they can ask a [related] man to close the ankle bracelet for her, not the groom, because she is still in her family's house and the groom has not arrived yet'.

<sup>353</sup> It was common for the urban households of Jeddah to have at least one slave until (1963 AD/ 1383 AH). See: 248: المجلد الأول: جدة، الموسوعة تاريخ مدينة جدة، الأنصاري، 262؛ حكاية مدينة، جدة.. طرابلسي، جدة.

<sup>354</sup> Binzagr, Seventh personal interview. Although it is a pattern in her work to conceal and/or marginalise male figures, the artist refuses to accept such interpretation, and insists that it was a necessity forced by

The marginalisation of female servants can also be seen in *Al-Rahmani*. All three servants, who wear round white caps and green, yellow and purple dresses, are shown from behind, similar to the adult male (Figure 40). This introduces the third method Binzagr uses to heighten elite urban women's status. The artist often paints at least one servant and expensive objects or furniture in the scene to indicate the woman's class. For example, *Toilette* (1970) illustrates one of the most important morning rituals performed by urban women of Jeddah in the past (Figure 41), and shows both the lady and her servant sitting to indicate that this process took a rather long time. Again, the scene confirms the lady's authoritative status since she has the luxury of spending time on herself. The presence of the servant in the scene, in addition to the golden buttons attached to her undergarment, the metal-inlaid wooden chest behind the lady, the richly carved door, and the fountain in the connecting room, all reveal the subject's wealth. Servants were also included in many other paintings, such as the three servants in *Morning Visit* (Figure 5), *The Ankle Bracelet* (Figure 29) and *Tea Party* (Figure 35).

Binzagr also adds to the activities of domestic areas by extending the space of the rooms. For instance *Toilette* (Figure 41), *Morning Visit* (Figure 5), *The Ankle Bracelet* (Figure 29), *Al-Henna* (Figure 37), *Al-Nassah* (Figure 38) and *Al-Rahmani* (Figure 40), all show an open door leading to a second room containing an activity or object related to what is happening in the main room. She describes this device as using the perspectives of two different rooms.<sup>355</sup> It is almost as if the main space was not enough to show the vibrancy of domestic life, as if the world of these women was unlimited. In *The Ankle Bracelet* (Figure 29). Binzagr uses a mirror for the same

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the angle she chose to give the audience a better view of the interaction between the figures in the different scenes she painted.

<sup>355</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview: 'أنا متميزة في حاجة عندي منظورين لو تطلي في أغلب [اللوحات] عندي غرفتين'. Translation: 'My style is unique because I use two perspectives; if look at most of what I have, [my paintings], you will realize that there are two rooms [in one scene] with two different perspectives'.

purpose. Hung on the facing wall, this extends the scene of joyful dancing, as if to suggest that the party will never end (Figure 31). Domestic spaces in Binzagr's work are limitless and endless, they give an impression of a continuous story awaiting discovery, similar to the eroded cultural history she was trying to retrieve. The traditional rituals, ceremonies, customs, costumes, even children games which were being abandoned by many Saudis and replaced with imported goods and lifestyles, are perpetuated in Binzagr's work.

The perspective she uses in these six paintings, which makes the rooms in her paintings look as if they are tilting, also helps her to show details of carpets and floor tiles, but, more importantly, the dual perspective and open doors show the event, such as a child's birth or a wedding, being celebrated in multiple spaces.<sup>356</sup> It therefore illustrates an aspect of the past, when houses used to be very small yet people managed to use them for many different activities.<sup>357</sup> Moreover, Binzagr often shows unexpected activities for conservative women, such as trading commodities, dancing, singing, or smoking the water pipe (Figures 27–29, 35, 37, 40), to signify their authority, and even produced images of women wearing only undergarments (Figures 27, 41). On some

<sup>356</sup> Binzagr, Second personal interview: 'الجبرين: ليش كنتي تحطين منظور خارجي و منظور... كان لك هدف معين والا بس ' كذا؟ بن زقر: كذا أحسه بجيني، حتى لو هو موجود تلاقيني دائماً أتوماتيكياً، البيوت أبين الداخل كده فبتلاقها، فمثلاً الرحماني هي الوالدة جوا غرفتها وهما بيسووا جنبها، الغرفة السرير باين هذي غرفتها وهما قاعدين والبيوت... السرير جنب حق الجلسة و الأشياء هذي، فيعني ساعات بتجي مثلاً الزفافات ماكانوا يدخلوا في المحل عشان العريس فبتلاقهم بيزفوا وهما في الغرفة اللي جنبها، كانت المجلس والصفّة، يعني عارفة [...] فانا بأسوي.. أدخل... أوظف كل موضوع حسب داخلي أو خارجي [...] فتشوفي توظيف الحالة في المكان فهو هذا، لأنني بأسجل الحالة الجبرين: وكمان هو... ما أعرف عن جذة بس كان معروف في نجد الغرف صغيرة فلما يكون مناسبة كل الغرف بيفتح في الزواج، فكله... بن زقر: إيوه لأن البيت الحجازي ثلاثة إلى أربعة أدوار، عبارة عن شقق صغيرة، المجلس اللي هو ضيوفه يفرشوا فيه، يناموا، وفيه الصفّة و الحنت الصغيرة تقعد فيها. Translation: 'Elgibreen: So why did you use two perspectives? Did you have something in mind or just did it for no reason? Binzagr: I did it because this is how I felt it, even if it did not really exist I automatically tend to draw it as such. I wanted to show what was inside the houses. For example, during the Al-Rahmani celebration, the new mother usually sits inside her bedroom and they celebrate next to her [room], so [you can see here] that they are sitting and the bed and the bedroom are visible. Houses used to be [arranged like this] the bedroom is next to the living room and so on. [...] I arrange the subject's composition according to its place, whether it is an interior or an exterior setting [...] Therefore, you can see how I employ the subject in the space, and this is because I am recording a case [a moment]. Elgibreen: Also, it is known that old houses used to be very small, thus in parties they had to open all the rooms to accommodate. Binzagr: yes, because the Hijazi house used to have three to four stories, but these were actually divided into small apartments. Therefore, the guests who are sitting in the guest room used to sleep there, and those who sat in the other smaller rooms would remain in their places'.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.



occasions the artist attempted to protect the reputation of these women by including symbolic reminders of Islamic orders, such as a copy of the holy book (Figure 8), and the veil in her paintings of Bedouin women (Figures 21–22).

There are many unexplored ideological and religious beliefs that could reveal other aspects of the unacknowledged agency women of Jeddah enjoyed. For example, the cultural emphasis on marriage as the first step towards child bearing, reflected in numerous paintings by Binzagr, is a constant reminder of the highly celebrated status of the mother in Islamic doctrine. Mothers, according to a number of famous Islamic scripts, enjoy some celestial powers. It is written that paradise lies beneath their feet, 'الجنة تحت أقدام الأمهات', and that their prayers are granted without limitation.<sup>358</sup> This means that their efforts are guaranteed to be rewarded with immortality in heaven. Pleasing or distressing a mother according to Muslim's belief can therefore determine her child's eternal destiny, whether in heaven or hell, as God's contentment with a person is dependent on how they honour their parents: 'رضا الله من رضا الوالدين'. In fact, according to a famous prophet's order: men should care for the company of their mothers three times more than they do their fathers.<sup>359</sup> The rituals of the *Al-Rahmani* celebration are a cultural translation of the religious order of paying respect to the mother. On the seventh day after a baby's birth, the parents throw a party for other children to celebrate its survival and officially declare its name.<sup>360</sup> The naming ceremony includes many rituals of prayer and giving alms of money and meat.<sup>361</sup> However, none of these rituals was depicted by Binzagr, who focuses only on that of pounding the mortar, which highlights the authority of the mother. Traditionally, an

<sup>358</sup> See: Yamani, 'Birth and Behaviour in a Hospital in Saudi Arabia', 172, for more information about how this belief is incorporated into the rituals of childbirth celebrations in Jeddah.

<sup>359</sup> See: أبو زكريا يحيى بن شرف بن مري النووي، "قوله 2548"، باب البر بالوالدين وأنها أحق به، كتاب البر والصلة والآداب، في المنهاج شرح صحيح مسلم بن الحجاج، الطبعة الثانية (بيروت: دار إحياء التراث العربي، 1962م)، الجزء 18/16، ص ص. 102-103، 108.

<sup>360</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 42.

<sup>361</sup> Yamani, 'Birth and Behaviour in a Hospital in Saudi Arabia', 171–72.

older woman would pound the mortar and give the baby orders to obey its mother.<sup>362</sup> She would then name other family members, asking the baby to obey them as well, while other children responded by repeating the order to the baby.<sup>363</sup> The aim of the pounding was to take away the baby's fear of loud noises.<sup>364</sup> Without incorporating this knowledge about the status of the mother in the culture of Jeddah, it would be impossible to appreciate their role as figures responsible for building courage in the hearts of the newborn.

*Al-Rahmani* also demonstrates how the status of women increased as they grew older (Figure 40).<sup>365</sup> Two older women are shown in the scene, and each is given something to attract attention. For instance, the one in the background, who is probably one of the grandmothers, is given the privilege of holding the baby during the ritual of pounding. The second older woman, on the other hand, is depicted in relaxed pose smoking a water pipe. The comparatively large scale of these two women reflects the artist's perception of their family status in controlling the family's alliances through friendship and marriage, as a result of the strict segregation system.<sup>366</sup> According to the Saudi anthropologist, Soraya Altorki, segregation excluded men from active control over decisions connected with these spaces. Hence women controlled many aspects of men's information and experience, such as meeting the future bride and her family.<sup>367</sup> In other words, they were the ones to decide whether a young woman would be a suitable

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<sup>362</sup> طرابلسي، جدة... حكاية مدينة، 378.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid.

<sup>364</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 42.

<sup>365</sup> See: Abdel Kader, 'The Role of Women in the History of the Arab State', 91, for a similar discussion about mothers-in-law.

<sup>366</sup> Altorki, 'Family Organization and Women's Power in Urban Saudi Arabian Society', 283–84.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

bride for their sons. Without segregated spaces, as well as traditional beliefs, these women would therefore have lost much of their agency.<sup>368</sup>

Binzagr also portrayed the belief system of Jeddah women that enabled them to exercise considerable control over their own destinies. *The Fortune-Tellers* (1968) shows three women at an afternoon coffee party, trying to predict their future from a bunch of seashells thrown onto a piece of cloth (Figure 42). From the perspective of a traditional Jeddah woman, segregated tea and coffee parties therefore increased the potential for increasing her control over her life through these exchanged services. The *Articles of Superstition* (1969) gives a sense of their belief in black magic and superstition, and of how effective women were in creating their own sources of empowerment and control (Figure 43).

### 3.5 Conclusion

The scope of the paintings analysed in this chapter demonstrates that domestic space could be representative of agency on two levels: first, the agency of traditional women of Jeddah, as they are often shown exerting authority over their male and female subjects; second, the agency of the artist in claiming back the collective power of Saudi women by depicting certain moments and settings of traditional celebrations in which women were the most authoritative figures. In highlighting the importance of production and reproduction in the traditional society of Jeddah as tools for increasing

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<sup>368</sup> See also: Soraya Altorki, 'Milk-Kinship in Arab Society: An Unexplored Problem in the Ethnography of Marriage', *Ethnology* 19, no. 2 (1 April 1980): 233–44, for another unexplored method, the Islamic milk kinship, which assists women in Jeddah to control the destiny of their children by breastfeeding other children who will be denied in the future from being a possible husband or wife to their child. It is also a method to control access to segregated spaces, as these breastfed babies become relatives of the family.

an individual's authority, the artist exerted significant influence over how Saudi women were perceived by her audience.

Most importantly, the fact that Binzagr was able to uncover these disappearing private spaces represents a power in itself. As Cherry says about Victorian artists, their choices helped them to shift marriage and motherhood from a concealed space to a highly public one – that is, to exhibition rooms and discourse, making them visible in a way that helped change how they were perceived.<sup>369</sup> In a similar way, Binzagr not only made visible women's traditional domestic roles, she also gave Saudi culture unprecedented exposure in art as it had hardly ever been captured before Binzagr's time.

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<sup>369</sup> Cherry, *Painting Women*, 131.

## Chapter 4: Pushing the boundaries with hybrid style

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter will argue that Binzagr's so-called 'primitive' style represents an aspect of her agency.<sup>370</sup> It is suggested here that she developed her own version of primitive art to serve a number of purposes beyond her personal taste, enabling her to meet three main requirements that were a result of the nature of society in that era. Firstly, the desire to represent the human figure without conflicting with religious prohibitions. Secondly, the urgency of certain social problems, which limited Binzagr's access to sitters. Thirdly, the desire to represent Saudi culture as a pure and authentic source of inspiration. The last required her to reach a location at a certain historical moment in the past to seek more information about the subject. Therefore, Binzagr had to push three boundaries at once: religious, social and spatio-temporal boundaries, and by doing this she helped changing the artistic scene in the country. However, the way Binzagr and her commentators described her style, reflects their desire to put her at the same level of some leading Western artists regardless of her wish to create authentic representations of her culture. This contradiction can be understood as a result of her main art training sources and her life in England, and in Egypt shortly after the end of British colonization.

Binzagr started and based her career in Saudi Arabia, and is one of the few artists of her generation to have produced representational art consistently since the 1960s. Yet she has never been criticised or banned from producing it. In fact, all of her exhibitions in Saudi were sponsored by formal organisations and inaugurated by a

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<sup>370</sup> See: Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 10.

public figure who was often a member of the Saudi royal family.<sup>371</sup> Therefore, it is important to examine how Binzagr gradually controlled perception of her art in the desired direction; firstly, by examining how Binzagr, as well as her commentators, presented and explained her style to the Saudi audience as it played a great role in perceiving it as a work of an ‘art master’. Then, by an examination of the situations that encouraged her to develop this style for herself. This analysis will illuminate several issues affecting her work: how style helped Binzagr create human images in a society that used to consider them sinful; how she used this to protect herself and her female sitters’ reputation; how she was able to please her local and international audience request for ‘authentic’ representations of Saudi Arabia; and how she neutralize the critical issues of image making by disengaging her work from the present.

#### 4.2 Binzagr’s style

Style is ‘the constant form—and sometimes the constant elements, qualities, and expression—in the art of an individual or a group,’<sup>372</sup> as well as a system that works to make the personality of the artist more visible<sup>373</sup> – a trademark that makes people identify the artist’s work easily. Meyer Schapiro considers style a ‘vehicle of expression within a group of people’.<sup>374</sup> He suggests that it forms a language of its own that has the ability of ‘fixing certain values of religious, social, and moral life through the emotional suggestion of forms.’<sup>375</sup> This definition by Schapiro is very close to what style means here. It is used to refer not only to the formal aspect of Binzagr’s work, but also to her

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<sup>371</sup> See: (Chapter 6).

<sup>372</sup> Meyer Schapiro, *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist, and Society* (New York: George Braziller, 1994), 51.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

expression and subject matter. Together these created a communication system between her and her audience.

Interestingly, Binzagr described her style as ‘primitive’.<sup>376</sup> She justified this choice by saying that it ‘represents’ her ‘subject’ well.<sup>377</sup> According to Schapiro, some art historians ‘find in the content of the work of art the source of its style’.<sup>378</sup> However, this still does not make Binzagr’s statement convincing, because she had both formal and informal artistic training.<sup>379</sup> Moreover, Binzagr’s subject, which is Saudi heritage, did not belong to a primitive society. The Arabian Peninsula has been inhabited by many civilizations since prehistoric times, and the Islamic empire sprung from the western region which is the focus of Binzagr’s work.<sup>380</sup> In 1979, Binzagr made a statement about all the artists who had inspired her over the years. Although these artists represent completely different styles and historical periods, she insists that she was influenced by all of them:

I had been very impressed by *Cezanne’s* early works when I first became interested in art, and my first painting was an attempted copy of one of his. As my knowledge of art broadened, I felt closer to *Gauguin’s* colours and style. (*My own style is primitive*, which I feel represents my subjects well.) *Giotto’s* work has also made an impact on me, and I enjoy *Fra Angelico* and most of the *early Renaissance* paintings.<sup>381</sup>

<sup>376</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 10.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

<sup>378</sup> Schapiro, *Theory and Philosophy of Art*, 82.

<sup>379</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview: ‘أنا أول شي.. خيلنا في البداية يعني هو أن... أنا اخترت.. كنت أبغى أدخل... يعني في’ البداية أحب الرسم، أرسم كأي واحد هاوي لكن ماخطر في بالي أنني أنا بأمارس، بس أنا ماوقفت بأخذ دروس خصوصية في الرسم، تجيني مدرسة وغيره.. أنه هواية لكن أنا جت فترة بعد ما رحت ‘فينيشنق سكول’ وبرضو أخذت هواية يعني فضلت السنين دي كلها ما وقف، يعني زي بأخذه تنمية هواية مع مدرسين حتى لما كنت برا خرجت من الدا، قبل الأستاذ دا فكرت أنني أدرسه جدياً أنا بجيب وحدة مدرسة برضوه في البيت وكنت أقعد أرسم معاها بس ما أدتني التأسيس الأكاديمي حق الجامعة أنا ضغطت ثلاث سنين الا شوية اللي هو برنامج ‘كامل قولي سنتين الى ثلاثة من الجامعة اللي غطى لي فيه التشريح وغطى لي فيه المنظور و’ستيل لايف’. These early lessons were grounded on an academic base, however, they were described by Binzagr as informal because she did not get a degree, instead taking private classes with Prof. Sabri Abdulghani for two years (1965–1967). Prior to that, Binzagr studied for a while with another tutor but was not happy with her teaching methods’.

<sup>380</sup> See: Wynbrandt, *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*, 1–116.

<sup>381</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 9–10. (My emphasis).

Then in 2010, she confessed that she was not happy about classifying her work according to a certain style because this restricts the artist's creativity.<sup>382</sup> Therefore, Binzagr's description of her style as primitive does not necessarily convey her perception of it but, rather, reflects the artist's consciousness of how others might see it. According to Binzagr people still compare her to Western artists other than those she mentioned, such as Henri Matisse.<sup>383</sup> In other words, Binzagr's desire to get international recognition, in addition to the lack of academically trained art critics in Saudi, forced her to accept any comparison between her work and other artists of the world particularly of the modern era.

This shift in Binzagr's attitude from 1979 to 2010, as well as her selection of artists, suggests that she was trying to keep up with local and international audience expectations, as will be explained later. It is unlikely that Binzagr was using 'primitive' to describe herself, as a self-trained artist because she had art training. Instead, her statement invites the reader to think about the motives for her choice of style, and for her use of the word 'primitive' to characterise it.

It may seem a rather broad statement to combine two post-Impressionist artists, Gauguin and Cezanne, with two early Renaissance artists, Giotto and Fra Angelico, and to claim that all four were sources of inspiration for the same artist. Nevertheless, this can be justified by looking back at the definition of style given above. Style can refer to the constant form in works of art, as well as to the expressive qualities and moral values of an artist. Binzagr explains, for example, that she loves Gauguin the most and uses his

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<sup>382</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview: Binzagr, First personal interview: 'شوفوا أنا ما أحب' فكرة الآرت... أقولهم: 'التصنيف، لكن كل واحد يصنف اللي بيغاه'. Translation: 'The idea of [classified] art.. I tell them: "listen, I do not like classification" but they carry on classifying [my work] according to their desire'.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.: 'ناس بيقلوا أنتي 'ماتيس'. Translation: 'Some people say you are Matisse [or you take after Matisse's style]'.



colours and compositional arrangements as a starting point;<sup>384</sup> but she is also inspired by the working methods of Fra Angelico and Leonardo da Vinci although she never attempted to copy any of their work.<sup>385</sup> She wishes that she could have lived in da Vinci's era to be inspired in the same way.<sup>386</sup> What links these artists together and appeals to Binzagr, other than their leading role in the art movement, is their genuine expression; their honesty which inspires her to create more work. Rudolf Arnheim explains a similar case in 'Gauguin's homage to honesty', but from a different source of inspiration. Arnheim discovered through Gauguin's journal that he was inspired by a work attributed to Giotto.<sup>387</sup> After a formal comparison of the two, Arnheim suggests that the honesty of presentation in the work attributed to Giotto was the main attraction for Gauguin. This study highlights other possible reasons for Binzagr's selection of artists, but first we must consider the question of how people see Binzagr's work.

Unfortunately, there are several common misconceptions about Binzagr's style.

These arose after Mohammad A. Fadhl published an analysis of Binzagr's style in the

<sup>384</sup> Ibid.: 'يعني ما .. يعني أنا مثلاً ما يعينيني إذا تأثرت .. أنا أكثر واحد بحبه 'جوجان' أكثر من 'ماتيس' يعني 'جوجان' أحب شغله ' بتحسي... أنا شوفي أخطط اللوحة عندي مخطط، بأرسم التخطيط تشريحياً كاملاً لكن لما بجي أرسم على اللوحة أنا مع اللون بيتغير، ليه تشرحي الخاص ما ألترم بالتشريح دا... بتلاقي... خليني يعني هم مثلاً.. بيكاسو من فين أستوحى؟ من الافارقة، من فين أخذ 'بريمتيف' من 'جوجان' الكهوف، 'ميرو' و'جوجان'. Translation: "I do not feel ashamed to say that I was influenced [by another artist]. I love Gauguin more than Matisse, I mean I love his work, you feel.. Listen, when I plan a subject I already have my own plan, so I draw a complete analytical sketch but when I start painting the colour changes. I have my own style of drawing, I do not follow his, but I cannot resist [using his colour scheme]. Let me explain more, for example, where did Picasso get his inspiration? From the Africans, where did they [artists] took their in inspiration for primitive [subjects?] from the caves [drawings]; similarly Miró and Gauguin and so on".

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.: 'لا هو شوفي صحيح أنا أقولك أنا معجبة لو قرأتي في الكتاب من 'فرانجليكو' لغاية الفنانين، لكن أنا بعدين أنتي بتأخذي ' . Translation: 'No, listen, if you read my book you will find that it is true that I admire Fra Angelico and others, but I never copy Fra Angilico or Leonardo [da Vinci], I take inspiration from them all and merger it together'.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid.: 'أنا قلت لهم كنت أتمنى أني أنا في عصر ليوناردو لكن مش حقدر أصير هو ولا الألوان يعني في كثير حللوا، يعني في كثير ' . Translation: 'I told them I wish I lived in Leonardo's [da Vinci] era, but I never said I would be him or use his colour scheme because this is impossible, but many have [tried to] analysed and asked me what do I prefer my work to be categorised as. However, now I am not categorised anymore; some people say [my work] is primitive art'.

<sup>387</sup> In: Rudolf Arnheim, 'Gauguin's Homage to Honesty', *Leonardo* 25, no. 2 (1992): 175, Arnheim explains that this is *The Arrival of Magdalene* in Marseille, located in the lower church of San Francisco in Assisi. It was attributed to Giotto but is now believed to be by one of his collaborators, the Master of the Chapel of St Nicholas.

artist's second book.<sup>388</sup> Fadhl, who was a professor of art education at the King Saud University in Riyadh at the time, was commissioned by Binzagr to write a chapter about her style. She trusted Fadhl – and his colleague Mohammad Alrosais,<sup>389</sup> who contributed another chapter in the same book – to add their professional perspective, but sadly, Fadhl's chapter is filled with historical mistakes and generalisations. These have been cited by other scholars and have perpetuated a false understanding of Binzagr's style and journey.<sup>390</sup> For example, he assumed that she completed her course at St Martin's School of Art before she started her career: 'After completing her studies in St Martin's in the U.K., she returned home after a long absence...'<sup>391</sup> This is then followed by an exaggerated description of how Binzagr felt when she returned:

We can imagine the *psychological trauma* this *young* artist went through upon her return *carrying sweet memories* of many personally dear small crannies in her Sham<sup>392</sup> neighbourhood and Jiddah [sic] city that were a constant source of solace for her in her time abroad<sup>393</sup>

Fadhl depended on Binzagr's first book for his account, but misunderstood and exaggerated her statements. Binzagr relates, 'I returned to Jeddah in 1963 to find the old ways were rapidly being eroded and replaced',<sup>394</sup> but she never said anything about having personal memories of the old Jeddah. In fact, Binzagr complains in the first book, saying: 'I need to do a lot of background reading and coaxing the elder members of my family [...] I often ask my father, my mother or eldest sister to check the details

<sup>388</sup> See: Fadhl, 'Works of Safeya Binzagr'.

<sup>389</sup> The spelling of Alrosais's last name was changed in Binzagr's second book by the translator of the English edition to Ar-russays.

<sup>390</sup> See for example: Al-Senan, 'The Effect of Culture on the Artistic Vision in Saudi Contemporary Painting and the Role of Women in This Field'; السنان، *أساليب معاصرة في التصوير التشكيلي السعودي؛ السنان، المرأة؛ مؤثرات الرؤية في التصوير التشكيلي السعودي المعاصر والفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية؛ السنان، مؤثرات الرؤية في التصوير التشكيلي السعودي المعاصر*.

<sup>391</sup> Fadhl, 'Works of Safeya Binzagr', 47.

<sup>392</sup> *Sham* is the name of the old neighbourhood where Binzagr was born.

<sup>393</sup> Fadhl, 'Works of Safeya Binzagr', 47. (My emphasis).

<sup>394</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 10.

while I am working',<sup>395</sup> because she did not remember anything from her childhood in Jeddah before moving to Cairo in 1947. Binzagr was honest about having a short memory,<sup>396</sup> and confirmed that the only things she knew were either from research or from her sister Soraya who was passionate about Saudi heritage.<sup>397</sup> Binzagr even expressed her gratitude to Soraya in the second book for that reason.<sup>398</sup> In other words, the artist's interest in preserving the past was driven by a fear of losing her identity, not by that of losing 'sweet memories', as Fadhl imagined.

Fadhl suggests that Binzagr's style went through three phases, which he calls 'The evolution of Safeya's style',<sup>399</sup> though these are not divided according to the formal development of her style or subject matter despite being the initial goal. Fadhl tries to avoid classifying her work chronologically:

These phases cannot be tied down to any chronological sequence since Safeya is known to work on several works all at the same time. She would start some paintings to complete one today, then would leave one of this group to be completed after one year or longer and thus may be subject to change, alteration, and re-composition.<sup>400</sup>

Yet he contradicts himself and categorises her work according to decades: 1968–78, 1978–88 and 1988–98.<sup>401</sup> This chronological division was adopted afterwards by Darat Safeya Binzagr, the artist's museum. However, Binzagr acknowledges that it is inaccurate.<sup>402</sup> According to her, Fadhl misunderstood when she said, 'I always have a

<sup>395</sup> Ibid.

<sup>396</sup> Binzagr, Second personal interview: 'أما بالنسبة ليّ، في حاجة من نعمة الله ربنا أنه عندي ذاكرة ضعيفة، فما أفكر'. Translation: 'But when it comes to me, I was blessed with a weak memory; I do not remember anything'.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.: 'أنا هذي الأشياء الحاجات كلها مو معقولة عاصرتها، أنا عرفتھا بالبحث. أختي ماشاء الله الكبيرة كانت من اللي يحبوا التراث'. Translation: 'It is impossible that I witnessed all these things, I learned about it through research. My older sister, God bless, loved heritage and she was.. [the one who taught me] Perhaps if I lived [in Jeddah] I would have seen these things'.

<sup>398</sup> Binzagr, 'Who Am I?', 41.

<sup>399</sup> Fadhl, 'Works of Safeya Binzagr', 51.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid., 51–52. See particularly the captions under the pictures.

<sup>402</sup> Binzagr, Second personal interview: 'الجبرين: [...] أنا قرّبت مرة كان محمد فضل كاتب أنك بنشتعلي كذا عمل في نفس'. الوقت؟، بن زقر: لا هو هذا غلطة منه، أنا ما أشتغل كذا عمل في وقت واحد [...] لا شوفي، هو ما أدري في هذي كيف كتبها، هو حلّها،

The first phase was an imitation of the style of the major artists especially the *Impressionists*. Among those as I mentioned earlier, she was influenced by *Cezanne*, the father of the modern art who had wanted to lay the foundations of Impressionism.<sup>406</sup>

But Cezanne has never been famous as an Impressionist, and Binzagr's early work has no affinity with that of the Impressionists. This mistake is repeated again when he says that 'Gogan [sic]', 'Van Gough [sic], who [according to Fadhl] started the Impressionistic school and introduced it', Fauvist and Oriental art, specifically 'Japanese or Chinese brush treatments' all influenced Binzagr during the first decade of her career.<sup>407</sup> The problem here is that, even leaving aside the historical mistakes, it is

هو أخذ الدا.. أنا ما اشتغل عملين في وقت واحد، أخلص عمل [...] لأنني مو مثلاً فنانة 'كوميرشل'، باشتغل للبيع [...] أوقف فين؟ لما ...'. المعلومة تنقص، أحس المعلومة نقصت، هذا اللي يوقني... هو أخذها من فين؟ قلت مجموعة الملابس أخذت سنين كثير وبأرجع لها Translation: 'Elgibreen: [...] I read once something written by Mohammad Fadhil where he say that you work on more than one painting at the same time? Binzagr: No, this was a mistake, he made this up. I never work on two paintings at the same time [...] No, listen, I do not know how he came to this idea, how he wrote it? He analysed this, he took the.. [first book]. I never work on two paintings, I have to finish my work [...] because I am not a commercial artist who works to sell [...] when do I stop? I stop when there is a missing information [about a detail I want to add] This what interrupt me sometimes. Therefore, he came up with this idea when I said that the Costume Collection took me years to finish...'

<sup>403</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 10.

404 Binzagr, First personal interview: 'عارفة عندك حقك الرحماني هذي لو دا حقلافي فيه شخصية، هذي اللوحة الوحيدة اللي رسمتها وبعدين صلحت فيها [...] الجبرين: ممكن تعدلين أو تعيدين أحياناً جزئيات بسيطة صح؟ بن زقر: وأنا برسم [...] شوفي اللوحة إذا [...] قدعت عليها، أكثر لوحاتي، إلا لما أخلص'. Translation: 'you know, when you look at Al-Rahmani you will find a figure [that was deleted], this is the only painting I have changed after it was finished [...] Elgibreen: Is it ever possible that you alter or change minor details? Correct? Binzagr: only when I am painting [...] listen, when I start a painting, most of my paintings, I never leave it until I am done'.

<sup>405</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 10.

<sup>406</sup> Fadhl, 'Works of Safeya Binzagr', 51–53. (My emphasis).

<sup>407</sup> Ibid., 53.

hard to accept the examples he gives to illustrate Binzagr's attempt to 'imitate' the work of these artists/movements.<sup>408</sup> His examples are either irrelevant, or do not support his claim because many of them are generalised. Moreover, Fadhl's analysis of the examples is confusing as he does not show clear distinction between imitation and inspiration.<sup>409</sup>

As the following pages will demonstrate, the three phases suggested by Fadhl do not illustrate Binzagr's style and how it developed. For example, he describes the second phase as

...a period of study. During this period of her career she would be seen adhering with *rigor to the artistic 'rules'* and abiding by the percepts of *proportion* and *perspective*. [...] she mimicked nature or made representations similar in style and commitment to that of some of the *impressionistic* school artists.<sup>410</sup>

He considers the third phase (1988–98) 'the takeoff stage' of Binzagr's career, because she liberated herself from mimicking the work of 'any other artist or school'.<sup>411</sup>

Moreover, Fadhl claims that Arabic calligraphy is common in Binzagr's work.

According to him, she typically uses it in three ways: first, by adding script as background, similar to old Islamic manuscripts of 'medicine, agriculture, pharmacology, and astrology';<sup>412</sup> second, by integrating Arabic letters into the painting in 'a way that the audience can recognise the words, though she made every effort to make the writing congruent with the work itself in an organic fashion';<sup>413</sup> and third, by using it as a decorative element in the depicted scenes. Apparently, Fadhl came up with this conclusion after seeing Arabic script in two of Binzagr's works: *Al-Henna* (1969) and *A Bedouin Women* (1978) (Figure 37, 129). However, these are the only works

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<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> Some of the traits of Binzagr's work have an affinity with some of Cezanne and Gauguin's work, but Fadhl was not successful in choosing the right examples or to show common traits between the two.

<sup>410</sup> Fadhl, 'Works of Safeya Binzagr', 53. (My emphasis).

<sup>411</sup> Ibid.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

where Binzagr added Arabic text. They are not enough to claim that this is a common trait in her work, and he failed to give an example of the second method he describes. Moreover, the two examples he uses are from an early stage in Binzagr's career: 1969 and 1978. Hence, they fall under the first phase which he suggests is an imitation of certain Western artists and 'Japanese or Chinese' art.

Fadhl could have avoided many of his mistakes if the chapter had been presented as a reading of some of Binzagr's work, rather than as an ambitious attempt to theorise her style and divide her work into distinct phases. One of the suggested reason why Fadhl's perception of Binzagr's style has perpetuated among Saudis is that it is the only official publication in Arabic about the artist. Her first book was printed in English and French, and, whether from convenience or because of the language barrier, people rarely refer to it. It is useful to know these mistakes when comparing the artist's statement and reading of her paintings with Fadhl's analysis. Interestingly, Binzagr agreed that Fadhl made a lot of mistakes in his chapter,<sup>414</sup> which may have happened because she did not revise the book before it was printed.<sup>415</sup> Darat Safeya Binzagr categorises her work according to the chronological phases Fadhl suggested, but does not use his descriptive titles: imitation, study and the take-off stage. Consequently, a more coherent analysis of Binzagr's style is required. The formal aspects of her work, or style, will be addressed in the following sections.

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<sup>414</sup> Binzagr, Second personal interview: 'الجبرين: أنا أتوقع أنه قاعد يحاول في كتابته يقنع القارئ إنك يعني... إلى حد ما متأثرة'. [...] هو فهمها غلط يمكن مع الحديث أنه الوتر كولور ما بيدققوا، بياخذوا عالسرير'. Translation: 'Elgibreen: maybe he was trying to convince the readers that you are influenced to an extent.. I mean because he wanted to divide your work into different stages [...] Binzagr: [...] he misunderstood, probably when I talked about my watercolour work.. They [scholars] do not look carefully, the gather [the information] in a hurry'.

<sup>415</sup> Binzagr, Seventh personal interview: Mounirah Mosly volunteered to do the art work, the revision, and assign a translator for the book to help the artist.

