

**The Mosaic of a Globalised Arab**  
Misk Cross-Culture Youth Project  
Penpal submission  
Eman AlFires & Mariem Aoun  
2025

## RECITALS

**WHEREAS**, Mariem Aoun is a law graduate currently pursuing a Master's degree in International Development, and Eman Al Fires is a law student;

Price Sultan University ↓ SoAS university

**WHEREAS**, the Parties have individually created written and creative works ("Works") addressing topics such as heritage, oral traditions, language, identity, and the Arab diaspora;

**WHEREAS**, the Parties desire to combine, merge, and jointly present their Works in a coherent and structured format, ensuring that each Party's contributions are properly recognised;

**WHEREAS**, the Parties seek to define their roles, responsibilities, intellectual property rights, and procedures for collaboration, merging of content, and dispute resolution in connection with their joint project;

**WHEREAS**, the Parties aim to produce a comprehensive and structured body of work for academic, creative, or public presentation purposes, while respecting each party's creative and intellectual input;

**NOW, THEREFORE**, in consideration of the mutual promises contained herein, and for other good and valuable consideration, the Parties agree to collaborate according to the terms set forth in this Agreement.

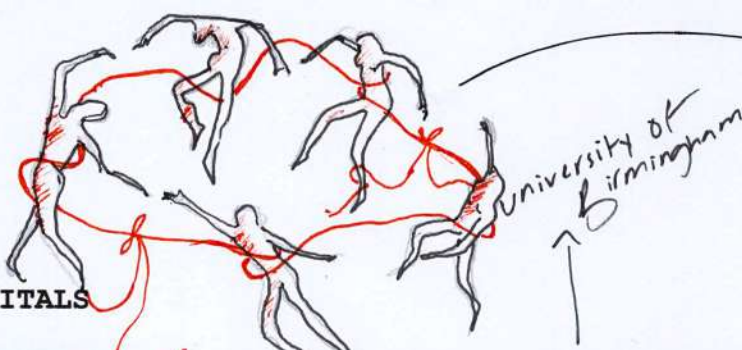
## THE PARTIES COVENANT AND AGREE AS FOLLOWS:

The words and expressions commencing with a capital letter used in this Agreement shall be interpreted in accordance with Schedule 0 (*Definitions and Interpretation*).

### 1. HERITAGE AND BELONGING

#### 1.1. Who We Are if Not Our Heritage

1.1.1. According to UNESCO, the domain of Oral Traditions and Expressions encompasses spoken



Our ideas  
throughout the  
months

Both parties  
are part-time  
Artists





According to who?

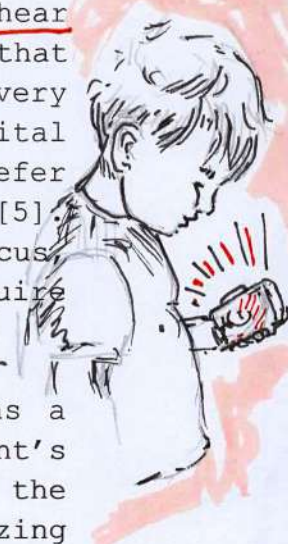
conversations in the majlis, the preservation of such an intangible tradition will undoubtedly be a challenge. Whilst modernization is an undeniable necessity for the development of the country, it poses a threat to the series of intangible traditions [1]. As cities grow, it becomes increasingly difficult to hold on to non-physical customs, especially to those that rely on face-to-face exchange, time, and intergenerational trust [2]. **Elders**, who once carried the responsibility of passing down oral traditions as both education and entertainment, now find themselves with a much smaller audience. **A child in Riyadh**, for example, may never hear the same wedding chants or mourning prayers that still echo in rural gatherings. In almost every household, our youth, shaped by fast digital culture and shortened attention spans, prefer short-form media and quick dopamine hits [5]. This leaves little room for the patience, focus, cadence, and depth that oral traditions require [2].

But why?

Paradox ???

1.1.4.

Saudi society continues to value heritage as a core of national identity. The government's Vision 2030 strategy explicitly highlights the importance of cultural preservation, recognizing that heritage is not a relic of the past, but a living, breathing foundation for future development [4]. International bodies like UNESCO echo this urgency, stressing that oral traditions must be safeguarded, not just archived, since they play "a crucial part in keeping cultures alive" [3]. The recognition of Alheda'a, the Bedouin camel-calling chants, as part of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List is one such example. What was once on the brink of disappearance is now revived through awareness and pride [4].



