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ETHNOMUSICOLOGICAL RESEARCH ON INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE PRESERVATION IN OMAN

by

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ABSTRACT

Cultural heritage (CH) is considered a precious gift of humankind that nations and communities strive to safeguard for future generations. A recent turn in CH perception from tangible objects and property to the intangible cultural artifacts and knowledge has caused the need to develop new tools for adequate capturing, evaluation and preservation of such CH elements. One of the most efficient and commonly used methods of ICH safeguarding used worldwide, and in Oman in particular, is archivisation. However, musical ICH is one of the most ephemeral and subjective living forms of human culture that escapes precise capturing without the consideration of context of its production; the process is also incomplete without participation of the bearers of living tradition. How a government arranges ICH archiving efforts often determines the inclusivity, fairness and comprehensiveness of ICH safeguarding measures. Therefore, this ethnomusicological study focuses on the archivisation efforts in Oman – a country with a rich, diverse and turbulent geopolitical past and vibrant cultural heritage unifying many intertwining and overlapping traditions.

My broad ethnomusicological inquiry touches upon the current state of musical ICH safeguarding through archivisation in the state of Oman, as seen from the competing perspectives of institutional and grassroots archivists, as well as the Omani community members and musicians who operate as living tradition's bearers and promoters. The most significant player is the government, which sets the ICH safeguarding agenda, allocates budgets to organisations concerned with archiving and determines the archive-worthy elements of the country's musical heritage. My primary area of interest was how governmental officials envision the process of ICH safeguarding, what measures they put in place to conduct ICH safeguarding activities and what ICH elements they cover in their efforts. The research also examined how these initiatives align with or are complemented by grassroots activists' efforts to create a comprehensive, representative complex of musical archives.

Another significant and presently understudied force contributing to ICH archiving and fair representation of all cultures living in Oman are grassroots archivists. These are amateurs and enthusiasts who select heritage to archive in their immediate surroundings, travel to musical festivals or compile social media archives and collections. My study uncovered a unique complementary dimension that grassroots archivists add to the process of Omani musical ICH archivisation along with the centralised and well-funded governmental initiatives. The findings suggest that the Omani work on musical heritage collection, archivisation and promotion to national and international audiences is well-established, consistent and organised, with many notable gains in this area that showcase unique Omani legacy and contribute to modern Omani identity and nation-building efforts. At the same time, grassroots archivists fill the gaps in outreach and bottom-up perspective on musical ICH evaluation that limit governmental initiatives. This way, grassroots and governmental musical ICH archiving processes work in tandem to create a strong musical legacy of old musical traditions, revived and rethought by the modern generations, conserved for successive generations and archived for international tourists and broader intercultural exchanges.

The central part of my research examined the process of ICH archiving and the challenges that numerous participants encounter. The interviewed archivists revealed numerous bottlenecks in the ICH archivisation process, from technical equipment to access to rural communities with unique musical traditions. A separate concern was the problem of music decontextualization during archiving and the potential issue of old records' vulnerability. My interviewees also repeatedly noted the modernisation and globalisation pressures that pose additional threats to traditional music.

My findings point to the complex landscape of musical ICH determination and its varied roles for different actors. The meanings associated with traditional Omani music are diverse, ranging from instrumental ones of an economic asset and a tourist attraction to living experience-embedded, part of the Omani identity and family ties.

The dissertation uncovered numerous challenges that archivists face in the process of their work on the Omani ICH cataloguing. Yet, it also discovered many successes in this field, giving hope that Omani traditions are given sufficient attention in the modern state, with much work being done to pass that legacy to forthcoming generations and share it with tourists and the international audience.

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I want to thank my son Aziz, who joined me when I started my PhD, for giving me unlimited happiness and pleasure. He was and still is the source of inspiration and influence. Practising motherhood was one of the strongest challenges during PhD, but I could turn this challenge into a strong motivation to continue and succeed. Finally, I feel fortunate to have had the honour of studying at the University of Birmingham. This experience has provided me with the opportunity to collaborate with exceptional individuals and access the resources necessary for achieving success.

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GLOSSARY

- Al Aazi: a genre of pride and the genre of praise. It is the genre of poetic recitation without intonation or singing. It is an individual art undertaken by a creative poet.

- Aldwasa: a genre of singing that accompanies the separation of wheat and barley grains from their spikes by hitting them with palm leaves or thick sticks to the rhythm of singing and hitting the stick.

- Aljedad: Simple songs are played as fresh dates are harvested throughout the summer. The tunes can be used in various ways depending on the poetry.

- Altahan: Singing performed by women on the movement of the palm or the mill to grind wheat, wheat, corn, or mink (small peas).

- Altaseef: songs intended to accompany the barley and wheat harvesting in the summer. A soloist often performs them, but occasionally, a group will repeat the same material after the soloist. The quick pace of Altaseef sets it apart, and it is replete with gratitude and adoration for God's bounties.

- Al Ayyala: Singing and movement performance by men on wedding occasions, national holidays and tourism festivals in the governorates of Al Dhahirah, Al Buraimi and Al Batinah, accompanied by Omani percussion instruments.

- Al Bar'ah: A men's musical genre for all wedding occasions in Dhofar, accompanied by many Omani percussion instruments.

- Al Bargham: is a trumpet made from the antlers of an antler or an oryx. It is a basic instrument in many Omani traditional music. It is a melodic instrument with limited vocal space that cannot produce more than two tones.

- Dan Dan: Women singing at weddings in the Al Batinah, Al Dhahirah, Al Sharqiya and Al Dakhiliyah regions, accompanying percussive musical instruments such as Al Kasir and Al Rahmani.

- Jam/Yam: A marine shell opens from its side or upper end, which is the hole in which it is blown. This instrument only produces one or two tonal sounds, often used to regulate the rhythm in the Omani music genre.

- Al Kasir: is the drum with a high-pitched voice that is smaller than Al Rahmani. Its artistic function is to emphasise and colour the particular rhythmic style. Typically, sheepskin is used for this drum's skin.
- Al Kozak: A genre of singing among the Baluchis, performed by women accompanied by trumpet, Al Kasir, Al Rahmani and a tank. There are two types of Al Kozak: standing and sitting. Al Kozak is widely practised in Baloch social events, such as weddings, as in the state of Barka in the Al Batinah region.
- Al Liwa: Singing and movement performance by men and women in Muscat and Al Batinah; it has many types and is practised in different ways everywhere. Many percussive Omani musical instruments accompany Al Liwa.
- Al Madama: Singing and movement performance by men in front of the beach for entertainment and national holidays in the coastal states of the governorates of Al Sharqiyah, Muscat and Al Batinah. Many percussion instruments accompany Al Madama.
- Al Midan: A genre practised for entertainment, socialising, and poetic discussions between poets or folk medicine.
- Misundu: A drum of African origin, a delegation to Oman with the returnees from the extension of the Omani Empire on the eastern coast of Africa and the adjacent islands. It is a drum with one covering on its broader end, and it is usually made of cow or bull skin and, in some cases, camel skin. This cladding is attached to the body of the drum by wooden pegs. It has several different types.
- Al Nahma: the singing of the sailors on board the ship while performing the marine works in Sur, Al Batinah and Musandam.
- Al Nirouz: An annual festive procession on the occasion of the end of the hot season and the return to the coastal villages, in which a large number of women, men and children participate, and in which there are many activities practised in Qurayyat in Muscat.
- Al Rababa: A stringed instrument with a bow and one string, it was played in the past in the southern region, accompanying a dance named after the musical

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instrument. The rebab is an instrument from Yemen that became extinct in Oman not long ago.

- Al Raboba: Singing and movement performance by men and women to celebrate wedding occasions, national celebrations or entertainment, practised in Dhofar Governorate.

- Al Rahmani is a substantial drum of various sizes whose artistic function is to emphasise the rich sound of artistic percussion and to carry out the fundamental beating in most traditional Omani music. Al Rahmani drum is coated in goat skin to produce a distinctively deep sound.

- Al Razfa: Singing and movement performance by men at weddings and national celebrations in Al Dhahirah, Al Buraimi and Al Batinah, usually without musical instruments.

- Al Razha is the genre of courage, the genre of the sword, and the genre of poetry. Al Razha technically consists of four basic types that respond to social needs. All types contain the same Omani musical instruments, and the difference is in the speed of performing the rhythmic beat and placing them at the performance, whether as a group or lines.

- Al Ruwah: A showy movement performance accompanied by singing with a fixed melody and beating of drums, performed by men and women on wedding occasions and national holidays. It is practised in the Musandam Governorate.

- Al Sadar: its Al Ruwah genre, which is practised at noon.

- Al Seerwan: Singing and movement performance by Baloch men and women on occasions such as weddings, national holidays and tourist festivals in a circular way, moving slowly in the middle of which the singer and the musicians.

- Al Sharah: Singing and movement performance by men and women on special occasions and folk medicine. It is practised in Sur city, accompanied by Al Kasir and Al Rahmani.

- Shilat Al Hamul is a song, also referred to as the song of porters, and it has traditionally been performed by seaside Omanis while loading the ship with goods.

- Shlah: a test performed by an individual or a group; there is a special Shlah for every Omani occasion.
- Al Shobani is singing performed by men on land for entertainment or board the ship while doing marine work. Al Shobani is a singing procession with three traditional drums: Misundu, Al Kasir Al Rahmani, and Al Bargham.
- Al Sirah: Al Ruwah genre, which is practised in the morning.
- Al Siriya: its Al Ruwah genre, which is practised in the evening.
- Al Sawt: Singing and movement performance performed by men at weddings, national holidays and entertainment. This genre is practised in various states and governorates of Oman.
- Sunray: This instrument consists of a double plectrum and a trumpet. It is made of wood and metal. It has six equal round holes. It is used in the Al Batinah, Al Sharqiya and Muscat governorates.
- Al Taghrooda: Singing on the back of a camel while moving, performed by an individual or a group of men, and does not contain musical instruments.
- Al Tambourine: Singing and movement performance by men and women to treat a person who is believed to be afflicted with jinn in the Sur city, and also performed for entertainment in national celebrations and tourism festivals.
- Tanak is an empty metal plate on which two wooden tools are struck, emitting a distinct metallic sound. It is used in Al Sharqiyah, Muscat and Al Batinah.
- Qassaba: A wind musical instrument made of a metal tube with seven round and equal holes on the upper face and an eighth hole on the lower face. It was used in Dhofar by the famous family of Bayt Tawfiq.
- Wanh: Sad singing performed by men and women in gatherings and entertainment without accompanying musical instruments.
- Al Zamat: It is a match between two teams of men who entertain themselves at night in some Al Batinah region. The match is held between two wheels of Al-Manjoor, the winner of which is the one with the best sound and the sweetest melody heard at the farthest distance.

- Zaffat Alkeetha: Singing and movement performance performed by women on the occasion of planting the Kida plant in the Al Dakhiliyah and Al Batinah governorates. Musical instruments are often not used.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

My journey with this dissertation started several years ago with one idea that lingered in my mind. I was walking along the street in my hometown in Oman and saw an old man playing qassaba (flute). The sound was soft, like a rustling of the wind in tree leaves, and it made me stop and listen, forgetting about my business. The melody was catchy and remained in my mind for many days. However, as time passed, I realised that the details of that performance slipped my mind, and there was no way I could keep the memory of it fresh. I did not know the song's name or the man who performed it. This situation made me think about the fragility and transience of traditional music that is not recorded and popularised like popular music. I still feel sad about not recording the song I heard and perceiving it as a personal loss that touched my heart but disappeared forever. After a few weeks, I started teaching in the music department at Sultan Qaboos University. One of my courses was to introduce non-musicians to the basic concepts of Western, Arab, and Omani music through an elective course. I noticed a gap and scarcity in the archives of traditional Omani music. To address this, I began teaching through the Twitter platform (now X), using a dedicated hashtag for the course. I encouraged students to participate weekly through this hashtag, discussing what we covered in the lectures and sharing traditional musical practices they observed around them in their villages. I observed the students' and the community's engagement, which helped enrich the hashtag. This interaction eventually led me to formulate my research idea.

Since then, I have been lucky to discover a whole new world of traditional music archivisation. I hope my research into this topic will help preserve it and allow traditional music heritage to become a permanent part of Omani's lives. I still do not lose hope that as I explore the world of traditional music archives of Oman, I will be able to find that long-forgotten tune that brought me to this research path.

1.1 Background and Context of the Study

Music is one of the most elusive types of ICH, which constitutes a significant proportion of elements inscribed on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) list (Broclain et al. 2019). Traditional music is inseparable from protected cultural practices, including dances, celebrations, rituals, poetry and know-how (Broclain et al. 2019). Music such as Jordanian singing and dancing practice of *as-samer*, Serbian singing to the accompaniment of the *gusle*, Jamaican reggae music, Greek *rebetiko*, and many other traditional music practices encompass 'spiritual' aspects of human nature and serve as a valuable tool for understanding a diversity of human experiences (Broclain et al. 2019). Musical traditions are 'repositories and organic inventory systems for the Indigenous living heritage', so their protection has immense socio-cultural significance (Gwerevende and Mthombeni 2023, 399).

Unfortunately, intangible cultural heritage, particularly traditional music, faces numerous threats in the increasingly globalising world. A great part of ICH belongs to tribes and ethnicities that face assimilation with the mainstream culture, which occurs through state-supported laws and policies that aim at creating a homogeneous citizenry (Eichler 2020). Moreover, urbanisation, international tourism, mass media and the spread of worldwide information networks undermined the resilience of cultural practices by promoting indigenous communities' rapid social, cultural and economic transformations incompatible with traditional lifestyles and practices (Gwerevende and Mthombeni 2023). Threats to ICH also come from less obvious processes, such as multiculturalism, which cause society's disdain and disinterest in slowly disappearing ICH (Eichler 2020).

As an Omanian citizen interested in preserving traditional music, I have been very concerned about musical practices dying out because the bearers of the tradition cannot pass down their knowledge to the younger generations (Eichler 2020). When the last senior performers of a certain musical tradition pass away, the treasure of musical art is often forgotten and lost forever (Kuang and He 2022).

Coupled with younger people's disdain and decreasing interest in ICH, this cultural and demographic shift poses a significant threat to centuries-long ICH (Eichler 2020). I noticed this problem while exploring traditional music recordings online and seeing how little attention and appreciation they sometimes get despite their uniqueness and extraordinary value for our national identity.

Furthermore, traditional music, closely connected to traditional practices and rites, may become obsolete and unpopular as these practices are less and less relevant to modern people's lives (Gwerevende and Mthombeni 2023). Cultural practices vanish because of the introduction of new materials and devices that replace material heritage, limiting the possibilities of preserving respective intangible heritage such as music. These changes include, among others, different means of communication (e.g., mobile phones instead of written paper letters) and the emergence of new forms of entertainment that appeal to younger generations more than traditional ones (Eichler 2020). Even the culture of ICH transmission reflected in teaching practices changes. Teachers and students today do not have a close relationship of discipleship and mentorship, which impedes ICH transmission because knowledge about instrument-building processes and practising music is better transmitted in a one-on-one, more intimate setting (Eichler 2020).

In addition, traditional music practices face the risk of being detached from their cultural milieu and original meaning, adopting other functions in the process of adaptation to modern reality (Eichler 2020). Whether or not this process damages the ICH is debatable, particularly from the perspective of modern ethnomusicology, which acknowledges the natural change and decay of musical traditions and calls for examining what constitutes music viability and sustainability (Grant 2012). However, one cannot deny the necessity of understanding how ICH and music change and what preservation methods can better reflect this change. As traditional music becomes an object of preservation through recording (audio-visual tools), archivisation and commercialisation, it catalyses new relations 'between the tangibility and intangibility of musical experience' and It helps reconsider the variety

of actors who make ICH protection possible in the modern world (Broclain et al. 2019, 9).

1.1.1 Dilemmas and Challenges of ICH Preservation

The threats to ICH listed above are numerous and serious, so people engaged in ICH preservation, such as policymakers, scholars, archivists, and musicians, are faced with the challenging and responsible task of finding ways to preserve and popularise heritage most efficiently and meaningfully. It is important to note at this point that preservations, or safeguarding, of ICH are understood in this dissertation as measures aimed at ensuring its viability. In other words, preservation does not seek to freeze musical forms, revive archaic practices, or create multimedia data for archives. Rather, it aims to help ICH be practised and transmitted within the community to remain a living tradition (UNESCO 2007). The challenge of ICH preservation consists in acknowledging and pursuing this real purpose and finding means to sustain the living musical tradition rather than a silent archive frozen in time.

One of the main points reflected in this dissertation is that technology is by far the greatest contributor to contemporary ICH preservation. Advanced digital recording tools allow archivists to make high-quality recordings and ensure their sustainable preservation in digital archives. A variety of tools for creating and storing traditional music electronically are available to everyone: video and audio editing software, website builders and social media – the opportunities for participating in ICH preservation are endless (Alieva et al. 2019; Giglitto et al. 2021; Kan 2022). Digital media help disseminate information about music events, thus popularising traditional music and engaging the community in an unprecedented, shared heritage celebration (Torwali and Troy 2022). However, while undoubtedly expanding possibilities for traditional music preservation, technology poses challenges, disrupting institutionalised, scholarly approaches to organising, producing and capturing the value of traditional music (Centorrino et al. 2022). The emergence of the 'do-it-yourself' music archives movement is a great example of how technology

disrupts ICH preservation, but the implications of this process are yet to be discovered (Cuervo 2018).

Numerous practical and legal challenges also make ICH preservation difficult. Archivists must make archives accessible, sustainable and consistent, but this task requires constantly upgrading the technological capabilities of archives, safeguarding them from destruction (e.g., by natural disasters) and enhancing file management systems (British Library 2023; Smithsonian Institution Archives 2023). ICH preservation in archives and its popularisation (e.g., through mass media) also faces the risk of unauthorised use and illegal reproduction of musical material, whereas its legal status and ownership further complicate the preservation process, as origins of traditional music are difficult to identify (Borrissova 2010; Inawat 2015).

Grassroots and private archives tend to face more practical challenges. They are fragmented and often lack funding, which affects their scientific value and sustainability in terms of long-term survival because of issues with quality, accuracy and systematisation. (Viken 2017). Grassroots archives are also often ignored by the government and do not receive proper funding and human resources, so the data they collect risks being lost and forgotten (Viken 2017). Since such grassroots initiatives evolve outside institutional frameworks and without professional intervention, they may not meet the archivisation standards, but they can play an important role in constructing social memory through ICH popularisation (Lučić 2023). Thus, the main challenge is determining the contribution of grassroots archives to ICH preservation and utilising their strengths to the maximum to complement governmental efforts in this regard.

Choosing what ICH material deserves preservation is also a topic of heated debate, which is inextricably linked to the role of power and governmental policies in ICH preservation. Policies for safeguarding ICH in the specific country/region are developed to preserve cultural diversity, but they are inevitably governed by the powerful and may not represent the voices of the small, most vulnerable cultures and peoples. In addition, the cultural heritage of musical traditions from other regions

(e.g., African cultural heritage in Oman) tends to be ignored by the institutional and grassroots archivists, reproducing the existing power relations and heritage notions. The process of ICH preservation is thus very politicised and non-inclusive (Chan 2023). As a result, tensions emerge between the national 'authorised heritage discourse' and diverse heritage-making and preservation practices (Su 2021).

Moreover, national policies for revitalising ICH may focus more on building national identity and strong nationhood at the expense of popularising non-dominating cultural traditions. The failure to share power in ICH preservation may result in local communities being underrepresented and uninvolved in safeguarding their heritage (Chan 2023). Archivists' task is to manoeuvre these challenges and add more equity and diversity in ICH archive-making and preservation, which is not always possible because institutionalised archiving is largely policy-driven.

ICH's potential for transformation and commercial exploitation is another challenge worth mentioning (UNESCO 2007). Although archiving itself is distanced from commodification (Vilotijevic 2019), the music itself is subject to ongoing change, making it hard to distinguish 'original' music from its tourist- and commercial-focused forms and even raising the question of whether such distinction can be made in the first place in the context of always-evolving ICH. Since promoting traditional music for tourism and commercial purposes has become a frequent and globally widespread practice, archivists may face the challenge of navigating the changing traditional music repertoires, practices and traditions (D'Agostino 2020).

Another essential point of discussion is ICH decontextualisation during its digital recording or reproduction. As noted by Meirelles (2004), Unsworth (2004) and Conway (2009), among others, the digitalisation of ICH masks and distorts the visual cues and deprives the ICH items of the essential context and atmosphere in which the user could extract its meaning. The same relates to the artificial recording environment that decontextualises cultural practices and makes them less natural and staged (Felix 2015). Thus, archivists are mostly exposed to the dilemma of

authentic recording in non-ideal environments, which is counter to staged and well-organised recording of ICH elements in a studio format that lacks authenticity.

Finally, those engaged in preservation need to possess extensive knowledge of diverse cultural traditions and connect to the communities these traditions belong to make archive-making more meaningful and reflective of the living tradition. Archive-makers should possess skills in managing metadata, navigating the complexity of cultural traditions within the area of expertise, and having advanced technical skills to work with digitised content (Viken 2017). They should also be able to connect close links with communities to understand the meaning people attribute to traditional music and better reflect their unique perspectives on intangible heritage. There is a limited number of such archivists who have all-around training and skills to be able to take responsibility for cultural heritage preservation.

1.1.2 Oman in the 21st Century: Battle Between Modernity and Cultural Heritage

The challenges described above concerns Oman as well, and one can understand them by looking back at the history of this country and its relationship with its cultural heritage. For centuries, Oman was haunted by internal divisions between coastal and interior tribes. They fought for dominance while also trying to respond to invasions by the Portuguese in the 16th-17th centuries, the Persians in the 18th century, and the Wahhabis in the 19th century (Peterson 2022). During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there was a significant division in Omani society entangled with political, social and economic structures and local traditions (Al-Azri 2013). The British control over the territory complicated the situation, imposing policies beneficial to the West, which weakened local rulers. Moreover, the political and geographical disconnect between tribes populating Omani territory and their varying visions of the future impeded the state's development and prevented the formation of a unified concept of nationhood (Peterson 2022).

The 1951 Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation, which gave Oman independence from Britain, marked a new stage in the country's history but did not contribute much to local economic development. Even though the country

possessed and began to exploit its impressive oil reserves, the rigid and isolated political regime impeded the much-needed modernisation (Allen and Rigsbee 2014). Bureaucracy, legal system and representative institutions were lacking, and the country's almost non-existent infrastructure reflected this stagnation. As for the Omani culture before the 1970s revolved around Arabness, Ibadism (a form of Islam), tribal affinities and resistance to outside interference.

The history of the modern Omani state as we know it today – consolidated and underpinned by a strong national identity – began in the 1970s, when it underwent significant changes driven by Sultan Qaboos. It was also the period crucial to the fate of traditional music, whose protection and popularisation gained prominence at the time. Sultan Qaboos' name is often associated with Oman's 'Renaissance' (Neal and Causevic 2018). After ascending to the throne in 1970, he initiated fundamental political, social, economic and cultural changes. Sultan Qaboos contributed to the abolition of slavery, ended the Dhofar Rebellion, and promoted the establishment of Oman's constitution (Fromherz and Al-Salimi 2022). His contribution to the country's economic development can hardly be overestimated, as he allocated oil revenues to modernisation plans, increased living standards, and reorganised governmental institutions to make the country appealing to investors (Fromherz and Al-Salimi 2022; Phillips and Hunt 2017). By the time of his death in 2020, Oman had become a modern state with a successful diversified economy and a strong sense of national identity, with the latter depending greatly on cultural heritage.

Sultan Qaboos, the former Sultan of Oman, played a significant role in Oman's cultural development is immense as well, as he actively supported education, preservation of cultural heritage, and tourism and promoted various cultural initiatives (Bonnefoy and Al-Rabaani 2022). While not bringing an explicit ICH program to Oman's government, Sultan Qaboos nevertheless had an immense impact on Omani music through his patronage, starting a number of military bands, the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra, and a number of traditional Omani and Arab

music ensembles shortly after coming to power (Al-Harthy and Rasmussen 2012). He also initiated the setup of educational programmes for gifted Omani children who were sent to study music in Muscat and could exchange regional musical traditions and enrich each other's musical experiences. Sultan Qaboos also established the policymaking apparatus for ICH preservation, with numerous ministries, national museums and archives financed by the central government to revive Oman's cultural heritage and build a consistent identity on its basis (Al-Harthy and Rasmussen 2012). Sultan Qaboos' charisma and power thus enabled him to contribute considerably to ICH preservation in Oman, setting the basis for subsequent efforts.

A narrative of historical continuity in the political discourse, which emphasises the links between the modern Omani culture and the country's rich past, is a response to the modernisation initiated by Sultan Qaboos. Today's culture in Oman is the outcome of a journey that lasted for the past centuries, but it underwent a major boost after the state opened up after international isolation and incorporated elements of modern culture ('Culture of Oman' 2021). It encompasses cultural elements of the past that are selected and reinterpreted to communicate a unitary vision of the state's development and modernisation. Thus, as Oman is confronted with new knowledge, cultures and people and welcomes external influence, it also seeks to preserve its unique identity based on Ibadi values and cultural heritage, which helps balance modernisation and traditions (Lozovan 2022).

However, this mission leads to a clash between the new and the old in Omani culture, which poses a challenge for those seeking to preserve Omani cultural heritage in the face of international influence. Intangible elements of Omani culture are at risk of extinction due to their elusive nature, as they cannot survive without proper preservation and popularisation efforts. Moreover, it is not known whether the process of planting national identity through Omani nationalism in the post-1970 state can withstand future challenges, such as the depletion of oil resources and political changes, which may decrease funding of ICH preservation projects and shift the agenda to more pressing issues (Al-Ismaili 2018; Peterson 2019). How cultural

heritage is treated today will largely determine the sustainability of Omani national identity and the very survival of ICH with the passing of time. Therefore, this research looks more closely at how ICH is preserved in Oman, focusing on traditional music as an important element of Omani heritage.

At this point, I would like to add that the ICH of Oman reflects its unique history (Bonnefoy and Al-Rabaani 2022). Even though Oman is a country with a history of tribal division and cultural diversity, it manages to maintain moderation and tolerance towards differences in social and political interactions, which could not but contribute to the thriving cultural development (Bonnefoy and Al-Rabaani 2022). Oman also demonstrates tolerance towards other religions, permitting a diverse religious narrative to develop Omani people's identity and culture (Thompson 2019). Diversity and inclusion of people of different cultures is important for a state whose population includes Arabs, the Hyderabadi and the Baluchis or the Zanzibari (Arabs of Omani descent who lived in Zanzibar and returned to Oman after the 1970s) and less numerous ethnic groups such as Luwātī, Bayāsira, descendants of formerly enslaved people called ''Abīd'', Persians, Jat Indians and others (Al-Ismaili 2018; Al-Maamari 2016). Linguistic diversity represented by Arabic, Swahili, Balochi, Shehri/Jabali, Mehri, Kumzari and Luwātī languages and religious and confessional pluralism[1] represented by Muslim (Ibadi Muslim, Sunni Muslim, Shia Muslim), Baha'i and Hindu populations creates additional diversity layers in Omani culture (Al-Ismaili 2018). Moreover, Omani culture varies geographically, with significant differences between the North and South cultures. Al-Dakhil, the culture of the Omani interior differs from the Ras al-Hadd culture in the southeast and Ras Musandam in the northwest (Al-Ismaili 2018).

This diversity gave rise to the richness of customs, traditions, and folklore arts such as *Al Razha*, *Al Midan*, and *Al Aazi* found in Oman. Unique wedding parties,

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[1] In this context, confessional pluralism refers to "the maintenance and accommodation of a plurality of forms of religious expression and organisation in the community" (Witte et al. 2022: 69). However, this term may also refer more broadly to the freedom of conscious and religious belief (Cromartie 2005).

religious and national festivities, and music reflect the culture that has been built over the centuries, constructing the cultural heritage of Oman. The country also boasts several distinctive musical ICH elements protected by UNESCO, which include *Al Bar'ah*, Dhofari music and dance, *Al Taghrooda*, traditional Bedouin chanted poetry, as well as *Al Ayyala* and *Al Razfa*, traditional performing arts, among others (Al-Abri 2020). The Omani government recognises the value of these ICH elements for the country's nationhood, but they also serve more practical purposes, such as tourism development (Al-Abri 2020).

Oman's heritage of performing arts is impressive and deserves a close look. The country takes pride in musicians skilfully using percussion instruments, such as the *Al Kasir* and *Al Rahmani*, in traditional music performances. Other instruments, such as *duff* (tambourine) and *khulkhal* (an ankle bracelet), are also widely used in different music genres. Notably, Omani musical tradition has been influenced by other cultures, including African and Western Asian cultures. Some instruments used in traditional music, such as the *Al Tambourine* (which belongs to the idiophone type of instruments), came from Africa, while others, such as *surnay*, have Baluchi origin, enriching local musical traditions (Culture of Oman 2021). Music penetrates all aspects of Omani life: births, circumcision, children's games, marriage, religious events and national festivals. It is also an inseparable part of traditional activities, such as fishing and sailing, which hold the memory of the country's past (Culture of Oman 2021). As a result, its preservation often depends on a loose-knit community to pass local traditions from generation to generation, as in the case of ''Swahili music'' kept alive by a small group of musicians preserving this African musical tradition (Fuchs 2011). Given this rich musical heritage, attempts at its preservation as a living tradition deserve a closer look.

1.1.3 Omani Archive-Making: Key ICH Preservation Patterns and Threats

The first official efforts to document and preserve Omani tradition date back to the 1970s-1980s when the government introduced laws to preserve and protect cultural heritage, such as the 1980 Royal Decree 6/80 for the Protection of National

Heritage (ICCROM 2020). This law required a nationwide overall inventory of national heritage to be conducted and regularly updated. However, it focused more on tangible elements such as monuments, so it was insufficient to guard ICH. Later efforts to preserve ICH are associated with the introduction of UNESCO's International Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003. Countries needed to send applications to UNESCO to appropriate specific items of ICH and codify them as their unique, distinct element of culture, which initiated a broad discussion of this issue in Oman and joined this international effort. The Heritage Law issued by a Royal Decree (35/2019) and a 'New Heritage Law' (Royal Decree No. 75/ 2020) are more recent legal tools allowing for better regulation and management of Omani cultural heritage in line with international best practices. As such, they are characterised by a more developed and comprehensive set of provisions, particularly those related to ICH (Wosiński 2022).

In the policy area, ICH preservation is largely supported by the Oman Vision 2040 (2040 Oman Vision 2020). This ambitious policy, which was developed under the support of the former culture minister and the current Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said (Nuzat 2020), specifies goals for the country's economic, social and cultural development in the upcoming decades and encompasses among others, goals related to ICH protection. The document is the result of an evolution of Sultan Qaboos' approach to heritage preservation, as it promotes ICH as a living tradition rather than an artefact, something the current Sultan has been actively promoting. Preservation of Omani identity, culture and heritage is also one of the priority areas in the 10th Five-Year Development Plan (2021-25) (ANDP 2020), which presents goals for the near future. These policies promote institutional transformations designed to make ICH protection more effective, such as the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Heritage & Culture merger into the Ministry of Heritage & Tourism (Royal Decree No. 92/ 2020) (Naima 2021). However, they do not provide details about how exactly ICH should be preserved, so the Department of Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth for Culture oversees practical aspects of ICH management, such as archive-making. On the lower levels,

organisations such as the Omani Centre for Traditional Music, the National Music ICH archive, the Centre for Civilisation Studies, and others are responsible for implementing the policies and complying with laws concerning heritage preservation.

Regarding ICH archive-making initiatives, Oman has made some progress in collecting and cataloguing a large body of traditional musical content. For example, the Audio Library Project (Ministry of Heritage and Culture 2023) contains more than 200 elements of ICH collected from different parts of Oman. The Oman Centre for Traditional Music boasts a larger collection of 500 audio-visual media and sound recordings (Nath, n.d.). The National Museum of Oman, which was opened in 2013 in Muscat, also possesses a unique collection of ICH and stores old musical instruments (e.g., Al Bargham, Jam/Yam and Al Tambura) demonstrating the history of ICH development (The National Museum 2023).

However, it is unknown whether these collections can capture the breadth and depth of Omani cultural heritage, given the government's focus on homogeneous nation-building and its rather selective and arbitrary policy of heritage building. A strong sense of national identity promoted by consolidating the policies of Sultan Qaboos may somewhat obscure a wealth of diversity in cultures, languages and ethnic groups found in Oman, resulting in insufficient coverage of ICH in archives. Therefore, it is unclear whether the existing archives cover the diversity of Omani culture and, if not, what elements remain to be included. Moreover, ICH archives are not easily accessible to the wider public, so there is a need for their digitalisation and modernisation. Given these issues, one of my objectives for this dissertation was to examine in-depth how institutional ICH safeguarding happens, its limitations, and how well it captures musical tradition in archives.

While Omani institutional archives have not been well-studied, grassroots archives have gained even less attention. Having emerged alongside the boom in social media and personal technologies such as smartphones, grassroots archives are now a thriving area where traditional Omani music is celebrated at an unprecedented scale. This grassroots movement involves a thriving community of

amateur archive-makers, Omani music connoisseurs and musicians who work in synergy to record and popularise musical heritage. No scholarly research has been conducted so far to explore the history of the grassroots movement, its unique goals and activities, and its contribution to ICH preservation in Oman.

In addition to archive-making, Omani institutional and grassroots archivists seek to preserve ICH as a living tradition. The term 'living tradition' is understood here as music and traditions that communities practice in their daily lives and that constantly change to adapt in response to the social and historical evolution of its creators and bearers (Lenzerini 2011). This goal is achieved through passing knowledge in educational institutions, such as the new Department of Musicology at Sultan Qaboos University and music education in schools (Nath n.d.). In addition, the Muscat Festival is an example of how traditional music is popularised as part of the living heritage, as it allows musicians to reproduce the music for younger generations and keep the tradition relevant (Nath n.d.). Grassroots archivists and professional and amateur musicians also play an important role in popularising Omani ICH and preserving cultural traditions. However, their role in this process is understudied, which warrants more research into comparing their efforts with those of institutional actors.

The laws, policies, and initiatives mentioned above are important because Omani cultural heritage is not shielded from the threats mentioned earlier. Omani society has become more urbanised, and living habits and activities become increasingly detached from traditional ways of life. For example, the culture and ICH of nomadic Bedouins or coastal seafaring populations are gradually dying out and surviving only because they pose an interest to tourists seeking authentic experiences (Ulaby 2012). The government also actively promotes infrastructural development that destroys traditional lifestyles by forcing Bedouins to move to houses instead of living in tents (Al Shaibany 2017).

There are also fears that social media create an intergenerational barrier that prevents the passing of the living tradition to younger generations who no longer

spend as much time in their social settings and prioritise online communication over face-to-face one through which ICH is born and preserved (e.g., in social events) (Al Shaibani 2018). Once constrained to a single locale, music is no longer dependent on a single place of performance and can be performed at festivals or recorded and popularised for social media sharing (Grant 2012). In this way, communication technology, migration, and social media have created shifts in musical dynamics whose effects are yet to be understood.

Finally, Omani archives preserving the elements of the living tradition are not immune to threats posed by the lack of resources and technological changes (Baker and Collins 2016). This problem particularly concerns grassroots archives whose value has not been properly recognised by researchers and government policymakers. The listed issues have been the main drivers of my interest in the sphere of traditional music preservation and archivisation in Oman. As an avid music and traditional culture fan, I have witnessed the struggles of performers playing traditional music and people who try to record them to popularise this music. Many Omanis do not fully recognize the importance of this intangible heritage or understand its role in their national identity. With grassroots archives becoming popular, there seems to be a gradual shift towards a greater appreciation of the value of intangible heritage.

1.2 Gaps in Research and Study Significance

Traditional music preservation and archiving are popular topics in musicology, with many studies exploring the general rules and patterns of archive-making or focusing on preserving specific countries' or cultures' heritages (D'Agostino 2020; Taylor Gibson 2019). Despite Oman's rich cultural heritage in the musical field (Bose 2020), surprisingly little scientific research has been conducted on traditional music in this country to contribute to existing musicology research. Studies such as those provided by Laith Ulaby (2012) and Majid Al-Harthy and Anne Rasmussen (2012) allow a better understanding of the traditional music landscape in Oman and how it evolved over the years. However, they offer little information on how this heritage is

preserved, particularly from a practical perspective. Besides, they were conducted more than a decade ago, so they do not reflect societal changes over the past years, such as the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the cultural sphere.

Intangible cultural heritage in Oman is a generally understudied topic. Scholars have examined some aspects of ICH, such as desert landscapes (Chatty 2016) or the role of UNESCO in guarding Omani ICH (Al-Abri 2020), but academic research in ethnomusicology has been scarce. Moreover, while ICH policies have been widely publicised in the media (Al Riyami 2018), they have also been overlooked in scholarly research. As a result, it is not known how the existing policies and the government's commitment to preserving ICH affect the practice of archive-making. Finally, no studies examine ICH from the archivists' and policymakers' perspectives, so it is not known how these people negotiate ICH and what role they play in its preservation. The voices of other stakeholders, such as musicians and listeners, are also not heard, creating a gap in knowledge about ICH preservation in modern Oman.

This study seeks to address the key knowledge gaps identified above. It contributes to the knowledge of Omani ICH by exploring how major stakeholders shape, understand and negotiate it. It also explored how the process of traditional music archive-making occurs, who is involved, and how effective it is. The key finding of this dissertation is that Omani ICH is currently preserved by two major groups: official and grassroots archive-makers; their different modes of operation, skills, capabilities, resources, goals, and community links underpin their mutually complementing approaches to ICH safeguarding. In this way, the study better understands the nuances of Omani archive-making while also showing how different actors cooperate in order to capture the diversity of Omani heritage. The study also provides a detailed analysis of the participants engaged in Omani ICH preservation on different levels, from policymakers to the community, challenging the existing status quo in the literature mostly focused on state-governed efforts. By giving a voice to everyone involved, I look at ICH preservation through their perspective and

determine how they make sense of ICH's value and their contribution to its preservation. As a result, a better understanding of complex socio-political and cultural processes affecting ICH in Oman, from the bottom up and vice versa, is achieved.

This study has theoretical and practical implications. The present research uncovers the complex and under-researched processes of ICH preservation in Oman in which formal and informal archive-makers operate in synergy to capture the diversity of Omani ICH. In this way, the study advances ethnomusicology research by exploring how governmental policies and official ICH archive-making are advanced and reshaped by grassroots archivists focused more on preserving the living tradition and ICH ties to communities. It also provides guidance on potential topics for further analysis of how ICH is shaped and negotiated in the contemporary globalised world and its role in national identity construction. In this way, the value of the study extends beyond the Oman setting, as similar studies may be conducted in other countries.

The study advances ethnomusicology research by contributing to a better understanding of the theoretical concept of proactive archiving, first introduced by Ray Edmonson (2004). The main idea behind proactive archiving is to build a bridge between ethnomusicology scholars, archivists and cultural heritage communities. It is believed to help archive-makers collaborate with knowledgeable culture-bearers to identify, correct, and expand musical archives, thus making them more accurate reflections of the living tradition (Gunderson et al. 2019). Moreover, proactive archiving may help make ethnomusicology methodology more equitable, generating benefits to the discipline and the people who interact with heritage first-hand as bearers of tradition (Landau and Fargion 2012). This concept helped me better evaluate the role of institutional and grassroots archives in Omani ICH preservation, highlighting the contribution of proactive archival practices aimed at recirculating materials within the community in building the living heritage. As such, my research contributes to the field by demonstrating the immense cultural value of proactive

archiving that helps achieve the much-needed inclusivity, transparency, and community engagement in ICH preservation.

Furthermore, the study raised some issues about how ICH is collected, processed, stored and shared. Specifically, it exposed the limitations of official archive-making that sometimes overlooks the complexity and diversity of Omani ICH and may be somewhat exclusive and excessively policy-oriented rather than community-oriented. These findings may give researchers a new understanding of what works well and what should be improved, as well as inform evidence-based guidelines and recommendations. This study may help researchers studying the archive-making process better understand the strengths and possibilities of contemporary archivisation, including technical capabilities and ways to maximise their impact. Finally, this study may be useful to anyone interested in ICH protection, from musicologists to musicians playing traditional music. It contributes to musicology research focusing on traditional music popularisation and survival in a world where the powers of globalisation and modernisation threaten cultural uniqueness.

1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

The increasing attention of government and international organisations to preserving the ICH has been brought by the growing demand to slow down the powers of globalisation and capture cultural diversity in all its complexity. Omani officials and policymakers have recognised the importance of protecting the country's unique ICH as the 'face' of the nation and an essential part of its identity. However, the main question remains: how well does this process of ICH preservation go? Therefore, the main objective of this study was to investigate the process of ICH preservation in Oman in depth from policymaking, practical perspectives, and community perspectives. I also sought to examine the motivations and meaning-making of key stakeholders involved in this process to understand the effectiveness of their work and its broader meaning for Omani nationhood. In this way, I pursued a broader objective of bringing to light the current state of ICH preservation in Oman,

the main actors involved, and the key processes/ challenges driving it. As such, the research was envisioned as the first comprehensive attempt at painting a picture of Omani ICH preservation efforts, which could be of use to anyone working with ICH or simply admiring and appreciating its cultural and social value. The research sought to challenge the perception of ICH archivisation as an inherently organised, state-sponsored activity and demonstrate the possibility and value of community-level efforts in ICH preservation.

To achieve the stated objectives, the three main research questions have been formulated to provide a guided direction for this study.

1. **How do the Omani government and institutional archivists approach ICH preservation?**

The first question focused on examining how institutional archive-makers approach musical heritage preservation. The question sought to determine what governmental policies drive this process and how they shape the approach taken by institutional archivists towards archive creation. Moreover, I aimed to explore the scope and effectiveness of this approach and dwell on limitations that institutional archive-makers experience in terms of collecting, preserving, and popularising musical heritage. By answering this question, I was able to understand better the challenges faced by the Omani government in regard to ICH management and what gaps they leave to fill for grassroots archives.

My findings demonstrate that for the Omani government, musical ICH is a powerful nation-building tool, so it strives for homogeneity and representation of ICH that is in line with strategic priorities. Many of the institutional efforts set up by Sultan Qaboos help the Omani nation seek to capture and preserve diverse musical traditions on the verge of dying out, which is achieved through various government-supported cultural programmes. These efforts, including sponsoring archives, public performances, festivals, bands and musicians, reflect the country's focus on embracing its rich intangible heritage for cultural continuity and a shared sense of belonging among Omanis. However, the given approach was found to be aligned

with the 'presentist' paradigm, that is an excessive focus on the present with a lack of regard for many centuries of the country's rich and diverse historical past. As a result of these curated ICH preservation efforts, national ICH archives have become somewhat detached from the living tradition, culture and history cherished through generations. This limitation created a vacuum eventually filled with grassroots archives.

2. **Why did the grassroots archivist movement emerge, and what role does it currently play in building Omani heritage?**

The second research question, which emerged logically from the first one, thus focused on grassroots archives as an emerging practice that complements governmental efforts at heritage preservation. My main goal when answering this question was to fill the existing research gap regarding the reasons and motivations behind grassroots archive-making and the role it plays in shaping ICH in modern Oman. Similar to the first research question, this one touched upon the challenges and limitations that grassroots archivists face. In this way, the second research question helped provide an in-depth analysis of a new stakeholder group responsible for ICH archives in Oman, which is essential for building a clear picture of how musical heritage is preserved from the top down to the bottom up. By finding answers to question one, I was able to justify the existence of grassroots archives as a phenomenon that emerged to address the limitations and complement the efforts of institutional archives.

The core findings of this question are as follows: First of all, I found that grassroots archivist activity emerged as a response to institutional archives' inability to capture the complexity and diversity of the living tradition that is closely embedded in Omani communities' everyday lives. Its emergence is also due to Omanis' willingness to reflect the nation's hybridity and represent a greater number of meanings attributed to music in this country. As a result, grassroots archivists became a much-needed link between the state and the nation in terms of musical ICH definition, preservation, and celebration. More importantly, they were found to

complement institutional efforts, e.g., by facilitating community-level transmission of ICH, as opposed to more scientific, organised research and learning activities permitted by institutional ICH archives.

Second, this research contributed greatly to understanding the nuances of grassroots archives' functioning and the challenges they face, such as the lack of funding, sustainability issues, resource limitations, and many others. The study revealed that grassroots activity is less centralised and organised compared to the government ICH preservation efforts. It is also less sustainable and continuous, which poses risks for long-term ICH preservation. Nevertheless, despite numerous challenges and limitations impeding the work of grassroots archivists, their creative and varied use of technology and social media, as well as their close links with the communities, make their input extremely valuable in overall ICH preservation efforts. Their desire and ability to capture ICH as it is, in all its vibrancy and complexity, helps give voice to the bearers of dying traditions and bring their perspectives to the forefront.

3. **How do institutional and grassroots musical archives shape and reflect the emerging Omani nationhood?**

The third and final question sought to explore the role of institutional and grassroots archives in constructing modern Omani national identity. This question helped develop an overview of how Omani traditional music reflects the nationhood-related issues Omanis currently face amid the ongoing globalisation and modern nation-building. The question helps uncover the challenges of constructing nationhood through ICH in a culturally diverse country and determine how well the Omani government has managed this task lately. Finally, by answering this question, I can better understand ICH preservation as a process affected by complex socio-political, historical and cultural processes in modern Oman.

My research revealed the juxtaposition between the top-down, centralised approach of the government to Omani nation-building and the community-based, contextualised celebration of ICH as a living tradition, which is promoted by

grassroots archivists. The latter thus challenge the dominant cultural politics of modern Omani nation-building by going beyond a limited set of state-selected musical tradition items. By using their contextual presence and competence, grassroots archivists capture the symbols of the Omani nation shaped by people's collective understanding of their identity, history and values, thus offering an essential dimension to a comprehensive Omani nation's image. As such, they complement state-imposed, patrimonial, cultural discourse, enriching not only ICH preservation but also Omani culture in general. Thus, nation-building emerged in this research as another area where institutional and grassroots efforts unintentionally complement each other, leading to a more comprehensive capturing of Omani ICH and the diverse identity it reflects.

1.4 Project Structure

The structure undertaken for this study is as follows. Chapter Two contains a literature review of the studies on cultural heritage and ICH preservation to grasp the context of this research better. This chapter presents definitions and an overview of the key terms and locates this study within the ethnomusicology field. The review helps understand the main processes and motivations behind ICH preservation, which is important for a more focused analysis of Omani ICH, which is presented in the following chapters. It also provides an overview of the state of scholarship on Omani music, which I will discuss later in my ethnomusicology study.

Chapter Three is about methodology. It specifies the value of ethnographic interviews for this study and clarifies how these were conducted. The chapter presents the key participants who contributed to this study and the positions/roles they play in ICH preservation in Oman. In addition, the methodology describes other data sources, including archival work and fieldwork (attendance at conferences and events). Finally, this chapter offers a reflective look at the process of data collection and analysis, which is in line with the ethnographic and musicology principles.

Furthermore, Chapter Four sets the stage for the analysis of archivisation in Oman, creating a background for readers to understand the context in which I

conducted my ethnomusicology study. This chapter discusses the distinct regional musical traditions in Oman. It traces the development of musical instruments and practices to show how music accompanies social, political and civic development and evolves as a living tradition shared and passed on by its bearers. It also explores historical influences on ICH development in Oman, allowing me to place its heritage in a wider regional and cross-cultural context. Next, Chapter Five examines individual motivations, power relations and governmental policies that shape and negotiate ICH in Oman. This chapter encompasses the data on Vision 2040 and ICH in policymaking to set the process of ICH preservation in the political context. Chapter Five also reflects government officials' perspectives on their roles in ICH preservation and gives an overview of institutional efforts at ICH preservation. In addition, it introduces the perspectives of grassroots archivists and musicians regarding their role in ICH safeguarding.

Chapter Six focuses on practical aspects of ICH preservation and investigates how institutional and grassroots archivists contribute to the preservation and shaping of ICH. It also explains how they complement each other's work regarding methodology, audience considerations, and resources. In addition, the chapter raises the problems of authenticity and sustainability and how these are navigated by institutional and grassroots archivists. Chapter Seven discusses music appropriation in state-led nation-building efforts, which I identified as a process of nationalisation through selective music archiving and dissemination. This chapter demonstrates the role of grassroots archivists as a key link between the official cultural politics driven by the states and the music practised and celebrated by people. Their combined effort is shown to provide a muti-vocal reflection of Oman's culture and history crystallised in the musical tradition. Thus, the chapter shows how ICH is transformed from a mere object of tangible value and strategic nation-building to a living tradition reflecting the soul of the nation. Finally, Chapter Eight is the concluding chapter, where I present the summary of the main findings, answer research objectives and provide recommendations for future research and practice.

This chapter reflects on the wider implications of the presented findings for the present and future of ICH in Oman.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to a detailed overview of the existing literature on the cultural heritage (CH) concept and its management at all levels of the community. The chapter starts with a definition of cultural heritage and a review of its recent evolution from a narrower cultural property perspective to a broader conception of living culture and tradition, which is ultimately adopted in this dissertation. A separate section is dedicated to singling out the features of tangible and intangible cultural heritage (TCH/ICH) and their differences to explain the unique nature of ICH that is still evolving conceptually. The following section examines how CH is preserved and safeguarded and examines fundamental conceptual challenges that archive-makers encounter in dealing with the ephemeral, context-based and living ICH. Moving from broader issues of ICH preservation, I dwell on the archivisation of ICH, focusing on the archivisation challenges and the problem of determining value when selecting items for preservation. This literature analysis is vital for a better understanding of how and why specific elements of Omani ICH are chosen for safeguarding. The related section on the role of social media in ICH preservation helps narrow the focus on the emerging methods and platforms for ICH archivisation that are examined in more detail in this dissertation. Moreover, I analyse the state of knowledge on ICH in the Arab world and Oman, concluding by identifying a significant gap in knowledge that this study seeks to address.

Furthermore, I dwell on the role of ICH in identity and nationhood, focusing on the roles of governments and grassroots archivists in securing, preserving and promoting the living cultural traditions in their communities. This section also touches on the arbitrariness of the official governmental ICH safeguarding efforts, which may leave many indigenous communities' cultural heritage marginalised and ignored in the official archive-making processes. Thus, I examine the role of grassroots heritage activism and community archivisation in the light of local practitioners' and archivists' activities directed at capturing the abundance of cultural manifestations

and the community's ICH diversity, outbalancing governmental failures in this regard. This discussion of the literature builds the basis for my analysis of government vs. grassroots efforts at ICH preservation in Oman. In addition, I explore the notion of music tradition, which is a key concept in ICH preservation. I conclude the chapter with an analysis of the most notable topics, issues and research directions in ethnomusicology, placing this study in the current academic discourse of musical heritage preservation.