### 4.3 Representing the human figure

Representational art was not common in Saudi Arabia when Binzagr first exhibited her work in 1968. The emergence of the religious movement of Muhammad bin Abdul-Wahhab (1703–1792) had a major influence on the development of art. The main aim of the movement was to eliminate the widespread practice of worshipping images, trees and sculptures,<sup>416</sup> and its success is arguably what created the general resistance against representational art that lasted until recently. In addition, Olfet Binzagr believes that living conditions in the Arabian Peninsula were extremely harsh. People had to constantly migrate in search of a livelihood, which also discouraged development of the arts.<sup>417</sup> This lasted until the foundation of the third Saudi state and the beginning of the modernisation movement.<sup>418</sup> Moreover, since the dawn of Islam the making of figurative images had been religiously prohibited to avoid idolatry.<sup>419</sup> This was based on a number of the Prophet's sayings and orders that warned people from making such images.<sup>420</sup> However, since these early Islamic periods, the ban limited but never entirely stopped human subjects from being produced.<sup>421</sup> Yet attempts at figurative representation in the Arabian Peninsula during the eighteenth century were strongly resisted. Bin Abdul-Wahhab's movement shaped people's daily lives and became the driving force for the foundation of the first Saudi nation (1744–1818),<sup>422</sup> and continued

<sup>416</sup> Niblock, *Saudi Arabia*, 23–27.

<sup>417</sup> Binzagr, 'An Historical Perspective', 18.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid.

<sup>419</sup> See: -5952. الأحاديث رقم. 5950-5951، ص. 176؛ أنظر أيضاً نفس الجزء، الأحاديث رقم. 5963؛ "باب بيع التصاوير التي ليس فيها روح، وما يكره من ذلك"، رقم. 2225، ص. 82؛ "باب تحريم تصوير صورة الحيوان وتحريم اتخاذ ما فيه صورة غير ممتهنة"، الأحاديث رقم. 2104-2112، ص.ص. 1663-1672.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

<sup>421</sup> See: Eva Baer, 'The Human Figure in Early Islamic Art: Some Preliminary Remarks', *Muqarnas* 16 (1 January 1999): 32–41.

422 See: محمد بن عبد الوهاب، 59: باب مجاء في المصورين، كتاب التوحيد، تحقيق: أبو مالك القفيلي، (مصر: مكتبة عباد الرحمن، 2008م)، ص ص 148-149؛ سليمان الحقييل، حياة الشيخ محمد بن عبد الوهاب وحقيقة دعوته، (الرياض: المؤلف، 1999م)، ص ص 57-58، 70-74؛ عبد الفتاح أبو عليّه، محاضرات في تاريخ الدولة السعودية الأولى: 1157-1232هـ / 1774-1818م، (الرياض: دار المريخ للنشر، 2002م).

its strong influence over the second (1840–91) and third (1932–present) Saudi states.<sup>423</sup>

Inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula swore allegiance to the Saud family mainly because the latter were allies of Bin Abdul-Wahhab and supporters of his movement. Thus it was hard to produce images in the Arabian Peninsula – later Saudi Arabia – without upsetting public opinion.

However, attempts by some respectable Islamic scholars in other countries to negotiate image making made this a possible subject of discussion. For instance, Sheikh Ahmed Harredi in 1963,<sup>424</sup> and Sheikh Jad Al-haq Ali Jad Al-haq in 1980,<sup>425</sup> of the *Dar Al-Ifta Al Misriyyah* in Cairo – a respectable Islamic institution that provides religious advice, ‘Fatwa’, about contemporary Muslim issues – have argued that figurative image making is permissible under certain conditions, such as when images no longer endanger people’s devotion to God. This justification was also employed by Olfet Binzagr in her argument about representational art:

Social, political or economic tyranny adulterates the Unity of God more than do representational art forms. The latter are no danger to the purist concept of Islam as long as the Muslim is not led to believe that such art forms in any way exercise or represent supernatural power.<sup>426</sup>

Therefore, the issue of debate according to this position is no longer Binzagr’s ability to breach the prohibition of image making. Rather, it is her ability to do so without agitating public opinion or overtly contesting people’s beliefs. Mainstream opinion in

<sup>423</sup> See: الحقيقل، حياة الشيخ محمد بن عبد الوهاب، ص ص. 57-58، 70-74؛ عبد الفتاح أبو عليّ، تاريخ الدولة السعودية الثانية: 1256-1309 هـ/ 1840-1891 م، (الرياض: دار المريخ للنشر، 1991 م) ص. 32؛ مديحة درويش، تاريخ الدولة السعودية المعاصرة حتى الربع الأول من القرن العشرين، (جدة: دار الشروق، 1992 م) ص ص. 7-9.

<sup>424</sup> أحمد هريدي، 1066: حكم التصوير، في: الفتاوى الإسلامية من دار الإفتاء المصرية، تحرير: جاد الحق علي جاد الحق وإبراهيم الدسوقي وآخرون (القاهرة: المجلس الأعلى للشئون الإسلامية، 1997)، المجلد 7، الطبعة الثانية، ص ص. 98-2496.

<sup>425</sup> جاد الحق علي جاد الحق، 1279: إقامة المتاحف وعرض التماثيل، في: الفتاوى الإسلامية من دار الإفتاء المصرية، تحرير: جاد الحق علي جاد الحق وإبراهيم الدسوقي وآخرون (القاهرة: المجلس الأعلى للشئون الإسلامية، 1997)، المجلد 10، الطبعة الثانية، ص ص. 3453-58.

<sup>426</sup> Binzagr, ‘An Historical Perspective’, 19.



Saudi Arabia still insists on the ban of image making,<sup>427</sup> yet so far there is no traceable criticism of Binzagr's figurative work, whose very first exhibition with Mosly was entitled *Portraits First Exhibition* (1968).<sup>428</sup> In fact, the Emir of Mecca, the holy Islamic capital, inaugurated this exhibition, which in a sense legitimised Binzagr's work both religiously and politically.<sup>429</sup> Olfet Binzagr explains the important things which this historical event represents:

An enlightened society protected by a body of law that ensures for its people peace, security, and educational, physical and social nourishment can never be misled by any form of demagoguery or charlatanism. Recognition of this truth by the Saudi rulers has encouraged them to sponsor a wide range of programmes.<sup>430</sup>

In addition, she considers this exhibition a transitional point in the history of art in Saudi Arabia. According to Olfet Binzagr, the exhibition led to a general acceptance of figurative art, and subsequently to the addition of fine art into girls' school curriculum.<sup>431</sup> The question here is how Binzagr won the support of the Saudi rulers although they were supposedly against these practices.

It is suggested here that Binzagr achieved this through her so-called primitive style. The figures in her work, especially during her early years (1968–76) are not realistic. Both their facial features and limbs are out of proportion. In addition, the artist does not commit herself to the rules of perspective or scale. She combines two kinds of perspective,<sup>432</sup> and manipulates the scale of her figures according to their importance in

<sup>427</sup> See for example: ع. ابن باز، *الجواب المفيد في حكم التصوير، الطبعة السابعة* (الرياض: رئاسة إدارة البحوث العلمية والإفتاء، 2003م)؛ م. واصل، *أحكام التصوير في الفقه الإسلامي، الطبعة الثالثة*، (الرياض: دار طيبة، 2006م)؛ ص. الغزالي، *حكم ممارسة الفن في الشريعة الإسلامية: دراسة فقهية موازنة*، الطبعة الثالثة، (الرياض: دار الوطن، 2000م).

<sup>428</sup> Monira [sic] Moussely [sic] and Safeya Binzagr, *Portraits: First Exhibition by Artist Miss Monira Ahmed Moussely & Artist Miss Safeya Said Binzagr* (Jeddah: n.p., 1968), (Appendix 5).

<sup>429</sup> Binzagr, 'An Historical Perspective', 20.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>432</sup> This will be explained with examples later in this chapter.

the scene.<sup>433</sup> In other words, her style reduced the threat her images might have over people's religious devotion. The figures were neither analytically accurate nor identifiable, and thus she has never shown an intention of emulating God's creation. Instead, the paintings were presented to the audience as having another purpose. According to Binzagr, her work was intended to teach new generations something about their traditional culture.<sup>434</sup> This accorded with the argument of Islamic scholars Harredi and Jad Al-haq, as mentioned above. Although Binzagr has never declared that primitivism was employed deliberately to ease the tension of image making, her sister's argument indicates that this was one of the main concerns.

The dominant style during the 1960s and 70s in Saudi was abstraction, which suggests that artists themselves were concerned with this issue. For instance, both Abdulhalim Radwi (1939–2006) and Muhammad Al-Saleem (1939–1997), who with Binzagr and Mosly made up the first generation of Saudi artists, developed their own version of abstract art. Radwi developed his abstract forms into a circular motion, a style that was inspired by his philosophy about the influence of electromagnetic energy over the dynamics of people's emotions, dreams and realities.<sup>435</sup> Al-Saleem developed what he called 'Horizontalism', a style of abstract forms confined within a few gradient horizontal lines inspired by the Saudi desert horizon.<sup>436</sup> Binzagr was one of the rare artists who never abandoned image making and negotiated its acceptance. Like Binzagr, Mosly produced representational art in her early career years. It is suggested that they were both encouraged because they studied art in Cairo where the subject of figurative

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<sup>433</sup> See: (Chapter 3).

<sup>434</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 11; see also the dedication of: Moussely [sic] and Binzagr, *Portraits: First Exhibition*, (Appendix 5).

<sup>435</sup> 93 الرصيصة، تاريخ الفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية، 221، 223؛ السليمان، مسيرة الفن التشكيلي السعودي، 93.

<sup>436</sup> 97 السليمان، مسيرة الفن التشكيلي السعودي.

art was discussed and permitted, whereas Radwi and Al-Saleem studied in Italy and were not exposed to debates that attempted to reconcile secular and spiritual beliefs.

During her years of training in Cairo (1965–67), Binzagr produced more realistic female portraits (see Figures 44–46). These were only published in her second book (1999) after the boundaries of image making were pushed in Saudi Arabia. When the *Dar Al-Ifta Al Misriyyah* was first announced in Cairo in 1963,<sup>437</sup> Binzagr may have been exposed to the debate there and been convinced. However, when she moved back to Jeddah (1967), her figures became less analytically accurate. Except for *Zabun* (1969), her early published work of women in Jeddah (1968–79) show them veiled.<sup>438</sup> It is difficult to determine whether this was done specifically to observe socio-religious norms in Saudi Arabia, or came about as a result of her personal interest in the subject of veiled women. Be that as it may, it is obvious that there was an attempt to conciliate the two conflicting opinions regarding image making. Binzagr could have continued painting the way she had in Cairo when she moved to Jeddah and caused conflict within her society, or she could have converted to an entirely abstract style to find favour. However, she rejected these options and found an alternative solution.

Examination of Binzagr's initial sketches in comparison with her final work is particularly important as it reveals the amount of effort that was put into making the figures less realistic. For example, *Study of Wash Day* (1972) (Figures 47–48) shows more defined faces compared with the original work (Figures 49–50). The subject is the old tradition of women gathering on the roofs of houses in Jeddah to do their laundry.<sup>439</sup> To compensate for the deformed faces and omitted figurative details, the artist added others to enliven the scene. For instance, the sketch shows the seated figure in the

<sup>437</sup> See: 2498-2496. ص ص. 'حكم التصوير'، 1066: هريدي،

<sup>438</sup> See: Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 50–59.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid., 102.

foreground – the woman wearing green in the painting – with her dress lifted up revealing her bare legs, knees and parts of her inner left thigh (Figure 48). However, this was changed in the final painting where the figure's legs are covered with a traditional undergarment, a pair of long striped pants (Figure 50). This adjustment would still have been considered a daring treatment of Saudi women, since they were supposed to maintain their modesty and remain unexposed in public, but the artist has done the opposite by undressing the figure standing in the background in an image for public display. In the sketch the woman is depicted wearing a full-length dress, but in the final painting she wears only her traditional undergarment. This can be interpreted as an attempt to subtly negotiate and familiarise the audience with unconventional representations of Saudi women. Binzagr succeeded in doing this by engaging her audience within the scene. In the final work she also added a fence in the background and a panoramic scene of Jeddah. This detail was important to stir the memories of her audience about mothers, aunts and servants gathering on the roof to do their laundry,<sup>440</sup> and to distract attention from issues of modesty and figurative representation.

It was hard to examine this process of alteration before the establishment of Binzagr's museum, because these sketches were never exhibited. However, now an entire gallery is dedicated in Binzagr's museum to show her sketches and life drawings, which included many studies of poses, hands, feet and faces (Figures 51–56). Although there is no study that follows the change in Saudi attitudes towards image making, it could be argued that sensitivity to this issue has been decreasing since the late 1980s. This suggestion is confirmed by the increase in publications during the mid-1980s and

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<sup>440</sup> Ibid.; doing the laundry in Jeddah used to take place on the house roof, which explains why these women were comfortable wearing immodest dress.

90s that discuss the subject of image making.<sup>441</sup> Opening the doors to negotiation of this subject, even if the initial attempt was to reinforce its prohibition, indicates public demand for rethinking the boundaries of this issue.

This scholarly activity assisted Binzagr in pushing the boundaries of imagery even further. By the end of the 1980s, alongside producing other work in her usual style, she created a large series of pastel portraits<sup>442</sup> that show more defined faces.<sup>443</sup> This was possibly a result of active debate around the issue, as well as her recent re-exposure to life-drawing classes, which lasted for two years (1976–78).<sup>444</sup> One example is a work entitled *Gathering Vegetables* (1989), which depicts a woman sitting in a relaxed pose (Figure 57). Her dress is slightly lifted to show her left knee, while a scarf is draped loosely around her head and shoulders; most importantly, her facial features are defined. Therefore, it can be said that Binzagr has never neglected representational art. However, her methods of representing human figures have changed over the years, which both helped induce, and reflected, changes in Saudi visual culture.

441 See for example: عبد العزيز ابن باز، *الجواب المفيد في أحكام التصوير*، (الرياض: الرئاسة العامة للبحوث العلمية والإفتاء، 1985)، محمد الحبش، *أحكام التصوير في الفقه الإسلامي*، (بيروت ودمشق: دار الخير، 1987)، أ. القضاة، *الشرعية الإسلامية والفنون*، (بيروت وعُمان: دار الجيل ودار عمار، 1987)، عبد الرحمن اليوسف، *أحكام التصوير في الشريعة الإسلامية*، (الكويت: جمعية إحياء التراث: مركز البحث العلمي، 1988)، الأمين الحاج محمد أحمد، *حكم التصوير في الإسلام*، (جدة: مكتبة دار المطبوعات الحديثة، 1989)، أحمد المصري، *جمع الدرر في أحكام التصوير والصور*، (الدمام: دار ابن القيم، 1991)، صالح الغزالي، *حكم ممارسة الفن في الشريعة الإسلامية*، (الرياض: دار الوطن، 1996)، محمد واصل، *أحكام التصوير في الفقه الإسلامي*، رسالة ماجستير، جامعة الإمام محمد بن سعود الإسلامية، كلية الشريعة بالرياض، قسم الفقه، 1996.

<sup>442</sup> It would be more appropriate to describe these works as ‘ethnographic portraits’ since Binzagr’s declared aim was to produce descriptive images of people’s costumes, customs, habits and differences as an attempt for a scientific study. However, the term ‘portrait’ is used instead to cohere with the artist’s classification of her work since the beginning in her: *Portraits First Exhibition* (1968), and her recent statements during her interview with the scholar. The constant change in the placement of Binzagr’s work, made intentionally by the artist, to serve different needs and address different audiences (see Chapter 6), as well as, the constant development in the way she understand and explain her work makes it difficult to put a fixed label on her work. See Richard Brilliant understanding of the term ‘ethnographic portrait’, and his opinion on ‘Fabricated Identities: Placements’ in: Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture*, Kindle Edition (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), locations 1518–1523.

<sup>443</sup> See: (Chapter 5).

444 Binzagr, Second personal interview: 'بالفعل أنني صرت دائماً كل يوم أخرج أمر على الأقسام و صرت أروح أجي في' الليل لان 'اللايف دروينق' في الليل، أيام اللي في الليل فيه 'لايف دروينق' أجي أقعد أرسم هي دي اللي كنت بتلقاها معاهم زيادة، لكن في [النهار الأستاذيو حقي 'توثر'، [مدرية خاصة]، عندنا 'توثر'، [مدرية خاصة] She attended life-drawing classes in the evening, while taking an advanced study programme in fine art during the day at St Martin's School of Art, London.

#### 4.4 Solving technical and social problems

Representing human figures in art was not the only problem Binzagr had to solve. There were other minor issues that stood in her way when she first started in Jeddah, one of which was to find female models willing to have their image displayed in public, as women were supposed to wear the veil in Jeddah during the 1960s and 70s. According to Soraya Altorki, the middle and the younger generation of women in Jeddah in the 1970s altered the veil form to suit their modern lives.<sup>445</sup> However, they could never entirely abandon wearing it in public places and in the presence of unrelated men.<sup>446</sup> Younger women were mostly afraid of the social stigma attached to shameless behaviour, whereas the older generation observed this dress code out of fear of divine retribution.<sup>447</sup> For example, walking in the marketplace without a headscarf was ‘considered a sin by unrelenting traditionalists, and a shameless act by all.’<sup>448</sup> Thus it can be imagined how problematic it was for a female to pose for a work of art that was going to be displayed in public.

Binzagr therefore had to solve several problems at once: firstly, she had to convince someone to pose for her in order to paint; secondly, she had to protect the model’s reputation from the shame stigma. Since female public exposure was not accepted at the time, only a few would probably have offered to help Binzagr.

According to the artist, her models were often household members – house servants and some of her sisters.<sup>449</sup>

<sup>445</sup> Altorki, *Women in Saudi Arabia*, 37.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid., 36–37.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid.

<sup>448</sup> See: Ibid., 37, for full description of the appropriate modesty dress in Jeddah during the 1970s.

<sup>449</sup> Binzagr, Third personal interview: ‘يعني .. أكثرهم مثلاً بيكونوا موديلات في البيت’. Translation: ‘Well, most of my models are members of my house’; *ibid.*: ‘مثلاً قريبين مني من العائلة ما في’. ‘اعتراض وأنا بأرسم الحالة ما أكون إني بأتعهد إني أخفي الملامح، أو أحط ملامح ثانية يعني بأعمل دويرة الوش وبعد كده من غير الصورة بأحط الملامح، أو ساعات بأغطيها و أرسوم، لكن لما بأرسم أسوي ناس في حالة اللي هما الموديلات أصلاً من العائلة، فبأكون مرتاحة إني بأقيد إني أضيق ملامح أو أضيق أشياء زي كده، فهذا بيترك في الوش’. Translation: ‘I, for example, take a

As a consequence, a technical problem was added to the situation: multiple figures in the same paintings might look very similar, because she had to depend on the same model for different figures. Hence the paintings could seem unrealistic or sometimes dull. Therefore, it is suggested that the artist had to think about a solution to diversify the figures in her work, particularly since many of her early works were ceremonial scenes that require a large group of women (see, for example, Figure 29). Her style therefore offered a solution to the problem because it enabled her to keep figures' faces unidentified, protecting the models and their family's reputation. It also helped Binzagr revitalise her subjects by decreasing attention on the figures and focusing more on their role in the scene. Binzagr acknowledged that the main reason for changing the features of her figures was to free herself from restrictions of display.<sup>450</sup> She used to ask some of her models to cover their faces when taking a picture as a reference so she would free herself from revealing their features by mistake later when she paint at her studio.<sup>451</sup> This was a precautionary measure she took whenever there was a possible risk, such as painting someone from outside her family.<sup>452</sup>

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picture.. you see, these [painted figures] are all close relatives, therefore, they do not mind being painted because when I paint the subject I purposely conceal the resemblance, or change their features. In other words, I draw the perimeter of the face, then I add different features than what I have in the picture, or sometimes I cover the features [in the picture] and I start drawing. When I paint family members to capture a certain action or pose, I feel comfortable because I do not have to force myself to distort or conceal their features, because this makes a difference in the face [and they do not mind].

<sup>450</sup> Binzagr, Second personal interview: 'الجبرين: لما كنتي تغيرين ملامح.. هو أسلوبك لما تغيري ملامح الوجه و كذا.. بس' 'كان فيه هدف واضح عندك أنه مثلاً ماتبغي ؟.. بن زقر: ما أبغى أتقيد عشان يقولوا لا تعرضيها'. Translation: 'Elgibreen: when you change the features, was this done on purpose to change how the face looks to create your own style, or was there any other significant goal you wanted to reach such as...? Binzagr: I did want to limit myself in case they [the sitters] prevented me from showing it in public'.

<sup>451</sup> Binzagr, Fourth personal interview: 'لما كنت بأصور للملابس عشان يوافقوا أقول لهم غطوا، خطوا شي على وجهكم' 'عشان أنا ما أتقيد ويجي أحد يقول ليه رسمتيني'. Translation: 'when I was taking pictures for the traditional costume collection I had to let them cover their faces in order to get their approval [to take a picture], because I did not want to limit myself when someone argues with me for drawing them'.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid.: 'لكن لما بأكون بأرسم عشان حرية العرض ما بأحاول أقيد نفسي، يعني مثلاً بتطلع ملامح لكن ما يهمني لأنو هذولا في العائلة' 'مافي إعتراض، بس ما أروح مثلاً رقصة شعبية وبأطلع الوجه، حتى لما كنت بأصور للملابس عشان يوافقوا أقول لهم غطوا'. Translate: 'when I draw, to liberate myself for the purposes of exhibiting [my work] I try not to restrict myself. For example, sometimes you can recognize the features because the sitters are members of the family and they do not mind so I am not concerned. But I would never attend a folklore dance [traditional party to paint] and then reveal the faces, even when I was taking pictures for the traditional costume collection I had to let them cover their faces in order to get their approval [to take a picture]'; Binzagr,

This situation, of observing social restriction more than religious orders, was not new in Jeddah. It had been present since 1900, when the Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid II, who ruled 1876–1909, issued a decree to ban the sale of photographs of women without a veil in all cities under his rule, including Jeddah.<sup>453</sup> This indicates that the women of Jeddah were accustomed to being photographed, but the ban was issued to prevent the circulation of their images and protect them from being exposed to the gaze of unrelated men. In other words, it was done to protect women's reputations. Mary Roberts cites that it was acceptable for elite Ottoman women in the late nineteenth century to breach the religious order of modesty, but not the social. They were allowed to be photographed by an unrelated male photographer, on the condition that he was trustworthy and would never publish their photos. However, it was never acceptable for an unrelated male viewer to see these photographs.<sup>454</sup> This is because the photographer was complying with the woman's demand, whereas the viewer would be looking at the image for personal pleasure. The Saudi artist Nasser Almousa (b.1955), mentions that during the 1980s he once had to abstain from exhibiting a portrait of young woman he had sketched from imagination after receiving a phone call from a man saying that the woman in the portrait looked like his daughter, and showing it in public might ruin her

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شوفي أنا اللي هما ما عندي ضرر منهم بيطلع، لأنه وأنتي طبعاً بتطلعي في الصورة الفوتوغرافية ' وبتترسمي بيحي الروح، بيحي الشبه، فيه ناس ما أهتم، لأنهم عارفة مش حيقولوا لا، فيه ناس أبعد.. ساعات الوجه أعطي الوجه واحط أنا 'الملاح اللي أبغاها'. Translation: 'Listen, those who will not be affected [by concealing their features] I let the resemblance show. When you look at a picture and then draw you cannot resist it; some resemblance [to the sitter in the picture] show in the drawing. This does not bother for some people who I know would not mind, but for those who are not very close to me, I sometimes have to cover the face [in the picture] and draw the features I like instead'.

<sup>453</sup> Durkje Van der Wal, *Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje: The First Western Photographer in Mecca, 1884-1885*, vol. 9, Rijksmuseum Studies in Photography (Amsterdam: Manfred & Hanna Heiting Fund, Rijksmuseum, 2011), 19.

<sup>454</sup> Mary Roberts, *Intimate Outsiders: The Harem in Ottoman and Orientalist Art and Travel Literature*, 1st ed. (Durham and London: Duke University Press Books, 2007), 115.



reputation.<sup>455</sup> According to Almousa, this incident drove him from portraiture to abstract art.<sup>456</sup>

Such conflicted situations usually occur during periods of drastic cultural change and a new exposure to a different culture. The people of Jeddah in the 1960s and 70s were going through a major period of modernisation, similar to that of the Ottomans in the late nineteenth century. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the younger generation of the Ottoman Empire, who had been educated abroad, tried to reconcile their desire to observe tradition with that of building a new identity and engaging with Western visual culture.<sup>457</sup> Likewise, the people of Jeddah during the 1960s and 70s had many conflicting practices,<sup>458</sup> which is why it is suggested that Binzagr and other artists in Jeddah, even before her time, faced similar obstacles to those of the Ottoman period. For example, the photographer Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936) had to overcome a series of obstacles in Jeddah and Mecca in order to photograph its people and places.<sup>459</sup>

Interestingly, there was an early incident when Binzagr breached social restrictions with her painting *Zabun* (1969) (Figure 58), but escaped criticism. The artist has long considered *Zabun* (1969) her ‘masterpiece’,<sup>460</sup> and a journalist once described it as a ‘signature painting’,<sup>461</sup> a ‘trademark’,<sup>462</sup> and ‘the Saudi Mona Lisa’.<sup>463</sup> *Zabun* was the only female portrait published in Binzagr’s first book with a comparatively defined

<sup>455</sup> Nasser Almousa, Public interview with Nasser Almousa in ‘Mawihba’ Summer programme for the gifted in Arts (Riyadh: Riyadh Girls University, Art Education Department), interview by Eiman Elgibreen, June 2004. This story was an answer to a question asked by the current scholar about the reasons behind Almousa’s choice of style.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid.

<sup>457</sup> See: Roberts, *Intimate Outsiders*, 3–4, 109–127.

<sup>458</sup> (Chapter 2).

<sup>459</sup> See: Van der Wal, *Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje*, 9:17–27.

<sup>460</sup> Binzagr, Second personal interview: ‘لأنها طبعاً تعتبر ماستر بيس’. Translation: ‘Because, of course, it is considered a masterpiece’.

<sup>461</sup> Nimah Ismail Nawwab, ‘Safeya Binzagr: Painting Cultural History’, *Saudi Aramco World*, February 2001, 22.

<sup>462</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>463</sup> Binzagr, Second personal interview: ‘حتى وحدة كاتبة في مجلة عربية قالت هذي موناليزا السعودية’. Translation: ‘Yes, even a journalist from an Arabic magazine said [wrote that] this is the Saudi Mona Lisa’.

face. There were several other defined portraits of male figures, which she presented carefully to avoid criticism,<sup>464</sup> but hardly any female representation other than *Zabun*. Binzagr's description of this work suggests that defining the face was not an easy decision. She mentions that she had to paint the face in *Zabun* four times until she was satisfied with what she called the 'Arabic face'.<sup>465</sup> She explains that she tried to emphasise this by adding the perfect tan to the face, although its roundness has always reminded her of 'Queen Victoria'.<sup>466</sup> Binzagr had to make the face more defined because her aim was to produce a work that could express the pride and glory of Hijaz women.<sup>467</sup> She therefore took this risk and painted *Zabun* after a photograph of her sister, Inja Binzagr, wearing a traditional dress, which became the subject of the picture.<sup>468</sup> This important information about the sitter's real identity has never been revealed in any of Binzagr's books or interviews, other than in those undertaken by the current scholar. However, people who knew the Binzagr were able to recognise the

<sup>464</sup> See: (Chapter 5).

<sup>465</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 10.

<sup>466</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview: 'لما تطلّي [...] كانت الأول - التفاصيل - كانت فيه الوش السمار - التفاصيل - لأنه لقيت فيه الوش السمار - التفاصيل - كانت الأول [...] لما تطلّي'. Translation: 'I changed it again [during the painting process] because I realized that the details, the face tan, was in the beginning.. [not satisfying], if you could see the layers beneath [the surface] you will find it, there are about two or three faces. I tell them: this is the face of Queen Victoria, it is a round face'; Binzagr, Fourth personal interview: 'لو دخلنا الصورة دي تحت ال'إكس راي' حتلاقي كذا وش [وجه] عشان إني أوصل للوش دا'. Translation: 'If we put this painting under X-rays you will find a number of faces that I did to reach this one'.

<sup>467</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview: 'أنا لما كنت با أرسمها أبغى أرسم اللبس و المرأة الحجازية كامراة كشموخ، كعزة كدا'. Translation: 'When I decided to paint her, I wanted to paint both: the costume, and the Hijazi woman's pride, glory, and other characteristics of that sort. All the figures I drew for women were made after their photographs wearing the costumes, but it does not show their features'; Binzagr, Fourth personal interview: 'بالنسبة للزبون، أنا 'سويتها كلوحة تمثل الشموخ والعظمة حققت المرأة الحجازية'. Translation: 'Regarding the *Zabun*, I made it to represent the pride and glory of the Hijazi woman'.

<sup>468</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview: 'بعدين حصل أنه أختي أتصورت بالزبون فلفقت فيه يعني'. Translation: 'then, it happened that my sister was photographed once wearing the *zabun*, so I thought..'; Binzagr, Fourth personal interview: 'آخر صورة استخدمتها - أنا ما حظيت قدامي أحد أرسمه - استخدمت صورة أختي. ما سميتها بإسمها مش عشان 'أنا ما أقدر أسميها، عشان أنا أبغى الصورة إسمها الزبون اللي هو اللبس؛ نهاية تطور لبس الزبون اللي هي المرأة في الحجاز بتلبسه'. Translation: 'the final picture I used [as a reference] was my sister's photograph, but I did not ask anyone to sit for me while drawing. I chose not to name the painting after her on account that I wanted it to be named after the dress which signified the final stage of the Hijazi woman's development, not because I could not name her [reveal her name]'.

face as Inja's, and others thought it was the artist's.<sup>469</sup> Consequently, when Binzagr decided to show the painting in Jeddah, she had to ask her sister and brother-in-law for permission.<sup>470</sup> There was a chance that society would criticise both Inja and her husband, so they had to think carefully before making this decision. *Zabun* was used as the main attraction for the exhibition and was printed on posters and billboards, and displayed for a while in the window outside the gallery. Some friends advised them to remove it from the window fearing that it may cause trouble, but no one criticised them for exhibiting it.<sup>471</sup>

In order to explain how this conflicted situation could happen without causing a problem, the situation must be analysed on two levels: understanding the nature of the model's family, and that of their society – in other words, how both were persuaded to approve and accept such an action. According to Altorki, in her study of elite women in Jeddah in the 1970s, 'The limits to which a woman can "expose" herself are culturally

<sup>469</sup> Binzagr, Fourth personal interview: 'لكن الزبون طلع الشبه اللي يعرفني يقول أنا واللي يعرف أختي يقول هي لأنو آخر'. Translation: 'However, the resemblance in the *Zabun* was apparent; those who knew me said it was me [in the painting], and those who knew my sister said it was her because the last photograph I relied on [as a reference] was my sister's'.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid.: 'إيوه كانت لابسة اللبس، وطبعاً أنا لما عرضتها أديباً أستاذت زوجها، بس طبعاً ما كان عنده مانع، بس أديباً لأنو طلعت'. Translation: 'Yes, she [Inja] was wearing that costume, and of course when I decided to exhibit this work, I had to ask for her husband's permission. He did not mind, but I had to ask out of courtesy because the [figure in the] painting ended up looking like her'.

<sup>471</sup> Binzagr, Third personal interview: 'مثلاً لما الزبون تشبه أختي – الله يرحمها – و يقدرُوا يقولوا تشبهني، طبعاً قلت:.. أستاذت جوز أختي قالت له: شوف الصورة دي داخله المعرض، إذا عندك اعتراض قبل ماتدخل لأنه لو دخلت مش حأخرجها وحتصير ماتعرف؟ بوستر؟ فلما جيت ردك، في قاعة سووها أسمها ردك، قد انعرضت قبل كذا ما قال شي فصارت لسه ما انعرضت، لا لسه ما انعرضت قاعة ردك. وأنا طبعاً ما أخذت بالي، سووا البوستر لوحة الزبون، وأثوا لواحد باكستاني يعلق، وهذا صاحبنا ما خلى مكان في جدة لا فوق كبري ولا تحت كبري [تضحك] [...] بضمير، طبعاً. وبعدين حبيننا نظهرها لأنها طبعاً تعتبر 'الماسترييس' فيه اللي هو زي الفترينة أنحطت فيها، أول شيء جاء أصحابه قالوا له اللي عنده في البشكه يجوا، هذا: والها مين جابها معروضة ومش عارفة إيه؟ جاء: 'تراني أستاذت، المهم شلناها من الفترينة وعلقناها جوا، خلاص أقتنع في كلامي'. Translation: 'For example, the [figure in the] *Zabun* looks like my sister –may her soul rest in peace– and they can say it looks like me of course. Therefore, I took her husband's permission and said: 'listen, this painting will be displayed. If you have any objection [say it] before it goes public, because if it does I will never remove it from the exhibition. It may be used in a poster, or anything of that sort.' And when I went to Radak, a gallery called Radak, I did not realize that they used in the poster. They ask a Pakistani worker [who was not aware of the country's traditions] to hang the posters, and he did not leave a spot in Jeddah without putting one of the posters in. He hung the posters over bridges, under bridges.. he did his job with true passion [saying this laughing]. Then of course we wanted to give the painting more exposure because it is considered a masterpiece, thus we put it in the glass window of the gallery. At the beginning, his friends [friends of her brother in law] who used to spend time with him asked him who is putting [his wife's image] in display and so on [raising some concerns]. He then came to me [asking her to remove it] so I said: 'I took your permission!'. Anyways, we removed it from the window to the gallery, but he was already convinced by my argument'.

negotiable,<sup>472</sup> but it required an ability to analyse the rules of restrictions and re-assess whether these needed to be maintained or could be changed. This was aided by the transfer of the power of decision-making from the older to the younger generation. For example, Altorki noticed that married women of the younger generation had more liberty than the unmarried, regardless of the latter's age. This is because the decision of the veil transfers from her family to become a shared with her husband once she is married.<sup>473</sup> Thus it was easier for those who were unconvinced that this dress should be observed to partially abandon it, and the men of the younger generation in elite families often 'regarded the veil as unnecessary in the presence of men who are allowed to enter the house frequently, unless such men are of "a backward mentality and object to meeting women"'.<sup>474</sup> Unmarried women were not allowed to appear unveiled to anyone who was a potential husband, unless he was a relative raised with her.<sup>475</sup> Such action could 'jeopardize the reputation of her family; "showing off" one's daughter or sister invites malign gossip'.<sup>476</sup> Although it cannot be confirmed if the Binzagr were part of Altorki's study, her observations are applicable to Inja since the Binzagr are part of elite society in Jeddah,<sup>477</sup> and they are related to Altorki.<sup>478</sup> As a result, Binzagr may have taken advantage of her sister's powerful position – being married at the time – and used her image to negotiate this social restriction.

