



## A Mirror of Saudi Social Reform: An Analysis of Haifa al-Mansour's Film "Wadjda" Tzvetan Todorov's Narrative Theory

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Received: 19-11-2024

Revised: 03-02-2025

Accepted: 05-02-2025

### Abstract

The film *Wadjda* by Haifaa al-Mansour is a cinematic work that portrays the struggles of a young girl in Saudi Arabia as she navigates rigid social norms. In recent decades, Saudi Arabian society has undergone various social reforms aimed at redefining the role of women, including easing restrictions on education and social participation. This context is significant to analyze, as films often serve as a medium that reflects and critiques ongoing social dynamics. This study aims to explore how the film reflects the ongoing social reforms within Saudi society. Tzvetan Todorov's narrative theory outlines five stages: equilibrium, disruption, recognition, resolution, and new equilibrium. The method used is narrative analysis with a qualitative approach. Data were collected through observation of narrative elements in the film and analyzed based on Todorov's five stages. The analysis process includes identifying the initial equilibrium, the disruption faced by the main character, the recognition of the arising situation, efforts to remedy it, and the achievement of a new equilibrium. The results show that *Wadjda* begins with an equilibrium, where *Wadjda* lives a typical everyday life. Disruption occurs when *Wadjda* expresses a desire to buy a bicycle, which conflicts with gender norms in her society. Recognition of this challenge drives *Wadjda* to pursue her dream, ultimately leading to a positive shift in societal views on women. Through Todorov's narrative analysis, it becomes evident that the film effectively illustrates how small changes can spark discussions on women's rights and individual freedom within a conservative cultural context. This study contributes to the academic discourse on the intersection between narrative structures and social reform by providing a case study that applies Todorov's theory to Arabic cinema. It also highlights the significance of *Wadjda* as a cultural artifact that reflects evolving gender norms in Saudi Arabia, thereby enriching the understanding of how media serves as a lens for societal transformation. Despite its insights, this study is limited in scope as it focuses solely on *Wadjda* without comparative analysis with other films addressing similar themes. Additionally, the study does not consider audience reception, which could provide a deeper understanding of the film's societal impact. Future research could address these gaps by incorporating comparative studies or exploring the film's reception in both local and global contexts.

**Keywords:** Film *Wadjda*, Narrative Analysis, Saudi Arabian Society, Social Reform, Tzvetan Todorov

### ملخص

فيلم "وجدة" للمخرجة هيفاء المنصور هو عمل سينمائي يصور معاناة فتاة شابة في المملكة العربية السعودية وهي تتنقل بين الأعراف الاجتماعية الصارمة. شهد المجتمع السعودي في العقود الأخيرة إصلاحات اجتماعية متعددة تهدف إلى إعادة تعريف دور المرأة، بما في ذلك تخفيف القيود على التعليم والمشاركة الاجتماعية. وتُعد هذه التحولات سياقًا مهمًا للتحليل، حيث تلعب الأفلام دورًا بارزًا كوسيلة تعكس الديناميكيات الاجتماعية الجارية وتنتقدّها. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف كيف يعكس الفيلم الإصلاحات الاجتماعية الجارية داخل المجتمع السعودي. تحدد النظرية السردية لتزفيتان تودوروف خمس مراحل هي: التوازن، والاضطراب، والاعتراف، والحل، والتوازن الجديد. المنهج المستخدم هو التحليل السردى بمنهج نوعي. تم جمع البيانات من خلال ملاحظة العناصر السردية في الفيلم وتحليلها استنادًا إلى مراحل تودوروف الخمس. وتتضمن عملية التحليل تحديد التوازن الأولي، والاضطراب الذي