2.2 Cultural Heritage

2.2.1 Definition and Theories of Heritage

Heritage is a powerful concept connecting phenomena, people and places in common causes (Hafstein 2012). This concept emerged to identify and preserve heritage objects and 'mobilise people and resources, to reform discourses and to transform practices' (Hafstein 2012, 502). Heritage, as referred to in this paper using a more accurate term, cultural heritage (CH), is a rich and heterogeneous range of tangible and intangible objects worthy of preservation. The tangible element includes but is not limited to 'artefacts, monuments, a group of buildings and sites, museums that have a diversity of values including symbolic, historical, artistic, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological, scientific and social significance' (UNESCO 2023a, n.p.). Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) encompasses more elusive, non-physical objects such as traditional music (UNESCO 2023). According to Olimpia Niglio (2014), CH can be described as historical, artistic, scientific and traditional. The umbrella term covers anything with value and identity for a specific cultural group. For example, the Heritage for Peace (2023) group defines cultural heritage as an expression of the ways of living developed in a particular community and inherited from one generation to the next, embracing the set of customs, practices, places, objects, values and artistic products.

Global and local heritage value is hard to overestimate because it shapes people's identity and provides humans with a common language of expression and self-representation in the broader social context. In addition, understanding one's

heritage gives vital clues for understanding each cultural group's past and its path of evolution to the present state. Moreover, a society's cultural heritage plays a significant role in its politics, social organisation, business mindset and general worldview (Kertz-Welzel 2018). Therefore, exploring CH is a cornerstone of any community's self-comprehension, continuity of historical tradition and shaping of its unique identity in the global society.

Value estimation is subjective and differs among people, governments, and international observers. Thus, defining CH often requires the artefacts' objective analysis from the perspectives of various stakeholders, such as professional CH assessment experts and the community to which CH belongs. If approached from the perspective of the government's use of the CH inventory for nation-building, CH is broadly defined as 'a political act of choosing certain ideas and symbols from the past through their use for society in the present and an imagined future' (Harvey 2001, 67). In this way, defining CH through political and social dimensions embodies ethnocentric perspectives on heritage. Indeed, the objects of CH, both tangible and intangible, possess characteristics of national culture (beliefs, assumptions, behaviours) and instill a sense of pride for symbolic ownership of CH items among people who belong to this nation and share those characteristics. In turn, such CH items raise social cohesion through shared ownership.

Therefore, it is unsurprising that the emergence of a globally shared conceptualisation of cultural heritage has been discussed in political terms. Laurajane Smith (2006, 28) referred to this discourse as 'authorised heritage discourse', whereas another seminal scholar, Valdimar Hafstein (2012, 502), called it a 'patrimonial regime'. These discussions have urged scholars to think about knowledge regimes and discursive practices implicated in recognising and establishing legitimate heritage objects and how these processes are shaped in the global fields of power (Nilson and Thorell 2018). Smith's (2006) work is particularly valuable in this regard, revealing how metropolitan conceptions of heritage, now

embraced by international organisations such as UNESCO, are spread worldwide as the standard for 'proper' heritage.

Another essential distinction in the discussion of CH is the evolving paradigm of cultural heritage as a broader term compared to the older version of 'cultural property'. For a long time, the community's 'cultural property' was regarded as the sum of tangible or intangible objects belonging to it and subject to protection under national and international law (Nafziger 2012, 13). However, a closer review of the terminology shows that ''cultural property'' relates to tangible cultural heritage assets, such as monuments, buildings and works of art. The term was adopted as a legal instrument for protecting national CH during geopolitical conflicts, thus subjecting any looting of cultural property to international prosecution. With the gradual recognition of intangible heritage as a vital part of the global cultural legacy, the term 'cultural property' became narrower in use and currently relates mostly to tangible assets that the state and private actors can truly own (Frigo, 2004). Currently, the 'tangible' perspective serves as a legal instrument for CH protection and value generation (Nafziger 2012), which is also evidenced in Regina Bendix and colleagues' (2013) argument that CH is a source of economic value for states and local interest groups.

CH underwent a significant transformation at the end of the 20th century, evolving from the concept associated with monuments and cultural property to a broader definition of heritage encompassing intangible terms (Vecco 2010). In this regard, Chiara Bortolotto (2007) observed a transition from objects to processes, and Koen Van Balen and Aziliz Vandesande (2015, 7) described the bottom-up approach to ICH safeguarding as a change from object-oriented to value-oriented and people-oriented dimensions of ICH. Shun-Sho Carmack (2021) went further and stressed that ICH is dynamic, contained in either objects or human beings transcending time, so it is embodied in the immaterial creative process of production.

In this way, what started as UNESCO's 'museological' principle of CH protection and preservation in tangible terms, as stated in the Convention

Concerning the Protection of the Natural and Cultural Heritage (Paris, 17 October 1972), later advanced to a more nuanced, anthropological vision of cultural properties (Bortolotto 2007, 22). This way, UNESCO divided CH into tangible (monuments and buildings of archaeological, religious, scientific or cultural value), natural (native wildlife, waterways, bogs, uplands.) and intangible (music, dance, crafts and traditions), with these categories broadly regarded as arbitrary and interrelated (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004). This change was encouraged by viewing culture and heritage as inseparable from their context, thus underlining their intangible characteristics and the tangible (movable and immovable) parameters. It also ushered a change in the policymakers' mindset from CH ownership and descent to broader concepts of justice and well-being (Hodder 2010). Therefore, the present-day view of CH is more nuanced and comprehensive, respecting the dynamic nature of culture and performance and the continuous recreation of cultural expressions (Bortolotto 2007).

A valuable paradigm shift that occurred in the design of heritage conservation initiatives in the early 2000s was observed in a renewed focus on a values-based approach to CH safeguarding. This approach was evident in the management of TCH and ICH items in equal measures, thus targeting the identification, enhancement and preservation of significance, which is the object's overall value. Avrami et al. (2019) pointed out that the values-based model has enabled new modes of engagement for a wider range of stakeholders and responded to the challenges of sustaining heritage sites by balancing their aesthetic, historical, scientific, spiritual and social values as perceived by the past, present and future generations. Besides, decisions based on the parameter of values take the form of a responsive and participatory public policy, which balances between policy-level priorities of public welfare and tourism promotion and on-the-ground conservation and management needs. Carman (2014) offered an insightful balancing framework for determining the value of heritage by balancing cultural and economic values to challenge the official, public discourses of heritage valuation instead of focusing on the values themselves. Therefore, this model is a valuable alternative, which

prioritises the item's use as a form of economic value and presupposes its evaluation against tangible yet non-inclusive "property" features.

As one can conclude, CH has historically impacted the construction of identities and societies' behaviour. However, the official definition and CH protection efforts commonly lack the vital element of community perceptions of CH. Therefore, according to Michael Turnpenny (2007), it is vital to develop integrated and inclusive CH management practices that would recognise and include community perspectives. This way, the CH preservation measures on the national level can ensure that CH reflects the diverse and heterogeneous fabric of local CH.

2.2.2 Tangible and Intangible Heritage

The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) first acknowledged the need to distinguish between tangible and intangible heritage in 1987. The ICOMOS officials recognised the need to preserve CH's material and spiritual elements to maintain and promote cultural diversity as a common heritage of humanity (Yuan 2008). Since then, extensive work has been done on refining the ICH definition, with the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage offering broad, comprehensive coverage of the ICH concept. In accordance with the 2003 Convention, ICH is defined as 'the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith…' and includes traditional craftsmanship, performance, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and nature practices (UNESCO 2003, Article 2). While the nominal difference between the two types of heritage appears to be set, the practical distinctions are debatable.

The differences between ICH and TCH arguably invite different strategies for their presentation. One view is that the ICH is held and carried by living people as part of their present-day lives. Therefore, it cannot survive without being practised and held by culture's representatives and needs to be reused to continue its existence (Rizzo and Mignosa 2013). TCH is embodied in physical objects, so once

created or built, it can exist without being reused (Rizzo and Mignosa 2013). On the other hand, ICH is dynamic and can be contained in either objects or human beings transcending time, embodied in the immaterial creative process behind a cultural manifestation instead of being the manifestation *per se*. With a focus on this 'living' nature of ICH, one cannot overestimate the importance of the home community that continually identifies, practises and changes the ICH through communal use (Carmack 2021).

The need for clearer distinctions between ICH and TCH and more focused efforts for ICH preservation was explained by van Zanten (2018) as a recognition of the change in the perception of culture. According to van Zanten, culture can no longer be considered a homogeneous agreement between all people in a community, and it is continually reconstructed and renegotiated by people. Van Zanten (2018) also recognised that globalisation had caused a reordering of community relationships, demanding more attention to ICH safeguarding based on the principles of universally accepted human rights, equity, sustainability and mutual respect among communities.

Despite these differences, authors like Mounir Bouchenaki (2004) and Cristina Amescua (2013) stress the interrelatedness of ICH and TCH and the need to consider them without separation. Gunderson et al. (2019) also underlined that TCH and Ich are not static polarities, as they tend to be presented today, but rather a spectrum of a community's cultural expression. Therefore, any heritage management plan should place TCH and ICH on a continuum that respects those intersections, with both types of heritage effectively used for community self-determination and the revival of old traditions. The embedded meaning and value of ICH need to be translated into forms of material or tangible heritage such as written documents and archives, but such transition states would mean that the dynamic nature of ICH risks being violated. Nobuo Ito (2003) also argued that intangible culture creates a solid background for tangible cultural property; for instance,

religious architecture is commonly associated with and inseparable from the existence of local religion.

Therefore, religious monuments need to be preserved with accompanying ICH pieces from communities to preserve the full meaning of the site. This discourse indicates that despite the differences, ICH or TCH cannot be fully separated in every case, but considering ICH requires an inquiry into related TCH as postulated in the UNESCO Convention. Besides, viewing ICH and TCH as complementing each other instead of juxtaposing them in terms of form and conservation methods can make the traditional value models applied in TCH conservation management plans relevant and useful in the ICH conservation agenda.

2.3 ICH Preservation Practices

Heritage management and conservation have gone a long way in conceptualisation and development throughout the past couple of centuries. Methods of conservation differed, ranging from direct conservation measures suggested by William D. Lipe (1974) to the curated decay paradigm proposed by Caitlin DeSilvey (2017) to minimise human interference and allow the CH evolution under the influence of objective natural processes. The research of John Carman (2002) is especially interesting in the discussion of the ICH preservation paradigm's evolution; the scholar observed the gradual distancing of archaeology from heritage studies and a departure from the documentation processes governing the anglophone international discourse of heritage throughout a major part of the 20th century. Carman (2002) pointed out that heritage was increasingly understood as inclusive of values other than archaeological or historical value, so it was allocated a unique cultural value of a public good.

A logical extension of the discussion of cultural heritage as a public good was the dilemma of ownership. National governments across the globe have practised a property-based approach and rhetoric in heritage management; they established

funded organisations and archives to conserve the appropriated CH and sometimes allocated exclusive ownership rights to private entities in exchange for investment in conservation (Carman 2002). However, this approach stands in sharp contradiction to a universally recognised public belonging of CH. Following the argument of Gunderson et al. (2019), cultural heritage belongs to everybody, so it cannot be owned by any person or organisation. These considerations inspired the long-standing debates about archive access, ownership and dissemination covered by Gunderson et al. (2019) in their extensive compilation of works on music repatriation as a method of reviving cultural traditions and giving communities a renewed sense of ICH ownership.

These concerns have fuelled a search for more effective and non-intrusive heritage preservation approaches that could facilitate what Araujo (2015) characterised as a horizontal, intercultural dialogue without top-down validation systems imposed by authoritative figures and entities. Pettan and Titon (2015) also concluded from decades of analysed applied ethnomusicological efforts that the best and most effective ICH preservation initiatives are small-scale projects resulting from long-term partnerships and shared goals. Therefore, the future of ICH conservation relies on collaborative ethnomusicological projects based on shared experience and executed in small groups, which are much more efficient than large-scale organisational projects (Gunderson et al. 2019).

A new approach to archiving ICH that can potentially overcome the existing limitations of the archival mode is one of advocacy and agency that applied ethnomusicologists can assume during their fieldwork. As Pettan and Titon (2015) clarified, ethnomusicologists can engage in a variety of advocacy activities, such as acting as agents to organise musician performances, political lobbying of artistic spaces, community education projects, facilitation of community self-documentation, etc. Gunderson et al. (2019) also confirmed the decisive role of advocacy and agency in connecting subjects with their heritage and encouraging ongoing, self-driven preservation practices. Practical methods for realising a humanistic,

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community-focused and experience-centred ICH preservation, as well as inherent challenges and methodological tensions around the process, are discussed below.

2.3.1. Approaching Endangered ICH

Unfortunately, many forms of ICH are currently at risk, as they may die out because of the lack of living bearers and practitioners, negative attitudes or government policies, loss of ICH practices' relevance for the current community's lives and practices, environmental issues, material shortages, loss of connections with the community or emergence of new techniques that outperform the old, traditional ways of doing things (UNESCO ICH n.d.). Multigenerational artistic traditions are at risk because of globalised communication and a lack of ICH promotional efforts (Pettan and Titon 2015). Therefore, preserving ICH using various means and techniques available to actors at local, national and international levels is imperative.

The leading organisation responsible for ICH preservation is UNESCO. Its conservation and preservation efforts date back to the 1970s. The organisation has been involved in developing the regulatory framework for the global governance of heritage, providing expertise, procedures and techniques for systematically and scientifically safeguarding and preserving CH (Nilson and Thorell 2018). UNESCO has also developed separate lists of ICH elements requiring protection to recognise their extreme cultural value and suggest a more suitable approach to their safeguarding (Stefano et al. 2014). By bestowing a symbolic value on the ICH elements, UNESCO also enhances their reputation and worldwide recognition (Meissner 2021).

However, the concept of ICH is a relatively new aspect of cultural heritage, which escapes the traditional conservation measures suitable for tangible CH assets (UNESCO ICH n.d.). The main features of ICH are that it is a living tradition—it is practised at present and constantly evolves with the community that is its bearer— and it is kept alive by being passed from one person to another (Lenzerini 2011). A

community shares ICH, and its value is determined by people who own it, thus escaping any objective evaluation parameters.

In this regard, Hafstein (2009, 105) raised some challenges concerning ICH institutional preservation, noting that any formal attempts at ICH preservation inevitably lead to 'itemisation' or 'artifactualisation'. In other words, ICH elements are reduced to objects for preservation and decontextualised from their source contexts. In addition, this itemisation brings the aesthetic qualities of ICH to the forefront, overlooking 'externally experienced' qualities (Stefano et al. 2014). Conceptually, there is a conflict between ICH's 'intangibleness' (Hafstein 2009) and the exclusive 'documentation' (Byrne 2009) of the heritage. As a result, ICH preservation turns into a beauty contest where ICH elements are subjectively assigned value (Hafstein 2009).

This criticism is shared by other prominent scholars such as Lourdes Arizpe (2013), Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004), Mary Louise Pratt (2013), Oscar Salemink (2016) and others. Another prominent scholar, Seeger (2009), added that even though ICH as a political strategy has been widely adopted, as exemplified by extensive UNESCO efforts, the concept of ICH remains problematic, both philosophically and politically, especially when applied in practice. The tensions between the local, the national and the global are difficult to resolve when deciding what ICH deserves preservation and how to safeguard and appreciate it properly (Seeger 2009).

A considerable issue surrounding the ICH conservation and management plans is accuracy and authenticity. David Lowenthal (1998) criticised the existing heritage practice as a mythologisation of the existing past, which is done in response to modern consumer demand and reflects the heritage-making curators' desire to make ICH more familiar to contemporaries. These efforts reflect the economic aspect of ICH value and the power-holding institutions' desire to appropriate cultural heritage for stimulation of tourism, revival of cultural interest and other carefully planned and curated processes. The potential solution to this flaw of state-led ICH

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preservation may be addressed by horizontal, collaborative efforts with active community engagement that Araujo (2015) advocated for. Another problematic point was observed by Pettan and Titon (2015) in the applied ethnomusicologists' efforts to conserve traditional music, conflating with anthropologists' efforts to modernise the traditional culture. This way, the ICH conservation process is continually challenged by the contradicting preservation and revival goals. While interventions in the traditional cultures are commonly criticised as 'social engineering', a humanistic turn with a focus on experience-centred ICH documentation offers a more sustainable and non-intervening approach to heritage capture.

The most frequently used methods of ICH preservation are transmission, recording and community participation in ICH co-production (Heritage Fund 2023). Transmission refers to passing the skills and knowledge about specific ICH to others, thus keeping the tradition alive. Traditional crafts, musical instrument use, dance or singing are best passed on to apprentices through live, hands-on training to preserve the tradition's authenticity (Oakes 2009). This practice is usually organised as workshops, formal training programmes or informal community knowledge-sharing (Heritage Fund 2023). Community participation is a community-led initiative during which community members co-produce ICH artefacts or partake in a local tradition or ritual to keep it alive and teach the growing generation its peculiarities (Grceva and Vehbi 2021). Recording of ICH is a large-scale ICH preservation activity that deserves a separate section for discussion, particularly in archive-making.

2.3.2 ICH Archivisation

It is recognised that it is vital to establish close collaboration between cultural scholars, artists, and technologists to identify, record and sustain ICH (EPFL 2018). ICH documentation, reproduction and presentation come with many theoretical and technical challenges that bearers of the tradition cannot address alone, so archivists are vital keys to preserving musical tradition. However, the very archivisation process has faced much criticism throughout the existence of the archival tradition; for instance, according to Lowenthal (1998, 19), 'heritage can't be stored in a vault

or an attic'. According to the researcher, the archival process poses severe limitations on the heritage itself by depriving it of the ability to be reanimated to stay alive and reshaped for the sake of natural preservation. Another issue highlighted by Hewison (1987) is the power of decision-making about which parts of heritage would be documented and which would be left out or modified for the sake of satisfying the modern consumers' interest and stimulating demand for heritage. These concerns highlight the context-dependent nature of archives and their vulnerability to the authoritarian agenda-setting of archival process curators.

Additionally, archivists face barriers to ICH identification and capturing because many ICH artefacts are ephemeral traditions and rituals of subjective, local and context-dependent value. Another important barrier is decontextualisation, which makes recorded audio or video devoid of context and cultural value (Beaudoin 2012). Thus, archivists explore innovative and technologically advanced methods like 3D reconstructions to create 'living archives' and immersive, interactive ICH reproductions. Some examples of such successful projects are the Hong Kong Martial Arts Living Archive and the DARE-UIA project (Digital Environment for collaborative alliances to regenerate urban ecosystems in middle-sized cities), both meant to construct a participatory cultural memory for their communities (Cardoni et al. 2023; IMP 2023).

The world is abundant in unique ICH manifestations and artefacts, so safeguarding and documenting everything is physically impossible, which elevates the risks of losing some ICH forever. As Mandana Seyfeddinipur (2019) cautioned in his account of the dying Tinigua language, half of the estimated 7,000 languages spoken by humanity today will disappear by the end of the 21st century. Thus, the archival community should utilise Ray Edmondson's (2016) 'loss principle' – a characteristic of the ICH item that shows whether it is dying out and close to extinction and permanent loss by humanity. The more widespread and actively practised the ICH is, the lower its risk of irreversible loss, while outdated practices and ICH that have a handful of living practitioners and are not passed down to the

next generations are evaluated as endangered and prioritised in the archival process.

The UNESCO ICH experts also dwelt on this subject and devised an assessment checklist for archivists to select archive-worthy ICH items. Using this structure of the ICH artefact's assessment, an archivist can evaluate the degree of danger it currently sustains and make a subjective decision on its prioritisation for archiving. Other guidelines for this evaluation are contained in the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity document that classifies ICH subject to high-priority archivisation as:

- possessing ''a strong concentration of ICH of outstanding value'.
- 'a popular and traditional cultural expression of outstanding value from a historical, artistic, ethnological, linguistic or literary point of view'.
- 'give wide evidence of their roots in the cultural tradition or cultural history of the community concerned'.
- 'demonstrate their role as a means of affirming the cultural identity of the peoples and cultural communities concerned' (UNESCO 2001).

However, with these criteria offering only broad guidance on the ICH item selection, many other approaches emerged to give archivists more concrete guidelines for archivisation choices. For example, Lingling Xiao (2022) proposed assessing the value of ICH by using indirect indicators such as the total number of ICH and the development trend of ICH tourism. Interestingly, social media increasingly engaged in ICH preservation, particularly in the grassroots context, seem to play by their own rules when determining the value of music, as shown in the next section.

2.3.2 Social Media and ICH Preservation

Social media and technology, in general, reshape the image of music archives. Instead of 'dark, lifeless places hidden in basements and guarded by monsters whose principal function is to deny blameless people access to what they want' (Seeger 1996, 89), they allow for creating vibrant cultural spaces where access

and participation are unlimited. Social media is relied upon as a workable tool for ICH preservation and documentation at all levels. Even UNESCO used the storage of immaterial heritage videos on YouTube as one of its ICH safeguarding measures (Pietrobruno 2013). A combination of UNESCO and user-generated heritage videos is a comprehensive approach to informal digital heritage archivisation used in many locations. According to Sheenagh Pietrobruno (2013), the exploration of YouTube as an ICH archive has a sound potential for countering the official heritage narratives that challenge the exclusions and arbitrariness of ICH selected for official archivisation.

David Otero and colleagues (2021) also evaluated social networks as a valuable source for documenting CH processes and evaluating the present-day state of ICH documentation. In his account, modern researchers often use social media to create reusable, searchable and interesting archives to boost public awareness of and interest in the local ICH. Shaimaa Fahad Rashid and Rawaa Putros Qasha (2022) shared their experience of extracting and archiving data from social media to support ICH preservation in Nineveh to showcase how social media can be a vital source of CH data even for the decaying and destroyed heritage items. The researchers collected a rich set of data to embrace the local community's feelings, opinions and knowledge, along with various media content, such as images, videos, audio and location data. This way, Rashid and Qasha (2022) showed the potential of social media to capture the ICH as a living tradition and provide context-rich descriptions and accounts for comprehensive archiving.

However, social media use in systematic archivisation is far from widespread. Ichraq Hammou and colleagues (2020) pointed out that social media is still underutilised to preserve and promote ICH. The researchers examined the use of social media for Moroccan ICH promotion on the example of Moroccan craftsmanship. They found out that many artists see the strong relationship between social media and ICH promotion through the development and marketing of handicraft products. Besides, as Otero et al. (2021) pointed out, this sphere still faces

the challenges of proper documentation and data pooling without manually referencing collections and separate items. As ICH archives derived from social media are largely fragmented and scattered across social media accounts, an efficient categorisation strategy may aid the systematisation and searchability of ICH materials in social networks.

2.3.3 ICH Safeguarding in the Arab World and Oman

Since Sultan Qaboos bin Said's accession to the throne in 1970, the modern Sultanate of Oman has become dedicated to identifying and protecting its cultural heritage. These efforts were also embodied in several governmental acts and culminated in the adoption of the 1980 Royal Decree 6/80 regulating the Protection of National Heritage at the national level. A later legislative move is Royal Decree 35/2019, referred to as a new Heritage Law; it is meant to regulate cultural and national heritage in legal terms. Oman has also been a member of the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) since 2003 (ICCROM 2023).

The country is a place for five UNESCO World Heritage Sites, which represent its cherished TCH: the Bahla Fort, archaeological sites of Bat, Al-Khutm and Al-Ayn, land of Frankincense, Aflaj irrigation system of Oman and the ancient city of Qalhat (GHM 2023). However, the situation used to be different from the present-day focus on heritage protection, as it witnessed a decline after the 17th-century prosperity as a commercial and maritime power and had no institutions protecting cultural heritage until the coming of Sultan Qaboos to power. Oil revenues were used to finance modern infrastructural objects, such as paved roads and airports, which caused the destruction of many cultural heritage objects in urban and rural areas in Oman (Al-Belushi 2014). Other risks for tangible cultural heritage objects came from modern agricultural practices, urban encroachment and the reuse of old structures and buildings (Al-Belushi and Hooti 2023). The sites that suffered from urban development are the archaeological sites of Bawsar and several historical areas destroyed in the process of building a highway between Muscat and Ad Dakhiliyah

(Elmahi and Ibrahim 2003). A lack of state archivists' traditional knowledge and skills coupled with massive migration and urbanisation has also caused irreparable damage to intangible cultural heritage, with many social practices, performing arts and traditional craftsmanship lost as a result of a rapid national transformation (Chatty 2016; Elmahi and Ibrahim 2003).

In response to these risks, the Omani government adopted the National Heritage Protection Law (NHPL) in 1980 to attempt comprehensive coverage of all cultural heritage. The law was the first of a kind in Oman to cover cultural heritage, but it faced considerable scrutiny for its broad scope and offering no practical mechanisms for CH protection (Gugolz 1996). The law was in force until 2019 when it was replaced with the Cultural Heritage Law, which is regarded as a more effective and updated version of CH protection legislation (Al-Belushi and Hooti 2023). The CHL of 2019 lays out the formal procedures for registration, survey and excavation of cultural heritage and imposes penalties for the violation of these procedures. According to a recent examination of the new CHL's application in UNESCO heritage site management, the Omani authorities have shifted from the protection approach to a management approach and have adopted the UNESCO World Heritage Operational Guidelines (WHC-OGs) in the management of the Bahla Fort and the surrounding oasis (Khalil and Nasr 2021).

The major changes brought about by the CHL adoption include the assignment of executive functions in CH management to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, while the cultural aspect of the ministry's responsibility shifted to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (CHL 2019). This change has demarcated a division in responsibility, with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism holding responsibility for TCH only and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth assuming responsibility for ICH (Al-Belushi and Hooti 2023). Interestingly, the CHL covers cultural heritage (ICH and TCH) dating back to around 100 years in history and also provides protection for non-Omani cultural heritage present in Oman – a policy fully in line with the UNESCO Conventions. Yet, what the CHL lacks is precise coverage

of legal, political and cultural implications of foreign heritage management and repatriation, management of countries' claims in regard to their heritage and issues of non-Omani heritage ownership.

The CHL follows a value model of heritage management by laying out the criteria for an item's registration in the state Registry based on its historical, aesthetic, scientific, social, symbolic, informational and rare value assessment (CHL 2019). The new law follows a different approach to CH inventory by distinguishing private and public CH and dividing it into three classes by value. Another notable issue of CHL is that all TCH and ICH items are recognised as state-owned, with no person having the right to practise those activities without the Ministry's permit. Even private cultural heritage organisations have to be managed by their owners under the Ministry's supervision and only after the Ministry's permit receipt. In terms of ICH, the law presupposes the participation of tradition bearers in the inventory creation for Omani ICH, while community participation is not explicitly laid out for TCH management practices.

At present, the country's authorities also actively promote ICH protection and preservation by recognising its key role in shaping Omani citizenship values (MENAFN 2019). Still, many invaluable archival materials representing the Arab region's intangible legacy have been lost because of natural decay, technological outdatedness and inadequate storage. The highest-risk items are audiovisual materials, such as sound recordings and videos, because of their physical perishability and vulnerability to improper storage conditions (Istvandity 2021). Thus, many states in the Arab world, including the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and Oman in particular, face challenges in the process of ICH preservation, such as a lack of technical expertise, high cost of conservation software and recording equipment and insufficient financing (Wosinski 2022). Another issue is structural, with many unique ICH archival items scattered across different institutions and public/private owners, which makes them vulnerable to loss and decay. Thus, a concerted effort is needed to organise ICH documentation in the Arab region and

preserve the at-risk ICH archives from destruction, combining these efforts with reinforcing the archive-making capabilities in Arab states, strengthening the interstate exchange of knowledge and archives, sharing best practices in archive making and raising awareness about the importance of ICH documentation. To attain that goal, UNESCO organised a regional conference named 'Supporting Documentary Heritage Preservation in the Arab Region' in 2018 (UNESCO 2018). The goal was to share best practices on ICH preservation and conservation and discuss initiatives and strategies implemented at the national level to preserve and promote heritage (UNESCO 2018).

The patronage of Said bin Sultan Al Busaidi, director general of the Directorate of Arts at the Ministry of Heritage and Culture (MHC), is also worth mentioning in the context of contemporary ICH preservation in Oman. The MHC supervises a separate project titled The Audio Library, which aimed to preserve the Omani cultural vocabulary, folk arts and various ICH representations. The project's objectives are preserving the vocal art from extinction, finding recordings of Omani folk art of good quality and vocal purity, and developing a database for specialists and folklore enthusiasts to research. Within this framework, the Audio Library already has over 200 folk art recordings from various regions of Oman, representing different cultural and social life practices of Omani peoples, which is nonetheless too little for the country of such rich cultural heritage as Oman (Ministry of Heritage and Culture 2023). Thus, the scarce representation of diverse ICH manifestations in the MHC library implies inadequate attention to the ethnic minorities and tribal peoples' cultural representations in this collection. The MHC oversees literature, music and poetry documentation and preservation and organises annual festivals to showcase these arts to tourists and nationals. Some examples of these events are the Omani Poetry Festival and Song Festival (Oxford Business Group 2012). The National Museum of Oman, a flagship cultural institution established in 2013 in Muscat, which hosts a unique collection of Oman's ICH, also features an Intangible Heritage gallery where the visitors can see the old musical instruments (*Jam/Yam, Al Bargham* and *tambura*) (The National Museum 2023).

Another nationwide initiative for ICH documentation and preservation is the National Inventories of Oman, set up in 2010, involving broad inter-agency collaboration between the Public Authority for Craft Industries, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Sports Affairs and Sultan Qaboos University. Other local-level entities engaged in the project are the Association of Omani Women, the Cultural Club, and local art practitioners who are partaking in the creation of the database. The National List aims to provide an exhaustive inventory and classification of all ICH components of Oman and preserve that ICH (National Inventories of Oman 2018). The inventories are also meant to provide an electronic database to include all data collected about the Omani ICH and conduct individual and separate documentation for all data related to specific ICH items. This project presupposes close collaboration between government officials, private agencies and local artists to collect ICH data, conduct interviews with practitioners and record ICH practices. The inventory should be updated every three years to ensure adequate ICH coverage and expansion of the database (National Inventories of Oman 2018). This broad inclusion of grassroots activist organisations, local authorities, and national ICH preservation agencies showcases the established channels of government-grassroots collaboration. However, there is little evidence regarding the effectiveness of this initiative; neither is there any publicly available evaluation of its contribution to ICH preservation efforts in Oman.

At present, thirteen ICH items from Oman are included in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Al Bar'ah, the music and dance of Oman Dhofari valley peoples, was the first to be included in the Representative List in 2010, followed by *Al Taghrooda* (traditional Bedouin poetry in the UAE and Oman) and *Al Aazi*, a processional march and poetry ritual related to elegy. The latest inclusion of Omani ICH took place in 2022, covering Alheda'a – oral traditions of calling camel flocks, Al-Khanjar – craft skills and social practices, and date palm, knowledge, skills, traditions and practices (UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage 2023). Al-Khanjar is a part of the traditional dress worn by Omani men during national and religious festivities and on special occasions; it is made of

wood, leather, cloth and silver and requires significant mastery and skill transferred by craftsmen from generation to generation (Oman Daily Observer 2022).

The existing literature on the preservation of Omani ICH is in its infancy. Most of the studies discussing this topic dwell on the nuances and unique characteristics of the traditional music landscape in this country (Al-Harthy and Rasmussen 2012; Ulaby 2012) and have missed the opportunity to examine in detail the practical, ideological and policy dimensions of the ICH prevention process. Specific elements of the Omani ICH, such as desert landscapes, have been explored in the literature (Chatty 2016), as well as the role of UNESCO in safeguarding Omani heritage (Al-Abri 2020). However, academic research in the musicology field has been scarce and insufficient in understanding how modern policies of ICH preservation affect the archivisation of traditional music and what meaning and value stakeholders such as archivists, musicians, and policymakers associate with intangible heritage.

2.4 Building a Framework for Contemporary ICH: Identity, Nationhood and Institutionalisation

Since cultural heritage reflects the culture of a specific group or community, it can serve as a source of these groups' identity and social continuity, cohesion and self-identification. It is also instrumental in examining the past and capturing the community's historical development with a better understanding of its evolutionary path and shared identity. Thus, CH is often used as a tool for identity communication in nation-building efforts, both formal (undertaken by the government) and informal (naturally occurring social processes). As John Skrzypaszek (2012) put it, ICH contributes to the formation of contextualised social and personal identity and influences people's self-understanding in contemporary culture. Here is a broader examination of CH institutionalisation as a tool for constructing identity and nationhood parameters.

2.4.1 ICH and Institutionalisation: Role of Government

The role of the government in preserving CH is important because most conservation and restoration initiatives are adopted and financed at the national level. However, various states approach CH preservation from various angles, as different socio-economic, political and pragmatic considerations guide it. For example, it has been common for states to employ CH as a tool for encouraging nation-building in line with the modern agenda, even if the state's goals were formulated without regard to intergenerational continuity and preservation of cultural diversity (Amescua 2013; Klamer et al. 2013). Some of these efforts were positive and encouraged the preservation of national CH, such as the Chinese government's efforts to increase attention to and perceived value of hand-made paper and Chinese embroidery (Zhu 2018).

However, in line with these goals, states might formulate a list of CH items important for achieving political goals, thus ousting the non-compliant elements of CH from the preservation efforts and limiting the cultural diversity of their nations. Thus, many case studies illustrate the negative impact of the government's arbitrariness in selecting preservation-worthy CH. For example, a seminal researcher of traditional Chinese music, Ziying You (2020), complains about the Chinese government's selectivity when choosing who deserves grants to support ICH preservation efforts. The scholar points out that the government prioritised 'representative transmitters' of ICH when giving out stipends, which could not but affect less popular ICH forms (You 2020). Another example of such artificial shaping of national CH is the preservation of ethnic music and dances by Zimbabwe's President Mugabe to establish a post-colonial identity in Zimbabwe (Turino 2008). These examples illustrate the crucial role of the government in identifying ICH elements that have value beyond the musical and cultural sphere while politicising the process of ICH safeguarding. They are also incredibly important for understanding the role of grassroots preservation efforts outside government policies.

In another study, Chatty (2016) accentuates the lack of recognition of the tradition and culture of nomadic populations and exclusion of those from the national CH fund and omission by international bodies due to 'othering' of the Gulf, which has been, however, changing with the growing interest towards desert tourism. Another example is when some CH objects can be neglected due to their politically charged nature, such as the Casbah of Algiers fortress, which was largely used by French occupation forces headquarters for a significant period (Peck 2016). These examples mark one of CH's greatest concerns as they translate a large portion of cultural values that may not be adequately judged outside of a nation or social group that authored a CH item. Therefore, the CH evaluations and preservation efforts should naturally stand apart from economic and political considerations, which may distort the CH protection agenda for non-cultural reasons.

Another example of ruining the age-old traditions is Hóng Wèibīng's desecration of Chinese Emperors' tombs in an attempt to sever the links with that period of China's history (Zhang and Wright 2018; Rodenberg and Wagenaar 2018; Tondo and Koshiw 2022). These examples illustrate the 'selective historiography' as noted by Helaine Silverman (2011) and emphasise the prominent influence of the ruling government on the formation of national CH through policy and political agenda.

Still, one has to note that studies on the government's role in preserving CH are lacking, specifically in the aspect of ICH, as policies in this area have yet to mature even in European countries (Klamer et al. 2013). Similarly, Arjo Klamer and colleagues (2013), as well as Leidulf Mydland and Wera Grahn (2012), note the lack of focus on the government's role in CH forming local identities, which is a subject this study will address. Many local community groups and NGOs emerged to counterbalance the governments' selective and manipulative CH preservation efforts. These organisations' activities are not necessarily directed against the official government's CH policies; community-level initiatives sometimes complement the state's efforts by assisting the CH preservation initiatives in various hard-to-reach

locations, rural areas and indigenous communities (Blake 2018). Therefore, a deeper insight into the government's role in CH promotion and preservation coupled with grassroots, community-level insights offer a much more comprehensive perspective on the CH dynamics nationally.

2.4.2 Community Involvement in ICH Safeguarding

The academic literature on CH also recognises the role of grassroots activities as important actors in recognising and preserving CH. As Van Balen and Vandesande (2015) pointed out, the modern heritage management and conservation policies of governments increasingly adopt participatory approaches, such as public participation, civil community engagement and heritage communities. At the root of the community's focus on heritage preservation is the idea that people cannot inherit their cultural heritage but need to develop a sense of belonging through experiential acquaintance and practice. As heritage is a vital link for every person with their ancestors and offspring, it certifies identity and roots people in their communities in time-honoured ways (Lowenthal 1998).

Communities' contribution to CH protection and preservation varies, usually covering information sharing, shared research, shared heritage valuing and management. This role was recognised by the 2003 UNESCO Convention, which shifted its gaze from CH as something that should be documented and catalogued to something that could be preserved via correct valuing and adequate safeguarding by its community (UNESCO 2003). In this manner, tradition bearers and adoptees can contribute to the process of preservation with their uniquely human mode of heritage storage and retrieval – the one that is fluid, oral, framed and selective but nevertheless serves as a vital tool for human reconnection with their ancestors through historical records (Reed 2019).

This change in the CH approach reflects a broad-scale paradigm shift in the 1990s that changed the global community's focus from object-oriented CH safeguarding efforts to value-oriented and person-oriented dimensions (Van Balen and Vandesande 2015). As a result of that change, greater emphasis has been given

to the local CH manifestations and the intangible components of CH (Jewiss and Laven 2021). This paradigm shift also ushered in a move from the expert-approved evaluation of CH that deserves protection to a community-approved vision of what CH encompasses (Wells 2015). Therefore, the modern community engagement model in the CH safeguarding efforts reconsiders the role of CH as an economic, social and intellectual resource of a specific community.

The focus on community participation in CH preservation became a guiding framework for major international organisations dealing with heritage across the globe. For instance, the 1987 ICOMOS Charter stated that 'the participation and involvement of the residents are essential for the success of the conservation programme and should be encouraged. The conservation of historic towns and urban areas concerns their residents first of all' (ICOMOS 1987, art. 3). The same stance was voiced in the 1993 ICOMOS New Zealand Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Heritage and the 1999 ICOMOS Charter on Built Vernacular Heritage, stressing the need to take the decisions of the indigenous community into account and engage the community into heritage conservation efforts (Van Balen and Vandesande 2015). Thus, since the 1990s, ICH conservation has become viewed as inseparably connected with the involvement of, and partnership with, the community that possesses that ICH.

This evolution of CH protection approaches also expanded the circle of parties involved in selecting and preserving CH artefacts at all levels. What used to be the role of conservation experts and governments became more public domain, with local stakeholders gaining more authority in the processes (Jewiss and Laven 2021). The 2005 UNESCO guidelines included private sector businesses, developers, owners, NGOs and community groups into the list of stakeholders that can partake in safeguarding the ICH, while the 2003 UNESCO Convention gave a prominent role in that process to communities that produce, safeguard, maintain and recreate their local ICH (Van Balen and Vandesande 2015). This change is attributed to the fact that ICH is defined as a phenomenon that exists when recognised, practised, and

valued by its community, giving those people a sense of identity and continuity (UNESCO 2003).

Regina Bendix and colleagues (2013) share a vision of CH as a source of economic value for states and local interest groups, which gave rise to grassroots activism understood as local professionals and community members involved in CH protection. The influx of investment aimed at restoring and preserving historical and cultural monuments as well as intangible elements of culture such as festivals means 'reconfiguration and expansion of state infrastructure for heritage and cultural management', which leads to the imposition of hegemonic national ideas under the banner of UNESCOs policies (Bendix et al. 2013, 407). In the same way, Nathalie Peutz (2018) indicates that the commodification often present in state and supra-state efforts for CH preservation where culture becomes a marketable good and preservation serves purposes other than purely scientific and historical.

Though grassroots heritage activism is a relatively new phenomenon in the ICH safeguarding process in Oman, it has already enjoyed success in many countries. According to Bernadette Lynch (2011), a museum professional who pioneered innovative participatory practices in the field of heritage management, grassroots activism took root in the 1960s and 1970s, ushered in the new mode of public engagement and participation in museum change and setup of participatory democracy in museums. Ali Mozaffari (2015) described the grassroots heritage activism efforts that originated in Iran in the 1990s and shaped a nascent heritage movement to capture the emerging, self-reflective heritage, revealing the Iranian identity in its full diversity. Cyprus also has a program of grants and subsidies to communities and civil organisations that issue workable proposals for ICH safeguarding, and Turkey has over 80 local administrative units that coordinate ICH safeguarding efforts across the country (Sousa 2018).

However, community involvement in ICH safeguarding is often challenged by socio-political tensions and a lack of autonomy, with governments unwilling to give particular communities decision-making power (Van Balen and Vandesande 2015).

An illustrative example is the Orthodox heritage of Kosovo, which is included in the World Heritage list. Still, as the UN considers Kosovo part of Serbia and does not recognise its independence, one can conclude that the local Kosovar community's perspectives are hardly considered in this CH conservation effort (Trkanjec 2021). Another illustration of dubious CH conservation practices with community neglect is the conservation of Petra Archaeological Park in the late 1980s, which involved relocating the local indigenous community for the sake of protecting the historical habitat of the ancient Nabatean community. Those efforts to protect TCH – the tangible fabric of an ancient city – were done at the expense of the present-day Bdul community's authentic habitat and CH preservation (Van Balen and Vandesande 2015).

Thus, Charles Briggs (1996) notes that grassroots actors are often overpowered by the state's access to information about heritage and thus often lose the bureaucratic struggle in the attempt to offer a local perspective on a particular heritage object. This was illustrated by the U.S. using arguably invented evidence of native tradition as a pretext for defending the rights of locals and bombing Kaho'olawe Island with no external proof of such native tradition existing due to the absence of access to written evidence and archives (Briggs 1996). Similarly, Alejandro Dayán-Fernández (2019) examined how grassroots activism helped revitalise the Galician language – an authentic community language of a Portuguese region, with those efforts finding zero support in the Galician government. Peutz (2018) also demonstrated that national efforts at CH preservation in Yemen miss a substantial portion of Socotra island's local diversity in their attempt to use CH as a top-down national identity creation process.

However, not all those grassroots efforts are challenge the official governmental initiatives and ICH safeguarding agenda. As Janet Blake (2018) pointed out, most governmental ICH conservation efforts are indeed highly centralised in policymaking, decision-making and action. Still, many governments have taken effective steps towards decentralisation and greater inclusion of

grassroots, local organisations into the ICH safeguarding process. For example, the Brazilian government created Centres and Points of Culture to disseminate ICH safeguarding efforts at the local level. Belgian authorities also provide formal support to NGOs like Faro and Tapis Plein and Civil Society Organisations to work with local authorities and communities on ICH preservation. Therefore, responsible and inclusive ICH preservation is possible only under shared responsibility and participatory planning of safeguarding efforts with the local community.

Looking at these examples of effective government-grassroots collaboration and following the position of Peutz (2018), one may view grassroots actors as a possible source of multidirectional partnership with state preservation efforts and international CH conservation programs. In line with Peutz's (2018) arguments, civil society facilitates relationships between individuals and the government when CH is concerned.

Such academic coverage of grassroots actors accentuates two important takeaways: the possible lack of validity of written evidence in highly politicised heritage discourse and the rising importance of grassroots activists as possessors of first-hand oral history and knowledge of culture. In light of the often-political process of CH preservation, it becomes important to study the role of grassroots activists and their insights as a source of knowledge on the value of CH and sources of ICH that escape the eye of international organisations and/or nationally contested ICH.

2.5 Tradition

Tradition is a paramount concept in the study of CH and is one of the subjects of CH preservation, which, similarly to CH itself, is viewed differently among scholars. Defining this term in the paper is essential for later analysis of the musical tradition in Oman, particularly in terms of how it is perceived and negotiated by different stakeholders. The term is also crucial for understanding how the value of ICH is understood by archivists, which helps explain the choices made for ICH safeguarding.

Classic or naturalistic definitions of tradition emerged in the second half of the 20th century. It covers temporal, spatial and qualitative boundaries, with Edward Shils and Alfred Louis Kroeber being their main ideologists. Shils (1981) posited that tradition can be anything transmitted from past to present in at least three generations and where some elements of the passed-down phenomena can be subject to change but with static 'essential elements' remaining recognisable. Richard Handler and Joselyn Linnekin (1984, 275) add certain clarity to their definition by suggesting that 'traditions are like organisms that grow and change while yet remaining themselves', which perfectly explains the criticisms addressed to Shills (1981) for attempting to combine dynamic and static qualities of tradition in their definition. The view of tradition as a dynamic process with certain static and recognisable elements is further supported by Alasdair MacIntyre (1985), who defined tradition as an intergenerational fundamental agreement on behaving and understanding natural phenomena challenged by external and internal forces. Yaacov Yadgar (2011) later referred to this definition as being closer to a phenomenological approach that transcends the simplistic understanding of tradition as an antonym to modernity.

Further, Ted Honderich (2005) suggested that tradition does not necessarily *change* but *reforms* itself, clarifying that it amends to reflect extrinsic aspects of life. To illustrate, Yaksharanga, a traditional Indian performance involving singing and dancing dating back to 1500, has been evolving from being exclusive to higher casts to being more available for the common people. Furthermore, changes in performance and instruments have been noticeable in the 20th century, which scholars refer to as an 'evolution' or 'experiment' rather than a change (Padmanabha and Kumar 2019). However, along with Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa (2009), Honderich (2005) adds that tradition is also subject to radical transformation, which again stresses the importance of its preservation and, by extension, the studies into ICH preservation.

Eric Hobsbawm is a seminal scholar whose definition of tradition as 'invented' points to its somewhat artificial nature. His views can thus be applied to the development of musical tradition as invented, constructed, and formally instituted to foster political stability and ensure a sense of continuity with the past (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, 1). As an example of this purposeful process, he cites folk music as being modified and popularised in England and other parts of the world to serve patriotic and nationalistic purposes (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, 7). Brazilian *choro* composition is another vivid example of this invented tradition, as this element of ICH has been deliberately selected as a symbol of national identity and an object of 'curatorial preservation' (Stroud 2016, 17). These examples bring us to the government's role in preserving tradition, which is discussed in the previous section. Interestingly, contemporary scholars, such as Ulrich Morgenstern (2021), consider Hobsbawm's understanding of tradition as negativistic. According to Morgenstern (2021), the term 'traditional music' is still relevant in the context of ethnomusicology and alongside its core issues, such as oral transmission, sonic orders, stylistic pluralism and community-based music.

Authenticity is a term closely linked to tradition, and it deserves attention here because it is sometimes used interchangeably with tradition, particularly in the context of ICH preservation, as will be shown later in this dissertation. Sandie Gunara and colleagues (2022, 26) explained that 'authentic' may refer to something 'having 'undisputed origin or authorship' or in a weaker sense of being true and 'faithful to an original' or being a reliable representation'. In the context of musicology, authentic may refer to musical elements that are real, honest, genuine, and have integrity (Moore 2002). The notion of authenticity, just like tradition, can inform people's intentions to maintain and preserve the music culture. However, it is a somewhat troubled and unreliable concept because music constantly evolves (Gunara 2022).

The core problem for research and practice in CH preservation is to recognise a particular tradition as valuable for preservation. From the perspective of state

officials, traditions such as oral performances or particular ways of conduct permeating the domain of ICH tend to be recognised as self-preserving (Lenzerini 2011). This means that if a particular tradition does not face extinction and is successfully passed from generation to generation while being widespread, it does not need to be included in ICH lists (Lenzerini 2011). This specifically concerns Omani music traditions, which appear to be well-presented among the population of sailor villages in the coastal regions, hence the lack of state interest towards preserving the small 'professional' elements of culture. Similarly, preservation and recognition of such intangible heritage elements are often omitted at the international level, as Briggs (1996) noted. The problem with such an approach is again the risk of tradition becoming extinct or being subject to radical change, which undermines efforts to study the evolution of tradition.

In this regard, Federico Lenzerini (2011) indicates that the lack of CH resources leads to languages, customs, ideas and other intangible manifestations being completely lost or changed shape vastly with little left to trace back to the original forms. Thus, Richard Kurin (2007) accentuates the focus on the 'product' of culture rather than on practice and conduct within a community imbued with international or national approaches to preserving tradition as part of ICH before the 2003 convention. The 2003 Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding Convention accentuated a shift from the 'product' vision of ICH towards a community-oriented focus on 'process'. Thus, Kurin (2007) suggests that folklore, oral heritage, traditional conduct and other forms of ICH are proposed to become *safeguarded,* meaning that activities will be focused on preserving the natural course of transmission, research and education on tradition so that it does not escape the national cognition. Mickey Hart (2001) connects the challenge of the focus on supporting grassroots-level activism in preserving tradition with the lack of funding to research, categorise and train local activists so that preservation is effective. At the same time, Mirko Ettore D'Agostino (2020) indicates that using modern technologies and means to safeguard music tradition is risky towards the original way of producing it and passing it on orally, as was the case before the digital age. Indeed, a digital recording of a

performance or a song might not accurately represent a live performance and would be contrary to the idea of safeguarding, whereby original means of distribution are the focus of preservation efforts (Kurin 2007).

This debate accentuates the need for research into the possibility of uniting the efforts of grassroots activists and authorities to devise ways of preserving musical tradition as it was originally practised. The lack of research into natural survival and evolution instead of preservation alone (referred to as 'freezing' by UNESCO n.d.), as inversely indicated by Hart (2001) and Patricia D. Stokes (2011), is the key academic gap in the area of tradition research. Therefore, this research is focused on investigating ways of archiving and cataloguing tradition as a form of ICH and understanding the perceptions of safeguarding heritage among the local population to inform CH theory and practice. Instead of looking at Omani musical tradition in pure or primordial form, this dissertation examines it as a living tradition. This focus on the living tradition is justified because, according to Michael Bakan (1999) and David Harnish (2007), traditional music is very vulnerable to freezing.

The topic of musical tradition has not been extensively studied in the Omani setting, but some important pieces of research are worth mentioning. For example, Ulaby (2012) demonstrates that Omani music traditions, specifically traditional sea songs, *nahhäm,* have remained prominent and mostly unchanged under the influence of external events. Colonisation and the decline in the pearling industry, whose workers were the main guardians of the musical tradition, has not led to its decline. However, this exceptional resilience of traditional singing is not examined in detail by many scholars, with Ulaby (2012) and Rasmussen (2012) being one of the few authors to discuss it, albeit with a rather historiographic lens. Rasmussen's (2012) work is particularly informative in the context of the given paper because the scholar examines traditional music as a force driving the development of collective identities in Oman. It also touches on musical life in the public sphere and how music reproduces relations of dominance and resistance, going far beyond its cultural functions (Rasmussen 2012).