The remarks of Binzagr about *Zabun* in her book and interview suggest many important things: that she developed the desire to negotiate this boundary after developing an affection for the painting, that the process of repetition sparked this desire, and that her description of the repetition is in itself a strong indication of her

<sup>472</sup> Altorki, *Women in Saudi Arabia*, 1, 37.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid., 37–39.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid.

<sup>477</sup> طرابلسي، جدة.. حكاية مدينة، 69.

<sup>478</sup> Binzagr, Seventh personal interview.

resistance and hesitation. 'For the *Zabun* I did four faces until I was happy with the Arabic face. Now I can never part with that painting. I like the colours, the style, and feel relaxed when I look at it.'<sup>479</sup>

It is also a reminder of how careful Binzagr was as an artist who favoured working within the hierarchies of her society, and of how important it was for her to stabilise, if not elevate, her social status by observing the social and religious conventions of Jeddah. Binzagr distracted the audience from the female face in *Zabun* through the title of the painting, which is the name of the traditional dress. It was also important to employ different methods of negotiation to maintain the trust of her audience, one of the most important of which was writing. Binzagr's first book was an important means of protecting her reputation and simultaneously provoking cultural change. This includes her explanation of the process of painting *Zabun*, which could be seen as an attempt to legitimise her action by signifying the cultural necessity of it. She also emphasised the importance of the defined Arabic face to complement the traditional dress,<sup>480</sup> but is it really Inja's face that tempted her to define it? Is it really Inja's face at all?

*Zabun* was the centre of attention in many of Binzagr's local and international exhibitions: it was the key piece in her first-ever international exhibition at the Woodstock Gallery in London (1973), printed on the exhibition invitations and the catalogue (Figure 59), and the advertisement of her exhibition in Paris which, according to Binzagr, was widely spread (1980).<sup>481</sup> It was also printed in Binzagr's second book opposite the beginning of the chapter entitled 'Who am I?'<sup>482</sup> Thus it could be argued

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<sup>479</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 10.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid.

<sup>481</sup> Binzagr, Third personal interview: 'في باريس في الثمانين نفس الحكاية عملوها البوستر وماخلوا حتة ما علقوها فيها'. Translation: 'The same happened in Paris, in 1980, they printed it on the poster and put up it everywhere'.

<sup>482</sup> See: Binzagr, 'Who Am I?', 24–25.

that the face in *Zabun* is actually the artist's face, the face of Safeya and not Inja Binzagr. Binzagr might have used her sister's photograph, but the face of the model bears a remarkable resemblance to her own (see Figure 60). Her hesitation and remarks about this painting become much clearer if one considers that it was her first self-portrait and a statement of her power.

Apparently, the agency represented by *Zabun* is not limited to Binzagr's ability to exhibit an image of a female face. Her perspective on the dress, along with that of Olfet Binzagr, reveals a significant authority traditionally inherited with this dress:

Zabun, the lady properly attired in the dress of the day, reflects a high point in both fashion and respectability. The demands on such a lady were many and great. She was a homemaker, and in this capacity she was expected to supervise her home, preparing it always to receive family and guests. She was a lady, but moral standards required her to help her domestics with the daily chores.<sup>483</sup>

The words speak for themselves. 'High point', 'respectability', 'supervise', 'moral standards'; these are all indications of status, moral observance, control and moral observance again. It is almost as if she was portraying the lady as a queen – a domestic, kind, humble queen – hosting guests and always prepared, wearing a costume that signified her moral and economic status. This explains why Binzagr recalled the face of Queen Victoria when she was describing the figure. Olfet Binzagr's description of the lady in *Zabun* stresses the characteristics that made her desired. Binzagr adds that this dress was usually secured with a chain attached to six buttons made of solid gold, silver, or even diamonds, which were given to the lady by her father as a gift depending on the family's wealth.<sup>484</sup> These can be interpreted as a sign of the family's support for their daughter's authoritative position, which would certainly please a conservative and

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<sup>483</sup> Binzagr, 'An Historical Perspective', 22–23.

<sup>484</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 48.

ambitious woman. Thus it is hardly surprising that Binzagr said about *Zabun*: ‘Now I could never part with that painting.’<sup>485</sup>

#### 4.5 The quest for a pure culture

According to Bhabha, ‘all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity’.<sup>486</sup> There is no such thing as a ‘pure culture’, however Binzagr’s statements reflect her belief about the purity of the Saudi heritage. Therefore, by recreating images from the past she assumed that she is producing representations of a culture that was not disrupted by foreign elements. This motivates a closer look at these statements in order to understand where did this misleading belief came from, and how the recreation of the past aided her furthermore in making her representational art acceptable.

The assumption about Mecca, as well as Jeddah, as places to observe a pure undisrupted society was not made by Binzagr. It was an idea that existed since the nineteenth century. The ban that restricted non-Muslims from entering the holy land of the Hijaz provoked Orientalist travellers to have access and examine its culture. In fact, to the present day, very restrictive rules are enforced on visitors to grant them access to Mecca. Thus, it is believed that any representation of its culture would interest those who are curious about it, and it also gave those who have the privilege of access an authority over the subject. Orientalists were eager to describe it in their journals. For example, the Swiss Orientalist Johann Ludwig Burckhardt (1784–1817), had to convert to Islam in order to visit the Hijaz and publish his travel journals about it.<sup>487</sup> However, the Dutch Orientalist Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936) was the first to take

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<sup>485</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>486</sup> Jonathan Rutherford, ‘The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha’, in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart Ltd, 1990), 211.

<sup>487</sup> See: Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia 2 Volume Paperback Set*.

pictures of these places and its people.<sup>488</sup> He followed the plan of Burckhardt by converting to Islam,<sup>489</sup> and described life in the Hijaz as ‘the unspoiled Mohammedan life untouched by Frankish culture’.<sup>490</sup> His romanticized descriptions with the help of his Meccan assistant, Abd al-Ghaffar, enabled him from publishing a successful two-volume album to showcase some of their photographs.<sup>491</sup>

The material Orientalist left was important to some of Binzagr’s work since she was aspiring to produce images of that era.<sup>492</sup> These were preliminary source of information, then she used her primitive style with its vivid colours and distorted proportions to emphasise the ethnic characters of the subject and highlight its assumed ‘authenticity’.<sup>493</sup> However, such sources of information remains deficient, especially since Binzagr was more interested in depicting the actual interaction of the ceremonies and daily life rather than the figures themselves; an aspect that does not show in the rare Orientalists’ photographs of her people. Therefore, Binzagr had to rely on oral history and her imagination to compose her subjects, and recreated these scenes in many occasions by arraigning settings using her collection of traditional objects and costumes. As a consequence, by painting the past Binzagr was able to protect her sitter’s reputation as her audience know that her work is mostly based on oral history. The past disengages her subjects from the present, and make her figures more tolerable as they appear to be from her imagination.

The focus on the ethnic identity of the pre-oil society gives Binzagr many advantages. It highlights her position as an insider to that culture, therefore gives her

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<sup>488</sup> Van der Wal, *Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje*, 9:8.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid.

<sup>490</sup> Ibid., 9:26.

<sup>491</sup> See: Snouck Hurgronje, *Makkah a Hundred Years Ago, Or, C. Snouck Hurgronje’s Remarkable Albums*.

<sup>492</sup> See: (Chapter 5).

<sup>493</sup> See: Ibid.



some authority over the subject. Moreover, it lures a wider range of audience who are fond of Orientalist art to her work.<sup>494</sup> Jeddah was ruled by many Islamic dynasties,<sup>495</sup> but Binzagr's work mainly reflects Ottoman influence which makes it more closer to Orientalist art. Her collection of the 1960s and the 70s often shows women smoking water-pipes, playing musical instruments, and dancing or reclining in extensively decorated interiors with servants in attendance. Such subjects work perfectly as signifiers of the East. However, unlike many Oriental paintings, these subjects are not treated in a sensual way in Binzagr's work. Binzagr's work is more focused on celebrating the exotic character of Saudi culture to add interest to her work, as well as to celebrate the people of Jeddah and the richness of their material culture.

It is interesting that although Binzagr is a contemporary artist, she has been through many situations and obstacles similar to those faced by other female Orientalist artists. For instance, she was raised outside the culture she represents and longed for a pure source of inspiration to enrich her work. Like most Orientalist female artists, she also experienced the disappointment of finding that the culture she dreamed of was not as traditional as she expected.<sup>496</sup> Similarly, the journals and letters of female Orientalists sometimes reveal their frustration with the drive for modernisation of the Ottoman Empire, and the combination of Eastern and Western elements.<sup>497</sup> However, they felt most disappointed with the fashion and the interiors of their subjects, which

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<sup>494</sup> Many Middle Eastern art collectors, such as Shafik Gabr from Egypt and others from the GCC countries, has long admired Orientalist art for its pictorial traits. The market for Orientalist art has been growing fast since 1975 regardless of its criticism. Presumably, there is a desire to find visual representations of their heritage to gain reassurance of its richness, even if these had conflicted details. See: Devon Pendleton, 'Why Orientalist Art Is Hot', *Forbes*, accessed 28 February 2015, <http://www.forbes.com/forbes/2009/0413/062-oriental-art-embracing-the-past.html>; and for the success story of Al-Mathaf Orientalist Gallery in the 1970s and 1980s, see: 'Brian MacDermot', 18 October 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/culture-obituaries/art-obituaries/10389729/Brian-MacDermot.html>.

<sup>495</sup> طرابلسي، جدة.. حكاية مدينة، 44.

<sup>496</sup> See: Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 9.

<sup>497</sup> See, for example, captions in Lucy Garnett and Grace Ellison's journals in: Reina Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2004), 255.

demonstrated that the exotic scene they had imagined no longer existed.<sup>498</sup> Hence the hybridity of these culture represented an obstacle that complicated the Orientalists' search for a new territory of creativity, and in Binzagr's case it was the similar.

Comparison between the Orientalist artist Mary Adelaide Walker's journal and Binzagr's text is particularly instructive in revealing the resemblance in their attitudes. As Mary Roberts notes, the Ottomans' hybrid lifestyle was 'disruptive to her [Walker's] preconceived ideas', and was 'distinctively unpictorial'.<sup>499</sup> She often expressed frustration with Ottoman women's insistence on being depicted in Parisian dresses and updated interiors that followed the latest European trends. Walker believed that 'the ease, the grace, the dazzling magnificence of the East [had been] lost and dimmed by a painful striving after Western fashions'.<sup>500</sup> Similarly, Binzagr complained about Saudis' abandonment of their heritage. She was not against modernisation, but refused to live in between traditional and modern cultures: 'It is better to live with the modern than spoil the beauty of the old by trying to mix the modern with it.'<sup>501</sup> Binzagr assumed that there was a clear distinction between cultures and was very critical of how Saudis were adapting to their new life:

The older, ordinary people who lived during that period do not understand why I insist on knowing more details [...] They have no artistic or historical perception [...] And the younger members of the Bedouin families recently settled in towns have so much to catch up on that they have no time for listening to their grandmothers' stories, and therefore cannot help.<sup>502</sup>

She was striving for a defined identity in a time of uncertainty, and fighting her fears of getting lost in between: 'If you are *in-between* the old and the new, *you are lost*.'<sup>503</sup>

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<sup>498</sup> See: Roberts, *Intimate Outsiders*, 117; Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism*, 139–40.

<sup>499</sup> Mary Adelaide Walker, *Eastern Life and Scenery with Excursions in Asia Minor, Mytilene, Crete, and Roumania* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1886); in: Roberts, *Intimate Outsiders*, 117.

<sup>500</sup> Walker, *Eastern Life and Scenery*, in: Roberts, *Intimate Outsiders*, 116–117.

<sup>501</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 11.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid.

<sup>503</sup> Ibid. (My emphasis).

Likewise, her sister, Olfet Binzagr, was unhappy about the new lifestyle and cultural choices being made by her generation, though she was more explicit about the things she wanted her society to adopt from Western culture:

With the oil industry came exposure to *outside influences*, such as European housing styles, Danish furnishings, French cosmetics and American hotdogs, but not much appreciation of Dickens, Hesse, Dante and Rousseau [...] Of the hundreds of Saudi graduating from Western institutions of higher education, I would estimate that only a few can distinguish between works by Picasso and Raphael, Seurat and Henry Moore. A large number have probably never visited any form of museum (not even the Cairo Museum), while many have visited Madame Tussaud's in London.<sup>504</sup>

The writings of both Safeya and Olfet Binzagr reveal constant comparison between Europe and Saudi Arabia although they were keen to preserve their cultural heritage. However, Olfet was judging Saudis from the perspective of a Western cultural capital,<sup>505</sup> and was therefore disappointed in their cultural and intellectual taste. Safeya Binzagr, on the other hand, was disappointed by their inability to embrace Oriental identity and fight the lure of modernity and Western culture, saying: 'I do not feel there is a beautiful life-style now; it is like a machine. *And in Europe it is the same.*'<sup>506</sup> Her comparison between Saudi Arabia and Europe was based on her dependency on the two cultures as a source of inspiration. Thus her failure to find a pure culture in both territories drove her to make art that sheltered her from this feeling of loss. Realising that she could never retrieve the past, she announced that her work is intended to 'treasure it'.<sup>507</sup>

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<sup>504</sup> Binzagr, 'An Historical Perspective', 18–19. (My emphasis).

<sup>505</sup> The term cultural capital was first introduced by Pierre Bourdieu to describe the cultural resources of habits and knowledge available to the children of the elite in France, which enabled them to dominate the social and economic sphere after they grow up because of these early intellectual experiences. This influenced their taste and judgment over material culture and art. See: Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', in *Readings in Economic Sociology*, ed. Nicole Woolsey Biggart (Massachusetts; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2002), 280–91; Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Routledge Classics (Oxon: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>506</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 11 (My emphasis).

<sup>507</sup> Ibid.

Binzagr's situation also share another obstacle with some female Orientalists regardless of the spatio-temporal differences between their cases. They all needed to promote their work to make a living, and this was dependent on meeting the public's preconceptions of the harem as a representation of the sexual fantasies of the *Arabian Nights*.<sup>508</sup> Even for an artist who did not plan to sell her work such, as Binzagr, pleasing the audience was her main goal. In fact, Binzagr declared that her choice of subject was made to cater to her audience:

After finding that the most admired paintings of the 1968 exhibition were those depicting desert life and everyday life in Saudi Arabia, I decided to use my brush to record the changing traditions and social customs of the country.<sup>509</sup>

Moreover, there was little traditional life left for Binzagr to depict when she first returned to Jeddah. What is significant about her method is that, on rare occasions, she was swept away by Oriental fantasy. This is visible in her painting *Bedouin girl* (1968), which shows an almost bare-chested figure (Figure 61). Although Binzagr claimed that the girl was wearing a bodice and trousers under her dress,<sup>510</sup> she in fact appears to wear a sheer dress that reveals her arms and bust, and the drum she is holding in her hand evokes the popular fantasy of the Oriental woman. However, the fact that there is no similar image in the rest of Binzagr's work suggests that she managed to resist this fantasy and to satisfy her local audience's demand for a more realistic representation of their past. Nevertheless, maintaining accuracy and meeting public demand for a certain type of pictorial image raised the problem of exhibiting portraits of Muslim women

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<sup>508</sup> See: Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism*, 12, 169; Roberts, *Intimate Outsiders*, 63.

<sup>509</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 10.

<sup>510</sup> According to Binzagr, she was inspired to do this work after attending a Bedouin party where women used to wear very sheer dresses over their bodice and trousers. She explain that it was still possible during the 1960s in Jeddah to hire Bedouin women to perform a traditional dance at home. Regardless of the artist's explanation, the bodice cannot be seen in the painting. Source: Binzagr, Seventh personal interview; see also: Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 51.

without breaching the modesty order such women follow.<sup>511</sup> This was especially important for Binzagr since her models were mostly based on her own family whose reputation she had to protect.

In her chapter 'The politics of portraiture behind the veil', Roberts demonstrates how Ottoman women, which reminds of those represented in Binzagr's work, controlled the way they were depicted by Orientalist artists, and when and where these images were shown.<sup>512</sup> In other words, artist had to comply to the society of their sitters and respect its customs and traditions. The relationship between Walker and the daughter of the Ottoman Sultan Fatma Sultan, for example, reveals many details about the politics of portraiture and harem dynamics of power during the period of Walker's visit in the 1850s.<sup>513</sup> According to Roberts, Fatma Sultan was an authoritative figure, who had a noticeable command over her husband, her household subjects and even Walker herself. Fatma observed the Islamic order of modesty, and took special precautions to keep Walker's portrait of her concealed from unrelated men. Painting sessions took place in her harem and a curtain was hung over the painting after it was finished.<sup>514</sup> These measures frustrated Walker as it limited her ability to show the work outside the harem, and she constantly expressed regret at her inability to exhibit Fatma's portrait in her diaries.<sup>515</sup>

Therefore, the Orientalist artists' ability to represent this highly restricted subject showed their capability of surpassing socio-political obstacles. To overcome the strict politics of harem portraiture, Binzagr, similar to Walker, was obliged to find alternative

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<sup>511</sup> See: Reina Lewis, 'Only Women Should Go to Turkey: Henriette Browne and the Female Orientalist Gaze', in *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 127–85; Roberts, *Intimate Outsiders*, 115.

<sup>512</sup> Roberts, *Intimate Outsiders*, 109–27.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid., 116.

methods. She has to resist the hybrid nature of the culture, meet audience expectations, and depict the harem without disrespecting the requirement of modesty. The last imperative was probably the hardest to address, because Binzagr, Walker and other Orientalist such as Henriette Browne could lose cultural authority, income and, most importantly, a rich source of inspiration if they lost the trust of their clients and models. Walker and Browne were not the only Orientalist artists who faced these obstacles,<sup>516</sup> but they are mentioned here because of their similarity with Binzagr in the way they desexualised the harem. Comparison between their respective solutions will deepen appreciation of their efforts and work, but is not intended to suggest that they enjoyed the same level of authority. Rather, it will call attention to the creativity of each artist in solving problems.

Starting with the problem of accuracy in Binzagr's painting, it is noticeable that her books include detailed descriptions of the process she followed to produce her work and avoid possible mistakes. However, this does not mean that she did not make mistakes. She declared this meaning in her book when she said: 'I am writing a cultural history with my brush and want to record it *as accurately as possible*. I often ask my father, my mother or eldest sister to check the details while I am working'.<sup>517</sup> She also complained about not finding enough information in libraries and archives, or from her meetings with the indigenous people of Jeddah.<sup>518</sup> Therefore, by mentioning her sources of information she shifted the burden of responsibility for any mistake from Binzagr's shoulders and legitimised her poetic treatment of the subject.

A similar use of writing can be seen in Walker's career. Walker's journals helped her to represent the harem to the Western audience and, although she was

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<sup>516</sup> See for example Elisabeth Jerichau-Baumann in: Ibid., 128–49.

<sup>517</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 10. (My emphasis).

<sup>518</sup> Ibid., 11.

obliged to use pseudonyms for Ottoman women in her journals, this enabled her to present a detailed description of harem life and to earn good fees without breaching the privacy of her Muslim clients.<sup>519</sup> In contrast, Binzagr protected the reputation of her models by emphasising that her scenes no longer existed and were based on family oral history leaving the audience to believe that the sitters are not real but from her imagination. In addition, Binzagr used her so-called primitive style to make these models less identifiable. Walker and Binzagr's different solutions demonstrate that conservative female artists were capable of overcoming the challenges of their work, but that the methods of problem solving they adopted also defined their respective levels of authority. The more the artist could help her audience visualise the subject, the more she became influential.

Appreciating the artist's authority in these examples depends on the willingness of others to appreciate her solution to obstacles. For example, in Brown's case, Lewis foregrounds her ability to desexualise the harem and activate it as a social realm by painting Ottoman women fully dressed and consumed by social obligations.<sup>520</sup> However, she notes that Browne's depiction of the veil worn by some women in *A Flute Player* (1861) seems incongruous in relation to what is assumed about harem etiquette.<sup>521</sup> Interestingly, this is different in Binzagr's case. Her painting *Morning Visit* (1986) did not receive such criticism, although it also shows a woman in full veil and waiting in relaxed pose for the maid to bring tea (Figure 5). The fact that the foreign audience knew Binzagr was depicting her own culture prepared them to accept her work, even though she was representing practices she often did not witness. Moreover, both Binzagr and her local audience are familiar with this 'traditional etiquette' as she

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<sup>519</sup> Roberts, *Intimate Outsiders*, 111.

<sup>520</sup> Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism*, 148–49.

<sup>521</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

calls it which made it unquestionable.<sup>522</sup> In other words, her deep understanding for her society and her audience aided with her constant verbal and written justification to protect her work from any criticism of that kind.<sup>523</sup>

Although the artist insists that her representations of Saudi heritage was her way to resist modern hybrid Saudi culture, what Binzagr and her audience often overlooked was that old Saudi culture, as represented in her art, was also a hybrid culture. Binzagr did not realise that hybridity has long been the norm of Jeddah's culture. The costumes, customs, interiors and rituals of Jeddah during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were highly influenced by different cultural groups, including Turks, Indians, Moroccans, Egyptians and Indonesians.<sup>524</sup>

The culture Binzagr presents in her painting is not the only hybrid aspect of her work – her art is in itself hybrid. Living between three different countries shaped Binzagr's identity and style, despite wanting to protect both from foreign influence.<sup>525</sup> Her work is a hybrid product of Western artistic techniques learned in Cairo and London,<sup>526</sup> as well as of her memory of works seen around the world, family history, traditional objects collected in Jeddah and old photographs found in London archives.<sup>527</sup> For instance, there is a resemblance between the composition of Binzagr's *Toilette*

<sup>522</sup> Binzagr, Seventh personal interview.

<sup>523</sup> See: (Chapter 2).

<sup>524</sup> الأنصاري، موسوعة تاريخ مدينة جدة، المجلد الأول: 111-13، 249.

<sup>525</sup> Binzagr, Second personal interview: 'قال لي: ليه تبغي تجي .. ليه تبغي تقدمي للكورس هذا؟ قلت الكورس دا مفتاح لأي .. أحدهم، الفنانين للبوست جرادويت [الدراسات العليا]، أنا عندي رغبة أبغى أدخل كلية وأحتك وأشوف، فقال لي: أنا خايف زي ما قلت لك أنتقلوا لبريطانيا [...] بعدين بعنونا في 'فينشنق سكول' في بريطانيا [...] أخذنا لغة. إحنا عشان كنا ندرس في مدارس عربي كانت اللغة 'فرنساوي [...] الإنجليزي طبعاً، فاستمرينا فيه، فاللغة الثانية هي الفرنسية'. During her interview for the advance course at St Martin's School of Art before starting the main programme, the director told her he was concerned that she might lose her personal style as an influence of the course. Binzagr assured him that she had no intention of changing her style and subject.

<sup>526</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview: 'إليه فدخلنا مدارس، أول ما دخلنا كانت مدرسة عربي، وفي دي الأثناء إخواني الأولاد ... أنتقلوا لبريطانيا [...] بعدين بعنونا في 'فينشنق سكول' في بريطانيا [...] أخذنا لغة. إحنا عشان كنا ندرس في مدارس عربي كانت اللغة 'فرنساوي [...] الإنجليزي طبعاً، فاستمرينا فيه، فاللغة الثانية هي الفرنسية'. Before her artistic training which started in 1965, Binzagr took French and English lessons after school in Egypt, then moved to England to attend finishing school, and her art experience developed from her visits during that time to galleries and museums, as well as, from books she bought when travelling to Egypt and other countries of the world. Source: Binzagr, Seventh personal interview.

<sup>527</sup> See: (Chapter 5).



(1970) (Figure 41) and *The Toilet of Venus*, “*The Rokeby Venus*” (1647–51), by Diego Velazquez (Figure 62), in London’s National Gallery, one of Binzagr’s favourite museums.<sup>528</sup> The subject of Binzagr’s *Toilette* is a beautiful upper-class woman from Jeddah performing her morning toilette within a luxurious setting.<sup>529</sup> A black figure is shown holding up a mirror, a reminder of Cupid’s role in Velazquez’s painting. Binzagr’s figure is also depicted facing the viewer and has a rather defined face, unlike the majority of the figures in her paintings, emphasising confidence in her beauty. As such, the painting is reminiscent of Manet’s *Olympia* (1863) (Figure 63) and indicates that Binzagr was perhaps unintentionally influenced by this work. Moreover, although the woman is not naked and does not appear in a sensual pose, her dress is improper according to Saudi standards of modesty. The white bodice and trousers are undergarments, a form of dress that was hardly ever represented visually, and the gold buttons on the woman’s bodice remind the viewer of the bracelet and ribbon worn by *Olympia*. This reflect the artist’s desire to produce a daring subject, yet Binzagr’s painting was never considered scandalous by Saudis, as this form of undergarment was no longer in fashion by the time *Toilette* was painted, which means that crossing the temporal boundary protected Binzagr’s work from criticism. In addition, there is no connotation in Arabic culture between black people and sexuality.<sup>530</sup> The black figure in Binzagr’s scene is intended to represent a servant and therefore indicates class rather than sexuality. As explained previously, urban brides used to be given a female slave as

<sup>528</sup> Binzagr, Second personal interview: ‘التيت أروح فيه حاجات حلوة، والتيت جاليري أحبه، الناشيونال جاليري أحب.. أناشيونال جاليري أحب.. والتيت أروح فيه حاجات حلوة’. Translation: ‘Well, I love.. the National Gallery, I love it. Also, I go to the Tate, it has a great collection of work’.

<sup>529</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 100.

<sup>530</sup> Such as the myth of black women’s bodies as sexually unstrained in colonial Europe and North America, which affected the way their images were perceived and led to read their bodies as ‘foul’ and ‘bestial’. See: Serena Maurer, ‘Embodied Public Policies: The Sexual Stereotyping of Black Women in the Design and Implementation of U.S. Policies’, *Journal of Public and International Affairs* 11 (Spring 2000): 37.

a gift from their grooms.<sup>531</sup> Thus Binzagr's *Toilette* reminds the viewer of the leisurely marital life enjoyed by upper-class women, an interpretation that is closer to Józef Grabski's description of Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538) as a 'commemorative allegory of marital love' (Figure 64).<sup>532</sup> The latter, like Binzagr's *Toilette*, shows a bridal trousseau chest in the background and uses servants to signify socio-economic status.<sup>533</sup> Binzagr emphasises the sense of leisure further by depicting her two figures seated on the ground, suggesting that the woman spent a long time performing her morning rituals and romanticized the subject. Thus it could be said that the main inspiration for Binzagr was the link between beauty, as represented by Venus's toilette, and the marriage chamber in Western art.<sup>534</sup> As a result, Binzagr's work is a hybrid of Eastern and Western sources, which reflects her family's activity as merchants and their introduction of European imported goods into Saudi culture.<sup>535</sup> Bhabha explains that hybridity is tied to a 'process of translating and transvaluing cultural differences',<sup>536</sup> and usually happens through *identification*, where a subject identifies 'with and through another object' as a form of 'otherness'.<sup>537</sup> Binzagr's use of cross-cultural elements to create a form of hybrid art was important in enabling her to define her cultural identity.

Hybridity, migration together with fantasy, were therefore the primary tools that empowered Binzagr and enabled her to overcome obstacles, and did not contradict her desire to resist the influence of modernity over her culture. According to Roberts and Jill Beaulieu, Oriental intellectuals usually tend to resist the hybridisation of their culture by manipulating Western codes that represent an 'idealized past', and by

<sup>531</sup> الأنصاري، موسوعة تاريخ مدينة جدة، المجلد الأول: 248.

<sup>532</sup> See: Józef Grabski, "'Victoria Amoris": Titian's "Venus of Urbino." A Commemorative Allegory of Marital Love', *Artibus et Historiae* 20, no. 40 (1 January 1999): 9–33.

<sup>533</sup> *Ibid.*, 15–16.

<sup>534</sup> See: Andreas Prater, *Venus at Her Mirror: Velazquez and the Art of Nude Painting* (Munich: Prestel, 2002), 14–25, 29–30, 35–41.

<sup>535</sup> See: (Chapter 6).

<sup>536</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 361.

<sup>537</sup> Rutherford, 'The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha', 211.

searching for ‘cultural authenticity through a resistance to the “universalising power of Western technology”’.<sup>538</sup> Moreover, the art historians Zeynep Çelik and Roger Benjamin both assert that the work of indigenous artists, even if it has a visual resemblance to Western art, can still be read as an expression of cultural difference.<sup>539</sup> Growing up, Binzagr was exposed to different events that threatened the stability of her cultural identity, one of which was the demolition in 1948, a year after the Binzagr family moved to Cairo, of the old wall that had surrounded Jeddah since the sixteenth century.<sup>540</sup> The wall was the defining border between the Bedouins and the urban citizens of Jeddah and was built to protect the city from outsider invasion. The event, together with moving to another country at a young age and for a long period of time, added to the artist’s feeling of being lost. In addition, Binzagr witnessed a very intense political period in the Arab world during the late 1960s and 70s, which infused a sense of patriotism in her entire generation.<sup>541</sup> Similar to Edward Said’s experience as a colonial subject raised in Egypt, Binzagr witnessed the independent movements of ‘Arab nationalism, Nasserism, the 1967 war’, and ‘the 1973 war’.<sup>542</sup> She was also exposed to Western discourse during her years of education in England, which instigated her ‘consciousness of being an Oriental’.<sup>543</sup> However, her reaction towards Orientalist art was different than Said’s. For her, Orientalist art was inspiring. It provides visual evidence; traces of the rich material culture of the Middle East in the

<sup>538</sup> Jill Beaulieu and Mary Roberts, ‘Orientalism’s Interlocutors’, in *Orientalism’s Interlocutors: Painting, Architecture, Photography*, ed. Jill Beaulieu and Mary Roberts (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 10.

<sup>539</sup> See: Zeynep Çelik, ‘Speaking Back to Orientalist Discourse’, in *Orientalism’s Interlocutors: Painting, Architecture, Photography*, ed. Jill Beaulieu and Mary Roberts (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 19–42; Roger Benjamin, ‘Colonial Tutelage to Nationalism Affirmation: Mammeri and Racim, Painters of the Maghreb’, in *Orientalism’s Interlocutors: Painting, Architecture, Photography*, ed. Jill Beaulieu and Mary Roberts (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 43–78.

<sup>540</sup> 52 حكاية مدينة، طرابلسي، جدة. The date has been converted from the Hijri to the Gregorian calendar by the current scholar.

<sup>541</sup> See: (Chapter 5).

<sup>542</sup> Edward W. Said, ‘Orientalism Reconsidered’, *Race & Class* 27, no. 2 (1 October 1985): 3. Binzagr was in Egypt (1947–1960), in London (1961–1963), then in Jeddah for 18 months, then went back to Egypt (1965–1967), see: Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 9–10.

<sup>543</sup> Said, ‘Orientalism Reconsidered’, 3.

nineteenth century, and helps her imagine the settings and domestic life of old Jeddah. Unlike Said, Binzagr did not have a long literature to rely on in her recreation of the past. However, she defended her culture by producing her own representational images and descriptive literature in the form of books and paintings starting from these images. Presumably, the deficiency of images and literature on many aspects of people's life in Saudi Arabia during the nineteenth century, in comparison to those in other Middle Eastern countries such as Egypt and Turkey, made Binzagr less sensitive about Orientalist art. The example of *Bedouin Girl* (1968) shows how she fell once under the influence of Orientalist art. This conflicted situation is understandable since she was first introduced to art by Western artists and had her first artistic experiences through the museums and books of Western and colonised countries.

As a consequence, Binzagr's ability to play the role mediator between past and present, Eastern and Western cultures must be considered as a representation of her authority. Conventionally, attaining or expressing power in conservative societies is measured by the female artist's ability to overtly cross social, political or religious boundaries. However, cultural and geographical borders are often overlooked during these discussions, which makes it harder to appreciate the power of female artists who succeeded in crossing these boundaries. Many British and French artists during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries crossed border lines, to enhance their status by exploring exotic subjects; similarly, Binzagr crossed both spatial and temporal boundaries by depicting scenes from the past. In general, the lure of Oriental scenes derived from breaching an inaccessible space and this is similar to Binzagr's case. Through their representation of certain scenes, Orientalist artists played the role of interpreters or mediators between cultures, and contributed to Oriental discourse. What distinguishes Binzagr from earlier female Orientalist artists, such as Henriette Browne

who also desexualised the harem,<sup>544</sup> is that Binzagr's local audience was never disappointed with her scenes. Binzagr's images are always carefully constructed and planned in terms of how, when and what she produced for her local and foreign audiences. Or at least, this is how the artist made her audience feel in her books. For example, her sister Olfet Binzagr wrote:

The Marriage Series is encyclopaedic, the product of many hours spent *collecting historical material* and *checking details* from one source against the next. Each painting of the series took days to dream, weeks to sketch and months to complete. In the years that followed, the artist's brush retouched the expression of the girl in the Al-Henna scene, adding or deleting something, as in Al-Nasbah, *so that every detail be historically accurate*.<sup>545</sup>

The *Marriage Series* is the most representative of the old harems of Jeddah and, as this account explains, was designed to reflect local perceptions of the subject. Moreover, publishing her sister's description of how she worked suggests that Binzagr was trying to engage her audience and gain their appreciation of the final product.<sup>546</sup>

#### 4.6 Conclusion

For Binzagr, pushing the boundaries of figurative representation would never have been successful if not for her so-called primitive style, which helped ease both the audience's and her own concerns, on both religious and social levels, about breaching the prohibition on image making. The style also lessened the significance of the faces in her paintings, which was important as she lacked sufficient numbers of people to sit for her. As a result, Binzagr was able to produce scenes with multiple figures that depended on very few people. No one could tell if her models were real or imagined.

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<sup>544</sup> Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism*, 148–9, 154–5, 182.

<sup>545</sup> Binzagr, 'An Historical Perspective', 21. (My emphasis).

<sup>546</sup> See: Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 10–11.

Binzagr's desire to represent the pre-oil society of Saudi Arabia, drove her to rely on her imagination in order to recreate scenes from oral history, and during the process she could not escape the influence of Western art. She was driven by the popularity of Orientalist themes in the West and focused on that aspect of her heritage in her work. However, she did not disappoint her local audience because she desexualised her scenes. Therefore, the advantages Binzagr gained from her 'primitive' style went beyond solving the problem of depicting human figures, it also accentuated the authenticity of her artistic experience and hinted at her authority over the subject by helping her to achieve two interrelated advantages: firstly, her primitive style signified the uniqueness of her subject, that is, the traditional heritage of Saudi Arabia which incorporate traces of the Ottoman heritage; secondly, it reminded the viewer that she was an insider. Unlike some female Orientalists whose authenticity was questioned for their attempt to show the harem as a social space, her interpretations of Saudi heritage were more likely to be treated as absolute truth. Binzagr's ability to signify her knowledge of the subject, either by producing descriptive texts or by the fact that she belongs to the same culture, was important to exert her control. According to Stuart Hall, knowledge not only indicates the authority of truth, it also 'has the power to make itself true'.<sup>547</sup> Binzagr's ability to bring her knowledge about Saudi into cultural discourse, regardless of how truthful it was, makes this knowledge part of Saudi reality and therefore contributes to her power.