1.1.5.- The cultural dynamics at play are therefore twofold: first, a strong pride in tradition and identity, and second, a generational drift toward globalized and digital ways of expression. In the past, oral traditions were preserved in community gatherings such as the majlis, where words carried social and cultural weight, memories were passed on, and values were shared. Today, those same traditions must find new life in digital platforms, classrooms, and cultural programs if they are to resonate and succeed with our youth. In essence, the cultural context of Saudi Arabia presents both the challenge and the opportunity: to ensure that traditions, with a history of wisdom, poetry, and identity, are not silenced by modernization, but transformed into living practices that adapt, endure, and continue to shape the cultural soul of the nation [4].

Unpopular opinion:-  
Poem writing is a dying art

Again, who's modernisation?

Multifaceted concept of Heritage



## 1.2. Heritage: Roots That Remember More Than Us

The concept of heritage is multifaceted, extending far beyond a simple definition of inherited property. To fully understand it, one must examine the term through three distinct lenses: the objective, the critical scholarly perspective, and the subjective.

1.2.1. The objective and universal view of heritage focuses on its quantifiable and legally defined aspects. This perspective is most clearly articulated by international bodies like the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), which categorises heritage into distinct, protectable forms. Heritage can be broadly divided into two main categories:

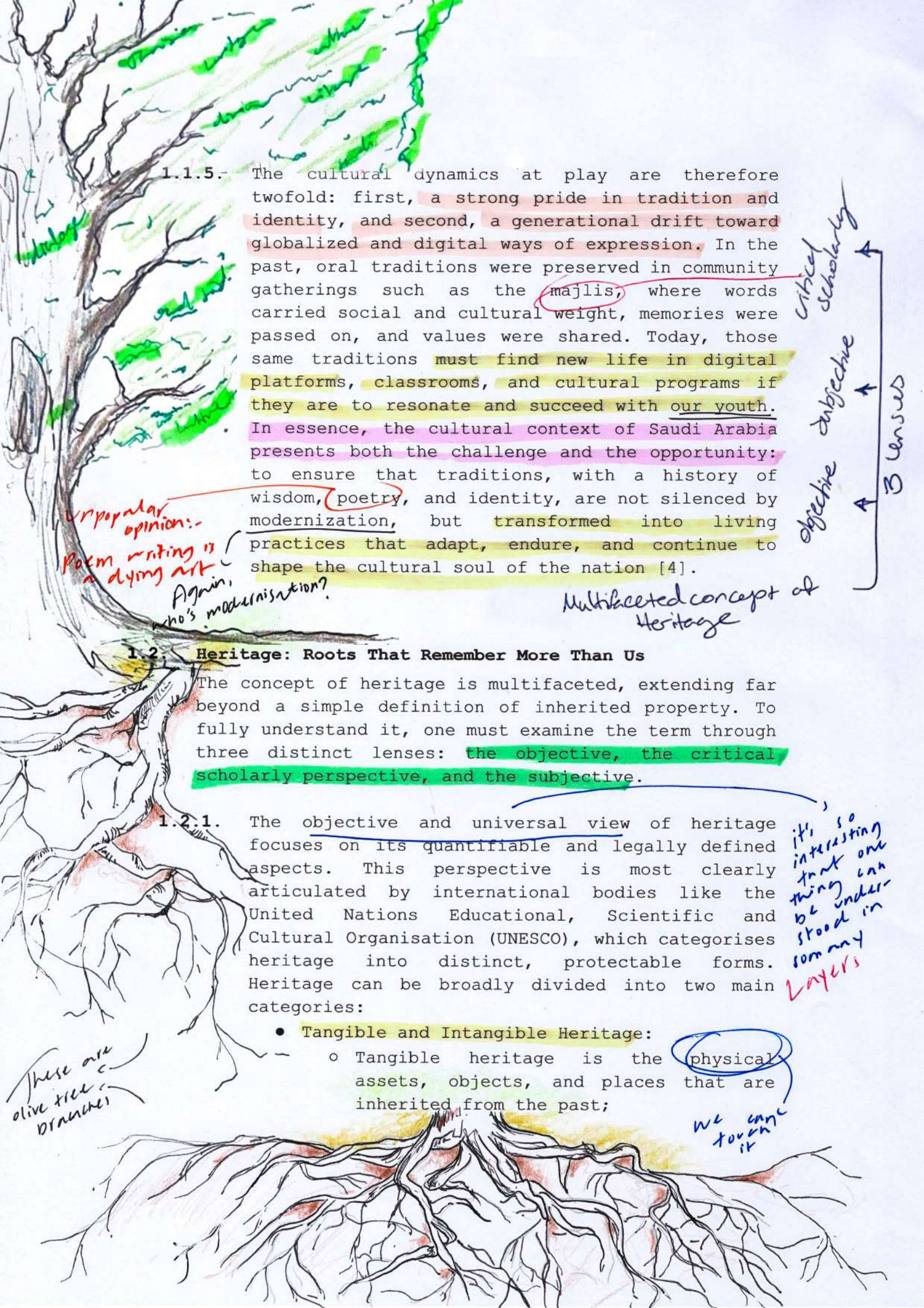
- Tangible and Intangible Heritage:

- Tangible heritage is the physical assets, objects, and places that are inherited from the past;

it's so interesting that one thing can be understood in so many layers

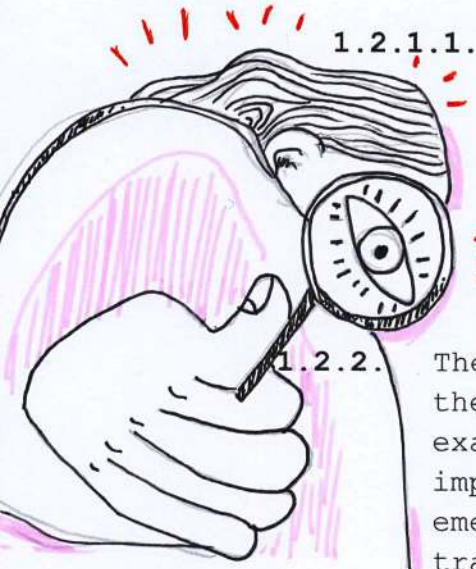
We can't touch it

These are olive tree branches





o while **intangible** is the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills that communities recognise as part of their cultural heritage. **This contract will mainly focus on this aspect of heritage.**



1.2.1.1. The most formal and widely accepted objective definition is found in the 1972 UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. This legal framework defines heritage based on its "outstanding universal value" from a point of view ranging from history, art, science, or aesthetics.

1.2.2. The scholarly perspective, particularly through the lens of Critical Heritage Studies (CHS), examines the power dynamics and political implications of heritage construction. CHS emerged in the late 20th century to challenge the traditional, often state-led, and Eurocentric approaches to heritage conservation. Key arguments and scholars include:

A part of me thinks that this is exaggerated, but another knows how dangerous it could be. I grew with girls who went through Female Genital Mutilation. This part of some cultures. It's horrible in my opinion. Others however, might praise it. Mothers do this to their daughters. So maybe it is not neutral.

1.2.2.1. **Challenging Neutrality:** CHS rejects the idea that heritage selection is a neutral act. It views **heritage as a political, cultural, and social phenomenon that is deeply intertwined with issues of power, identity, and exclusion.**



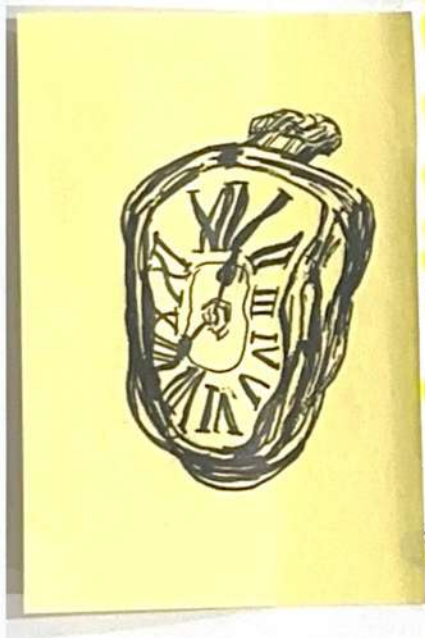
**The "Heritage Crusade":** Scholars like David Lowenthal and Laura Jane Smith have been foundational. Lowenthal's work, such as *The Past is a Foreign Country* and *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, is central to understanding **heritage as a constructed narrative, often fabricated or exaggerated for present-day purposes.**



*I don't fully agree! half in, half out*

1.2.2.3. **The Politics of Exclusion:** CHS questions whose past is being preserved and whose is





interesting point, considering the less uncivilised you're considered

What does this mean

being forgotten or marginalised. It highlights how official heritage narratives often serve to legitimise the power of dominant groups, while neglecting the heritage of minorities, indigenous peoples, and subaltern communities.