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2.6 Ethnomusicology

2.6.1. Ethnomusicology Goals and Current Research on Archives

The scientific interest in studying music is often built upon the complexity and sometimes metaphoric nature of music, which is difficult to decipher. The study of music is a part of culture that is inseparable from those who create it. In the context of ICH, which is a focus of this study, ethnomusicology provides a vital lens for studying musical traditions. Following the definition by Timothy Rice (2013, 1), ethnomusicology is the study of 'why and how human beings are musical'. This definition places the academic discipline of ethnomusicology at the intersection between social sciences, humanities and biological sciences, assigning it the role of examining the human capacity to create, perform and organise musical sounds and react to them (Merriam 1964; Merriam 1977; Rice 2013).

Modern ethnomusicology is a diverse intellectual discipline that studies various projects to make sense of musical practices in specific social contexts. All research in this area concerns the nature of music and social life and seeks to interpret music and cultures (Bohlman 2019). At the heart of ethnomusicological research is an assumption that all people are musical to a certain extent, with that musicality serving as one of the fundamental definitions of humanity and parameters for comprehending and analysing human experience (Rice 2013).

The concept of applied ethnomusicology is also important to define in this paper because it directly concerns the topic of the study and the research goals outlined earlier. Applied ethnomusicology deals with studying music and musical heritage in the social context. It is driven by social responsibility and social justice principles and seeks to benefit communities in which music is born (Pettan and Titon 2015; Sheehy 1992). Applied musicologists are engaged in the following key activities:

'(1) developing new 'frames' for musical performances, (2) 'feeding back' musical models to the communities that created them, (3) providing

community members access to strategic models and conservation techniques, and (4) developing broad, structural solutions to broad problems' (Sheehy 1992, 330-331).

The present study's focus on grassroots archivists and ICH preservation in the Omani community thus clearly points to its alignment with applied ethnomusicology principles. Moreover, in the light of the given definition, I believe that I was working as an applied ethnomusicologist before I had any claim to be an ethnomusicologist, as I have always been interested in uncovering the social and community aspects of traditional music that cannot be separated from its context.

The problem of endangered musical heritage has always been one of the most pressing in contemporary ethnomusicology, with issues of archival practices and heritage-making taking centrality in the debates about effective methods for ICH preservation. Many scholars have conceptualised this problem regarding sustainability, with attention being put on the genres facing disappearance (Titon 2008; Schippers 2010). Scholars have also used the ecosystem analogy to musical heritage to explain the fragility of musical diversity and sustain the dying traditions that are inextricably connected with cultural and social practices (Cottrell 2011; Schippers 2010). The complexity of the mission of preserving musical heritage has even inspired some scholars, such as Catherine Grant (2014), to define ICH preservation as a wicked problem, an ill-defined, ambiguous issue that resists solution. Given the complexity of the problem, it is unsurprising that the discipline shifted from 'armchair analysis' of musical heritage to studying music in context (Fargion 2009, 75), which is what this research attempts to achieve.

What is more important in the context of the given dissertation is the research on the intersection of ethnomusicology and the preservation of musical heritage, particularly in the context of musical archives. Carolyn Landau and Janet Fargion are some of the most prominent scholars working in this area, as their context-specific studies help better understand the value of ICH archivisation and ways to make it more equitable. For example, in their seminal study on the changing nature

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of sound archives, Landau and Fargion (2012) touched upon the emerging patterns of sound archive use, pointing to the importance of making them more accessible and reconsidering archiving as a social process. More importantly, Landau and Fargion (2012) suggested the concept of collaborative archiving, inviting institutional archivists to engage local bearers of the musical tradition in its preservation. According to Landau (2012), such approaches to preserving musical tradition can help local communities reclaim and proclaim their cultural heritage, evoke memories of their history and legacy, and reinforce a strong sense of identity. In this way, Landau's (2012) ethnomusicology work can be located in the wider context of the literature dedicated to community role in ICH preservation (Jewiss and Laven 2021; Van Balen and Vandesande 2015; Wells 2015).

Many scholars have challenged the propriety of archives as a primary form of heritage preservation. For instance, Robert Hewison (1987) cautioned the ethnomusicological community against engaging in the "heritage industry" – the process of sanitising and commercialising the version of the past produced as heritage. Though Hewison's research is primarily related to the UK context, his observations are universally applicable to any context in which the heritage industry is carefully curated to reshape heritage as popular entertainment and satisfy the community's nostalgia for the past. David Lowenthal (1998) expanded Hewison's ideas by pointing out that fabricated heritage enjoys greater success among consumers because it is more familiar and satisfies the demand for imagined, not real, past.

Archives have faced criticism on the part of many scholars, with Lancefield (1998) equalling them to traces of past events and Seeger (2001) claiming that only obsolete cultural artifacts with no community relevance are archived. However, the role of archives in the creation of archival memory, revival of old traditions and creation of new ones can hardly be overestimated. As Gunderson et al. (2019) explained in *Oxford Handbook of Music Repatriation*, audiovisual archives serve as avenues for community activism, access and distribution, so they function as a

strong voice of identity and a locus for a vibrant dialogue of present identity and the past cultural heritage. Therefore, accurate fieldwork and recordings created as a result can become a powerful catalyst for song and music revival in any community.

Another popular criticism surrounding archive-making as an approach to heritage-making is the archives' vulnerability to what Lowenthal (1998) referred to as upgrades (making the past better than it was by romanticising it), updates (anachronistic reading of past traditions through the prism of the present) and selective forgetting. When archives are viewed from this perspective, one can see how heritage-makers exercise the power of discretion over what will be recorded and what will be forgotten, thus shaping the community's heritage in line with their vision and intentions. The same concerns were shared by Pettan and Titon (2015), who referred to the archival process, as well as archive ownership and determination of access to it, as an aspect involving intricate relationships of power and control.

An approach counter-balancing the static, framed and fragmented archival process, as proposed by Gunderson et al. (2019), rests on heritage-making through pedagogy, which is a modality of activism and sustainability. The researchers pointed out that by working with youth, ethnomusicologists can reinforce traditions, foster interest and reciprocity in interactions with archival materials, and encourage ongoing, self-driven modes of preservation via advocacy and agency. This position reflects the dichotomy between what Reed (2019) explained as human and archival modes of memory storage and retrieval. The former is fluid, oral, messy and selective, while the latter is static and mediated, always resulting in a tangible reference that is partial, decontextualised and authoritative. This way, one can see a divide between preserving heritage by helping it live and conserving it in tangible archives for future reference, dissemination and universal access.

Contemporary ethnomusicological research has gone a long way in balancing these approaches and finding comprehensive approaches to ICH safeguarding. One of the changes observed in the traditional "conservation" approach dominant in the 20th century was the humanistic turn that Pettan and Titon (2015) characterised as

a change towards more experience-centred ICH recording. One can see the characteristics of experience-centred archiving in the concept of 'proactive archiving', which can be helpful when analysing the role of grassroots archives in Oman. Edmonson (2004, 20) explained that 'proactive archiving' happens when access to collections is initiated by the archive itself, compared to 'reactive archiving' referring to the users of an archive initiating access. Proactive archiving, manifested in the production of CDs and the online spread of archive materials, lectures, exhibitions, and presentations, seems an increasingly common practice engaging professional and amateur archivists (Landau and Fargion 2012). A case study of gospel archiving in Los Angeles conducted by Brigitta Johnson (2012) is a vivid example of how proactive archiving reshapes relationships between ethnomusicologists, ethnographic researchers, archivists and community members.

Fargion (2019) joins this discourse on the changing nature of archives by arguing that technology and digitalisation have made sound archives more democratic. The scholar notes that the word archive evolves because the modern online community repurposes music recording and storage, making archives a place of radical inclusion and transformation (Fargion 2019). The author also approaches modern ethnomusicology through the postmodernist lens, arguing that the emerging archivisation patterns and approaches, such as the grassroots archives analysed in this dissertation, challenge institutional authority and make music preservation more participatory and inclusive (Fargion 2019). Archivist Terry Cook (1994) also embraced this perspective, maintaining that archives should not exist in one place or have one creator. In addition, Fargion (2019) mentions the Records Continuum Model, developed by Frank Upward, Sue McKemmish and Livia Lacovino in the 1990s. This model is relevant in the given paper because it views recorded items as part of larger archival, cultural, social and political processes rather than mere objects for preservation (Millar 2017).

Interestingly, the way even seminal studies on ethnomusicology and archives become outdated points to the fast technological development in this area. For

example, a widely cited study by Anthony Seeger and Shubha Chaudhuri (2004) on future archives called for archive digitalisation, which is currently a standard practice. Yet, given more recent research on this topic, their recommendations regarding raising awareness about audiovisual archives and their preservation goals, training archivists on cooperating to preserve the archives, and securing funding are still relevant (Mengel 2013). Thus, one may suggest that while technology is indeed reshaping ethnomusicology quickly, some fundamental issues regarding how it is utilised remain unaddressed and require further analysis.

2.6.3 Methodological Issues in Ethnomusicology

One of the methodological issues in ethnomusicology concerned with musical heritage is a problem of the Western gaze whereby music traditions of the indigenous populations were often judged as not real music; thereby, the music search often excluded music culture elements such as Inuit ''throat games'' or Australian didgeridoo (Laurent 2007). This problem reiterates the CH noted by Arizpe (2000), where Western aesthetics interfered with understanding CH sourced from distant and culturally diverse localities. Such an issue thus welcomes the research into music that imbues the original, authentic representations of culture and, simultaneously, devoid of West-centric analytical paradigms. More specifically, there is a need for a primary inquiry with limited influence of researcher bias that this study will attempt to undertake.

One of the key problems in ethnomusicology as related to CH is defining the subject of study or, rather, defining its boundaries. Harnish (2007) indicates, for example, that each particular ethnic group has a wide range of historical influences and co-dependencies which simultaneously enrich musical tradition and broaden its scope, thus making it difficult to differentiate and pinpoint a specific musical tradition to one ethnicity. He illustrates this with Sasak people in Indonesia, who were historically blended with Javanese migrants and additionally being a part of a larger South-East Asian ethnicity of Balinese. Identifying whether the musical tradition of Sasak should be studied and related to their heritage is a point of contention as

Sasak and Balinese prefer to differentiate their art and culture (Harnish 2007). Oman is also home to several major ethnicities, such as Omani, Al-Lawatia and Zanj (Zanzibar), as well as tribal populations and expatriates who have long assimilated into the culture of Oman (Al-Abri 2020). The attribution discourse in ethnomusicology is reminiscent of the same discourse in the literature concerning CH preservation, suggesting that problematising music origins remain strong in the academic agenda (Blake 2000). According to Hart (2001) and Harnish (2007), there is a need to work with local people's perceptions and the inclusion of representatives of various ethnic groups within one nation to provide for adequate representation and limit bias.

In practice, however, such research designs are limited across the musicology literature, where academics prefer to focus on one ethnicity (Merriam and Merriam 1964). Despite Blake's (2000) suggestions of departing from the attribution debate, the government's role in safeguarding music heritage has been centred on ownership issues. The study by Ronald Inawat (2015) indicates that the US government's agency is focused on protection rather than preservation by giving local musicians intellectual property rights on their creations. Insufficient focus on the agenda of safeguarding from local authorities seems to usher in a bottom-up approach, inviting grassroots-level activism and cultivating.

This is the issue of music repatriation that first surfaced in the intellectual works of Lowenthal (1998) and is further discussed at length in the *Oxford Handbook of Music Repatriation* edited by Gunderson et al. (2019). According to Lowenthal (1998), heritage cannot be learnt or inherited; it can only become the person's heritage by being embraced. Following the researcher's position, people should realise that they are heirs of the past, and at the same time, they should be given the possibility to decide what this heritage means to them, what they will do with it at present and what it will mean for them in the future. This position is in line with UNESCO's official goal of ICH safeguarding without freezing, which means that only reanimated and reshaped ICH can stay alive and be preserved, even if it means its continuous evolution. However, this discussion is deeply problematised by the

concepts of ownership, control, and community belonging, which are rarely rigidly assigned to a specific location or geographic unit. Therefore, Gunderson et al. (2019) proposed shifting the methodological focus from physical ownership, which gets further complicated in the digital age, to rights over access and reproduction.

However, what is missing in the literature is an understanding of the needs and wants of the local communities regarding their musical creations. Indeed, as Marcia Ostashewski and colleagues (2020) contended, there is a need for collaborative research into local music that would bridge the gap between the preservation efforts of the government and the community. Although the method used in this dissertation is not collaborative per se, the study is focused on understanding the perspectives of local musicians and grassroots activists in Oman because the research into their perceptions of music as heritage has been largely missing. This ethnomusicology inquiry seeks to uncover the power relations within the context of musical ICH safeguarding in Oman in line with a more nuanced understanding of the cultural dynamics of ICH production and practices.

2.7 Conclusion

As it turns out from the literature review, the global community has witnessed a large-scale paradigm shift regarding the cultural heritage it has and should secure with a complex of preservation, promotion and safeguarding measures. What initially started as a cultural property concept gradually evolved in comprehending the rich diversity of intangible cultural practices and manifestations that deserve attention and protection. UNESCO has been the leading global actor in the protection of TCH and ICH, with numerous financial, consulting and practical safeguarding practices put in place to protect the rich cultural legacy of humankind.

With the increasing awareness of the ICH's significance at the international level, nation-states have also started dedicating separate attention to ICH identification, archivisation and protection for the sake of social cohesion, cultural identity preservation and communication, and political and economic use value. Since ICH has strong ties with the community's identity, it has been used effectively

for nation-building and nationhood reinforcement. However, the role of the government in ICH protection and promotion often takes the form of arbitrary ICH artefact selection in line with the present-day political course, which occurs with neglect to indigenous or marginalised groups within that state. In these situations, grassroots activists, equipped with advanced technology and opportunities provided by social media, come into play to give a voice to all groups within a community and ensure proper representation for the entire heterogeneous and culturally diverse population of a specific nation or region.

The research gaps the present review disclosed relate mainly to the practical steps and guidelines in ICH archivisation in Oman and worldwide. Despite all states' commitment to ICH safeguarding, only a few have worked out the dimensions and recommendations for ICH item identification, archiving and proper storage and cataloguing. The main problem of this lack of consistency is the nuanced, unique and context-specific nature of ICH coupled with the abundance and heterogeneity of ICH manifestations in any given location. Therefore, advancing this area of study in ICH archivisation seems appropriate. Moreover, there is a lack of ethnomusicology research examining the changing nature of archives in the Omani setting, another major gap that this study seeks to address.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology used to answer the research questions. I begin by describing the use of ethnography as the qualitative method most suitable for examining the topic of ICH preservation in Oman. I also set the context for how data collection and analysis occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic to justify some methodological choices. The main part of the chapter is dedicated to the description of methods, including critical discourse analysis, interviews, archives, field observations, and social media research, as well as how these were combined to gain a full picture of ICH preservation efforts. The scope and limitations of the study are also discussed here.

3.2 Ethnography

This study used ethnography as the core methodological approach to data collection. Ethnography is a naturalistic and field-oriented approach that seeks to immerse in the culture, thus balancing the insider and outsider perspectives (Bresler 2021, 5). Specifically, it allows exploring the topic through the perspective of participants as insiders and a researcher as an outsider. As a result, the researcher gains an opportunity to step away from an a priori research plan and approach data collection freshly and creatively, allowing data to guide the direction of the study (Bresler 2021, 5). This approach was valuable in the context of the given study, as I had limited evidence to rely on and had to examine ICH preservation in Oman almost from scratch.

Ethnography as a methodology is normally grounded in participant observation, where the ethnographer studies a population, often remaining there for a long period (Baker 1987, 14). Through 'empathetic immersion in the daily life and meaning systems of those studied', ethnographic research helps generate a vast body of fieldwork data, which are written accounts and descriptions that present how objects of the study perceive the world around them (Atkinson et al. 2001, 2).

Another useful way to generate data for analysis is called ethnographic inscription. It is defined as the writing process whereby a researcher transforms portions of their lived experience into written field notes (Atkinson et al. 2001). By using fieldnotes, the researcher can capture in detail the events, experiences, and interactions studied, providing a compelling and comprehensive picture of the social world. Ethnographers often frame the experience of participant observation as a narrative where they question basic assumptions and then a new understanding of emergent cultural logics: if not 'through the native's point of view' (Geertz 1974), then at least as a translation from a previously unknown language into a familiar one (Geertz 2008). The listed characteristics of ethnographic research make it a suitable approach for the given study, which seeks to look deeper into the meanings people attach to ICH preservation and examine how the archivisation process occurs in various social settings. Observation was an important part of this study, so ethnography provided a valuable methodological underpinning to this endeavour, helping me organise data collection meaningfully.

However, while remaining ethnographic, the methodology of the present study will stray from Geertz's approach for several reasons. The most important problem in my case was that I could not act as a classic insider in this ethnographic study, as I am a representative of the culture I studied (Bresler 2021). Having grown up in Oman, I found it important to be mindful of presuppositions regarding my culture and my position within it (Alvesson 2009). Also, the present thesis does not seek to explore the nature and practices of traditional Omani music as much as it looks at the processes of its archivisation. Archivisation in the present work is creating an archive out of a lived tradition: the choices regarding what will be included, how it will be recorded, edited and stored, and who will have access to it.

One of the key characteristics of ethnographic research is the use of triangulation (Bresler 2021). By combining data collection sources, the researcher supports findings by showing that independent measures agree with it. So, checking with different sources, applying different methods, and attaining corroboration by

different participants becomes a key requirement for generating valuable, accurate data (Bresler 2021). Given these requirements, the study's data were collected in several complementary manners, namely ethnographic interviews, archival studies, museum and concert visits, and organisation. My ethnographic interviews were the centrepiece of my fieldwork, allowing me to interpret my visits and archival studies and pointing me to what I should be looking for. Furthermore, they allowed me to glimpse the many aspects and perspectives that went into the archivisation process. Next, my study of archival materials allowed me to explore the unravelling of networks of social relationships and discourses around ICH preservation in Oman. Furthermore, my visits to museums and concerts allowed me to observe different parts of the archivisation process by allowing me to investigate an acoustical experience of music-making before recording. Finally, a major part of the study was the organisation of a symposium, which was thought of as applied ethnomusicology (Murphy 2015).

I was also made aware that by focusing my research on archivisation as a process, I did not deal with a single musical tradition but with several, as the process of archivisation was entangled within several differing discourses and perceptions. Furthermore, none of my interviewees listened to only Omani traditional music: their musical worlds spanned a multitude of 'micromusics' (Slobin 1992, 1), allowing them to perceive and evaluate music in different modes. Slobin's notions of subcultural sounds and musical intercultures gave me a way to conceptualise archivisation as something that happens at the intersection of multiple such cultures.[2] While often overlapping, the discourses of government officials, archivists, musicians, and community members were often in stark contrast, so I had to learn new ways to

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[2] Subcultural sounds are, for Slobin (1992), 'small musics in big systems'. As such, this perspective allows for looking at both the grand narrative the Omani government presents to its own population and to outside gazes, and the micro-level peculiarities and diversities among performers and bands. Furthermore, Slobin's perspective allows for analysing the ways these sounds communicate with each other on the everyday level, with different musicians taking up ideas heard from others, seen on TV, or simply introducing their own inspirations into musical traditions.

communicate on ethnomusicological subjects with Omani musicians and community members to get a fuller picture.

3.3 The Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic took a massive toll on all social activities and interactions domains and affected how ethnographic and ethnomusicological research was done (Muhammad As'ad et al. 2023; Trisnasari Fraser et al. 2023; Schwartz 2023). Since I started my research after getting ethical approval at the end of September 2021, I faced the need to adjust my research methods and data collection procedures to the realities of social distancing and isolation.

During periods of social distancing, I used social media platforms and the official website of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to collect and classify data. Social media platforms became an incredibly valuable source of information during the coronavirus period, partly because many musicians began to use them more actively as tools for socialising and sharing music. Social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter have reported major increases in the number of daily users and the time spent online daily (Dixon 2022). Since most people interacted online, digital engagement became essential for researchers who often could not access information otherwise. To keep up with academic demands, I needed to be flexible and substitute face-to-face contact with online data collection, a common solution for many scholars at the time (Heo et al. 2022). Social media use for research purposes was a cost-effective solution that required no advanced tech skills, so it was a suitable option for me. On the downside, I wasted time filtering out irrelevant information, which took much work. A more detailed description of the research methods I used is provided later in this chapter. When meetings were allowed, I strived to improve my situation and sought to gather interview information and develop digital contacts quickly. Still, many meetings were cancelled, and some were postponed due to Covid-19 regulations. Furthermore, choosing a date for the symposium I would conduct in February 2022 was challenging. I waited for the

Omani authorities to announce when we could do events, and then I set a date for everything related to the symposium.

Nevertheless, there was a positive edge to the situation. Many of the performances I witnessed (from formal ministry-organised performances to street bands) were greeted with extreme enthusiasm by their audiences, who would often film and share their experiences with the hashtag #lifeafterCovid. This enthusiasm also made many of my informants eager to share what they had to say. While within a more traditional understanding of fieldwork, it can be said that I was deprived of consistent contact with the musical cultures I was studying (Cooley and Barz 2008), I would claim the opposite: I was separated from these musical cultures while their performers and participants themselves were separated from them. This, apart from giving me time for reflectivity amidst my interviews, allowed me to experience not only the musical cultures themselves but also the enthusiasm of the public and the power of performance that followed years of crisis and deprivation, including in the realm of traditional music.

3.4 Methods

The thesis uses a number of different approaches in answering its questions: policy documents and governmental statements; interviews with officials, performers, archivists, and laypeople; and performance and event attendance. This mixed approach culminated in a symposium I organised and prepared.

3.4.1 Government Policy Documents, Narratives and Oman Vision 2040

In addition to Oman Vision 2040 as a cornerstone policy document for ICH preservation efforts in Oman (discussed in detail in previous chapters), I studied relevant policy documentation of Ministries and agencies involved in ICH safeguarding. These documents included the document 'The Omani Culture System in the Renaissance' published by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture (Al-Afifi 2006), Carter's (1976) seminal material 'Tribal Structures in Oman' published in the proceedings of the 10th Seminar for Arabian Studies held in the Middle East Centre,

publications of seminars on ICH organised by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture and specifically the Department of Intangible Cultural Heritage, the working paper 'Intangible Cultural Heritage and Oman National Inventories of Intangible Cultural Heritage' (Al Busaidi 2018) and documents of the National Records and Archives Authority. These documents provided a detailed picture of government-led efforts to preserve ICH in Oman, clarifying what exactly is covered by ICH safeguarding policies, what cultural artefacts are prioritised, and who is involved in these efforts. The documents also provide valuable insight into the dominating discourse around ICH preservation and the actors controlling it.

3.4.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) was the methodology selected to make sense of the listed policy documents. CDA is one of the discourse analysis methods that seek to 'understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality' (van Dijk 2005, 352). More importantly, CDA helps uncover the role of language in processes of exclusion, inequality and identity building (Aydın-Düzgit 2013). As such, CDA is valuable in analysing discursive practices in official documents and policies as the means of shaping the social world, social identities and social relations (Aydın-Düzgit 2013). Originally developed by Fairclough (1992), CDA has evolved to encompass a variety of methodological approaches, which may sometimes combine different theories.

The given study uses one of the dominant CDA approaches called the discourse-historical approach (DHA). Its core characteristic is the specific focus on identity construction, and it has been widely used in analysing the development of national identities, so it perfectly fits the present research (Aydın-Düzgit 2013). DHA is based on the principle of intertextuality, which refers to the ways in which a policy text draws explicitly or implicitly from other available texts. This may be done through references to topics, people, events, and arguments. In this way, DHA helps locate the text within a wider setting that led to its creation (Aydın-Düzgit 2013). DHA analysis used in this study consisted of three steps. First, the discourse topics stage

involved outlining the main content of the themes and discourses in the analysed texts. Second, I explored discursive strategies used in the narratives. Third, I explored linguistic means through which these discursive strategies were realised (Aydın-Düzgit 2013). This approach helped me gain an in-depth understanding of the official discourse around ICH preservation and its effects on national identity construction. Its focus on both macro and micro analysis is another notable advantage that helped conduct a more meaningful and comprehensive analysis of documents (Aydın-Düzgit 2013).

3.4.3 Ethnographic Interviews

One of the main sources of information for this thesis was the interviews I conducted with my contacts in Oman. I managed to interview people of diverse backgrounds and, in this way, explore the role of ICH and ICH archives among the people who perform, archive, hear, or make decisions about its future. Inclusion criteria for this study were as follows: (1) self-identification as an archivist (which allowed including both institutional and grassroots archivists; (2) knowledge of Omani ICH, which originates from either professional position or self-education; (3) participation in ICH reproduction, recording, spread, or celebration. As one can see, these inclusion criteria were rather broad, which helped engage people who come in contact with ICH in different contexts an through different channels. I excluded people who worked with genres other than traditional music from this study. The sampling was thus purposive, which allowed for the generation of a sample of people who were most knowledgeable about the topic in question, including both institutional and grassroots archivists. Institutional archivists and governmental officials were reached via emails or phone calls, unlike grassroots archivists whom I contacted via social media. Snowball sampling was used as an additional technique to access more grassroots archivists working with Omani ICH. Finally, the rest of the participants were reached during social events.

The first group of interviews included government officials from the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth and related institutions. These interviews were extremely

valuable for learning more about the past and present of institutional archivisation in Oman, archivists' views on the processes and trends in ICH preservation, and how different governmental institutions and bodies work collaboratively to build national heritage. In addition, interviews with institutional archivists gave me an in-depth understanding of how the ICH selection, recording, preservation, and management occur, which was essential for the later comparisons with grassroots ICH preservation approaches. Many of these interviews were conducted in governmental and private institutions or archives, which provided additional sources of information for the study. For example, I attended the archive of Sultanate of Oman TV, which gave me a better understanding of the challenges faced by archivists in preserving a vast amount of ICH data.

I also interviewed grassroots ICH archivists who are making their own archives. I managed to interview six such archivists on social media that I found through searches, tags, and expanding my social network among Omani folk musicians. Their interviews allowed me to uncover new meanings behind tradition, archivisation and even national identity. Even though grassroots archivists often included aspects of the more monolithic discourse I had encountered among officials, they framed those aspects in new ways relevant to their experience of what Omani traditional music means. For example, they would repeat narratives of Oman as a cultural crossroad, but they would often not make such a sharp distinction between traditional and modern Omani music: for them, both were representatives of the same musical legacy. Grassroots archivists often reflected more openly on their role in archivisation. However, this information came at a cost as they were often quite difficult to reach since they did not perceive my research as something particularly formal or meaningful for their practice.

Figure 1 Musical Archives at the TV Association Archive (Photo taken on 27 December 2021)

Figure 2 Musical Archives at the TV Association Archive (Photo taken on 27 December 2021)

Finally, a number of traditional musicians and dancers, as well as their lay audiences, were interviewed for this study to provide a community perspective, set ICH preservation in a wider social context, and account for the experiences of people who produce and consume traditional music. Most of my interviews with musicians and dancers would be right after their performances. The interviewees, myself and the people around us would still be uplifted by the experience. This made my interviews less structured but much more vibrant and informative. Finally, a key group of interviewees was older adults from Oman. I wanted to understand how ICH was perceived by those who were producing it and those who were enjoying it.

Nevertheless, the interviews were rather difficult, partly because they were done online, and the participants found it hard to concentrate using the virtual medium. Furthermore, they saw my research as an attempt at popularisation (which was later aided by my participation in organising the Symposium) and would not respond very informatively to more critical questions. Nevertheless, I eventually realised that a particularly useful approach is guiding them towards describing stories (particularly ones in a social setting) from their youth and patiently following ICH's role in these stories.

I divided my interviews roughly into four parts when dealing with governmental officials. The first part asked general questions regarding the interviewee's details, their role in archivisation, and participation in the overall process. The second part asked questions regarding the interviewee's motivation to work with archives, what Omani ICH means, and how they perceive the government's role in the archivisation process. The third part of the interviews sought to explain the technicalities of the interviewee's role in archivisation, either direct (through choosing, recording, editing and publishing) or indirect (through policy-making or lay usage). For example, I would ask archivists how they made their recordings: where (in studios, outside, in treated rooms at home), what microphone they used, or how they edited the recording. Finally, the fourth part of my interviews enquired about the notions of nationhood among my interviewees. I would often ask questions regarding the authenticity or originality of Omani ICH to provoke responses among my interviewees. This part was the most challenging, as it sought to explore something that most of my interviewees were unaware of and assumed was true.

As for interviews with grassroots archivists, musicians and the audience, these were less structured, with the protocol largely dependent on the venue, type of interaction and performance. I selected the number and type of questions after probing the person's background knowledge, eagerness to respond and the availability of their time for a more in-depth discussion. Some interactions were limited to just a couple of questions about the overall impression of the musical

performance (audience), motivations to perform and make music (musicians) and motivations, technical means of recording and broader perceptions of their contribution to the ICH preservation process (grassroots archivists). The interview schedule, with interviewee details, is presented below in Table 1.

Table 1

Name	Position	Date	Place
Al Sayyid Said Al Busaidi	Undersecretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth for Culture	14 Oct. 2021	Muscat
Rashid Al Hashmi	Director of the Music and Folk Arts Department	17 Oct. 2021	Muscat
Nasser Al Sawafi	An employee of the Centre for Civilisation Studies	21 Oct. 2021	Muscat
Emad Al Baharani	An employee of the Centre for Civilisation Studies	24 Oct. 2021	Muscat
Younis Al Nooumni	Assistant Director of the Cultural Sector of the Omani National Committee for Education, Culture and Science	27 Oct. 2021	Muscat
Anonymous #1	Performance attendee	1 Nov. 2021	Performance at the Music Centre, Muscat
Mahomood Al Abri	Assistant Secretary of the Cultural Sector of the Omani National Committee	4 Nov. 2021	Muscat

	for Education, Culture and Science		
Amal Waqar	Oud player	8 Nov. 2021	Al Mouj, Muscat
Anonymous #2	Performance attendee	8 Nov. 2021	Al Mouj, Muscat
Nasser Al Naabai	Director of the Omani Centre for Traditional Music	22 Nov. 2021	Muscat
Anonymous #3	Street musician	18 Nov. 2021	Al Mouj, Muscat
Ahmed Al Zadjali	Archivist at the Omani Centre for Traditional Music (institutional)	22 Nov. 2021	Muscat
Jamilela Al Makusi	Traditional music singers employed at the Centre for Traditional Music	22 Nov. 2021	Centre for Traditional Music, Muscat
Anonymous #4	Archivist	22 Nov. 2021	Omani Centre for Traditional Music, Muscat
Khalfan Al Barwnai	Institutional archivist	2 Dec. 2021	Muscat
Juma Al Shedi	Institutional archivist	8 Dec. 2021	Muscat
Younis Al Noamani	Institutional archivist	12 Dec. 2021	Muscat
Ahmed Al Salmani	Archivist at the Oman Cultural Channel	27 Dec. 2021	Muscat
Mr Ahmed Al Hadri	Director of Oman Cultural Channel	27 Dec. 2021	Muscat
Fathi Mohsin	Studio holder +Oud player	20 Jan. 2022	Muscat

Essam Al-Mallah	professor from the Royal Opera House	6 Feb. 2022	Muscat
Basem Al Daoudi	Grassroots archivist	11 Feb. 2022	World Traditional Music Festival at Royal Opera House, Muscat
Noura Al Naziri	Musician	11 Feb. 2022	World Traditional Music Festival at Royal Opera House, Muscat
Musallam Al Kathiri	Musician, former director of the Centre for Traditional Music	11 Feb. 2022	World Traditional Music Festival at Royal Opera House, Muscat
Mohammed Al Masrorri	Composer and poet	11 Feb. 2022	World Traditional Music Festival at Royal Opera House, Muscat
Youssef Al Rasbi	Grassroots archivist	11 Feb. 2022	World Traditional Music Festival at Royal Opera House, Muscat
Nasser Al Kindi	Musician	28 Feb. 2022	The Omani Cultural Heritage Symposium, Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat

Khaled Al Barashdi	Grassroots archivist	28 Feb. 2022	The Omani Cultural Heritage Symposium, Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat
Anonymous #5	Elderly person	3 March 2022	Kumzar Village
Anonymous #6	Old woman	4 Apr. 2022	Wedding celebration (Qannah)
Sami Al Hadabi	Grassroots archivist	15 Apr. 2022	Performance in Wakan village
Saad Al Shuaibi	Grassroots archivist	3 May 2022	Nizwa Fort celebration, Nizwa
Maryam Al Riyami	Grassroots archivist	9 Jul. 2022	Azwa Fenga Festival, Fenga
Anonymous #7	Female attendee	9 Jul. 2022	Azwa Fenga Festival, Fenga
Anonymous #8	Street musician	9 Jul. 2022	Azwa Fenga Festival, Fenga

Interview data was carefully recorded and transcribed manually. Since this study is ethnographic, the data analysis was iterative and unstructured and consisted of three key stages: description, analysis and interpretation (Reeves et al. 2013). In the description stages, I recounted and described the collected data by treating the information from the interviews as fact. During the analysis stages, I proceeded to examine relationships, factors and patterns across the data points. Finally, the interpretation of data helped me understand and explain the data beyond the data

points (Reeves et al. 2013). The main challenge I faced with data analysis was the heterogeneity of interview data, which was collected from different people and in different contexts. Therefore, in order to facilitate data analysis, my field notes included information about the space, actors involved, activities, objects (e.g., musical instruments), event, time, goal, and emotions and experiences. By structuring my field notes systematically across the events, I was able to generate a coherent dataset for further analysis. One of the challenges I faced with thick descriptions was the lack of time, which prevented me from building sufficiently 'thick' descriptions and writing down more contextual data. According to Marsh (2009), this problem is common in ethnographic research because it is not always possible to ensure extended engagement with the participants. I sought to minimise this limitation by adding more details to my reflective journals and fieldnotes immediately after the events and interviews to capture my experiences when they were still fresh in my memory.

3.4.4 Research Ethics

Research ethics played an important role in my interviews. Before collecting any data from the participants, I informed them about the goals of my study, their expected contribution to research, and their rights as participants. In most cases, this was done verbally, but I also sent written information sheets and consent forms to those I contacted online. In this way, I was able to comply with the informed consent requirement and make sure the interviewees took part voluntarily. For interviews that occurred in governmental institutions and archives, additional consent to access was obtained to meet the ethical standards of ethnographic research (Reeves et al. 2013). Another important ethical obligation of a researcher conducting the ethnographic study is to ensure that participants are not exposed to harm or feel taken advantage of, either during or after the event of data collection (Balkin et al. 2023). Ethnographic researchers need to be mindful of mining their participants for data as a means to their scholarly ends and always keep in mind the potential implications for the participant and their communities (Balkin et al. 2023).

Therefore, in this study, I was careful to accurately record interlocutors' stories and experiences in the process of turning them into anthropological knowledge. I made sure the data collection occurred in a safe and convenient space for everyone and refrained from recording if the participants felt uncomfortable. I also used reflective journaling to recognise my personal bias and ensure it did not affect the interpretation and presentation of the collected bias. Thus, I was committed to communicating the findings truthfully and in a way that would benefit local communities.

Confidentiality and anonymity are important ethical principles to comply with in any research involving human participants (Duclos 2017). However, naming the participants is sometimes necessary for ethnographic research to give participants an opportunity to voice their concerns or mediate their narratives, thus co-producing knowledge (Duclos 2017). Disclosure of participants' names and backgrounds, alongside the first-hand descriptions of places, social contexts, and emotions attached to social experiences, were crucial in this study for creating a relational space where ICH is negotiated, reproduced, preserved, and celebrated. Besides, as stated by Van den Hoonaard (2003), anonymising the data collected in small communities does not make sense, as no act of data collection goes unnoticed. Even when the data is collected face-to-face, the use of snowball sampling allows the members of the researched community to identify the chain of acquaintances eventually ending up in the sample (Van den Hoonaard 2003). Finally, there was a practical reason not to anonymise the data during the data collection stage. It helped me correlate findings and find patterns across a wide set of collected data from field notes, observations, interviews, etc. The project complied with the 2018 Data Protection Act.

3.4.5 Studying Archives

Archives are vital in ethnomusicology research, as they are unique and systematically record people's musical expressions. As Anthony Seeger (1986) pointed out, their exceptional value is in the lack of constraints by commercial

markets and paying audiences. Therefore, they are exclusive primary data sources about a specific community's musical traditions and practices. Field recordings contained in the archives are a rich source of information for the cultural heritage community to which music belongs and the ethnomusicologists dealing with these communities' musical heritage. Besides, following the new applied ethnomusicology 'movement' initiated by Seeger, archives play a significant role in the community's social and cultural lives, allowing a better understanding of their history, culture and performance (Landau and Fargion 2012).

Therefore, in line with the ethnomusicological enquiry's tradition, the first source of my information was a musical archive study. On the one hand, I was able to observe the local musical acts and the administrative process of their recording, and on the other, I understood the global perspective on the national archive that is now accessible from all over the world. In other words, the musical archives allowed me to look at the archivisation process through the lens of its final product. I was kindly provided access to the archives by the Centre for Traditional Music. I made the best of this access throughout my fieldwork, and the recordings I found in these archives had a significant impact on the questions I asked my informants, especially archivists.

The other type of archives I explored were online grassroots archives. Most of these were located on Instagram and had started as a few recordings made by influencers. Many influencers did not distinguish between their ICH-related recordings and their other content. As such, this creates a novel type of communal archive-as-content, where users can interact (like, share and comment) with an archive, asking for future developments.

3.4.6 Visits to Concerts, Museums and Locations

After the COVID-19 pandemic, I was trying to take any opportunity to attend events and performances around Oman as I was afraid that restrictions would be reintroduced. I searched through social media platforms for convenience, but this also allowed me to follow the kind of events that younger generations sought to

attend. The first performance I attended on December 5, 2021, was at the Oman Centre for Traditional Music. The singer who performed was one of the participants in my research interviews, Jameila Al Makusi. That performance was immediately after the lifting of lockdown restrictions. There was an almost tangible feeling of excitement in the audience, akin to hunger—a hunger for music that I shared, as the audience participated with the singer and the music band by singing and clapping along with them.

Figure 3 Performance at the Music Centre for Traditional Music (Photo taken on 5 December 2021)

While certainly more intense after the restrictions, this participation did not feel like something they did only out of excitement but as a traditional part of experiencing music that the audience had been deprived of for a long time. In all, the more casual performances I saw, a part of the audience would always participate, while another (usually younger) would try to capture their experience and share it over social media. I often shifted between these two positions, in many ways exemplifying participation and observation.

Particularly interesting was a performance I saw at Al Mouj (a popular destination for Omanis). It was National Day 2021, which was celebrated as it coincided with the end of some of the COVID-19 restrictions. The people who

participated in the festival were thirsty to attend and to listen to live music close to them. I went with my family to Al Mouj in the city of Muscat, which is also a popular tourist destination. The scene at the festival looked rather unusual, as most participants and attendees were wearing masks, but they were amazingly interacting with the popular music bands even when they had to keep their distance from them.

I had a conversation with a band that performed there, whose name was the Al-Balad Band for Traditional Music, who are from Sur, Al Shariqia Governorate. They told me that the organisers had asked them to offer daily performances during the days of National Day for two hours from six in the evening. The band was made up of four players on rhythmic instruments: Misundu, Al Kasir, and two Al Rahmanis. The melodic instrument which was prominent there is the Qurba (a musical instrument similar to the Scottish bagpipe), which creates a unique sensory experience. Furthermore, they have a Jem player, which was important for stabilising the rhythm as the Qurba player sometimes comes to improvise his harmony with playing and also because of his enthusiasm in the presence of the masses.

Additionally, I recorded traditional dances, which are an important part of traditional music performance in Oman. For example, I recorded a performance of one of the most well-known traditional dances called Al Madama. As an ethnomusicology researcher, I was recording and focusing on every movement that occurred in this performance. In fact, it was very difficult to document and note every shot and every movement due to the rapid rhythm of Al Madama and the large number of participants and spectators. Nevertheless, I was also focused on the expressions of the dancers' faces and players, as I noticed between them communication signals, for example, when the Qurba player is allowed to improvise and also when one should play the end of the genre.

I noticed the enthusiasm of the people present in photographing the celebration and broadcasting it on social media, and I had a random chat with some of them. One of them mentioned to me that he was using the Snapchat platform to photograph his diaries and got many comments from his followers. Another

interviewee mentioned to me that he loved to post his daily status on WhatsApp, where many older adults followed his diaries and listened to what he published. I also talked to an American resident in Muscat who was keen to publish musical clips online; he mentioned that he hoped to see more traditional Omani performances because they are different from his traditions.

After about an hour of continuous offers, the band took a break to return to the show, and here, I had the opportunity to speak with the members of the band. They told me that the Al Mouj administration asked them to perform at the 2021 National Day to attract tourists and residents to this place and that they are grateful and proud to participate. They expressed their enthusiasm for being part of a festival after a break of more than a year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. They also expressed to me that they feel joy when they watch themselves on social media, as they use these videos to promote their performance as well. Their Instagram is actively used for promotion purposes, as they have about 10,000 followers.

Figure 4 Al Madama performance at Al-Mouj (taken on 18 November 2021 at Al-Mouj)

Figure 5 Mexico Traditional Music Band Performance (photo taken on 11 February 2022 at the World Traditional Music Festival at Royal Opera House, Muscat)

I also attended the World Traditional Music Festival at the Royal Opera House Muscat on 11 February 2022. There were performances from four different countries,

including Oman. People were excited to attend and listen to music (albeit not clapping along as during more casual performances). There were many foreign people there, probably even more than Omani people. Many of them were also keen on filming, recording and posting through social media. The state media were present to report the event through television newspapers and to conduct interviews. Many attendees said they appreciate this beautiful combination of four different cultures and their merging in an attractive musical palette.

Figure 6 Omani Traditional Music Band Performances (photo taken on 11 February 2022 at the World Traditional Music Festival at Royal Opera House, Muscat)

During the celebration of Eid al-Fitr 2022, May 2-3, 2022, I went to Nizwa, especially Nizwa Fort, where traditional music is performed throughout the year. I noticed many Omani and foreign visitors interested in photographing and posting what is being filmed for social media platforms. I had some short conversations with the visitors and asked them about their interest in attending these events, the incentive that makes them take pictures and videos, and what motivates them to publish them.

Before my visit, I conducted social media research on the activities performed in the celebration of Nizwa during the days of Eid Al–Fitr. I found that community gatherings and traditional activities start as early as 8 AM. Even though those

activities were early in the morning, I could observe them in one of the heritage hostels. When I arrived at the place, I asked one of the receptionists, Mr. Salem Al-Hursi, about the cultural significance of the hostel. He mentioned to me that local citizens seek to sustain such heritage buildings and consider them part of their heritage, preserving it and living in it. In order to ensure the sustainability of this place, they turned many ancient houses into heritage hostels in order to attract tourists, especially non-Omanis, to experience the ancient living in Nizwa. Once I entered this hostel, I felt an atmosphere that was similar to my grandmother's village. I was familiar with the smell of walls with the heritage accessories such as wooden boxes and old metal bowls. They have also kept the structure of the old bed to show how the Omani people used to sleep.

I spent the next day at Nizwa Fort. I arrived at the place by one of the old cars that were also re-rotated to transport tourists through narrow streets. In front of the door of the fort, I found a traditional band performing *Al Razha*. I talked to an old man there who was wearing a typical Omani dress with Al Khanjer (Omani men tend to wear Al Khanjer at their waist on their occasions). I asked him why they play *Al Razha* here. He said this is our way of welcoming visitors and tourists. He said they mostly perform *Al Aazi* and *Al Razha* because those genres are associated with courage, pride and generosity, and this is how he wanted the tourists to remember Oman. I also had the opportunity to talk to some social media creators, such as Muhammad Al-Balushi, who mentioned to me that he is from the city of Shenas and came to Nizwa because the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism invited him to document these cultural heritage events.

The Nizwa Fort is a home of cultural and heritage significance for the Omani people. I went to the square where folklore was performed, observing the Al Razha, Al Aazi, and *Al Mald*, which are usually practised in this region. It should be noted that the local heritage traditions are usually not influenced by African or even Asian cultural influences, so its people do not practice other genres such as *Al Madama*, *Al Shobani*, *Dan Dan*. Here, one of the admins at Fort, Mr Khaled Al

Kindi, told me to me that the residents are keen to practice and perform their traditional music, and on some occasions, it is possible to invite other traditional bands in Oman in order to introduce the Omani heritage to their children and their youth. I also admired the presence of a large group of young people who participated in every part of the festivities conducted in the fort.

Figure 7 Old Man wearing Omani custom holding weapon for Al Razha performance (photot taken on 2 May 2022 at Nizwa Fort)

Figure 8 Celebration of Eid al-Fitr, preforming Al Razha (photo taken on 2 May , 2022 at Nizwa Fort)

On July 9, 2022, I went to Fenga City and attended a celebration called 'Azwa Fenga'. All the residents of this village go out to celebrate, as they perform traditional music and other traditional Omani rituals. What caught my attention in this celebration was the keenness of older people to teach young people what they considered the tradition, its 'right' practice and even how to play some musical instruments. When I asked them why they do this, one of the elderly individuals replied, 'So that our heritage and our music do not die with us, so we are ahead of time in teaching our children to preserve it'.[3] The most beautiful thing about this celebration was that it was trending on the Twitter platform for two consecutive days,

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[3] Anonymous participant #8, "Azwa Fenga" celebration, Fenga City, July 9, 2022

as many categories, including photographers, directors and content makers, published this event.

Researchers emphasise the importance of accurate language in describing traditional music. For example, Louth (2023) argued that researchers risk imposing Western assumptions about the music's structure and meaning by using neutral common language to describe it. As a result, there is a risk of making 'inappropriate transfers of meaning' to traditional music and universalising its features (Louth 2023, n.p.). I share these concerns and avoid the risk of Omani ICH becoming academised or asocial.

There was one notable moment during the celebration that taught me to use the right language so that ICH would not lose its cultural links and meanings. When interviewing different people during the event, I mentioned the term 'women dance'. One of the local people corrected me and said the term 'women play'[4] is more appropriate. It was forbidden to say 'women dance'. The participant clarified that the word 'play' more accurately communicates the role of women in Omani traditional music performance. This made me reflect on how verbal description of ICH transmits deep cultural meanings surrounding music performance and how these can provide insight into gender and social norms. This situation was a useful lesson because I realised that I need to pay more attention to how local people describe their ICH and their specific terms and expressions.

In March 2022, I also spent a whole day at a University campus with a popular traditional music band, Al Burj, which has been practicing traditional music for 20 years. This experience helped me gain insight into ICH performance and allowed me to take many photos and videos to publish on the Twitter platform through a hashtag I launched at the beginning of my fieldwork. The band has existed for 20 years, engaging young people through music lessons and performances. Their work at the University campus is truly outstanding and immensely valuable for ICH preservation,

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[4] Anonymous participant #7, "Azwa Fenga" celebration, Fenga City, July 9, 2022

as they attract many listeners who are eager to record and post the performances on their social media, thus contributing to the continuous reproduction and sharing of Omani ICH.

My goal when collecting the data from the band was to learn more about how it operated and answer the following questions: How did it emerge? What are its motives? Who support it? Saleh Al Rasbi, one of the players, mentioned that since his childhood, he watched his father and his peers practising musical genres as part of their daily lives and as a means to provide for the family. He said:

> What attracted me more since my childhood is the *Al Jem* (Marina shell) and how to extract the sound from it, so I participated in this band by playing this instrument and also learned to play *Al Kasir* and *Al Rahmani*, and this is the goal of my father from the beginning to practice each of us more than one instrument so we cover the shortage if one of the band members is absent.

Saeed Al Shuaibi, who is *Al Qurb* (bagpipe) player in the band, said:

> I learned this instrument by observation and listening without any musical academic study, through my practice of this instrument and for a long time, I exceeded in ten years and I was able to professionalise it, and there are a lot who have been asking me to perform in local and international events with the band and without the band.

He added, 'I try to show a lot on social media so that I can get job opportunities and offers because it is my only source of income'. In turn, Saleh Al Rasbi shared his experience:

> During the past three years we opened an account in Instagram, and that is because of our belief that in order to keep our recording and our work, we warmly need to archive our videos on the Instagram, which is a suitable place where it will still exist and also the followers can know us and know our performs. In addition, obtain job opportunities as well, as we do not get any government or private support.

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When I asked him about government support, he mentioned to me that the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth asked them to register officially so that they are added to the list of registered bands that can be invited to perform at various events or festivals.

Figure 9 Saleh Al Rasbi playing Al Jem in Madama performance at photo session in Sultan Qaboos University (Photo taken in 19 March 2022)

Figure 10 performance by Al Burj Band at photo session in Sultan Qaboos University (Photo taken in 19 March 2022)

Figure11 Al Madama performance by Al Burj Band at photo session in Sultan Qaboos University (Photo taken in 19 March 2022)

Additionally, I was part of a discussion session at the International Book Exhibition Creativity in the Traditional Music on 26 February 2022. Participants in

this discussion seminar were one of the decision-makers, the governor of Sur, Sheikh Hammoud Al-Ghailani, the writer of poetry who writes in traditional music, Juma Al Saeedi, and a well-known drummer in Sur, Eid Al Rasbi. These people represent important actors in the ICH preservation in Oman. The title of the seminar was "Creativity in Traditional Music in the Southeastern Governorate." This seminar highlighted the importance of engaging powerful actors in ICH safeguarding as they have the means to spread the word and mobilise resources needed for archivisation. This discussion during the seminar was an opportunity for me to share my research thoughts and get feedback. This experience helped me better understand the importance of my research and motivated me to continue with data collection and analysis. I also got a chance to meet many people in this field, musicians, archivists and decision-makers, which further expanded my knowledge of the topic.

Figure 12 Advertising poster for the discussion session 'creativity in traditional music in the South Eastern Governorate'.

Thus, my presence at various events throughout my fieldwork was pivotal in answering all my questions. First, it helped me understand the various ways Omani ICH was being experienced by various actors and how archivists saw tradition and were seen by the general public. Finally, my presence at Ministry-organised events and participation in organising such gave me an in-depth understanding of the Ministry's agenda regarding ICH and how it was used to depict Oman to foreigners.