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<sup>547</sup> Hall, 'The Work of Representation', 48–49.

## Chapter 5: Portraiture as a manifestation of power

### 5.1 Introduction

To make her work less challenging Binzagr used her style to make her figures less realistic, hence accepted. However, on a few early occasions Binzagr produced portraits of identifiable figures and was not criticized for it. This chapter argues that the strategic choice of the portrait subject and the way it was presented had protected Binzagr from criticism, and that it enabled her at a later stage to negotiate other pressing issues triggered by socio-cultural changes brought by the oil boom, such as women and labour rights. In addition, it will be argued that the intense political atmosphere around the world during the 1960s and 70s as a result of the oil embargo, provoked Binzagr to adjust old images of Saudi women in visual culture and make a statement about heritage and women, rather than oil, being the true wealth of her nation.

All the figures in her published works of the first decade (1968–78), except for *Grandfather* (1968), *King Faisal* (1970) and *Mr. Asfahani* (1976), remained unnamed (see Figures 65–67). These three portraits were of people who had an influential role in the history of Jeddah in particular, and Saudi Arabia in general. This raises a question about the potential for Saudis, during the 1960s and 70s – an intense period in Saudi history – to push the boundaries of image making in certain contexts. Both negative and positive political and socio-cultural changes in relation to the protection of the cultural heritage, national identity and women rights were taking place in Saudi, but by 1979 Olfet Binzagr had noted that positive change was becoming the norm.<sup>548</sup> This suggests that these portraits were produced and accepted on the same grounds as her other subjects. They were presented as purposeful images that paid tribute to the people who

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<sup>548</sup> Binzagr, 'An Historical Perspective', 19.

changed the course of events. It is therefore important to examine these three portraits within their historical setting to understand what they represent to Saudis, particularly the people of Jeddah, and what they reveal about the artist's use of portraiture as a means of demonstrating and enhancing her agency as an artist.

During the rule of King Saud (1953–64), Saudi Arabia was on the verge of collapse. The country was steeped in international debt as a result of the king's wasteful expenditure.<sup>549</sup> In addition, his government was facing serious threats from pan-Arab nationalists, socialists, and Marxist and pro-Nasserite groups supported by other organisations and governments, such as Egypt during Gamal Abdel Nasser's presidency.<sup>550</sup> The main aim of these oppositional groups, particularly Saudi nationalists, was to nationalise the kingdom's oil wealth and join the United Arab Republic (UAR).<sup>551</sup> This was a result of the anti-Western movement that swept the Arab world in the 1950s. The Saudi government's first response was to encourage a return to traditional values and religious studies, and to curtail modernisation.<sup>552</sup> However, this solution did not satisfy oppositional groups. As a consequence, Crown Prince Faisal bin Abdulaziz (1906–1975) was forced to dethrone his brother, King Saud, to restore public trust in the royal family.<sup>553</sup> He then proceeded to launch a programme of infrastructure development to improve standards of living and restore the country's financial stability. As of 1962, the new King Faisal faced critical challenges from old enemies of the previous king, and from traditionalists threatened by his radical development projects, all of which he managed to suppress.<sup>554</sup> For instance, in 1967 he eliminated a bombing

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<sup>549</sup> Tim Niblock and Monica Malik, *The Political Economy of Saudi Arabia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 62.

<sup>550</sup> See Abir, *Saudi Arabia*, 49–50.

<sup>551</sup> Ibid., 49. The (UAR) was a temporary union between Egypt and Syria.

<sup>552</sup> Wynbrandt, *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*, 213.

<sup>553</sup> Niblock and Malik, *The Political Economy of Saudi Arabia*, 63.

<sup>554</sup> Wynbrandt, *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*, 225; see also: Hamdan, 'Women and Education in Saudi Arabia: Challenges and Achievements', 49.



plot by non-Saudi oil workers, and in 1969 he uncovered a serious military coup and plot to assassinate the king.<sup>555</sup> However, this situation never hindered his development plans, which began in 1958 when he was appointed prime minister.<sup>556</sup> One of his first reforms when he became king in 1962 was to abolish slavery.<sup>557</sup> This was followed by an aggressive state building plan drafted in the year of the military coup (1969),<sup>558</sup> and put into action (1970–74).<sup>559</sup> These initiatives also resulted in the establishment of a number of state ministries to enhance the quality of public services. These included the ministries of Justice (1970); Higher Education; Municipal and Rural Affairs; Planning, Public Work and Housing; Commerce, Industry and Electricity; and Posts, Telegraphs and Telecommunications (all 1975).<sup>560</sup> These departments funded a number of ambitious projects, such as desert reclamation, education, healthcare, and, most importantly, settlement of the Bedouins.<sup>561</sup>

These development activities encouraged the involvement of the country's youth. Like Binzagr, many young Saudi pioneers in a variety of fields had grown up under King Faisal, whose accomplishments enhanced the nation's status by playing an active role in solving global conflicts and establishing a number of international organisations, making his country a world power after he used oil embargo to exert political pressure.<sup>562</sup> Therefore, Binzagr and many other Saudis were driven by a sense of citizenship to do their best, leading her to dedicate her first exhibition, with her colleague Mosly, thus:

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<sup>555</sup> Wynbrandt, *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*, 225; See also: Alexei Vassiliev, *King Faisal of Saudi Arabia: Personality, Faith and Times* (London: Saqi, 2012), 288–299.

<sup>556</sup> Niblock and Malik, *The Political Economy of Saudi Arabia*, 62.

<sup>557</sup> Niblock, *Saudi Arabia*, 49.

<sup>558</sup> See: Mohamed A. Ramady, *The Saudi Arabian Economy: Policies, Achievements, and Challenges* (New York; London: Springer, 2010), 22.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid.

<sup>560</sup> See: Niblock, *Saudi Arabia*, 48–49.

<sup>561</sup> See: Wynbrandt, *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*, 226.

<sup>562</sup> See: Ibid., 227–232; Vassiliev, *King Faisal of Saudi Arabia: Personality, Faith and Times*, 386–408.

To *every good citizen* who has devoted himself to [a] better future and happier life... to him in his struggle in life to assure [sic] his existence and consolidate his being and defend his rights we offer this humble efforts [sic] with the hope that we may learn and teach.<sup>563</sup>

Her sister, Olfet Binzagr, explains that King Faisal succeeded in pleasing both the conservatives who thought his modernisation projects were moving too fast, and the liberals who thought he was not going fast enough.<sup>564</sup> She believes that Saudis should ‘take an active part in social and cultural integration’, to ‘assure that Saudi Arabia becomes one viable whole’.<sup>565</sup> Regardless of their area of interest, Saudis were engaged in all the changes taking place during this period, and Binzagr was no exception. Although her portraits were accepted as images of traditional dress, they also reflected the socio-political changes that had occurred since 1968, and her opinion on many debates from that date onward. In order to understand how her portraits expressed her views, and how they developed in parallel with events, these will be examined as a series of groups: firstly, her portraits of public figures; secondly, her ethnographic portraits of urban and Bedouin females; and finally, her representations of the working class. In addition, an interesting group of a more recent ethnographic portraits made after Orientalist photographs will be analyzed separately.

## 5.2 The king and I: early self-representations

Binzagr was threatened twice by the Arab Nationalist movement. In 1956, her family, although not Egyptian, lost their properties in Egypt to the government when Gamal

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<sup>563</sup> Moussely [sic] and Binzagr, *Portraits: First Exhibition*, n.p. (My emphasis).

<sup>564</sup> Binzagr, ‘An Historical Perspective’, 15.

<sup>565</sup> Ibid., 16.

Abdel Nasser nationalised assets.<sup>566</sup> This incident and the unpredictable political future of Egypt forced the Binzagr to change their plans and to send their children to England to finish their education.<sup>567</sup> After graduating from finishing school in 1963, and spending some time with her family in Jeddah, Binzagr thought the situation in Egypt was settled. She therefore admitted herself to the Leonardo da Vinci Art Institute in Cairo, a very well-known institute at the time, but had to withdraw and take private lessons instead at the request of her father, because he feared that her studies could be interrupted if the Egyptian government decided to deport her.<sup>568</sup> This was because of the longstanding conflict that existed between President Abdel Nasser of Egypt and King Saud, then King Faisal, in the years 1956–67. One of the main reasons for this conflict was Nasser's declared support of the Saudi nationalists and other oppositional groups in Saudi, especially his endorsement of their claims to control and nationalise the oil wealth of the Arabian Peninsula, and his 'vitriolic attack on Faisal personally'.<sup>569</sup> Thus it could be said that the Binzagr's stability and livelihood were threatened by nationalist movements in both Egypt and Saudi Arabia. In addition, if the monarch was overthrown, the Binzagr and other merchant families in Jeddah would lose their special

<sup>566</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview: 'سعوديين كثير تأممو بس ما عندنا أملاك كثير أراضي، في عوائل عندهم أراضي'. Translation: 'Many Saudis [assets] were nationalised, but we did not own many properties, I mean lands [in Egypt]. There were families who used to own many agricultural lands, but we only had a few'.

<sup>567</sup> سالم مريشد. 'وهيب بن زقر: الفلسفة قادتني إلى عشق التجارة.. والتجارة قادتني إلى أحضان الفلسفة، جريدة الرياض، العدد 14211 <http://www.alriyadh.com/2007/05/22/article251121.html>, 22 مايو 2007م، قسم الرياض الإقتصادي

<sup>568</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview: 'كانت لسه فيه العائلة مانقلوا النقلة دي، أنهم بيرجعوا فرجعت أبي في محل فقدمت'. Translation: 'My family were still there [in Cairo] and have not moved back [to Jeddah]. Therefore, I decided to apply to the Leonardo da Vinci's [institute]. However, [laughing], the Abdel Nasser nationalisation movement happened, and we were one of those who had to go through nationalisation [...] Anyways, he [my father] said: 'How you will continue your studies? what will you do if they suddenly decided to deport us from the country? The best thing to do is to hire a private tutor at home''; Ibid: 'لما كنا بندور، قيده قبلوني في ليوناردو دافنشي'. Translation: 'when we were trying to find a tutor, I was already accepted at the Leonardo da Vinci's [institute]'.

<sup>569</sup> Abir, *Saudi Arabia*, 37–39; Wynbrandt, *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*, 218, 228; Vassiliev, *King Faisal of Saudi Arabia: Personality, Faith and Times*, 297–299.

concession for the supply of certain goods,<sup>570</sup> which they had earned as a reward for their early economic support of the founder of Saudi Arabia before the era of oil wealth.<sup>571</sup> Binzagr's first portrait, *Grandfather* (1968) (Figure 65), commemorates not only her forefather's role in building the family's name and legacy, but also his prestigious status as a supporter of the monarchy. It is hard to imagine a loyal citizen condemning Binzagr for declaring the name and identifying the face of such a respectable person. Unlike the majority of her work, the subject in *Grandfather* closely resembles its original source, his photograph (Figure 68).

This work was soon followed by two portraits of the king: *King Faisal in a Najdi Dance* (1969), which shows the king with some of his brothers and companions performing a traditional dance (Figure 69), and the individual portrait, *King Faisal* (1970) (Figure 66). The paintings were included by the artist in her 1979 book as illustrations for certain subjects: *King Faisal in a Najdi Dance* (Figure 69) was re-titled *The Late King Faisal in a Najdi Dance* and presented as a scene from 'Desert Life', while *King Faisal* (Figure 66) was given as an example of 'Traditional Dress'.<sup>572</sup> However, the subject and year of production of *King Faisal in a Najdi Dance* (1969) suggests that it was concerned with the power of the state and manifestations of the artist's support. The year 1969 marked the king's victory over one of the most radical coups in Saudi Arabia staged by a military group,<sup>573</sup> whereas three neighbouring Arab regimes were overthrown by their military and were transformed to republics.<sup>574</sup> The Najdi dance also known as *Al-Ardah*, meaning parade, was originally a war dance in

<sup>570</sup> Niblock and Malik, *The Political Economy of Saudi Arabia*, 77.

<sup>571</sup> Ibid.

<sup>572</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 47, 113. 'Desert Life' and 'Traditional Dress' are the titles of each chapter.

<sup>573</sup> See: Wynbrandt, *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*, 225.

<sup>574</sup> Abir, *Saudi Arabia*, 55.

which men paraded with their weapons. Although the painting was supposedly an illustration of desert life, in her description of the work Binzagr says nothing about this:

Here swords are unsheathed in this ceremonial dance. Al-Ardah, the war dance, is still performed by the King at state parties. It is originated in the Najd region of Saudi Arabia. The black, crossed belts of the dancers are bandoleers for guns. The men's old-style, long-sleeved garments are worn for this dance.<sup>575</sup>

The painting therefore represents the main elements of state power: its fearless leader, and his loyal men and their weapons. Fearlessness is conveyed by the unsheathed swords ready to attack the enemy, though the men are also armed with other weapons and have prepared other tactics. The dance itself has a dual meaning: as an expression of both power and joy. In the past, Najdis used to perform this dance before going to war to encourage enthusiasm and scare their enemies, but it was also a formal performance to celebrate and express joy in times of peace.<sup>576</sup> Although *King Faisal in a Najdi Dance* is not a portrait, it gives the king's face a special attention that makes it as important as his individual portrait. The face of the king in this work appears brighter and more defined than those of the other men (Figure 69), which suggests that in addition to his significance in the painting his status protected the artist from possible criticism and encouraged her to define his face.

Significantly, the individual portrait of *King Faisal* (Figure 66) also coincided with the launch of the first development plan.<sup>577</sup> According to Mordechai Abir, by 1970 almost all Saudis supported the king because of the significant rise in the standard of living, and many had joined his power base.<sup>578</sup> Thus the portrait marks the beginning of a new era of stability and positive change in internal affairs.

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<sup>575</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 112.

<sup>576</sup> See: Penni AlZayer, *Middle Eastern Dance* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2004), 67.

<sup>577</sup> See Ramady, *The Saudi Arabian Economy*, 116.

<sup>578</sup> Abir, *Saudi Arabia*, 59.

The subject of the king was important in enabling Binzagr to push the boundaries of painting in Saudi Arabia but, more importantly, it reflected many aspects of her life. The artist continued to declare her loyalty and admiration for the king after his death. One year after his assassination in 1975, she painted a third portrait of *King Faisal* (Figure 70), which was never published in any of her books. It hangs on the wall of Binzagr's personal studio with a small group of paintings she made when she was training at St Martin's School of Art, in London (1976–78). According to Binzagr, these paintings have been kept in her personal studio on the second floor instead of the galleries of her museum, because the king's portrait was repeated and the rest of the work next to it does not represent Saudi culture.<sup>579</sup> They depict scenes from the streets of London (see for example, Figure 71).<sup>580</sup> But why did Binzagr repeat the king's portrait although she does not need it for display? The artist admitted that she painted King Faisal many times because, like many of her generation, she loved him and admired his work.<sup>581</sup> Her sister, Olfet Binzagr, describes King Faisal as a 'devout Muslim, [and] a true Prince', who died 'too horribly and too soon'.<sup>582</sup> He was assassinated by his nephew, but the latter's motives have never been confirmed and are subject to many theories.<sup>583</sup> Some believe that the assassin was taking revenge for his older brother, who was sentenced to death ten years earlier by the king.<sup>584</sup> The brother was a fundamentalist who was upset by the king's modernisation projects and killed some members of the National Guard during a protest he led against the inception of television broadcasting in Saudi.<sup>585</sup> Others believe that the assassination was staged by

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<sup>579</sup> Binzagr, Seventh personal interview.

<sup>580</sup> Binzagr, Third personal interview. This information is not on record.

<sup>581</sup> Ibid.

<sup>582</sup> Binzagr, 'An Historical Perspective', 15–16.

<sup>583</sup> See: Vassiliev, *King Faisal of Saudi Arabia: Personality, Faith and Times*, 445.

<sup>584</sup> Wynbrandt, *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*, 236.

<sup>585</sup> Ralph Braibanti, 'Saudi Arabia in the Context of Political Development Theory', in *King Faisal and the Modernisation of Saudi Arabia*, ed. Willard A. Beling (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 53.

the CIA as the assassin had lived in the US for a long period, to punish the king for the financial damage caused by his plans for an oil embargo and his objection to the expansion of Israel into Egypt and the Palestinian territories.<sup>586</sup> Regardless of the truth, Faisal's death made him a hero and romanticised his struggle in the eyes of his supporters. The King Faisal Centre for Research and Islamic Studies recently mounted a successful exhibition to commemorate his death: *Faisal: A Witness and A Martyr* (2014).<sup>587</sup> A man who brought political stability and economic prosperity to his country, he was described by the American statesman Henry Kissinger as 'the mightiest Arab in a millennium'.<sup>588</sup>

Before he became king, Faisal had a special place in Hijazi hearts. His relationship with the people of Hijaz started in 1926 when, at the age of nineteen,<sup>589</sup> he was appointed first viceroy of the region and first minister of foreign affairs in the history of the country.<sup>590</sup> The prince's young age and great responsibility won him the admiration of the public. The Jeddah historian Ahmad Badeeb tells many stories about how Faisal was perceived by the people of Jeddah, particularly women, since he was the first member of the royal family to be directly in touch with Hijaz subjects.<sup>591</sup>

According to Badeeb, women used to anticipate the passage of the Emir, Prince Faisal

<sup>586</sup> See: رفيق الننتشة، المملكة العربية السعودية وقضية فلسطين (الرياض: مكتبة الملك عبدالعزيز العامة، and عبدالفتاح أبوعلية: 370-366، (1998; Abdulaziz H. Al-Sowayyegh, 'Saudi Oil Policy During King Faisal's Era', in *King Faisal and the Modernisation of Saudi Arabia*, ed. Willard A. Beling (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 224; Vassiliev, *King Faisal of Saudi Arabia: Personality, Faith and Times*, 446. In 1967, King Faisal started what he called 'The Positive Oil Use' plan. However, the real plan was imposed after the Arab-Israel Six Day War in 1973, when he blocked the export of oil to the United States and other countries to stop them supporting Israel.

<sup>587</sup> نوال الجبر، 'تزامناً مع احتفالية المركز بمرور ثلاثين عاماً على تأسيسه أمير منطقة الرياض يرعى معرض الفصيل "شاهد وشهد"..' اليوم، جريدة الرياض، العدد 201416631، متابعات، يناير 5، 2014، <http://www.alriyadh.com/2014/01/05/article898321.html>.

<sup>588</sup> Vassiliev, *King Faisal of Saudi Arabia: Personality, Faith and Times*, 398.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>590</sup> Ibid.

<sup>591</sup> (Appendix 9). أحمد باديب، 'فصيل جدة'، مقال غير منشور (جدة، 8 سبتمبر 2011)، سلسلة الملك فيصل، أرشيف أحمد حسن باديب (9).

at that time, in the street wearing his traditional Najdi crown and cloak,<sup>592</sup> carrying his golden sword and riding his horse (in years later his car), and call each other to watch him from the *rushaans*, the lattice-style windows, admiring his handsomeness and chivalry.<sup>593</sup>

Thus Binzagr's portraits of the king (Figures 66, 69–70) are early forms of self-representations of the artist's identity. As will be discussed later in this chapter, the development of her paintings reveals that she was influenced by many of the issues of debate that was within the king's interest. In addition, she often used images of the royal family and symbols of the state in her projects. For instance, the cover of her first book recalls the Saudi passport: in addition to sharing the same shade of green, the words 'Saudi Arabia' are accentuated in relation to the rest of the title by their brighter colour and larger font (see Figure 72–73). The first page in the book shows five members of the Saudi royal family: three kings and two crown princes (Figure 74), while the preface is written by the vice-minister of the Saudi Ministry of Information, H. E. Abdulaziz Al Rifai.<sup>594</sup> Currently, a relatively new portrait by Binzagr of the founder of Saudi Arabia, King Abdulaziz, hangs in the entrance to her museum in Jeddah (Figure 75). Whether she did this out of nostalgia for her country, or as a result of her identity crisis, these state symbols have helped Binzagr negotiate the boundaries of image making by adding a formal touch to her work. The only sitter of the first decade in Binzagr's career who has been identified, other than her grandfather and King Faisal, is Muhammad Asfahani. Asfahani, a famous intellectual and founder of the first press in Jeddah, was related to both the Binzagr and the king.<sup>595</sup> His portrait, *Mr. Asfahani* (1967) was produced by

<sup>592</sup> Najd is the central, and Hijaz the western, region of Saudi Arabia.

<sup>593</sup> أحمد باديب، 'جدة: إنها حقاً عائلة محترمة' (10)، مقال (جدة، 15 مارس 2005)، سلسلة جدة إنها حقاً عائلة محترمة، أرشيف أحمد حسن باديب (Appendix 10).

<sup>594</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 7.

<sup>595</sup> كابللي، الحرفيون في مدينة جدة في القرن الرابع عشر الهجري، 206.



Binzagr from a photograph (Figures 67 and 76), as a gift for sponsoring her early exhibitions and printing its brochures.<sup>596</sup> According to Badeeb, Asfahani was related to the Binzagr through his maternal side of the family, and was a close friend of Prince Abdullah, son of King Faisal.<sup>597</sup> In other words, *Mr. Asfahani* (1976) represents the power of knowledge, which is the missing link between the economic power of the family represented by *Grandfather* (1968), and the political power of the state represented by *King Faisal* (1970). All three portraits were presented in the first book and explained by the artist as examples of different traditional costumes for men,<sup>598</sup> yet they had greater political significance for the artist at the time of their production. Portraiture is used by Binzagr to create a network of social relations, and to negotiate their support for her career especially her family's support which will be discussed later in further detail.<sup>599</sup>

Binzagr agrees that, like many other Saudis in the 1960s and 70s, she was not satisfied with Western and Arab's mockery of the traditional ruling system, and their doubts about the country's ability to survive without imported Western machinery and

<sup>596</sup> Binzagr, Fourth personal interview: 'لكن الأصفهاني يعتبر 'سبونسور' هو من اللي ساندوا لأنه طبع لنا في المعرض 'الأولاني' الكتيب حق المعرض. الجبرين: أها.. حلوة المعلومة، وهو وجوده أظن كان مهم لأنو صاحب أول مطبعة، ولأ؟ بن زقر: إيوه، كانت من المطابع الأولانية، فيعتبر من السبونسورز لأنه طبع لنا الكتيبات. الجبرين: اللي هو الكتاب الأول؟ بن زقر: لا، مش الكتاب، البروشورات حق المعارض. الجبرين: أها، بس قيديك عملت اللوحة قبل ما تقدمي عليه؟ ولا لا؟ بن زقر: لا لا، هذي بعد ما عمل، أدبته Translation: 'but Asfahani is considered a sponsor; he was one of the people who supported us because he printed our catalogue for the first exhibition. Elgibreen: that is an important information, and I guess his support was particularly important because he owned the first press house, what do you think? Binzagr: yes, his press was one of the very first [in the country] so he became our sponsor when he did the catalogues. Elgibreen: you mean the first book? Binzagr: no, not the book, the exhibitions brochures. Elgibreen: I see, but you had already finished his portrait before you ask for his help, correct? Binzagr: no no, the portrait was made after he helped us, I gave it to him as a gift. I sent it as a gift'.

<sup>597</sup> (Appendix 11), أحمد باديب إلى إيمان الجبرين، 'رسالة من المكتب الخاص للأستاذ أحمد باديب'، رسالة، 15 مارس 2011.

<sup>598</sup> Binzagr, Fourth personal interview: 'لأنو شخصيات موجودة وطلعت وجوههم' Translation: 'I named the Grandfather, King Faisal, and Asfahani works because these were about real figures who had been recognised by their faces and familiar to the public. Elgibreen: yes, they were photographed before. Binzagr: Yes, they did not sit for me, but the purpose of the painting was to show their costume'; see: Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 47, 52–3.

<sup>599</sup> See: (Chapter 6).

goods.<sup>600</sup> However, she denies that her work was intentionally made as a direct political response to these accusations, and insists that it was meant for preserving the vanishing cultural heritage.<sup>601</sup> This also applies to her public figures' portraits, which according to Binzagr were only made to show different examples of male traditional costumes; and also to her later work showing her nieces, *Motherhood Series*, and the working class as being primarily made to capture a moment she witnessed before it disappear.<sup>602</sup> These statements however do not contradict the suggestion that her subjects were triggered by the intense socio-political environment, and that she had used it strategically to push the boundaries of image making and manifest her opinion on many issues. The international criticism of the newly developed country of Saudi Arabia, which Binzagr disliked, was stirred by two main political events: first, the export of oil and the pan-Arab nationalists' desire to control its revenue; second, the oil embargo and the global economic crisis which created an international resentment. Therefore, the artist's desire to show that Saudis had been self-sufficient and satisfied with their traditional lifestyle and trades before the production of oil cannot be understood without the historical context of the period of production. Similarly, the choice of her sitters for the traditional dress collection cannot be detached from the artist's affinity and connection to these public figures, as well as, the increase of influence she gained by showing these particular subjects. Otherwise, she would have painted anonymous figures instead wearing the same dress to serve the documentation purposes of the traditional dress collection. The artist admits that it was almost impossible at the time to be criticized for painting the king, but explains her choice of subject as an attempt to produce 'formal' work for special purposes.<sup>603</sup> According to her, the portrait of King Faisal was made

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<sup>600</sup> Binzagr, Seventh personal interview.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid.

once as a proper gift for HRH Prince Majid of Mecca in a formal occasion, and that she included the images of the royal family in her first book only because it was a popular protocol in Saudi.<sup>604</sup> In addition, she hung the portrait of King Abdulaziz in the entrance of her museum to copy the followed protocol in the Saudi ministries.<sup>605</sup> In other words, Binzagr was giving royal authority to her actions which again coincide with the chapter's argument. Moreover, the artist's justifications draw attention to an important fact, that is Binzagr's attempts to show her loyalty and pride was a common practice, many Saudis were doing the same. This explains the artist's insistence on neutralizing her motives, and her incapability of seeing a direct link between her work and the time of its production as this chapter will continue to reveal.

### **5.3 *The Wealth of the Nation: female images***

Examination of Binzagr's work reveals that she uses the female figure to represent the Saudi nation, and that the style and subject of her female representations have developed in parallel with the country's debates. For instance, the majority of her individual portraits of 1968 –78 depict female Bedouins. These works coincided with the ambitious state project to settle the Bedouin tribes by providing them with accommodation, stable jobs, education and healthcare.<sup>606</sup> This meant that Bedouin society was on its way to extinction through merging with villages and towns. This may be what made them one of Binzagr's favourite subjects.

*The Wealth of the Nation* (1969) is an oil painting of a Bedouin woman (Figure 77), who is shown covering her face with a traditional face mask embellished with gold jewellery while holding a small goat in her arms. Though it seems to portray a simple

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<sup>604</sup> Ibid.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid.

<sup>606</sup> Wynbrandt, *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*, 226.

and traditional subject, it carries a strong statement, declaring that the moral and economic wealth of the Saudi nation is in the hands of its women. This is a message that cannot be understood without referring to the cultural meaning of the two main objects in the painting: the mask and the goat.

According to the ancient traditions of the tribes of Hijaz, the region where Jeddah is located, women represent the tribe's honour and status. Therefore married women wore face masks to indicate the sacredness of their honour, and indicated their wealth by embellishing their masks with all their assets of real silver and gold.<sup>607</sup> Throughout the history of the Arabian Peninsula, Bedouin women were, literally, the homemakers. They were responsible for weaving wool and goat hair to make the family home – the tent – and for herding livestock, the primary source of livelihood, for fetching water from the spring, and for gathering firewood.<sup>608</sup> Binzagr expresses this authority by depicting the woman staring back in confidence at the viewer, in control of her tribe's wealth. This is supported by a comment written by the artist below the image on the cover of the catalogue to her exhibition, *Safeya Binzagr: paintings and etchings*, at the Patrick Seale Gallery in London, in 1980 (see Figure 78): 'The wealth of the Bedouin woman was her mask. The wealth of the tribe was in its sheep.'<sup>609</sup>

The role of women as representatives of the Saudi nation continued to appear in Binzagr's later work. In the late 1980s, she started a series of pastel drawings called *Heritage is Wealth*, of which the principal subject was the traditional costume of women in Bedouin and urban societies. The first drawing in the series, *Heritage is Wealth 1* (1989), shows five costumes of Bedouin women from different regions in

<sup>607</sup> 18، العزي، البطولة: نشأتها وتطورها، 607 Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 56. It should be noted that Binzagr has a different perspective about the marital status of mask wearers. She mentions in her first book that veiling was a custom practised by non-married Bedouins. However, this does not conflict with the fact that masked women represented the tribe's honour in Arabia.

<sup>608</sup> Mauger and Mauger, 'Everyday Life in a Camp', 31.

<sup>609</sup> *Safeya Binzagr: Paintings and Etchings* (London: Patrick Seale Gallery, 1980), 1.

Saudi Arabia (Figure 79). *Our Heritage is Wealth 2* (1990) (Figure 80) illustrates five more costumes of urban women from the same regions. Some of the costumes in both paintings are traditional bridal gowns that Binzagr owns, such as *دُرْفَة الباب*, or 'Durfat Al-Bab', and their portrayal seems to be an attempt to give each region a feminine face. Women were often responsible for keeping their culture alive by transmitting customs and traditions to later generations. Marriage was an important stage in fulfilling this task, and was also an occasion to parade their new role.<sup>610</sup> Thus *Heritage is Wealth 1* (1989) and *Our Heritage is Wealth 2* (1990) can be interpreted as an attempt to present marriage as a unifying experience for the nation and a guarantee for the survival of its cultural heritage. Although the images appear to document the traditional wedding dress, they also reflect Binzagr's appreciation of traditional gender roles. This accords with an opinion expressed by Olfet Binzagr about the marriage collection from the first decade in Binzagr's career. She was concerned that drastic regional distinctions would create division, especially between the groups that opposed King Faisal,<sup>611</sup> but also believes that art in general transcends regionalism,<sup>612</sup> and that the *Marriage Series* acts as a reminder of cultural solidarity.<sup>613</sup> 'Marriage is a happy occasion,' she has said, but the 'obligations connected with it were, and still are, too much for one person to undertake alone'.<sup>614</sup> The entire community used to take part in wedding preparations, and almost everyone was 'related either by blood or by marriage'.<sup>615</sup> Marriage was therefore an important form of solidarity that Binzagr was seeking to remind her audience of in her work. Olfet Binzagr also insists that, although many of these customs

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<sup>610</sup> (Chapter 3).

<sup>611</sup> Binzagr, 'An Historical Perspective', 15–16, 18, 20.

<sup>612</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>613</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>614</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>615</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

have disappeared, marriage is still a binding experience in Jeddah society. She describes this poetically in relation to Binzagr's work:

The perception of family and communal obligations is thereby modified in scope and, to a certain extent, in essence, but still respected. Consequently, the fanfare and mystique surrounding the trousseau-making are gone from contemporary life (there is no more slipper carrier; the nuptial henna is performed, but only by few, and in a limited ceremonial setting; the bridegroom goes to the barber to shave before the wedding), but the communal bonds remain strong. The relatives might no longer spend long hours sewing, embroidering, baking and cooking, but they give gifts and other services that cement family ties. In short, from the day he is born, each Saudi child is obligated to be an involved member of the family group, especially at births, weddings and deaths, and is eternally indebted directly to his parents, family and community [...] The beauty of the past as captured in Miss Safeya Binzagr's paintings may have been [sic] disappeared, but the bonds that made such time possible still exist and will ultimately enable the creation of a harmonious new social reality, based on modifications of the old traditions.<sup>616</sup>

To Safeya and Olfet Binzagr, the occasions and objects related to the female role represent national solidity, which is applicable to images of brides. For instance, the early work, *The Wealth of the Nation* (Figure 77), highlights the value of women's traditional role in Bedouin society in the 1960s and 70s. However, the changes that occurred in traditional female roles after modernisation, especially the increased opportunities that arose for girls' education and work, changed Binzagr's representation of women but not her perception of them being the wealth of the nation. A series of work produced in the 1980s and 90s illustrates this change.<sup>617</sup> The implementation of state funding for many services, such as the educational system, the formal broadcasting channel, and settling the Bedouins in towns, bridged the gap between different sectors of Saudi society and to a certain extent unified their life experiences. This change is reflected in *Motherhood*, which shows four women of different ethnicities with their

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<sup>616</sup> Ibid.

<sup>617</sup> See Hamdan, 'Women and Education in Saudi Arabia: Challenges and Achievements', 42–64.

babies (Figures 81–84).<sup>618</sup> Each mother and baby couple has a different hair colour, complexion and facial features, indicating that they represent different ethnic groups. They could be either from the Hijaz region, which is famous for drawing pilgrims from around the world who often settle after completing the *Hajj*, or from different regions, since modernisation has changed so many aspects of Saudi society. There is also the possibility that these four women are members of the Binzagr family, since some of the artist's siblings are married to non-Saudi, or non-Arab, spouses. However, regardless of these possibilities, the sitters looked significantly different from each other.

Motherhood, like marriage, represented a unifying experience, but the difference between *Heritage is Wealth* and *Motherhood* is that the latter shows modern, rather than traditional, women. The change in modern women's roles appears in *Toilette 1* (1991) and *Toilette 2* (1991), where the mother takes the role of the servant and help the daughter, who takes the place of the bride, style her hair (Figures 85-86).

By the 1990s, Binzagr was producing portraits of female members of her own family, such as the *Motherhood* and *Toilette* series, and presented them as part of the 'Daily Activities, Markets, Trade and Occupations' collection.<sup>619</sup> However, for the first time the female sitters are identified by their names in some of these works. A drawing, *Thoraya and The Goat* (1991), features her niece, Thoraya, daughter of her brother Abdullah,<sup>620</sup> carrying a goat in her arms (Figure 87), similar to the Bedouin woman in *The Wealth of the Nation* (Figure 77). According to Binzagr, Thoraya was an active girl

<sup>618</sup> The number of the edition is inconsistent with the year of production. The used titles in the current research are based on the main source: Binzagr, *A Three-Decade Journey with Saudi Heritage*, 16, 38, 50, 92.

<sup>619</sup> These works are exhibited in the hallway of Binzagr's museum but they are considered an extension of the 'Daily Activities, Markets, Trade and Occupations' collection. Source: Binzagr, Seventh personal interview; see also: Binzagr, 'Mission of Safeya Binzagr's Darah', 107.