**Democratisation and Participation:** A major aim of CHS is the democratisation of heritage and the development of participatory heritage practices. This involves shifting the focus from top-down expert management to bottom-up community engagement, allowing diverse voices to define and manage their own heritage.

As it should be. I can't believe this is considered revolutionary

### 1.3. The Subjective Dimension and Diaspora Perspective

1.3.1. Heritage is far more complicated than any legal definition, any objective measure, or any checklist could capture. Unlike a legal document or a static object, heritage is not an inherent quality of a place, an artefact, or even a tradition. It is a living, breathing social and cultural construction, a process of selecting, interpreting, and valuing the past in the present. Heritage is how we connect with the generations that came before us, the ones who have allowed us to be the "one in a million," carrying their stories not just in our genes, but in our spirit. Heritage is rooted in the present. It is not just about the past for its own sake, but about what the present generation chooses to remember and preserve. It is a resource for identity, and a compass that helps us understand who we are and where we relatively belong.

These are still important

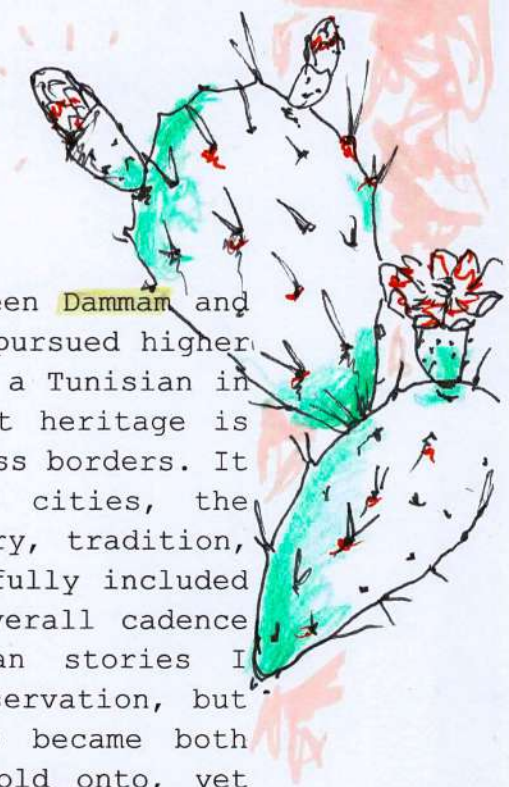
Not necessarily, but could be

However, the meanings of heritage are never fixed; they are defined by social, cultural, and individual processes.





Does the passport do me any good? I don't feel Tunisian.