واجهته الشخصية الرئيسية، والاعتراف بالوضع الناشئ، والجهود المبذولة لعلاجها، وتحقيق توازن جديد. تُظهر النتائج أن وجدة تبدأ بتوازن أولي، حيث تعيش وجدة حياة يومية نموذجية. يحدث الاضطراب عندما تعبر وجدة عن رغبتها في شراء دراجة، وهو ما يتعارض مع المعايير الجندرية في مجتمعها. يدفع إدراك هذا التحدي وجدة إلى تحقيق حلمها، مما يؤدي في النهاية إلى تحول إيجابي في نظرة المجتمع إلى المرأة. من خلال تحليل تودوروف السرد، يتضح أن الفيلم يوضح بشكل فعال كيف يمكن للتغيرات الصغيرة أن تثير نقاشات حول حقوق المرأة والحرية الفردية في سياق ثقافي محافظ. تُبرز هذه الدراسة دور فيلم وجدة في عكس الإصلاحات الاجتماعية ومكانة المرأة المتغيرة في المجتمع السعودي، مما يُساهم في فهم التحولات السردية والثقافية في السينما العربية. ويمكن أن تتوسع الأبحاث المستقبلية من خلال تحليل موضوعات مشابهة في أفلام أخرى أو دراسة تأثير الخيارات اللغوية على الهوية الثقافية والمعايير الاجتماعية. تساهم هذه الدراسة في إثراء النقاش الأكاديمي حول العلاقة بين البنية السردية والإصلاحات الاجتماعية من خلال تقديم نموذج تطبيقي لنظرية تودوروف على السينما العربية. كما تسلط الضوء على دور فيلم وجدة كعمل ثقافي يعكس التغيرات المتنامية في أدوار النساء داخل المجتمع السعودي، مما يعزز فهم دور وسائل الإعلام كأداة تعكس التحولات الاجتماعية. ومع ذلك، تقتصر هذه الدراسة على تحليل فيلم وجدة فقط دون إجراء مقارنات مع أفلام أخرى تتناول قضايا مشابهة. علاوة على ذلك، لم تتطرق الدراسة إلى تحليل استجابة الجمهور، وهو ما قد يساهم في تقديم رؤية أعمق حول تأثير الفيلم على المجتمع. لذلك، يمكن أن تركز الدراسات المستقبلية على سد هذه الفجوات من خلال إجراء مقارنات مع أعمال سينمائية أخرى أو دراسة استقبال الفيلم على المستويين المحلي والدولي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الإصلاح الاجتماعي، فيلم وجدة، تزفيتان تودوروف، تحليل سردي، المجتمع السعودي

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## Introduction

Social reform in Saudi Arabian society has become an increasingly relevant topic as changes have taken place in the last decade.<sup>1</sup> Haifaa al-Mansour's *Wadjda* is one such work of art that manages to capture these dynamics with great depth. *Wadjda*, released in 2012, is not only the first film directed by a Saudi woman but also symbolizes the struggle of women and marginalized groups to find their place amidst the ongoing social changes in the country. Through the simple story of a little girl struggling to own a bicycle, al-Mansour depicts various aspects of ongoing social reforms, including changes in gender roles, increased access to education, and challenges to patriarchal norms long rooted in Saudi culture.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Daffa Agussandy Ikhsan, Ida Putri, and Zakiya Darajat, "Reformasi Arab Saudi di Masa Kepemimpinan Faisal Bin Abdul Aziz (1964-1975)," Socio Historica: Journal of Islamic Social History 2, no. 1 (2023): 6–7. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15408/sh.v2i1.29703>

<sup>2</sup> Mazen A. Al-Sinan, Abdulaziz A. Bubshait, and Fatimah Alamri, "Saudi Arabia's Journey toward Net-Zero Emissions: Progress and Challenges," Energies 16, no. 2 (2023): 16. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/en16020978>

Social reform is a process of planned and executed change in social structures and institutions with the aim of improving people's well-being. Social reform can involve changes to public policies, social practices, cultural norms and laws to address injustice, promote equality and create better living conditions for all people. The aim of social reform is to achieve these goals.<sup>3</sup> In recent decades, social reform in Saudi Arabia, especially with regard to women's rights, has become an increasingly important topic. Various policies and legal changes that grant women freedoms and rights, such as the right to drive and participate in elections, are evidence of these reforms.<sup>4</sup> These reforms not only include changes in government policy but also reflect a transformation in the attitudes and culture of Saudi society as a whole.<sup>5</sup>

The most prominent aspect of social reform in Saudi Arabia is the improvement of women's rights. Some important policies that demonstrate this change include: (1) Freedom to drive for women, in June 2018, Saudi Arabia lifted the ban on driving for women. This step is part of efforts to increase women's participation in public life and the economy.<sup>6</sup> (2) Access to education and employment, reforms have also improved women's access to higher education and the job market. According to the Saudi Ministry of Education, women now represent more than 50% of the student population in Saudi universities. In addition, women's participation in the labor force has also seen a significant increase. (3) Cancellation of the guardianship system, in 2019, the Saudi government announced major changes in the guardianship system that had restricted women's freedom. This reform allows women to apply for passports, travel abroad, and access government services without the permission of a male guardian.<sup>7</sup> These reforms reflect a major shift in the role and status of women in Saudi society.

Social reform in Saudi Arabia is also seen in the efforts to modernize the legal system. In this case there are 2 modernizations, namely: (1) Domestic Violence Law, in 2013, Saudi Arabia passed a law prohibiting domestic violence. This law provides stronger legal protection for victims of domestic violence, most of whom are women and children. (2) Reforms in the justice system, the Saudi government has also introduced reforms in the justice system to increase transparency and accountability.<sup>8</sup> This includes training for female judges and increasing women's access to the legal system.<sup>9</sup> These measures include the passage of new laws and the revision of existing laws to create a more equitable and inclusive environment.