<sup>620</sup> Binzagr, Fourth personal interview: 'بنات مين بالضبط من إخوانك؟ بن زقر: بنات أخويا ' عبدالله'. Translation: 'Who are Nora and Thoraya? Which one of your brothers is their father? Binzagr: They are the daughters of my brother Abdullah'.

who loved playing with animals,<sup>621</sup> prompting the artist to capture these moments in both *Thoraya and The Goat* (1991) and *Thoraya and The Horse* (1991) (Figure 88). Binzagr also felt the need to depict scenes from her daily life, such as *Nora Writes* (1991), which features Thoraya's sister (Figure 89),<sup>622</sup> and *Nouria and the Chickens* (1991), which shows one of the house maids feeding chickens (Figure 90). These portraits reflect the changing position of women in Saudi Arabia, as well as of image making. Regardless of their role in the drawings, whether they are young girls learning or playing with pets, or house servants helping with daily chores, they are no longer anonymous. Declaring their names reflects their individuality. Except for *Zabun*, individual portraits of female from the first decade were all of veiled women, indicating that the veil was a temporary solution to the social and religious obstacles of painting female figures. Consequently, what is significant here are the issues that helped push the boundaries of image making.

Interestingly, many of Faisal's decisions, before and after he became king, affected Binzagr's portraiture, both directly and indirectly. His reforms not only spurred drastic cultural change, but also stirred debate around social issues. For instance, in 1963, Faisal was able to contain a large group of tribesmen who were protesting against the modern formal schools system he had introduced for girls.<sup>623</sup> Traditional tribesmen only approved of basic religious education,<sup>624</sup> but Faisal's success in convincing tribal

<sup>621</sup> Binzagr, Second personal interview: 'هذولا طول النهار: ثريا.. فين ثريا؟ داداتها إختفت! ثريا ماني شايفها! روحوا' 'هذي الحيوانات المقد هذا شوفوها.. الجبرين: هي بنت أختك؟ بن زقر: بنت أخويا ، يلاقوها عندنا، كان عندنا حق عيال أخويا ولد أخويا .. هذي الحيوانات المقد هذا Thoraya?'. Translation: 'They used to call all day long: "Thoraya.. where is Thoraya?"', her nurse [would say]: "She disappeared!! I cannot find Thoraya!!" [her mother would say]: "Go find her". Elgibreen: Thoraya was your sister's daughter, right? Binzagr: No, my brother's. They used to find her at our place, we used to have a pony for my nephew. You know, the little French ponies that never grow? the goat and the pony [were ours].

<sup>622</sup> Binzagr, Fourth personal interview: 'نورة وثرىا [...] بنات أخويا عبدالله'. Translation: 'Nora and Thoraya [...] daughters of my brother Abdullah'; Binzagr, Second personal interview: 'كلهم [...] ثريا' 'نورة تكتب' و إلا 'ثرىا'. Translation: 'both [Nora in] Nora Writes and Thoraya have now graduated from University, so I was painting something [moments] I have experienced'.

<sup>623</sup> Hamdan, 'Women and Education in Saudi Arabia: Challenges and Achievements', 48–49.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid., 48.



leaders helped legalise women's right to a modern education system. Binzagr declared her support for female education subtly in *Recitation* (1968) (Figure 91), a work about an old Muslim woman reciting the Quran.<sup>625</sup> The painting reminds the audience that Islamic law acknowledges women's right to education, and that it should therefore be respected since Islam constitutes the law in Saudi Arabia. The use of an elderly woman as a subject asserts that this right is deeply rooted in Islamic culture, but, more importantly, the numerous books filling the shelves behind her indicate that older female generations have enjoyed reading and learning from more than just the holy book. In 1982, she made another painting called *Al-Fagiha*, representing the traditional Islamic female teacher (Figure 92), to whom families would send their children for lessons from the late nineteenth century.<sup>626</sup> *Al-Fagiha* shows females of different ages, identified by Binzagr's use of scale, sitting in different places (Figure 92). Some read from a book and others from a wooden panel, while the teacher in a white striped dress holding a rosary and small stick waits for the girls to finish. This work also reminds the audience that women have long been working in paid occupations such as teaching.

Politics played a noticeable role in pushing the boundaries of image making. For example, since the establishment of Saudi Arabia, photographs of Saudi kings were widely circulated and have never been condemned by *Ulama* – prominent Islamic scholars. This suggests that the issue was discarded either as a matter of courtesy to these kings, or was considered a political necessity since the public needed to know their leader. However, the most important incident that introduced women's photographs to the public sphere took place in 1970, when King Faisal sanctioned an edict requiring 'Yamani and other Arab women wishing to enter the kingdom' to have a

<sup>625</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 85.

<sup>626</sup> See: 440، 432، حكاية مدينة، طرابلسي، جدة.

photograph in their passports.<sup>627</sup> This decision came after a series of bombings in 1967–68 carried out mostly by ‘Yemeni and Palestinian infiltrators and residents’.<sup>628</sup> Thus the king convinced the *Ulama* to permit the use of photographs in the passports of Yemeni and other Arab women to increase security levels in the country.<sup>629</sup> Soon afterwards, in 1975, Saudi women were required to do the same.<sup>630</sup> Before 1975, Saudi passports showed an empty space next to the male holder’s picture for his wife’s thumb print (see Figure 93), whereas, after 1975, the writing in the space next to the passport holder’s picture changed from *بصمة إيهام الزوجة*, or ‘the wife’s thumb print’, to *صورة الزوجة*, or ‘the wife’s picture’ (see Figure 94). This explains why Binzagr published her photograph on the back cover of her first book in 1979 (Figure 95). Before 1979, none of the traced exhibition catalogues showed a picture of the artist, except for *Exhibition of Paintings by Safeya Binzagr* at the Woodstock Gallery, London, in 1973 (Figure 96), which did so probably because of its location (see Appendices 7 and 8). This change in Binzagr’s ability to publish her photograph by the end of the 1970s was consistent with events in Saudi Arabia, but her photograph, as well as *Zabun*, were also protected by symbols of the state and the way they were presented. Like *Grandfather*, *King Faisal* and *Mr. Asfahani*, all the female images in the first book, including *The Wealth of the Nation* and *Zabun*, are presented under the theme of ‘Traditional Dress’.<sup>631</sup> Moreover, the copy of *Zabun* on the front cover is protected by its patriotic design (Figure 72), while the artist’s photograph on the back is printed on the inside leaf of the jacket, to indicate that neither is meant to be challenging.

<sup>627</sup> Abir, *Saudi Arabia*, 59.

<sup>628</sup> Wynbrandt, *A Brief History of Saudi Arabia*, 225, 304.

<sup>629</sup> Abir, *Saudi Arabia*, 59.

<sup>630</sup> It was hard to find any written document to explain the reason for this change, or that even mentions there was a change in passport requirement for Saudi women. However, the old passport shows the change, as explained in the example above.

<sup>631</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 45–59.

Shearer West explains that portraiture has the capacity to represent not just the sitter, but someone else who may not be present.<sup>632</sup> Hence *Zabun* and *The Wealth of the Nation* (Figures 58 and 77), which Binzagr used for the cover of her exhibition catalogues and book, as well as the portraits *Grandfather*, *King Faisal* and *Mr. Asfahani*, acted as self-portraits of the artist to compensate for the absence of her own image during the early years. Nevertheless, her published self-portrait of 1979 (Figure 95) contains similar symbols of authority to those in *The Wealth of the Nation* (Figure 77) and *Zabun* (Figure 58). Instead of the gold-embellished face mask in *The Wealth of the Nation*, and the gold buttons of the dress in *Zabun*, Binzagr shows her big diamond ring (Figure 60), to which she draws attention by raising her hand to her face. This gesture demonstrates not only her economic status, but also her independence. Though the ring is on her wedding finger, Binzagr never married. The only difference between her pose in the picture and those of the sitters in *The Wealth of the Nation* and *Zabun* is the gaze. Binzagr decreased the possible tension her picture could cause in Saudi by disengaging herself from the viewer and by looking demure and unthreatening. By contrast, her portrait in the brochure, *An Exhibition of Paintings by Safeya Binzagr*, at the Woodstock Gallery in London (1973), shows her smiling and looking directly at the viewer (Figure 96). Interestingly, the picture also shows part of *Zabun*, which confirms that the latter work acted as a self-portrait.

#### 5.4 Empowering others: visibility of the working class

Portraiture gave Binzagr new authority and enabled her to focus on certain subjects that came about as a result of modernisation in the 1970s, particularly the disappearance of small crafts that was leading to the extinction of local goods and dependency on

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<sup>632</sup> Shearer West, *Portraiture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 24.

imported labour. As a result of the oil boom, Saudi Arabia had 6-7 million foreign nationals workers and the number was increasing drastically.<sup>633</sup> Therefore, in the 1980s Binzagr started a series of pastel drawings of the working class, which depict a range of dying trades that assured self-sufficiency in the old days. The series included craftsmen, peddlers, seamstresses, servants and traditional musicians, with each named after the sitter's trade (Figures 57, 97–104). The majority of the subjects are men, although they also include a few women who are mostly African migrants.

One of the functions of portraiture is that it can raise the sitter above the occasion of the moment and give him or her a greater visual presence.<sup>634</sup> Thus Binzagr's representations of the working class reflected her desire to give these workers a special place in visual culture, it also reflect a nostalgia to a time when Saudis were content with their local goods. The huge leap in the Saudi economy and standards of living raised demand for imported consumer goods.<sup>635</sup> Industrial and agricultural production cost more than imported goods, and could not satisfy growing demand,<sup>636</sup> so imported goods and services replaced local ones.<sup>637</sup> As Olfet Binzagr explains, somewhat cynically, the oil industry created exposure to outside influences,<sup>638</sup> it was still possible to visit traditional markets but visitors would be 'bombarded by Mazola Oil and Fisher Price toys'.<sup>639</sup> Hence the arrival of modernity brought a sudden end to Bedouin crafts, along with the erasure of small hamlets, fields and oases.<sup>640</sup> Even those who worked in home services and small crafts were no longer required as a result of the series of pan-Arab coups and the oil boom of the late 1960s. This situation forced the king to replace

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<sup>633</sup> Vassiliev, *King Faisal of Saudi Arabia: Personality, Faith and Times*, 437.

<sup>634</sup> West, *Portraiture*, 24.

<sup>635</sup> See Niblock and Malik, *The Political Economy of Saudi Arabia*, 37–39.

<sup>636</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>637</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>638</sup> Binzagr, 'An Historical Perspective', 18–19.

<sup>639</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>640</sup> *Ibid.*

Arabs with non-Arab, mostly Asian Muslim and non-Muslim workers,<sup>641</sup> whose short-term contracts and foreign language ensured disengagement from the rest of Saudi society.<sup>642</sup> Their contracts also meant that they were not allowed to bring their families into the country.<sup>643</sup> Imported labour was a cheaper and safer alternative and became a fast-growing phenomenon.<sup>644</sup> However, Binzagr believes that imported labour is no longer trustworthy as foreign workers do not belong to the local community.<sup>645</sup> For instance, *A Takrony Woman*, or *An African Wandering Seller* (1990), is a reminder of how old African migrants used to enter houses to sell their goods and help with household chores without raising concerns (Figure 98).<sup>646</sup> The image of a baby on a woman's back suggests that these migrants were born and raised, or at least settled, in the country and therefore formed part of the cultural and social structure.

Hence by painting members of the working class, Binzagr was drawing attention to the extinction of local crafts, which she saw as part of her responsibility to preserve Saudi heritage. She has declared her negative response to the changes brought by oil revenue many times, but one of her most powerful statements appears in her 1980 exhibition brochure, *Safeya Binzagr: paintings and etchings*:

Safeya Binzagr's subject matter is her own Saudi environment... the everyday life of the present, but more particular[ly], the fast vanishing customs, costumes, and

<sup>641</sup> Abir, *Saudi Arabia*, 59.

<sup>642</sup> Ibid.

<sup>643</sup> Ibid.

<sup>644</sup> See: J. S. Birks, I. J. Seccombe, and C. A. Sinclair, 'Labour Migration in the Arab Gulf States: Patterns, Trends and Prospects', *International Migration* 26, no. 3 (1988): 267–286.

<sup>645</sup> Binzagr, Second personal interview: 'رسمت التكرونية شي موجود في المنظومة حقتنا [...] من العائلة [...] فيعني' التكرونية من جملة المنظومة حقتنا، هي مهنة. مهنة، التكرونية كانت تروح تبيع موجودة بياعة في جدة، تجي تنظف البيت، شيء فتحنا عيوننا عليه. دحين التكرونية شكل ثانيء ما هي حقت أول اللي هي الحاجة هذي، اللي كانت يتدخل البيوت دحينه تقدرى وحدة من اللي في الشارع تدخلها؟ لا [...] فكانت من جملة المنظومة الإجتماعية عشان كده حظيتها'. Translation: 'I painted A Takrony Woman [which means an African woman] because she was part of our community system [...] from the family [...], so the Takrony was [a representation of] a trade: she used to sell goods around the houses, clean, and something we were accustomed to. However, now it has changed; she no longer goes inside houses to clean, can you trust someone from the street nowadays and let them in your house? No! [...] Therefore, I painted her because she was part of the general community system'.

<sup>646</sup> Ibid.

coaxing of aunts and grandmothers go into her paintings of how Arabia used to be before oil wealth shattered the millennial old ways.<sup>647</sup>

Binzagr's feelings towards modernity, and her passion for heritage, gave her a sense of authority over this subject, and drove her to present herself to her English audience as a guardian of the past and conductor of the future in Saudi Arabia:

The beauty of the past, as captured in her paintings, may have disappeared, but Safeya Binzagr is herself a guarantee both that the past will not be forgotten, and that, on the basis of old traditions, a harmonious new social reality can evolve in Saudi Arabia today.<sup>648</sup>

Before 1979, the working class occupied very little place in Binzagr's paintings, and both male figures in general, and female servants, tended to be marginalised.<sup>649</sup> However, this has changed. Early in her career, Binzagr created *Zamzami* (1968) – a water seller from *Zamzam*, a sacred well in Mecca, for worshippers at the holy mosque of Al-Medina<sup>650</sup> – and *Al-Saga* (1968–1969) – water seller to the houses of Jeddah<sup>651</sup> – which represent the same subject: a man selling drinking water (Figures 105–106). However, neither painting shows the worker's emotions, nor indicates the harshness of their lives. The figures in both works are lost in their surroundings and have no noticeable expression on their faces. In contrast, in *Water Carrier* (1989), which is a later edition of this subject, Binzagr gives a clearer indication of the subject's living conditions (Figure 104). The figure appears isolated against a blank background to give him a stronger visual presence, and his pose, with his shoulders bent under the heavy weight of his water skin, his distressed face and modest clothing all emphasise the sense of adversity. Binzagr shows the same sensitivity towards other workers, who are often

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<sup>647</sup> Safeya Binzagr: *Paintings and Etchings*, 3.

<sup>648</sup> Ibid.

<sup>649</sup> See: (Chapter 3).

<sup>650</sup> See Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 84.

<sup>651</sup> See *ibid.*, 104.

shown isolated from their surroundings, immersed in work and their faces creased with worry (Figures 57, 97–104).

These images indicate that the changed situation of the working class also significantly affected their depiction. Labourers were no longer included to complement a traditional subject, but as a subject in their own right. In fact, Binzagr confessed that after painting *Mr. Asfahani* (1967) she was no longer interested in portraiture,<sup>652</sup> until the 1980s when she found herself attracted to the subject of traditional crafts and daily activities. This last subject included ethnographic portraits of the working class and motherhood, as Binzagr has long believed that motherhood also represents a traditional profession that deserves recognition.<sup>653</sup>

During the 1970s, many factors other than modernity influenced changes in Binzagr's work. For instance, negotiations over image making loosened restrictions and gave her the freedom to experiment with new variations on human figures: a wider range of sitters and ethnicities, and different occupations. In addition, her life-drawing classes at St Martin's (1976–78) encouraged her to look carefully at the sitter (Figure 107), and to find subjects in her surroundings rather than depend on oral history. In the past, listening to these narratives appealed to Binzagr's imagination on account of their poetic aspects, and made her see everything through the eyes of the upper class and her family. However, her experience at St Martin's allowed her to wander the streets, gardens and markets of London and to paint passers-by, sellers and shoppers (see

<sup>652</sup> Binzagr, Fourth personal interview: 'هذي بعد ما عمل، أدبته هي، وديتها له، كانت هدية، بس جريت تجربة البورتريه ' . Translation: 'After he did what he did [print the catalogues] I gave it to him, it was a gift. I tried to paint portraits [for a while] but frankly I did not enjoy it so I stopped'.

<sup>653</sup> Binzagr, Second personal interview: 'أنا كان الهدف هو تسجيل التراث عشان تسجلي تاريخك هو الإنسان، الإنسان سواء ' . Translation: 'My goal was to document the heritage. In order to document your history you have to [document] the human beings regardless [of his/her role]. When I did Motherhood and other subjects, I did not make it because I have chosen to represent motherhood; I chose to represent the functioning human being in life. [...] This was the start of a theme, which is why when you look you will see that all these, including Motherhood, are representations of trades regardless of their subjects'.

Figures 88, 108), which could be one of the reasons that drew her attention to the traditional craftsmen of her own country.

### 5.5 Historic intervention: recreating images

When Binzagr did her first traditional scene, *Al-Henna* (1969), she did not care much about historic accuracy. She relied on her information about this tradition and made little effort to validate the details (Figure 37).<sup>654</sup> However, the painting reveals no noticeable mistakes related to the ritual. Nine female figures are shown in the bride's room, while the bride and two women sit in the bridal chamber, hidden behind a green curtain embellished with religious texts for blessings. One woman is dyeing the bride's hair, the other dyes her hands with henna, and the rest of the women play music, serve drinks and enjoy the festive occasion. In the left corner a woman yodels,<sup>655</sup> while holding a round tray carrying the henna bowl lit by twelve candles. Unlike the rest of her work, Binzagr did not base this particular painting on research.<sup>656</sup> For her, it was enough that it was a familiar subject as the henna ceremony was a popular tradition in many Arab countries, hence she felt she could rely entirely on imagination to paint it.<sup>657</sup> The research process started after the painting had been shown in public, when audiences asked Binzagr to present more scenes from the past.<sup>658</sup> However, in 1979, after a decade of producing researched subjects, the artist expressed her disappointment

<sup>654</sup> Binzagr, Fourth personal interview: 'كانت من غير دراسة مثلا الحنة في الستابل وفي طريقة توظيف اللوحة تلاقيها تختلف ' عن الباقي'. Translation: 'The Al-Henna was not based on research, therefore my style and treatment of the subject in this painting was different than the rest'.

<sup>655</sup> Yodelling, also known as ululation, is a long, high-pitched sound that women in some traditional Arab societies make to express joy.

<sup>656</sup> Binzagr, Fourth personal interview.

<sup>657</sup> Ibid.: 'لأنو كحنة كانت فكرة سويتها قبل، يعني كانت الحنة تاريخها أول، كلوحة منتشرة في كل البلاد العربية، فتخيلت العروسة من ' الحكاية وراء الستارة لكن ما تقيدت باللبس، ماتقيدت بالجلسة لأنني ما أبنديت أسوي بحث'. Translation: 'Because the idea of the henna night was old and very popular in all Arab states. Therefore, based on the tale [I have heard] I imagined the bride sitting behind the curtains, but I did not obligate myself to paint the [authentic] costumes and setting because I did not start yet doing research'.

<sup>658</sup> Ibid.: 'الريسرتش أبداً بعد الحنين، مش الحنين مني أنا، الحنين من الكبار'. Translation: 'The research started after the nostalgia. It was the older generation's nostalgia, not mine'.



in libraries in London and Saudi Arabia, which, according to her, had too little information about Saudi heritage.<sup>659</sup> This statement raises the question of *what* Binzagr found in these libraries, rather than *how much*. Research undertaken to answer this question revealed an important body of work produced after 1979, copied from Orientalist photographs of Saudi Arabia before the oil wealth. What is interesting about it is that Binzagr had changed some details to make the pictures consistent with her perception on Saudi men and women at the time.

Research into Binzagr's watercolour, *Hejaz Bridal Costume "Al-Shur'a Al-Arabi"* (1998), reveals that it was copied from *Portrait of a Meccan bride* (1887–88) by Abd al-Ghaffar, the first photographer from Mecca (Figures 109–110).<sup>660</sup> Binzagr never mentioned that she used Orientalist photography as a reference for her work, but when asked about it she explained that these old photographs were a starting point.<sup>661</sup> She strongly believes that this fact makes her work no less authentic since it offers additional information about the subject.<sup>662</sup> For instance, the red colour of the bride's dress in *Hejaz Bridal Costume* (Figure 109) does not appear in Abd al-Ghaffar's black-and-white photograph (Figure 110). Rather, Binzagr discovered the colour while seeking information for an earlier work, *Al-Nassah* (1975) (Figure 38). She also explains that her hands are raised up to show the guests the henna embellishment, and

<sup>659</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 11.

<sup>660</sup> See: Snouck Hurgronje, *Makkah a Hundred Years Ago, Or, C. Snouck Hurgronje's Remarkable Albums*, 16–17, for more information about how Abd al-Ghaffar's pictures were first published in an album by his photography instructor, the Orientalist Snouck Hurgronje, without mentioning Abd al-Ghaffar as a contributor. This led to attributing the images to Hurgronje for a long period, until recently when scholars rediscovered the album.

<sup>661</sup> The scholar encountered this during her archive research, and asked the artist about it when she met her again in 2013. See: Binzagr, Fourth personal interview: 'يعني مثلاً في بريطانيا أروح للرويال جيوغرافيكال 'سوسائتي أجيب منها صور، يعني أي مكان فيه صور أشترى الكوبيز وأخليهم عندي [...] هو هذا اللي كنت أتكلم فيه'. Translation: 'For example, in England, I used to go to the Royal Geographical Society to find pictures, I would go to any place that has some picture and I would buy them to keep them with me [in my archive], [...] so this is what I was talking about'.

<sup>662</sup> Ibid.: 'لكن طبعاً ماهو مبين لونه لأنه الصورة أبيض وأسود، بس مع البحث لقيت أنه أحمر'. Translation: 'but of course the colour could not be identified from the picture because it was in black and white. However, through research, I was able to discover that it was red'.

the unusually shaped bust of the bride in both *Al-Nassah* (1975) and *Hejaz Bridal Costume* (Figures 38, 109) is actually a cushion made to hold the subject's gold coins and jewellery.<sup>663</sup> The latter was often borrowed from friends and neighbours to demonstrate solidarity in front of the groom's family.<sup>664</sup> Moreover, the pillow was essential to protect the bride's chest from the weight of the jewellery.<sup>665</sup> All this information was not provided by Abd al-Ghaffar's picture, but was the result of ongoing research and contacts with people from other countries in order to discover the original sources of influence over this dress.<sup>666</sup> According to Binzagr, in order to make *Al-Nassah* (Figure 38) she had to see the dress in reality and understand how and why the bride sits in such manner. Therefore, in the late 1960s she invited a woman who was specialized in traditional bridal costume to her house to show her how this costume is worn and made a pillow for the chest similar to the traditional one since they no longer

<sup>663</sup> Binzagr, Third personal interview: 'الجبرين: وهي ترفع يديها عشان توري الناس الحنا؟، بن زقر: هي كده العادة قعدتهم'. Translation: 'Elgibreen: does she raise her hands to show her henna tattoo? Binzagr: no, this was simply how they were supposed to sit!'; *ibid.*: 'بتتأجر مع'. Translation: 'The cushion she is wearing was to hold her jewellery on, it used to be rented with the rest of her costume'.

<sup>664</sup> Binzagr, Third personal interview: 'فيه مثلاً وحدة بتلبس عندها مجوهراتها، تستأجر المجوهرات أو ماعندها بتستأجر من'. Translation: 'Some [brides] have their own jewellery, others would rent their jewellery from certain houses. Sometimes, the bride comes from a wealthy family, therefore every member of the family will lend her a piece of jewellery to wear, then they will take it back afterwards'; see also: 358. *طرابلسي، جدة.. حكاية مدينة*.

<sup>665</sup> Binzagr, Third personal interview.

<sup>666</sup> *Ibid.*: 'هو للأسف لغاية دحينه مصدر [...] كيف السبب؟ من فين اللبس؟ لكن حتى أنا حاولت كثير الوزير حق الثقافة كان جاء زار'. Translation: 'Unfortunately, the source of the dress, [...] the origin, and why they wore it [is missing]. However, I tried many times to find out: the [Moroccan] minister of culture visited the Darah and I said to him: "Listen! This is a copy of a letter I sent to the [Moroccan national] museum and other official authorities hoping to find the source of this dress, but each one gave a different answer" The minister replied to me: "oh, no no, do not worry. When I go back I will send you the information" and sure enough he did not! And until now I could not trace this. I used to search for books [hoping to find an information about this costume] whenever I travel. There is [books] about the Tunisian and Algerian [bridal] costumes, but this one is not included'.

had the original.<sup>667</sup> It took the two, Binzagr and the costume specialist, an entire day to make this happen.<sup>668</sup>

Close comparison between *Hejaz Bridal Costume* (Figure 109) and *Portrait of a Meccan bride* (Figure 110) reveals some noticeable alterations in Binzagr's version: the bride's face, the crown on her head and her ankle bracelets are all somewhat different. In addition, the bride in Binzagr's version bears a henna tattoo on her palms, gold rings are attached to her bracelets with gold chains, and slippers cover her feet, all of which indicate a higher social class.<sup>669</sup> In fact, Binzagr did more than adjust certain details of the *Hejaz Bridal Costume* (Figure 109), she changed the title to *Al-Shur'a Al-Arabi*, meaning, literally, Arabian wedding veil, or, as she translates it in English, *Hejaz Bridal Costume*. This change of title shifts attention from the bride to the costume, which itself changed from one specific to Mecca, the city, to the formal dress worn by all brides in the Hijaz region. Binzagr's research was therefore an important step in this process, helping her to validate her version of history regardless of accuracy.

Binzagr follows a noticeable pattern when recreating images from old photographs, which involves generalising the title, changing the figures' facial features and elaborating details. The last is specific to subjects involving female figures and can be seen in three paintings made after pictures taken by the Orientalist photographer Gerald de Gaury (1897–1984), during his visit to King Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia, in midwinter 1939 only a few months before the beginning of oil export.<sup>670</sup> Apparently,

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<sup>667</sup> Binzagr, Seventh personal interview.

<sup>668</sup> Ibid. This process was photographed and the scholar has copies of these pictures, however these cannot be used since the artist does not have the permission of the model and the costume specialist to show the pictures to the public.

<sup>669</sup> See: Niebuhr, *Travels through Arabia and Other Countries in the East Performed by M. Niebuhr... With Notes by the Translator; and Illustrated with Engravings and Maps*, 2012, 2:190, for more about women's dress during his travels to Arabia in the eighteenth century.

<sup>670</sup> 'Gerald de Gaury Album', Photographs (London, n.d.), 1, Box 1, Album 1/1 – 1/42, Royal Geographical Society Picture Library, accessed 3 July 2013.

Binzagr was not satisfied about the fact that de Gaury captured images of poor Bedouin females and nothing of the rich, hence she amended these images. The first, *Female Bedouin* (1984) (Figure 111), is made after *A Bedouin Beauty of the Ataiba Tribe* by de Gaury (Figure 112), and shows a veiled female figure with her entire face covered except her eyes and a stick in her left hand. Although de Gaury attributed the picture to the Atiba tribe,<sup>671</sup> Binzagr omitted the tribe's name from the title, attributing the subject to the Bedouins in general. In addition, she coloured the embroidery on the figure's chest in yellow, and her undergarment in turquoise. The latter colour can be seen clearly on her right sleeve, which appears from beneath her black outer dress. The artist also added two gold jewellery pieces either side of the figure's forehead, as well as a red tassel hanging from the embroidery on her chest, and drew the left hand which does not appear in the original picture. Finally, to complete the scene, Binzagr added some brown strokes in the background to create the illusion of a desert landscape, thereby presenting the figure in her normal environment. In *A Bedouin* (1985), on the other hand, Binzagr chose to isolate the male figure (Figure 113), an image inspired by *An Elder of the Hejaz* by de Gaury (Figure 114). The original picture shows some dunes behind the old man, but in Binzagr's painting the background appears blank. This accords with what was said previously about Binzagr's common attempts to marginalise her male figures in different ways.<sup>672</sup>

This is not the only example of Binzagr deleting details from her male figures. In *Falcons* (1987), made after *Royal Falconers* (Figures 115–116), she simplified the figures' appearances, deleting certain details of their costumes: the figure on the right has one buckle instead of three, his left hand has been deleted and the falcon now stands

<sup>671</sup> There are different Bedouin and urban tribes in Saudi Arabia, and Atiba – or more commonly written as Otaiba – is one of the many famous Bedouin tribes that Orientalist travellers have written about. See: (تركي القдах العتيبي، قبيلة عتيبة في كتابات الرحالة الغربيين (بيروت: الدار العربية للموسوعات، 2006).

<sup>672</sup> See: (Chapter 3).

on his shoulder rather than on his hand. She also deleted the ribbon on the left figure's cloak and, instead of using a metallic colour similar to de Gaury's picture, she has painted the button clasp the same colour as the cloak. In addition, the body of the falcon on the right has been completed and the tail of that on the left has been shortened. Finally, Binzagr has shifted the meaning of the image by naming it after the birds instead of the falconers.

Another example of Binzagr's elaboration of details in her female-dominated scenes can be seen in *Heritage is Wealth 1* (1989) (Figure 79). This shows a group of five Bedouin women, wearing different designs of traditional black costumes heavily embellished with silver jewellery and colourful embroidery. Although this drawing is not copied,<sup>673</sup> it is reminiscent of another picture by de Gaury called *Bedouin Women* (Figure 117). Three of the figures' poses and veil styles in *Heritage is Wealth 1* (Figure 79) are similar to those in de Gaury's picture, but their position in the scene is different. For example, Binzagr's middle figure is a mirror image of the left-hand figure of de Gaury's *Bedouin Women* (see Figure 118), while the figure in the top-left corner is a mirror image of that in the middle of the photograph (see Figure 119). Similarly, the veiled figure in the lower-left corner of Binzagr's painting resembles the one on the right side of de Gaury's picture (see Figure 120). The most obvious difference between the two images, however, is that the modest quality of the original costumes has been transformed into something much richer and more elaborate, based on adding many details and jewellery to reflect the title, *Heritage is Wealth 1*. This serves as a reminder of how Binzagr interprets *The Wealth of the Nation*.

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<sup>673</sup> Binzagr, Seventh personal interview. Binzagr agrees that there is some resemblance between this work and de Gaury's *Bedouin Women*, but confirmed that this particular work is not copied.

Hence it could be said that, rather than retrieving Saudi cultural history, Binzagr has been intervening to change it according to her own perception and knowledge. For example, her interpretation of the meaning of wealth as a power is illustrated in the museum labels next to her painting. In the case of *Heritage is Wealth 1* this reads:

Wealth is shown in the female Bedouin's costume from different regions of the Kingdom. The Bedouin costumes from "Al-Hroub" tribes are embroidered with jewellery. The covers of the face are embroidered with silver, showing pride in their costumes. Also women of different tribes of the Hijaz and the Southern region show elegance and wealth.<sup>674</sup>

The dates of the four paintings inspired by de Gaury indicate that Binzagr took her time between each work, and that they were produced neither by researching a particular collection, nor to meet the demands of a certain audience. In fact, the artist maintains that some of the pictures she used had sat in her drawers for years before she felt the need to paint them, such as *صانع العقال*, or *The Traditional Iqal Maker*.<sup>675</sup> Thus it depended on her mood at the time whether she decided to recreate a certain image.<sup>676</sup>

Binzagr's Bedouin paintings were not the only works inspired by Orientalist photographs, as her domestic scenes also share similarities with these sources. For instance, the setting of the scene in Binzagr's works is often reconstructed in a way that focuses on popular Orientalist features. These might include a water pipe, the Oriental settings for coffee and tea with their special cups and pots, Oriental musical instruments such as the oud and drum, singers and dancers, rich Oriental interiors with elaborately

<sup>674</sup> Darat Safeya Binzagr to Eiman Elgibreen, 'RE: Additional Information for Documentation', 3 September 2013.

<sup>675</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview: 'أحب الشيء، أنا أحس أنا أبغى أسويته، يعني جاي ز أصوره صور، يعني أنا مثلاً (صانع العقال) أنا صورت الصورة هذي كنت ماشية لقيته وصورته قعدت يمكن في الدرج سنين لغاية ما رجعت لها حسيت أبغى حرفة أبغى أسوي، شوفي الرجال طلعتهم في أشغالهم هما تخصصهم فيها، حق البشت، حق العقال، هذي إندماج تلاقى يلفت نظرك، الحرفة وتعابير الوجه معاها تحسي فيه تراكب'. Translate: 'I have to love the subject. I need to feel the urge of making it, and I may take some pictures. For example, The Traditional Iqal Maker, was based on a picture I took one time by coincidence [for the craftsman] while I was walking. Then, left the picture in a drawer for years before I decided to go back to it when I felt the desire of making a painting about a trade. Listen, I produced images of men in trades they were known for: the cloak maker, the iqal maker. What makes them special is the fusion of their facial expression and their trade. You feel that they complement each other'.

<sup>676</sup> Ibid.

decorated carpets, seats, doors and windows, Oriental costumes with unique fabrics, prints and embroidery, and servants waiting on the main figure in the scene.<sup>677</sup>

Binzagr has also followed a similar system of categorisation to that used by prominent Orientalist photographers in their published albums, such as Pascal Sebah in his album *1873 Yılında Türkiye'de Halk Giysileri Elbise-i Osmaniyye*,<sup>678</sup> commissioned by Osman Hamdi Bey; and Christian Snouck Hurgronje, in his two-volume albums, *Bilder – Atlas zu Makka* (1888) and *Bilder Aus Mekka* (1889).<sup>679</sup> Both in her first book and her museum, Binzagr's work is categorised according to different subjects, such as traditional dress and daily life, similar to the albums mentioned above. However, an important difference between Binzagr's work and Orientalist photographs is her ability to enliven her subjects. Her figures, especially females, are always engaged in an activity, and her domestic scenes have an ongoing scenario, whereas those of Sebah, Hurgronje, and other Orientalists were silent, isolated and subjected to the gaze of the photographer. For example, Binzagr's *Tea Party* (1968) shows three women: one is sitting in the middle holding her water pipe and is engaged in conversation with the second woman on the left. On the right side appears a third woman, possibly a servant, preparing some tea (Figure 35). They are shown indoors, which was the normal place for women to take tea, and the scene looks based on a real moment, not one conjured by the artist's imagination. In contrast, the figures in *Jiddah ladies in street dress and home dress*, photographed by Siegfried Langer (before 1888), appear idle and isolated from their surroundings and from each other (Figure 121). One woman sits on the floor

<sup>677</sup> See: Engin Çzendes, *Photography in the Ottoman Empire, 1839-1919* (Beyoğlu, İstanbul: Haşet Kitabevi, 1987), 88, for an example of these Oriental characters combined in a photograph of a studio arrangement.