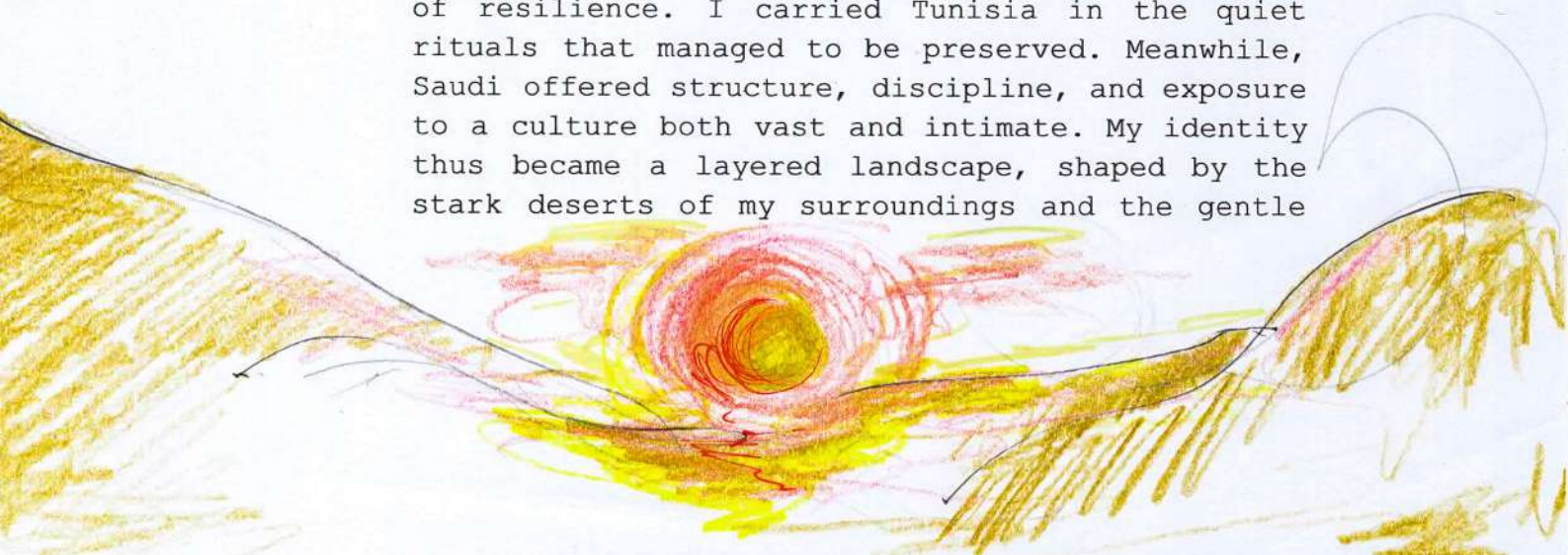
I was born in Kuwait, raised between Dammam and Riyadh in Saudi Arabia, and later pursued higher education in the UK. Growing up as a Tunisian in Saudi Arabia, I learned early that heritage is not merely inherited, or shared across borders. It is complicated. The deserts, the cities, the streets, all were steeped in history, tradition, and Arab culture, yet none of it fully included me. My accent, my gestures, and overall cadence marked me as other. The Tunisian stories I carried were intimate acts of preservation, but they also set me apart. Heritage became both refuge and burden, something to hold onto, yet also a reminder of my difference.

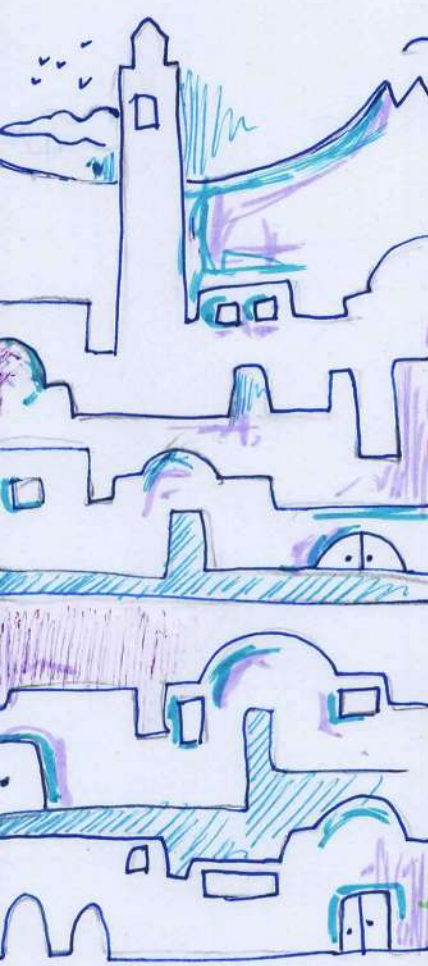


Returning to Tunisia in my early 20s did not resolve the tension. Here, the land acknowledged me by blood and history, yet my upbringing abroad left a layer of estrangement. I belonged in some ways, yet not entirely. This dual estrangement has shaped the way I perceive identity. Heritage is not merely inherited; it must be performed, understood, and lived. It must find space in the community, in shared rituals, in oral traditions and collective memory. In Saudi Arabia, I clung to Tunisia through family stories and the preservation of customs within our household, but these acts were small islands of belonging in a sea that never fully recognised me. In Tunisia, I confronted a reversed estrangement; the physical land acknowledged me, yet the social rhythms, the unspoken cultural codes, and the intimate sense of belonging were elusive.

Hand-drawn illustration of a passport cover. The cover is titled "REPUBLIC OF TUNIS" and "الجمهورية التونسية". It features a portrait of a woman and various fields for personal information, including "Surname", "Given Name", "Nationality", "Tunisian / Tunisien", "Date of Birth", "Place of Birth", "Date of Issue", "Date of Expiry", "Issued in", and "Issued at". The passport is drawn in a sketchy, hand-drawn style with green and black outlines.