The Vision 2030 launched by the Saudi government in 2016 includes 2 initiatives to diversify the country's economy and reduce dependence on oil. (1) The development of the tourism sector, is one of the main focuses of Vision 2030. By introducing tourist visas in 2019, Saudi Arabia seeks to

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<sup>3</sup> M Zulifan, "Reposisi Identitas Sosial Perempuan Saudi Pasca Terbitnya Visi Saudi 2030," Nady Al-Adab: Jurnal Bahasa Arab 18, no. 2 (2021): 111–22. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20956/jna.v19i2.23510>

<sup>4</sup> Mega Hardiyanti and Sri Yuniati, "Penjaminan Hak-Hak Perempuan Dalam Visi Saudi Arabia 2030," Journal of Feminism and Gender Studies 1, no. 1 (2021): 1. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.19184/fgs.v1i1.21552>

<sup>5</sup> Cammelianne Typhano Rachmadie and Suryo Ediyono, "Reformasi Sistem Kebudayaan di Arab Saudi Masa Pemerintahan Raja Abdullah (2005-2015)," Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities 2, no. 1 (2017): 41–64. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18326/millati.v2i1.41-64>

<sup>6</sup> Mahmud Hibatul Wafi, "Diskursus Reformasi Arab Saudi: Kontestasi Kerajaan Saudi dan Wahabi," Journal of Islamic World and Politics 2, no. 1 (2018): 4. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18196/jiwp.2113>

<sup>7</sup> Rai Ayu Utami, Salsabila, and Nunung Nurmawati, "Pembaharuan Aturan di Saudi Arabia: Mengungkap Sudut Pandang Agama dan Feminisme," Musawa: Journal for Gender Studies 14, no. 1 (2022): 109–19. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24239/msw.v14i1.461>

<sup>8</sup> Eman Alhalal, Wafa'a Ta'an, and Hani Alhalal, "Intimate Partner Violence in Saudi Arabia: A Systematic Review," Trauma, Violence & Abuse 22, no. 3 (July 2021): 512–26. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838019867156>

<sup>9</sup> Escwa, Ohchr, and IC, "Women in the Judiciary in the Arab States Removing Barriers, Increasing Numbers," 2019. <https://www.unescwa.org/publications/women-judiciary-arab-states-removing-barriers-increasing-numbers>

attract international travelers and create new economic opportunities.<sup>10</sup> 2) Small and medium enterprise empowerment, the Saudi government provides incentives for the development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as part of efforts to broaden the economic base and create new jobs. This includes training programs and funding for SMEs.<sup>11</sup> These reforms have also had a social impact on development in Saudi Arabia.

Film is one of the most effective media to show and encourage social change in society.<sup>12</sup> The movie "Wadjda", directed by Haifa al-Mansour, successfully addresses social issues and reforms society. "Wadjda" is more than just a movie, but a manifesto depicting the desires and struggles of women in Saudi Arabia. The movie tells the story of a young girl named Wadjda who aspires to own a bicycle, which is a symbol of freedom and independence, and it sparked a debate about gender roles and women's rights in Saudi society. Movies have two forming elements, namely narrative elements and cinematic elements. Both are interconnected in forming a movie.<sup>13</sup> The narrative aspect is the chronological structure that builds a story. This aspect focuses on film material related to characterization, dialog, plot, setting, and theme. Cinematic elements are technical aspects such as mise en scene, cinematography, editing, and sound. Simply put, the narrative element is the material to be processed in a movie, while the cinematic element is the way it is processed.<sup>14</sup>

The film Wadjda by Haifaa al-Mansour stands out with its unique narrative structure compared to other Saudi films addressing themes of gender and social reform. Wadjda centers on the personal struggle of a young girl striving to own a bicycle, symbolizing her resistance to the conservative social norms. The film adopts a deeply personal approach, emphasizing the protagonist's emotions and aspirations.<sup>15</sup> This contrasts with films like *Barakah Meets Barakah* by Mahmoud Sabbagh, which uses humor and satire to critique societal restrictions, or *The Perfect Candidate*, which explores the political challenges faced by women from a broader perspective.<sup>16</sup> By focusing on an intimate story, Wadjda delivers a universally relatable social message, particularly in its depiction of women's struggles amidst cultural transitions.