<sup>678</sup> Marie de Launay, *1873 Yılında Türkiye'de halk giysileri: elbise-i osmaniyye*, trans. Erol Üyepazarcı, Reprint, first published (1873) (Karaköy-İstanbul: Sabancı Üniversitesi, 1999).

<sup>679</sup> Combined and reprinted in: Snouck Hurgronje, *Makkah a Hundred Years Ago, Or, C. Snouck Hurgronje's Remarkable Albums*.

holding the water pipe, looking as if immersed in a daydream, while the other stands fully veiled and looking straight at the viewer. They have clearly been photographed for documentation purposes as both women pose in a way that allows the viewer to examine them closely. However, this does not explain the choice of place – the exterior of the house with minimum furniture – which enhances the feeling of isolation and being out of place. Only a chair is placed next to the standing woman, while three pillows and a carpet lie under the arm of the seated woman. There are no signs to indicate their class, such as lattice-style windows, engraved doors, and servants.

Other examples include two pictures showing women smoking a water pipe from the late nineteenth century (*Figures 122–123*).<sup>680</sup> Both pictures have obviously been taken in a studio, and the models, especially in (Figure 123), do not look Eastern. They also have the same arrangement, with one woman standing and the second sitting, and the water pipe held by the seated woman gives no indication that it will be smoked. In fact, it would be impossible for the woman holding the pipe in (Figure 122) to smoke since her mouth is covered by her face veil. The second woman in both pictures is holding an Oriental drum, but shows no sign of joy or amusement. Although the women in (Figure 122 and 123) appear less stiff than those in Langer's (Figure 121), they still look isolated from their surroundings. It can be understood that Orientalist photographers were accustomed to recreating their images and copying earlier work, but they also abstained from adding additional ingredients to enliven their work or make it more authentic. It was these aspects that Binzagr attempted to rectify through her paintings.

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<sup>680</sup> These photographs are attributed to Tancred Dumas (c.1870), and to Sebah and Joaillier (c.1890) in the source. However, the current scholar believes that both are taken by Comtesse de Croix-Mesnil, especially since the source makes an error and attributes the *Portrait of a Mahometan Woman* from *Femmes d'Orient Album* by de Croix-Mesnil to Dumas. See: Çzendes, *Photography in the Ottoman Empire, 1839-1919*, 60, 83, 119.



In addition, although Binzagr marginalised her female servant figures,<sup>681</sup> they still appear more active and influential than in Orientalist photography, as well as actively engaged in their surroundings. For example, '*Al Merakkab*' *The Old Kitchen* (1981) shows a group of servants cooking (Figure 124). The two women on the right are dealing with some pieces of meat: one clasps the knife between her toes to cut the large piece she is holds in both hands; the second reaches for a black rectangular object with her right hand, which could be a tray or container to hold the meat. Two small kittens playing around the meat in front of the second woman also enliven the scene. In the middle, a third woman, with a bag of flour to her right side and a small bowl to her left, is busy kneading dough, while at the back a woman holding a traditional fan is probably working to keep the fire lit under the pots. In the left corner of the foreground, a larger, cropped female figure adds a sense of depth to the scene. She is watching the other women work, which suggests she is the mistress of the house or has higher status. In *Al-Rahmani* (1973–75) three servants appear to be busy doing something related to the occasion, despite partially hiding their faces (Figure 40). All have their heads turned towards the gathering: the first, in a yellow dress, holds a baby and sits watching the children sing; the second is wearing purple and heading to another room, yet still tries to watch the event; the third, wearing green, is placed in the right-hand corner. This contrasts with *Servant and eunuch with the child of their master* (before 1888) published in Hurgonje's album, which shows a servant seated on a chair holding a baby in his arms, while another servant stands behind him (Figure 125). Both figures face the viewer, but their facial expressions, particularly that of the seated figure, are quite stiff. Similar to the setting of *Jiddah ladies in street dress and home dress* (Figure 121) by Siegfried Langer, there is no furniture or anything to indicate their place apart from a

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<sup>681</sup> See: (Chapter 3).

few plant pots in the background. The chair under the seated figure is also covered and out of view.

Even in Orientalists' photographs of musicians and dancers the figures often appear idle and disengaged from their surroundings. This is a characteristic that becomes clearer when their work is compared to Binzagr's. For example, the musicians and dancers in *Al-Nasbah* (Figure 28), *Bedouin Dance* (Figure 25), *The Ankle Bracelet* (Figure 29) and *Music* (Figure 156) appear in action. Their drums face in different directions and they behave as a band rather than as solo musicians. The dancers, too, are depicted in different poses. By contrast, *Portrait of a Mahometan Woman* (1893) photographed by *Comtesse de Croix-Mesnil*, shows only one dancer and a single drummer, and there are no other objects or figures to emphasise the mood of joy and festivity (Figure 126). But even an individual portrait by Binzagr of a male drummer, called *Drums* (1989), looks comparatively alive (Figure 102). The figure is shown against a blank background, holding a drum over his head and another under his elbow and above his left knee, yet the pastel strokes on the man's body and dress, as well as the blurred white above his head, add movement and lessen the isolation of the figure (Figure 102). In *Alms-seeking pilgrims from Yemen* (before 1888), on the other hand, by Hurgronje, silence dominates the scene (Figure 127). The two male figures are shown standing still, holding their drums towards the photographer to ensure their visibility, while the background and expression on their faces are blank. There is one image in which Binzagr makes her subject appear similar to an Orientalist photograph, though this is not typical. This is in *Moment of Harmony* (1968), in which a man with an empty look on his face holds his water pipe in one hand (Figure 128), as suggested in the previous chapter, Binzagr struggled on a few occasion to incorporate Orientalist art into her own vision.

Recently, Binzagr has started to produce work closer to that of the Orientalists, but not copied from it. These are intended as illustrations for a yet-to-be-published book about traditional dress from different regions of Saudi Arabia.<sup>682</sup> The figures, both male and female, are painted over a blank background and the collection, named *The Traditional Costume Collection*, was inaugurated in a special exhibition.<sup>683</sup> The collection idea started when Binzagr produced an etching about *A Bedouin Woman* (1978). In the background she includes a printed text describing the history of the dress represented, and under the female figure runs the title in Arabic, 'بدوية من قبيلة الجدعان '، 'والجاذلة', or *A Female Bedouin from the Tribe of Al-Jada'an and Al-Jahadilah* (Figure 129). The written text makes the print more of a historical manuscript and signals the artist's desire to provide a source of information – an image to replace the work of the Orientalists. However, the addition of the texts turned out to be impractical and discouraged Binzagr from adding them to the rest of the collection. This was because the prints were originally made at a workshop in London, where the artist was assisted by professionals and had access to the necessary equipment; the text, on the other hand, was produced with the help of a calligrapher in Saudi Arabia and was then sent to London to be added to the prints.<sup>684</sup>

The constant desire to create and recreate images similar to Orientalist work, and add more details to the scene to enliven the subject can be attributed to Binzagr's familiarity with Saudi culture. This entitled her to feel more engaged with the subject, and therefore to show more enthusiasm and provide more details. It can also be

<sup>682</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview. This information is not recorded on tape. The project is postponed because the artist has been busy running the museum. However, most of the collection is printed on cards and large signed and numbered posters and sold at the museum's gift shop. See: (Figures 147-167).

<sup>683</sup> See: 'Event Calendar, Latest News: The Inauguration of the Traditional Costume Collection', *Darat Safeya Binzagr Website*, 26 May 2008, <http://www.daratsb.com/daratsbdsb/Latest-News/33.html>.

<sup>684</sup> Binzagr, Fourth personal interview: 'وما أستمريت فيها لأنو لقيت أنو حنتعيني في الجرافيك [...] فبعدت عن فكرة 'المعلومات'. Translation: 'and I did not continue this idea because I realised that it will be difficult to produce with engraving [...] therefore, I decided to let go of the idea of printing the information'.

interpreted as her way to defend Saudi culture from the claims of having no value before the production of oil, and to remind her people of their old legacy.

## 5.6 Conclusion

According to Bhabha, ““small differences” and slight alterations and displacements are often the most significant elements in a process of subversion or transformation.’<sup>685</sup> The process of making images at a time when it was not quite accepted, through subtle negotiation and experimentation, is arguably what helped Binzagr not only to control or change her style, but also to control the public’s reaction towards her production and stimulate change in the ideological system. Her portraiture acted as a representation of her authority and as a substitute for her image, while at the same time easing tensions towards the definition of faces by treating them as illustrations of certain themes.

Portraits of the king and other people who influenced the history of Jeddah commemorated their efforts and illustrated their role. In addition, ethnographic portraits of the Bedouins and urban women celebrated their role in the nation’s pre-oil economy and cultural heritage, while her images of workers, which presented them as a lost national treasure, served as means of empowerment: for the workers by attracting the attention to their eroded role, and for Saudi culture by showing other valuable assets other than oil. In addition, adopting the role of guardian of the nation’s heritage encouraged Binzagr to alter Saudi female images in Orientalist photography to make them appear wealthier, and hence authoritative even before the oil wealth.

The entire collection of Binzagr’s portraits shows a drastic change in her technique, as well as her subject matter, both of which were affected by the relaxing of socio-religious constraints in art in Saudi Arabia. Starting with portraits of public

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<sup>685</sup> Mitchell, ‘Translator Translated: Interview with Cultural Theorist Homi Bhabha’, 82.

figures, she progressed to women of the middle and upper classes, and finally to her drawings series of the working class, while the declaration of the names of her female sitters represented a further cultural shift.

## **Chapter 6: Art starts at home: negotiating the audience**

### **6.1 Introduction**

One of the many indicators of Binzagr's authority is her strategic planning of the way she represented herself. She has often highlighted certain aspects of her cultural identity in her paintings and planned carefully how these would be presented. This is probably why she refused to send her work to any exhibition that she would not be able to attend.<sup>686</sup> Binzagr has also been very careful about how her biography and work are presented in exhibition catalogues, in order to maintain her social and professional reputation. This chapter argues that the strategic construction of self-representation is an effective method for exerting change in conservative societies, as the artist's emphasis on cultural identity cast aside any doubts about her intention to overtly break the norms of her society. In other words, the artist gained the trust of the public when she showed pride in her traditional culture and its norms. Therefore, in addition to examining Binzagr's strategies of self-representation, it is important to examine the targeted audience at every stage.

This chapter argues that her first and most empowering audience was her family.

This suggestion is based on the nature of the social system in Saudi Arabia that is highly

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<sup>686</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview: 'أسألهم مين حيطلع مع اللوحات يقولوا الفنان الفلاني أقولهم خذوا عمله لأنه عملي ما ' يطلع إلا معاه، ذاك الوقت ماكانوا بيطلعوا الستات، فأقول لهم اللي يطلع خذوا عمله لكن أنا ما أرسل عملي مع أحد'. Translation: 'I ask them [the ministry of culture]: "who will travel with the paintings [to represent the artist]?" They give me a name of a certain male artist, so I tell them: "then, take his work instead because my work will never be shown without me!" Women artists did not use to go [with their work] during that time, which is why I used to tell them take the work of whoever is travelling with the exhibition, I do not send my work with anyone else'; Binzagr, Second personal interview: 'مره صار كذا معرض، وقالوا حيديروا، وأنا الصراحة ما أرسل ...لوحاتي تدور لوحدها'. Translation: 'One time there was a few touring exhibitions, and honestly I cannot send my work on a tour without me...'

influenced by the tribal system; where one become more trusted and influential once they win the trust and support of their cultural group. Therefore, it is argued that Binzagr's ability to show the support of her family to the public enabled her to persuade the local audience, starting with her class and moving forward to the rest of Saudis to support her work and establish the first art museum in the country, which has been functioning as an educational institute giving Binzagr a broader influence.

The home appears as the most important element of Binzagr's cultural identity, and was used on different levels to support her self-representation. However, the home in this context exceeds the meaning of the house itself and incorporates the life journey and history of the Binzagr family, its cultural roots, social status, connections to other influential figures in Jeddah and professional experience. Interestingly, in the beginning, Binzagr's family was not supportive of her career choice: 'Art was not accepted by *society* or by my *family* as a proper pursuit – especially for a woman, who was only permitted self-expression within the *confines* of the family home,' says Binzagr.<sup>687</sup>

However, she soon succeeded in gaining their support and respect. From 1965 they sponsored her training, and from 1968 her exhibitions.<sup>688</sup> The artist's success at home can be regarded an indicator of her future success in Jeddah. The statement above shows that support from family and society were the two main sources for success in her home city Jeddah. Moreover, the fact that art was allowed in the family home means that domestic space provided a potential ground for negotiation and empowerment. Understanding and observing the family norms and values was a conscious decision and could be used by the artist as a strategy of

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<sup>687</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 9. (My emphasis).

<sup>688</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview.

negotiation, which makes it worthy of careful examination. Germaine Greer, in her study *The Obstacle Race* explains that many female artists in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, who worked in the family business, voluntarily refrained from signing their work.<sup>689</sup> According to Greer, ‘such prohibition was not necessary. Daughters were ruled by *love* and *loyalty*; they were more highly *praised for virtue and sweetness* than for their talent, and they devalued their talent accordingly.’<sup>690</sup> Greer’s explanation highlights the importance of family love and the reciprocal advantages, which are often dismissed since such benefits were usually bestowed on male members. In addition, ignoring the advantages a daughter may have received makes her appear submissive and powerless, and it becomes difficult to notice the link between her early decisions and later success because of this presumption. ‘The ability to intervene in the world’ is as influential as the ability to ‘refrain from such intervention’.<sup>691</sup> Therefore, the choice of not doing something, or of doing it in a certain way, can be more persuasive in a conventional society. In addition, subtle steps of transformation can help establish new conditions.

Philip Pacey called his study of the objects produced within families, *Family Art*, to express the idea that these act as visual representations of their ‘understanding and love of one another’.<sup>692</sup> Thus it is important to put the reciprocal relation between Binzagr and her family at the centre of discussion. This, in turn, will shed light on some historical facts about the artist’s family and business, and how each benefited from the other. This information represents primary material that involved tracing the family history from hard-to-reach sources, such as following the career of Binzagr’s siblings

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<sup>689</sup> Germaine Greer, *The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and Their Work*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2001), 14.

<sup>690</sup> Ibid. (My emphasis).

<sup>691</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, New Ed (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1999), 14.

<sup>692</sup> Philip Pacey, *Family Art* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1989), 1.

and recovering the history of the family's companies. As a consequence, the artist's self-representation she produced for the public was based on three factors she borrowed from her home: firstly, the family's respectable reputation and life journey, which enhanced her own reputation and influenced her lifestyle; secondly, its class which affected her training, career decisions and biography; and, finally, its market experience which inspired her to invent new methods to promote her work and to establish her museum.

## 6.2 Beit Binzagr: the first audience

The word *beit*, or بيت, in Arabic, means 'home', and is also commonly used in Saudi Arabia to refer to household members as a group. Thus the Binzagr can be referred to as *beit* Binzagr. In addition, when family members want to introduce themselves, they could say: 'I am from *beit* Binzagr', which means I am a Binzagr. This also applies to any Saudi who uses their family name in conjunction with the word *beit*. Such culturally specific use of the home as a representation of the family illustrates the solidarity of its members and is therefore a representation of power. Pierre Bourdieu has demonstrated that producers of art and literature cannot be separated from formal and informal institutional sources, which authorise, enable, empower and legitimise their work.<sup>693</sup> It is therefore important to analyse how the concepts of home and family were used in Binzagr's art and career. For instance, the name of Binzagr's museum, Darat Safeya Binzagr, comprises the word *home*. On the occasion of the museum opening, Binzagr explained that '*Darah* in Arabic means an enclosure and home or house',<sup>694</sup> and the

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<sup>693</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, 'Editor's Introduction: Pierre Bourdieu on Art, Literature and Culture', in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1993), 10.

<sup>694</sup> Binzagr, 'Who Am I?', 41.



container of an activity or an object.<sup>695</sup> Thus she made a conscious choice to represent this specific meaning of the home. Interestingly, *Darah*, or دارة, is the feminine name for home from the original word *Dar*, or دار.

It could be said that integrating the concept of home into the business was a tradition in the Binzagr family. *Beit Binzagr* is the traditional name of the company started by the artist's grandfather, Mohamed Obeid Binzagr, in the 1880s (see Figure 68).<sup>696</sup> Hence, home for the Binzags represents everything: house, family and livelihood. It should therefore come as no surprise that the artist painted the family's house twice in the early stages of her career. She first painted a portrait of the founder of the family's legacy, *Grandfather* (1968) (Figure 65), which was followed by *The Front of the Old Binzagr House in Jeddah* (1969) and, from a different angle, *The Old Binzagr House in Jeddah* (1969) (Figures 133–134). These paintings attempt to immortalise the family legacy and were succeeded by a group portrait of the first three male generations of the family that remained a private property of the family.

*The Front of the Old Binzagr House in Jeddah* (Figure 133) was used as an advertisement published for the family company in the *Guardian* in 1981.<sup>697</sup> The page was about 'Trading with Saudi Arabia' and the promising future of Saudi economy, and the advertisement is printed next to a section about 'The future of change in Saudi Arabia' and pictures of the king and the crowned prince (see Figures 135–136). What is interesting is how the painting was used to encourage the investor's trust in the family

<sup>695</sup> Binzagr, Seventh personal interview.

<sup>696</sup> Mediaman, 'Profile', *Beit Binzagr Website*, 2002, <http://binzagr.flyer.co.uk/html/hold.htm>, (Figure 130); 'التاريخ', موقع شركة بن زقر, 2001, [http://www.binzagr.com.sa/history\\_arab.htm](http://www.binzagr.com.sa/history_arab.htm), (Figure 130); Gulf Net Solutions, 'Beit Binzagr', *Bfim Binzagr Factory Website*, 2008, [http://www.bfim.com.sa/en/Beit\\_Binzagr.htm](http://www.bfim.com.sa/en/Beit_Binzagr.htm), (Figure 132). The English and Arabic editions of the company's website were updated after March 2013, and much of the retrieved material is no longer accessible. However, a few screenshots of both were captured and included in the image catalogue for reference.

<sup>697</sup> See: 'Display Ad 21 -- No Title', *The Guardian*, 10 June 1981, 21.

business. The slogan of the advertisement is ‘The House of Binzagr. Your entrée to Saudi Arabia’ (Figure 136). This work was also posted on the company’s old website, along with the portrait of her grandfather and the second painting of the family house (see Figures 130–132, 137–140), a fact that suggests that these paintings were important to the family, as much as they were important as representations of the artist. The importance of what Pacey calls ‘family art’ helps celebrate the family’s existence and structures its ‘dwelling in *time*’.<sup>698</sup> The fact that all four of the paintings mentioned above are not listed in any of the catalogues of Binzagr’s exhibitions (1968–1980)<sup>699</sup> suggests that these were initially intended for family use and were key to the artist’s success in winning family support for her career.

The Binzagr family started as a very small family with a rather short history, compared to the majority of the wealthy families of Jeddah, and therefore needed to enhance their image and reputation to gain consumer trust. The artist’s grandfather, Mohamed Obied Binzagr, was born in Jeddah but his father was originally from Hadhramaut, a region that now belongs to the Republic of Yemen and moved to Jeddah as a young boy.<sup>700</sup> His mother سعاد زامكية, Sadeya Zamikyah, married her second husband, a ship captain from Jeddah called منصور عبدالعزيز الحاربي, Mansur Abdulaziz Alharbi.<sup>701</sup> Mohamed Binzagr learned the secrets of his stepfather’s trade and accompanied him on most of his trips in the Red Sea, Suez Canal and Arabian Sea to trade goods.<sup>702</sup> This helped him to learn

<sup>698</sup> Pacey, *Family Art*, 88.

<sup>699</sup> Moussely [sic] and Binzagr, *Portraits: First Exhibition; An Exhibition of Paintings by Safeya Binzagr; Past and Present Tradition: An Exhibit of Oil Paintings by Saudi Artist Safeya Binzagr*. (Dahran, S.A.: Aramco Public Relations, 1976). (Appendices 5–7) .

<sup>700</sup> Binzagr, Seventh personal interview.

<sup>701</sup> العواد في مذكراته لسعيد بن زقر... والدكم دفع لي جنيه ذهب لشراء كتاب، جريدة البلاد، 23 فبراير 2010، قسم الأخبار، الثقافية، <http://www.albiladdaily.com/news.php?action=show&id=47048>. There was no indication of whether she was in Hadhramaut or in Jeddah when her first husband died.

<sup>702</sup> Ibid.

different languages and sometimes to work as a translator for other merchants.<sup>703</sup>

Afterwards, Mohamed Binzagr established a successful trading company importing international goods, called the Shinkar and Binzagr Company.<sup>704</sup> This expanded in the 1930s under Mohamed's two sons: Abdullah and Saeid;<sup>705</sup> and in the 1970s his four grandsons, Waheeb, Faisal, Mohamed and Abdullah, took over the company and expanded it further.<sup>706</sup> This illustrates the drive to build a strong image for the family, especially since Abdullah, Safeya Binzagr's only uncle, could not have children of his own and the future of the Binzags was in the hands of Saeid's sons, the artist's brothers.<sup>707</sup>

This inherited obligation and the story of continuous success was translated into the group portrait Binzagr made of her family. The male members are arranged in a very stable composition, that is, a pyramid with the four brothers comprising the base (Figure 140).<sup>708</sup> It would have been easier for the family to have used photographs (see, for example, Figures 141–143), especially since the grandfather's portrait (Figure 65) is a copy of an old photograph (Figures 68). However, painted portraits create the impression that the company and family have a history that precedes the invention of the camera. In addition, portraiture signifies wealth, sophistication and class since it is

<sup>703</sup> أحمد باديب، 'جدة: إنها حقاً عائلة محترمة' (89)، مقال غير منشور (جدة، 11 مايو 2008)، سلسلة جدة إنها حقاً عائلة محترمة، (Appendix 12). أرشيف أحمد حسن باديب

(Appendix 11)، (أحمد باديب إلى إيمان الجبرين، 'رسالة من المكتب الخاص للأستاذ أحمد باديب'، رسالة، (15 مارس 2011) <sup>704</sup>

<sup>705</sup> Ibid.; 89). 'جدة: إنها حقاً عائلة محترمة' (89). It was not possible to trace whether or not he had daughters, but it is confirmed that he only had two sons.

<sup>706</sup> أحمد باديب، 'جدة: إنها حقاً عائلة محترمة' (89)، مقال غير منشور (جدة، 11 مايو 2008)، سلسلة جدة إنها حقاً عائلة محترمة، (أرشيف أحمد حسن باديب؛ أحمد باديب إلى إيمان الجبرين، 'رسالة من المكتب الخاص للأستاذ أحمد باديب'، رسالة، (15 مارس 2011) (Appendix 11); Gulf Net Solutions, 'Beit Binzagr', *Bfim Binzagr Factory Website*, 2008, [http://www.bfim.com.sa/en/Beit\\_Binzagr.htm](http://www.bfim.com.sa/en/Beit_Binzagr.htm). The different stages of the expansion of the company and its precise dates were mentioned in the old version of the Beit Binzagr website, but this was removed when the website was updated in February 2013. However, similar details are available on the bfim Binzagr Factory website, see: (Figure 132).

<sup>707</sup> 'باديب إلى الجبرين، 'رسالة من أحمد باديب؛ باديب، 'جدة: إنها حقاً عائلة محترمة' (89) <sup>708</sup>

<sup>708</sup> 69 حكاية مدينة، طرابلسي، محمد. Muhammad Traboulsy considers the Binzags to be amongst a number of Hadhrami families that act as pillars of the Jeddah economy.

comparatively more expensive,<sup>709</sup> and was rarer than photography in Saudi Arabia during the 1960s.<sup>710</sup>

As a consequence, it could be said that although the artist's family were working in a different sector, art became part of the family business as a way of strengthening their presence. For instance, the artist remembers that during the 1970s and 80s her older brother Waheeb was working hand-in-hand with her to execute all her major projects, such as publishing her first book, manufacturing reproductions of her work and planning international exhibitions.<sup>711</sup> Her other brothers and sisters were also involved in her career. Soraya, her older sister, was an important source of inspiration; Inja was the model for the *Zabun* (1969); Olfet co-authored the artist's first book, and Faisal was responsible for the construction of Binzagr's museum.<sup>712</sup> Their support has never ceased, and even now her sister Souad attends the monthly salon of Darat Safeya Binzagr whenever she can, despite living in Riyadh,<sup>713</sup> and many of the artist's nieces are closely attached to her. In fact, some of them, such as Thoraya, the daughter of

<sup>709</sup> Pacey, *Family Art*, 6, 61.

<sup>710</sup> الرصيص، *تاريخ الفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية*، 30–55. The first registered art exhibition in Saudi Arabia was in 1965, but there were no art academies for a long time.

<sup>711</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview: 'أخوانا، يعني لما مات أبويا وعمي ماحسبنا بفرق لأنه هما نفس الحكاية، الله يرحمه ' و هيب بعد ما مات أبويا، الفكرة قبل ماتخطر في بالي هو يكون فكر فيها، معرضي الدائر حق الثمانين هو اللي رتبته، كتابي الأولاني [...] كل شيء يعني كان بيرتب لي هو [...] طباعة الكتاب الأول هما الشركة طبعوه، الصحن، الصحنين الأولين الشركة، الكروت، البروشورات، معرض بريطانيا الأولاني هو. يعني كان هو خلاص يعني كل شيء يفكر فيه كل شيء يعود لنا ودا يعني من جملة الأشياء. هو Translation: 'when my father and uncle died, we never felt that anything has changed because our brothers filled their space. My brother Waheeb, may his soul rest in peace, used to think about everything [to build her career] even before I realise that I need to work on that aspect. For example, my touring exhibition of 1980 was his idea and he made all the necessary arrangements, my first book [...] everything. The [family] company [led by Waheeb during that time] printed the first book, the first two [porcelain] plates, the cards, the brochures, the first exhibition in England, all of these projects. I was the specialist and this was my work. He had to come back to me on everything and let me decide, but his role was to give me his advice and guide me to the right way that will work for me '.

<sup>712</sup> Binzagr, Second personal interview: 'أخويا صحيح يعني وقف. الجبرين: مين، أية واحد؟ بن زقر: واحد من إخواني ' '... فيصل' هو اللي مع المقاول ويشرف وفي كله، لكن عشان المقاول كان إنجليزي فكان يجي ويجيب لي، فكنت بتتابع يعني حتى من Translation: 'It is true that my brother supported me, but.. Elgibreen [interrupting]: Who and when?

Binzagr: One of my brothers, Faisal, he was the one in charge to supervise the contractor [of the museum] and the entire project. However, because the contractor was English, he used to visit me [in hospital] and show me [samples], therefore I was able to supervise the project from [the hospital]... '.

<sup>713</sup> She was witnessed attending the salon on 6 January 2013, during the second visit of the current scholar to Darah, 'from 6 January to 8 January 2013'. Her name is also on the kudos list of the museum, see: Binzagr, *A Three-Decade Journey with Saudi Heritage*, 10.

Abdullah Saeid Binzagr, share their aunt's interest in art and consider her a role model.<sup>714</sup>

The Binzagr's have often succeeded in engraving their name on Saudi history. Indeed, a street in Jeddah was named after them.<sup>715</sup> Waheeb Binzagr, the artist's eldest brother, was the first municipal mayor to be selected from the private business sector in Jeddah, and received recognition for the improvements he made to public services and progressive projects.<sup>716</sup> Likewise, the artist was not only the first female Saudi artist to hold a solo exhibition and established the first art museum, she also received a 'Recognition Award' from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for her contributions to preserving Saudi national heritage.<sup>717</sup> The placement of the image of the family's old house on the back cover of Binzagr's first book (Figure 144) indicates that the entire family supported her and helped her write the story of her success after she won their admiration for her work and their appreciation for what it could add to the family's reputation.

<sup>714</sup> Binzagr, Second personal interview: ' [...] مين بيمسك الدارة؟ يعني في أحد دخلتيه معاكي الحين إحتياط لو تشغلي لو شي [...] ' [...] من العائلة لا ، لسي ماعملت الترتيب هو لازم يتسوى ترتيب [...] ما أظنه! دحينه بقول لثريا عشان إنتي... ، كانت هذي ثريا وهي صغيرة أشوف شغلها أقولها: إنتي فنانة حتصيري أحسن مني بقول لي: طبعاً [تضحك] [...] فيعني فيه... عارفة الجبرين: هي من نفس العائلة شابلة... وإلا عائلة... بتختلف عائلتها؟ هي بنت أخوك؟ بن زقر: بنت أخوي، فا أنا كلهم عندنا... يعني... مهتمين ما أعتقد أنهم حيهملوها. [...] لغاية دحينه ما بيدروا... الواحد... يعيني الجبرين: هي ثريا هذي مثلاً بتدرس الحين مشغولة في دراستها؟ بن زقر: هي اللي بتعمل ماجستير و بتعمل دا... لما تخلص إن شاء الله. الجبرين: بنت مين هي؟ بن زقر: بنت أخويا الصغير. الجبرين: إيوة أية واحد؟ بن زقر: عبدالله... During the two trips to Darat Safeya Binzagr (2010 and 2013), the artist's interview was constantly interrupted by calls from her nieces. She explained to the current scholar that many of them share her love of art, and that she asks for their opinion and help on many art-related subjects. However, when asked if she had thought about who would take over the museum after her, the artist replied that Thoraya is probably the best candidate.

<sup>715</sup> أحمد باديب، 'جدة: إنها حقاً عائلة محترمة' (31)، مقال غير منشور (جدة، 26 مارس 2005)، سلسلة جدة إنها حقاً عائلة محترمة،<sup>716</sup> (Appendix 13). أرشيف أحمد حسن باديب

<sup>716</sup> 613-611 طرابلسي، جدة... حكاية مدينة،<sup>717</sup>

<sup>717</sup> Binzagr, Second personal interview: ' [...] أنا وأخويا حق البيئة دا، رحنا للأردن يونيب، هذا فيه برضوا ترشحت لأنه أنا ' [...] 'أعتبر كحماية للتراث event for UNEP. I was nominated for it because my work was considered a protection for national heritage'.

### 6.3 Self-defining and the enacted biography: persuading the public

The advantages of the enacted biography, or the decision to accord with cultural notions of the artist, has long been effective. Catherine Soussloff demonstrates how Renaissance artists and writers depended on ‘the concept that the culture holds to the category “artist”’ to produce their self-representations’, and fashioned their ‘authorial self’ through texts and self-portraits.<sup>718</sup> In every society there is a certain preconception about the great artist in order for the public to accept their work, which is usually related to their style of education, level of training, subject matter and other factors. Self-fashioning or self-defining proved to be a useful method for raising an artist’s status.<sup>719</sup> It therefore seems appropriate to analyse Binzagr’s enacted biography and writings in order to determine her sources of empowerment.

Binzagr has declared that she was influenced by a group of artists,<sup>720</sup> although they share nothing in common but the pioneer role they played and the prestigious position they occupy in the history of art. This suggests that Binzagr was exposed to these artists’ biographies and understood how they controlled their status, and was attempting to compare herself with them. Consequently, it is no surprise that Binzagr put herself at the centre of texts and paintings, using a subjective style of writing and describing personal feelings and experiences, and included self-identifiers in the titles of both of her books, *Saudi Arabia: An Artist View of the Past* (1979) and *Safeya Binzagr: A Three Decade Journey with Saudi Heritage* (1999). The title of the two books reflect a change in her status and self-awareness from 1979 to 1999. With the first book she presented herself in the title as an anonymous individual, ‘An Artist’, while in the

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<sup>718</sup> Catherine M. Soussloff, *The Absolute Artist: The Historiography of a Concept* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 21.

<sup>719</sup> Ibid.

<sup>720</sup> See: (Chapter 4).

second she presented herself as 'Safeya Binzagr'. In addition, the languages of the translated editions of each book suggest the change in Binzagr's sources of empowerment. Although her publications were mainly marketed in Saudi Arabia, her first book was published in English and French, but never in Arabic,<sup>721</sup> whereas the second book was published in English and Arabic without a French edition. Apparently, at the beginning, Binzagr was keen on proving herself in a highly competitive artistic environment, therefore her publications addressed a European audience and the sophisticated Saudi elite. However, after the expansion of art practices in Saudi Arabia, she started to focus more on her middle and upper-middle class Saudi audience. However, her acclaimed status in Saudi Arabia did not compensate for the desire to prove herself in a more demanding context. After her first exhibition abroad, at the Woodstock Gallery in London, Binzagr expressed her feelings on this subject:

I was anxious to be accepted and approved as an artist in England where there is a strong artistic tradition. The exhibition was held in a small gallery, with a tight circle of critics and publicity. I am not satisfied with that exhibition, because I want more criticism in order to know where I stand and to be *recognised as a Saudi artist* in a wider circle. I hope to exhibit in Paris, the United States, all over the world.<sup>722</sup>

This exhibition was the second solo show after her first one in Jeddah (1970), and was an important decision for her career because it proved to her Saudi audience, especially the elite, that she was becoming an international artist. Being 'recognized as a Saudi artist in a wider circle'<sup>723</sup> meant that Binzagr was putting Saudi artists on the global art map.

The catalogue of the 1973 show, *An Exhibition of Paintings by Safeya Binzagr*, carefully presents Binzagr to the foreign audience and describes her mission as 'to

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<sup>721</sup> The first book was printed in Geneva, Switzerland.

<sup>722</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 10. (My emphasis).

<sup>723</sup> Ibid.

preserve on canvas the fast disappearing customs and traditions of her native land'.<sup>724</sup>

This idea was also highlighted in the catalogue of her second exhibition held at the Patrick Seale Gallery in London (1980), which focused on Binzagr's precedent as a Saudi woman artist and reflected the growing interest in women's art that emerged as a result of second feminist wave of the 1970s.

So compelling is her need to paint that it has made her *the first woman artist* in the history of Saudi Arabia to hold an exhibition [...] sponsored by the Saudi Art Society of which *she is the only woman artist member*. The compulsion to make a visual record of her world dates back to her early school days in Cairo [...] but Safeya Binzagr is herself a guarantee both that the past will not be forgotten, and that, on the basis of old traditions, a harmonious new social reality can evolve in Saudi Arabia today.<sup>725</sup>

This passage reflects a clear understanding of the Western audience expectations of a Saudi women artist. To attract attention to her exhibition she focused on her precedence in art, and her autonomous role as a woman in preserving cultural heritage rather than adopting the modern material culture brought by oil capitalism. These elements accord with the Western discourse of the 1970s generated by feminists and Marxists although Binzagr was resisting their movements.