3.4.7 Social Media Research

Social media use and overall digital media utilisation is widespread in ethnomusicology enquiries. The Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM) generally encourages ethical and professional engagement with communities of interest on social media and through scholarship (SEM 2023). However, social media use for ethnomusicology research purposes comes with some digital-related challenges, such as questionable academic validity of data (Reily 2003) and threats of arbitrary classification of identified materials (Egan 2021).

During the lockdown period, I researched online using social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Twitter and Facebook. To make the process more effective and methodical, I developed a list of hashtags for all social media platforms. These included but were not limited to the following:

- #Omani_Intangble_Culture_Hertiage
- التراث_الثقافي_العماني_الغير_ملموس#
- #Life_after_Covid
- الحياة_بعد_كورونا#
- #Omani traditional performers
- فنانون_عمانيون_تقليديون#
- #Omani traditional music
- موسيقى_عمانية_تقليدية#
- #Omani music
- موسيقى_عمانية#

I used different variations of these words to elicit as many relevant results as possible. In addition, I used location tags to find ICH published in specific cities/villages.

With the help of the listed hashtags, I found many social media accounts with useful data about my topic. I saved particularly valuable information by making screenshots, saving the links and following regularly updated accounts. This work was meaningful because, by examining social media, I learned what attracts people, what kind of music is the most popular and what patterns of Omani music reproduction, preservation and sharing are the most widespread.

My work with Twitter before I started this dissertation was particularly useful in the context of this study. I used the hashtag #Omani_Intangible_Culture_Heritage to build a network and organise social media posts dedicated to this topic. Students were asked to use this hashtag to post pictures and videos representing traditional music from their villages. They discussed the content with their peers and expressed their tastes, perceptions and expectations regarding traditional Omani music. These discussions inspired me to use Twitter as a research tool, as I could not communicate with people face-to-face due to the lockdown. The main idea was to post a hashtag #Intangible_Omani_Heritage' and initiate the Twitter community's communication on 'Ethnomusicology Research on Preserving the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Oman'. I added: 'Your interaction through this hashtag will be your consent to participate in my study'. This way, I ensured everyone who posted their content using this hashtag automatically agreed to participate in preliminary data collection.

This method helped me collect useful information and engage many people in posting and discussing Omani traditional music. It also helped me uncover people's perceptions, attitudes and wishes regarding safeguarding ICH, which boosted my motivation to conduct the research on the given topic. I found many users eager to share their favourite songs, describe musical traditions they value the most, and appreciate the dying art of traditional music. I also found many unique

videos with performances recorded in different parts of the country, which advanced my understanding of traditional Omani music and its regional diversity and informed my research direction.

Textual data that I collected during this stage was analysed with the help of thematic analysis (TA). It is one of the foundational methods of qualitative data analysis, which helps identify themes and patterns within a dataset. Its main advantages include flexibility, transparency, and suitability for working with heterogeneous data (de Castro 2023). The latter was particularly valuable in this study because of the nature of the data posted online, which included posts, comments, video-embedded text, etc. The themes that emerged during this stage of my research included 'acknowledging the urgency of ICH preservation', 'ICH as a reflection of Omani spirit', 'lack of attention to disappearing musical traditions', and 'community engagement with ICH'. These themes informed by research questions by identifying important areas worthy of analysis, such as the role of the community and grassroots archivists in ICH safeguarding and celebration.

3.4.8 Combining Approaches

The use of several approaches towards answering my research questions allowed me to have an adaptive methodological framework. Many of my interviews would naturally shift toward discussing archival materials, musical performances, or policy documents that were puzzling or inspiring me. Moreover, I was often pointed towards musicians, performances, recordings, or readings due to the interviews. This created a research cycle where I would gradually immerse myself in traditional Omani music and the different discourses surrounding it. This also meant an increased engagement with the processes of archivisation or traditional music playing. I would attend more and more events, culminating in my organisation a traditional music event under the patronage and presence of the undersecretary of Ministry of culture, youth and sport for culture.

3.4.9 The Omani Intangible Cultural Heritage Symposium

The Omani Intangible Cultural Heritage Symposium I organised in February 2022 was a centrepiece of my fieldwork. The symposium allowed me to see the archivisation process in practice. It was the full mixing of Omani tradition, of notions of how it is to be performed, of national identity-making and state policy and of the way modern Oman wants to be seen (and heard) by the West. As such, I initially supposed that my involvement would be limited to initiating the event rather than organising its contents: I conducted that activity with the help of the Music Department at Sultan Qaboos University's faculty. I designed the logo below for the symposium theme, using the two most important Omani traditional instruments, Al Rahamni and Al Braghum.
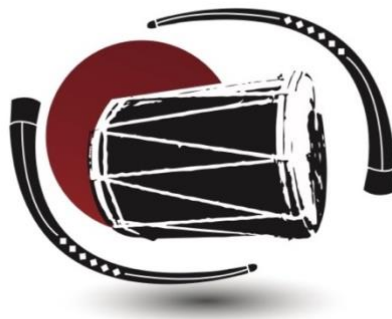
ندوة التراث العماني الغير مادي
الفنون العمانية التقليدية

Figure 13 The logo of the Omani Intangible Cultural Heritage Symposium

The symposium discussed four main topics through insightful presentations and panel discussions. The first topic touched on the beginning of documenting traditional Omani music, presented by Mr. Nasser Al Naabai from the Oman Center for Traditional Music. In his presentation, Mr. Nasser highlighted the documentation of traditional Omani music over the past years and the contribution of these efforts to preserving Omani arts. The second topic examined the role played by Omani institutions in preserving and conserving traditional Omani music. Mr. Rashid Al

Hashmi from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and Mr. Younis Al-Nomani from the Omani National Commission for Education, Culture and Science gave informative presentations that demonstrated these efforts. The third topic explored the artistic value of traditional Omani patterns through a presentation given by Professor Essam Al-Mallah from the Royal Opera House Muscat. The fourth topic tackled the role played by the community archives in presentations given by Mr. Khaled Al Barashdi and Mr. Basem Al Daoudi. During these, Al Razha, Al Madam, and Al Raboba were performed by the Al Burj band. Moreover, each presentation was allocated a time slot for a discussion to dwell more extensively on the topic and see what people think. This way, I could record many points and get opinions from different aspects of the archivisation process.

The symposium provided me with a useful image of the process of heritage-making. I could both participate in and observe the process of selecting musicians. Quite often, the choices were pre-made, either because of a particular musician or band's connections or because certain musicians had become common in essentially all of the Ministry's presentations of traditional music. Furthermore, this meant that performers would often play with fewer microtonal intervals and better-tuned instruments than most traditional musicians, so foreign officials could better accept them at state venues. Finally, this also meant focusing on the more cinematic performances of large bands of male dancers rather than on more meditative performances such as single bards or tambura rituals. The performers in the symposium were thus not a random sample of traditional musicians but rather a selection that had both political and economic reasons to be selected.

Furthermore, the performances I saw were neither fully authentic (being performed for a passive audience to enjoy and within a nation-state identity-making project) nor fully artificial (with most musicians having grown up within the traditions they performed). This duality was constantly present in all aspects of the symposium, and perhaps the best depiction of this synthesis was the Omani (Scottish) bagpipe

player who, while playing a Western (harmonised) instrument, would give it a completely local interpretation in rhythm and melody.

I got the support to organize this event from the undersecretary of the culture, sports and youth Ministry Al Syaad Said Al Busaidi, the president of the Sultan Qaboos University Dr Fahad Bin Al Julanda Al Said, the Dean of the College of Arts and social sciences Dr Nabhan Al Harasi.

Figure 17 Professor Essam Al-Mallah from the Royal Opera House Muscat

Figure 15 Mr. Khaled Al Barashdi one of the grassroots archivist

Figure 16 Mr. Younis al-Nomani from Omani National Commission for Education

Figure 14 Ayat Al Matani, presenting the speech of the symposium

Figure 19 Al Madama Performances during the symposium at Conference Hall at Sultan Qaboos University (Photo taken at 28 February 2022)

Figure 20 Saeed Al Shuaibi playing Qurb during the symposium at Conference Hall at Sultan Qaboos University (Photo taken at 28 February 2022)

Figure 18 The undersecretary of the culture, sports and youth Ministry Al Syaad Said Al Busaidi, the president of the Sultan Qaboos University Dr Fahad Bin Al Julanda Al Said at Omani Intangible Cultural Heritage Symposium

Figure 21 Media cover for the Omani Intangible Cultural Heritage Symposium at Oman Newspaper published in 1 March 2022

Figure 22 Media cover for the Omani Intangible Cultural Heritage Symposium at Alwatan Newspaper published in 1 March 2022

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3.5 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This research focussed on the ICH preservation methods employed during the research (2021-2023). While the study touches on the evolution of ICH in Oman, the historical overview of archivisation methods falls outside the scope of this analysis. Furthermore, I attended only a limited number of musical events because of COVID-19, so the scope of this study is limited to the review of performances I experienced.

Given that traditional music often cannot be separated from the social context in which it is created and performed, the study inevitably touches on the cultural events, rituals, festivities and other practices surrounding music and making it meaningful. I provide ethnographic descriptions of these ICH aspects to explain how they affect music performance and archivisation without dwelling on their characteristics and cultural value per se. I do not limit the analysis to Arabic cultural heritage, which dominates the ICH landscape, but recognise the existence of other cultures and peoples' contributions, including Persian, Indian and African influences. Moreover, the study inevitably discussed the preservation of the Bedouin heritage and recognised that the Bedouin heritage is common in the Gulf States. However, the analysis focused on how this Bedouin heritage is preserved in Oman exclusively and does not examine how the Bedouin ICH influence the preservation policies of the other states in the Gulf.

I followed the main requirements of ethnographic research regarding methodology, sampling and data presentation (Luintel 2020). However, there are still some limitations that are traditionally associated with ethnographic work that are out of my control. First, there are concerns about the rigour and scientific validity of the findings because of the reliance on participants' subjective perspectives. Their views are subjective per se, but they may be even more biased due to the disclosure of their identities. There is a risk that the participants presented information in a more positive light to make them look good or failed to raise some important issues because of the fear of consequences for their careers (which is particularly true for

government officials). To minimise this risk, I used triangulation and drew data from other sources to confirm the interview findings (Luintel 2020).

Furthermore, since it is an ethnographic study, subjectivity was used to an advantage. Immersion in the field and the studied phenomenon (e.g., through participation in live events) required a certain degree of subjectivity to make sense of the studied phenomena. However, this subjectivity has been beneficial because it allowed us to move from emic (inside the phenomenon of ICH preservation) to etic (outside of it). It was not part of the a priori research plan but rather emerged naturally during data collection and analysis, which is common in studies like this (Bresler 2021). These varied experiences provided varied data points and enriched the data. My subjectivity was controlled through reflexivity and data triangulation, two widely used methods in ethnographic research (Luintel 2020). Furthermore, although the study included a sample drawn from different stakeholder groups, it may be unrepresentative of the target population, which means that I might have missed important perspectives and narratives regarding ICH.

3.6 Conclusion

Capturing the multi-faceted and complex network of efforts on Omani music archivisation requires a similarly diverse and multi-tool methodology to ensure this topic's unbiased, comprehensive coverage. This chapter outlined the methodological considerations and procedures I have engaged in throughout the data collection process on the present-day Omani musical heritage treatment at all levels and by all stakeholders engaged in music production, consumption and archivisation. The modern reality of digital and offline presence should be considered, so I mixed digital enquiry with face-to-face data collection methods to embrace the entirety of human interactions with music and musicians and a diversity of archive-making tools and techniques. The process was mostly non-linear and involved some trial and error; a detailed account of my ethnomusicological enquiry process can shed light on how I arrived at the final dataset in this dissertation.

CHAPTER 4: SETTING THE STAGE: OMANI NATION, STATE AND ICH

4.1. Introduction

Cultural pluralism is a core attribute of modern societies, with multiple ethnicities getting fair representation and attention in every state, which is the key to harmonious development and peaceful coexistence. In this chapter, I discuss the distinct regional musical traditions in Oman and how they co-exist without giving the Omani nation a combined sense of belonging and diversity. I also trace the development of musical instruments and practices to show how music accompanies social, political and civic development and evolves as a living tradition shared and passed on by its bearers. What I have noticed throughout my research and interactions with participants is that the Omani ICH safeguarding policy faces contradictory motivations of leading the nation to homogeneity versus nurturing its diversity, and exactly this tension gave rise to the grassroots archivist movement focussing on the other side of musical tradition – the living one practised in the streets and touching the strings of people's hearts instead of occupying a shelf in the national archive. Therefore, this section is an inquiry into the versatility of Oman that builds a solid base for further examination of how well this versatility is captured by institutional archival efforts and how and why grassroots archivists emerged to counterbalance that authorised, curated ICH discourse.

4.2. Oman as a Unique Nation

Oman is the easternmost state of the Arab region; it is inhabited mostly by Arabs and has sizable diasporas of Baloch and Swahili peoples. Though the country's official language is Arabic, some communities speak Bathari, Baloochi or Swahili languages in certain regions due to their tribal ancestry and historical links to other cultures (Baporikar 2014). Oman is a part of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a regional union that includes Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Britannica 2023). The Union was established in 1981 to consolidate the political and economic activities of states unified by

common Arab and Islamic cultural identities. The GCC also has a consolidated heritage management policy and legal framework; as noted by Michał M. Wosiński (2022), earlier legislation treated heritage as cultural property, while more recent legislative acts in Oman (Cultural Heritage Law, Royal Decree 35/2019), Saudi Arabia (2014) and the UAE (2020) reflect a shift toward a more mature and integrated heritage theory and practice.

Figure 23: Map of Oman (Britannica 2023)

According to John Peterson (2022, 262), Oman's modern history started in 1970, which turned the state into a new, capable state, elaborating a cohesive national identity. Nevertheless, the core of the modern Omani identity relates to the concept of citizenship or nationality. It is largely defined in legal rather than emotional

or ideological terms, mainly because the notions of national origin, nation-state and nationality were new to all Gulf states at the moment of their formation in the mid-20th century (Peterson 2022).

Another complexity of constructing Omani identity is the close historical relationship and overlapping culture with the UAE. For instance, Nasser Al Naabai mentioned the consolidation with the Dhafur region that attempted to cede to Yemen and the loss of the Omani Coast territories to the UAE (Peterson 2019). Therefore, the present-day Omani state is only recently formed, with only part belonging to the centuries-old Omani Sultanate and the resulting territorial entity following a new *nahdah* vector in identity formation associated with the Omani identity renaissance (Lozovan 2022). In other words, modern Oman is not the state that has existed for many centuries. The territorial borders changed considerably in the past century, and the present-day Omani nation is not the one it used to be in the past, with newly added or lost territories of the Sultanate.

Therefore, its identity formation process is more complex, though it generally follows the Sultan-set *nahdah* direction. Nasser Al Naabai characterised it as follows:

> Political borders are a formality here; those who know the history of our region well understand that these borders don't denote the borders of identity. Just think of Trucial Oman – isn't that also Oman? The historical and cultural one, the shared heritage we're trying to protect today.

I could relate that view to the findings of Neil Patrick (2009), who claimed that many Omani elite representatives still regard the UAE as part of Oman, which does not represent a politically threatening or hostile position and only deals with shared culture and history. However, the grassroots musicians whom I interviewed regarding nationhood issues reflected in the musical ICH took a more negative perspective on this shared history by claiming that the UAE has no right to authentic Omani music and dance because it is not Emirati but Omani in cultural origin, stretching far beyond the official birth of modern Omani nation in the 1970s. So, when evaluating those positions, I could feel a divide between the deep cultural

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ancestry considerations and the formal ICH agenda in the Gulf states as modern political formations with distinct borders and cultural attributions.

What I also found prominent in interviewees' responses is the feeling of a delayed nation-building process because of the dispersion of people calling themselves Omanis across the region and the geographically indeterminate borders of the state. This arrangement led to nuances of 'national' identification stretching beyond the modern borders of the Omani state and, therefore, a different concept of 'state' as such, covering the eastern regions of Africa and the UAE tribes. Therefore, the Omani identity at the beginning of the 21st century differs considerably from what one would associate with it less than a century ago. Ethnic minorities such as Swahili-speaking Omani Zanzibaris who want to assume Omani identity but do not even have Omani passports and the Baluch community representatives experience a 'dual belonging' linking their ancestral heritage and the present-day location (Patrick, 2009). The same is true for the Dhofar region's separatist inhabitants, who used to be a distinct community consolidated with Oman by force (Peterson, 2007). However, for Khaled Al Barashdi, the modern trend of urbanisation and greater population mobility are favourable contributors to the establishment of Omani nationhood. As he pointed out in the interview,

> 'people grow less linked to their birthplaces. They all want to come to study and work in Muscat for financial reasons. So, Omanis gravitating to the main Omani cities inevitably adopt a more conforming mindset and nationhood view'.

This way, the forces of community belonging and distinct socio-cultural and historical histories are still pronounced in Oman and should not be excluded from the nation-building agenda. However, they get weaker in terms of resisting the Omani homogenising nation-building efforts.

When analysing the historical documents and literature on Oman's modern nation-building efforts under Sultan Qaboos, I also identified a complexity associated with the tribal leadership arrangements in Oman – a major force of resistance to the

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Sultan's modern rule reforms. Oman is a small Gulf state ruled by tribal authority for many years. So, Sultan Qaboos attempted to change the system by appointing tribal leaders as lower-level sheikhs for local governance in the Omani provinces. This way, Oman acquired a more modern appearance on the formal level, though Sami Al Hadabi characterised it as a 'traditional tribal state in disguise', suggesting that the actual state of affairs in the political rule took much more time to change.

In light of these challenges, Sultan Qaboos pursued a national identity-building path by reconstituting the Sultanate in the 1970s based on long-held traditions. The 20th-century Omani identity was only a proto-national identity, with loose connections and imposed values, focusing on Ibadism, Arabness and tribal rule. However, I discovered in the discussions and academic literature analysis that this position concealed many deep-level tensions, such as Ibadism's unifying nature for Ibadis and Sunnis, leaving Shia and other communities marginalised (Peterson 2022). Sultan Qaboos's major achievement was a true ideological cohesion of the concept of national identity and a genuine = nationalism- building on the sound foundations of tribal and regional identities, achieved through linking the Omani nationhood concept to a broader Arab and Muslim community without limitations to the present-day Oman borders (Phillips 2017). When relating these findings to heritage, I felt that Sultan Qaboos's foundation for unifying regional identities served as a solid base for heritage collection and reintegration; people in modern Oman felt more engaged in and connected with the culture they had to adopt. I believe this approach enhanced Omanis' connectedness across the dividing lines of tribe, regional, or sectarian belonging (Peterson 2022). The efforts were reinforced by popularising citizenship and belonging through education and on TV, radio and print media (Valeri, 2009), which my interviewees found largely successful. For instance, Khaled Al Barashdi praised the Sultan's inventiveness and strategic thinking in the process of nationhood construction. As he pointed out,

> The sultan did a very wise thing. Instead of rising walls, he broke them and gave Omanis a clear sense of belonging without rigid boundaries. Take, for

instance, the flag – the new flag was a combination of old Imamate symbolics and the white flag of the ancient Sultanate. It gave everyone a sense of being Omani.

The ideological efforts were reinforced with quick and efficient political reforms, giving Omanis a feeling of pride and confidence in their country with a well-delineated path of progress. Juma Al Shedi commented, 'People suddenly found it reassuring and appealing to feel they are Omanis; they started being proud of it'. This way, the nation-building process was organised around common cultural heritage, history and values, which was more successful than a focus on distinctions.

However, along with building links to give everyone a feeling of Omani belonging, the new Omani nation-building efforts were also directed at creating a distinct image for the country that would set it apart from others. In my interviews with officials, I noted that most of them are highly positive about the perspectives of Omani ICH preservation and evaluate the potential of Oman's differentiation from other Gulf states in the context of unique ICH as very high. Mr Al Kathiri mentioned the common association of Oman with *Ruh Al-khalij* – the soul of the Gulf. Mr. Al Kathiri spoke about it as follows:

> Many may consider our ICH preservation efforts artificial or concerted; I saw many accounts like that. But what they can't explain is why Oman is called *Ruh Al-khalij*. It is a historical phenomenon, the richness of our traditions and customs, the unique sound of our music and the look of our dancing. Other Gulf states pay tribute to Omani artists and often call them to public events. They know that no other musician or dancer can reflect the heart and soul of Gulf culture better than Omanis. And that's what we're trying to preserve.

Therefore, I felt that the Omani authorities take advantage of this unique positioning of Oman in terms of the richness of cultural legacy in the region and use it as an advantage in self-differentiation during the present-day nationhood construction efforts.

I also discovered that government officials do not envision the Omani musical heritage only as a matter of the past, which I attribute to a strong focus of the new Sultan Haitham, a maker of Oman Vision 2040 and a culture minister, on the integration of ICH into people's lives as a living heritage, not a museum artefact. Many strongly support modern musical initiatives, events, and educational programmes and believe in moving further in the development of music in Oman. As, for instance, Juma Al Shedi noted,

> I have many old records of traditional Omani music and consider these archives precious. But music doesn't stand still; we should move from observers of artefacts to practitioners and bearers of that tradition. I never miss an opportunity to visit the annual Muscat Festival and reserve a few days. There's always something new, a new performer or interpretation of the old song.

Another archivist, Ahmed Al Zadjali, shared his love for the annual musical events at the Al Flayj Castle Theatre and Salalah's Al Morooj Theatre. According to him,

> there's always something fresh and non-trivial at those events as if I'm presented with a new face of Omani music every time I listen.

Even more, Khalfan Al Barwnai shared a positive account of the international-level music events held in Muscat and other cities, such as the Spring Music Festival, attended by modern musicians and DJs from other countries. To him, such connections are the 'bloodstream of Omani music, a new shade of our nationhood that we cannot deny – its modern shade'. Thus, officials' opinions about music events in all directions have been positive. They see the government's engagement in encouraging and promoting music in Oman as one of the crucial aspects of Oman's nation-building set by the Sultan in the 1970s and continued in the modern context.

4.2.1. Multiple Layers of Omani Nationhood and Identity Reflected in Music

Nation-building typically involves national identity construction by moulding different ethnic and cultural groups into a single nation. These dynamics are slow and hard to achieve without proper regard for the entire spectrum of cultural representations within one country. Besides, the problem of nation-building in culturally diverse states like Oman is attributable to the unique and distinct ways of living that different groups have been practising for centuries, reflected in their musical traditions. These are the Bedouins, the maritime people who have historically inhabited the coastline, involved in sea trade and fishing, and the farming communities of the Omani mountain foothills. However, I saw throughout my research – both in the observations of musical performances and in the interactions with people who produce, consume and archive music – that living heritage cannot be built without incorporating all these layers, traditions and practices under the umbrella of Omani ICH concept. Each of them is part and parcel of the Omani musical tradition, with living bearers and dedicated followers. Therefore, excluding any element would deny a specific population group of their ancestral tradition, eroding their sense of belonging to the modern Omani nation.

Bedouin people in Oman have been shaping their musical heritage for centuries to reflect their nomadic lifestyle and values, their intimate connections to the desert and their Bedouin identity. The typical Bedouin music includes *Al Razha* songs (vocal chanting and rhythmic hand clapping performed at social gatherings and special events, praising the motifs of honour, loyalty and pride) and *Al Aazi* music (poetic, rhythmic songs glorifying the heroic deeds of Bedouin ancestors and telling the tribal legends) (Al Siyabi 2011; Rasmussen 2012). Bedouins use *Al Razha* instruments (handheld instruments for creating percussion during *Al Razha* singing), such as *tabl* – a small drum stricken by a hand and a stick – and a handheld frame drum *jahlah* (Urkevich 2014). This cultural group also uses the double-reed wooden instrument *Al-mizmar*, which is an analogue of clarinet or oboe, meant for melodic tune production during lyrical singing, and the *Al Rababa* instrument – a single-

stringed fiddle comprising a hollow wooden body and a string made of horsehair (Abma 2015; Al-Jandaly 2003).

Oman's coastal people have been the cultural group inhabiting the Arabian Sea and Gulf of Oman's coastline for centuries. These Omanis have been sailors and fishers, which affected their musical traditions and instruments. Besides, coastal inhabitants have been in close contact with the neighbouring countries' representatives due to their sea travel and trade. Thus, the musical heritage of coastal dwellers reflects the centuries-long maritime lifestyle, fishing and sea voyage themes. The most widespread musical genre in this region is *samri* – lively songs performed in a call-and-response manner and performed at social festivities with the accompaniment of percussive instruments (*tabla* and Al Tambourine) and hand clapping (Koskoff 2008). Al *Liwa* is another traditional vocal performance style specific to the town of Sur; it involves singing to the accompaniment of *duff* (a drum) and *tabla*, exploring the themes of fishing, the beauty of the ocean and sea travel. Other popular genres unique to this location are *Al-Nahma* (fishermen's and sailors' sea song) and *Al Sawt* (a lyrical song about the love and beauty of the coastline popular in many Gulf countries) (Lambert 2014). Apart from the traditional Omani instruments like *tabla*, duff, oud and Al Tambourine, coastal people use *rebab* (a fiddle-like instrument) and *ney* (a local type of flute) in their musical production (Urkevich 2014).

Finally, the farmers of Omani mountain foothills have a unique musical heritage reflecting the centuries of agrarian traditions and their deep connections to the land. They also sing *Al Razha* like Bedouins, but their songs cover the themes of harvest, work on the land and the surrounding nature. Some unique musical genres in this cultural group are the *Dan Dan* song, with farmers expressing their care for the land during agricultural work, and *Aljedad* songs accompanying the harvesting of fresh dates in summer (Al Siyabi 2011). Other farmer songs are *Altaseef* (harvesting of barley), *Aldwasa* (threshing of barley and wheat), *Altahan* (grinding barley and wheat to flour), *Al Zamat* (a song accompanying the irrigation

process) and *Zaffat Alkeetha* (harvesting of the *keetha* tree) (Al Siyabi 2011). Most of these songs accompany agricultural routines and discuss the joys and challenges of farming work.

Thus, when researching all these distinct musical traditions across various parts of Oman, I felt that cohesive national identity construction is impossible without harmonising them and giving them a deserved place in the Omani musical ICH. Juma Al Shedi supported that assumption and enriched my perspective on this issue by adding that the vocal traditions of singing and music production are completely different in these three regions, as these peoples have historically developed separately from each other and nurtured their unique traditions. According to her, 'you'll always distinguish the Bedouin singing from others. It's the *khishom* tradition of generating nasal sounds that only Bedouins practice'. Mr Nasser Al Naabai also gave some details about the peculiarities of other Omani peoples' performances, 'yes, while Bedouins have the *khishom* style, coastal areas' musicians use vocal sounds originating in the chest as their hallmark. Mountain dwellers also sing differently; you'll know it by hearing the vocalisation of the countertenor voice achieved with laryngeal. Thus, as I uncovered during my interviews, the song and music traditions of these three population groups in Oman are distinct from one another, and all deserve a specific place in the Omani archives as part and parcel of the Omani musical heritage.

The problem I have identified in the modern Omani heritage formation is to give prominence to those differences while maintaining the broader national coherence around a central idea of nationhood. Thus, for instance, Yousef Al Rasbi mentioned the songs of *Dan, Yodan, Li Laro* and *Lal,* in which the words did not matter as much as the vocal style of the performers did. In his opinion, the performer's approach was a unique element of ICH instead of the words and content of these songs, which could be unclear to tourists or amateur musicians at first glance. Thus, as Rashid Al Hashmi also underlined, it is imperative to accompany the archives of these regional music ICH samples with detailed contextual

explanations and cultural introductions. In his opinion, not even every Omani knows these specifics and can distinguish mountain singing from coastal one, with many traditions lost or gradually becoming obsolete. So, it may be extremely challenging for an outsider to embrace the nuances of Omani ICH and its geographical dependencies without appropriate archivist instructions.

In this regard, the significance of terminology was also mentioned as one of the key elements of proper ICH archivisation to achieve a mutual understanding of specific artefacts' cultural value and belonging to a specific cultural group. Here is how Khaled Al Barashdi, a grassroots archivist working much with local communities, explained it,

> You see, the words by which we denote songs and music matter in the archival work. Every tribe and local group has its own denominations for their vocal heritage, and it's vital to speak the same language with them to codify everything correctly. Take, for example, *Shlah* (lyrical singing term) or *Nhma* (sea shanty). While *Shlah* is universally used and understood, *Nhma* is a seaside people's term that not everyone will get.

Maryam Al Riyami mentioned the same issue, 'my first acquaintance with *Wanh* happened when I visited the Omani countryside. I never knew about this distinct song style, though I heard about the sad version of *Alnh* before that'. Thus, the archivists' work gets more complex as they encounter different cultural varieties in their country.

The use of musical instruments is also subject to changes with time and regional differences. One of the notable examples to which Sami Al Hadabi turned my attention is the use of the oud, a popular national musical instrument in Oman. Mr. Al Hadabi pointed out that the oud is a very ancient instrument, with some depictions of ouds met in ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian images. However, the most interesting part is that oud was not actively used in traditional Omani music and was introduced only in the 20th century as a more modern musical development. As Mr. Al Hadabi put it,

oud was only used in Shami and Arabi musical genres, as a rule, and the rest was done without it. Now, it enjoys a priority status in the Sultanate, probably because of the large melodic range it can offer. Indeed, almost any melody can be played with its two octaves, and its sound has a unique Arabic flair.

Thus, I concluded that my interviewees believe that oud's use expanded in modern Omani music due to its ability to produce all the musical intervals characteristic of Omani music. This way, we can witness the oud's place in the Omani ICH growing steadily, though it was much smaller in the past.

With these geographical and temporal varieties in the musical tradition, the most important aspect of the archivist's job is to stay open-minded and not perceive these subtle shades of Omani nationhood as alien to the mainstream musical ICH agenda. As Basem Al Daoudi characterised it,

> the country is large and has many faces. It's okay to confess that you didn't know about some of its faces just because you were born in Muscat or a seaside town. It's the path of discovery and acquaintance with our nation that we do by exploring musical artefacts of different locations.

With so many manifestations of what is genuinely Omani, the archival job would be fragmented and superficial without a proper understanding of all those varieties and how they have historically formed. Therefore, it is also vital to embrace the historical processes and numerous influences shaping the modern-day Omani musical heritage; these influences are discussed in detail in the following section.

4.3. Historical Influences Shaping the Traditional Omani Music

Many interviewees at all levels noted the problematic nature of conceptualising the Omani identity in the diversity and multi-dimensionality of the Omani nation. As Mr Nasser Al Naabai described it,

> Oman was historically populated by two types of Arab tribes – the Yemeni in southwest Arabia and the Nizari people, who came from Nejd. Add to that an intimate relationship of Oman with the neighbouring Persian, Indian and

African people, and you get a complex mix of cultural influences that have shaped the traditional Omani music.

For Mr Al Naabai, discerning these influences is more of an expert archivist and historian task, while all these elements have long blended into what people see as authentic national heritage. Yet, understanding these elements is key to understanding the Omani national identity and strengthening it with the concerted effort of archivisation, popularisation and preservation.

Given these versatile historical influences and modern-day geopolitical changes, the real-life Omani identity is much more versatile than its official version claims, as it combines the experiences of different tribes, ethnic groups and formerly enslaved people into a complex cultural fabric no official documentation has yet managed to embrace. Because of these distinctions, the comprehensive coverage of Omani nationhood and its reflections in music is impossible without a deeper look at the different shades of identity – that of Omani officials, grassroots artists and regional and external influencers. This section thus aims to uncover various cultural and regional influences shaping Omani nationhood in various periods, seen as influential and significant for the present-day Omani national heritage and identity.

4.3.1. Ancient Arab Civilisation and Omani Music

During my research, I discovered that Arab influences have historically been strong in Oman and occupy an essential part of the present-day Omani nation-building process. For instance, as Musallam Al Kathiri, an ex-director of the Omani Centre for Traditional Music, shared, 'The Arabic culture is in every Omani musician's and artist's heart. It's woven into individual and collective music performances; it's felt in every musical tradition'. Yet, Mr. Al Kathiri noted that the Arab influences are not imposed or formally educated; they are deeply rooted in the artists' hearts and come 'from within'. This account reflects the inherent cultural identity of Omani people that develops in the bottom-up form in the individuals' families and local communities. Thus, Omani music is something an artist can

absorb from their environment, while Arabic influences are imposed in an external, more artificial format by government-organised cultural contact and fusion efforts.

Though Oman strives to shape a state identity of its own in the modern nation-building process, it is still a part of the ancient Arabic civilisation, shaping the Omani culture and nation to a larger degree than modern Omanis can imagine. For example, Jameila Al Makusi shared her experience of attending a ritual in the Shehri Arabic mountains, where the tribal people of the Dhofar region sing chants and tap on the stones for hours during the lunar eclipse. As she explained,

> though modern people know the reason for the lunar eclipse and understand that there's nothing supernatural about it, this ritual is deeply embedded in the Dhofar people's rites. It dates back to the ancient times when people worshipped Seen, the god of the moon, and regarded an eclipse as their God's wrath. Thus, the ritual was done to make the eclipse go away.

Sami Al Hadabi also talked about several musical traditions in the Dhofar region, such as the *nana* song of the night, performed without musical instruments, and the *Rajseet* (*Al Ragiz*) song. Both songs are performed in the Shehri and Arabic Mehri languages. These musical rituals were described in detail in the ethnographic study of Al Kathiri (2004), who provided an account of the song's context and cultural meaning for the tribes. Jameila Al Makusi shared another example of the ancient Arabic song popular in the Dhofar region that she once heard from one of her fellow students from that locality. She talked about the *Boboba* song, typically sung by cattle breeders praising this field of activity and reassuring their cattle about their care.

Nasser Al Kindi, a musician interested in the Bedouin musical heritage, shared another valuable musical ritual practised by the Bedouin people. He talked about the practice of *Al Rohbah*, a song that used to accompany the therapeutic process of healing people who suffered a poisonous snake bite. As Mr Al Kindi explained, the tradition dates back to ancient times when Bedouins had to travel long distances on foot and were at a high risk of snake bites. So, the *Al Rohbah* song was

a ritual accompanying the process of a person's healing, either through traditional means (e.g., rubbing oil into the wound, hot milk with fat, and sacred healers' work).

Basem Al Daoudi mentioned the *Hubbell* (or *Habat*) song tradition as one of the most ancient elements of the Arabic vocal tradition preserved in the modern Omani heritage. He explained the meaning of this song as the centuries-old struggle of his nation for water, especially in the country's desert areas. Thus, the *Hubhat* (*Habat*) song was sung by people caring for the cattle many centuries ago; now, it is often included in various festivities held in the desert, though very few know about its rich cultural value and historical significance for the nation.

When discussing the roots of the ancient Arabic civilisation in the Omani musical ICH, I discovered the associations with a rich history, cultural wisdom, and ancestry that arose from the discussions with various interviewees. For instance, for institutional archivists and officials like Musallam Al Kathiri, the role of these songs was mostly about giving an account of the interaction of Omani people with other cultures of the Arabian Peninsula. As Rashid Al Hashmi described it, 'By studying these songs and rituals, we can better understand the ancient Arab beliefs and practices and the way our unique Islamic culture has been forming based on them'. Nasser Al Sawafi added to that account that knowing these ancient songs is about raising the consciousness of modern Omanis about the deep roots and values of their Arab personalities and heroic past. Jamila Al Makusi also commented on them as follows:

> From rocking a child to sleep to the hard work of breeding the cattle in the valley seeking water in the desert, it's all about how our ancestors lived, what they worried about, and how they evolved into what we are now. How can there be a future without history? I feel deeply connected to these songs as they are my ancestry, strength, and wisdom.

Thus, it appeared important for all interviewees that the ancient Arabic legacy is properly placed in the modern Omani ICH archivisation as an essential element of nation-building and nationhood construction on a firm historical basis.

4.3.2. Asian Influences on Omani Music

Though Oman is an Arabic state, its geographic position on the Eurasian trade routes made it an active participant in trade with countries in the Indian Ocean. That meant close links with the representatives of Iran, Pakistan, and India during active trading, which resulted in profound mutual influences in terms of culture and music. For instance, there are notable traces of the qawwali music tradition – the Sufi devotional music popular in South Asia, specifically in Afghanistan, India and Pakistan – in the Omani music (Sakata 2023). Indian music also affected the Omani musical tradition, as one can see from the popularity of The Singing Sailor of Oman, Salim Rashid Suri, whose unique fusion of Arabic and Indian musical elements enjoyed wide popularity across Oman in the 1930s (BBC News 2014). Besides, the wide use of table drums and a stringed instrument called sitar is of Indian origin. Iranian influences are also pronounced in Arab music, including the musical tradition of Oman, with the most notable Persian components felt in the Omani melodic arrangement, rhythm and vocal style (Nasehpoor 2002). Al Siyabi (2011) also noted the exposure of Omani territories to several Persian invasions and times of Omani dominance over some regions of India and Persia due to military successes. Given these facts and extensive periods of Omani merchants' activities in Malaysia, China and beyond, nothing is surprising about the distinguishable Asian traces in traditional Omani music.

I had a unique opportunity to embrace the Asian-inspired musical heritage of Oman at one of the local festivals, where a band performed the *Al Seerwan* song – a traditional part of the Al Bakit performance with strong Asian roots. The mixture of Arabic and Persian languages created a mysterious atmosphere at the performance, especially given the skilled vocalists' use of voice and nuanced representations of emotions. The performance involved using traditional Omani instruments – *oud* and *tabla* – but the textual fusion made the impression distinct from the regular Omani musical products. The lead singer had a beautiful, strong voice and was accompanied by a chorus; the public encircled the band and sat on the pillows, thus

creating an intimate and warm atmosphere of a communal musical ritual. Thus, listening to such musical pieces can clearly distinguish outside influences that do not belong to the Arab culture yet enrich and diversify Omani musical traditions.

I also had an in-depth discussion with Mr Al Kathiri, the Head of the Oman Centre for Traditional Music, who examined Western Asia (India, Lebanon, Pakistan, Yemen, Iran, Turkey, etc.) influences on Omani music and found many Asian elements in the existing musical products. For example, he told me about the classification he invented to aid ethnomusicologists' ICH recording and classification efforts. These are the Al Bakit (a song from the Persian territory and used for men's amusement during evening singing and dancing events) and *Al Seerwan* (a song performed in Arabic and Asian and sung for fun). As Mr. Al Kathiri clarified, there are regional differences in *Al Seerwan* performance, with Barka state's people using the *oboe* (double reed wooden instrument) as accompaniment, while people of the Sohar region perform it with women's dance and applauds as accompaniment. Mr. Al Kathiri also mentioned the *Laro-Al Blushi* song and dancing, *Al Kozak* and *Al Nirouz*, with their regional performance and music accompaniment specifics.

Mr Al Kathiri still noted, 'The Asian-inspired songs are not as commonplace as music with African or Arabic elements in Oman. They're mostly limited in their geographical outreach and popularity. I know they're favoured in the coastal villages near Muscat and Al Batinah'. Thus, in his opinion, it was vital to codify and record them in the Omani archives with as much information on the region and context as possible, as even for people familiar with those musical rituals in their localities, other regional performances may seem unclear and alien.

I noticed a little disagreement on the place of Asian roots in the Omani ICH, as only a few experts with in-depth knowledge of the Omani past and connections to Asian countries could acknowledge it more or less objectively. For instance, Khaled Al Barashdi mentioned his fascination with the Asian legacy of Omani music and shared some details about his findings. For him, Asian heritage is vibrant yet less distinguishable, felt on a 'deeper aesthetic level'. Besides, he said that Asian

influence is a natural element of the rich, diverse Omani ICH and should not be disguised or underscored for some reason. As he pointed out,

> it's the nation's past that made us who we are now. So, why invent something new and present it as our nationhood? A much simpler way is to uncover what we have and learn the history, with Asia being a significant part of it.

Still, Mr Al Barashdi agreed that the Asian impact is still not as strong as the Arabic influence is, mainly due to the cultural and religious differences and many centuries of different cultural paths after historical contacts.

4.3.3. African Influences on the Omani Musical Heritage

Oman was one of the regional players in the African slave trade routes of the 18th and 19th centuries. The country was unified with Zanzibar and was officially called the Sultanate of Oman and Zanzibar in 1698; it was a large regional hub of the Indian Ocean slave trafficking route from Zanzibar (Causevic and Neal 2019). Omani slave traders were referred to as 'Swahili Arabs'; they were actively engaged in capturing, selling and transporting Africans from Zanzibar, Pemba and the Swahili Coast of the African continent. Slave practices did not refer exclusively to Africans, with representatives of many other ethnicities enslaved for work on the Omani plantations and in the households (Bhacker 2002). However, the international dynamics of slavery abolition pushed by Western states in the middle of the 19th century caused a decline in Oman's involvement in the slave trade, with an 1873 treaty between Oman and the British Empire codifying the abolition of slavery and freeing of all enslaved people in the country's territories (Nicolini 2004). The practice of slavery was fully abolished by Sultan Qaboos's order in the 1970s, so Oman was a state related to the slave trade and practices less than half a century ago.

Thus, following the opinion of an ethnomusicologist, Lisa Urkevich, Omani music contains multiple African influences because of the complex historical engagements of Oman with Africa (Urkevich 2015; as cited in Plackett 2017). However, the legacy that should be celebrated or at least properly acknowledged

and respected represents a topic that most Omanis try to avoid. This topic was also actively explored in the articles of Majid Al-Harthy, an ethnomusicologist specialising in the country's African identities and Afro-Omani music tradition. The expert repeatedly noted that official acknowledgement of the African presence in the culture and music of Oman remains a delicate subject for Omanis (Al-Harthy 2012).

The official records of Omani ICH were initiated in the 1980s, after the abolition of slavery. However, as field research in the African diasporas in Oman suggests, Omani music has many African borrowings that require proper documentation in the Omani archives. When examining the African influences on Omani music, Noura Al Naziri mentioned the *tambura*, a six-string instrument that involves beating the strings with a horn. The musician pointed out that this instrument is African, and the tradition of tambura playing has much East African (Swahili) borrowing. Besides, an expert listener can easily distinguish the beats of Africa in Omani music, like in traditional drum performances. Mr Al Kindi also talked about the use of *Misundu*, tall, cylindrical, single-headed drums beaten with a stick or hands, as an originally African instrument that has taken its deserved place in Omani musical performances. Thus, as one can see from the real-world music performance context and the accounts of musicians, African music is deeply fused into the present-day Omani musical heritage and requires a proper account in the national archives.

Many interviewees talked about the traces of African heritage in Omani songs. For instance, Jameila Al Makusi mentioned *Al Liwa*, a song traditionally accompanying festivities where people drink brewed beverages. The musician talked about the song this way,

> I often heard *Al Liwa* with the *Naghar* Pipe and *Misundu*, Al *Kasir,* sometimes accompanied by *Al Rahmani* drums and tank. This song is more characteristic of coastal Omanis; it's performed in a mix of Swahili and Arabic. The dance to *Al Liwa* is magnificent; it's an integral part of the tradition that should accompany any song recording.

Maryam Al Riyami and Basem Al Daoudi also mentioned hearing *Al Liwa* and watching the seaside performances, noting the song's calming effect. Sami Al Hadabi also noted an exceptional interest in this song variety and shared his archiving efforts to preserve all four kinds of performance in the Omani archive: *Al Liwa* as a traditional form, *Al Sata* and *Al Boom*, and the *Katmerey* type, all taking root in the African traditions.

Another African-inspired music tradition Khaled Al Barashdi mentioned is the *Al Madama* song of sailors, performed in Swahili and Arabic. Mr Al Barashdi described the song's performance in detail and added, 'watching the *Al Aqeed* chant the *Al Madama* song and hearing all that clapping and drum rhythm… It's a performance worth seeing at least once, for everyone'. Thus, according to the archivist, the *Al Madama* song and dance ritual take a deserved place in the Omani ICH archive due to their impressiveness, appeal to viewers and rich historical tradition that reflects the nation's past.

However, alongside the willingness of archivists and performers to talk about the African, Indian and Arabic elements in the Omani musical tradition, I faced commonplace reluctance among Omani officials and heads of Omani music-related organisations to talk about the African presence in Omani musical tradition. The answers were dry and short, clearly showing that the interviewees felt uneasy about discussing this topic. However, grassroots musicians were more willing to share their insights into African motifs in Omani traditional music. Some had African ancestors, so they fused African musical practices with their musical style to pay tribute to their cultural heritage. One of the musicians I interviewed at the festival in Nizwa Fort said that he used Swahili texts in his early songs and liked to include African drumming patterns in the interludes.

I have collected some statements from the interviewees to discern the reasons for the intentional and uncompromising desire to disguise the African heritage from the official Omani ICH agenda. For instance, Mr Al Masrorri shared his guess that the unwillingness to give Africans a deserved place in the Omani culture

is the active process of nation-building that is far from finished. Thus, according to Mr Al Masrorri, the active makers of nationhood and identity for the newly established Omani society want to construct an ideal image without the dark, contestable pages of the historical past. This guess was also reiterated by Al-Harthy in Plackett's (2017) article, which said that the Omani government wants to 'let sleeping dogs lie'. This way, the African heritage, though present and identifiable to an expert, is only starting to gain prominence in the Omani ICH agenda.

Regardless of the official stand on the African presence in the Omani territory, culture and music, the reality is that African influences are broadly felt in the Omani music profile and are becoming much more distinct in the places where African diasporas still live. One of the illustrative examples is the city of Sur –where the largest African diaspora resides and pursues its authentic practices, ceremonies and music. One of the artists I interviewed at the performance at Al Mouj told me that he had African ancestry and sometimes used the traditional Swahili instruments *Al Madama* and *Al Shobani* in his local performances. However, he indicated that using African instruments was not part of his regular musical practices, as not everyone would accept them as Omani music. So, he chose African instruments to play in the communities he knew respected African culture and included people with African lineage.

One notable observation about the presence, recognition and acceptance of African legacy in the Omani musical tradition is the typical underestimation or neglect of it among people without African roots. The practice of underscoring and willingly excluding the African identity from the Omani cultural landscape was commonplace among layperson performance visitors I interviewed during musical festivals. Most of them could not identify African musical instruments or African musical performance elements in the performances and, when explicitly asked about African heritage, attributed the entertaining or outdated nature to them. One of the interviewees I talked to at a street performance explained it this way, 'there was little attention to what's African and what's not. I love this band and visit their

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performances every other weekend. But they also don't talk about African elements in their music, so how should I know?' This quote hints at the unwillingness or inability of Omanis with African roots to adapt, acculturate and integrate into modern Omani society. This way, they associated African lineage with something inappropriate that should be abandoned to get the privilege of being called Omani.

There were also Afro-Omani musicians willing to share their musical art's African roots but felt arbitrariness and exclusion of this vital cultural dimension from the Omani musical agenda. One band I interviewed mentioned a negative change in the arrangement of the Muscat Festival, which previously covered the local groups' expenses for participating in the competition and welcomed participants from all 28 Omani provinces (*wilayat*). However, since 2015, the terms for participation in the festival changed, and the organisation welcomed all willing bands that should cover their living expenses. The summer festival in Salalah, known as Mahrajan al-Kharif, also experienced changes in the arrangement, with the priority given to Muscat region's groups. As a result, the music and dance performances of Muscat bands were given priority, which ruined the representation balance and made too much focus on the mainstream Muscat heritage, such as *Al Ayyala, Al Razfa* and Al *Razha*, at the expense of other regions' musical heritage. This way, Afro-Omani and Dhofar musicians felt the unfair advantage of Oman's tribal elite's music at the musical events of national and international levels.

Overall, I found the position of African heritage in the Omani nationhood marginalised and largely seen as undesirable. Even those with expert knowledge and understanding of the African presence in Omani music and culture found it hard to discuss it openly and at length. Thus, it is evident that Omani nationhood, at least in the modern approach to its construction, seeks to minimise the mentions of the slave past or erase it altogether from the ICH profile. This practice, though not without some pragmatic sense for the official Omani authorities, still deprives the Omani ICH archives of the vital, undeniable element affecting cultural manifestations

in Oman for many centuries and shapes the modern ICH, including music, to its current form.

4.3.4. Western and British Influences

Oman is in the active nation-building process, but being a part of the Arab world and the rest of the globe also contributes to and shapes its ICH construction. Thus, it is important to analyse the broader global influences on Omani nationhood and identity, which have been pronounced for centuries. The major challenge faced by the authentic Omani culture today, as clarified in Oman Vision 2040, is to counterbalance the political, cultural and social globalisation processes without denying them altogether. Thus, the nation needs to develop into a culturally and politically unique entity while at the same time embodying and responding to regional and global influences.

Western influences are still a delicate subject in Oman, as the country has long been under the British Empire's powerful influence, with some Arab-oriented nationalists even calling Sultan Qaboos a British 'puppet' (Beasant 2011). Indeed, British imperial rule in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf left traces on the Omani culture, but it was not of a colony-ruler nature. These specifics can help the Omanis celebrate the British elements in their musical tradition formation instead of diminishing or criticising them. As Nasser Al Naabai commented,

> it's all history, and we can't let it go. But what we all remember and are proud of is that Oman has never been a British colony. So, I am used to thinking that there's as much British influence in Omani music as our nation has let in.

Nasser al Sawafi also explained that before the arrival of British imperialism, the country was ruled under the raj system, which ensured Oman's polycentric political course and regional neutrality. His story was consonant with historiographic data by Takriti (2013); after the British arrived in the Gulf, the local leaders had to subside, serving the British oil and geostrategic ambitions in return for protection from the escalating geopolitical threats in the region.

The duality of British influence – that of enrichment and imperial pressure for conformity - was thus felt in the interference of the British with the national affairs of Oman, like many Gulf states, throughout the 20th century and the orientation on the West as a source of high-quality education and prestige. While many interviewees saw it as a step forward in Oman's globalisation and modernisation, others envisioned a threat to indigenous musical traditions in that approach because of the lack of foreigners' insight into, respect for and understanding of authentic musical culture and heritage in Oman. For example, Sami Al Hadabi pointed out:

> Most music education is done by UK-sponsored schools. They're everywhere – in Muscat, Qurum and other parts of the country. So how can we expect people to continue the tradition if they're taught Western classical music traditions and history?

These accounts point to the limited effect of government-led efforts to encourage music education and promotion of music ICH in Oman. Several respondents from the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth shared stories of how the Omani musical tradition developed in the past decades, with talented girls and boys in different Omani cities being sent to Muscat for formal education and training. The interviewees explained that most teachers working with those children were of foreign origin; some came from the UK and other Western countries, and others were of Arabic descent (e.g., Egypt) but not Omani.