Living between sand and sea also became a source of resilience. I carried Tunisia in the quiet rituals that managed to be preserved. Meanwhile, Saudi offered structure, discipline, and exposure to a culture both vast and intimate. My identity thus became a layered landscape, shaped by the stark deserts of my surroundings and the gentle





coastline of my imagination, each teaching me patience, humility, and the importance of cultural memory. In Tunisia, I confronted the sea of belonging I had always longed for, but discovered that land alone does not guarantee acceptance. The land that did not claim me in my youth taught me to carry my heritage within myself, resilient and portable. The land that is mine by blood, though initially alien, revealed the depth of connection that memory and culture can create.

For all the times I felt like I had nothing to do with where I grew up, I see its imprint in my life every day. It's in the subtle ways it marked me as different that has shaped who I am. The heritage I carry is not limited to Tunisia alone; it is layered, hybrid, and complex. And I know that the generation to come will carry this part of me forward, a quiet inheritance of deserts and dunes, stories and rituals, that I once thought were only the heritage of another place.



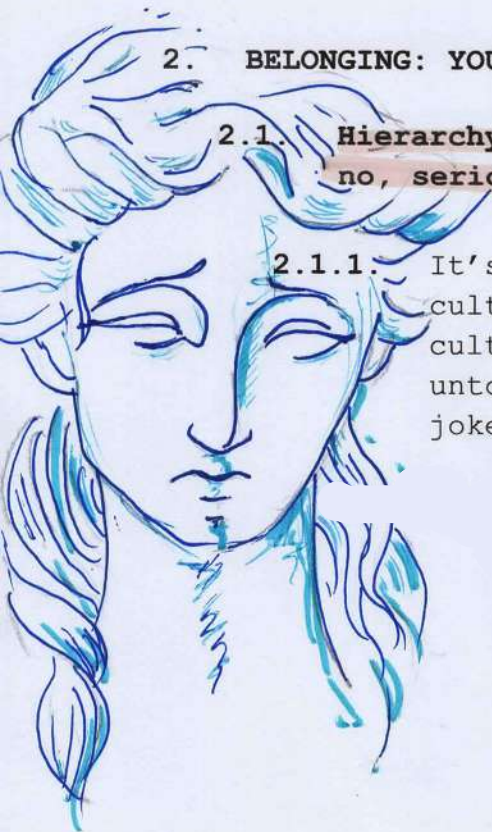
*I'm confused*

1.4.2. A similar reflection from Party A's experience can be seen in "Schedule 1"

**2. BELONGING: YOU'RE NOT PHOENICIAN, BUT THAT'S OKAY**

2.1. **Hierarchy of culture: My culture is not your costume... no, seriously**

2.1.1. It's fascinating and infuriating to see how culture is valued differently in our world. Some cultures are preserved, celebrated, and almost untouchable. Others, however, are flattened into jokes, caricatures, or costumes.





### 3.1.1.1.1. A Personal Vendetta Against My Tongue

18

As someone who was educated in Private International Baccalaureate schools and raised in the Western world, "born and bred" in Chelsea, London, I carry a native English tongue. My personal Haladie. A great asset, a greater disadvantage. At age 10, when I moved back to the "homeland" I had never called home before, I felt behind, when I once felt so ahead. My language; which was very well established, was suddenly unwarranted. To accommodate, I started to learn Arabic, but I came across this fact "to achieve fluency learning must begin before 10 years of age" (Smith, 2018) [10]. With a dimmed north star and 10 years later, my pursuit of a second "native" language is still advancing.

[10]

So ahead of the curve, it became a sphere -T.S



→ peering a degree in Law 70% taught in Arabic!

The struggle is real

# POEMS

## Schedule 1

### Eman's POV: Diaspora poem

#### Diaspora

So many boxes that I can't be boxed in  
Belong to so many but the connections feel thin  
I struggle to hold onto so many strings  
Four from my parents and two from within  
From heritage to experience the juxtaposition  
I am so much more than my composition



## Schedule 2

### Eman's POV: Poem on Language

#### My Landmarks, The River By The Mountain

I'm asked to speak, something so natural, so instinctual.

The mecca of my face, I trace it like a ritual.

I can speak, polished, well articulated, well rehearsed.

The first thing I see, I thought I was cursed.

But to speak in the tongue I was born with, not the one I raised,

And to live with the nose I was gifted, uncensored, unerased.

A far more challenging feat, one that comes with unwelcome  
stutters, uncertain cadence.

Angular, and hooked, uninspired by the chisel that waves good  
riddance.