Furthermore, Wadjda employs powerful symbols, such as the bicycle, to represent freedom and equality, enriching its narrative simplicity with profound meaning. Other films, like *The Arabian Warrior*, spotlight challenges in sports, or *Amira*, which delves into themes of identity and social limitations. In contrast, Wadjda integrates social reform themes into a familial and everyday context,

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<sup>10</sup> Anna Zakiah Derajat and Toni Kurniawan, "Saudi Vision 2030 dan Kebijakan Reformasi pada Kerajaan Arab Saudi," Global and Policy Journal of International Relations 9, no. 1 (2021): 39–50. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33005/jgp.v9i1.2465>

<sup>11</sup> Sultan Al-Mohammad and Gareth Butler, "Tourism Sme Stakeholder Perspectives on The Inaugural 'Saudi Seasons': An Exploratory Study of Emerging Opportunities and Challenges," Tourism and Hospitality Management 27, no. 3 (2021): 669–87. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20867/thm.27.3.11>

<sup>12</sup> Erwan Efendi et al., "Peran Media dalam Perubahan Sosial Budaya Masyarakat," Jurnal Ilmiah Wahana Pendidikan 9, no. 3 (2023): 156–63. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7613693>

<sup>13</sup> John Golden, "Introducing Cinematic and Theatrical Elements in Film," 2015, 1–9. <https://dubg8.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/cinematic-techniques-15-pdf.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Rahman Asri, "Membaca Film Sebagai Sebuah Teks: Analisis Isi Film 'Nanti Kita Cerita Tentang Hari Ini (NKCTHI),' " Jurnal Al Azhar Indonesia Seri Ilmu Sosial 1, no. 2 (2020): 74. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36722/jaiss.v1i2.462>

<sup>15</sup> Ed S Tan, "A Psychology of the Film," Palgrave Communications 4, no. 1 (2018): 82. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-018-0111-y>

<sup>16</sup> Khanza Jasmine, "Analisis Wacana Representasi Budaya dan Ideologi dalam Film Wadjda," AL-Ma'any 3, no. 2 (2014): 1–7. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56874/almaany.v3i2.2116>

making its narrative resonate with diverse audiences.<sup>17</sup> Wadjda is not merely a piece of art but a compelling tool for social critique. The film reflects the beginnings of social reform, initiated at an individual level—a distinctive characteristic that sets Wadjda apart from other Saudi films.

This research will focus on narrative analysis with Todorov's narrative structure in the film Wadjda. The movie Wadjda was chosen as the study material in this research because it has a strong foundation of story elements as it reflects social reforms in Saudi society. We will study the main themes raised in the film, such as gender, education, and individual freedom, as well as how the film serves as a tool of social criticism that shows the changes and challenges faced by women in Saudi Arabia.<sup>18</sup>

Film is a tool to convey various messages to the audience through the medium of stories. Film is also a medium of artistic expression as a tool for artists and film people in order to express ideas and story ideas. Essentially and substantially, movies have power that will have implications for the communicant community.<sup>19</sup> Movies act as communication intermediaries or can be called communicators because movies always have an attachment to the audience, both in terms of life stories, culture, values, and social norms that exist in it.<sup>20</sup> Films become a means of communication to the community that can influence the values and behavior of people's lives made by using effects and visual displays that are as attractive as possible to attract the attention of the audience when viewing them. When looking at movies as a medium of communication, mise en scene is the way filmmakers convey messages in communication. Mise en scene comes in the form of visual language, where filmmakers act as encoders or senders of messages that convert movie story narratives into visual language. However, the audience acts as the decoder or receiver of the message who interprets the embedded message in their minds.<sup>21</sup> Most movies have narrative elements, which focus on themes or aspects of the story. These include characters, conflict, location, purpose, and time. Mise en scene, cinematography, editing, and sound are further topics in cinematics.<sup>22</sup>

Narrative is a series of events that are related to each other or have a causal relationship that occurs in a certain time and space. Narrative is a type of discourse that aims to explain in detail to the reader about what happened by providing details about where, when, how, and how quickly the event occurred.<sup>23</sup> Narrative is a series of events that are related to each other and bound by causal logic (causality) that occurs in one space and time.<sup>24</sup> Narrative is an orderly explanation that claims to be a record of events.

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<sup>17</sup> Muh. Zulkarnain, "Eksistensi dan Representasi Perempuan Muslim Arab dalam Film-Film Arab," LINGUISTIK : Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra 8, no. 4 (2023): 640. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31604/linguistik.v8i4.640-653>

<sup>18</sup> Ebet Triyani, Merry Choironi, and Isnaini Rahmawati, "Representasi Eksistensi Perempuan dalam Film Wadjda Karya Haifaa al-Mansour: (Kajian Feminisme Eksistensialis Simone De Beauvoir)," Kitabina: Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra Arab 4, no. 01 SE-Articles (October 9, 2023): 47–56. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2345/kitabina.v4i01.15921>

<sup>19</sup> Nazhif Dzaky Thaheer and Vani Dias Adiprabowo, "Analisis Naratif dalam Film Singot," TONIL: Jurnal Kajian Sastra, Teater dan Sinema 21, no. 1 (2024): 15–27. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24821/tnl.v21i1.11588>

<sup>20</sup> Redi Panuju, *Film dan Komunikasi Massa*, (Jakarta: Intrans Publishing, 2021), hlm. 54.