This way, Omani authorities pursued the goal of fusing the heterogeneous musical traditions and practices from various parts of Oman into a more consistent and interconnected whole. The result was mostly positive, with musicians from different regions exchanging experiences and teaching each other their musical traditions. But still, as Mr Al Busaidi briefly acknowledged, the process of musical fusion and formal education by Western teachers without an in-depth understanding of locally specific musical traditions in Oman left much of the regional musical heritage obscure and unattended. Mr Al Busaidi did not state that musical traditions vanished from entire Oman; he suggested that many of those practices were kept

and passed down to the next generations in various Omani locations. Yet, those intricacies of regional musical art would not be presented in the official musical ensembles and Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra (ROSO) performances, thus depriving the officially kept and propagated Omani ICH of the richness and diversity it possessed in natural settings.

4.3.5. Evolution of Omani Musical Instruments

The discussion of historical influences and processes surrounding the formation of traditional Omani music would be incomplete without tracing the evolution of the use of various musical instruments. Today's variety of musical instruments is rich, much richer than it used to be half a century ago. What was used in the old times includes the oud – a traditional Arabic musical instrument, a qanoon created in the 10th century, and various instruments for producing rhythm (Al Siyabi 2011). Youssef Al Rasbi mostly talked about rhythmic instruments when discussing musical accompaniment, saying, 'Traditionally, singers could perform without music. So, using musical accompaniment is a later and largely optional invention. Rhythm ruled the musical world in Oman, giving songs the structure and flow expected from them'. Thus, as Al Rasbi shared and Jameila Al Makusi confirmed, the Omani traditional music sphere is dominated by double-skinned and double-headed rhythmic items, such as *Al Rahmani, Misundu, Tanak* and *Al Kasir*, beaten with a stick, hands or both a stick and a hand during performances.

As Mohammed Al Masrorri shared, traditional Omani music does not presuppose using many instruments. To him,

> You see, traditional Omani songs are not meant for an orchestra. I am okay with modern royal orchestras playing them; they sound fascinating. Yet, in the original sense of this practice, traditional songs were sung with a couple of instruments only, such as blowing instruments.

Noura Al Naziri supported that point by saying, 'From what I saw by studying the old videos and attending local performances, the most powerful music for

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traditional songs is rhythm. It can be created by clapping and beating the *Al Kasir or Tanak*. Anything will work'. Noura Al Naziri also mentioned the use of non-skinned instruments that produce sound via shaking and blowing, mentioning the use of duff (Al Tambourine), *Qassaba* (flute) and *Sunray* (wooden oboe that has historical roots in the Beluchi region) in her musical performances. For her, these instruments reflected the vibrant melodic potential of Omani songs, with some accompanying family-taught traditions and others reinventing on her own.

An instrument of African descent frequently used in Omani music is the *tambura*, with other names of *Al Tambourine* or *Nuban*, which was also mentioned in the discussion of Omani ICH. While the institutional interviewees did not prioritise its recording as a cultural element of exceptional value (following the 'no prioritisation' agenda delineated by Nasser Al Naabai), it constituted a key tenet of the African lineage in Omani music for some grassroots archivists and musicians. The factor of subjectivity and personal association with the role of African heritage in the Omani nationhood might have played a role in these diverging evaluations, as Nasser Al Kindi, for instance, mentioned African ancestry and never concealed his utmost interest in preserving, disseminating and enriching that part of his culture.

4.3.6. Implications

This chapter presented my enquiry into the diversity of Omani identities and cultural practices forming during centuries of the country's existence and contact with other cultures, such as Westerners, Africans, Asians and other Arabs. Only by capturing the totality of cultural influences and their modern manifestations in the Omani ICH can the archives of musical heritage reflect the living tradition, thus becoming relevant to modern Omanis. I have observed a tension between the drive towards homogeneity and modern nation-building on a specific set of unifying terms and the broad, rich cultural history and diversity that does not fit into those limits. Though for the state, capturing that diversity may often pose a threat to nation-building, in reality, it acts as a facilitatory tool that reflects real-life, everyday musical practices instead of the carefully chosen and curated ICH catalogues. Losing some

regional musical heritage creates the risk of leaving some population groups out of the modern nation's concept, so I felt that most people dealing with music, both governmental and grassroots, feel the need for greater mediation between all stakeholders' efforts for the sake of making the ICH relevant to everyone. This is what can be best arranged with the help of complementary grassroots archivist efforts – the ones balancing the narrower governmental effort and giving a living, practical dimension to the musical ICH archiving process.

CHAPTER 5: DEFINING THE INTANGIBLE. NEGOTIATING ICH IN MODERN OMAN

5.1 Introduction

There are varied perspectives on ICH in Oman – an official one of the Omani government and the unofficial one of the music practitioners, grassroots archivists and music appreciators in all corners of this diverse country. Obviously, as with many other institutional efforts, that of the Omani government may seem official, curated, patrimonial and authorised (following the ideas of Hafstein (22012), Smith (2006) and Stefano et al. (2014), I considered in the text above). For the government, musical ICH is one of the nation-building tools, so it strives for homogeneity and representation in line with strategic priorities without accounting for the real-life nuances, discrepancies, and diverse realisations of musical tradition. Yet, it is vital not to underscore the government's role in ICH safeguarding, as it's the primary state body with financial and human resources, allowing a centralised and concerted effort on ICH protection, preservation and archivisation. Many of the institutional efforts evident in Oman today were set up by Sultan Qaboos, helping the Omani nation capture and preserve many musical traditions on the verge of dying out. Most efforts are pursued under the new Sultan's reign and reflect the country's focus on embracing its rich intangible heritage for cultural continuity and a shared sense of belonging among Omanis.

Yet, the well-financed and organised ICH preservation policy followed by the Omani government is often blamed for what Rasmussen (2012) characterised as a 'presentist' paradigm – an excessive focus on the present with a lack of regard to many centuries of the country's rich historical past. Reasons for setting those cultural milestones may be reasonable, reflecting the modern government's desire to level the tensions and conflicts between various ethnic groups inhabiting Oman today to mould a more homogeneous society. However, the by-product of such curated ICH redesign efforts is the detachment of national ICH archives and the population's

long-held traditions, culture and history cherished through generations. At that point, the national ICH policy became disconnected from the real life of Omani society, and this is where the grassroots archivist movement emerged to close that gap and link the state and the nation in terms of musical ICH definition and preservation.

Though less centralised and organised, the grassroots perspective on the musical ICH is still a vital dimension of the ICH preservation process. There is significant value in ICH when tradition bearers share and reflect their culture and history. Therefore, my process of making sense of ICH archivisation processes in Oman led me to various stakeholders' unique views on Omani music, which co-exist and offer unique perspectives instead of confronting each other. In this chapter, I uncover the nuances of the institutional approach to musical ICH and their practices and procedures for its safeguarding and approach the subject from the viewpoint of tradition bearers – musicians and appreciators – and grassroots archivists. This chapter thus serves as an alignment point for different musical ICH conceptualisations and motivations behind archivisation, giving a better understanding of the role and value of musical ICH for different stakeholders.

5.2 Heritage in Policymaking: Oman 2040 and Beyond Governmental discourses on tradition

Modern Oman's development is far from over, and protection, preservation and revival of the country's traditional heritage plays a key role in the overall histographical record. It is impossible to shape a coherent, deeply rooted, and unifying identity for a modern nation without a sound socio-cultural basis. Omani ICH serves this role. Therefore, heritage is given close attention in policymaking, ranging from the strategic Vision 2040 document to various ministries' work on ICH archivisation, heritage dissemination among Omanis and arrangement of national and international events for ICH appreciation and display. In this section, I consider the governmental action and policymaking reflecting ICH-directed efforts and initiatives in the institutional format.

5.2.1 ICH and Oman 2040

Oman Vision 2040 (*2040 Oman Vision* 2020) is a policy statement document that charts Oman's social, economic, and political development for two decades – from 2020 to 2040. Much of it is aimed at economic development and whose objective is to improve metrics related to GDP, FDI, and the Global Innovation Index. Nevertheless, from the beginning, Oman Vision 2040 sets the strategic goals of creating socio-economic prosperity and social justice nurtured in urban and rural communities. It lays the foundations for an ''empowered knowledge-based society whose members are creative, proud of their identity and culture'' (Oman Vision 2040 2020, 11). One of the four national priorities set for the forthcoming two decades' development is titled ''A Society of Creative Individuals', defined as a community of people proud of their identity, among other features. One of the objectives for this priority's realisation at the national level is to nurture ''citizenship, identity and national heritage and culture'' (Oman Vision 2040 2020, 13). The document envisions the work on this objective in the form of sustainable investment in heritage, culture and arts to contribute to national economic development and efforts directed at making the Omani society proud of its identity and committed to the preservation, documentation and diffusion of the national Omani heritage worldwide (Oman Vision 2040 2020, 24).

This document suggests that the Omani government is committed to building its society with values of active citizenship, pride in Omani heritage and identity and cultural preservation and promotion in the coming decades. It is expected that the government will collaborate with private sector players and contribute to preserving Omani identity and reinforcing Omani citizenship with the following strategies:

- Incorporation of identity, culture, heritage and citizenship concepts into the educational curriculum.
- Collaboration with the media to frame the Omani culture and ensure a balance between authentic cultural values and optimal use of modern advancements and the Omani community's participation in the globalised world.

- Promotion of cultural tourism to promote citizenship values among the Omani youth and encourage their cultural and identity pride.
- Dissemination of Omani cultural heritage and values beyond the boundaries of Oman via tourism and cultural contact (Oman Vision 2040 2020, 24).

These are the key aspects of the Omani government's work is set out for the coming two decades on matters surrounding society's development, identity and culture. The following sections consider how these priorities and objectives are realised specifically for Omani musical ICH at the practical level through governmental policymaking, Omani ministries' practical work, and the promotion of musical education. I also take a deeper look at how the contribution of Sultan Qaboos laid the foundation of the modern musical ICH preservation efforts and gave these strategies a current direction.

5.2.2. ICH in Policymaking

Omani ICH policies and projects are developed following a standardised framework that allows for centralisation and adequate evaluation of efforts. Most of them follow the overarching mission and goal set out by Oman Vision 2040 and earlier – by Sultan Qaboos. The major entities overseeing and implementing musical ICH safeguarding practices is the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth for Culture and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism; they develop policy documents and working papers that guide the ICH archivisation and preservation work.

After ensuring the conceptual commitment to ICH preservation, the Omani government developed practical instruments for this policy's implementation. This step involves establishing the legal frameworks required to ensure that ICH is properly protected, such as developing regulations and policies that outline the rights and responsibilities of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and of local communities in protecting ICH and setting out procedures for registering and monitoring ICH. The technical aspects of this process are far from public oversight, but the policy documents I could find enumerate the Ministry's scope of activities as preservation and maintenance of archaeological sites, museums and historical buildings,

collection and archivisation of relevant documents and records and promotion of traditional arts and folklores as an essential component of the Omani ICH (*Ministry of Heritage and Tourism* n.d.). The Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth for Culture is also tasked with promoting theatre, music, cinema and fine arts by arranging festivals and cultural events. Besides, the ministries are responsible for regional and international cultural communication for sharing Oman's ICH and popularising it among the nation's representatives.

5.2.1 Government Officials' Perceptions of Their ICH Preservation Roles

The focus on, and knowledge about, Omani ICH and musical ICH in particular stood out as prominent in most of my interviews with government officials. Most of the Omani Ministry of Heritage's resources were dedicated to displaying and celebrating intangible cultural heritage – a core value in the Omani identity paradigm and a distinct aspect of cultural tourists' interest. I have managed to uncover two major roles of ICH in modern institutional policy; first, as Mr. Al Busaidi confided, the government has realised the potential for intangible cultural heritage to increase the appeal and uniqueness of Oman's national profile. Second, as I learned from the conversation with Mr. Al Barwnai, the preservation of intangible cultural heritage is seen as a way to unify the nation's diverse cultural groups. These two directions in the ICH agenda also surfaced in my discussion with Nasser Al Sawafi, who said,

> we cherish ICH as a unifying factor for all Omanis, whether Dhofari or coastal residents. The efforts we've been making for the past three decades were directed at giving everyone a broader, shared sense of belonging and the feeling that their heritage is celebrated like that of other regions. And tourists like that diversity, too.

'As I concluded from that interview, Mr Al Sawafi saw the unifying role and shared sense of belonging in giving credit to all regional musical traditions instead of pushing a mainstream musical agenda forward. This position, however, contradicted my findings from interviews with musicians and grassroots archivists, most of whom felt that unequal representation was still the case.

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Still, officials repeatedly mentioned ICH as a tool for the Omani people's unification around core values. After a series of interviews, I had a feeling that governmental officials indeed believe that the inclusion of several regional musical practices gives their musical archives much more representativeness and inclusivity. In reality, even that inclusion was patrimonial and authorised, failing to reflect the real-life diversity and plurality of Omani music. One of my interviewees, Mr. Nasser Al Naabai, explained it this way:

> Our ICH is what makes Omanis unique. And we've been doing that since the 1970s – showing Omanis in which way they're unique and how they can show and celebrate that uniqueness. There's still much disappointment among people because their authentic musical instruments, dances or songs are officially considered Emirati or generally Gulf heritage. So, we work on setting Oman's cultural artefacts apart and allowing people to own and be proud of them.

He also mentioned that the Ministry of Heritage is working to ensure that the intangible heritage of Oman is preserved and displayed in a way that is accessible and relevant to tourists, following the twofold paradigm mentioned earlier by Mr Al Sawafi.

A common view of ICH among officials was that it was a strategic tool that served many state goals. For instance, Essam Al Mallah also added that preserving intangible cultural heritage is important for the economic development of Oman. He explained that position as follows,

> ICH is indeed intangible, a living practice and tradition we celebrate. Yet, don't forget that it's also a source of income for many small businesses, craft stores and family firms whose craft has historically been connected with cultural practices. Thus, stimulating ICH preservation is also an economic stimulus and a source of survival and prosperity for many Omani businesses.

This way, the officials touched upon the varied shades of ICH-related efforts' importance at the national level. They confirmed the direction initiated by Sultan Qaboos and directed the state of Oman towards a better-formulated, uniform national identity based on unique cultural heritage and values.

Many of the government officials I interviewed rather eagerly embraced soft power – access to governmental budget and human resources - as a tool for preservation. For example, when I asked Mr Al Naabai, the director of the Centre for Omani Traditional Music, what he thinks of the role of social power relations in the way ICH is formed, he eagerly embraced those as a tool for 'rooting and consolidating' the love of Omanis for their culture and practice. He argued that:

> The Omani government has the power of influence, authority and financial resources to promote state-wide initiatives. The ICH archivisation project was initiated for the people and for the country's welfare, so we use the full toolkit of resources we have at our disposal to streamline and finance musical ICH preservation projects, share Omani heritage with tourists, educate the youth and so on.

One significant aspect still lacking official attention, according to Mr Al Naabai, was the financing of grassroots musical initiatives. He commented, 'We do much ICH archiving work here, in Muscat, and across the country, but the archives are still in Muscat. What I see as an ideal state of affairs is to set up local development centres in all regions and small cities so that local musicians get essential resources to continue their musical work, educate youth and not worry about survival'. He argued that the state could encourage Omani youth to learn and enjoy their local cultural heritage.

Overall, as my interviews suggest, the Omani government is making a concerted effort to preserve and promote the intangible cultural heritage of Oman. They recognise the potential for intangible cultural heritage to provide economic benefits, increase tourism, and strengthen the national identity of Omanis. Officials are also taking steps to ensure that the intangible heritage of Oman is preserved and

displayed in a way that is accessible and relevant to tourists, thus encouraging international attention to Omani ICH and instilling a sense of uniqueness and national pride in Omanis. Nevertheless, as information in previous sections suggests, officials often resort to formal ICH preservation strategies, such as archivisation and staging of performances, instead of capturing the regionally diverse ICH manifestations in their natural contexts and contributing to living practices' continuation.

5.2.2 Music Preservation Efforts in the Institutional Format

Music preservation in Oman is a formally led and supervised initiative in which many agencies are involved. Their concerted efforts since the 1970s have contributed to a huge dataset of Omani ICH archived in the process of extensive ethnomusicologist work by numerous Sultan-established agencies. The interviewees I talked to mentioned the prominent roles of the Omani Centre for Traditional Music, the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth for Culture, the National Music ICH archive, the Centre for Civilisation Studies and other educational sponsoring and archiving institutions overseeing music.

Therefore, it seems that music is given enough emphasis at the governmental level, with much being done at present and going far broader in scope than the agenda initially set by Sultan Qaboos. As Rashid Al Hashmi explained,

The Sultan set the direction for us, and we continue his ideas and expand the scope of activities to keep his vision of Omani music heritage and tradition alive. There is still a nationwide programme for talented children who come to Muscat and are trained to join ROSO and other national bands and orchestras. Music is a cherished element of our nationhood.

Nasser Al Naabai also mentioned decades of The Omani Centre for Traditional Music's work on ICH archivisation in various corners of the country, saying,

We've done a good job, with over 20,000 photos and over 500 audios and videos of local musicians' performances. But that's by far too early to say that

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we've captured everything. We have a team of archivists actively engaged with local communities and continuing the archivisation process to help our centre's archive grow.

'This idea shows that regardless of the many years of the Centre's operations, it continues collecting musical heritage items and sees its role as prominent in the process of ICH archivisation in the country. Mr. Al Naabai added, '

> Our country is large and diverse, with some old and rare rituals that add colour and uniqueness to our nation. But to my shame, I can say that I know not all of them, and that's true for most Omanis. So, our centre's goal is to embrace the musical heritage, show Omanis who we are, and share that unique knowledge with future generations and the rest of the world.

'Therefore, it seems that further archivisation work and active ethnomusicology research are among the non-changing priorities at the governmental level.

Like the ICH conceptualisation discussed in the previous chapter, Omani officials envisioned Omani nationhood in the same holistic format – as a generalised concept representing the entire nation, not its specific local manifestations and varieties. In this regard, many interviewees pointed out the role of formal music-related initiatives and undertakings that Sultan Qaboos initiated. For example, the setup of the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra (ROSO) in 1985, the opening of the Royal Opera House in 2010 and the launch of the House of Musical Arts in 2019 were all prominent events in the musical tradition of the Omani state. However, they have little to do with the grassroots traditional Omani music and its real-life contextual manifestations. As Rashid Al Hashmi explained, 'ROSO is a matter of our exceptional pride. It represents Oman as a whole, both here and overseas. It's a pleasure to listen to ROSO musicians, and the events with the orchestra's participation are always exceptional'. This way, I interpreted his words as a view of the best Omani musical traditions and exemplary musician performance represented by ROSO, which is largely beyond the scope of everyday musical rituals and routines of the Omani nation.

Again, in line with the focus of officials' attention on Oman's international representation, it seems unsurprising that much of the official effort to document and preserve Omani tradition is related to the setup of the International Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO in 2003. Countries need to send applications to UNESCO to appropriate specific items of ICH and codify them as their unique, distinct element of culture. One example of such application is the 2010 application to include *Al Bar'ah*, the traditional music and dance of Oman Dhofari valleys, as a unique element of the Omani musical tradition. The Omani authorities characterised *Al Bar'ah* as a typical Bedouin warlike exhibition of music and dance performed by the residents of the Dhofar mountains. The dance is performed using drums and chanting tribal poetry. Thus, the dance initially associated with the war tradition has evolved into a universal modern codification and representation of social relationships associated with the Dhofari culture in Oman (UNESCO 2010). Other unique manifestations of Omani ICH were *Al Razfa* (a sung poetry genre accompanied by specified movement), *Al Ayyala* (registered in 2014) and *Al Taghrooda* (registered in 2012), with the latter two shared by Oman and the UAE (Rasmussen 2021).

5.3. Musical ICH and Grassroots Archivists

My account of governmental efforts for musical ICH preservation and safeguarding shows that the Omani government dedicates enough resources and attention to building and protecting the Omani musical tradition. However, these efforts, though conducted under the motto of intangible heritage protection, reflect the object-like treatment of musical ICH. Staged performances, closed national archives, structured and carefully curated archiving efforts and appropriation of cultural heritage for tourism and economic benefits are far from capturing and reflecting the living musical tradition and practice with which Omanis could associate themselves and develop a shared sense of belonging. This divide has grown increasingly more pronounced, giving rise to the grassroots archivist movement as a balance for the centralised national ICH archivisation initiatives. Grassroots

archivists work in the field, interacting with bearers of traditions in the natural contexts and embracing the musical heritage in its entirety and liveliness without following set governmental frames or agendas. This is why grassroots archives tell a different cultural narrative and enrich the Omani musical archives.

National and local contexts in ICH archivisation have emerged as an important difference between grassroots and institutional archivists. One of the tenet of Omani ICH archivists, whether governmental or grassroots, is the idea that ICH is a fundamental aspect of Omani national identity and should be recorded, collected and preserved for this reason. Ahmed Al Zadjali of the Oman Centre for Traditional Music reports that preserving the Omani national identity motivates him to archive the intangible cultural heritage in Oman because 'without it, we become without culture and identity. Culture is an essential part of identity. I have noticed that he cared much about celebrating his cultural and national identity, as he wore a beautifully embroidered white *dishdasha*, a traditional men's garment in Oman. Expectedly, Ahmed Al Zadjali's motivation is also evident in some grassroots archivists, such as Khaled Al Barashdi, who also points out that 'future generations will need this legacy' to keep the continuity of Omani national identity.

However, among grassroots archivists, there are also reports of more personal and contextual circumstances which have led to their active role in archiving ICH, which points to different motivations that drive these actors. Basem Al Daoudi, who makes video montages of live musical events and posts them on Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube, wants to preserve the musical practices of his native village. Mr Al Daoudi was worried that young people were not motivated to take it up and decided to intervene:

> I noticed that, in our village, our local traditional music performances were growing less and less popular, and there was no motivation for local young people to perform them. Maybe they had no talent for it. So, I started filming and broadcasting the events still taking place to display this valuable heritage.

Thus, for Mr. Al Daoudi, archiving and broadcasting ICH became a way for local traditional practices to be passed on, even if imperfectly, as his comment seems to show. When we spoke about this, he also expressed his disapproval of how the youth disregards the musical heritage in favour of popular music, including that performed by Western artists. He even admitted that his younger brothers and sisters were only interested in popular music. So, the perceived negligence of the younger generation is what sparks his interest in archiving the musical practices of his native village.

Another interesting personal twist to grassroots archivists' motivation to collect and broadcast ICH is the fear of 'losing' their heritage. 'I fear that this heritage, which I perceive as my own, will one day be lost and gone', says Sami Al Hadabi, who records and does interviews with Omani musicians and posts them on social media. I acutely understood what he was referring to because of my experience of losing a piece of ICH that I referred to at the beginning of this dissertation. Another grassroots archivist, Maryam Al Riyami, expresses a similar fear and links it directly to globalisation, which 'I consider a serious threat to heritage'. Thus, archiving ICH on the grassroots level seems to imply for many a reaction to its evident disappearance, sometimes directly linked to the effects of modernisation and globalisation. It may be considered ironic that Al Riyami points out modern technology as a helpful and even necessary tool for collecting and disseminating ICH.

One of the most important ideas I discovered during my interviews is that institutional and grassroots archive-makers build musical heritage brick by brick by sharing 'spheres of influence'. The interview with Khaled Al Barashdi, who argued that grassroots organisations and archivists participate mostly in ICH safeguarding and cultivation, helped me uncover how the institutional focus on protection gives more space for grassroots archivists to complement government efforts in a way that is accessible and appropriate for them. Al Barashdi explained: 'It happens naturally, you know. There are trained archivists whose job is to collect and preserve, and

there are people like me who want to celebrate our music'. Moreover, my conversations with amateur archivists, confirmed in interviews with institutional representatives, led me to conclude that grassroots archivists' limited engagement in protection is logical, as it emerges from their limited financial resources and formal training. Sami Al Hadabi shared his thoughts: 'I don't consider myself an archivist. I have no IT skills or training, and no one pays me for this. I only record traditional music and share it with people as much as I can'. In this way, the protection vs. preservation division between institutional and grassroots archives forms spheres of interest that each of these groups focuses on. Their varying resources, policies, skills, and motivations should not be perceived as conflicting. They balance each other so that heritage management is not the government's prerogative but a shared social effort.

Participatory archiving and interaction with the community are at the heart of grassroots archiving activities. Grassroots archivists in this study mostly shared their ideas about providing a space where local communities can participate in heritage activities and materialise their cultural memory. Basem Al Daoudi noted that quite often, archivists and community members may not even realise they participate in ICH preservation: 'Members of the community would hardly call their collective work as 'archiving'.

Evidence collected during community events and celebrations or communication with people following grassroots archivists' social media pages online provided proof of these words. To them, interaction with this music through listening, singing, playing the instruments, or dancing is a natural part of community engagement. When I asked people who attended the event about why they were there, they did not answer in the formal language of archive-making or cultural heritage preservation, which is understandable because they engaged in a living tradition. To them, it was a way of uniting with people, communicating, expressing emotions, celebrating something, etc. Indeed, the 'Azwa Fenga' celebration, which takes place on the fourth Eid al-Adha, involves all the village residents going out to

celebrate by performing traditional music and engaging in other traditional Omani rituals. After all, traditional music has emerged and developed as a form of social communication (Fleming, 2004). One of the young women I talked to said in this regard: 'I visit this event every year to pay respect to my late grandmother who used to take me here when I was a child. Every time I hear this music, I have this feeling of returning to Oman I knew'. Others I managed to talk with never even mentioned the term 'heritage' because traditional music was a natural part of their lives or, as said one of the attendees, 'what it means to be Omani'. Maryam Al Riyami, a grassroots archivist, said that it does not matter how people interpret their participation and whether they recognise their role in ICH preservation. 'It's our work to provide space where people can engage with our music heritage, and it's the result that ultimately matters', she added.

Therefore, my observations suggest that institutional and grassroots archivists tell unique stories of the Omani musical ICH. The former is constrained by the officially set agenda that tries to fit Omani musical ICH in the conception of the modern Omani nation. The latter is freer and more flexible in their approaches, able to record the musical tradition in the 'as-is' form and share it with people to disseminate these traditions. This way, the grassroots approach is more dynamic and proactive, letting the archives serve the tradition's bearers instead of freezing the musical tradition for its own sake or objectifying it as a contribution to tourism or economic development.

5.4 The Meaning of Music Tradition for Music Performers

Apart from what the Omani officials do to preserve, archive and maintain traditional Omani music, it exists as part of the living tradition in various regions of the country, sometimes working in tandem with governmental efforts and sometimes living a life of its own. As I have witnessed during my travels throughout the country and visits to various national festivals and conferences during my ethnographic study (e.g., performance at Al Mouj, Nizwa Fort and Azwa Fenga celebration), the role of the government is mainly directed at (though not limited to) capturing the existing

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diversity of the Omani musical traditions, rituals and customs across the country to codify them in a more or less tangible form (i.e., via archives). What happens in real-life music reproduction is more of a living organism that evolves and changes as generations of musicians replace one another and accept some innovations and external influences. My main argument in this section is that this dimension of the Omani musical heritage is adequately captured by grassroots archivists – people with a more proactive, reciprocal position towards musical heritage. I examine the music performers' perspectives on musical ICH as an integral part of their identity and way of life, giving an alternative view of the ICH preservation process and proving that music as a part of an Omani person's living is distinct from the one buried in archives, building a case for grassroots archive movement's rise for the sake of not only capturing but also reintegrating Omani music into the Omani people's daily routines.

5.4.1 Self-Identification as Bearer of Omani ICH

All interviewees I talked to are practitioners of music in some form or another throughout their lives, starting from childhood. Most of them started their musical practices in an environment composed of family members and close friends who are musicians. Therefore, I discovered that all of the musicians see their musical practice as an organic part of their life; that they put the most important characteristic of traditional music in its actual practical life in the people of Oman. What makes the music 'Omani' or traditional is not just something specific in the instruments or the techniques and so on, but the fact that it is lived and played by the people of Oman in their different communities.

Another significant point is that for Omanis, ICH is mainly passed on either through family members or close friends, and it signifies a way of living, which is realised in performances with groups of people in various traditional forms of specific dances, songs and melodies, musical instruments and techniques, etc. As Muslim Al Kathiri shared,

I didn't give much thought to whether to make music for a living or not. It has always been a part of my life, as my large family lived with their parents and grandparents in the coastal community. We sang songs and danced every evening; seniors taught us to do that, and that was never a choice, like a choice of profession or vocation…it's just my life.

Thus, it is evident that Omanis view music as an integral part of their day-to-day routines and a cherished aspect of their culture reflected in everyday interactions and communal celebrations. Jameila Al Makusi, a singer of traditional Omani music, also shared that she started performing because her brothers had a traditional band. Since Omani folklore music has been an essential part of her life since she was a small child, she adopted these traditional practices.

The same idea was shared by Muhammad Al Masrorri, an Omani folk poet who learned the art from local senior masters. As Mr. Al Masrorri explained it, 'I used to sit with old people and poets and tried to imitate them'. Therefore, he learned only contextually, without prioritising formal education or attending a school to learn the conventions of Omani music and poetic tradition. For him, it was the 'love for Oman as well as the passion for art, that is most important for the tradition'. The words of Mr Al Masrorri thus echo many other interviewees' opinions about the deep contextual connections of Omani music with the Omani nation, which makes the art torn away from the context less lively.

Contrary to this – submerged in traditional learning – stands formal education. For Noura Al Naziri, there is an important distinction between the two since she was born into a family of traditional musicians but fell in love with the local music that people sang and danced to but simultaneously was formally trained in classical music during her youth. For her, the education system cannot truly understand the local traditional music because its work methods are very different from the ''natural living'' in your home, where you naturally begin to sing and play without ''actually thinking it through'.

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Besides, it is essential to note that Western norms and traditions have heavily influenced formal education in the Sultan's effort to bring Oman closer to the modern world and borrow the best ICH practices. Nasser Al Kindi, a violinist, supported this observation. He started playing at a very young age and performed in the Royal Orchestra from the age of 12. Al Kindi studied both Omani and Western music from a very young age, but he always felt a big difference between the two: 'Western music is meant for concert halls, intelligent audiences and expresses the thoughts of great composers'. On the other hand: 'traditional Omani music […] tells different stories about our ancestors' lives, our history, our past and ignites our passion'. For Al Kindi, Omani music is something he recognises himself in, while Western music is something he admires and cherishes but cannot truly see as 'his own'. This account suggests an inherent divide between music as such and the musical and cultural heritage of one's nation, which transcends the limits of the simple aesthetic pleasure of listening to beautiful music and touches the deeper strings in people's hearts by reflecting their culture, heritage and belonging.

5.4.2 ICH as a Community Practice

The interviewees' answers among native musicians of Oman and local music bands show that most people think of their heritage as a big part of their cultural and personal identity. According to Jamilela Al Makusi, 'music is Oman's part, heart and soul of our culture, that withstands the impact of time and other civilisations. We practice what our parents and grandparents did, giving life to these traditions regardless of modernisation and globalisation'. Thus, the music construction and reconstruction process is seen as a context-dependent, community process involving people, here and how. The importance of context is also explained by the fact that Omanis eagerly participate in street performances, music and dance. They partake in these communal rituals and enjoy the process, which I noted many times during the attendance of festivals and rural areas.

The community makes Omani music unique and gives it an authentic, context-embedded heart and soul. I received valuable insights on this subject from

Amal Waqar, an oud player of Omani and Arabic music who studied music from childhood in Sultan School. He attended various traditional events in Muscat and participated in TV festivals. Since he was familiar with Omani and Arabic national music, I decided to ask him whether he thinks that there is an influence from different cultures that affect the Omani heritage. It is interesting to note that to him, ''Omani music will remain unique'', but not because it is not influenced by Arabic music.

On the contrary: ''this interaction [with Arabic music] is positive and enriches Omani music'' for what makes Omani music Omani are not the instruments, nor the various techniques or motifs used in songs, but the specific way that Omani people come together and play, sing and dance. It is not the similarities of the resources (instruments, music motifs, and dance moves.) but the uniqueness of the concrete performances that makes Omani music special. In other words, the community of people following this tradition and giving it life through practice should be given enough importance in the ICH preservation agenda.

5.4.3. Musicians as Contributors to ICH Preservation

The most important part of being a folk musician is comprehending the cultural importance of one's activities, so I asked the musicians about their motivations in musical practices. One of the most common motivations for practising, celebrating and disseminating Omani traditional music was the desire to give these traditions a new life – the so-called 'revival'. As Basem Al Daoudi observed, the living tradition of music and dance has started to fade out as people have moved to cities and have changed their lifestyle to more urban. According to him, 'my fellow villagers, though still villagers, seemed to adopt another style of thinking, or approach, to music. I connect this trend with the advances in technology. Why play music if you can turn it on?' Thus, for Mr Al Daoudi, the live performance practice became an artefact worth preserving and developing in modern Oman. Though he is also directly engaged in promoting technology and makes social media videos with Omani music, Mr. Al Daoudi's purpose lies mainly within the in-person performance rituals.

When discussing how they can contribute to preserving musical ICH, I discovered that most musicians favour two effective ways of preserving Oman's ICH. One is preserving the environment and conditions that make it possible – this should be the government's main concern, in the opinion of Maryam Al Riyami. The second is describing, filming, recording, and documenting Omani traditional music, drawing attention to it and sharing it with as many people as possible. Both ways are centred on preserving the natural living community in which the music is created.

In my interview with Al Makusi, the musician commented that ICH documentation is the most important method of preserving heritage, like the activity of grassroots archives. Although Al Makusi reported that there had not been any governmental financial support for musicians, Al Busaidi rejected those claims by noting, 'there is support in the adoption of many to learn music academically and practically. For example, some of the activities of Qaboos University are dedicated to supporting the teachings of traditional music. Although these institutions' contribution is small, according to Mr Al Busaidi, 'there is no real risk for Omani music to be forgotten because it is rooted in the people of Oman, and they are keeping it alive'. However, these interview fragments hint at the major flaw of Omani policies directed at conserving and archiving musical ICH at the centralised level instead of supporting its grassroots aspects.

Another vital tool for encouraging Omanis' acquaintance with their authentic musical ICH is promoting a broader range of folk musicians and artists, not only those on the state-approved list. Mr Al Busaidi mentioned some festivals organised by the new Sultan (Haitham bin Tariq Al Said) that have provided opportunities for people to listen to Omani music and for writers, composers, musicians and singers to express themselves. For him,

> music needs a theatre, a stage, a hall – a place to present itself, so the government and its institutions must provide these conditions for talented people. Otherwise, Omani traditional music will remain confined and isolated in the small villages and regions.

However, I found this statement controversial because staged performances are not alien to the folk music tradition in Oman. Musical performances have been typically organised in communities, in the streets or in the elder's houses and used to celebrate specific events or practices. With the stage, the audience and the performers are radically separated, something unimaginable for traditional music. Therefore, I attributed Mr Al Busiadi's opinion to a more Westernised, modern view of musical events that can collect audiences and share Omani traditions with the masses.

Public education on the long-standing musical art and traditions can also play a role in the revival and preservation of musical ICH. According to Mr. Al Masrorri, it is important 'to organise lectures and seminars to consolidate this knowledge; in practice, this means to teach the foundations of Omani music to students in schools and universities'. In line with the statement above, Al Kindi pointed out that it is important to establish a committee that specifically works to preserve traditional Omani music: 'This could potentially lead to an annual festival, dedicated to Omani music, that shows these traditions not only to students but to a larger audience as well'. These forms of ICH protection deserve consideration, but the risk is high for committees to select ICH items arbitrarily without giving a voice to all manifestations of diverse musical traditions across the state of Oman. Therefore, the committee idea was counterbalanced with a proposal to create grassroots archives to ensure the absence of bias in Omani folk music representation.

5.4.4 ICH Preservation and Modern Challenges

Omani traditional music faces many challenges, such as the external influences of Western musical forms (perceived positively or negatively by different musicians and experts) and the pressures of globalisation, modernisation and commercialisation. The bearers of Omani musical ICH have commented on these challenges in various ways. When talking about the impact of the West, some musicians voiced their fears of the eroding effect of external influences on the Omani musical tradition. One of the sceptics was Youssef Al Rasbi, who said Western music

''is different from Omani music in a way that can hardly allow combining the two without harming any of them'. Jameila Al Makusi also commented on Western influences by saying, 'we have to deal with them, as they are part of modern musical practice. Yet, some things (like notation) are doomed to remain alien'. This way, I saw the desire of many specialists involved in the musical practices and preservation of music tradition to make clear boundaries between what is Omani and what is not, at least for the preservation of tradition without fusion that may erode the authentic, historical Omani legacy in future. With many music traditions gradually fading out and becoming documented legacies, some archivists and practising musicians are naturally concerned about the purity of those traditions and the precision of their revival by modern artists.

Sami Al Hadabi shared the same concern as an archivist documenting the Omani traditions daily. As he said, 'I fear that this heritage, which I perceive as my own, will one day be lost and gone', and that change is attributed to the changing notions of nationhood in the modern context. Maryam Al Riyami attributed that change to globalisation and changing people's priorities and lifestyles, characterising globalisation as ''a serious threat to heritage'. Thus, following these archivists' observations and worries, I have realised that Omani nationhood is also evolving with the nation that has stepped into a new epoch – that of a modern globalised state. In line with those changes, many practices people have been having for centuries can become obsolete and abandoned as part of their previous daily routines. Therefore, it is logical that many musical and dance traditions that used to be part of the local communities' daily rituals and community festivities only a couple of decades ago will soon transition to cultural artefacts rather than elements of practice.

Globalisation and modernisation discussions are intimately connected with the role of technology in ICH preservation. The use of technology and social media seems almost inevitable in the 21st century, and most interviewees supported preserving and sharing the heritage through modern means of communication. For

example, Al Makusi strongly agrees that we should record, film and store as much traditional music as possible: 'This will be extremely valuable for our nation, especially for school students. I have an account on Instagram, and I publish much work from the centre there. All people spend much time on the phone, so our music should be on every device to be close to people'. Here, Al Makusi interestingly defends a conservative point with modern means; that is, this value for the nation (indeed, the identity of the people of Oman) is tightly linked with traditional music. The way of preserving music is through technology. This means we could preserve peoples' national identity through technology – a conservative goal with a progressive meaning. In agreement with Jameila Al Makusi, Mr Al Busaidi also thinks that technology is an important element in developing and disseminating heritage: 'I recommend using our latest technology positively and effectively. A lot still has not been documented regarding Omani music, and grassroots archives are an effort that must continue'. Therefore, technology can be highly helpful in ICH preservation and archivisation if viewed as a supportive tool, not an enemy.

Still, there is a need to balance the centuries-old musical art and modern technologies so they don't conflict. Although Mr. Al Masrorri supports ICH preservation through technology, he illustrates these risks as follows:

> If we do not pay attention, we will forget the origins of our music and start living on our phones. I agree that digitalisation is important and must happen, but we must always remember that nothing could ever replace our traditional practices and lives. And this life cannot be captured by a camera.

This excerpt implies that some private community practices, like burial or disease treatment, should not be recorded with devices alien to the rural communities to avoid scaring the musicians off and ruining the trust between archivists and Omanis. These concerns do not bother Noura Al Naziri, who encourages grassroots archives 'because they highlight our music and our efforts'. According to him, during COVID-19, social media has become a main way to share and enjoy music'. Still, with the

lack of technology adoption in many rural regions of Oman, it should be used sparingly to avoid the destruction of complex socio-cultural ecosystems.

Another important observation is that along with the process of Omani nationhood formation through music, a more global process of social evolution and the musical tradition's response to changing people's needs takes place. 21st-century Oman is not isolated but part of the broader regional and global community. Therefore, global cultural trends and modern music tendencies influence how Omani people consume music. Mohammed Al Masrorri talked about it as follows,

> you see, the problem is that commercial music production follows different goals than formal archivisation efforts. Commercial music that we hear on the radio or social media blends traditional Omani music and Western and Arabic influences. In other words, it usually follows consumer demand more than Omani tradition. It's about money and popularity, not authenticity.

I heard related concerns about commercial trends in music from the archivist Sami Al Hadabi and the musician Youssef Al Rasbi, who pointed out that commercial bands hire many foreign musicians who bring a part of their musical style and cultural tradition into Omani music. Mr. Al Hadabi said that the effect could not be that evident on the surface, but it still takes a toll on authentic music. One of my interviewees, Jameila Al Makusi, a professional musician, described this as follows: ' I am the creator of our band's music. I am Omani, and I give my soul to the music by creating an Omani melody. Yet, some of my production team members are non-Omani. So, they add their cultural background to how our songs sound, making it different from an Omani song'. These concerns were also voiced in the ethnographic observations of Rasmussen (2021), who talked to numerous Omani musicians and found that Omani music is heavily affected by international trans regionalism and outsourced musical production staff from Egypt, Iraq and the Gulf countries.

One of the reasons for outsourcing is the basic economic necessity. As I found out in a discussion with a studio holder, Fathi Mohsin, music outsourcing is a

common practice because of the lower cost of such musicians and their greater availability. According to him,

> you know, I am an Omani musician and can create Omani music. Yet, collecting the full band of Omani performers to record a track is hard. The best are employed at royal orchestras; they can hardly reserve an hour or two for such a recording, and their schedules are tight… So, I work with what I have and often engage musicians from the region.

This way, as Mr Mohsin explained and other musicians confided, traditional Omani musicians are pretty rare talent in the country, with the trend worsening over the years (for instance, as Maryam Al Riyami complained, they travelled with a team for four hours to record a souk's performance at Souq es Sabt in Muscat, but the souk they were interested in was old and felt ill, so he did not perform on that day).

Therefore, as it comes from my interviews, the impact of technology and global influences is unavoidable on Omani music. Yet, it is essential to keep traditional music alive and distinct from mass culture. The globalisation processes are ongoing, and the Omani society is not isolated from the rest of the world, so listening to music other than the country's traditional folklore is natural. However, distinguishing between authentic, centuries-old musical traditions and evolving mass-market musical products is key to keeping the heritage alive and intact.

5.5 Conclusion

The present chapter dealt with the different angles of viewing ICH and approaching its preservation by the key stakeholders of the process – governmental officials in Oman, archivists working with governmental agencies, grassroots archivists and local musicians. In the process of this analysis, in-depth differences were identified in the ways the representatives of the Omani government, grassroots activists and bearers of the living Omani tradition approach ICH as such and the target of musical ICH preservation in particular. What seems to be a part of the national strategy of social homogenisation and economic growth through cultural

tourism consistent with the Oman Vision 2040 priorities is a living heritage, a cultural process and a dear part of practitioners' identities.

Given this divide in the perception of musical ICH (as an artefact that should be archived, codified and objectified on the part of officials and as a living, vibrant communal tradition inseparable from its regional context), the approaches to music practices and archivisation also differed extensively. While government officials sought to promote a mainstream, government-approved ICH agenda through staged performances and showcasing pre-approved musical and dance products, grassroots archivists and musicians focussed on the regional diversity, cultural heterogeneity and the richness of musical genres and variants that skipped the officials' attention.

However, it would be an exaggeration to say that musical ICH promotion and protection is unsatisfactory. There is much effort directed at conceptualising, reviving and archiving the Omani ICH as part and parcel of the state's modern nation-building and a process of attracting tourists to Oman as a state with a distinct cultural legacy and soul. The only problem is that various stakeholders approach the task from strikingly different angles, thus revealing the underlying differences in the concept of what constitutes ICH and what ICH varieties should be given a voice in the overall process. There is a pronounced lack of representation for non-mainstream musical genres and regional musical traditions largely absent in the Muscat educational or cultural institutions' agendas, which throws a shadow on the degree of fairness with which distinct socio-cultural groups and communities in Oman are treated within the framework of ICH protection.

CHAPTER 6: DILEMMAS OF PRESERVATION: PROCESSES OF MUSICAL ARCHIVE-MAKING IN MODERN OMAN

6.1 Introduction

This chapter closely examines the archiving process of Omani ICH by exploring what and why it gets chosen for preservation, as well as the technicalities and dilemmas of recording and editing digital media. The first part of the chapter, 'Technical Aspects of ICH Archivisation', explores how Omani ICH is preserved from a technical perspective. It investigates a step-by-step process of finding, recording, editing, storing and publishing musical materials by government archivists and a newly emerging group of grassroots archivists using social media. The goal is to understand better the archivisation process and its technical challenges as the chapter goes through each key step of archive-making, allowing readers to understand this complex process better.

The second part of the chapter, 'ICH Archivisation from Institutional vs. Grassroots Perspective', examines ICH preservation from the perspective of the two groups: government-affiliated specialists and grassroots archivists. This section identifies the differences in ICH archivisation, both technical and skill-related ones, which characterise the work of the mentioned groups, thus completing a more policy-related argument from the previous chapter. This section helps provide a detailed and insightful examination of how institutional and grassroots archives build Omani ICH brick by brick. Institutional archives effectively maintain robust ICH collection, categorisation, protection and popularisation of Omani ICH. They conduct massive work by recording, categorising, storing and popularising musical heritage. However, their work, albeit extremely valuable from the heritage preservation perspective, cannot always capture the diversity and complexity of Omani ICH. This is where grassroots archivists fill the gap in practice due to their close relationship with the communities and their particular attention to preserving ICH as part of a living tradition. Grassroot archives complement institutional work by capturing the rich

complexity of Omani heritage and pursuing archivisation to continue the living tradition.

The third part of the chapter titled 'Choices Behind ICH Collection and Preservation' looks at how conscious and unconscious choices are made regarding the collection and presentation of traditional Omani music and how these choices change, transform, or even develop traditional music. Here, I also explore the problematisation of the ICH origin and links of ICH to specific ethnic roots.

Finally, the fourth part of the chapter, 'Authenticity Issues in ICH Archivisation', deals with authenticity issues. Among other things, I seek to determine whether studio recordings are seen as more sonically faithful to the original or eluding the performativity of traditional music. The chapter questions the risks of archiving living traditions and whether preserving the full power of live performance via digital media is possible. In this way, by examining the decision-making and technicalities of ICH preservation through the institutional and grassroots archive-making lenses, the chapter reveals fundamental differences in how these groups approach heritage preservation. It shows that institutional archivists have more structured methodologies of collecting and managing ICH than grassroots archivists, contributing to their archives' sustainability. However, grassroots archivists have the advantage of being closer to their communities and utilising innovative archivisation methods such as social media. This shows how, despite their varying goals, methods and technical capabilities, institutional and grassroots archivists complement each other's work. The discussion is based on the data collected by examining policy documents and governmental statements; interviews with officials, performers, archivists and laypeople; and performance and event attendance.

6.2 Technical Aspects of ICH Archivisation

6.2.1 Finding and Recording ICH

My field research and interviews with participants revealed the primary interest of archive experts in musical instruments, forms, instrumental and vocal

techniques, musical systems and scales and more elusive aspects of ICH, such as melody, rhythm and harmony. However, their interest is not limited to technicalities. Archivists also focus on how music is performed, what cultural aspects it represents and how it links with a wider Omani culture. All these elements of Omani ICH become the target for archive-makers who travel around the country to accumulate this material.

My experience attending various cultural events suggests that traditional ceremonies, celebrations, events, street performances and dances are the main sources of this ICH material that ends up in grassroots archives. However, institutional archivists also actively record the material during festivals and official celebrations. Notably, the stage/location of the performance can be defined by both communities (as in informal events) or authorities who organise concerts, city celebrations and festivals. Characteristics of the stage of performance are important because they affect the availability of resources (e.g., musical equipment, venue suitable for high-quality recording), community engagement and types and forms of musical performances. As for the latter, more informal community gatherings where music is performed are less structured, organised and directed, but they offer a greater degree of artistic freedom that archivists value particularly. As Khaled Al Barashdi notes, 'I like informal music performances on the streets or during celebrations. They allow me to move freely through the crowd and capture everything from all angles'. Musicians and amateur archive-makers I interviewed all recognised the immense value of the described ICH sources, stressing their ability to provide cultural context for the music, understand its values and beliefs, and connect with performers on an emotional level.

In many ways, recording ICH during concerts/festivals is a convenient means of collecting ICH for government-affiliated archive workers. For example, events organised by the Oman Centre for Traditional Music are an excellent opportunity for archive-makers to collect rich material. Music performed in these events may lack community/cultural context, an issue discussed in greater detail in the following section. However, it is easier for archivists to collect information about instruments,

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performers, genres and other characteristics needed for categorising and describing ICH according to the institutional archives' standards. It has another important quality that online recordings often lack– the interaction aspect.

I visited one such event at the Omani Centre for Traditional Music, which took place in November 2021, soon after strict isolation measures due to COVID-19 were lifted. There, I realised the difference between recordings that can be watched at home and music that can be experienced first-hand. As I had watched many videos during the COVID-19 lockdown, seeing them live was a completely different, immersive experience. I can say there are many differences, but the one that caught my attention was how musicians improvise during the stage performance and how they interact with each other in certain ways so they follow the rhythm and the melody.

During this event, I observed several people recording the performances using personal phones and cameras. After the event, I talked to one of them (he preferred to remain anonymous) to learn more about their work. The archivist noted that although formal events like this rarely feature unique performances that have not yet been archived, it is obligatory for him to attend and record them. 'Sometimes, we are lucky to stumble upon a particularly skilful performance or dying musical tradition that ends up in archives. So, it's an important work',[5] he added. I also noticed that events like this create favourable opportunities for musicians, audiences and archive-makers to communicate in an informal atmosphere, extending the celebration of ICH through actual performance to its discussion in conversations. Venues used for organising the events are properly constructed in terms of acoustics and placement of the scene to enable high-quality sound. However, superior audio and video recording in these places is hardly possible due to background noise, just like in street or community locations where even microphones are not always used.

My interviewees also praised the value of video recordings that capture important aspects of musical performances. For example, Noura Al Naziri pointed to

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[5] Anonymous participant #4, interview at the Omani Centre for Traditional Music, 22 Nov. 2021.

technical aspects of music performance that visual keepsakes can capture quite effectively. For example, she noted that specific aspects of fiddling, such as bowing and some ornamentation, can be accurately communicated on video. As she tried to explain her point, she used peculiar gestures designed to show the complex musical rhythms, as if illustrating the elusive nature of the music that cannot be captured through classical means. These views explain why my interviewees discussed audio and video recordings for ICH preservation rather than written documents (e.g., song texts, newspaper cuttings, diaries, letters, photographs, and, most importantly, music notations).