Accompanied by a shameful heat, an overwhelming lack on my end.

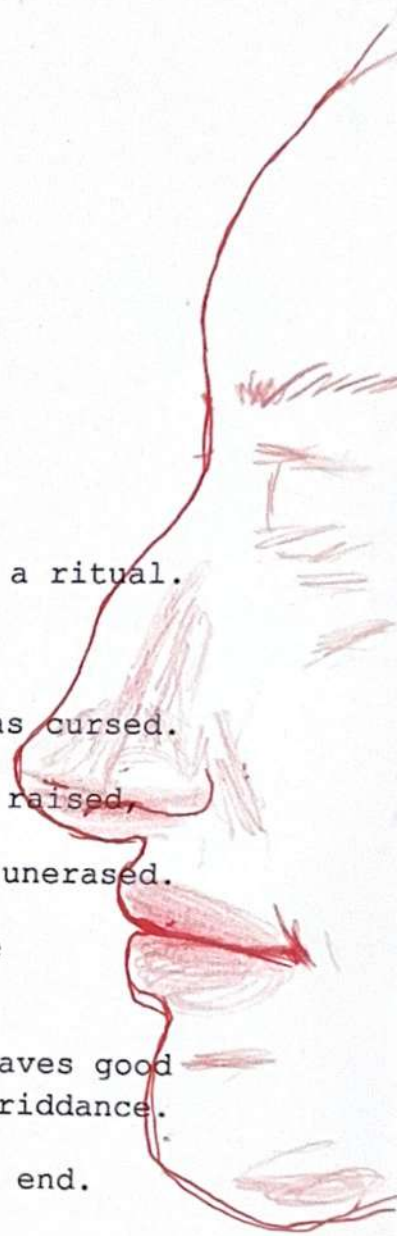
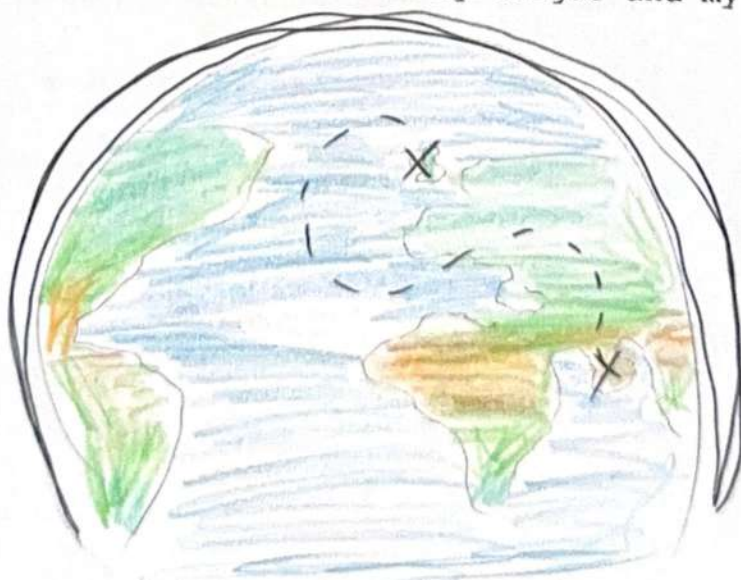
Loud, proud, and telling, there's nothing here to mend.

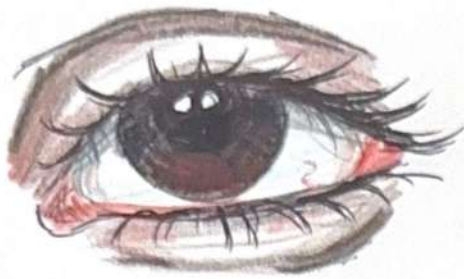
Two storeys, my tongue lives beneath my nose,

Two stories they tell, you tell which I chose

I find that for neighbours so close,

There are thousands of miles between my tongue and my nose.





### Schedule 3

#### Eman's POV: Poem on Eyes

##### Built-in Kolidescopes

Of facial features, far and wide

There is one place where truth resides -

And no not in the atmosphere,

The truth lies in the eyes, I fear

Though you may search, and find the stars,

In desert skies, in hues of mars,

A chestnut rouge, or honey gold,

An arch of depth, dark and charcoaled.

A subtle fold, a downwards tilt

A look from one, to make one wilt

A language, scripture, holy, true.

A reverent mixture, safe from view.

Wide, rich, capsulated skies

There are worlds behind our eyes.