<sup>21</sup> Khairunnisa Pratiwi Maulida Usman and Yostiani Noor Asmi Harini, "Analisis Mise En Scène dalam Film Pendek *Tilik* 2018," TONIL: Jurnal Kajian Sastra, Teater dan Sinema 20, no. 1 (2023): 48–58. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24821/tnl.v20i1.9512>

<sup>22</sup> Gail Lathrop and David O Sutton, "Elements of Mis-En-Scene," *Film Study Journal*, 2013: 1–7. [http://www.proseproductionsink.com/1102\\_Licata\\_Elements\\_of\\_Mise-en-scene\\_modified.pdf](http://www.proseproductionsink.com/1102_Licata_Elements_of_Mise-en-scene_modified.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Devi Putri Aji and Kamila Adnani, "Makna Life Goals dalam Film Rentang Kisah: Analisis Naratif Model Tzvetan Todorov," *Academic Journal of Da'wa and Communication* 4, no. 1 (2023): 113–34. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22515/ajdc.v4i1.5427>

<sup>24</sup> Yohanes Arnold Setiawan and Sia Kok Sin, "Studi Kejadian 2:4b-3:24 Dengan Konsep Naratologi Tzvetan Todorov," KURIOS, 2024. <https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:273485033>



Thus, a narrative must have a logically interwoven relationship or relation that is connected by the presence of the subject in the story. Another opinion that corroborates this opinion states, that "A narrative is integral to the process of storytelling".<sup>25</sup> That the narrative is an integral part of the storytelling process. Narrative elements in movies refer to story elements that occur in chronological order with characters, locations, time, problems, and other elements that have a specific purpose. The writer consciously plans the way the story is told by using a certain structure or arrangement to make the story interesting.<sup>26</sup>

Bulgarian literary and cultural scholar Tzvetan Todorov proposed the idea of the structure of a narrative. Todorov's idea is interesting because he sees the text in stages or structures. Whether or not the author realizes it, the audience will also read the narrative based on these stages or structures. For Todorov, narrative is what is said, hence it has a chronological order, motive and plot, and causal relationship of an event.<sup>27</sup> In this theory, Todorov mentions there are 5 stages, namely Equilibrium, Disruption, Recognition, Attempt to Repair, New Equilibrium. a) Equilibrium, is the stage where the character lives a normal life and does daily activities that are in character. b) Disruption, is the stage where the character begins to get life disturbances. c) Recognition, is the stage where the character has realized the problem of disturbances that affect the character's life. d) Attempt to Repair, is the stage where the character tries to repair and manage all the problems that occur in the story. e) New Equilibrium, is the stage where the character has repaired and managed all the problems that occur in the story and in this stage, the character is having a normal life like in the first story or adjusting to a new situation in the story.<sup>28</sup>

To strengthen the theoretical and methodological foundation of this study, the researcher reviewed several previous studies that addressed the research issue of Social Reform which investigated the reform policies implemented by King Faisal bin Abdul Aziz between 1964 and 1975. The research emphasized how the policies brought about changes in various sectors, including education and law, and their impact on people's lives. The findings are relevant as they show the historical context of social reform in Saudi Arabia which is the backdrop for the thinking in the movie *Wadja*.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Lilik Kustanto, "Analisis Naratif: Kemiskinan dalam Program Reality TV 'Pemberian Misterius' di Stasiun SCTV," REKAM: Jurnal Fotografi, Televisi, dan Animasi 11, no. 2 (2016): 109. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24821/rekam.v11i2.1297>

<sup>26</sup> Yanna B. Popova, "Narrativity and Enaction: The Social Nature of Literary Narrative Understanding," *Frontiers in Psychology* 5, no. AUG (2014): 1–14. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00895>

<sup>27</sup> Siti Shadrina Azizaty and Idola Perdini Putri, "Analisis Narasi Tzvetan Todorov pada Film *Sokola Rimba*," *ProTVF*, 2018: 11. <https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:192283434>

<sup>28</sup> Tzvetan Todorov and Arnold Weinstein, "Structural Analysis of Narrative," in *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 3, (Carolina Utara: Duke University Press, 1969), hlm. 70–76. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1345003>

<sup>29</sup> Ahmad Zaini Akbar, "Kritik Sosial, Pers dan Politik Indonesia," *Unisia* 17, no. 32 (1997): 44–51. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20885/unisia.vol17.iss32.art5>