Video recordings are also extremely valuable for capturing the technicalities of musical performance for educational and professional purposes. In this regard, Juma Al Shedi shared his opinion on the value of video recordings. This interviewee explained that it is important to ensure that the recording accurately reflects the sound and context, communicating the music as intended by the author(s). 'The best recordings allow other musicians who use the same instruments to produce comparable results', explained the expert. This replicability feature is critically important for making the archives useful for practitioners, both teachers and professional musicians, who want to use the recordings for playing music. When I discussed this interesting idea with Emad Al Baharani from the Centre for Civilisation Studies, he confirmed that replicability allowed by high-quality audio and video recordings is essential, adding that it helps ensure that Omani ICH remains a living tradition passed on to new generations. When I asked him how the quality relates to the living tradition, he explained that high-quality archives are more suitable for teaching purposes, which help spread knowledge about traditional music and prevent it from disappearing as the older generation dies. Krajewska (2020, 69) partially supports this by pointing to 'the considerable potential of audio and video documents to support high-impact, vivid, thematic and analytic engagement with meaningful issues, personalities and contexts'. The use of archives as a teaching tool is a topic that requires more attention so that I will dwell on it later in this chapter.

In addition, interviews helped me uncover the nuances of both medium and length. According to Khalfan Al Barwnai, who has been working on ICH archivisation since 1983, video clips lasting approximately three to four minutes are some of the most widely used types of content in their database. He explained: 'These clips demonstrate the main qualities of musical instruments. They do justice to the performers' skills and work as great educational material'. Nasser Al Sawafi, whom I interviewed during one of my visits to the Centre for Civilisation Studies, dwelled deeper on the value of video clips, noting that they allow capturing things that cannot be captured otherwise:

> Imagine a traditional music band that has been performing for decades in their village during various celebrations. They have never given live concerts or been recorded in professional studios. Their legacy would be lost if it wasn't for their children and grandchildren, who record them using their cameras or smartphones. Such videos help collect and preserve material that would otherwise be forgotten.

Musallam Al Kathiri shared this excitement for the possibilities of new technology: 'Modern smartphones have noise reduction tools and various audio filters that allow making high-quality recordings in almost any setting. You can zoom, improve the lighting, and things like that so that viewers immerse into the performance'. He seemed so excited about these possibilities that he could not help but show me his latest smartphone model with advanced video and audio recording features and an app he uses for improving the quality of recorded pieces. He proudly stated that with the help of this technology, his recordings allow listeners to immerse in the atmosphere. So, technology helps communicate nuances of performance while preserving the emotive context. Thus, my interviewees praised video recordings as an accessible means of preserving ICH, even though they often do not meet the requirements regarding recording duration, smooth motion and the absence of external sounds. My conversations with interviewees on the means of finding and recording ICH in Oman inevitably led to the discussions of technical

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challenges, which appear to be one of the main themes worthy of a more detailed discussion below.

6.2.2 Challenges of ICH Archivisation

ICH archivists face challenges at each stage, including recording, storage and file formatting. Some are similar for institutional and grassroots archivists, while others are unique and confirm the importance of combining different archivists' work. To begin with, fieldwork comes with challenges that require cultural sensitivity and experience to overcome. For instance, my interlocutors noted that some performers refuse to be recorded. Musicians may feel uncomfortable because it distracts them from performance.

Hidden observations and recordings may be ideal in such cases, but they raise moral and ethical issues. Notably, Khalfan Al Barwnai, who shared his experience as an institutional archivist, said that older musicians are more likely to feel uncomfortable around cameras and microphones, unlike younger performers who are more used to technology and understand its contribution to popularising traditional music. He raised this problem in our face-to-face conversation: 'Some of them refuse to be recorded because they feel insecure or distrustful towards technology. Others are convinced that they are not doing anything special and that they do not deserve attention paid to them. There are also people who don't want to appear on social media or gain popularity'. When I questioned him about the latter, trying to understand why older people distrust technology, he explained that they often do not even understand how social media works and prefer not to engage with it. 'They are very conservative', explained the participant.

Al Barwnai's colleague Juma Al Shedi, an institutional archivist, mentioned logistical difficulties in bringing heavy recording equipment to a location that may impede ICH collection. As we spoke face-to-face, he explained: 'For a high-quality recording, you need to have professional equipment. Portable recorders are great because they are lightweight and easy to use, but they do not work for the kind of work institutional archivists perform in the field'. Al-Sayyid Said Al Busaidi, a

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musician who attends various cultural events regularly, expanded on the logistical challenge by adding that performances are often not publicised because many of them are spontaneous. It is practically impossible for institutional archivists to learn about some performances and attend them. Therefore, archive-makers who are also members of the target community have an undisputable advantage regarding immediate access to ICH. They can reach the location quickly and set up the recording equipment to capture the performance.

Ideally, institutional archive-makers use studio recordings to collect ICH. Several interviewees mentioned this artefact collection method, but it appears it is underutilised as a means for expanding the existing ICH archives in Oman. Existing literature suggests that financial reasons are by far the most pressing. Goold (2022) argues that large studios are experiencing a decline due to the high cost of recording. However, musicology research often ignores the considerable financial and social concerns of access that most researchers, musicians and archive-makers face in this context (Meintjes 2003; Thompson and Lashua 2014). The fact that I did not have a chance to attend a studio recording of Omani ICH is notable in this regard and illustrates how rarely this means of recording is utilised.

Grassroots archivists are also uncommon users of professional recording studios. Mr. Al Barashdi complained about the limited use of professional studio recordings where one can use special channels for each instrument, ensuring even performance. The cost of performing studio recordings is important for him, as 'good studios which can offer great acoustics are very expensive, and there are not many of them in Oman'. As a result, this type of ICH recording is 'rarely affordable to independent artists who perform traditional music', concluded Khaled Al Barashdi, referring to the high cost of studio recording per hour. However, the described problem promotes the emergence of do-it-yourself (DIY) recording practices (Goold 2022). The latter may provide more opportunities to independent musicians and grassroots archivists due to their accessibility. My interviews with musicians confirmed that DIY recordings are popular for capturing and spreading ICH in Oman.

People use acoustically favourable rooms in private houses and conservatories as studios, which allows recording free of charge.

The problem with recordings in carefully controlled settings such as professional or informal studios is that they are devoid of liveliness and cultural context, so they are unsuitable for capturing cultural heritage. While a prominent scholar, Eliot Bates (2013), praises studio work in his research, he admits that studios isolate musicians from the outside world, placing them in a setting that promotes new practices and shapes new interactions. These are not bad per se, but they disconnect the music from its social setting. My interviewees, particularly musicians, raised concerns about decontextualisation, that is, archives failing to represent the heritage and how it is experienced in real communities.

The problem is that when music is recorded and placed outside its context in the archive, it becomes a decoration devoid of cultural, religious and community meaning. Musallam Al Kathiri shared a comment that accurately describes this archivisation challenge: 'Traditional music is often part of a religious rite or cultural celebration. If you remove its context, you strip it of its soul. And you should also not forget about people who endow music with very context-specific meaning'. I could not but agree more with this statement, as I had the pleasure of witnessing a lively musical performance when I attended the celebration of Eid al-Fitr 2022 in Nizwa. The performance in an impressive Nizwa Fort involved young women who played *sunray*. Their smiles and soft singing were in perfect harmony with the instrument's warm timbre, creating a continuous flow of tones and overtones that communicated the main idea of their performance – a celebration of life. I cannot imagine how their delicate acting, manifested in smiles and gestures, can be communicated in a studio recording. Nasser Al Kindi also touched on this problem, mentioning how the meaning of songs performed by professional musicians (*firga*) specialising in the playing of drums at weddings, circumcisions and other parties is lost if they are devoid of the social context (e.g., in studios). Based on my conversation with Al Barwnai mentioned above, I can suggest that engaging older musicians in studio work may also be problematic due to their inexperience playing in such settings and

the logistical challenges associated with getting musicians from distant locations to cities.

Moving from the limitations of studio recordings, I would like to dwell on the quality problems arising in open-air and informal contexts. My interviewees complained that much is lost due to noisy microphones, improper ambience and recording mistakes (especially when amateurs make recordings). I witnessed how this issue plays out in practice during Eid al-Fitr 2022. A local social media blogger who posts video recordings of musical events asked a band to perform one song again because he had technical problems with his phone and failed to record the performance the first time. In a face-to-face interview, Juma Al Shedi lamented that 'some recordings do not make it to archives because of technical errors and poor recording quality' and argued that archivists have no control over these issues when they work with the material collected by someone else. He noted that field recordings completed by amateurs are sometimes compromised by the inappropriate placing of the microphone (e.g., at a considerable distance from performers or on the side of the scene) or even by using a simple recording app on the smartphone. As a result, the equipment cannot communicate multiple aspects of the music event and evenly record all instruments and voices. These challenges complicate the process of archive-making and may result in some material being lost or ending up too low in quality for being published online or stored in institutional archives. However, given my conversation with Musallam Al Kathiri, who showed me the immense possibilities opened up by new technology, I would suggest that it is not so much the lack of tools and technology that impede recording but the grassroots' lack of skills and knowledge in using these. Moreover, Juma Al Shedi may inaccurately evaluate the quality of material collected by grassroots archive-makers today because, as he admitted, it has been a couple of years since he had worked with amateur archives.

I also heard many complaints about the noise in live-recorded performances. Based on my field observations, these are inevitable because people talk, clap, laugh and sing along during musical events. I tried to make a video for personal use in Al Mouj during the National Day 2021 celebrations, and I could not find a moment

with at least a moderate noise level. People around me were very excited and talked loudly, so all these noises inevitably ended up on my recording. While it was not a big problem for me, it might be for archivists whose goal is first and foremost to record the music rather than environmental sounds. When I raised the quality issue in my interview with Nasser Al Naabai from the Oman Centre for Traditional Music, they responded that one needs to differentiate between professional studio recordings and amateur ones and not apply the same expectations. 'We use professional audio and video recordings more due to their high quality. However, amateur material can present much more than music performed in a carefully controlled environment. In the latter case, we get the atmosphere, cultural context, spontaneity – all those things that make music alive'. They added that both types of recordings are valuable for archives and should be carefully preserved.

The aesthetics of noise and extraneous sounds appear to be an important feature of recorded musical heritage. Grassroots archivists, including Khaled Al Barashdi and Maryam Al Riyami, said they see noise as part of the context that cannot be separated from the music they capture in their recordings. 'It's like separating the smell of coffee from its taste', explained Al Riyami when I asked her to clarify the importance of noise. Even institutional archive makers give proper credit to noise in recordings. According to Khalfan Al Barwnai, noise in live recordings is an inseparable part of archivisation: 'Noise gives us, the archivists, valuable information about the recording's history, technological tools that made it possible, the ambience of the space where the recording was made, and original performance'. In other words, noise can be a signifier of provenance and life span when placed in this context (Fife 2019, 219). Al Barwnai continued by stating that a change in a format aimed at removing noise should be perceived as a change in content, which is undesirable for archivisation. 'Enhancements of the content, such as the colourisation of black and white videos or improvement of the sound, change the inherent characteristics of music, so we should be very careful about that', added the interviewee.

These conversations led me to another important problem associated with archive-making: whether digitisation can ensure the accurate preservation of artefacts. This problem emerged as I spoke with representatives of government-sponsored archives and grassroots archivists. Institutional experts seem to have embraced digitalisation, which is informed by the Omani vision of a more technologically driven future, as described in the previous chapter. To them, the digitalisation of ICH is an absolute necessity for its preservation. When I mentioned the problems of transferring the old material into digital formats, they seemed to recognise them as inescapable but not critical. It appears that, in their opinion, even if some unique qualities of the musical content are lost, this loss is worth it when perceived in a larger context of Omani ICH preservation. 'Old films may have their advantages, but how long will they last?' asked Emad Al Baharani in this regard. 'We need to be realistic and create better conditions for material storage and access', added the interviewee. In addition, audio and videotapes have a limited lifespan, so recordings made 20 to 30 years ago may be lost as the recording medium deteriorates.

Nasser Al Sawafi's position regarding this challenge is rather unconventional. He recognised the cultural value of old artefacts and did not perceive them as obsolete. This is what he said on this topic: 'Of course, access and maintenance are challenging. I know that the government wants to digitalise everything for practical reasons. But we must keep copies in older formats because they have cultural value'. I wondered how much this opinion is shaped by the interlocutor's sentimental feelings about old recordings. When we spoke, he appeared to be very nostalgic, sharing his memories of when he collected materials for his first book on Omani musical heritage. I must also mention that Al Zadjali's remarks concerned the lack of equipment and skills that prevent people from using old formats. Indeed, for old material to be of real value, more efforts will be needed to ensure researchers, teachers, and musicians can use it. From my interview with Al-Sayyid Said Al Busaidi, which was conducted in his office, I sensed that the government is focused on digitalisation and is willing to make archivisation as technologically advanced as

possible, so it is doubtful that the government will invest financial and human resources into this. As a researcher who recently studied Omani musical archives, I can also confirm that the lack of knowledge and skills about the old technology hampers the research process, so digitalisation seems inevitable as fewer people have the necessary skills.

I witnessed first-hand the pressing need for speeding up digitalisation when I visited the TV Association Archive, where I communicated with Mr. Ahmed Al Salmani. As you can see in the photos below, the archive still relies heavily on old technology, which risks being lost due to accidents or natural disasters. I had a closer look at the old archiving methods used at the centre from the beginning and the digitalisation method it gradually introduces into its work, starting with the manual method, which is writing a script, then moving to film tape, then to 2-inch tape, then 1-inch tape, then Bitecam, then the digital method. With 90,000 pieces to be digitalised and insufficient human resources, the process goes very slowly and ineffectively.

Figure 24 Old archivisation equipment (photo taken on 27 December 2021 at TV Association Archive)

Figure 25 Old tapes waiting to be digitalised (photo taken on 27 December 2021 at TV Association Archive)

Figure 26 Manual method of adding a piece into an archive (photo taken on 27 December 2021 at TV Association Archive)

Figure 27 Manual method of adding a piece into an archive (photo taken on 27 December 2021 at TV Association Archive)

Next, my interviewees also mentioned editing archived content and file formats involved in this process. Unsurprisingly, transferring original recordings to digital preservation-quality formats is a challenge many archive experts face as they work with traditional Omani music. Most participants argued that the low quality of original recordings makes it difficult to transfer them to new lossless formats more suitable for preservation and subsequent use. These new formats may include WAV (uncompressed files) or FLAC (lossless compressed files). 'The quality of some recordings is so poor that it's not always possible to discern what instruments are played and how many performers there are', noted Ahmed Al Zadjali. At the same time, Ahmed Al Zadjali suggested that the problem may not be as serious as professional archivists may think: 'Most people cannot tell the difference between old recordings, mp3 and FLAC. Basically, they are all good for achieving the archivisation purpose, and the rest doesn't matter'.

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Furthermore, not all field recordings have key information needed for the archive. Performers' names, songs, places, dates and instruments should all be noted to allow archive users to understand the context. However, in practice, some of the information is not collected, which poses challenges for those categorising context for archives. Many interviewees I met during my research dwelled on this problem as one of the most serious challenges impeding archive-making work. Ahmed Al Zadjali argued that the absence of descriptions of audio and video recordings that Omani archives get hold of results in a large body of material being difficult to categorise. 'It is frustrating when you get a great recording which obviously has an immense cultural value, but you can't label and describe it for the archive because you don't know who is performing and when the recording was made'. This problem is another argument in favour of professional studio recordings that have the practice of collecting all necessary information. As a person who attended multiple music performances and cultural events during this research, I can confirm that collecting the needed data may be difficult, even for prepared individuals knowledgeable in Omani cultural heritage and musical instruments.

Moreover, vital data may disappear when migrating musical material from old formats to digital ones. Ahmed Al Zadjali from the Oman Centre for Traditional Music mentioned that in the digitalisation process, inexperienced or poorly trained archive curators can discard original carriers and packaging, thus losing vital provenance and other information. 'Original film stock may contain dates, which should be properly transferred into the digital format. Unfortunately, I know several cases when this information was lost due to negligence or inexperience', explained the participant. His frustration with the situation seemed genuine, as he kept dwelling on the importance of training the personnel to avoid such situations. Indeed, better training for archive curators is needed to address the mentioned challenge and preserve all vital information about Omani ICH. It is also a convincing argument in support of preserving old formats alongside digital ones instead of discarding the former as obsolete and useless.

I understand the challenges Ahmed Al Zadjali raised in our interview because I was lucky to see an impressive collection of 50,000 items at the Oman Centre for Traditional Music, which I visited on 22 November 2021. Black photographs and colour slides, old Iomatek devices not currently in use, BitiCam, with a recording time of up to 30 minutes, Microcast for recording meetings, and other technologies were represented there. I also learned that the archive used reel tape to record the meetings to document the first archiving operation in Oman, which was the only one in 1983 (see photos below). Working with these technologies requires extensive knowledge and experience that archives struggle to secure.

Figure 29 Photos Slides at the Oman Centre for traditional Music Archive (photos taken on 22 November 2021).
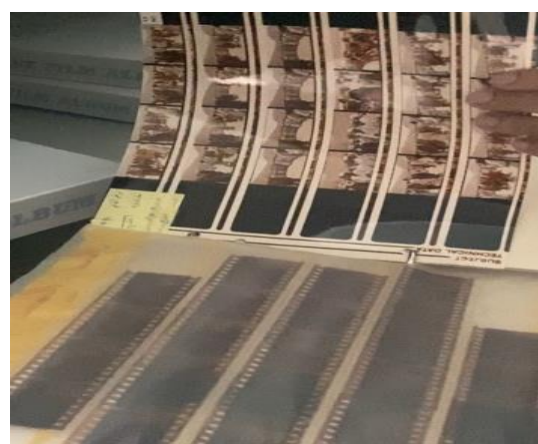
Figure 28 Nagtives at Archive at the Oman Centre for traditional Music (photos taken on 22 November 2021).

Figure 30 BitiCam device at the Oman Centre for traditional Music Archive (photos taken on 22 November 2021).

Figure 31 Old Iomatek device at the Oman Centre for traditional Music Archive (photos taken on 22 November 2021).

Figure 32 Reel device at the Oman Centre for traditional Music Archive (photos taken on 22 November 2021).

Figure 33 Microcast device at the Oman Centre for traditional Music Archive (photos taken on 22 November 2021).

Archivists and translators commissioned by the government to work with music archives may also lack deep knowledge of dialects. Muslam Al Kathiri explained that people working with cultural heritage are familiar with Omani geography and ethnic diversity, but they may find it difficult to discern local languages such as Dhofari, Swahili, Urdu, Kumzari, Bedouin and other dialects and languages. When they work with colloquial Arabic, they cannot always understand everything the performer is signing, which may corrupt the archive-making process. Moreover, archivists editing the recordings may be unaware of the value of specific parts and cut them out. Khalfan Al Barwnai recalled one such case when an archivist deleted the parts of the recorded rite they considered ''unnecessary'' and ''empty'' because there was no music. In reality, silence was a crucial part of the rite, without which it cannot be fully understood. It represented the community's respect for their ancestors and the emptiness they left behind in the lives of those alive. Through silence, community members shared a common sense of loss and mourned in a culturally acceptable way without diving into grief. The music that followed these

silent minutes represented the continuity of life, the meaning of which cannot be understood without death as its opposition. A closer collaboration with local communities may thus be needed to ensure that the cultural heritage is recorded, noted and archived accurately, appropriately and without omissions.

The problem of the excessive focus on audio materials in archives seems to bother many archive-makers. Nasser Al Sawafi and Emad Al Baharani dwelled on it extensively in their conversations with me, complaining about the lack of supportive information that could shed light on archived music and its cultural value. For example, they stated that audio files often lack descriptions of the origin of the song or ethnic group it belongs to. Full translations for the selected tracks and English descriptions of artefacts are largely absent, preventing non-Arab-speaking researchers and archivists from utilising Omani archives. Emad Al Baharani said: 'Scrolling through hundreds of audio files is time-consuming and boring. Archives should engage users, offering them supportive information that describes the context, meaning and cultural value. There's still much work to do in this regard'. As a regular music archive user, I agree with this statement. I cannot express my frustration when I tried to find recordings of specific genres or instruments but failed to do so because of the poor organisation of archives that I attended.

This idea was reiterated by Emad Al Baharani, who noted that audio material should be supported with video files if necessary. He used the example of Sur dancers who sing to the rhythmic accompaniment of drums and clicking sounds. Their songs would lose important cultural meaning without videos showing their unique movements simulating hauling and rowing. The difficulty of translating into permanent documentation cultural artefacts such as visual stimulus, body movements and step patterns emerges from my conversations with Omani music performers. For instance, Youssef Al Rasbi highlighted the complexity and extreme importance of dance. Moreover, musicians I spoke to, particularly Muslam Al Kathiri and Mohammed Al Masrorri, pointed to another problem: they claimed that archives often prioritise information about instruments, performance context and function and even historical descriptions over information about musicians themselves. Again,

fruitful collaborations between archive-makers, activists and community members, including musicians, may facilitate adding the missing information while ensuring its accuracy.

Finally, while my interlocutors from governmental institutions took pride in Omani archives, the challenges they mentioned suggest that these lag behind the most technologically well-equipped music archives and online repositories. As a regular user of such archives, I can confirm that they lack some useful options that may enhance content retrieval and use for research, educational and practical purposes. Nasser Al Kindi shared my concerns when we spoke about the most technologically sophisticated music archives available in other countries. Al Kindi noted that it would be great to create a database of traditional Omani music that would allow both text-based and content-based retrieval. The latter allows locating songs by using melody or even rhythm. Indeed, many artefacts do not even have names, so it is extremely difficult to find them using a simple text-based search. So, expanding archives' functionality would increase their research and educational value. Discussion of challenges associated with ICH archivisation also included problems with methods of ICH delivery, which mostly originate from legal constraints. These are uncovered in more detail in the following section.

6.2.3 Methods of ICH Delivery: Access Options and Copyright Nuances

Following the heritage preservation policies discussed in detail in the previous chapter, archives seek to make the nation's history embodied in music more prominent through its preservation and popularisation. Digitalisation is one of many processes confirming the Omani government and activists' shared desire to make archives a part of a cultural heritage everyone can appreciate. Digitalisation may help make ICH more accessible to a wider audience and preserve and popularise it more effectively. My interviews with participants and my experience attending national and amateur archives of traditional Omani music, where digital copies of recordings are abundant, confirm that this trend is well-established in Oman.

However, there is a huge difference in how institutional archives can be accessed and used compared to archives created by activists and amateur archive-makers. Ideally, unrestricted access to ICH should be an integral part of cultural heritage preservation. Official digital and physical archives created by government-affiliated organisations do not always conform to this rule, as access to artefacts varies depending on legal and contractual impediments. These originate from intellectual property rights that often restrict access to some parts of the collection and impose restrictions on copying and further use. Private companies such as TV channels with their own ICH archives are also unwilling to share them freely because they are a valuable tool for making money and are not legally obliged to provide access in the first place. Therefore, legal issues remain the main problem impeding unrestricted access to ICH and allowing users to utilise it for educational, research, entertainment and other purposes.

Khalfan Al Barwnai mentioned this problem in the interview, stating that one of the most difficult things associated with creating and running an archive is establishing ownership of rights and respecting legal obligations. 'With traditional songs, copyright is not an issue because it falls within the common domain'. Indeed, the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works that Oman signed in 1999 does not grant traditional groups and performers ownership rights over their music. Similarly, the World Intellectual Property Organisation recognises that copyright law is not a sufficient legal framework for protecting ICH because it does not bear the mark of individual originality (WIPO 1997). 'However, when a traditional song is recorded by an individual artist, especially if they introduce some changes in it, that's when things become tricky because of the copyright of this recording', added Al Barwnai. He explained:

> The law does not classify traditional songs as original because artists use the material from the public domain, but artists argue that the basis for protection does not lie in 100% originality or the act of creation as such. Anyway, it's still a matter of debate that won't be resolved soon.

Moreover, most of the recordings made in the 1970s-1990s were made by local/national TV and radio stations, and they are unwilling to send this valuable material to archives. These legalities may result in some artefacts being inaccessible to third parties. Geographic inaccessibility of archives may also present a problem for some people. Representatives of indigenous communities who might benefit from studying their cultural heritage often do not have the financial means to travel to physical archives or lack the skills and knowledge to use them.

The legal and ethical access issues deserve attention in the context of institutional archives. A problem that emerged during my conversations with archivists and officials was the lack of agreement about whether intellectual property rights (IPR) apply to traditional music and, more importantly, how they should work in practice. On the one hand, Ahmed Al Zadjali argued that the principles of collaboration and participation guide traditional music production and distribution and that traditional media have little to fear about releasing those materials. He added: 'Besides, do not forget that our goal is to protect cultural heritage, not to exploit it and derive economic benefits'. In other words, the interviewee pointed to IPR's limited relevance in this context.

On the other hand, officials I spoke to, particularly Al-Sayyid Said Al Busaidi, recognised restrictions imposed by IPR and, more importantly, argued that effective IP protection over Omani folklore music is needed, placing it on the same footing as Western music protected by IPR. Juma Al Shedi took a middle-ground position and stated that traditional music archives are created first and foremost for preservation and research rather than for consumption and distribution.

> Of course, intellectual property is an issue we cannot escape, but it should not stand in the way of archive creation and use. We just need to be more careful and clearly establish our goals and archive rules.

These conversations clearly show that the creation of legal rules guiding Omani music archives' functioning is a project in progress, and the debates around this issue are necessary to find relevant solutions. These should be included in the policy process surrounding ICH preservation, which currently seems to be

overlooking this area. Meanwhile, grassroots archives may take advantage of the vaguely defined legal norms and come forward as platforms that allow for the unrestricted use of ICH.

Given the mentioned challenges, informal and amateur archives created by musicians and independent archivists have notable accessibility advantages. Social media such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Twitter and Facebook deliver content to a wider audience and are accessible to all subscribers. They give unlimited opportunity to the public to enjoy traditional music, often in its social context. However, this opportunity depends largely on the social media account owner's willingness to care for the archive. Once they stop updating it or delete content, it can hardly be accessed again by third parties. Next, musicians interviewed for this study often publish traditional music performances on their social media pages, and these serve well for explaining the context of the performance and communicating the setting, ambience, and people's reactions. The same applies to grassroots archivists such as Khaled Al Barashdi, Basem Al Daoudi, Sami Al Hadabi and Maryam Al Riyami, who have been using technical capabilities provided by social media to store and disseminate cultural heritage. Wider outreach is complemented by the ability of informal archives to map out major uncharted territories on the cultural heritage map, expanding on more formal music collections. Moreover, social media archives help build rapport and conversation with communities and allow Omani people to gain a sense of belonging to their cultural heritage. International research shows that local music collection management through social media is a popular way of engaging communities as users comment on and share multimedia files online (Doi 2018). From this perspective, informal archives work more effectively on popularising Omani national identity, which is examined in greater detail in the next section.

At the same time, grassroots archivists' archives on social media have several important disadvantages. The main one is their limited usefulness for educational purposes due to ineffective or largely absent cataloguing. Looking through various social media archives with traditional Omani music, I noted that in most cases,

cultural artefacts on social media constitute a poorly organised, scattered body of data that can be difficult to use in formal education. This problem is not unique to Oman, as research confirms that the educational and research value of social media archives is limited by the incompleteness of the material and related metadata and the poor organisation (Vlassenroot et al. 2021). One should also point out that the digital divide problem may restrict access to amateur archives for some populations. Limited computer skills, absence of profiles on social media that allow access to digital archives, limited Internet access and other problems may prevent a wider audience's use of social media archives.

Therefore, given the limitations of institutional and amateur music archives, it is important that they are used in combination to work effectively towards retaining, cataloguing and spreading Omani cultural heritage. Their limitations are counterbalanced by each other's advantages, increasing the chances of musical heritage being conserved and popularised more effectively. For example, I recall my face-to-face interview with Ahmed Al Salmani from the Omani Ministry of Information, who mentioned that the Television and Archive Departments of the Ministry have displayed and broadcast different materials from the Ministry's archive on TV. Such efforts at reaching the wider (and often older) population that may have limited access to social media are critically important. Although Mr Al Salmani is not satisfied with what had been presented, as the Sultanate of Oman TV archive contains more than 50,000 items that have not been shown or benefited from, granting access to a wider population is an important step towards preserving Omani ICH. The previous sections established some important differences between institutional and grassroots archivists, but these require a more in-depth exploration because they affect how Omani ICH is preserved. Therefore, the following section compares how institutional and grassroots archivists approach ICH archive-making.

6.3. ICH Archivisation from Institutional vs Grassroots Perspective

The previous section touched upon the technical issues affecting the work of institutional and grassroots archivists. This section examines whether there are

practical and ideological differences in how ICH is archived by institutional (government) actors compared to grassroots archivists. It uncovers the reasons driving these actors' involvement in ICH preservation and the meaning they attribute to this process. Similar to the previous section, this section demonstrates how archive-makers from the two groups complement each other's work and how their efforts intersect to encompass different manifestations of Omani ICH. It shows that they build musical heritage brick by brick together through ongoing mediation of goals, audience needs and means to collect and record ICH.

6.3.1 Protection vs Preservation?

One of the main differences between institutional and grassroots archives I discovered during my research was the attitude towards protection and preservation. Government-funded archives proclaim preservation to be one of their main objectives. My interviewees, such as Nasser Al Sawafi and Emad Al Baharani from the Centre for Civilisation Studies, spoke in-depth about the handling and storing of materials, conditions that should be imposed to protect them for future generations, and strategic preservation plans. This strategic focus explains their interest in the general conditions of archival facilities, security systems, digitalisation, archivists' skills, and budgeting. It also determines the skills needed for employees of these formal archives, who should be trained in technical and legal aspects of archive management, as well as Omani culture and history.

However, it would be wrong to claim that institutional archives overlook the preservation and popularisation of cultural heritage, judging by their recent efforts at ICH cultivation in mass media and among researchers and the wider public. For example, the Oman Centre for Traditional Music collected traditional Omani music recordings and organised an international conference in 1986 and even broadcasted their recordings, thus contributing to the protection and popularisation of traditional music as an important part of national culture. Still, their contribution to popularisation of musical heritage among the wider audience is less significant than that of grassroots archivists who harness the power of social media to connect with people from all over the world. The fact that institutional and informal ICH archives

target different populations is very important, as it points to their well-coordinated work. Maryam Al Riyami commented:

> We are not competitors: community archivists have their goals and areas of interest while those who work with the archives have theirs. I'm not saying that our work is more important because it is more about people; it's just different.

In addition, ICH's institutional archivisation is more methodical than grassroots archive-making, which has no unified methods or principles. Musallam Al Kathiri spoke about this division emotionally, which suggests that he has strong opinions regarding the work of institutional archives and their overall scientific value. He said,

> Trained archivists are like scientists – they collect, organise, and categorise the material. It's a straightforward process that requires diligence and rigour. Grassroots archivists do everything differently. Their work has no structure, and most of them cannot even be considered archive-makers in a sense people attribute to this term.

Although he may be somewhat biased due to his professional background and training, my interviews with grassroots archivists, including Basem Al Daoudi and Sami Al Hadabi, support his position. When I asked them to describe the methodology of their work, they found it hard to articulate it professionally. It appeared as though they had never been asked to think about this process from the methodological perspective. The way they collect, organise and store the material follows their logic and may not be easily grasped, but it does not affect the value of their work.

My interlocutors also raised a problem of ICH sustainability and institutional archives' advantages in this regard. Musallam Al Kathiri pointed out that official archives are 'all about sustainability' because they 'make sure traditional music will be accessible in the long term'. In this context, sustainability was interpreted by my interlocutor as the effective preservation of ICH material to make it accessible for a long time. He emphasised that this characteristic differentiates institutional archives

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from grassroots ones, increasing their value as 'guardians of cultural heritage'. Mr Al Kathiri added: 'Amateur archivists use Instagram and Twitter to post a large amount of material relating to Omani music. The problem is that social media are not designed to store something for a long time'. Khaled Al Barashdi partially confirmed Mr Al Kathiri's concerns, adding that social media accounts containing valuable ICH may be lost once an archivist can no longer do the work. During an exploration of social media accounts dedicated to traditional Omani music, it was observed that many accounts were dormant, with no updates for months or even years. This lack of activity suggests a possible decline in engagement and interest in promoting and preserving traditional Omani music on these platforms.

Personal factors affecting the functioning and preservation of grassroots archives are another issue affecting their sustainability compared to institutional ones and, consequently, their effectiveness in protecting and preserving ICH. Maryam Al Riyami confided that although activists working on the community level are driven by immense enthusiasm and genuine interest, these cannot last forever. She explained: 'Some people step aside because long-term responsibility and effort are time-consuming and exhausting. The financial strain of operations may wear out even the most dedicated archivists'. Thus, while love and devotion that fuels grassroots archival work may facilitate archivisation, gradual loss of interest and burnout can become problematic because the collected material may be easily lost. Moreover, Baker and Collins (2016) stated that grassroots archivists might not conceive their practice as archiving, so they are less concerned about continuing their work and, more importantly, preserving it beyond their lifetime.

When I spoke about this with Al Riyami, it appeared she had heard these arguments many times before because she was fully prepared to give her opinion: 'Critics of grassroots archives think that only fully trained professionals in properly funded institutions should collect and preserve traditional music. This opinion completely undermines the role of people who guard the living tradition from within the communities'. The following section on the grassroots archivists' 'closeness' to local communities expands on this idea. Moreover, Al Riyami reported that advanced

technology may offset grassroots archives' limitations in terms of sustainability. She and her team have developed an electronic application dedicated to Omani ICH: 'We collected more than 300 elements related to Omani ICH. We also translated the content of the application into English. And all this was voluntary work without government support', Al Riyami explained. However, I doubt whether technological innovation alone may ensure the sustainability of archivisation practices, especially if the funding for sustaining it stops at some point.

A creative way to address this problem was raised in my conversation with a ministry official I had the chance to interview. Rashid Al Hashmi, Director of the Music and Folk Arts department, told me how amateur archivists who no longer want or can work on preserving their music archives give their collections to government-funded archives. 'Our archive works with grassroots archive-makers who are willing to give their collections to us for further preservation. We appreciate their contribution and encourage such collaboration because it helps ensure that recorded materials are not lost', specified the official. He added that the problem is that amateur archive-makers do not always know this option exists or do not know whom they should contact. So, he pointed to the importance of developing closer ties between institutional archives and grassroots archivists for more effective ICH preservation.

Institutional archives rarely face this problem because their work is continuously funded, even though not always sufficiently, and supported with governmental policies that inform institutional functioning in a long-term perspective. Financial support from the government, in turn, means that the financial aspect of their work does not pose so much trouble to employees. Still, even though the Ministry has financed and organised the ICH preservation process, Al-Sulaimani laments that there is not enough staff to do the work with the necessary speed. He expressed his concerns cautiously, apparently unwilling to openly criticise the government and decision-makers. All interviewees, including Ahmed Al Zadjali, Khalfan Al Barwnai and Ahmed Al-Sulaimani, hint at the overall impression that even though there seems to be better access to technological tools when governmental financing and established media (in terms of TV networks) is available, there is too

little enthusiasm or ambition to make a difference in terms of long-term ICH protection and preservation.

Returning to the topic of protection vs. preservation, grassroots archive-makers showed little interest in any of the ICH protection aspects embraced by government-affiliated archives. Their primary goals include a collection of valuable, hard-to-find cultural heritage and its spread, celebration and popularisation. They are less constrained than official archivists in regard to policies, information management security, the accuracy of publicly available data, the security of cultural data, etc. In many ways, their archivisation efforts are more about creativity, freedom and cultural celebration, especially compared to the carefully governed, methodical efforts of institutional archivists to capture Omani ICH for future generations. Basem Al Daoudi's words illustrate this idea: 'I collect all this data to share it with people, not to store it for my pleasure or academic purposes. I believe that my role in all this is to make sure that the true spirit of Omani music is alive and spread to as many people as possible'.

6.3.2 Local and National Contexts in ICH Archivisation

An important conclusion I derived from my conversations with grassroots archivists, institutional archivists and government officials was that institutional archivisation is concerned with nationwide cultural heritage in all its diversity and differences and its role in national identity construction as it resists globalisation forces. Al Riyami pointed out that Omani ICH is what makes Omani society different from other societies – and that is one of the main things which in and of themselves make ICH valuable: 'The uniformity of today's global societies personally bothers me a lot. I want our society to look different. I think we must preserve our identity and heritage to look different and to be able to distinguish our society from others'. In this way, Al Riyami points out an inherent problem of globalisation, one implied by the very idea of ICH, namely that particular and unique features of culture are valuable in themselves. This narrative can be found in the scholarly literature, which recognises the inevitable effect of globalisation on the diversity of human culture and the subsequent increasing value placed on uniqueness (Prott, 2000).

Along similar lines, Mr Nasser Al Naabai, whom I interviewed in the Omani Centre for Traditional Music, where he works as a director, perceived the archivisation of traditional Omani music as a fight against globalisation and homogenisation of national identities that have multiple dimensions and nuances reflected in different local traditions. He clarified: 'The loss of our ancestral music will make us more vulnerable to the global influence, as it may create a lacuna easily filled with Western popular music'. Essam Al Mallah shared this opinion, dwelling on the threats of globalisation and westernisation and the immense potential of Omani ICH to withstand these powerful forces. At the same time, he pointed out:

> It's not that Western culture is bad. My concern is more about giving Omani people a chance not to lose their identities as they are exposed to the influence of globalisation. It's all about remembering who we are and how we can express our uniqueness.

When talking about these issues in the context of traditional Omani music, Mr Nasser Al Naabai and Essam Al Mallah used terms such as 'national pride', 'national heritage', and others, clearly indicating their focus on Omani music in general. Neither mentioned how local dimensions of Omani music preservation may help strengthen Omani communities' unique local identities.

In contrast, grassroots ICH archivisation focuses more on the learning and transmission of the local and communal heritage of separate regions or even small communities to strengthen local identities. This archive-making work is less likely to compare local traditions or position them within a wider national ICH context. When I talked to musicians and grassroots archivists, I understood that one of their main concerns is ensuring that traditional music practices can be taught to the next generations to preserve local identities. I concluded based on how much they mentioned the new generation's role in preserving the ICH, the threats of globalisation and the importance of Omani cultural identity.

Another notable feature of local ICH archivisation is the use of participatory methods that help archive-makers and local people establish closer contact to learn and transmit ICH. ''

Interviews with six archivists on social media and an investigation of the online grassroots archives helped me understand the topic better. Most of the online grassroots archives were on Instagram and started as a few recordings created by influencers. Many influencers did not distinguish between their ICH-related recordings and their other content. As such, this created a novel type of communal archive-as-content, where an archive's users, many of whom are community members, can interact (like, share and comment) with an archive, asking for future developments of it. While professional archivists, such as Emad Al Baharani, tend to view this as a disadvantage due to the lack of methodical material collection, Kuang and He (2022) described such social media use as a safeguarding measure that helps strengthen the sustainability of traditional music. The scholars argued that the adaptability of social media to indigenous peoples' current interests and needs plays a huge role in preserving cultural heritage (Kuang and He 2022).

An important thing to highlight here is that my interviewees engaged in grassroots archive-making confirmed that when it comes to producing social media content, they consider their followers' interests and try to post the music they enjoy the most. Basem Al Daoudi's words illustrate this finding: 'Sometimes, I post a song that really touched me or that I think will impress my followers'. These words made me consider that attentiveness to the perceived audience is much more complicated than archivists admit to themselves. Grassroots archive-makers' desire to participate in the social media game of catering to followers might have long-standing consequences for ICH in Oman, which particularly threaten less impressive forms of musical performance and traditions. In contrast, audience interests are not the focal point of institutional archivists' work. Not once during my interviews with them did they mention being guided by what the audience might like/dislike. They focus on the Omani nation and its ability to preserve its rich heritage rather than on specific population groups that consume archived content at a specific period. This important distinction between the two archivist groups allows a better understanding of how they make heritage through collective but distinct methods.

Interviews with grassroots organisations' representatives helped me fill the gap in knowledge about the lack of understanding of the needs and wants of the local communities regarding their musical heritage (Ostashewski et al. 2020) by uncovering their rich experiences, perspectives and understanding of the cultural value of their archivisation work and the contribution ICH preservation makes to sustaining local communities' identities. One of the themes I found particularly interesting was how social media used by grassroots archivists helps connect with a younger audience. Musicians I talked to, including Youssef Al Rasbi and Jameila Al Makusi, said that young Omanis want to find relevant means of cultural expression and are seeking their cultural roots. 'The best way to help them is to allow them to explore traditional music in a familiar way – through social media', explained Noura Al Naziri. 'This is why I think social media should be recognised as a valid means of building our cultural identity rather than a second-rate tool for amateur archivists and musicians who promote themselves online', she added.

Sami Al Hadabi also pointed out that grassroots archivists are more 'user-friendly' and helpful if one wants to find local music traditions:

> With amateur archives found online, it becomes easier to explore your cultural heritage. You can find someone from your community and subscribe to their YouTube channel or follow them on Instagram. This way, you get access to the music of your ancestors recorded in a familiar setting. National archives are simply not adapted to achieving this level of personalisation and connecting with people on such a personal level.

Khaled Al Barashdi developed this idea further, arguing that grassroots archive-makers are also more in sync with the dynamics of the local community, following its natural, annual patterns of celebrations, festivals and various community events. These people record and popularise music as part of everyday life, making it easier for local citizens to connect with it. This point makes sense because institutional archives often lack the cultural/community context but present music in isolation as a cultural gem in and of itself. This theme is important for determining the contribution

to ICH archive-making made by institutional and grassroots archivists, so it is examined in greater detail in the following section.

6.3.4 Role of Community Participation and Belonging

Pre-existing community relationships provide grassroots archivists with access to music material that institutional archivists may not even be aware of due to the local nature of this ICH. Local archivists know the local music scene, have personal relationships with performers, and can keep up with local musical events, often by participating in them as volunteers. More importantly, community members are more likely to trust and know what to expect from them. All this puts grassroots archivists at an advantage in terms of being able to collect valuable material and document it properly. As stated by Fife (2019, 219), in this regard, such community engagement enables archivists to embed themselves 'within a culture and also develop reciprocal modes of labour that supported both spaces and archive services'.

Basem Al Daoudi recalled his experience recording a mourning event in his village, which exemplified the above argument. He highlighted the sacred, very intimate nature of this performance, which consisted of music and dancing rather than weeping:

> The whole village gathered that day to mourn one of the oldest members of our community. The deceased's family was there, and there was a lot of pain and crying, you know. At the same time, when people started to play and dance, I felt a sense of liberation and hopefulness … I don't even know how to describe it. I was lucky to be there and be allowed to record this event.

He recalled the peculiar sequence of events surrounding the mourning. It began with men from the village forming a circle. They established the rhythm by pounding softly on the ground. This pounding gradually increased in tempo and intensity and was later accompanied by music. A group of local musicians, including three drummers and a man blowing on a shell that produced a single note, were responsible for the emotional effect of the performance. The sound of the shell went against the rhythm, creating a sense of an ominous event. 'Even somewhat scary, the sound was also

enticing and appropriate for the event', recalled Basem Al Daoudi. Coupled with dance, it helped me immerse in community mourning. Basem Al Daoudi emphasised that he was lucky to be welcomed at this intimate event because it helped him better understand the context of recorded music. Without being closely linked to the community of interest, it would be hard for him to discover how music reflects attendees' emotions and how it builds a structure for the established mourning procedures. In other words, community participation allows a better insight into the social meaning of recorded music. As a result, grassroots archivists can facilitate accurate protection and preservation of ICH.

Positive and close relationships between amateur archivists and their communities allow them to perform field recordings that are much more lively, spontaneous and authentic. Those relationships allow archivists to gain access to the cultural heritage that institutional archivists cannot always do. Basem Al Daoudi suggested that this may be why it is easier for grassroots archive-makers to collect the data. 'People know who I am and what I do. They are not afraid of opening up through music and are always ready to be recorded. Our relationships are built on trust'. Maryam Al Riyami expanded this idea, saying that grassroots archivists blend in and are perceived as part of the community. 'This gives us a chance to speak for the communities we represent and guard the authenticity of the content we collect', added the participant.

My experience attending field recordings helped me understand what she meant. Musicians and dancers often become shy or suspicious when they see a new face in the community. They can shut down, become more self-conscious, or change their behaviour, which affects their performance. However, even if they see cameras, smartphones and microphones, they are more relaxed and genuine when they are recorded by people they know. As I have noticed during a wedding celebration I attended in January 2021, clothes may play an important role in this us-them distinction. Local grassroots archive-makers who attended the event wore traditional clothes widely accepted in the community. To compare, I have seen institutional archivists who attended other events, such as the 'Azwa Fenga' celebration, wear

more formal garments that may create a psychological barrier and affect their perceived approachability.

Furthermore, remaining independent and creative in their work was particularly important to the grassroots archivists I interviewed. They emphasised their service to the community as their key mission and took pride in deciding what to do with their cultural heritage. Sami Al Hadabi commented: 'Grassroots archives are not policed by outsiders – they are created by and for communities themselves. In this way, we avoid the risk of becoming a tool for academic and government programmes'. When I asked him why being independent of the government is important to him, he explained that he would want his work to serve his community, not researchers and educators. I sensed barely hidden disdain towards professional archivisation, which made me wonder whether they had a negative experience interacting with the government archivists or academic community that affected his views. However, I could not determine if this was the case as he refused to speak. Maryam Al Riyami did not share this position, characterising her work as an attempt to 'break down the walls between the academy and the community'. One of the reasons for this may be that Maryam utilises methods that are more characteristic of institutional archive-making, which induces her to identify herself more with professional archivists. To conclude, the differences between institutional and grassroots archiving work identified above are not exhaustive. The following section examines how choices are made in regard to ICH selection, collection and preservation and what these differences matter for the archival work in Oman.

6.4 Choices Behind ICH Collection and Preservation

One of the topics I was particularly interested in was how archive-makers select material to be preserved and what factors motivate their choice. My interviews with archivists from different institutions and independent grassroots archivists reveal that ICH collection and preservation depend on many subtle, often subjective factors, such as perceived value, rarity, genre, policy, and others. Archive-makers, both grassroots and professional, are not always aware of these selection biases,

even when they follow some institutional or personally designed criteria for archivisation. This section shows that although it may seem that archivisation is inconsistent and biased, institutional and grassroots archivists' different skills, preferences, and interests allow for covering all diversity of Omani cultural heritage.

I discussed the theme of ICH choice with all participants engaged in archivisation, and they unanimously claimed that the value of ICH is often determined by its vulnerability. In other words, archive-makers prioritise musical material most at risk for disappearance, which Edmonson (2016, 64) called 'the loss principle'. Emad Al Baharani stated in this regard:

> The musical heritage of small villages that are gradually dying out is our primary focus. In these communities, whose youth is moving to the cities, the transference of culture from generation to generation is broken. As older musicians and singers die, we risk losing our cultural heritage once and for all.

Grassroots archivists confirmed this statement, saying they often turn to older musicians for new material. Basem Al Daoudi said he often engages his grandparents in ICH recording and preservation. He expanded on this:

> My grandmother is 82 years old. She's been singing and playing *Khulkhal* all her life. I know that all her knowledge will die with her when she passes away. That's why I try to spend much time with her, recording her performance on my smartphone camera and then transferring it to the cloud service.

Khulkhal, mentioned by the interviewee, is an ankle bracelet often used by female music performers in Oman. Basem Al Daoudi explained that *khulkhal* has always been treated like a treasure in his family and that his grandmother cannot pass down this item and her knowledge further because the family does not have girls. Even though I have not heard about such a tradition in Oman, his family has been cherishing the idea of passing down knowledge through female lineage. Therefore, it is not surprising that this archive-maker is very sensitive regarding the elusive nature of ICH and takes preservation seriously because time plays against him. This

example shows that individual, sentimental value placed on specific ICH parts may also play a role in preservation decisions.

Other grassroots archivists admitted that they often work with older musicians, many of whom have stopped public performances because of their age and health problems. Recording them at home while still possible becomes an important mission for amateur archive-makers. My interviews with older adults helped me gain insight into the value of this work for archivists and the community. One of the older men I spoke with told me that a group of musicians in his village are no longer performing due to age and health issues. However, a local archivist convinced them to get together every week and play some music. The interviewee was excited telling me this story because it was important for the whole village:

> They get together every Friday in one of the biggest houses and invite others there. They play, laugh and tell stories of older days. It's always so lively and nostalgic. Sometimes, music is being recorded and then posted on the Internet. That's how these events become popular. Now, more and more people want to attend.

I found a social media archive the man was speaking about, and it is indeed a valuable contribution to preserving Omani ICH. Videos posted there are cultural gems because they show traditional music performances with at least a 50-year history (most musicians on the videos are about 70-80 years old). One of the most remarkable things about these videos is that they feature instruments that can hardly be found in modern Oman. For example, I have seen a recording of *rababit ash-shair*, who is one of the musicians on the recording and is proudly described as the 'mother of all string instruments'. The old man played it vertically by placing it on a thigh, producing a peculiar voice-like tone.

Moreover, 'the loss principle' applies to music linked to traditions and lifestyles slowly becoming obsolete. Maryam Al Riyami explained that some traditional activities that slowly die out have often had specific music that was supposed to make them more entertaining. For example, the open-air coffee-drinking habit that traditionally united Omani people is gradually losing its appeal for younger

generations who prefer to gather in cafes. As a result, music performed during these traditional gatherings with a cup of coffee is at a high risk of disappearing. Another example is *Al-Tariq* and *Al Taghrooda*, which are Bedouin songs sung while riding a camel or seated on the ground. Performed by two singers in alternating verses, *Al Tariq* praises the shoe-camel and reflects a slower pace of the camel in contrast to *Al Taghrooda,* which mimics the camel going faster. With camel riding becoming obsolete and limited to small desert communities, these songs risk being lost or disconnected from their original context. In contrast, folk music performed during activities that still engage many people, such as Al Sharah in Dhofar, is not endangered that much and may pose less interest to archive-makers.

Nasser Al Sawafi and Emad Al Baharani also admitted that they have to be fastidious because it is impossible to archive everything. Resource and time limitations mean they need to evaluate the material worth prioritising. 'I always ask myself: is this recording interesting, well-shaped, unique? How does it represent the qualities of traditional instruments? What does it say about Omani culture?' Thus, the very process of selecting artefacts for preservation shapes Omani heritage. An archivist chooses an artefact to preserve, then denotes that artefact as heritage, and this process of artefact selection informs the heritage choice.