In contrast, in Saudi, Binzagr focused on showing her connections with respectable members of society, such as intellectuals and royalty, to attract the attention of their admirers and win support. This accorded with the Saudi mind-set, which is highly influenced by tribal heritage and considers solidarity the most important element of power and survival. For example, the authors of the preface of her first book,<sup>726</sup> and

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<sup>724</sup> *An Exhibition of Paintings by Safeya Binzagr*, (Appendix 7). (my emphasis).

<sup>725</sup> *Safeya Binzagr: Paintings and Etchings*, (Appendix 8). (my emphasis).

<sup>726</sup> See: (Chapter 5).



of certain chapters in her second book,<sup>727</sup> and those invited to inaugurate her exhibitions, were all from a certain social and professional class.<sup>728</sup>

Moreover, publishing her books in the three languages – English, French and Arabic – signified Binzagr's desire to show her sophistication and cross-cultural experience gained from travelling. She was also very selective about her training choices as well as her leisure activities, which indicated an elite lifestyle. Growing up in Egypt, she used to visit art galleries every Sunday and would attend many concerts at the Cairo Opera House.<sup>729</sup> Although Binzagr's father did not share her interests, he respected her passion for art, opera and ballet.<sup>730</sup> He used to buy her the entire season's tickets and would spend hours with her at the Cairo opera to show his full support despite his own lack of interest.<sup>731</sup> Showing his support was important for both, him and his daughter, to gain the respect of their class.

Binzagr's first choice to study art was the prestigious Leonardo da Vinci Art Institute in Cairo, and when she was unable to attend she settled for no less than a college professor as tutor.<sup>732</sup> The choices Binzagr and her family made for her career were always significant. When she decided to publically exhibit her work, she chose the Dar Al-Tarbieah Al-Hadeethah School for girls as the venue, one of the early private

<sup>727</sup> These were: her fellow artist Mounirah Mosly, academics such as Dr Mohammad Fadhl and Dr Mohammad Alrosais, as well as members of the royal family such as HRH Prince Faysal, the son of King Fahad and the President General of Youth Welfare, and her older brother Waheeb Binzagr who is well known in Saudi as a prominent businessman and entrepreneur. See: Binzagr, *A Three-Decade Journey with Saudi Heritage*, 9, 11.

<sup>728</sup> See: (Chapters 4, 7).

<sup>729</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview: 'كان بيحب لي تذاكر الموسم مايقول لي لا، وعارفة السيارة وحدة لأنه مافيه ناس كثير، ' يوم الأحد هذي السيارة فاضية بعد الظهر، ليه؟ عشان أدور على كل المعارض اللي موجودة، يعني حتى لو هو عنده حاجة أو دا ما يخرج الأحد هو ساعات ما يخرج بعد الظهر، لكن يوم الأحد هذا حتى لو جاء عارف أن اليوم هذا أنا بخرج أروح ألف على كل المعارض الجديدة الموجودة اللي نازله فلولا أنه يعني... هو مش أنا مش أنه أفضلية'. Translation: 'He [my father] used to buy me the entire [opera house] season's tickets, and never said I cannot go. You see, we only had one car because there was not many of us [using it], but the car was reserved for me every Sunday afternoon, do you know why? So I could visit all the exhibitions in town. Even if he had to go somewhere, he would wait until I finish and then he would take the car and go. Therefore, if it was not for my father, I would never be...[who I am today]'.

<sup>730</sup> Ibid.

<sup>731</sup> Ibid.

<sup>732</sup> (Chapter 5).

girls' school in the country. The Emir was invited to show the public his support for girls' education, and to protect the artist's reputation and legitimise her art practice.<sup>733</sup> And although the conservative nature of Saudi society at the time prevented Binzagr from attending the opening night, since all the main guests were men, her father, uncle and male siblings were all supportive, acting as hosts and taking pride in her work.<sup>734</sup>

Later decisions also involved careful choices. For instance, Binzagr chose to attend a two-year advanced course at St Martin's School of Art in London, at a time when Saudis were calling for an art institution in their own country. The prospectus of the 1976 course, the year that Binzagr attended, described the advanced studies programme as an elite choice, which would certainly have appealed to her and the audience of her early career; that is the upper-class:

Other Advanced Studies: Saint Martin's has traditionally provided facilities for a limited number of properly sponsored students from overseas who have had previous full-time training in their own countries and wish to come to London to study for a period outside the normal examination structure [...] only a strictly limited number can be accepted in any year.<sup>735</sup>

These examples demonstrate how Binzagr was able to develop her image as an artist. However, her most crucial decisions were those made after her first two exhibitions. First, she decided to commit to the subject of Saudi heritage (1968) and, second, to refrain from selling her work after the second exhibition (1973).<sup>736</sup> The first decision helped Binzagr focus her future plans, while the second helped her to build her art collection. They also reflected the artist's financial and artistic independence, which ultimately gave her authority over the entire subject of Saudi heritage and liberated her

<sup>733</sup> Binzagr, 'An Historical Perspective', 20.

<sup>734</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 11.

<sup>735</sup> 'Saint Martin's School of Art Prospectus 1976-77', Course Prospectus (London, 1976), 8, Central Saint Martin's Archive.

<sup>736</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview: 'بن زقر: من 73 أنا وقفت البيع، من معرضي الثاني'. Translation: 'Binzagr: Since 1973 I stopped selling [my work], since my second exhibition'.

from having to cater to public demand although they were her first motivators to paint this subject. Moreover, keeping her work under her own control increased its financial and historical value, and as the collection continued to grow her status as an artist rose. Eventually, when Binzagr decided to establish her own museum, the collection was almost complete.<sup>737</sup>

Binzagr's career decisions reveal that 'Class has a long, partially hidden history [...] in the idea of self, which has significance for how identity can be known, recognised and performed.'<sup>738</sup> In other words, her choices and work reflected her sense of identity, as well as that of the audience she targeted at every stage. Her depictions of upper-class life and celebrations were important for shaping her identity, as were her images of the Bedouins and working class which highlighted the difference between these subjects and defined this identity (see, for example, Figures 48, 124). This raises the issue of masquerade as a form of self-definition, as in a rarely exhibited pastel drawing called *Thobe Tali from Najd* (n.d.) (Figure 145).<sup>739</sup> The subject of the drawing is the traditional dress of central Saudi Arabia – the Najd region – but there is a striking resemblance between the face of the artist and the depicted figure (Figure 146). Najd has long been the strongest and only rival to Hijaz, the region the artist comes from, and the drawing therefore represents a playful attempt, whether intentional or coincidental, to put herself in the place of the other. According to Helen Lucey, 'a sense of self is constructed and felt through psychic, cultural and social connections that bind us to others in both positive and negative ways', and 'involve a profoundly relational version

<sup>737</sup> The only missing works were the few paintings she sold in her first two exhibitions and those she gave as gifts to family members.

<sup>738</sup> Beverley Skeggs, 'Class, Culture, and Morality: Legacies and Logics in the Space for Identification', in *The Sage Handbook of Identities*, ed. Margaret Wetherell and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (London: SAGE Publications, 2010), 340.

<sup>739</sup> This drawing was found in a large (1995) calendar against the month of September. The calendar was sponsored by a Saudi insurance company called Al-Alamiya Insurance.

of the self'.<sup>740</sup> The resemblance also demonstrates Diane Reay's view on identities being 'constructed as much through a sense of "what we are not" and notions of how others see us as conceptions of who "we" are.'<sup>741</sup>

The change of subject in Binzagr's work, from portraying the upper class of Jeddah to the working class and people from other regions, coincided with the expansion of her audience group. In order to achieve that, Binzagr used other methods which were highly influenced by her family's experience and status in the business world.

#### **6.4 Branding: a strategy for gaining new audience**

'A brand is a promise of satisfaction',<sup>742</sup> and the promise Binzagr made her audience was to preserve Saudi heritage, 'so that future generations may take pleasure in it and benefit from it'.<sup>743</sup> Although Binzagr never aimed to sell her work, it was important to her to create a brand name that would attract attention to it and build her reputation in the art world. Her task was all the harder given that her paintings would never be shown in a commercial gallery or collection. However, Binzagr has followed different strategies at different stages of her career to overcome this obstacle. The first method of branding she used was her constant attempt to share the stories behind her paintings and her feelings about them with her readership. According to Matthew Healey, '[m]ost buying behaviour is driven by *storytelling* and *emotions*, which are exploited by brands.

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<sup>740</sup> Helen Lucey, 'Families, Siblings and Identities', in *The Sage Handbook of Identities*, ed. Margaret Wetherell and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (London: SAGE Publications, 2010), 289.

<sup>741</sup> Diane Reay, 'Identity Making in Schools and Classrooms', in *The Sage Handbook of Identities*, ed. Margaret Wetherell and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (London: SAGE Publications, 2010), 277.

<sup>742</sup> Matthew Healey, *What Is Branding?* (Hove: RotoVision, 2008), 6.

<sup>743</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 11.

How brands are created – and the process by which things are branded.’<sup>744</sup> This summarises the main ideas discussed in Binzagr’s two books, in which she talks about how she produced her work and established her museum.

Around 1980, Binzagr began producing souvenirs and reproductions of her work. This was important to expand her international reputation as she was planning for her European touring exhibition. The catalogue of her 1980 exhibition, *Safeya Binzagr: Paintings and Etchings*, at Patrick Seal Gallery in London shows a price list of prints she made for sale other than the original work which was not intended for sale.<sup>745</sup> In addition, a collection of cards and postcards (Figures 147–148), and match boxes of different sizes sold for three Saudi Riyals each (Figures 149–152),<sup>746</sup> were produced around the time of the exhibition.<sup>747</sup> Then, after the establishment of her museum, in the mid-1990s she started producing porcelain plates (Figures 153–155), a new collection of prints from her engravings (Figure 156) and posters from her watercolours (Figures 157–159). These are sold at the Darat Safeya Binzagr’s gift shop for 1000 to 2500 Saudi Riyals depending on the quality of the printing.<sup>748</sup> Finally, to answer public demand for her oil painting *Zabun*, in 2010 the artist released a limited number of pictograph prints of this painting hand-touched by her (Figure 160–164). These sell for 2500 Saudi Riyals. All the above were limited editions, signed and numbered, and

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<sup>744</sup> Healey, *What Is Branding?*, 6. (My emphasis).

<sup>745</sup> See: *Safeya Binzagr: Paintings and Etchings*, (Appendix 8).

<sup>746</sup> Approximately £0.5.

<sup>747</sup> There is no date on any of the reproductions Binzagr produced, but, according to her secretary, Kawthar Alfarhan, the oldest reproduction is probably a collection of postcards produced around 1980, on the occasion of the artist’s European tour. From: Binzagr, Third personal interview. This information is not recorded on tape.

<sup>748</sup> Approximately £160 to £400.

From the original paintings and etchings of Saudi Artist SAFEYA BINZAGR come these fascinating views of the past. The vast barren land, the old houses, the people and their customs and traditions all preserved on the canvasses, are brought to you by the kingdom's only match maker through these high quality gift and souvenir boxmatches [sic]. Truly, a collector's delight.

749 After publishing her first book, Binzagr faced a conflict with the publisher of her work. She discovered that he was selling prints of her work in an art gallery in Lausanne, which forced her to seek legal aid in order to stop him. She also discovered another seller in Jeddah who had bought a large stock of her book, which sold for 200 Saudi Riyal each, and cut out and framed the pictures to sell individually for 250 Riyal to tourists visiting Jeddah. Moreover, a simple search on Ebay shows pages from her first book being sold individually as prints. This demonstrates that there was a demand for Binzagr's work as tourist art. See: Binzagr, Second personal interview: 'أنا صارت لنا مشكلة في الكتاب مع أنه محامي وعقد وكله، الناشر قال: أنا أجي أصور، أخذوها وأنه واحد بيعي بجي السعودية وكم الصورة اللي ماهي مصورة بصورها، فجاءه بعد كذا لقيناه صاروا يقولوا لي: ترا في لوزان ibid.: 'بنتباع حاجات بوسترات غير دا [...] فأتصل بي المحامي وقال لي والله الفيلم هذا حقي [...] اضطررنا نشترى سعر النيجاتيف منه عارفة كان واحد هنا في جدة يشتري الكتاب و يشيل الصورة بيروزها وبيبيعها بـ 250 ريال وكانوا يشتروها الناس لوح مبرور دحين إحنا في بعض الكتب عندنا صار مشكلة كبيرة [...] دحين عندنا كتب خربت جاها مويه من المستودع خربت دا، فخرج المجموعة الطبية'. وبيروزها وبيبيعها قال لي والله هذي بنتباع كثير بس ما بيعي بـ 250 أظن

Mecca and Madinah, as souvenirs by pilgrims and tourists when photography was first introduced into the region.<sup>750</sup> The form of these souvenirs has changed over the years, such as binoculars with images attached to a removable paper dial (Figure 168), or toys that looked like cameras and tiny televisions with interchangeable images (Figures 169), but images of the holy land remain constant. The popularity of these souvenirs was recently demonstrated in the British Museum's 2012 exhibition, *Hajj: journey to the heart of Islam*, after they were found being sold for a couple of Saudi Riyals in the streets of Mecca.<sup>751</sup>

Finally, the influence of Binzagr's family is visible in how she benefited from their experience as merchants to promote herself, and in how they used each other's names and services to market their goods. On the one hand, the match boxes were manufactured in a factory owned by the Binzagr family, who celebrated their daughter's significant position as a Saudi artist by referencing her on the box. On the other hand, they announced that their factory was the only one in the country at the time: 'brought to you by the kingdom's only match maker' (see Figure 167). The artist and her family were never shy to celebrate their achievements through marketing or to promote art as a family business.

### 6.5 Darat Safeya Binzagr: recreating history

Art started and flourished at *beit* Binzagr, therefore her museum appears as a representation of that home. In the year 2000, Binzagr inaugurated Darat Safeya

<sup>750</sup> بدر الحاج، المملكة العربية السعودية: صور من الماضي 1861-1939، الطبعة الثانية (لندن: فوليو المحدودة، 1997)، 43.

<sup>751</sup> See: Robert Irwin, 'Journey to Mecca: A History (Part 2)', in *Hajj: Journey to the Heart of Islam*, ed. Venetia Porter (London: British Museum Press, 2012), 209; Ziauddin Sardar, 'Hajj After 1950', in *Hajj: Journey to the Heart of Islam*, ed. Venetia Porter (London: British Museum Press, 2012), 249.

Binzagr in Jeddah, the first and only purpose-built art museum in Saudi Arabia.<sup>752</sup> This museum is an important representation of her authority and contains the signifiers of her influence over Saudi art and cultural history. Almost all of Binzagr's works of art,<sup>753</sup> her rare collection of traditional objects and costumes, and her library and archive where she keeps resources for her paintings, reside in this museum.<sup>754</sup> In addition, the museum offers a rich educational programme for children and women only, as well as an annual art contest for children and a poetry contest for woman,<sup>755</sup> which further extends Binzagr's role in the culture of Jeddah and identify the new audience she is targeting.

In order to appreciate her role in shaping perception of Saudi cultural history, it is important to examine the museum's collection and its function in relation to the idea of *recreation*: firstly, the recreation of physical spaces that emulate some of those depicted in Binzagr's paintings and others from the past; secondly, the continuous recreation of Saudi culture as a result of the museum's activities and the changing content it presents. This content includes labels placed next to the objects and paintings, as well as the museum's annual art contest and temporary exhibitions which focus the audience attention to, and create an interest for, certain subjects (see Figure 170).<sup>756</sup>

<sup>752</sup> Binzagr, Second personal interview: 'التصميم من مهندس سعودي شاب كان جديد، طبعاً كانت لديه حاجة كبيرة أنه 'متحف... يعني أول مكان كان يبنني متحف [...] هذا أول مكان يبنني كمتحف. الجبرين: ومأخوذ في الاعتبار النشاط اللي بيزاول فيه والمجموعة اللي بتنحط فيه مره مدروس؟ بن زقر: أتسوت كل شيء! طبعاً الخرايط كانت معمولة وكل شيء، وأنا وقت البناء غيرت'. Translation: 'The design was made by a merging young architect at that time. Of course, it was a great opportunity for him, he was given a chance to design the first project of its kind; a museum [...] this was the first purpose built museum [in Saudi Arabia]. Elgibreen: did you take into consideration the nature of the activities that may take place in it during the design process? Binzagr: everything was planned for! The maps were already made and during the construction process I had to change a few things to serve my needs'.

<sup>753</sup> The only works not held in the museum are the 28 pieces that were sold in the first and second exhibitions. See: 48، 45، الرصيصة، تاريخ الفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية. In addition, there are a few pieces that were especially made as gifts for friends, family and certain organisations and were not part of the main collection that Binzagr published in her two books. However, the number and details of these gifts are private.

<sup>754</sup> Binzagr, 'Mission of Safeya Binzagr's Darah', 89–11.

<sup>755</sup> The poetry contest is discontinued. Source: Binzagr, Seventh personal interview.

<sup>756</sup> Such as her recent exhibition from her private collection of traditional antique handheld fans '25–29 May, 2013', Darat Safeya Binzagr, Jeddah. Source: Safeya Binzagr, Sixth personal interview, interview by Eiman Elgibreen, 21 October 2013, 34 Restaurant, London, (not recorded).



Darat Safeya Binzagr is located on the intersection of Wali al-'Ahd Street and Madina Road, an important location in central Jeddah with good access to a number of business and residence districts (Figure 171).<sup>757</sup> The overall size of the museum is 3054 square meters, and the building itself consists of two floors.<sup>758</sup> The ground floor is open for everyone and consists of an atrium, a gift shop, the administration office and nine galleries showing Binzagr's work and historical objects divided thematically (see Figure 172). These galleries are connected to each other by arches, as well as by an exterior corridor surrounding the atrium, which is open on one side to the galleries and on the other to the atrium (Figure 173).<sup>759</sup> This gives visitors the option to skip or enter the galleries wherever they want. A number of glass displays showing historical objects, paintings and drawings from Binzagr's training years are exhibited in the corridor. Entry to the first floor, which functions as an educational centre, is only permitted to women and children. It contains a library for adults and another for children, an Arabic room filled with traditional furniture and objects, the artist's personal studio which also includes her photo archive for visitors, a studio for women's art workshops, a multipurpose room often used for children workshops and for hosting the monthly salon, the artist's private office and a computer room (Figure 174).<sup>760</sup> The artist's personal studio and some of the connecting corridors show other paintings and sketches by the artist, while the multipurpose room and connecting corridor exhibit works by children. The establishment of this museum marked an important stage in Binzagr's career.

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<sup>757</sup> Muhammad Ar-Rusayys, 'The Development of Art Museums and Their Goals: The Inauguration of Safeya Binzagr's Darah', in *A Three-Decade Journey with Saudi Heritage*, ed. Safeya Binzagr (Jeddah: Darat Safeya Binzagr, 1999), 79.

<sup>758</sup> Ibid.

<sup>759</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>760</sup> Ibid.

The most important role of the museum, however, lies in its ability to perpetuate Binzagr's influence over Saudi culture, which will last as long as the collection exists. Binzagr has been aware of its impact since the beginning, and therefore took personal responsibility for the planning and construction of the museum.<sup>761</sup> Her consent was required for every detail during the building process, and even when she had to travel abroad for a long medical treatment, plans and samples of construction material were sent to the hospital for her to choose from.<sup>762</sup> 'I chose the floor tiles, light bulbs, and other things while I was still ill in London,' says Binzagr.<sup>763</sup> Since the inauguration, she has been running the museum directly on a daily basis. Binzagr has many future plans for her museum to increase opportunities to exert influence,<sup>764</sup> not only because the collection makes powerful visual statements,<sup>765</sup> but also because representation involves subjugation.<sup>766</sup> In other words, it puts her in control of the culture and people she represents.

Binzagr's museum has the effect of mediating issues of cultural identity,<sup>767</sup> but only according to her perception of that culture. In a study about the *Te Maori Exhibition* in 1986, at the National Museum of New Zealand, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill demonstrates how this exhibition helped the Maori people, who had limited recorded history, be in

<sup>761</sup> Binzagr, Second personal interview: 'بن زقر: أنا طبيعتي كل شي أحب أسويه بنفسي، أنا كنت اقدر أني أسلمه لشركة ' ويدوني المفتاح..بس مو أنا..أنا كل شيء يعني..أختيار بلاط لمبات- غيره. أنا ديك الفترة كنت مريضة في لندن [...] وأنا وقت البناء غيرت حسب إحتياجاتي، لكن الأساس أنا أدبت الكروكي للمهندس ، أنا أيش أبغى؟ Translation: 'I like to do everything myself, I could have assigned a company to supervise the project and hand me the keys when they finish. However, this is not like me. I had to choose the lighting, the floor tiles, everything! I was ill in [hospital] in London during that time [...] Initially, I gave the architect a sketch to explain what I want, but I had to change a few things during the construction process in order to serve my needs'.

<sup>762</sup> Ibid.

<sup>763</sup> Ibid.

<sup>764</sup> Binzagr, Sixth personal interview, (not recorded).

<sup>765</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 7th ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 23; see also: Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley [Calif.]: University of California Press, 1998), 2–3.

<sup>766</sup> Craig Owens, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power and Culture*, ed. Scott Bryson et al., New Ed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 261.

<sup>767</sup> See a similar discussion but about museums in general in: Gordon Fyfe and Max Ross, 'Decoding the Visitors' Gaze: Rethinking Museum Visiting', in *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World*, ed. Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe (Oxford [etc.]: Blackwell Publishers/The Sociological Review, 1996), 127.

touch with their heritage again.<sup>768</sup> Hooper-Greenhill explained that the identities formed by museum collections ‘are likely to be more firmly established and endure over a long period of time’, especially ‘when there is access to economic, social, and cultural resources’ that will assure the permanence of the collection.<sup>769</sup> Likewise, Saudis needed such a resource to reunite with their cultural heritage, which is provided by Darat Safeya Binzagr. For Binzagr, building a strong identity for her people has been an important goal since the 1960s, and fulfils the needs of other Saudis.<sup>770</sup> Thus, she constructed that culture to reflect a certain class and wealth, and the establishment of the museum changed her role consequently from an artist to a patron. Her sister, Olfet Binzagr, puts this issue into historical perspective, explaining that the urgency for a national identity arose before Saudi Arabia itself was established, as a result of the diversity of ethnic backgrounds dispersed across the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>771</sup> This diversity led to different groups living in isolation, with each town jealously guarding its separate identity and privileges.<sup>772</sup> The townspeople were envious of the Bedouins’ freedom and fearful of their power, yet the Bedouin tribes were ‘unable to unite to subdue and rule the towns’ until they were all united under the rule of the Saud family.<sup>773</sup> Interestingly, Olfet Binzagr considers that Saudis have been in greater danger of losing their identity in modern times than ever before, and feels that the arts offer the solution:

The challenge to the survival of Saudi Arabia is greater now than that faced in the turn of the century. It is no longer a physical danger, but instead is *moral and cultural*. A Saudi Arabian might converse with you about the latest fashion in Paris, or the latest electronic calculator, or racism in America, yet if he is for example a Hijazi tradesman, more often than not he might know little of the local history or customs of the Najd, Asir or Al-Hasa. In pre-Saudi times, history was kept alive for tribesmen by

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<sup>768</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 101.

<sup>769</sup> Ibid.

<sup>770</sup> See: (Chapter 2).

<sup>771</sup> Binzagr, ‘An Historical Perspective’, 14.

<sup>772</sup> Ibid.

<sup>773</sup> Ibid.

poets and their ballads. *Modern Saudi Arabia is in need* [of] social scientists, poets, artists, and writers to portray and preserve the old *as a sound foundation* for the new. *We* Saudi Arabians *need to be re-acquainted* with our social and cultural past, so that from diverse experience *we may create a Saudi whole*. Only then can we survive the onslaught of non-Saudis keeping our books, building our roads, running our machines, directing our bureaucracies, caring for our sick, teaching our young, and providing our entertainment. *Only a socially and culturally integrated Saudi Arabia* can assure a sound environment for its Muslim faith and Arab values, so that they may endure as a monument to our will *to survive and be master over our desert, wealth and destiny*.<sup>774</sup>

This reflects the tensions felt by Binzagr and many of her generation, and highlights the importance of the museum. For them, preserving identity is a matter of life or death, and her art therefore represents a method of survival. Moreover, Darat Safeya Binzagr is particularly important to Saudi women. Museums in general ‘possess a power to shape collective values and social understanding in a decisively important fashion’,<sup>775</sup> and the ability to contribute to knowledge and alter perception is ‘the commodity [they] offer’.<sup>776</sup> Binzagr’s museum offered a new analysis on gender. The focus on women’s role in domestic life, and the neglect of male subjects, changed the general conception of women and helped present them as influential figures in Saudi culture. The artist insists that it was never her intention to highlight the role of women in domestic space over men, and that it was only a matter of coincidence since traditional ceremonies and celebrations always happen in domestic space.<sup>777</sup> This confirms the thesis argument about the artist's desire to celebrate the collective agency of Saudi women by showing its roots. Men often appear doing modest jobs in Binzagr’s work, such as fishermen, shepherds and servants; and on the rare occasions where they are given more attention, they are considered less significant than her female-dominated scenes.<sup>778</sup>

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<sup>774</sup> Ibid., 16. (My emphasis).

<sup>775</sup> Timothy W. Luke, *Museum Politics : Power Plays at the Exhibition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xiii.

<sup>776</sup> Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1995), 2.

<sup>777</sup> Binzagr, Seventh personal interview.

<sup>778</sup> See: (Chapters 3, 5).

Binzagr's museum is equally important to Saudi heritage, which it attempts to interpret, preserve and represent through the medium of an institution. The custom of the ankle bracelet and henna night, the procession of the bride's trousseau, the pounding on mortar in the child's naming ceremony, and fortune telling, alongside many other practices, are all presented through her art and museum as significant civilian and cultural traditions of elite Saudi families. The museum makes them more accepted and embraced, and motivates people to retrieve and reconsider their grandmothers' stories about their marriages, labour, domestic chores, and daily and ritual adornments, as unique aspects of urbanisation. It also raises the historical and financial value of the inherited historical objects related to women's roles over other objects. It is therefore important to look at Binzagr's museum as an effective tool that enabled her to civilize the ritual practices of her culture.<sup>779</sup>

### 6.5.1 Recreating spaces

In 1989, Binzagr started planning her own museum,<sup>780</sup> spurred by the high demand of scholars interested in Saudi heritage to access her work.<sup>781</sup> The latest inventory of the Darat Safeya Binzagr museum shows that more than 150 scholars of different subjects have used her work as reference for their research.<sup>782</sup> It had long been one of Binzagr's dreams to have her paintings hanging in a world-class museum,<sup>783</sup> so she finally decided to take control and create her own historical space. Construction started in 1993, and by

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<sup>779</sup> This idea was inspired by the title of Carol Duncan's book: Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals : Inside Public Art Museums*, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>780</sup> Binzagr, 'Who Am I?', 41.

<sup>781</sup> Binzagr, Fourth personal interview: 'ما هو هذا اللي خلاني أوقف البيع بعد المعرض الثاني، لأنو من البدايات في البيت أنا...'. Translation: 'This what made me decide to abstain from selling my work after the second exhibition. Since I started at home [before exhibiting the work in public], scholars used to contact me...'

<sup>782</sup> Safeya Binzagr, Fifth personal interview, interview by Eiman Elgibreen, 10 June 2013, Scott's Restaurant, London, (not recorded).

<sup>783</sup> See: Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 10.

1995 the museum was complete.<sup>784</sup> The formal inauguration of the museum was delayed for five years because Binzagr was waiting for the then Emir of Mecca, HRH Prince Majid Bin Abdulaziz, to recover from an illness.<sup>785</sup> He paid an informal visit to her museum before he died in 1999,<sup>786</sup> and the following year the museum was inaugurated by the new Emir of Mecca, HRH Prince Abdulmajeed Bin Abdulaziz, the king's brother.<sup>787</sup>

The museum spaces were carefully planned to bring Binzagr's imagined past into reality and to enable visitors to interact with her work. Hence the collection was divided according to subject in separate galleries on the ground floor,<sup>788</sup> so that each gallery could create its own story (Figures 7, 175).<sup>789</sup> She wanted the audience to envision these stories as they entered each separate space,<sup>790</sup> but also to allow it to see the different galleries at once and to choose the one that appealed most. She therefore asked the architect to design an open round space in the centre of the ground floor (see

<sup>784</sup> Binzagr, 'Who Am I?', 41.

<sup>785</sup> Binzagr, Second personal interview: 'طبعاً إفتتاح الدارة.. إحنا شغالين من 95م ضاع علينا خمس سنين بسبب إني كنت حابه الله یرحمه الأمير ماجد یفتتحها، فكان أيامها مریض وجات فترة الإنتقالیة وأنا ما أبغی أفتح إلا بأمیر منطقة، لأنی معارضي كلها بأمیر منطقة'. Translation: 'The opening of the Darah was delayed five years. I wanted Prince Majid to inaugurate it, and we have been active since 1995, but he was sick and then came a transitional period [after his death and before assigning a new Emir] so I had to wait. I was insistance that only a Province Emir [governor] should inaugurate my museum since all my exhibitions were inaugurated by Province Emirs'.

<sup>786</sup> Ibid.: 'مرّوا علیه ناس أنبسطت و دي یعنی شایلاها لأن الأمير ماجد لما جاء من رحلة العلاج قیل لا یتوفی وجاء زارني، وفرحت'. Translation: 'I was delighted by many visits, but one that I will never forget is when Prince Majid came to see the museum after returning from his final medical treatment trip, and before he dies. He came and said: "See Safeya, I came especially for you, but I am sorry I cannot inaugurate the museum" This made me happy'.

<sup>787</sup> Ibid.: 'وطبعاً صار الأمير عبدالمجید و برضو أنه جاء و کرّم و فتح الدارة'. Translation: 'Of course, then they assigned Prince Abdulmajeed and he honoured the Darah with his visit and inauguration'.

<sup>788</sup> Originally, the themes were: nuptial, popular children's traditional games, fishing and hunting, traditional costumes, daily activities, markets, trades and occupations, architectural heritage, preliminary studies and sketches. See: Binzagr, 'Mission of Safeya Binzagr's Darah', 89–105.

<sup>789</sup> Binzagr, Second personal interview: 'أنا أبغاهَا خصوصیة، کل مجموعة لیها غرفتها، حکایتها لوحدها ما یصیر فیهِ'. Translation: 'I wanted to maintain the individuality and separation of each collection. Therefore, each collection has its separate gallery, and tells its own story'.

<sup>790</sup> Ibid.

Figure 173).<sup>791</sup> Allowing this option and creating this experience for the audience was very important for Binzagr.

In addition to the galleries, Binzagr recreated a number of historical spaces in her museum. These can be divided into two groups: firstly, objects that she used as props for her paintings, and secondly, architectural elements that embody historical and symbolic meanings. The objects were either displayed in a designated room, such as the two large galleries dedicated to displaying her rare collection of traditional costumes (Figure 176), and the Arabian sitting room ‘Majlis’ (Figure 177), filled with traditional carpets, furniture, wooden chests, and tea and coffee sets, which act as reminders of *Morning Visit* (Figure 5), *Tea Party* (Figure 35) and many of her other paintings. The other way she displayed traditional objects was to put them in glass cases in the hallway next to the relevant gallery (Figure 178). For example, outside the Nuptials Gallery there are two authentic pairs of bridal slippers: one was from the Ottoman period in Jeddah, and the other was used as a prototype for *The Slipper Carrier* (1969).<sup>792</sup> These two pairs are placed over an embroidered face towel, all of which belong to the bridal trousseau (Figures 179–180). There is also a metal ewer and wash bowl set in the same display case with the slippers, similar to those in the foreground of *Toilette* (1970) (see Figure 181). Interestingly, the design of the display cases is similar to bridal trousseau chests. What makes the objects related to the marriage collection significant is that it remind the audience of the important role a woman played as a delegate of her family in the occasion of a wedding and a start of a new alliance. ‘Women make the far become

<sup>791</sup> Ibid.: ‘أبغى النص...اللي بوقف في النص يشوف الغرف تجذبه ، حتى هو قالي نسويها مساحة ‘. Translation: ‘Binzagr: one of the special requirements I was concerned about is the middle space. I wanted to allow the visitor to have a glimpse of all the galleries when he/she stands in the centre and go to the room that attracts him/her the most. He [the architect] even suggested that we separate the galleries with a partition, but I refused and insisted on the individuality and separation of each collection. Therefore, each collection has its separate gallery, and tells its own story’.

<sup>792</sup> Binzagr, Seventh personal interview. The artist believes that the second is originally Indian though it was part of a Hijazi bride’s trousseau.

closer', or *الحريم يقربوا البعيد*, is an old saying in Jeddah that signifies the power women play in consolidating relations between distant people since men do not leave the family house even after marriage.<sup>793</sup> This is brought about mainly by entering another family through marriage, and by bringing symbolic objects made especially for the wedding as signifiers of the collective power of the family.<sup>794</sup>

By including traditional marriage objects, it could be said that Binzagr is recreating an intimate domestic experience and elevating its cultural and historical value. Since her museum is the only one of its kind in the country, her collection of objects relating to women and domestic life has become the principal cultural representative of Saudi. Kings, such as Juan Carlos of Spain, princes, diplomats, ministers and many other important figures have visited the museum (see Figure 182). This has given Binzagr the authority to represent the status of women in Saudi cultural history, and to influence public opinion about them.

The idea of recreating a traditional cultural experience is not new in Binzagr's life. On the occasion of her younger brother's wedding, she remembers that her older sister, Soraya, made a candle by herself using a large plastic pipe as a mould to give to the wedding singer. According to her, the singer was thrilled to receive the candle and considered the gift a privilege since this custom was no longer performed.<sup>795</sup> 'Only you would do such thing!' the singer said to Soraya, Binzagr's older sister.<sup>796</sup> This story

أحمد باديب، 'جدة: إنها حقاً عائلة محترمة' (102): الحريم يقربوا البعيد، مقال منشور (جدة، 25 مارس 2010)، سلسلة جدة إنها حقاً عائلته محترمة، أرشيف أحمد حسن باديب.

<sup>794</sup> See: (Chapter 3).