## Method

This research uses a qualitative method to understand the social reforms depicted in Haifaa al-Mansour's *Wadjda*. Qualitative research is descriptive in nature and tends to go through an inductive approach. Qualitative research is often called naturalistic, interpretive, and phenomenological research because the research has a lot to do with everyday life.<sup>30</sup> The qualitative approach allows research to explore the deep meanings and social narratives contained in films through the interpretation of visual symbols, dialogue, and story structure.<sup>31</sup> The purpose of this method is to identify and analyze how the film *Wadjda* reflects social changes in Saudi Arabia, especially those related to the role of women. This research utilizes a narrative analysis approach used to identify and explore key themes related to social reform in the film, including themes about women's freedom, education, and changing social norms. Narrative content analysis was used to understand how *Wadjda*'s story narrative and character development reflect the tension between tradition and modernity in the social context of Saudi Arabia.<sup>32</sup> The subject of this study is Haifaa al-Mansour's *Wadjda* (2012), which is the first film by a female Saudi Arabian director. This film was chosen because it is considered a strong reflection of the ongoing social reform process in Saudi Arabia, especially regarding the role of women in a patriarchal society. The object of research includes dialog, visuals, main characters (*Wadjda* and her mother), and symbolic elements that represent social change in the film. *Wadjda*'s movie can be accessed in full through the link (<https://tv1.lk21official.my/wadjda-2012/>).

The data collection technique in this research is through the technique of watching, listening, taking notes. First, researchers listened by watching the entire *Wadjda* movie. Second, recording dialog or conversations that are considered in accordance with the results of representation and the concept of narrative analysis. Third, take some footage from the movie. Finally, adding and correlating with relevant previous studies.

## Result and Discussion

The first part, the equilibrium stage or the balance of the situation, the equilibrium stage in the narrative is when the initial condition or normal state is introduced before the disturbance that triggers the conflict of the story.

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<sup>30</sup> Andrea J Bingham, "From Data Management to Actionable Findings: A Five-Phase Process of Qualitative Data Analysis," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 22 (August 10, 2023): 20. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231183620>

<sup>31</sup> Lynn Gillam and Danya Vears F, "Inductive Content Analysis: A Guide for Beginning Qualitative Researchers," *Focus on Health Professional Education: A Multi-Professional Journal* 23, no. 1 SE-Focus on Methodology (n.d.): 111–27. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11157/fohpe.v23i1.544>

<sup>32</sup> Telhalia Telhalia, "Refleksi Teologis Atas Prosperity Theologies: Studi Analisis-Naratif di Resort GKE Kapuas Kalimantan Tengah," *Danum Pambelum: Jurnal Teologi dan Musik Gereja* 3, no. 1 (2023): 15–32. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54170/dp.v3i1.180>



**Figure 1.** Overview of Equilibrium in the Movie

Based on Figure 1, it is found the audience is introduced to Wadjda's initial environment, where conservative social norms are firmly in place. Figure 1 shows that there are 2 data points that reflect the existence of Equilibrium. Figure 1 starts at minute 09:19. On Dialogue:

والله يكون عندي الدراجة واوري

*(I swear I'll get a bike, you'll see).* (Wadjda, 09:19).

On a sunny morning, Wadjda walks alone to school, following her usual route, wearing the uniform and abaya typical of their daily lives. The atmosphere seems ordinary, with strict rules governing the conservative society around them. She meets Abdullah, a male friend who has freedoms that Wadjda does not. Abdullah teases Wadjda by taking her veil, running away while mocking her. In this interaction, though seemingly simple, Wadjda shows her different spirit. When Abdullah laughs at her for not being able to catch up, Wadjda firmly says, "I swear, if I had a bicycle, you would know!"

Here, in the equilibrium stage of Wadjda, the audience is introduced to the conservative social environment in Saudi Arabia, where the role of women is governed by rigid cultural norms. Wadjda, despite living in an environment that dictates strict rules to women, begins to show signs of resistance to this order. Her desire to own a bicycle, something that is considered incompatible with the role of women in her society, is symbolic of the changes that are taking place.<sup>33</sup>

In her interactions with Abdullah, Wadjda expressed her broader aspirations for freedom, marking the beginning of a shift in the social structure that was beginning to become visible. This reflected a larger context of social reform in which women were beginning to assert their rights in a society still clinging to tradition. Figure 2 is shown at minute 9:32. On Dialogue:

كم مرة لازم؟ نعيده نزيده صوت المرأة عورة.