However, Ahmed Al Zadjali's interview clearly showed that the selection process at the cataloguing stage is even more important for institutional archive-makers. He said:

> You know that with modern technology, we have many opportunities to record traditional music. It is more problematic to decide what material will end up in the archive. So, archive-makers need to evaluate the quality of the recording, clarify information about the performers and content and determine the material's place in the catalogue.

Institutional archivists are often guided by their subjective judgments because they do not have clear guidelines on what should be included in the archive and how. Al Zadjali added that some of the recorded material does not make it to the archive because archivists do not know the location, performers and name of the

composition. Thus, although it may seem that the categorisation process is systematic and less at risk for implicit bias than recording itself, archivists can still use their subjective judgments when deciding whether a particular style/genre of music is well-represented in the archive, what performers deserve more attention, while their factors such as training and expertise may also affect the ICH preservation process.

It appears that grassroots archivists also use subjective judgments in their work, but most do not truly recognise the extent of their biases. My interviews with these people showed that grassroots archivists record everything valuable – street performances, concerts, celebrations, cultural events, and others. However, the large body of this recorded material has not been uploaded to their archives. Basem Al Daoudi proudly showed me his smartphone with thousands of video and audio recordings of traditional Omani music. He scrolled his collection for a couple of minutes, showing me the oldest videos that he recorded in 2015. He admitted that only about a quarter of this material is added to his social media account. When I asked him to explain how he chooses what gets shared with people, he said it depends on the context:

> I also share videos where people play rare instruments because it's my passion. Well, obviously, recordings that end up being low-quality remain on my smartphone. I am considering creating a website where I could post my recorded materials, but I always postpone this project because I don't have time.

The cited interview piece shows that Basem Al Daoudi has no system regarding the archivisation process and relies on subjective judgment. Even though his collection contains hundreds of valuable performances, the risk of losing it is high due to the lack of archivisation skills, time and resources. This interview also made me wonder what amount of the material may get lost because it is simply not too interesting for amateur archive-makers to collect and share.

Interviews with Jameila Al Makusi and Sami Al Hadabi revealed how grassroots archivists' preferences affect ICH collection and preservation. Jameila Al

Makusi argued that she tries to record as much traditional music as possible: 'As time goes by, the skill and expertise of older generation are going to be lost, so I need to contribute somehow to protecting this legacy'. At the same time, I noticed that most of her videos posted online had been recorded in one or two locations, with the same performers appearing in the videos. So, she may effectively cover most of the material produced in her community, but her outreach is very narrow. Sami Al Hadabi, in turn, is interested in Omani musicians and posts interviews with them, but he seems to be less interested in music performed by musicians without classic music education, who are the bearers of the living tradition.

This selectivity in terms of what content to record and post has an important advantage – it allows covering different aspects of the ICH so that archive-makers contribute brick by brick to building a comprehensive picture of Omani cultural heritage. As I studied online archives on social media platforms, I noticed that even though they have some common features and themes (e.g., a focus on specific locations or instruments), they provide very diverse material. Juma Al Shedi confirmed my observation conclusions by stating that even though archives usually do not have a 'specialisation' or focus, varying policies, institutional goals, archivists' motivations and interests and other factors make them distinct. It is an important point supporting the claim that institutional and grassroots archives complement each other in a greater sense and in terms of material selection.

Ahmed Al Zadjali raised another issue worth covering because it directly relates to content selection. This representative of the Oman Centre for Traditional Music criticised grassroots archives using social media for their vulnerability to positive evaluations. He explained:

> The way social media promote certain content people like and comment on results in some content being popularised more than others. Traditional music that may have immense cultural value but be … how to say it … less impressive is ignored because users are less likely to respond and engage with it emotionally. In contrast, music performances that involve dancing, bright costumes and catchy tunes get noticed more online.

In other words, the fact that the artefact may be lost is not as critical to the social media audience as its impressiveness and entertaining qualities.

In my conversation with Sami Al Hadabi, I raised this problem, asking him to describe how he selects the content to be published on social media. He confirmed that some music performances are more suitable for public display online and tend to be more popular than others. As an example, he mentioned Al Bar'ah, UNESCO-protected music and dance. It is performed by men and women and involves the use of drums and songs performed in a local tribal dialect. Al Bar'ah consists of drumming, chanting and clapping, which create a rhythm with which male dancers holding *khanjars* (daggers) should keep up as they perform specific dance-like movements. Sami Al Hadabi noted: 'Everyone likes Al Bar'ah tradition, including a war-like dance or sea music *Al Madama*. They are impressive, so it's unsurprising that they get more attention than other traditional performances'. Thus, the visual and acoustic appeal of some traditional performances may affect the diversity of material collected by amateur archivists by shifting attention to some ICH and diverting it from other heritage pieces.

The question of the selection of ICH material cannot be fully answered without considering whether selection bias results in some groups being preferred over others. In other words, I wondered whether the music of specific ethnic groups is prioritised over the ICH of others and why. I asked this question during conversations with government officials such as Mr Nasser Al Naabai. However, they were very careful in their responses. Al Naabai said, 'We don't have a hierarchy of folk music. It's all important for capturing Omani culture's diversity', thus clearly denying any preferences for specific genres, ethnic groups and locations. However, it would be unreasonable to expect a different response from government officials who know the politics around heritage preservation and who are always as neutral as possible in their responses. Based on at the data collected in the ICH archive created by Khalfan Al Barwnai and Juma Al Shedi, it is possible to conclude that archive-makers do not indeed prioritise some ethnic heritage over another, even though it may seem so simply because the Arab culture dominates in Oman.

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In comparison, grassroots archivists were more sceptical regarding how the material for the archive was selected. For instance, Ahmed Al Zadjali argued that music thought to have an Arab origin is more likely to get to the state-funded archives compared to the folk music of ethnic minorities living in Oman, such as people of Persian, Indian and African origin. Those issues will be explored in more detail from the perspective of national identity construction, which is examined in the next chapter.

Grassroots archivists I talked to also spoke about the selectivity of institutional archives regarding the music played by women. Maryam Al Riyami maintained that this music gets less attention than that performed by male artists. According to her, 'female performers unfairly receive less attention even though they have always been important participants in community celebrations and events that involved music playing'. However, Maryam is not surprised, linking this gender problem to the broader inequality issue in Omani society. She specified that fewer women are working in archives and performing traditional music, which, in her opinion, explains the problem. Jameila Al Makusi agreed with this, adding that women are more reluctant to popularise their music on social media due to cultural traditions. As a result, invisibility on social media creates an illusion of women's limited participation in ICH preservation. My observations also show that women tend to be shyer and more reluctant to be recorded than men, who appear more confident performing around camera and recording devices. Sami Al Hadabi reported that he once tried to record *Al Wyliyah Al-Nisa*, a dance performed by women in Ibri in the central Dhahira region, and faced resistance on their part. This dance involves groups of women who place their hands on the neighbour's shoulders, moving around in unison. The dance is accompanied by the shaking of a silver rattle, which women hold in their free hand, creating a simple rhythm. Although Sami Al Hadabi did not provide details on why he did not succeed in recording this dance, I dare to suggest that since it is traditionally performed in a female circle, women may perceive men's attention and involvement, even in the role of an archive-maker, as unacceptable or uncomfortable.

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However, when I asked Ahmed Al Zadjali to comment on this, he insisted that the dominance of male-created material in archives has nothing to do with gender inequality. 'It's a common stereotype that women in Omani society are subjugated', he noted. He explained that male performers are recorded more because they produce more artefacts than female-produced material because men have traditionally dominated the scene. Musallam Al Kathiri pointed out that this gender imbalance in the folk music scene can be found in many parts of the world, and it automatically affects the material collected by archive-makers.

Finally, Mr. Al Kathiri raised the problem of cultural authenticity as one of the factors that affected his choice. He explained that Omani music performed for tourism or commercial purposes is not authentic and, therefore, has little cultural value. This is what he said in this regard:

> Folk revival is an important phenomenon but has little to do with ICH because the truly valuable musical material is performed in other contexts. That is why attending community celebrations often makes more sense for archive-makers than attending a concert.

Although I am not trying to undermine the value of institutionally organised musical events such as those by the Omani Centre for Traditional Music or musical performances for tourists, I cannot but agree. I have seen more vibrant, authentic and genuine music when I saw musicians simply performing on the streets or playing for fun in the family setting.

When I discussed the issue with Khaled Al Barashdi, he responded that musicians are indeed affected by what D'Agostino (2020, 192) called ''massification'' and Westernisation of the musical repertoire. Al Barashdi explained: 'Musicians often care more about the general appeal of the music rather than its authenticity, and they may experiment with instruments and techniques, presenting their interpretations of traditional music'. In this way, whatever entertaining and appealing material may be, it is not perceived as authentic and accurate enough to be considered for archivisation. Authenticity issues are an important topic worth discussing in more detail, so the following section dwells on how archive-makers

understand authenticity and whether digitalisation threatens this critical characteristic of Omani ICH.

Even though bias can occur on both institutional and amateur levels, I found that professional archive-makers are more methodical and less subject to the influence of personal preferences, popularity among social media users and other factors meaningful to amateur archivists. At the same time, the section suggests that gender and ethnic bias may be present in ICH archivisation, leading to the inadequate representation of certain cultural heritage in institutional archives. Finally, the section showed that choices behind ICH preservation (adding to the catalogues, publication online, categorisation) are governed by multiple subjective and objective factors, such as archivists' knowledge, information about the performance, and available resources. The discussed factors affect the contribution made by institutional and grassroots archivists to Omani ICH preservation, but they are not exhaustive. The following section examines how the perceived authenticity of music affects archive-makers' choices.

6.5 Authenticity Issues in ICH Archivisation

My conversations with institutional and grassroots archive-makers revealed their different understanding of the authenticity of traditional music, which is another important point that explains how their varying approaches to musical tradition shape Omani heritage protection and preservation. This research showed that the authenticity of folk music plays an important role in ICH archivisation in Oman but revealed a rather ambiguous nature of this concept and the absence of agreement on how it should be measured and expressed. The study shows that archivists express a misleading and potentially inaccurate understanding of authenticity as being 'true and faithful to an original' or being 'reliable representation'' (Gunara et al. 2022, 27). There is also evidence of authenticity as being 'replicated in a historically accurate manner, or that is seen in its original context', which is debatable in the scholarly literature (Gunara et al. 2022, 27). The main problem is that although the idea of closeness to the original in reproduction may seem logical, it can hardly be

applied to traditional music that evolves with time. Thus, the lack of a clear understanding of what authenticity means is a serious problem as it affects the selection of ICH items to be preserved, re-created and popularised. However, one cannot discard authenticity concerns altogether as invalid because they may affect the state of ICH and its future in archives, as shown below in this section.

An institutional archivist, Khalfan Al Barwnai, pointed to the elusive nature of the authenticity concept that may cause confusion. He argued that there is no absolute standard or measure of folk music authenticity, and this opinion is generally shared in the scientific literature (Gunara et al. 2022; Lum 2009). This characteristic is ascribed on a case-by-case basis and is a subjective judgement that may differ depending on an archive-maker, context and other factors. He explained:

> Archivists look more closely at each piece of material and evaluate whether it respects the historical tradition, whether the original lyrics are used, whether sonic expectations of the genre are met and things like that. So, authenticity consists of multiple pieces, and there is no rule that fits all material.

Moreover, Khalfan Al Barwnai clarified that authenticity can be hard to apply to something so fluid as the living tradition, as traditional music changes organically with time, making it hard to trace to root or establish a canon. I found this note very important, as it is also reflected in seminal research such as that produced by Chinese scholar Belle Yung. According to this author, there are still heated debates among *qin* players in China who actively promote the modernisation of *qin* musical tradition and some scholars and musicians who oppose inevitable changes (Yung 2009). So, it appears that the authenticity dilemmas are not limited to the Omani musical stage but can be found in other parts of the world where traditional music is reconsidered in the modern context.

Another important idea Al Barwnai shared was that even though authenticity is important, inauthentic performances are not objects of lesser value. 'Traditions and music evolve. It is not about being picky and choosing only authentic pieces; it is about recognising the diversity in the performances and that traditions and culture change', explained Al Barwnai. His response also reminded me of the notion of

'staged authenticity' discussed by Nagy-Sándor and Berkers (2018, 408), who argued that not all elements of the performance need be authentic as long as it succeeds in conveying 'a shared feeling of 'we', of community, of belonging and tradition'. Omani dance *Al Razha* is a good example illustrating this point. This Bedouin dance was traditionally performed in desert regions of the country to announce the onset of war, celebrate victory, call troops, or mediate between warring parties. Neither of these social functions is relevant today, but it is still widely regarded as a valuable piece of the country's ICH (Al-Barwnai 2005). This dance, which I had the pleasure to enjoy several years ago during a celebration dedicated to His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, has preserved its unique, impressive atmosphere due to the use of the swords and poetry between men recited to the rhythm of the drums. The authenticity of this piece of ICH is thus not questioned despite its evolution.

Furthermore, the authenticity of the music, judged by its connection to the social and cultural context, is an important topic that needs to be discussed in-depth. When I attended the 'Azwa Fenga' celebration in Fenga, one of the locals I met there, who preferred to stay anonymous, commented on the authenticity of the traditional performance we watched. The woman said, 'I bet you have never seen anything like this. Such music is not played anywhere else in the country. It's our thing, and you can only hear it on the fourth Eid al-Adha'. This phrase made me think about how the connection of folk music to a specific context makes it sound more authentic, even if it is an illusion of authenticity. It reminded me that folk music with specific cultural and social significance is often claimed to belong to a particular group and, therefore, is ascribed value only when viewed in this context (Félix 2015). Therefore, I discussed this topic with archive-makers, both grassroots and professional ones, to understand how context affects perceptions of authenticity and archivisation decisions.

Institutional archivists emphasise the importance of the social context as a measure of authenticity that makes material worthy of archivisation, which is a debatable idea (Cipta et al. 2020; Gunara et al. 2022). 'To me, authenticity is about

placing the music into the context of everyday life and social experience. It has nothing to do with entertaining tourists', commented Muslam Al Kathiri. When I asked him to specify why entertainment uses affect authenticity, he explained that they involve disconnecting the music from its original context and incorporating new functions and meanings: 'Let's say, for example, that music that has been traditionally performed at weddings to accompany *Al Aazi* dance is played by a street musician. Would you consider it authentic?' Unable to answer this tricky question, I realised how difficult it is for outsiders to determine whether the performance is authentic due to the lack of knowledge and the ambiguity of the authenticity concept itself. More importantly, Muslam Al Kathiri added that although he considers authenticity an important factor for ICH preservation, it cannot be reliable, so other parameters for ICH selection are employed. Khalfan Al Barwnai's and Muslam Al Kathiri's positions regarding authenticity are reasonable and consistent with existing musicology research. They point to the institutional archivists' awareness of the hidden hazards of using the authenticity logic in ICH archivisation.

Furthermore, the notion of authenticity has arisen with the commercial popularity of folk music, and my study showed that the clash between commercialisation and authenticity remains an important debate in the traditional music field, at least on the grassroots level. Grassroots archivists raised the problem of commercialising folklore, which drives the production and consumption of music artefacts. Khaled Al Barashdi explained:

> Commercialisation worries me the most. New musical instruments foreign to the Omani culture are often added to the performances, like combining *Al Kasir* with Western drums. You see, *Al Kasir* produces a lighter sound and adds a unique flare to the music, which can be lost If it is played together with drums.

The participant reflected on how particularly recognisable clichés of traditional music penetrate popular musical genres and create new music forms. Then, they are widely replicated and returned to the bearers of traditional music in a new form, thus eroding authenticity. However, fears that this process may affect authenticity have

been challenged by Nannyonga-Tamusuza (2006), who argued that musical archives are a storage place not only of the past but also of the present, so new music forms deserve to be recorded and stored on a par with those perceived as older.

In addition, Al Barashdi noted that an increasing number of young performers try to preserve Omani music's authenticity by respecting the way music has been played by their predecessors instead of using their creativity to alter it, which is an approach promoted by some scholars (Nethsinghe 2013). They resist commercialisation's urge to increase performances' visual appeal and are reluctant to change traditional tunes to keep up with music trends or the general audience's preferences. Indeed, many Omani folk music performers I met during my research cultivated their respect for tradition and built their identity around being defenders of Omani's cultural heritage. Whether or not this approach guards authenticity is debatable because 'authenticity in any music is not constant and unchanging' (Lum 2009, 36). However, one cannot deny that preserving tradition by respecting how the music was created and performed, by whom, in what context and for what purpose is extremely important for archivisation as it helps capture tradition in the moment.

Furthermore, Mr. Al Kathiri argued that the transformation of traditional music and musical instruments for a wider audience's consumption is an alarming problem in the context of authenticity. Al Makusi argued that organisers sometimes persuade musicians to adapt their performances to meet people's expectations. By modifying music, they create specific emotive narratives, which express imaginary culture rather than actual cultural heritage. This is where the paradox lies, according to Al Makusi. On the one hand, public events help performers popularise Omani music and support them financially to continue their music careers. On the other hand, a wider audience's interest results in modifications of music material that render it unauthentic. Musical instruments can also be modified to make them cheaper, lighter, and more portable and facilitate widespread use. For example, the expensive and rare wood used to make many instruments can be replaced with cheaper wood of similar quality. However, Al Makusi is convinced that such modifications normally

do not affect the quality of music but only the visual appearance of traditional Omani instruments.

Furthermore, Ahmed Al Zadjali challenged the common stereotype that amateur musicians perform more authentic music than professional musicians who earn their living by playing Omani music. 'Amateur means a personal state of mind and belief, a lifestyle if you like. Professional means that they receive money, which does not affect authenticity', explained Al Zadjali. 'Professional players play a huge role in preserving Omani traditional music because they invest much time and effort into mastering traditional instruments', the interviewee added. It appears that it is not the degree of professionalism that affects perceived authenticity but musicians' desire to preserve the tradition as much as possible.

My interviews also exposed a dichotomy between urban revivals and surviving rural heritage practices. The so-called 'revival artists' learn folk music in a contemporary urban setting and have to practise it away from its original context and function (Nagy-Sándor 2018). Some musicians I interviewed, such as Noura Al Naziri, belong to this category. In contrast, musicians who learn the music from their parents, grandparents and community members and perform it within the social setting are believed to be the bearers of rural heritage, sometimes called the living tradition (Nagy-Sándor 2018). Some participants considered the latter group the primary target of archive-making work because they did not separate the music from its context. Mohammed Al Masrorri said, ' The music's soul is precisely in this social setting, so it should be performed in a way it was intended to. Only in this case does it become valuable as an example of cultural heritage. Otherwise, it's just music'. Nasser Al Kindi shared a contradicting view on the role of the context. This narrow view holds that authenticity should be perceived as part of the music alone, irrespectively of the context and 'the packaging that accompanies the performance'. However, since he is a musician and not an archivist, his position may not reflect the actual decision-making on archivisation.

Another key theme I analysed was the effect of technology utilised in ICH archivisation on the perceived authenticity of preserved cultural heritage. I met many

sceptics who argued that technology has limitations in reflecting the authenticity of traditional music. For instance, my interview with Al Masrorri revealed his doubts regarding technology's ability to communicate authenticity and preserve the links to the social setting in which music is performed. He argued that there is no guarantee that material stored in archives is not disembodied from its original role and accurately communicates the context and meaning attributed to the music by the indigenous performers. He asked me: 'How can you properly capture the history and cultural meaning of something in three minutes and 30 seconds?' Al Masrorri also noted that traditional music is a social experience that technology cannot adequately encompass. This response may originate from the interviewee's fear of losing Omani traditions and lifestyles accompanying traditional music performances rather than his doubts regarding technological capabilities.

Furthermore, Muslam Al Kathiri seemed not to be convinced by the possibilities of modern technology to capture all aspects of the music performance. His criticism of technology as an archivisation tool reminded me of the argument presented by Scarce (1986), who dwelled on the limitations of sound- and film-recording of musical performances. According to Scarce (1986), archived items should be considered an individual interpretation of the cultural heritage rather than its definitive, universal representation. This idea was advanced by Seeger (1986, 262), who argued that purity is an 'elusive trait whose pursuit leads quickly to subjectivity and stereotyping'. Whereas these ideas do not question the role of archives as 'storehouses of tradition' (Seeger 1986, 262), they point to the importance of acknowledging the limitations of technology in translating authenticity. At the same time, one needs to recognise that criticism voiced by Scarce (1986) and Seeger (1986) and reiterated by Al Kathiri fails to recognise the advanced capabilities of state-of-the-art technology currently used in ICH archivisation.

To summarise, the study demonstrated the lack of agreement and understanding about how authentic Omani ICH looks and, more importantly, how it should be archived. Institutional and grassroots archivists have different understandings of authenticity, perceiving it in terms of fundamental content, social

context, historical accuracy, 'true spirit', and other hard-to-measure notions. While this lack of agreement causes confusion, it may be useful for ICH preservation, allowing archivists to focus on different elements of the heritage they consider worthy of protection. There are fears that the commercialisation of cultural heritage presents a problem in this regard, transforming Omani tradition and making it harder to differentiate between 'original' Omani tunes, songs and performance nuances from those added to increase the appeal of the music for a wider audience. There are also concerns about the disconnect of traditional music from the social and cultural setting that makes it truly authentic. Finally, the section discussed the perceived threats of using modern technology as an archivisation tool, exposing its (in)capability in terms of translating authenticity. While the authenticity concept remains debatable, the issues raised by participants are worth considering because they affect how institutional and grassroots archivists perceive Omani ICH and how they prioritise and evaluate its relevance and value.

6.6 Looking Beyond Archivisation: A Path to More Effective ICH Preservation

Informal learning, both in and outside the home/community, through the processes referred to as enculturation and living tradition, remains the key ICH transmission process (Ward 2019). At the same time, archival work can be positioned as an extension of a living tradition, critically important for preserving Omani ICH. This section elaborates on the importance of the popularisation of ICH, its promotion as a living tradition, and, more importantly, the contribution of archives in this regard. It examines archives' role in sustaining and developing the living tradition (e.g., by giving teachers access to valuable cultural heritage that can be promoted among the young generation). The main idea is that traditional Omani music is not a museum exhibit frozen in time but a thriving, diverse living organism that can be developed by allowing educators, musicians, researchers and other actors access to ICH archives.

As I reflected on the contribution of archives to strengthening the living tradition, I asked my interviewees about their views on this issue. Some of their

responses were particularly valuable for understanding the importance of traditional music archives. For example, Youssef Al Rasbi argued that traditional music performers often use old recordings to revive and rethink the abandoned or slowly dying tradition. To him, archives serve as authentic learning spaces that provide accurate and rich knowledge about traditional music genres, techniques, instruments and songs. In our face-to-face conversation, Saad Al Shuaibi noted that he uses archives to calibrate the authenticity of his music:

> I love archives because they contain information about the origins of the songs and how they were played. I particularly enjoy watching how people 30 or 40 years ago were performing folk music and comparing it to contemporary performances. Archives help find slight nuances that may not be visible to the audience but are very important for traditional music performers. Then, I try to incorporate these nuances into my performances; it helps me feel a stronger connection to my heritage.

These words illustrate that archives play a crucial role in ICH preservation by helping musicians preserve the authenticity and meaning of Omani folk music.

In turn, researchers can utilise archives to study the transformation or continuity of the living tradition, ensuring that the conversations around Omani cultural heritage do not stop. According to Nasser Al Sawafi and Emad Al Baharani from the Centre for Civilisation Studies, archives are an unlimited source of research topics for musicologists and anthropologists. Institutional archives' categorisation methods and scientific approach to material storage enable academic research that can popularise Omani ICH. Nasser Al Sawafi said: 'We always welcome researchers and provide them access to our materials because there is no use in storing artefacts unless they can be truly analysed and understood'. The participant thus pointed to the role of archives in rethinking, discussing and exploring Omani cultural heritage in the academic context. Younis Al Nooumni agreed with this in our interview: 'Living tradition is not confined to local communities but is embraced on all levels, from academic research to music education'. According to him, using archives for research and educational purposes is one of the key reasons for their existence.

My visit to Fenga city and a celebration called 'Azwa Fenga', which took place in 2022, vividly showed that while archives are critically important for ICH preservation, particularly for urban populations often disconnected from the living tradition, continuing tradition is best ensured through social learning in the community context. An important thing that caught my attention during 'Azwa Fenga' was the keenness of older people to teach young people what they considered the tradition, its 'right' practice and even how to play some musical instruments such as Al *Rahmani* and *tambura*. I heard them teaching the youth the small technical nuances that are difficult to learn by watching the videos and practising independently. Things such as the location of hands while playing, the strength one needs to apply, body placement in relation to the instruments and others are best learned in the social setting from older guardians of the tradition. Older community members' efforts to engage the youth can be perceived as an attempt to preserve intangible cultural heritage. One of the elderly individuals I spoke with noted that they taught young people 'to make sure they learn, preserve and pass on the old musical traditions'. When I asked him how exactly they taught young people, they responded that learning occurs through everyday observation, practising and soaking in cultural meanings attached to different songs and melodies.

This social learning approach and the archivisation of Omani musical heritage are essential for popularising, preserving and celebrating traditional music. It is also one of the reasons why Al Busaidi, a musician whose interview is discussed in detail in the previous chapter, states that 'there is no real risk for Omani music to be forgotten because it is rooted in the people of Oman and they are keeping it alive'. What he meant was that tradition is made alive through people's experiences of playing and listening to music in the community setting. Interviewees also mentioned the role of traditional music in preserving the values, culture and history of local communities. In this way, Al Busaidi reiterated ideas put forward by Rice (2014), who maintained that ICH reflects social structures, relationships, traditions and lifestyles. My research confirmed that by transmitting knowledge of traditional music to younger people, representatives of the older generation do not separate their beliefs and

values from music-related knowledge, as happens in classic music education. In this way, they fully preserve cultural heritage, without separating it from the cultural and social reality. However, institutional archives are also important for strengthening the living tradition, as they complement grassroots efforts due to their established connections with researchers, curriculum developers and musicians. Their archival work is an extension of a living tradition that helps Omani ICH be popularised and celebrated on a larger scale.

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter sought to answer the third research question: *How do institutional and grassroots archivists contribute to the preservation and shaping of ICH?* The main idea that emerged from my fieldwork and my conversations with participants is that institutional and grassroots archivists complement each other's efforts in terms of archival work's focus, methodologies and mission. Institutional archivists engage mostly in ICH collection, categorisation, protection and popularisation, but they cannot always capture the diversity and complexity of Omani heritage due to various technical, legal and policy challenges. This is where grassroots archivists step in and contribute to a fuller and more nuanced ICH archivisation due to their close relationship with local communities and their willingness to preserve ICH as part of a living tradition. In fact, the findings presented in this chapter suggest that grassroots archives emerged in the first place to address the gaps that Omani music connoisseurs and regular citizens saw in the work of institutional archives. They now work betwixt and between official policy but co-exist with institutional archives to build archives as sustainable heritage and employ more flexible, creative preservation methods.

The chapter showed that Omani traditional ceremonies, celebrations, events, street performances, dances and official music concerts offer numerous opportunities for institutional and grassroots archivists to collect valuable cultural heritage for cultural preservation. Audio and video recordings are the most popular methods of collecting and storing data, but one should not underestimate the value

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of additional data such as textual descriptions, transcripts, historical information, etc. For archives to be valuable for cultural, educational and research purposes, they must be created with due attention to the accuracy, depth and cultural appropriateness of collected artefacts. Furthermore, although technological advancements have facilitated cultural heritage preservation, many issues remain to be addressed, such as the decontextualisation of content, legal impediments and cataloguing and access problems. Despite these challenges, my research paints a positive picture because institutional and grassroots archivists complement each other's work perfectly, covering different aspects of the archive-making process based on their technical capacity, skills, access to musical heritage and purposes.

The findings locate grassroots and institutional archive-making on a continuum that registers levels of intentionality, professionalism, and resource capabilities. However, the chapter shows that both types of archive-making are essential in contemporary Oman and complement each other. This chapter reveals that for many valid reasons (funding, broader institutional mission, government objectives, limited connection to the local communities) government-funded archives engage mostly in ICH collection, categorisation and protection. They also may favour a segment of the population (e.g., male-produced music or music of Arab origin), which makes their work somewhat biased. In addition, it is difficult for institutional archives to maintain ears and eyes on all musicians, folk bands, festivals and community events. Hence, grassroots archives act as rescue sites for diverse musical traditions and genres because amateur archive-makers cover areas that mainstream organisations overlook.

The chapter recognises the role of grassroots archivists' knowledge and skills in preserving and popularising traditional music heritage and making local music collections more inclusive and robust. While institutional archives have the infrastructure, training and resources to maintain their ICH collections, they sometimes lack the community archivists' ethos, freedom and emotional connection to the material. This difference accounts for valuable acts of ICH collection and sharing that occur outside the realm of institutional heritage institutions. Moreover,

grassroots archivists are more engaged in spreading, celebrating and popularising Omani music and its transmission to younger generations. Utilising advanced technology and social media, they allow local communities to celebrate and popularise their traditional music. Close relationships with communities and better access to music performances allow grassroots archive-makers to be creative and more independent in their work.

This chapter also examined the choices behind ICH collection and preservation. My interviews with various actors involved in archive-making showed that factors such as value, rarity, genre, perceived authenticity and many others dictate archivists' choices. Both grassroots and professional archive-makers are at risk for bias as they make decisions about what material to collect and catalogue. They are affected by personal preferences, knowledge and training limitations, technological issues, lack of information and other problems. However, these biases are not dramatic in the broader sense because archivists' different focus, skills and knowledge help counterbalance each other's limitations and encompass Omani folk music in all its diversity. Next, the chapter touched upon the contentious problem of authenticity and the perceived threats posed by commercialisation, tourism, social disconnect, and, possibly, modern technology. Despite the ambiguity of the authenticity concept, concerns raised by interviewees are valid and call for examining how traditional Omani music is modified under the influence of external factors and what can be done to preserve its origins.

Finally, the chapter demonstrated that institutional ICH archives in Oman act as platforms for research and learning, serving the interests of scholars, musicians, students, and the general public who are interested in preserving the country's cultural heritage. At the same time, learning in a community context occurs through grassroots archivists, who sustain musical heritage as a living tradition through their archiving work and ensure that local people's lifestyles, values and history continue to endow folk music with meaning and cultural value. Thus, the chapter shows that institutional and grassroots archivists contribute to ICH preservation by unintentionally balancing, complementing and supporting each other's efforts. Their

difference is their strength, allowing ICH to be archived in a top-down and bottom-up way. In this way, Omani ICH can be preserved due to the shared efforts of policymakers, institutional archivists, grassroots archivists and local musicians.

CHAPTER 7: BUILDING HERITAGE: CULTURAL POLITICS VERSUS POPULAR NATIONALISM

My ethno-musicological inquiry revealed multiple layers at which music is practised, made sense of and related to the complex and discourse-specific understandings of nationhood. As Christi-Anne Castro (2011) pointed out in her discussion of the Philippine nation's musical landscape, each state has a network of meanings attributed to music, continually mediated by the state, private institutions, influential ensembles and individuals, and that network is highly dependent on the discourse of musical sound and genre. Therefore, the collective symbols of the nation depend on the shared understanding of a national history, which I found to face tensions between the state-led culture politics focusing on modernism and the popular nationalism drawing from many more centuries of the state's existence, stretching far beyond the modern state's emergence in the 1970s.

This chapter is dedicated to analysing music appropriation in state-led nation-building efforts, which I identified as a process of nationalisation through selective music archiving and dissemination, which Castro (2011, 14) characterises as 'musical actors performing their nation' at the national and international level. The Omani state also uses the practice of commodification discussed by Michael Frishkopf (2008, 49) – the introduction of state-sanctioned forms of music that reflect alternative voices of the nation but do not come into a direct clash with the official cultural politics. Of particular interest for me is the role of grassroots archivists as a vital link between the official cultural politics (state) and people's music (nation) that allows the creation of a muti-vocal reflection of Oman's culture and history reflected in the musical tradition. I argue that it is due to the grassroots archiving effort that the commodified and nationalised musical archives – an object of tangible value and a strategic nation-building tool of the state – are complemented with popular music to establish what Castro (2011) defined as hybridity of nationalistic expression in music.

7.1. Musical ICH and Hybridity of Nationalistic Expression

Hybridity is a norm for all modern nations, and it is present in the formation of the Omani musical tradition. On the one hand, the Omani government shapes the cultural politics of modernism – an ideological impulse for attaining modernity, Westernisation and belonging to a global community of nations set forth by Sultan Qaboos and actively promoted throughout the past 50 years to mould a new Omani nation based on the state-authorised vision of a modern nation. On the other hand, Oman has a rich historical past that cannot be discounted and dropped in the pursuit of modernisation. During my research, I uncovered that the state-led, patrimonial, cultural agenda has dominated Omani music for half a century, intentionally and unintentionally silencing the diverse musical manifestations of the community. As practice has shown, Omanis cannot be taught anew about who they are and what music they should appreciate; policy imposed by the state can shape only one layer of the musical tradition but cannot substitute it entirely. Here, I recap how the state, grassroots archivists and musicians act as distinct parts of the Omani musical tradition and shape the network of meanings attributed to music.

7.1.1. Top-Down Governmental Initiatives on ICH

The government is the primary funding source and organised effort for ICH safeguarding, so it acts as the primary actor in the top-down process of ICH preservation. Therefore, I have found much of the ICH preservation effort in Oman to be shaped by the Sultan's *nahdah* plan – an official representation of cultural politics imposed by the governing structure, the state. Many officials I talked to voiced an opinion of musical ICH's strategic role in the country's economic, political and diplomatic objectives, such as Essam Al Mallah's account of ICH being a source of income for small businesses and craft stores and Mr. Al Naabai's story about using ICH to increase the appeal and uniqueness of Oman's national profile at the international arena. Therefore, I concluded that for the Omani government, music is a tool that, as Castro (2011) pointed out, can shape a society and give it national symbols essential for shared community imagining. Yet, I found the Omani government to pursue a relatively materialistic vision of Omani ICH, which aligns

with existing research (Bendix 2013; Bortolotto 2007; Nafziger 2012). These efforts embody what Castro (2011) explained as music nationalisation – elevating music and performers compliant with state ideals and goals to the national level of significance and using their performances to support an agenda of the newly invented cultural nationalism.

However, the process of shifting from the objectified treatment of musical ICH as an asset of economic value and a tool of cultural politics is also evident in Oman. I see it emerging due to several underlying causes – one of which is the recent shift of UNESCO's attention to the intangible dimension of living heritage in the early 2000s. After recognising the importance of intangible heritage and its unique role separate from cultural property, the global community and separate states faced a novel challenge – reflecting on their ICH and how it can be protected and preserved (Vecco 2010, 321). This new pressure for reconceptualising ICH and distancing from the materialistic approach also surfaced in my interviews. ICH has complex yet undeniable connections with people's communal identity and values, deeply cherished traditions and culture preserved for many centuries, which cultural politics invented by the state cannot capture or reflect. Therefore, approaching heritage always raises the challenging questions of ownership and representation (Chan 2023, 2798). In this regard, Mr Al Naabai's comment about the Centre's role of showing Omanis 'who we are' and sharing that unique cultural heritage with future generations is highly important. It reveals a major shift from building national heritage in line with the invented, state-selected vision of who Omanis are to the inclusion of popular music into the framework of Omani ICH, taking the intangible, community-based dimension of ICH into account. These efforts are the only way to achieve real hybridity, which presupposes the coexistence of multiple realities and vantage points in one musical tradition.

I found it alarming that the Omani government has dedicated much effort to shaping the nation's musical tradition along its arbitrary, selective agenda of a modern Omani state and nation, which implies using ICH as a tool or asset in cultural

politics. I see what Harvey (2001, 67) called a 'political act' of shaping instead of reflecting the nation's cultural heritage – arbitrary idea and symbol selection for the society's past reinvention and formation of the imagined future. Fan and Wang (2022) also explored these ideas, saw an inherent connection between culture and tourism and proposed putting the ICH to serve the economic goals of attracting tourists. Many interviewees in my study mentioned, either directly or implicitly, the strategic role of Omani ICH in the present-day state-building efforts. For instance, Nasser Al Sawafi pointed out the ICH archivisation initiative's strategic role of unifying the diverse cultural groups across Oman and noted, 'Tourists like that diversity, too'. Essam Al Mallah stated that ICH is important for Oman's economic development. So, I have found the rates of musical ICH commodification high in Oman, with some manipulative practices employed to direct modern Oman's nation-building process the way the government envisions and plans it.

7.1.2. Bottom-Up Approach: Community-Based Perspectives on ICH

The top-down, centralised approach of the government is distinct from the community-based, contextualised vision of ICH as a living tradition (Bortolotto 2007; Van Balen and Vandesande 2015). In the research process, I saw that music works as a shaper of society when used by the state and a society's reflector when practised by the community. This way, formal, centralised processes of ICH capturing and safeguarding in Oman are increasingly juxtaposed to more natural, local processes – my observation of these tensions and their exemplification with context-specific descriptions thus shows how state-led pursuit of modernism via music nationalisation coexist with the emerging popular nationalism reflecting a different dimension of the Omani nation. As Nasser Al Kindi commented, traditional Omani music tells the stories of people's ancestors, Oman's history and past, and Muhammad Al Masrorri explained that love for Oman was the most important part of musical tradition. These accounts suggest that Oman's ICH cannot be separated from the community practising it, as such efforts deprive the musical records of the living soul.

Unfortunately, I see that state-led cultural politics still dominate the music landscape in Oman, as well as ICH safeguarding efforts and practices. The government-led, formal course was initially set by Sultan Qaboos – a great appreciator of Western values and a visionary leader who decided to make Oman a part of the modern global society. Though the reforms were positive for state-building and resulted in considerable progress, they also led to the formation of an artificial, top-down incentivisation approach that overshadowed authentic, community-based ICH to a certain degree, depriving Omani music of the essential multi-vocality and hybridity of every natural musical tradition possesses. The problem with such efforts, as noted by Smith (2006, 116) and Wu et al. (2016, 18), is that they introduce an arbitrary, authorised heritage discourse that fails to reflect the real-life dynamics of ICH development. Thus, I also found that such efforts create an artificial ICH inventory that cannot embrace the living tradition, thus distorting ICH representation to tourists and even the nation's members.

To address this problem, numerous researchers and practitioners recommend including the community at all levels of ICH archivisation (Carmack 2021; Hodder 2010). Without community participation, the ICH archivisation process can only end with a huge catalogue of senseless, context-deprived archives with no tangible value for the nation that does not associate with those items. Following the idea of Benedict Anderson (1991), I define the Omani nation as a community with a shared vision of their identity and place, reflected in various cultural activities and products, including music. Thus, the role of community is invaluable in the well-organised and sensitive ICH archivisation process because heritage bearers continually identify, practice and change ICH through communal use. In this regard, the comment of Nasser Al Sawafi about local amateur recordings as the only source of unique ICH data and Juma Al Shedi's words about the failure to record Omani music otherwise because of its incompliance with the Western notation principles are essential. These accounts suggest that the Omani context for ICH capturing is unique, with its distinct challenges and peculiarities, so it should be addressed with

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a nuanced understanding of these specifics to ensure that ICH is adequately embraced and not lost forever.

Besides community participation in the ICH archivisation process, its role in ICH reproduction and survival is essential (Heritage Fund 2023; Oakes 2009). My findings also repeatedly pointed at ICH as a community-based practice that could be continued only via local-level learning and apprenticeship, and most traditional musicians got naturally accustomed to and trained in traditional music genres at home, in their families and communities, such as Muhammad Al Masrorri learning folk poetry from older adults and Jameila Al Makusi who was introduced to traditional music in the band of her brothers. These natural, local dynamics usually serve as a strong foundation for self-association with the traditional craft, while ICH inventorying without regard to community perspectives may lead to 'depletion' of shared intangible values and disassociation of locals with the artificially reconstructed and adjusted traditions (Chan 2023, 2797; Cang 2007, 46).

7.1.3. Grassroots Archivists as a Link Between State and Nation

As the state-led cultural politics of the Omani nation's shaping are increasingly challenged by popular nationalism, I have witnessed greater community involvement in ICH safeguarding in Oman. What stood out as important for my study is the balancing power of grassroots archivists in that negotiation process around multiple layers of music's meaning for the heritage bearers. I found support for that observation in prior research by Peutz (2018) and Ostashewski et al. (2020), who traced that understanding in the interviews. For instance, Ms Al Riyami noted that grassroots archivists, though lacking professional training, are 'closer to people' and that advanced technology helps grassroots archivists make high-quality recordings. This way, I concluded that the grassroots archiving movement gradually emerged in Oman to reflect the nation's hybridity and represent a greater number of meanings attributed to music in this country, thus challenging the dominant cultural politics of modern Omani nation's building on the principles of modernism and a limited set of state-selected musical tradition items. This way, I see the vital contribution of

grassroots archivists' work in the shift from the policy of 'shaping' the modern Omani society through invented cultural tradition to 'reflecting' the Omani society with deeper regard to centuries-old traditions and musical culture. This approach is much more coherent with any nation's cultural dynamics. It can aid nation-building efforts by giving symbols of a nation dependent on the collective understanding of national history – the heritage with which Omanis can genuinely self-identify instead of adopting an invented, externally designed notion of nationhood alien to them.

I see the contribution of grassroots archivisation in establishing what Rasmussen (2021, 1072) characterised as 'nativism from below', with grassroots actors able to reflect the actual living heritage instead of inventing it and fitting it into the state-shaped cultural discourse. Basem Al Daoudi managed to do this by recording a private, intimate mourning event in his native village because of being an insider whom locals trust. Maryam Al Riyami also supported this assumption by noting that grassroots archivists 'blend in' and are perceived as part of the community, so they can get access to ICH that commonly escapes state-led archivisation initiatives and cannot be recorded in studios, at festivals or other staged events. Mr Al Barashdi also pointed out that grassroots archiving 'happens naturally', so there is more authenticity in the created materials. All these accounts helped me conclude that grassroots archiving efforts are essential for creating what Castro (2011) called a multi-vocal reflection of a nation in contemporary ethnomusicology. I believe their role is to add multiple discourses to the Omani musical heritage and complement the incomplete, artificial and partly contradictory modernism efforts of state nation-building.

The main issue of my concern is the power relations and imbalances existing in any state and the limited impact grassroots efforts can produce on forming musical heritage. As Briggs (1996, 435) commented on it, grassroots actors are often overpowered by the state's access to information about heritage and lose the bureaucratic struggle in the attempt to offer local perspectives on particular heritage objects. In my study, this overpowering was mostly reflected in the lack of funding

for the grassroots archiving efforts and improper management of rich, sometimes truly unique, grassroots archives people have collected. However, I see the positive dynamics in the shaping of hybridity and multi-dimensionality of Omani music coming from various sources. First, it is the coming of a former Heritage Minister to power in Oman – the new ruler is highly competent in heritage studies and practices, so the shift from firm state-curated cultural politics to a more reflective approach is evident in many context-based events and readier representation of indigenous heritage in the Omani performances and international cultural profile. Therefore, there is a strong hope that the louder voices of various Omani groups, amplified by grassroots volunteer efforts, will get a deserved place in state-led archivisation and preservation activities as a natural reflection of the Omani cultural identity.

One of my original contributions is a close study of the role of social media in ICH archiving in Oman, which was not done by ethnomusicologists in this context before. Social media is a powerful tool for grassroots archivists, as it gives access to popular music and uncovers the wide variety of popular nationalism reflections through music. Many researchers agree on the pronounced role of social networks and digital archives in the process of ICH documentation (Otero et al. 2021; Pietrobruno 2013; Rashid and Qasha 2022), and my study found these assumptions true for Oman as well. In my study, social networks also played a vital role in many efforts of grassroots archivists; Al Makusi and Al Busaidi recommended using the latest technologies positively and effectively, and Al Naziri pointed out that social media used to be the only means of music dissemination during the COVID-19 pandemic. I also found many rich, unique social media archives for Omani music, which may become a valuable source of ethnomusicology material. Therefore, I believe social media should not be discounted as a powerful modern nation-building tool because it can help disseminate ideas about identity free from state curation.

7.2. Omani Nation, Nationhood and Musical Heritage

Based on the outcomes of this research, I associate the complexity of examining Omani nationhood with the relatively recent emergence of Oman as a

modern nation-state and an apparent dominance of state-led cultural politics discourse over a more natural, popular self-determination as a nation as reflected in the shaping of Omani musical tradition. The Omani state, in its traditional, historical sense, represented a complex fabric of regional cultures and tribes – *'asabiyyat* – who shaped the country's political course and exercised considerable impact on the social, cultural and political affairs (Wippel 2013). However, Sultan Qaboos's cultural politics shifted the focus from the rich tradition to the struggle for modernism, which Castro (2011, 7) characterises as an ideological impulse of Westernisation and belonging to a global community of nations. This way, Qaboos's change in the approach to cultural heritage in general, and music in particular, reduced *'asabiyyat* influences and homogenised the Omani nationhood concept (at least in the state discourse) around his authority and legitimacy.

In other words, I found that Sultan Qaboos legitimised his authority as an Omani ruler by creating a new image of Omani identity and nation (Peterson 2019), which positively impacted Omani development but deprived Oman of hybridity in nationalistic expression. These changes did not presuppose refusing the rich history of Oman altogether; instead, accommodating the entirety of ICH manifestations across ethnically and culturally diverse regions into the state-led preservation initiatives. However, I would agree with Castro's (2011, 11) statement that it is vital to separate the state from the nation, as the state cannot reflect natural national processes and can only be a shaper of society. This governing structure represents the nation in an official domain and often does that through an imagined state-constructed policy framework. This way, I found many ICH elements inconsistent with the mainstream agenda of the Omani heritage that has skipped the national initiatives and remained beyond the scope of governmental oversight. These aspects of Oman's hybridity – expressions of the nation falling beyond the state's cultural politics – are what ethnomusicological research can help uncover, as an ethnomusicological inquiry gives proper account to all voices within one community and considers all discourses of music in multiple contexts.

My research showed that the Omani government contributes extensive effort to music nationalisation by all means – sponsoring all kinds of public performances, festivals, bands and musicians that advance the official cultural politics and reflect its ideals. It is a vital dimension of Omani culture today, but it is only one of the numerous voices that deserve the right to be heard. Therefore, looking at the reflection of Omani nationhood in traditional music only from the viewpoint of the official government's course and initiatives would be limiting and superficial. A broader outlook on the construction and preservation of Omani nationhood in music is impossible without considering the diversity of tribal groups, African influences, and the variety of historical influences from Western allies. Besides, the process of nationhood construction and reflection in Omani community's practices requires a more nuanced insight into how officials, grassroots participants (musicians and archivists) and consumers of Omani musical ICH make sense of these connections.

In the examination of official and popular music discourses, I also traced that Oman faces the challenge of compliance with the fast-paced global development and preservation and enrichment of its national heritage. These processes are normal for all young states, and a certain degree of hybridity is fine for all modern nations. As Mr. Al Baharani noted,

> The process of national identity formation is on its way, as it's too young to be complete. I also believe it's too early to evaluate its outcomes because the *nahdah* identity and nation-building are just half a century old. So, Omanis still need to cover a long way to full identity formation and its embracing in full.

This internal tension between the natural bottom-up nationhood and cultural formation and the state-imposed Omani nationhood vision is thus reflected in the ICH preservation practices, which Mr. Al Baharani and Mr. Al Nooumni characterised as intentionally and consistently constructed via concerted governmental and policymaker action. For instance, there is a strong focus on preserving national Omani musical arts that reflect the Omanis' joys, sorrows and historical legacy and have also become a diplomatic tool. The traditional Omani musical form – the art of

the 'Al-Mawlid' – is of primary importance, currently preserved and documented via national projects, government programmes and community-level initiatives. Mr. Al Nooumni also spoke at length about the 1983 traditional Omani music heritage preservation project set up by Sultan Qaboos, which lasted only for one year and then evolved into the International Symposium of Omani Traditional Music. Mr. Al Baharani mentioned the importance of the research conference held by the Oman Centre for Traditional Music every year, which will still serve as a platform for national initiatives in traditional music support, development and preservation.

By looking at these data, I see the main challenge in front of the Omani stakeholders related to musical ICH is harmonising those directions of national heritage shaping without contradictions and conflict. It is time to realise that some musical ICH is unapproachable at the level of government-led archivisation and a greater role in its reconstruction and preservation lies within the area of grassroots activists' efforts. I see the grassroots archiving effort as a vital link between the state's cultural politics and popular nationalism reflected in music. By using their contextual presence and competence, grassroots archivists can adequately capture the symbols of the Omani nation shaped by people collective understanding of their identity, history and values, thus offering an essential dimension to a comprehensive Omani nation's image without internal contradictions over the state-imposed, patrimonial, cultural discourse.

The greatest problem I have identified in my research is that the government's cultural politics, though effective to a certain degree, has limited coverage of the real Omani cultural tradition. Instead of capturing the multiple voices of people constituting the modern Omani nation, Omani officials have concentrated their efforts on what Stroud (2016) called an invented tradition. I heard many interviewees say that preserving Omani music is an economic goal, as a nation with a unique, distinct identity and cultural legacy is more attractive to tourists. Thus, I was left with an impression (that was further supported by my attendance of Ministry-organised events and performance and close reading of Oman Vision 2040) that the Omani

ICH is treated as a tangible heritage, an asset that can be used to achieve goals different from the ICH preservation and cultivation alone. This is a frequent flaw of state-led cultural discourse that focuses on attaining economic and strategic goals more than on presenting existing culturally specific interpretations of music as an everyday cultural practice. As a result, the state-dominated musical ICH agenda completes only one role of the two – it acts as a shaper, not a reflector of the Omani nation, though there is a rich, vibrant cultural heritage awaiting proper representation without the need for reinvention.

Moving on with this point, I asked several officials about the value of ICH and the far-reaching strategy of ICH archivisation as undertaken by the Ministry and the Omani Centre for Traditional Music. Most talked about the challenge of shaping a distinct, unique cultural image and profile for the state of Oman, which is problematic because of the common cultural and historical legacy of all Gulf states. Thus, to attract other people and make Oman distinct from the rest of the tribal Arab states in the region, the Omani public and government have to embark on the joint effort of nation-building and appreciation of the unique cultural features, traditions and artefacts they have built throughout existence, which is often hard to grasp and codify on the explicit level. The problem with accurate archivisation was thus seen in the different visions that officials and the public in various regions of Oman belonging to different social groups (e.g., more urbanised or tribal Omanis) hold about what constitutes the unique, traditional Omani musical heritage.