<sup>795</sup> Binzagr, Third personal interview: أيام جواز أخويا الصغير كانت - الله يرحمها - أختي بتجيب شمع وبتسيحه، إيش بتسوي؟ الجبرين: أه هي اللي تسويه، أحسب تطلبه من أحد معين يعملها. بن زقر: لا لا هي من الناس بس طبعا ما فيه أحد دحينه، فكانت اللي بتغني حتغني فتحية. الجبرين: هي اللي بسموها توحه؟ بن زقر: إيوه، المهم فعدت وفي النهاية جابت ماسورة بلاستيك ودهنتها بالزيت و صببت وسوت هدا، حطت لها، هي [فتحية] قالت لها: ماكنت أتخيل أني في حياتي في الغناء أحد يسوي لي راس الشمعة هدي. لأنه ما 'عاصرتها كانت في المغنيات اللي قبلها

<sup>796</sup> Ibid.: فقالت لها [فتحية] يعني ماكنت أحلم أنه في حياتي أحد يسوي لي الشمعة لكن ماحد يسويها غير أنتي. الجبرين: ماشاء الله، معناته أختك تحب التراث يمكن هي اللي زرعت فيك. بن زقر: إيوه هي اللي تديني المعلومات، لأنها هي كانت عندها قوة الملاحظة



draws attention to another aspect of Binzagr's museum in terms of recreating spatial experiences induced by its architectural design.

Many of the architectural elements of the museum represent the different sources of Binzagr's authority: her family, her class, and the history of the country, which are also the main sources of identity. For example, the front door of the museum is a replica of the door of her old family house (Figure 183).<sup>797</sup> Binzagr wanted to use the original door, but it was lost when the house was renovated.<sup>798</sup> The design of the windows is based on the traditional lattice style of Jeddah – the *rushaan*, *taga-wa-sheesh* – similar to those in *The Slipper Carrier* and other paintings.<sup>799</sup> The artist also installed a traditional-style fountain at the entrance to the first floor, which partly resembles the one in the background of *Toilette* (Figure 184). Both the windows and the ceramic tiled fountain are signifiers of upper-class status in Jeddah. The building itself was inspired by those in the ancient city of Mada'in Salih (see Figure 185),<sup>800</sup> a site registered in UNESCO's World Heritage List (WHL) located about 750 km north of Jeddah.<sup>801</sup> The site is famous in Islamic culture for being a landmark with miraculous power given by God to the ancient Nabataean tribe, who lived in Mada'in Salih from the first century BC.<sup>802</sup> According to the Qur'an, the city has been inhabited by various tribes, including the Thamudic, from the third millennium BC,<sup>803</sup> which makes it one of the oldest cities in the Arabian Peninsula. The power given to the Nabataeans was to carve huge mountains into houses and tombs. Thus Binzagr was constructing a heritage

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<sup>797</sup> 'About Darat Safeya Binzagr: The Architectural Design', *Darat Safeya Binzagr Website*, 2008, [http://daratsb.com/main\\_e1.htm](http://daratsb.com/main_e1.htm).

<sup>798</sup> Binzagr, Seventh personal interview. The house was finally demolished in 2013.

<sup>799</sup> See: (Chapter 3).

<sup>800</sup> 'About Darat Safeya Binzagr: The Architectural Design'.

<sup>801</sup> *Sites In Saudi Arabia: Registered and Nominated for Registration in the UNESCO World Heritage List* (Riyadh: Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, 2009), 2.

<sup>802</sup> *Al-Hijr (Mada'in Salih) Exhibition: A Saudi Arabian Archaeological Site Candidate for Inscription on the World Heritage List* (Riyadh: Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, 2007), 10.

<sup>803</sup> Ibid.

site, which, like her paintings, drew on different histories, subjects and architecture. To make her museum even more significant, she chose an important location that took her five years and considerable effort to find.<sup>804</sup> Binzagr wanted a large plot of land in the centre of Jeddah that would be accessible to tourists and had its own parking space.<sup>805</sup> This was difficult since Jeddah is a very old and crowded city, but she managed to find a suitable location.

Interestingly, after the establishment of Darat Safeya Binzagr, the artist decided to make the building her home and built a new unit attached to the museum as her private residence (see Figures 172, 174). As such, she recreated a significant representation of her history and re-lived in it. One of the reasons why Binzagr moved into the museum was to protect it from government supervision.<sup>806</sup> She refuses to register it officially, using the excuse that it is a private residence,<sup>807</sup> and even avoids using the word ‘museum’ in its title and in daily conversation so she can run it independently.<sup>808</sup> This decision reflects her autonomous personality and her desire to singly supervise such an influential institution on her own. It also demonstrate how home was a necessity for Binzagr’s authority; the museum had to be *private* and *domestic* in order to maintain its independence.

<sup>804</sup> Ar-Rusayys, ‘The Development of Art Museums and Their Goals’, 79.

<sup>805</sup> Ibid.

<sup>806</sup> Binzagr, Seventh personal interview. The artist explains that she planned to move into the museum right from the beginning, but she did not want to ruin the design of the museum. A few years later, when the second phase of construction started to build the additional costume gallery and the other studio, Binzagr ordered them to build her residence following the same design of the museum but in a smaller size.

<sup>807</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview: Binzagr, First personal interview: ‘عشان ماتكون... أنا أحب أمشي شغلي بنفسي [...] أنا بأقول لهم هذا بيتي الدارة ماسجلتها عشان ليه؟ عشان ماتكون...’. Translation: ‘The Darah [museum] is not registered, do you know why? Because I do not wanted to be under the authority of anyone. I like to run my business by myself [...] I tell them: “This is my home!”’.

<sup>808</sup> Ibid.: ‘عارفة أنا بأحاول قدر ما أستطيع أشيل قولة متحف لكن بتنزل غضباً عني لكن أنا أضطريت عشان لا يدخلوا، أدبته...’. Translation: ‘You know, I try as much as I can, not to use the word “museum” but it slips out of my mouth sometimes. However, in order to make sure that they [authority officials] cannot have access to it, I gave it more privacy. It is my home; I built an additional residency in it so no one can intrude’.

Since the objects, paintings and architecture can be understood in different ways depending on how the museum presents them and how much the audience knows about them from the beginning,<sup>809</sup> there are unlimited chances for the audience to develop new meanings according to their perception of the different displays. Hence the creation of a cultural and historical experience in Binzagr's museum should never be underestimated as décor but rather as a result of careful planning, which Binzagr has done continuously in her career: firstly in her paintings through representing the past, secondly in her books when she explains her work and the stories behind it, thirdly on the walls of her museum, and fourthly when she created other spaces and filled them with historical objects to complement her work. Thus the effect of the museum spaces will continue to grow and vary every time she changes the content or order of the display.

### **6.5.2 Recreating culture**

Binzagr's images and spaces have recreated Saudi culture, reshaped collective memory about the past and guided public appreciation of the value of art and cultural heritage. Moreover, since Darat Safeya Binzagr is still the only art museum in the country, it will continue to play an important role in shaping artistic taste in Saudi Arabia. It is therefore important to examine the performance of the museum to predict how it is likely to influence Saudi art and culture in future.

The collection of Darat Safeya Binzagr is open to everyone for free, but the educational programme is only for women and children, and there are two libraries, one for women and one for children (Figures 186–188). The focus on children is an investment in the future of public culture, whereas privileging women is an attempt to exert control over the current cultural scene. One of the museum's most significant cultural events is the monthly women's salon. This started in the artist's family house

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<sup>809</sup> Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 101.

nine years before the establishment of the museum, and then moved to Darat Safeya Binzagr.<sup>810</sup> The idea for a salon was born when a group of ten Saudi women artists complained about discrimination by the Saudi Arabian Society for Art and Culture in Jeddah.<sup>811</sup> As a consequence, Abdulhalim Radwi, who was in charge of the society at the time, asked Binzagr to organise a meeting in her house to discuss their concerns and pass on to him their demands.<sup>812</sup> By the end of the first meeting, Binzagr decided it would be a good idea if they continued to meet and discuss their issues and any other subjects.<sup>813</sup> She therefore suggested that they meet again the following month, and thereafter the salon became regular.<sup>814</sup> This initiative gave Binzagr a leading role in the art scene and increased her influence. What makes this salon special is that its effect extends to other areas of knowledge: topics of discussion vary from art and poetry to industrial design, history of slave music,<sup>815</sup> drama and many others.<sup>816</sup> Since men are excluded from the salon, women are able to control the knowledge exchanged. Consequently, Binzagr's role is now that of patron rather than custodian of Saudi art and culture. This role is reinforced by the other activities and facilities she offers

<sup>810</sup> Binzagr, 'Who Am I?', 41.

<sup>811</sup> Binzagr, First personal interview: 'شوفي أسمعيني، صالوني الأدبي من قبل الدارة، أنا أحب الاستمرارية ما أحب الإعلان، إيش سبب الصالون؟ طبعاً فيه عندنا هنا تواصل شوية بس تواصل بمناكفات فكان الله يرحمه 'الرضوي' مسئول في الجمعية وعن المعارض أشتكوا الفنانات أنهم هاضمينهم، فقال لي أجمعني بيهم وشوفي إيش بيغوا، فطلبتهم عندي ماكانوا كثير يعني 10 كدا، جو عندي إيش طلباتكم؟ إيش تبغوا؟، طيب أنا ماعندي مانع نجتمع شهرياً وتشوفوا إيش طلباتكم، المهم وهما خارجين، هيا متى تبغوا تجتمعوا ثاني؟ والله مش عارفة فيه إيه، فيه إيه، هذا أتولد منه الصالون حقي الفني [...] وصار شهرياً كل أول شهر، كان في البيت وأنتقل في الدارة، ولما أنتقل للدارة كان صالون (صفية بن زقر الثقافي)، فاستمر حتى في الدعوات الفنية Translation: 'Listen to me, my salon proceeded my museum. I do not like publicity because I love to remain constant. The idea of the salon came after an incident. There was a struggle between some women artists with the Saudi Art Society. Therefore, the artist Radhwi, who was in charge of the society at that time, asked me to have a meeting with these artists in my house and send him a report of their claims and demands. There were not that many; they were about ten artists. After meeting them and knowing their needs, I suggested that we meet again next month to update the society about their requirements. And this is how the salon was born [...] It was in the beginning of every month at our house, and then was moved to the Darah when was established and became Safeya Binzagr Monthly Salon and continued its activity up to this date'.

<sup>812</sup> Ibid.

<sup>813</sup> Ibid.

<sup>814</sup> Ibid.

<sup>815</sup> Such as an Arabic lecture about slavery in Islamic and pre-Islamic times by Hind Bagaffar. See: 'Event Calendar: محاضرة القيان في العصر الجاهلي والإسلامي', *Darat Safeya Binzagr Website*, 5 December 2010, <http://www.daratsb.com/daratsbdsb/news/63.html>.

<sup>816</sup> Such as: Hind Bagaffar, 'The History of Theatre' (presented at the Safeya Binzagr Monthly Salon, Darat Safeya Binzagr, Jeddah, 6 January 2013); 'Courses and Education: Educational Lectures', *Darat Safeya Binzagr Website*, 2008, [http://daratsb.com/eng/learn/main\\_e\\_learn\\_3.php](http://daratsb.com/eng/learn/main_e_learn_3.php) see also:

through her museum, such as art classes for children of 6–11 years and for females from the age of 12,<sup>817</sup> and an annual contest of children's art to encourage their interest in Saudi heritage.<sup>818</sup> A library with audio-visual material for women and children, in addition to an archive of old pictures and documents, are also offered for free.<sup>819</sup> These facilities answer the pressing demands that Saudi art scholars have expressed in their studies.<sup>820</sup>

Jan Marontate notes that 'Museums of the twenty-first century are seen, and see themselves, as active agents in the politics of public culture.'<sup>821</sup> Hence the value of Binzagr's work should never be underestimated as an innocent representation of the past, or as limited to its ethnic value, as described by Mohammad Fadhl in Binzagr's second book.<sup>822</sup> In reality, it works as a two-sided gate: one side is open to the past to retrieve and rewrite the history of Saudi women, as Binzagr sees it; the other side opens to the future to influence their position in years to come. Henrietta Lidchi sees a link between the rise of ethnographic museums and the expansion of Western nations, on account of their methods of representing other cultures.<sup>823</sup> Lidchi asserts that

[m]useums do not simply issue objective descriptions or form logical assemblages; they generate representations and attribute value and meaning in line with certain respective or classificatory schemes which are historically specific. They do not so

<sup>817</sup> 'Courses and Education: Courses', *Darat Safeya Binzagr Website*, 2008, [http://daratsb.com/eng/learn/main\\_e\\_learn.php](http://daratsb.com/eng/learn/main_e_learn.php).

<sup>818</sup> 'Courses and Education: Annual Events', *Darat Safeya Binzagr Website*, 2008, [http://daratsb.com/eng/learn/main\\_e\\_learn\\_4.php](http://daratsb.com/eng/learn/main_e_learn_4.php).

<sup>819</sup> Binzagr, Second personal interview: 'لأنه أضفت غرف، صار بعدين دحين عندنا بعد لما كبرت المكتبة صار فيه حركة في المكتبة، كانت حته صغيرة نقلتها هنا ونقلت الغرفة العربية لهنالك، وعملت توسعة، وسويت مكتبة أطفال [...] انفتحت الدارة لكن إحنا كنا نشغالين محاضرات ودروس'. Translate: 'Because I added more rooms. When the library collection grew bigger I had to move things around. Therefore I moved it from the smaller area to this area, and transferred the Arabic room to library's old space. I also made an expansion and added a children's library [...] the Darah was inaugurated [in 2000] but we were already offering classes and talks'.

<sup>820</sup> See: (Chapters 1, 2).

<sup>821</sup> Jan Marontate, 'Museums and the Constitution of Culture', in *The Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Culture*, ed. Mark D Jacobs and Nancy Weiss Hanrahan (Malden, MA [etc.]: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 286.

<sup>822</sup> See: Fadhl, 'Works of Safeya Binzagr', 45; see also: (Chapter 5).

<sup>823</sup> See: Henrietta Lidchi, 'The Poetics and the Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures', in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: SAGE Publications, 1997), 135.

much reflect the world through objects as use them to mobilize representations of the world past and present.<sup>824</sup>

Hence museums are cultural authorities.<sup>825</sup> This also applies to the link between Binzagr's museum and the rise in status of Saudi women in cultural discourse.<sup>826</sup> But for Darat Safeya Binzagr to maintain this role, it has to constantly update programmes and change its annual contests and exhibitions to attract and stay close to its audience. Therefore the themes of its annual contests and exhibitions are always changing.<sup>827</sup> However, the process of the annual art contest for children remains fixed: every year Binzagr pre-orders manufactured white fibreglass models, which the children are asked to decorate with their own designs (see Figures 189–190), but the shape of the model and the information related to it change. First, Binzagr designs special contest pamphlets which explains the theme of the contest and provides historical background. Participants draw their designs in a special place on the application form and send it to the museum, which then invites 60 nominated children to meet Binzagr and work for a full day at her space to draw their designs on the fibreglass models.<sup>828</sup> Topics of the last seven years have been: the traditional fan (2007),<sup>829</sup> *Al-Mihrab* or the mosque niche (2008),<sup>830</sup> Arabic dress (2009),<sup>831</sup> the Arabic lamp (2010),<sup>832</sup> the carpet (2011),<sup>833</sup> the

<sup>824</sup> Ibid., 160. (My emphasis).

<sup>825</sup> Marontate, 'Museums and the Constitution of Culture', 287.

<sup>826</sup> See for example: Bahry, 'The New Saudi Woman'.

<sup>827</sup> Such as: the exhibition of traditional antique handheld fans, '25-29 May, 2013' Darat Safeya Binzagr, Jeddah. Source: Binzagr, Fifth personal interview, (not recorded).

<sup>828</sup> The current scholar witnessed the preparation of the 2013 competition, and these steps were explained to her by the artist during her visit to Darat Safeya Binzagr in January 2013.

<sup>829</sup> 'Event Calendar, Children Section: "Le Mall Show" Photos of Annual Art Competition – 2007', *Darat Safeya Binzagr Website*, 23 July 2007, <http://www.daratsb.com/daratsbdsb/Children-Section/15.html>.

<sup>830</sup> 'المحراب: مسابقة تشكيلية للناشئة', *جريدة الرياض*, 15 فبراير 2008، العدد 14480، <http://www.alriyadh.com/2008/02/15/article318081.html>.

<sup>831</sup> 'الرداء: موضوع المسابقة السنوية لإدارة صفية بن زقر للناشئة', *جريدة الرياض*, 27 فبراير 2009، العدد 1485، <http://www.alriyadh.com/2009/02/27/article412508.html>.

<sup>832</sup> 'Event Calendar: معرض مسابقة الدارة السنوية للناشئين', *Darat Safeya Binzagr Website*, 8 April 2010, <http://www.daratsb.com/daratsbdsb/news/54.html>.

<sup>833</sup> 'Event Calendar: مسابقة دارة صفية بن زقر السجادة إعلان النتائج', *Darat Safeya Binzagr Website*, 12 May 2011, <http://www.daratsb.com/daratsbdsb/news/68.html>.

saddle (2012),<sup>834</sup> and *Al-Sharbah* or the clay jug (2013).<sup>835</sup> Apart from the saddle, these objects relate to domestic experience and therefore present domestic life as the main focus of Saudi cultural heritage.

## 6.6 Conclusion

Binzagr's desire to create a visual culture for Saudi Arabia forced her to negotiate her audience to gain their support at different stages of her career. Therefore, she conducted her work, career choices and her self-representations to accord with the ideological system of her audience. Therefore, winning family support was the most important step towards her success considering that she was working in traditional society that was threatened by any attempt to break its solidarity. This made Binzagr's family her first audience to negotiate, and she was able to win their support by celebrating their legacy through her art and lending them a new method of self-representation. From that point and with the support of her family, Binzagr carried her plans to persuade the local and international audience with different plans that involve branding and self-fashioning strategies. These plans led her all the way to establish her private museum.

The overview of Binzagr's museum as a collection and as a performance space demonstrates her influence over Saudi culture, as well as her chances of increasing that influence in future. But Darat Safeya Binzagr also represents not just individual but also the collective agency of Saudi women. The female images in the museum compensate for both the absence of Saudi women from visual culture, and the absence of Saudi culture from cultural discourse in general.

<sup>834</sup> ياسر الجاروشة، 'ستون مشاركاً يتنافسون على مسابقة الفنانة التشكيلية صفية بن زقر اليوم'، *جريدة الرياض*، 12 أبريل 2012، العدد 15998 edition, <http://www.alriyadh.com/2012/04/12/article726465.html>.

<sup>835</sup> 'Event Calendar, Children's Section: 2013 الشربة بن زقر - مسابقة دارة صفية بن زقر', *Darat Safeya Binzagr Website*, 21 April 2013, <http://www.daratsb.com/daratsbdsb/Children-Section/78.html>.





## Chapter 7: Conclusion

The previous pages have shown how Binzagr managed to introduce important changes to Saudi art and culture through a process of subtle negotiation. She not only made images of Saudi women more visible, but also presented their domestic life and traditional roles as fundamental to Saudi cultural heritage, to convince her audience that women represent the true wealth of the nation. Moreover, she was able to make these changes without clashing with the socio-religious norms of her society. Binzagr became powerful by showing that she could surpass all the obstacles she faced in her career as a woman artist, and by formalising her perspective on Saudi culture through her museum and books.

Binzagr's domestic scenes represent her authority over these issues most clearly, as she depended on her ability to record spaces to which male artists were denied access. Her portraiture demonstrates her ability to push the socio-religious boundaries of representational art and her sources of empowerment. Her local subjects also manifest her understanding of the culture from within, making her perspective unquestionable by Saudi scholars of different fields who treated her work as scientific documents of the past. Finally, her museum highlights her authority over Saudi art, cultural heritage and history among other stakeholders, such as those with whom she collaborates and who benefit from its collections. It also creates new audience of women and children as a result of its educational programme since it is a space of representation and knowledge production.

Binzagr has used her art to negotiate many issues, but has also relied on an important non-visual negotiation strategy to support her art. This was her books, especially the historical and religious arguments that she asked her sister, Olfet Binzagr,

to explain in a separate chapter.<sup>836</sup> This strategy is effective in many conservative Islamic societies. Social scientist Fatima Mernissi believes that in order for progressive individuals of both sexes to make changes in Islamic countries ‘where religion is not separate from the state’, they must ‘base their political claims on religious history’.<sup>837</sup> According to Mernissi’s observations, it is ‘the only weapon they can use to fight for human rights in general, and women’s rights in particular’.<sup>838</sup>

This approach applies to any attempt to achieve social and cultural progress in Saudi Arabia, and is therefore also relevant to political issues. Saudi art scholars link the development of visual arts in the country to the government decision in 1945 to introduce art classes to public schools.<sup>839</sup> However, what has been overlooked is how they made this acceptable to the masses. All major decisions by the Saudi government at the time needed approval from the *Ulama*, a group of religious scholars who worked closely with the government as advisors and who later formed what is called the Council of the Assembly of Senior Ulama, a formal advisory council that continues to play this role for the government.<sup>840</sup> Religion is an important aspect of Saudi identity and those who aspire to change must first prove that their progressive aims will not affect the piety of the masses. As Bhabha explains, in order to maintain their sense of cultural stability, people in times of cultural uncertainty need assurance that their

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<sup>836</sup> Olfet Binzagr studied Middle Eastern politics at St Antony’s College, Oxford University in the mid-1970s. See: Muhammad Abdel Wahhab et al., ‘Research at Oxford: Some Abstracts’, *Bulletin (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)* 3, no. 1 (1 January 1976): 42–45; Binzagr, ‘An Historical Perspective’.

<sup>837</sup> Mernissi, ‘Women in Muslim History: Traditional Perspectives and New Strategies’, 338.

<sup>838</sup> Ibid.

<sup>839</sup> 25. الرصيصة، تاريخ الفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية، (Chapters 1 and 2).

<sup>840</sup> See: Abir, *Saudi Arabia*, 3–14. Religion has long been a strong part of the identity of people in the Arabian Peninsula. As a consequence, the founder of Saudi Arabia had to form an alliance with the leader of the religious reform movement, Mohammad Bin Abdulwahhab, and to present himself as a protector of this movement in order to convince tribal leaders and town Emirs of the Arabian Peninsula to accept and support him as king. Since then, all state laws and decisions must first get approval from senior religious scholars to assure the public that they do not conflict with religious devotion.

traditional beliefs will survive,<sup>841</sup> and religious arguments are therefore a form of protection. These debates enliven both long-forgotten literature and modern discourse.

What helped the Binzagr, and many progressive individuals in Saudi Arabia, is that Islamic texts have always been open to new interpretation, though people need to learn how to interpret such texts. Moreover, Islamic history is filled with social, political and religious debates and stories that can be used to negotiate modern ideas, but the negotiator must have access to the literature to retrieve them. This is why Islamic scholars appear to have such influence over public opinion in Saudi Arabia, as they are trained to do both. For example, in Egypt, Islamic scholars responded to people's request to permit human images by opening the debate until they reached common ground;<sup>842</sup> and in Saudi they were the ones who permitted the use of photography on certain occasions as a security measure.<sup>843</sup>

Binzagr and other artists who studied art abroad and introduced new practices to their country needed the help of others to push boundaries. It could therefore be said that the progress of art in Saudi Arabia started when the number of people with access to in-depth religious studies increased, and not, as other Saudi scholars suggest, when the government introduced art classes.<sup>844</sup> Until 1930, the traditional school system in Jeddah taught basic subjects that did not encourage critical thinking, such as reciting the Qur'an, and reading, writing and calculating.<sup>845</sup> From 1930, more complex religious subjects were added to the curriculum of certain private schools in the Hijaz region, such as *التفسير*, 'religious text interpretation', *الفقه*, 'Fiqh or Islamic jurisprudence', *الحديث*,

<sup>841</sup> See: Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 51.

<sup>842</sup> See: (Chapter 4).

<sup>843</sup> (Chapter 5).

<sup>844</sup> See for example: 25، *الرصيد، تاريخ الفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية*.

<sup>845</sup> See: 196، 191–189، 185، *المجلد الأول: موسوعة تاريخ مدينة جدة*.

the prophet's sayings, and creative writing.<sup>846</sup> Following the addition of these subjects, schools started to introduce a few secular subjects, including drawing and Arabic calligraphy.<sup>847</sup> Subsequently, some of these new classes were cancelled and then reintroduced later.<sup>848</sup> This instability suggests that when the public had access to complex religious subjects, the school curriculum became a subject of debate. It could therefore be said that the decision taken by the government in 1945 to introduce art classes to newly established schools was a result of the negotiation private schools had previously gone through with the public to renew their curriculum.<sup>849</sup> This highlights the role of upper-class families in driving progress in Jeddah. However, their influence became even greater when progressive projects were given support by the state's oil revenues.<sup>850</sup> Rising wealth, the growth of public schools and authorisation by the government all helped to increase the number of people supporting change.

Since the structure of Saudi Arabia is based on the alliances of its indigenous social groups, including settled tribes, Bedouins, and urban who were mainly immigrants it was important for the upper class to show that the ruling family supported their proposals in order to gain approval from the rest of the alliance. This explains what Olfet Binzagr means when she says the foundation of the Saudi state created a 'secure environment' for the enjoyment of art.<sup>851</sup> The alliance of political leaders, including the royal family, tribal leaders and town Emirs, with religious scholars created the

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<sup>846</sup> Ibid., 198–196:المجلد الأول.

<sup>847</sup> Ibid., 199–198:المجلد الأول. English language, science, geography, and history were some of the other classes added during this period.

<sup>848</sup> 24 الرصييص، تاريخ الفن التشكيلي في المملكة العربية السعودية، 24. The Khaireiah Arafeiah School in Mecca was the first school to introduce art classes to its curriculum in 1908, before the establishment of Saudi Arabia, which were then cancelled in 1930; however, soon afterwards private schools in Jeddah started to add drawing classes to their curriculum, see: 201–196:المجلد الأول، الموسوعة تاريخ مدينة جدة، الأنصاري، موسوعة تاريخ مدينة جدة، 201–196:المجلد الأول.

<sup>849</sup> Private schools were first established by individuals who had had exposure to different educational systems abroad, through travelling and studying in other countries such as Egypt. See: الأنصاري، موسوعة تاريخ مدينة جدة، 450–436:المجلد الأول، 201–185:المجلد الأول، طرابلسي، جدة.. حكاية مدينة، 450–436:المجلد الأول.

<sup>850</sup> See: Altorki, *Women in Saudi Arabia*, 9, for more information about the role of this class in Jeddah in pushing forward progress in Saudi Arabia.

<sup>851</sup> Binzagr, 'An Historical Perspective', 18.

opportunity to bring about change on a wide scale. Contrary to autonomy in Western culture, solidarity among both men and women in Saudi Arabia is key to power. The more individuals are attached to their social group the more influential they become. This is why Binzagr has often focused on showing the communal aspect of society in her paintings, and involves her family in all her new projects.<sup>852</sup> The support of one's group and its acquaintances is key to gaining the trust of the rest.

The progress of Saudi women's rights followed the same pattern. Efforts by Binzagr and the first generation of upper-class women educated abroad were not enough to exert wide-ranging change, and they therefore needed the support of middle-class women of their own generation to expand their influence. Thus the establishment of girls' schools in Saudi Arabia helped women make more consistent progress, as they learned how to make their ambitions accord with the ideology of society. Socio-political scholar, Loay Bahri, observes that it was Saudi women who led progress after the establishment of girls' schools in 1960, regardless of these institutions' Islamic structure.<sup>853</sup>

The fact that change could only be achieved by negotiation and the support of other groups did not mean that Binzagr had to compromise. Rather, it drove her to invent new methods of expressing herself through tradition. According to Homi Bhabha, negotiation involves reformulating ideas and objectives by creating a third

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<sup>852</sup> See: (Chapter 6).

<sup>853</sup> In: Bahry, 'The New Saudi Woman', 502–503, Bahry gives many examples of Saudi women who used channels of negotiation in their work, and he also explains the position of the Saudi government to liberals and religious groups in the country and how their attitude changed from time to time; A similar case in: Cherry, *Painting Women*, 26–27, where Deborah Cherry demonstrates how women who voiced their demands for equal opportunities in education and work in England during the 1840s were mostly the daughters of Unitarian and Quaker families. They were motivated by the 'interlocking discourses of radical politics, civil rights, feminism and Unitarianism', which had been initially established by many of their parents.

space for hybrid solutions.<sup>854</sup> In Binzagr's case, it was her interest in traditional subjects that helped her to pursue her aims.<sup>855</sup>

It is important at this stage to re-write the chronology of Binzagr's work which Fadhl suggested earlier.<sup>856</sup> As Binzagr's agency increased in the art world, the involvement of her family in her projects declined. This can be observed by following the progress of her career (Figure 191), which can be divided into three main stages. The first stage (1968–76) was her early career in Jeddah, when the family provided the greatest support on many levels: representing her at the opening of her exhibitions, using her work to promote the family legacy, and drawing on their connections to invite high-profile figures to support her activities and increase interest in her work.<sup>857</sup> During this stage, Binzagr started many collections, but the one that received most response from the public was that depicting traditional heritage scenes, such as ceremonial celebrations and daily life in old Jeddah. While producing this series, Binzagr was alert to the socio-religious limitations of image making, and worked her way round the prohibition by making faces less defined; since most of the paintings show large groups of figures engaged in a ceremony, there was no need to focus on their features. She also gave the figures unrealistic body proportions, and enlivened the scenes with vibrant colours and rich interior details that reflected her unique perception of the socio-economic status of women in old Jeddah. Moreover, many of the paintings depict theatrical scenes as a result of Binzagr's dependency on oral history, and she also made several works with more defined faces, including *Zabun* (1968) and one of *King*

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<sup>854</sup> Rutherford, 'The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha', 216.

<sup>855</sup> See: (Chapters 4 and 5).

<sup>856</sup> See: (Chapter 4).

<sup>857</sup> See: (Chapter 6).

*Faisal*.<sup>858</sup> These portraits represented an early attempt by Binzagr to push the boundaries of image making on a smaller scale.

During this stage, the media and techniques she used were quite traditional, with oil on canvas the most frequent medium, and the ceremonial paintings were the largest. In these years, she also focused on building her career at a local level. Hence most of her exhibitions were in Saudi apart from one at the Woodstock Gallery in London, in 1973. This was important as it introduced Binzagr to her local audience and gave her a solid platform on which to build later achievements. By the end of this stage (1967), Binzagr was able to attend the opening of her own exhibition for the first time in her career.<sup>859</sup>

The second stage (1976–78) was when Binzagr studied at St Martin's School of Art in London. This was a transitional phase and a turning point in her career as she prepared to take on bigger projects after completing her training, and at this point her family's involvement in her work receded. Binzagr occupied herself in collecting material from libraries and archives, observing the function of museums and planning new methods of self-representation. She also experimented with new media and techniques in her painting, and with life-drawing and printmaking classes. The work she made at this stage consisted of ethnographic portraits of veiled Bedouin women and architectural scenes reminiscent of Orientalist etchings and watercolours, as well as a small group of oils depicting people in the streets, markets and gardens of London. Although this last work has never been put on display, it had an important influence on Binzagr's style and encouraged her to focus on the present rather than the past.<sup>860</sup> By the end of this stage (1978), Binzagr was writing her first book, in collaboration with her

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<sup>858</sup> (Chapters 4 and 5).

<sup>859</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 11.

<sup>860</sup> See: (Chapter 5).

sister Olfet, which expressed many of their concerns regarding the future of Saudi heritage, art and society. It also touched on more sensitive subjects, such as their interpretation of Islam's position towards representational art, in order to prepare the local audience for Binzagr's new collection.

The third stage (1979–2000) saw the establishment of Binzagr's art and cultural authority. During these years, she focused on self-promotion and expanding her activities locally and internationally. Family support was restricted to providing professional assistance for her marketing and branding strategies, which started with the publication of her first book, then with the reproduction of her work and curation of her three solo exhibitions in London, Paris and Geneva, in 1980.<sup>861</sup>

Although Binzagr did not get the support she hoped for from her international audience,<sup>862</sup> her success in Saudi Arabia encouraged her to start planning her museum. The design process started in 1989, and in 1995 the museum opened its doors to Binzagr's friends who shared her interest in Saudi heritage, culture and art.<sup>863</sup> The same year (1995), Binzagr formalised her monthly salon by transferring it from her family house to the museum,<sup>864</sup> which gave her and other women a new voice and greater freedom to discuss subjects of interest.

The key collections of the third stage are noticeably different from those produced previously. At the beginning of this period, she created individual ethnographic portraits based on certain themes, such as motherhood and the traditional crafts practised by the working classes. These differ from the earlier portraits in many ways: they are pastel drawings on paper and the figures have defined faces and realistic

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<sup>861</sup> (Appendix 7).

<sup>862</sup> Binzagr, *Saudi Arabia*, 10.

<sup>863</sup> Binzagr, 'Who Am I?', 41.

<sup>864</sup> Ibid.



proportions. Each figure is also isolated against a plain background to focus attention on the figure. What makes Binzagr's work unique at this stage is that it represents people from the present, and several works reveal the names of sitters. This collection subsequently developed into variations on small and medium-size individual and group ethnographic portraits illustrating traditional dress, which use watercolour and printmaking techniques in addition to oil and pastel. Binzagr completed some of her old collections during this period and started a number of new ones, such as children's traditional games, but these were yet to be included in the promotion plans of her museum.

In 1999, Binzagr finished her second book, and the President General of Youth Welfare, HRH Prince Faisal bin Fahad, the king's son, wrote its preface.<sup>865</sup> Then in 2000, the museum was inaugurated formally, and since that date Binzagr has been consumed in planning and supervising the museum's activities. As an expert in the Saudi art market, she also provides professional services to many organisations that are considering buying Saudi art or nominating Saudi artists for projects.<sup>866</sup>

This study has examined the gradual rise of Binzagr's status and social and professional influence, as well the diminishing role of her family as she expanded her authority and gained the trust of the public. By presenting the artist's views on her career and society, the research has also helped explain many conflicting ideas about how ambitious women artists function in conservative societies, and offered a new reading for certain themes and visual codes in Binzagr's work. It would be interesting to know if other female artists in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the GCC countries have similar feelings and memories about their society and traditional gender roles. If a

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<sup>865</sup> Binzagr, *A Three-Decade Journey with Saudi Heritage*, 11. Prince Faisal bin Fahad died four months before the official inauguration of the museum, so Binzagr included a separate obituary in the Arabic edition of her book.

<sup>866</sup> The consultation services are private and the clients do not want their names to be involved in the current study. However, the current scholar has witnessed herself the process of a few of these projects during her visits to the museum and learned about some old ones from her conversation with the artist.

consensus or pattern is discovered, then art historians might change their perspectives on women's art from the Arab region. Comparison between the works of male and female Saudi artists of the same generation, and their perspectives on space, gender and power, could also provide valuable information, since men are excluded from the domestic sphere in Saudi Arabia. Another potentially useful topic to explore might be the effects on Saudi artists of identity crisis, as well as the work of women artists living in conservative eras in the West, such as those in France and Britain from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. Crucially, these women must also have employed strategies of negotiation and support systems to achieve their goals.

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