*(How many times do we have to repeat it? To raise our voices for Women is humiliating).* (Wadjda, 9:32)

As they entered the schoolyard, one of Wadjda's friends began to make a louder than expected noise, and the teacher on duty immediately approached. "How many times do we have to remind you?" the teacher said in a serious tone. "Speaking loudly, especially for girls, is very embarrassing." Their laughter and freedom were instantly lost, replaced by an oppressive silence.

The reprimand is a reminder that, even in an open place like the schoolyard, there are rules that control how women express themselves. This scene shows how society strictly enforces social

<sup>33</sup> Maud Ceuterick, "Affirmative Aesthetics and Wilful Women: Gender, Space and Mobility in Contemporary Cinema," Gender, Space and Mobility in Contemporary Cinema, no. Madsen (2020): 1–186. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-37039-8>



control, especially over women, even in everyday interactions. The school becomes a space where such norms are reinforced, ensuring women remain within the established social boundaries.<sup>34</sup>



**Figure 2.** Overview of Disruption in the Movie

Based on Figure 2, it is found the scene marks the beginning of the Disruption stage in Todorov's narrative structure. Figure 3 shows that there is 1 data that reflects the existence of Disruption. Figure 3 starts at minute 14.04, in the Dialog:

أريد دراجة لكي أتمكن من السباق مع عبد الله  
 هل سبق لك أن رأيت امرأة تركب الدراجة؟  
 (*I want a bicycle so I can race with Abdullah*)  
 (*Do you see Women on bicycles?*). (Wadjda, 14.04)

In the quiet of their home, Wadjda finally reveals his dream to his mother, something that is rarely said in their neighborhood. "I want a bicycle so I can race with Abdullah," Wadjda said, excitedly. However, her mother was surprised to hear the request, showing her astonishment by asking, "Have you ever seen a woman riding a bicycle?" This question reflects the cultural boundaries that still restrain women in their society, where the idea of a woman riding a bicycle is considered out of the ordinary. However, for Wadjda, this request was more than just a bicycle, it was a symbol of her fight for freedom and equality.

This stage of Disruption underlines that Wadjda wants to go beyond cycling, she wants to challenge the notion that women should not have the freedom to express themselves and participate in activities that are usually taken over by men. As such, Wadjda represents the beginning of social reform, where women begin to voice their aspirations and challenge the boundaries set by Society.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Rohil Zilfa, "Telaah Komparatif Pengarusutamaan Gender dalam Pendidikan Islam di Saudi Arabia, Mesir, Malaysia, dan Indonesia," Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam (Journal of Islamic Education Studies) 5 (November 2, 2017): 264. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15642/jpai.2017.5.2.264-287>

<sup>35</sup> J Ridha'a Ali, "Female Triumph: Haifaa Al-Mansour's Feminist Issues as Reflected in Wadjda," مجلة جامعة بابل للعلوم الإنسانية, 32, no. 2 (2024): 71–79. <https://www.journalofbabylon.com/index.php/JUBH/article/download/5033/3847>



**Figure 3.** Overview of Recognition in the Movie

Based on Figure 3, it is found that at minute 36.42, the scene marks the *Recognition* stage in Todorov's narrative structure. In the dialog:

أرغب في الانضمام إلى مجموعة مسابقة حفظ القرآن الكريم

(*I want to join the LKI Qur'an memorization competition group*). (Wadjda, 36.42)

Wadjda went to the principal's office with the intention of expressing his desire to join Lembaga Khusus Ibadah (LKI), a Qur'an memorization competition. With confidence, Wadjda said, "I want to join LKI for the Qur'an memorization competition." This statement reflected not only his ambition, but also Wadjda's awareness of his potential. His teacher seemed surprised but also proud of the enthusiasm Wadjda showed. This moment signifies Wadjda's transformation, from a girl trapped within societal norms to an individual who dares to take the initiative to pursue her goals and contribute to things that are valued in society. With her willingness to participate in competitions related to religious values, Wadjda shows that women also have a place in activities that have been dominated by men.

At the recognition stage in Wadjda's film, when Wadjda expresses her desire to join the Lembaga Khusus Ibadah (LKI) for the Qur'an memorization competition, this represents progress in larger social reform. Wadjda's move to take the initiative and talk to her teacher shows the development of mindset among the younger generation, especially among women. This decision signals that women are beginning to realize their abilities and rights to engage in activities that are considered prestigious. By participating in a competition related to religious values, Wadjda not only affirmed her dedication to education and spirituality, but also contributed to changing society's views on the role of women. Wadjda became a symbol of hope for other women who began to demand recognition and their right to engage in various fields, including education and wider social activities. This showed that women were no longer just seen as individuals bound by traditional norms, but as agents of change capable of taking steps to achieve their goals. This representation is important in the context of social reform in Saudi Arabia, where women are increasingly empowered to transcend existing boundaries.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Muassomah Muassomah et al., "Gender Inequality in Arabic Textbook: Misrepresentation of Women in Culture and Society," *International Journal of Society, Culture and Language* 11, no. 1 (2023): 272–88. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22034/ijscsl.2023.1989944.2944>



**Figure 4.** *Attempt to Repair*

Based on Figure 4 shows that there are 3 data that reflect the existence of Attemp to Repair. Figure 1 starts at minute 1.06.31, in the dialog:

ممتازة بس يبغي لك ترتيل و تجويد تبين تفوزين من المسابقة

(*Excellent, improve your tartil and tajweed to win the competition*). (Wadja, 1.06.31).