Here, I identified the major divide in the angle taken to music preservation; the government officials generally saw no problem in selecting musicians, ensembles and musical works for archivisation, performances for tourists and reconstruction of Omani nationhood in the national and international events. Therefore, the state-curated invented tradition is fine for the government because of the instrumental approach it takes to the role of music in nation-building. However, my ethnographic observations and visits to various performances of grassroots musicians presented me with a much greater variety of Omani music manifestations,

which points to the limited scope of governmental coverage and suggests the need for a greater role for non-mainstream archivisation channels, like social media or YouTube performances, in the ICH archivisation efforts.

Thus, my general observation from the discussion of the place of music in the Omani nationhood as constructed through the concerted government effort is considerable progress in this sphere, though with specific limitations in scope and coverage. The government works on the ICH archivisation and reconstruction in line with an official vision of Omani nationhood codified in the state documents and agenda of Oman Vision 2040. This position, though helpful in the process of present-day Omani nation-building, distances the official presentations of Omani traditional music from the real-world musical practices in which it could be embraced in a much richer form and greater variety. Ultimately, as some interviewees would later observe it (mainly among grassroots musicians and artists), Omani music has become a museum exhibit instead of a living cultural artefact, which deprives it of many vital characteristics the ICH should possess. These efforts are valuable as an official discourse of musical heritage preservation and formation, as the government possesses enough human and financial resources to protect vulnerable heritage from extinction. However, looking only at the official musical ICH archives, one can hardly understand what real Omani music is and what meanings people associate with it at the level of their daily cultural practices. The official musical discourse shapes the concept of the nation, while popular music reflects the nation, and these two dimensions of musical analysis can give a much more comprehensive idea of the musical heritage in Oman.

All participants of the musical ICH archivisation and celebration in Oman have unique experiences and insights into what Omani nationhood comprises and how it can be captured via Omani traditional music. While for Omani officials, the process was more formalised and fixed by specific documentation, guidance and the scope of Sultan-established national music preservation programmes, grassroots archivists focused more on what Rasmussen (2021) called 'nativism from below'.

Their efforts were primarily associated with finding, preserving and celebrating Omani music in its existing format by observing and participating in the living tradition. Governmental officials try to develop a musical tradition they find compliant with the broader nation's development plan. At the same time, grassroots archivists archive music in the as-is format, thus engaging in proactive archiving and disseminating the symbols of the Omani nation with which people are ready to self-identify. All these efforts occur amid the ongoing modernisation – a process unavoidable for most contemporary states; the growing commercialisation of Omani musical practices evolves in line with consumer demand and deviates from the centuries-old tradition. Thus, it seems to be of high priority to record the local musical practices of Omani communities in the non-staged, 'as-is' format to build a sound archival base documenting authentic Omani heritage unaffected by modern urbanisation, globalisation and commercialisation trends.

Generally, I find the fears and concerns about heritage loss reasonable; as the population of Oman gets more urbanised and Western-oriented, it may abandon many centuries-old traditions, thus harming the living representations of traditional music and dance. This is the vital gap created by the pursuit of modernism by the Omani government, and modern archivists and grassroots activists take an active role in promoting local musical traditions and preserving what exists and can be evidenced locally. These dynamics and a unique, ongoing mediation between the state, musicians, audiences and grassroots archivists shape the unique hybridity of nationalistic expression through music in Oman. Therefore, I believe the Omani nationhood concept will likely continue changing as the Omani nation evolves in the modern world.

7.3. Multiple Voices in the Omani Nation

According to the standard of ethnomusicological research voiced by Geertz (1973), my inquiry attempted to create a dense, multi-layer and culturally specific interpretation of meanings assigned to music in the tradition bearers' daily lives. What struck me the most is that the government gives an account of the country's

indigenous heritage, but it is a state-curated discourse that can hardly reflect the real musical tradition of numerous subgroups, tribes and communities residing under one roof and sharing an Omani identity. Therefore, a deeper regard for indigenous communities and grassroots archiving in those contexts is necessary to capture the real diversity of musical heritage, not only objectified elements of Omani music stored in the state archives.

I have seen the Omani nation as a diverse entity uniting Arabs, the Hyderabadi peoples, the Baluchis and the Zanzibaris under one roof, as well as less plentiful cultural groups of as Luwātī, Bayāsira, descendants of formerly enslaved people called ''Abīd', Persians and Jat Indians (Al-Abri 2020, 30; Al-Ismaili 2018, 58; Al-Maamari 2016, 439). Yet, their voices are not as strong in the official cultural politics as in the local contexts. In other words, I saw the curated, patrimonial representation of diverse populations in the state policy of Omani ICH preservation, which rarely reflects those populations' reality but only shapes it in a state-intended manner. This process was extensively covered by Castro (2011) as the nationalisation of music – appropriation of various matching elements compliant with the broader national strategy for the sake of shaping new nationhood. This makes Omani state archives devoid of true life and heritage, focussing only on conserving and objectifying existing musical traditions. In reality, the Omani cultural landscape represents a patchwork of histories, traditions and cultural heritages that cannot fit a narrow, enforcing modernism policy and invented tradition of Sultan Qaboos's nation-building reforms. Therefore, a proper account of Omani cultural diversity requires a clear understanding of the local culture of the Omani interior parts, the Ras al-Hadd culture of the southeast part and the northwest Ras Musandam culture that only grassroots archivists can adequately capture (Al-Ismaili 2018, 60). Thus, I felt that the true cause of the grassroots archivist movement is the realisation that forceful homogenisation cannot reflect all the diversity of Oman's cultural roots and expressions, and it poses a real hazard of closing the door to Omani people's past.

It would be an over-exaggeration to say that the Omani government ousts the tribal tradition from state cultural politics, as it is not so. However, I have seen many tribal ICH elements in Oman being preserved and safeguarded only due to their appeal to tourists, which again implies the government's focus on ICH's face value for the country's economy. These observations fall in line with Eichler's (2020, 42) findings that tribes are highly vulnerable today, as they are forced to assimilate with the mainstream culture in the process of modern nation-building. This way, I have seen tribal uniqueness and cultural elements be sacrificed to build a modern nation on the invented ideals of Westernisation and globalisation. One of the notable illustrations of this point is the setup of music schools in Muscat, where talented children from all towns were brought to learn music and were taught by foreign teachers with little knowledge about Omani music. Another example is the opinion of one of the interviewed archivists, saying that policymakers in Muscat have no physical possibility to connect to local musicians and capture traditional music in full totality and diversity. I see these accounts as testimonies to the limitations of state-imposed cultural politics, which ultimately encouraged the rise of grassroots archivists connecting to people in their natural contexts and passing the true Omani music across to restore the balance and proper hybridity in nationalistic expression through music.

My study did not attempt to uncover the reasons for the gradual silencing of indigenous culture in Oman, yet that finding came out as pronounced in the research process. I can suggest that the process started with Sultan Qaboos's initiation of the modernism reform in the newly created nation, where long-held cultural traditions and expressions were sacrificed to join the global community and become a contemporary state. Another probable reason is the lack of critical insight into governmental tools and efforts for musical ICH capturing, exclusively directed at artefact-like archiving in line with the invented cultural politics. This approach narrows the scope of outreach and prevents Omani official archivists from creating archives that reflect an Omani nation instead of only shaping it.

One more explanation is the lack of collaboration with local people in the process of ICH preservation; it is the divide between the state and the nation that Castro (2011) examined at length and characterised as a major hurdle to a proper, comprehensive national self-expression. Hart (2001, 2) and Harnish (2007, 62) explained that locals' perceptions and inclusion of representatives of various ethnic groups within the Omani nation can ensure adequate representation of all cultural groups without limiting bias. The greatest issue in this regard is that Omani officials sincerely believe they have captured everything; for instance, I recollect the point Mr. Al Kathiri made about the richness of state-funded archives, including numerous Al-Mawlid recordings, performances of military bands and the Oman Oud Hobbyist Association's materials, which came into sharp contrast with a much greater range of musical genre and type diversity I managed to witness within over one year of ethnomusicological inquiry. These observations suggest that the Omani nation can hardly self-identify with state archives, as they lack many locally significant musical items and do not reflect the richness of local musical genres, meanings and discourses. The grassroots effort can effectively preserve and revive various regional musical traditions not as an opposition but as an addition to modernism, e.g., nomadic Bedouins' dying musical legacy and seafaring populations' culture, extremely vulnerable to urbanisation and globalisation in the coastal villages. At this point, grassroots archivists step in as a significant element of national heritage building; they add the missing component to the state-authorised cultural politics and establish the living dimension of music that speaks to most Omanis and creates a coherent cultural basis for a shared sense of belonging to Omani nation.

A dimension of Omani musical tradition worth a separate mention is that of African cultural heritage. African people who came to the country during Oman's participation in the slave trade have produced a tangible impact on the Omani ICH, and their role is far from negligible. The 'Swahili music' is still alive in Oman, though kept by a small, locally concentrated community of musicians with African ancestry. However, many elements from a broader African musical tradition have fused with the Omani mainstream music and can be found in various performances. Expert

listeners can also distinguish the typical African sound of Misundu, as Al Kindi pointed out. Even one of the most commonly used musical instruments, *Al Tambourine* came from Africa and was quickly embraced by Omani musicians, as noted by Noura Al Naziri. Thus, it is hard to deny African legacy a place in Oman's rich and diverse cultural landscape. Yet, these cultural voices are poorly represented in Oman's official agenda and practical preservation activities.

I see that intentional underscoring of African heritage in Omani nation-building as a part of the official cultural politics that aims to shift the emphasis from Oman's slave past to an image of a modern nation. African roots and influences are considered, but only to the extent they present interest for international tourists and historical objectivity. I found another proof of the Omani government's reluctance to give proper credit to African legacy in the striking lack of documentation of the African borrowings in Omani musical works during the early years of national archive development (the 1980s). This shift of focus led to a considerable gap in the national self-expression and comprehension that African heritage should have occupied. My interviewees at the Al Mouj performance and viewers of street performances could not identify African musical instruments; the musicians who used African musical tools were reluctant to position their music as African because of the fear of its non-acceptance by Omani listeners. Interviews with officials did not yield any substantial findings because of the common reluctance among government representatives to discuss the African motifs in Omani music in any way; the brief answer of Younis Al Noamani about African influence's marginalisation pointed to the unwillingness of state representatives to engage with this topic at any level. The same uneasy attitude to Black history and African legacy is observed on the official level in many countries participating in the slave trade, including the Gulf states. Therefore, the imbalanced approach in state-led heritage discourse caused African musical tradition's silencing and inadequate representation, thus removing an important layer of Omani identity formation.

Moreover, African descent has come to be associated with prejudice and bias in the cultural landscape. My study revealed that many musicians with African roots are unwilling to expose their African ancestry and try to disguise it without emphasising African elements in their creative activity. Those who want to celebrate their African legacy observe the arbitrariness and marginalisation of African dance and music performances at music festivals and concerts for local and international audiences. As one of the summer Muscat festival's participants shared, the largest number of performances is for *Al Ayyala*, *Al Razfa* and *Al Razha* dance and music – the mainstream Omani ICH recognised by the international audience and codified by UNESCO. This preference for mainstream leaves Dhofari and Afro-Omani musicians without essential support and largely ousted from national and international music events because of the lack of financial and cultural support.

By looking at these representation imbalances in Omani cultural politics, specifically in the Omani officials' approaches to music evaluation and prioritisation in line with its policy, I have seen another important value of grassroots movement in Omani archivisation. While the government's policy is rigidly shaped based on modernism and national image ideals set by one person or a small group of persons, the official Omani archives cannot but reflect that small groups' vision of the Omani nation, which has only loose ties with what Omanis are. Official archivisation efforts are value-enforced and structured around those broader instrumental objectives, so they are inherently biased and reflect only the invented tradition and nation. At the same time, grassroots archivists are not bound by any priorities, objectives or missions and do not need to fit the Omani musical tradition into the rigid limits of official cultural politics and norms. For this reason, they are a powerful tool for unbiased archiving of everything an Omani nation cherishes and practices in various contexts. They give the popular nationalism dimension to nation-building without showing people who they should be and what music they should love; they only reflect the actual social and cultural practices that can give a proper image of who Omanis were and are.

7.4. Challenges in ICH Preservation

My study focussed on the role of the government and grassroots archivists in the efficiency and comprehensiveness of musical ICH archiving. Along with distinct meanings assigned to this process and each of the parties' contributions to it, I have uncovered many significant challenges that may threaten or hinder the archivisation and heritage preservation efforts. Two broad categories of identified challenges are technical and modernisation-specific issues.

7.4.1. Technical Challenges of ICH Preservation in Oman

The initial challenge that Omani archivists reported encountering is recording and identifying intangible cultural heritage. Many ICH objects are ephemeral traditions and rituals of local and context-dependent value, and cultural scholars, artists and technologists should collaborate on ICH identification and recording (EPFL 2018). Besides, ICH selection is a pressing issue because of the lack of resources for comprehensive ICH archivisation (Baker and Collins 2016). Thus, archivists are usually guided by what Edmonson (2016) characterised as 'the loss principle', – an assessment criterion to determine whether the ICH is dying out or is close to extinction. In case it is evaluated as endangered, it is prioritised for archiving. My interviewees reported using this approach – as Maryam Al Riyami pointed out, she archived the musical ICH because of the fear it would be 'lost and gone' one day, mainly due to the influence of globalisation. Emad Al Baharani emphasised the risk of musical heritage in small villages that are gradually dying out, and Basem Al Daoudi mentioned recording his 82-year-old grandmother's *khulkhal* performances to avoid losing that unique legacy when she passes away.

Another central concern for archivists at all levels was the digitalisation of archival material. Overall, the advancements of modern technology are praised as a contribution to archiving quality, with advanced digital recording tools, high-quality records, and sophisticated video and audio editing software serving the goals of sustainable ICH preservation (Alieva et al. 2019, 118; Giglitto et al. 2021; Kan 2022). Torwali and Troy (2022) also noted that digital media helps popularise traditional

music and engage the community by disseminating information about musical events. According to Abduraheem and Sheri (2022, p.252), digital technology can remove access barriers to ICH archives as digital archives can be used in education anywhere. These positive assessments found much support from my interviewees, with Jameila Al Makusi noting that she publishes much on Instagram to ensure that traditional Omani music is in everyone's phone and becomes closer to people. Mr Al Busaidi pointing to the essential role of technology in heritage dissemination.

One of the most valuable contributions of digitalisation to ICH safeguarding practices is the emergence of decentralised narratives and counter-narratives that balance the official governmental ICH agenda. Pietrobruno (2013, 1259) noted that even UNESCO used YouTube storage within its ICH safeguarding measures and pointed out that user-generated content on YouTube is a great way to counter the official heritage narratives. Centorrino et al. (2022) and Cuervo (2018) added that the emergence of 'do-it-yourself' musical archives disrupt institutionalised, state-led approaches to capturing and preserving traditional music. These opinions were confirmed in the interviews with Maryam Al Riyami, Youssef Al Rasbi and Jameila Al Makusi, who noted that people like the way of exploring traditional music in a familiar way – through social media and user-generated content – and they make music a natural part of their lives.

However, together with the benefits of digitalisation for ICH safeguarding efforts, one should not forget about the potential risks coming with the use of innovative and unknown methods. D'Agostino (2020, 106) cautioned against using modern technologies and means to safeguard music tradition because it is risky towards the original way of producing ICH and passing it on orally, which was the usual way of doing it in the pre-digital age. Kurin (2007, 9) also warned that a digital recording of a performance or song may not accurately represent a live performance and would contradict the philosophy and principles of ICH safeguarding. Some of my interviewees also voiced fears and hesitations about modern technology, such as Khalfan Al Barwnai reporting old musicians' distrust of technology, shyness, and

unwillingness to be recorded, and Noura Al Naziri's criticism of studio recordings are devoid of liveliness and cultural context.

The issue of ICH decontextualisation in archiving also stood out as a significant barrier towards the proper preservation of ICH material. This problem is commonplace in many countries, and Oman is not the only state countering this barrier in ICH safeguarding. Beaudoin (2012) characterised decontextualisation as the problem of removing context and cultural value from recorded videos and audio. Another popular opinion is that the digitalisation of ICH masks and distorts the visual cues and deprives ICH of the essential context and atmosphere in which the user can extract meaning (Conway, 2009, 2; Meirelles, 2004; Unsworth, 2004). Felix (2015, 21) also noted that artificial recording environments decontextualise cultural practices and make them less natural and staged. These problems were underlined by Musallam Al Kathiri, pointing to the intimate, event-related nature of many Omani musical traditions that can't be adequately captured in artificial environments. Nasser Al Kindi also mentioned the limitations of professional recordings with older musicians who are inexperienced with modern technology and face the logistical challenges of arriving at the studio and bringing their equipment.

A common solution to decontextualisation is using innovative technology for adequate context capturing and realistic rendition of cultural events and performances. For instance, Beaudoin (2012) proposed using 3D reconstructions to create living archives and immersive ICH reproductions. Skublewska-Paszkowska et al. (2022, 1) suggested 3D visualisation, 3D modelling, AR/VR and motion capture systems for immersive ICH reproduction. Rossau et al. (2019, 103), Partarakis et al. (2020, 2) and Carrozzino et al. (2011, 82) used these technologies in their studies to preserve traditional crafts, so the value of VR is real for ICH safeguarding. According to Wu et al. (2016, 18) Skublewska-Paszkowska et al. (2022, 3), these technologies enable a better understanding of ICH practices, consideration of their context and repeatability and understanding of the ways people act, sing, dance, use musical instruments and feel during notable cultural events. These suggestions were

supported by Khaled Al Barashdi, Basem Al Daoudi, Sami Al Hadabi and Maryam Al Riyami, who used modern technical capabilities to store and disseminate musical heritage.

With various existing musical archives and plenty of audiovisual recordings of local musical performances and dance, the Omani archivists have also faced the challenge of accurate, careful data migration. This aspect of archive preservation and modernisation is sensitive in many countries, with common problems of obsolete hardware maintenance, responsible file encryption and compression, and the need to consider a lack of backward compatibility (Besser 2000, 165; Chen 2001, 24). Day (1997) was one of the data migration pioneers who touched upon the concerns of data migration and proposed adding metadata to each file to avoid critical data losses. The international archivist community still makes hardware and software choices, file formatting and digital format translation (Beaudoin 2012; Brocks et al. 2009, 197; Faniel and Yakel 2011, 157). Here, the comment of Musallam Al Kathiri about trained archivists acting like scientists with diligence and rigour and Al Kindi's hopes for creating a nationwide Omani database with text-based and content-based search options reveal the pressing technical issues that archivists encounter in various aspects of their activities.

Other technical hardships that Emad Al Baharani mentioned in the interviews are the technical capabilities of archives and their protection from destruction. These issues are commonplace for archives worldwide, with the pressure to manage technological obsolescence discussed by reputable archives (British Library 2023; Smithsonian Institution Archives 2023). Research also suggests that Omani archives preserving the elements of the living tradition are not immune to threats posed by the lack of resources and technological changes (Baker and Collins 2016). These ideas are consonant with the reports of Al Zajdali and Al-Sayyid Said Al Busaidi, who noted the lack of training for archivists to deal with old-format materials and a pronounced shortage of technical resources for accurate data handling.

In technical terms, the most vulnerable category of materials are audiovisual records. Istvandity (2021, 331) emphasised that the highest risk is audiovisual materials because of their physical perishability and vulnerability to improper storage conditions. This limitation can pose a real hazard to Omani musical archives because, according to Wosinski (2022, 2), GCC countries, including Oman, face problems with ICH preservation because of high software and recording equipment costs, insufficient financing and lack of technical expertise. The comment of Ahmed Al Zadjali is notable in this regard, with the archivist complaining of the poor quality of some archive recordings that prevents discerning the type of musical instrument used. Therefore, the calls of Khalfan Al Barwnai and Emad Al Baharani for more archivist training, careful data migration, accurate archive material description and digitisation stand out as the most significant challenges the Omani ICH safeguarding community has to address in the near future.

7.4.2. Modernisation Challenges

Another distinct barrier to ICH safeguarding in the form of a living practice is modernisation and globalisation, which produce varied effects on traditional crafts and cultural practices. As Eichler (2020, 43) pointed out, many musical practices die out because the bearers of traditions cannot pass down their knowledge to younger generations (urban migration, disinterest of young people). Gwerende and Mthombeni (2023, 399) also noted that urbanisation, international tourism, mass media, and worldwide information networks undermined cultural practices' resilience and promoted rapid social, cultural and economic transformation incompatible with traditional lifestyles Sami Al Hadabi and Maryam Al Riyami confirmed that opinion by noting that these practices are less relevant to modern people's lives, with young people moving to cities and not engaging in local community's musical practices anymore.

As usual in the discussion of authentic cultural heritage, the issue of Western influences stood out as a significant factor causing the centuries-long Omani musical tradition to evolve. Oman as a state and Oman's influential ruler, Sultan Qaboos,

were heavily influenced by Western tradition, so the country's cultural politics of modernism could not but affect the ICH archiving efforts. The interviewees' opinions were divided in terms of the negativity or positivity of those influences, with Youssef Al Rasbi denying any possibility of combining the Omani and Western musical traditions and Jameila Al Makusi saying that Western music is already part and parcel of modern musical practice in Oman. Mr Al Masrorri also cautioned against over-reliance on modern devices and Western musical trends because of the fear that Omanis can quickly forget their heritage and traditions.

Finally, a modernisation-related challenge for the ICH safeguarding sphere is the gradual commercialisation of Omani music and the increasing involvement of outsourced musical talent to compensate for the shortage of qualified staff in Oman. However, with these outsourced roles in music production come international influences, which make Omani music different. The problem was discussed by Vilotijevic (2019, 165), who said that ICH archivisation is inevitably affected by the modern, evolving forms of musical tradition and makes it hard to distinguish the original musical performances from tourist-focused, commercial forms of music production. This issue was extensively covered by Mohammed Al Masrorri, who talked about the changing face of Omani music produced to satisfy commercial demand, and by Sami Al Hadabi and Youssef Al Rasbi, who discussed the practice of hiring foreign musicians by commercial bands and the in-depth evolution of traditional music such decisions cause.

7.5. State and Nation as Heritage Builders

This study uncovered the unique dynamics of nation-building through cultural heritage formation and reinvention in the modern state of Oman. I have managed to evaluate many perspectives of this process's participants throughout my research, and what strikes me is the largely shared consensus on the role of music in shaping the modern Omani nation. Prioritisation of unique Omani ICH, such as music and dance, shows that both officials and grassroots activists see its strategic role in the process of instilling pride and distinct self-identification among modern Omanis –

elements vital for an emerging nation (Skrzypaszek 2012). I observed a strong emphasis on the image of Oman as *Ruh Al-khalij*, the soul of the Gulf, in the Gulf region, which sets it apart in cultural and heritage terms and makes its unique sounds of music and unique appearance and spirit of dancing exclusively to this state. However, state effort, no matter how well-financed and logically crafted based on modernism ideals, is still an invented tradition with which Omanis cannot fully associate. It is an artificially created cultural politics that shapes a nation according to government-envisioned ideals – not a shared imagining of a community of people based on their mutual ideal about identity and place. For this reason, state archivisation efforts have become disjointed from the social nation-building dynamics, reflecting only the state-held ideas and values that a nation can hardly associate with natural, everyday self-expressions.

Yet, music is an essential element of national self-expression and self-determination, as it is a significant element of broader cultural heritage. ICH raises social cohesion through shared ownership, so the Omani cultural heritage, including music, is a building block for the Omani national identity. For the state, it consolidates state power and supports stable, peaceful social development. For the nation, it reflects their shared identity, values and history and gives a sense of belonging to Oman. Therefore, the emergence of the grassroots archival movement is a sure sign of reclaiming the cultural and national hybridity that has long been neglected in cultural and political advancement by the Qaboos government. No matter how well-meaning and economically beneficial it was, a nation as old and multi-faceted as Oman cannot match the narrow cultural policy set by Sultan Qaboos. The rise of local voices, amplified and disseminated with grassroots efforts and modern technology, is thus a natural supplement to the official cultural discourse and a great opportunity for more coherent Omani national identity formation and self-expression.

I see a lack of understanding of regional musical traditions among Omanis as a major bottleneck to nationhood formation, according to many interviewees I talked to. Historical awareness and the ability to understand the roots of modern ICH play

a pronounced role in shaping modern nationhood with proper accounts of Omani culture. That's why I see the multi-vocal, hybrid musical ICH that starts shaping in Oman today as a great tool for reinforcing a shared identity among Omanis, giving them a better idea of their unique heritage and providing a rich base for national pride. Regardless of the degree of attention given to these elements in the official musical ICH archiving efforts, they are undeniably part and parcel of Omani music, as everyone knows.

One more observation from my research is the tension between Omani ICH archivisation and preservation of the old, original form versus openness to the modern dynamics and changes in the Omani community. On the one hand, archivists claim that it is vital to archive the authentic Omani ICH in its original form to preserve authenticity and tradition. On the other hand, modern musical practitioners are growing more accepting of the modern trends that influence the modern Omani identity. This way, while MENAFN (2019) experts advocate focusing on the protection and preservation of original Omani ICH for the promotion of Omani citizenship values, some of the interviewees of this study noted their keen interest in modern performances at the Muscat festival, Al Flayj Castle theatre and Salalah's Al Morooj Theatre where they are presented to new faces of Omani music and modern interpretations of traditional songs. Thus, preserving the old versus being open to the new seems to be far from decided in Oman. In any case, openness to new musical performances, genres and interpretations does not diminish the role of tradition and the importance of capturing and safeguarding it in the face of modern challenges, such as massive urbanisation, young people's migration to large cities and rising disinterest and disengagement from authentic musical traditions' learning.

With all these findings in mind, I want to emphasise the importance of community involvement and partnership between governmental entities and Omanis for adequate, non-limiting and non-biased national heritage building through music. Ethnomusicological enquiries allow researchers like me to tap deeper into context-based musical expressions in all contexts and at all levels of the nation's existence,

uncovering the Omani society's true hybridity that gives a deserved voice to the state, nation, music practitioners and archivists in between. Archiving held by the government cannot be considered complete, as it reflects only one part of the Omani musical heritage, and grassroots archivists add the missing part of the puzzle by capturing the dynamic audience and musician sentiment and presenting Omani music as a living process, not an artefact or product. Therefore, giving local archivists a role in this process is a proactive step towards nationhood reinforcement. These musical archives can also play a role in the identity formation that currently takes place, with every Omani getting a role in that process and being able to contribute.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

8.1 Reflection of the Research Objectives

With Omani ICH being at the forefront of heritage preservation efforts, there is a growing need to explore how ICH preservation goes and what forces drive it in this country. The lack of research from the ethnomusicology perspective prompted an investigation of the process of ICH preservation from policymaking and practical and community angles. I aimed to examine the motivations and meaning-making of key stakeholders involved in this process, including government officials, institutional archive-makers and grassroots archive-makers, to understand how they make sense of their work and contribute to guarding traditional music. I used an ethnographic approach to achieve these goals and combined different methods, including in-depth interviewing, observations, archival studies and document analysis.

My main findings are that institutional archivists perform important work in terms of ICH preservation by setting overarching goals for ICH safeguarding efforts, running large archives, and popularising traditional music, among other things. However, there are some blind spots in their work, such as the limited links to communities where ICH exists as a living tradition, as well as the lack of attention to the diversity of Omani ICH. Grassroots archivists have identified these gaps and successfully filled them in due to their connection to local communities and greater freedom in choosing what to archive and how. They also add to understandings of heritage in specific ways, approaching it as a vibrant, diverse, living tradition that exists first and foremost as part of everyday community life.

These findings started to emerge as I began my work by analysing government policy documents, Sultan Qaboos' contribution, and the *2040 Oman Vision* to understand better how ICH preservation is understood on the state level and what priorities, narratives, and processes are at the forefront. Later on, my conversations with institutional archive-makers helped me determine how these

policies are interpreted and what specific approaches institutional actors use to preserve ICH. I found that representatives of the Omani government, specifically institutional archive-makers, approach ICH as part of the national strategy of social homogenisation, nation-building and economic development, which aligns with the Oman Vision 2040. Understood in this way, ICH is actively preserved by the government, which perceives it as an essential tool for forming the national identity and an economic tool attracting more tourists. I discovered immense progress that the Omani government has made in creating the legal and policy framework for ICH preservation, which aligns with international guidelines and best practices as promoted by UNESCO. Institutional archivists demonstrate high professionalism due to their academic training, knowledge of sophisticated recording and methodical cataloguing, and overall knowledge of Omani ICH and its historical and cultural roots. Thus, my research demonstrated that much effort has been recently directed at conceptualising, reviving and archiving the Omani ICH as a cornerstone of the state's modern nation-building.

However, the examination of the official approach to ICH preservation also led me to some worrying conclusions. While it is difficult not to acknowledge the immense contribution made by institutional archivists to musical heritage preservation, their work remains selective and arbitrary, treating ICH as a product. Moreover, their work, albeit rather comprehensive, rigorous and methodical, does not always reflect the diversity of Omani ICH, which is far more complex than government policies suggest. Various stakeholders engaged in ICH preservation approach the task from different angles, thus exposing the fundamental differences in the conceptualisation of ICH and what ICH varieties should be given a voice in the overall process. There is a significant lack of representation for non-mainstream musical genres, with regional musical traditions being largely absent in the governmental efforts. This gap is particularly striking in Muscat's educational and cultural institutions' agendas, which do not appear inclusive. This problem raises concerns as to the degree to which all sociocultural groups in Oman are represented within the official framework of ICH protection. Thus, the study demonstrated that

institutional archives do not accurately represent Oman's rich and complex cultural history, pointing to the gap in practice that needs to be addressed. In many ways, institutional archives remain reactive rather than proactive in their approach to ICH collection and sharing, which is another important limitation that disconnects them from communities. Institutional missions, government policies and limited connection to the local communities restrict government-funded archive-makers, who engage mostly in ICH collection, categorisation and protection.

This is where grassroots archivists step in to fill the identified gaps, emerging as a response to institutional archives' limitations in capturing the complexity and diversity of the living musical tradition that is closely embedded in Omani communities' everyday lives. The development of the grassroots archivisation movement was driven by Omanis' genuine interest in the ICH and their willingness to reflect the nation's complexity. As such, grassroots archives became meaning-makers that define traditional music in Oman, expanding the boundaries of what is considered valuable for preservation and covering a wider array of musical traditions. In a way, they de-monopolise the state power to shape an understanding of ICH, making its preservation more egalitarian and democratic. The findings also demonstrate that grassroots archivists became a much-needed link between the state and the nation by de-centralising ICH definition, preservation, and celebration. Their striking ability to complement institutional efforts, e.g., by facilitating community-level education around ICH, as opposed to more academic, organised learning activities permitted by institutional ICH archives, is another reason why grassroots archives in Oman deserve more attention as a relatively new but fast-developing sociocultural phenomenon. This finding explain the mystery of the factors driving the emergence of the grassroots archives which was one of the most intriguing gaps guiding this research, as there have been no scholarly studies so far to shed light on this cultural phenomenon.

It has been found that although grassroots archive-makers have limited decision-making roles, they are free to create their understanding of Omani heritage,

guarding its connection to daily lives and social relationships. In this way, they approach archives proactively, as Edmonson (2004) suggested. They rescue diverse musical traditions and genres that gain less attention from state-funded archivists. Their engagement in spreading, celebrating and popularising these diverse traditions is particularly valuable because they approach them as a living tradition and proof of the country's rich past. By utilising advanced technology and social media, they allow local communities to celebrate and popularise their traditional music within their own constructed narratives of identity rather than those imposed by the government. Moreover, grassroots archivists have a close relationship with the communities in which ICH exists as a living tradition, so they are more aware of nuances, variations and cultural roots of traditional music that exist inseparably from social life. Even though grassroots archivists might lack the resources of institutional archivists, their access to the living tradition and their connection to communities where traditional music is reproduced make them extremely valuable for ICH preservation.

That said, the differences in ICH archivisation priorities between the stakeholders, which emerged during this study, make sense as they originate from a different understanding of ICH as such. Compared to government officials who promote a mainstream, government-approved ICH agenda through staged performances and showcasing pre-approved musical and dance products, grassroots musicians and archivists celebrate cultural heterogeneity, regional diversity and the richness of musical genres that often skip the officials' attention. They practice music not for preservation purposes but to enrich their social lives, which reflects their more intimate relationship with Omani ICH.

The research also revealed some practical archivisation challenges. For example, technical issues such as the digitalisation of the content have been raised in the study. Transferring ICH from old formats into digital ones is an important part of ICH work to make archives more sustainable, searchable and informative. However, it requires proper training, time, and technical resources, so digitalisation

progresses slower than expected. Decontextualisation of musical content is another challenge, as Omani ICH becomes increasingly detached from the social and cultural contexts in which it was originally produced (e.g., music traditionally performed during social events is now performed at festivals or concerts). It creates difficulties for archive-makers seeking to differentiate between traditional styles and practices and more modern, transformed ones. In addition, legal restrictions caused by intellectual property rights cause access problems and hinder a wider use of archives in the musical industry, entertainment, education, etc.

In addition, both grassroots and professional archive-makers are at risk of bias when they decide what material to collect and catalogue. Personal preferences, knowledge and training limitations, technological issues, lack of information and other problems may impede objective decision-making. In addition, it takes much training and experience to navigate the nuances of tribal and regional variations in Omani ICH and recognise and appreciate their academic and musicology value. Decision-making remains challenging, contradictory and ambiguous, as there are unresolved issues regarding what heritage deserves attention and how to locate the cultural and historical roots of ICH elements.

Furthermore, the dissertation exposed the differences in the utilisation of archives by showing that institutional archives' use is mainly restricted to educational and research purposes, whereas grassroots efforts are more egalitarian, accessible, and focused on celebrating ICH as a living tradition. Due to the structure, organisation and access rules of institutional archives, people who use them require knowledge and specialised training to take advantage of their collections. In turn, grassroots archives are more 'pluralistic' in this regard, as they can be accessed and used by everyone having access to the Internet. They also engage the public more meaningfully by giving people a sense of belonging to the living tradition as they watch, listen, like and comment on the published ICH. In light of the discussion presented above, I consider that the second research objective was achieved, as the study demonstrated that institutional and grassroots archivists contribute to ICH

preservation by balancing, complementing and supporting each other's efforts. As a result, Omani ICH is preserved in a top-down and bottom-up way.

Lastly, I uncovered the challenges of constructing nationhood through ICH in a culturally diverse country and determined how well the Omani government had managed it, particularly since the 1970s, when massive reforms of Sultan Qaboos formed the modern state as it is known today. Omani officials approached ICH as an element of nation-building and reproduced narratives fixed within specific documents and policies. In line with these policies established by Sultan Qaboos and his officials, musical tradition encompassed in educational programmes is believed to contribute to the ICH continuation and survival and, as such, the survival of the unique Omani identity. However, the research raises concerns about the non-inclusivity and politicisation of cultural heritage and imbalances in terms of what is chosen for preservation. I found that the legacy of smaller tribes and cultures, such as the Al-Dakhil culture, the Al-Sharqui culture and the Ras Musandam culture, does not receive proper attention from policymakers. They seem to lack an understanding of how complex and diverse Omani ICH is and what risks their policies of creating a homogeneous citizenry pose to this heritage.

Grassroots archivists and musicians approach the mission of nationhood construction and preservation from the bottom up, thus acknowledging the variety and diversity of Omani ICH. For them, it is a natural process of celebrating Omani music as it is without attaching it to economic or political objectives. They approach traditional music as an opportunity to discover and develop their cultural and personal identities by helping traditional music remain part of their daily social life. Thus, ICH archiving is less policy-driven and restricted for them, as they are closer to the voices of the communities they belong to and can help them be heard and recognised. However, practising musicians and archivists raised the problem of the growing commercialisation of Omani musical practices, which sometimes deviate from the centuries-old tradition. Although traditional music cannot stagnate, their concerns are worth attention because they suggest the need to build a sound

archival base to document Omani heritage before it becomes irreversibly modified by urbanisation, globalisation, and commercialisation trends.

Another issue raised in this paper concerns the diversity of Omani cultural heritage, which originates from the country's geographical, cultural, ethnic and social conditions. This diversity has centuries-long roots and should be preserved more effectively because there is a risk of approaching ICH as a homogeneous construct rather than a mix of different musical traditions that can contribute to nation-building only if their value is recognised. One of the problems this study exposed was that the 'inconvenient' past is often silenced and stifled, resulting in specific elements of musical heritage being ignored, at least on the government level. This is seen in how African roots in Omani ICH are understudied and unrecognised by many policymakers and even some institutional archivists. Musicians and grassroots archivists were found to be more willing to give this legacy more attention, which is reasonable given the immense effect the African musical tradition has had on Omani music.

Finally, the process of nationhood construction is bound to change as Oman becomes increasingly modernised. Old lifestyles, social practices and economic relations are disappearing or evolving to find their place in modern Oman. Participants in this study acutely realise that ICH may change its role and value due to this process and are concerned about the risks of some elements of ICH disappearing. However, they also recognise that the current effort at preserving it will greatly help safeguard the unique Omani identity, so the commitment to ICH protection is high among all stakeholders. The role of grassroots archivists and musicians is hard to overestimate in this context, as they help Omani ICH remain a living tradition, reminding people of who they are. Institutional archivists, grassroots archivists, musicians and policymakers must collaborate more meaningfully to ensure that ICH remains a living cultural artefact rather than an irrelevant part of the country's past frozen in archives.

8.2 Significance/Contribution of the Study

This study sought to address the identified gap in the literature by providing a comprehensive account of the existing ICH preservation policies, processes and practices used by institutional and grassroots archivists in Oman. To my knowledge, it was the first attempt to analyse and compare the perspectives of different stakeholders on Omani ICH preservation and archive-making. In this way, the study advances the existing knowledge on ICH preservation in Oman, uncovering the strengths and limitations of this process and revealing areas that require further policymaking, research, training and technical support.

Furthermore, much of what has been written on Omani ICH is examined through the lens of *Oman Vision 2040*. While this document is indeed crucial for understanding the process of traditional music preservation, this study showed that a significant part of the work is performed by grassroots archivists whose activities remain outside the government-controlled ICH preservation agenda. Thus, the study contributed to the literature by acknowledging the value of grassroots archives in safeguarding Omani ICH and, hopefully, encouraging further research.

Furthermore, the study has practical significance for celebrating, popularising, and archiving Omani traditional music. By analysing the contribution of different stakeholder groups, the study may help archive-makers better understand their role in guarding ICH and possibly expand their outreach by trying new techniques or stepping outside government policies. I also had the honour of expanding my practical contribution by becoming a member of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee at the Ministry. This position was granted to me after my ethnomusicology research was recognised. This Committee aims to present new ideas regarding the intangible cultural heritage of Oman, organise events and conferences, and conduct research closely on an ongoing basis. As a result, my work went much more clearly into the field of applied ethnomusicology.

My practical contribution also includes exploring how the school music curriculum can be enhanced to include more elements of Omani ICH. While working

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at the Ministry's Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee, I had the chance to meet Omani curriculum developers in schools. I discussed the current status of the Omani music curriculum and why many of the intangible Omani cultural heritage elements are not added. The existing curriculum, which the Ministry of Education strongly regulates, is dominated by a Western-imposed understanding of musical education, detrimentally affecting the popularisation of rich musical heritage and threatening its long-term survival. As a result, knowledge about specific elements of Omani ICH, particularly concerning small cultural groups and rarely used instruments, is transmitted in families rather than schools. I brainstormed with the team for more than four hours about how to develop the school's music curriculums and gradually add many ICH elements.

Finally, I also had a chance to contribute practically to ethnomusicology due to my role at the university. Specifically, I could also share what I am researching and studying in depth through Oman Radio and Sultanate of Oman TV, which expanded my network of informants, as many people were eager to contact me. Many wanted to know the difference between the institutional and grassroots archives. My position in the field was somewhat ambiguous, as I was essentially exposed to two potentially conflicting positions: on the one hand, I was a researcher who sought to retain her external judgement, while on the other, I was part of a state institution with its agenda. Thankfully, I was not placed in a position where I had to choose between my different loyalties, as the Ministry never pressured me to represent (or not represent) Omani ICH in a certain way. Thus, I take pride in preserving the integrity and objectivity of my research and my practical contribution to the field.

In addition, the study has methodological significance, as it advances the existing research on Omani ICH by utilising various sources within the limits of ethnographic inquiry. Existing studies on the topic are valuable for setting the background for exploring Omani musical heritage, but they do not pay sufficient attention to analysing and comparing how different stakeholders approach ICH (Al-

Harthy and Rasmussen 2012; Ulaby 2012). There is also a methodological gap in primary data, with studies mostly focusing on literature, policy analysis, or historical research. The present study demonstrates that by combining various data sources, such as in-depth interviews, observations, archive research and document and policy analysis, one can gain a much deeper understanding of the forces driving archive-making efforts in Oman. The use of multiple data sources, particularly the involvement of policymakers, musicians and institutional and grassroots archivists, helped explore the topic from the perspectives of different stakeholders, which was essential for revealing the fundamental differences in how ICH is understood and preserved.

The study also demonstrated the value of attending cultural and social events and immersing oneself in community life to understand how ICH is negotiated and preserved. Intangible heritage, such as traditional music, can be examined in all its diversity and completeness when encountered in social settings that endow it with meaning. In this way, the study confirms the findings of Curran and Radhakrishnan (2021), who argued that the holistic and inclusive focus of ethnography can help researchers make the communities and musicians be heard, recognised and respected for their culturally distinct legacies. This study revealed a much more complex traditional music heritage than it is often depicted in mainstream Omani policymaking and research, so the methodological choice was justified. Moreover, the given study showed that the value of ethnographic research for musicology comes from a unique vantage point, allowing key stakeholders such as musical practitioners to express their positions and responses to government-controlled ICH preservation narratives.

Finally, the research has theoretical significance by applying Edmonson's (2004) concept of proactive archiving to better understand the contribution of grassroots archives to Omani heritage preservation as a living tradition. The existing research on Omani ICH lacks theoretical insights, so I made an important step towards examining the topic through the theoretical lens, which may advance

knowledge and provide the impetus for further, more theoretically sound explorations. Future research should apply and test other theories, which may help reveal previously unrecognised themes and issues overlooked in ethnomusicology research, particularly in the Omani setting.

8.3 Recommendations for Practice

Based on the obtained findings, I formulated recommendations for archivists and policymakers. It is important to note that only the collaborative effort of all stakeholders will lead to significant improvements in ICH preservation, as they need to combine resources, knowledge and expertise to act more systematically, sustainably and with deep respect for Omani cultural diversity.

8.3.1 Recommendations for Archive-Makers

Institutional archivists need to build closer ties with local communities because it affects the effectiveness of their work and the scope and richness of ICH they collect. By including representatives of local communities in the archivisation process, they can contribute to a better understanding of Omani heritage as a value per se, without seeing it through the lens of government policies or Western perceptions of music. Close collaboration with amateur archivists and local musicians may also help institutional workers to expand their knowledge and understanding of culturally diverse musical practices that currently skip their attention.

Institutional and grassroots archivists may adopt each other's practices in collecting, recording, analysing and storing ICH. For example, institutional archive-makers can learn much from their grassroots colleagues' engagement in community life and discover new ways of connecting to the culture reflected in traditional music. They can also benefit greatly from adopting social media tools to give access to their collections to a wider audience so that Omani ICH remains a living tradition rather than a mere object of research and analysis. Grassroots archivists, in turn, can adopt more methodical and scientific approaches to organising their collections, increasing

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their academic and cultural value and improving their sustainability and transferability.

One of the ways to support grassroots archive-makers in their work is to organise educational events where they can communicate with professional archivists, expand their knowledge of archivisation practices and techniques and visit institutional archives. Such events can become platforms for sharing knowledge, experience and aspirations and building bridges between institutional archive-making and amateur ICH preservation. They can also help government-affiliated archivists remain informed about what ICH efforts are performed locally and what areas require their support and attention. For example, grassroots archivists may raise concerns about some musical practices that skip institutional attention disappearing, which may help initiate a timely response.

Finally, this study showed that part of Omani ICH is overlooked because of the lack of knowledge and awareness and the rigid governmental policies prioritising mainstream music elements with economic and ideological value. Therefore, institutional and grassroots archivists should also expand the focus of their archive-making efforts to include musical traditions that are less popular or less recognised in the official policies, particularly the legacy of small cultural and ethnic groups and African music. This would enrich the existing archives and prevent dying musical practices and elements from diving into oblivion.

8.3.2 Recommendations for Policymakers and Government Officials

The study found that traditional music does not receive proper attention in the school musical curriculum and that music education is detached from the living tradition, so it is recommended to gradually include more ICH elements in musical education for all age groups. Policymakers must collaborate with archivists and musicians to develop a school curriculum encompassing the ICH of major and smaller ethnic and cultural groups living in Oman. Among other things, the curriculum may encompass regular visits to musical and cultural events where students can connect with traditional music on a personal level and observe how it is performed

and in what contexts. More importantly, a people-centred and place-focused approach to education should be adopted, which will help promote wider inclusion and diversity and create value for diverse communities with unique ICH. This means that a broad range of stakeholders should be involved in ICH education and that the curriculum should be modified to consider local ICH practices and traditions. Moreover, the ultimate objective of music education should be driven by the needs and benefits brought to communities, which means that the top-down approach to curriculum development should be reconsidered. In this way, curriculum modification will help traditional music remain a living tradition and partly address the problem of the breakage of social bonds and impeded passing of knowledge from older to younger generations. These efforts align with government policies and narratives about ICH being a key element of the national identity and should be welcomed by all stakeholders, irrespective of their varying values and priorities.

There is also a need to reconsider the current understanding of Omani musical heritage and include musical elements of smaller cultural and ethnic groups in it. Future policies concerning ICH preservation need to be developed in collaboration with scholars, researchers and bearers of the living tradition to ensure that intangible heritage is not confused with mainstream musical culture, which is greatly affected by the powers of globalisation and Westernisation. Policymakers also need to change the approach to safeguarding ICH and avoid placing its worth on economic or political value.

Furthermore, the process of transferring grassroots archives to institutional ones should be developed for those activists who, for some reason, can no longer sustain grassroots archives. This will ensure the sustainability of collected material, which may be easily lost if stored online and on social media.

It is recommended that debates be initiated regarding the development of legal rules guiding Omani music archives' functioning, as legal restrictions currently limit a wider public's access to archives and may create difficulties for using ICH for educational and entertainment purposes. Consultations with legal professionals may

help fine-tune intellectual property rights (IPR) with the unique cultural milieu within which Omani music thrives. Further collaboration with UNESCO experts is needed to keep up with the latest recommendations regarding proper ICH preservation. Their expertise may help Omani policymakers use best practices and innovations to make ICH archiving efficient. Moreover, close ties with UNESCO benefit Oman's reputation, as they may draw more attention to its unique musical heritage from international tourists and musicians. Given that the Omani government is interested in preserving ICH partly because of its economic value, one may expect a significant commitment to partnerships with UNESCO.

8.4 Research Limitations

The present study focused on music and musical ICH preservation. Other forms of ICH, particularly those connected to music (e.g., traditional dance and rituals), were not examined. Moreover, this study focused on the Omani ICH, but throughout this research, I found many common musical elements, such as musical instruments and styles, used across the wider Gulf area. Investigating these fell outside this study's scope, so I did not dwell much on how traditional music evolved across this larger region. In addition, the study revealed the impact of commercialisation processes and tourism on Omani ICH. However, the perspectives of people consuming traditional music by attending musical concerts and festivals or following grassroots archivists on social media were not considered.

8.5 Recommendations for Further Research

Given the limitations stated in the previous section, the following recommendations might be considered. Future studies may examine how other forms of ICH are preserved, what challenges this process entails, and what stakeholders keep them alive. Such research is essential for the Ethnomusicology field as well because the protection of other forms of ICH inevitably affects musical

practices. For instance, if knowledge of how a traditional dance is performed is lost, the accompanying music would also disappear.

It is recommended to conduct more research to explore the common factors that affected the development of the musical tradition in Gulf countries is recommended. These may include but are not limited to the legacy of imperialism, shared religious beliefs and practices, and tribalism. This research may reveal some interesting interrelations, previously unrecognised cultural synergies and historical processes that might have affected the living musical tradition. Such research would require more resources and incorporating historical and comparative methods into the analysis.

Furthermore, I was fascinated by the richness and complexity of the Omani musical heritage, which deserves a closer analysis that could not be performed due to this study's narrow scope. Therefore, more attention should be given to the unique characteristics of ICH of separate ethnic groups, including Arabs, the Hyderabadi peoples, the Baluchis, the Zanzibaris, the Luwātī, Bayāsira, Persians and Jat Indians. Ethnographic research might help scholars better understand how ICH exists within these groups, what specific threats it faces, and what role it occupies in preserving their cultural identities. This further research is crucial for addressing one of the major limitations of the current archive-making process in Oman, which was found to be very Arab-centric.

It is also recommended to investigate how the general public, including locals and international tourists, perceive ICH and what it means to them. These people may not be at the forefront of the archive-making process, but they have a massive effect on how traditional music evolves, what parts are celebrated more, and how it is represented in society and media. This study showed that grassroots archivists consider the public's tastes when they collect and post the ICH material, so knowing what this public thinks may advance the findings presented in this study. Thus, their insights may help look at ICH preservation from a new angle.

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Finally, future research may look into archive-making practices in other countries. It may be useful to examine how archivists in different cultural and political settings approach ICH preservation, their methods and strategies, and whether these are effective. Ireland may be an interesting point of comparison due to its rich musical tradition but a completely different cultural, political and social background. It may be particularly valuable to investigate the work of archivists and policymakers in culturally diverse countries and regions with the colonial past, whose experience in safeguarding different cultural legacies may translate to Oman. These include but are not limited to the Caribbean and African countries, which boast ICH formed by a melting pot of cultures, ethnicities and languages. In this way, researchers may develop practical recommendations for Omani decision-makers and archivists based on existing best practices.

8.5 Conclusion

This study is the first academic attempt at uncovering the nuances of ICH preservation in Oman from the perspective of the key stakeholders, including institutional and grassroots archivists, musicians, and everyone who admires traditional music. The findings reveal immense efforts made at recording, preserving, and popularising ICH on all levels while at the same time exposing the remaining challenges, particularly in terms of inclusion and diversity. Given the immense role of ICH in national identity construction in modern Oman, it is vital to unite efforts to safeguard and celebrate the country's unique ICH. Hopefully, this research will become a stimulus driving more comprehensive state policies in this area and wider collaborations across institutions, communities, and archivists.

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