Set in a classroom full of female students, Wadja sits with her friends, repeatedly memorizing verses of the Qur'an with earnestness. Their teacher, a woman with a serious yet attentive gaze, watches as each student recites. When Wadja's turn came, she came forward with great confidence. He began to recite the holy verses, but his tajweed was not perfect. A few small mistakes in pronunciation made her recitation sound less smooth than that of her friends. After Wadja finished reciting, her teacher looked at her attentively but firmly. "Wadja, your memorization is good, but your tajweed needs improvement. If you want to win this competition, you need to get your recitation right," the teacher said with an encouraging smile. Wadja nodded, feeling a boost of motivation despite realizing her efforts still needed to be improved. With growing determination, she promised herself to study harder to achieve her dream.

At the Attemp to repair stage in Wadja's film, this scene not only illustrates the challenges Wadja faces in trying to win the competition, but also reflects the theme of social reform raised in the film.<sup>37</sup> Wadja's limitations in tajweed symbolize the larger challenges girls face in Saudi Arabian society, where religious education and strict social norms limit their space.<sup>38</sup> Wadja's decision to practice tajweed was not only to qualify for the competition, but also a subtle symbol of resistance to social structures that separate women from certain rights, such as freedom in choosing activities or accessing things that are considered to be for men only, such as cycling. Figure 2 is shown at minute 1.08.44. On the dialog:

الإجابة صحيحة

(*The answer is correct*). (Wadja, 1.08.44)

Minute 1.08.44, In his modest room, Wadja sits diligently in front of the small television while playing a Qur'an memorization game on cassette. The remote in her hand feels familiar, different from the Mushaf she used to use at school. This game was a unique way for him to learn and strengthen his memorization in a more fun way. Questions about Qur'anic verses appeared on

<sup>37</sup> Patrice Flynn, "Metaphors of Resistance: What the Film *Wadja* Says about Present-Day Saudi Arabia as Seen from the Perspective of a Female Guest Worker" 4, no. 3 (2015): 55–60. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14303/irjass.2015.015>

<sup>38</sup> Ameen Omar, "The Limits of Legalism in Saudi Arabia: A Commentary on Haifaa Al-Mansour's *Wadja*" 2021, no. 2021 (2021): 1–16. <https://www.hbku.edu.qa/sites/default/files/LegalismInSaudiArabia.pdf>

the screen one by one, and confidently, Wadjda chose the right answer. Each time he got the answer right, a victory chime sounded from the game, making him smile with satisfaction. Wadjda answered all the questions correctly, not missing a single one. This simple game became an effective tool for him to memorize the scriptures. When the last question came up and he again answered correctly, the screen displayed a small animation in celebration. A triumphant smile spread across his face. Wadjda found his own way of learning, different from the traditional method at school, but still helping him to achieve his goal in the memorization competition he participated in.

The film's relationship with social reform is illustrated by Wadjda's use of games for learning. The game depicts the representation of young women utilizing modern technology to counter traditional limitations. This reflects the evolving role of women in rigid societies, where they are beginning to more actively use new media as a tool to achieve greater freedom and access to education.<sup>39</sup> Wadjda's choice to use games as a medium for learning illustrates a broader social shift, where women are no longer just subject to traditional norms, but also become agents of change by utilizing technology to achieve their personal goals, challenging the social structures that limit their roles in society. Figure 3 is shown at minute 1.22.42. In the dialog:

مبروك وجدة

تفوز بفضل جهودك وطاعتك

(*Congratulations Wadjda, you won thanks to your effort and obedience*). (Wadja, 1.22.42)

In minute 1.22.42, when Wadja finished competing against his friends, he was then passed into the top three, with his sincerity, Wadjda managed to answer all the questions and recite the recitation smoothly, then the announcement of the championship arrived, and the winner of this competition was Wadjda. After being announced as the main winner, Wadjda stood in front of his teacher and friends, greeted with applause and congratulations. Her teacher, who had been emphasizing the importance of appropriate behavior, approached Wadjda and said proudly, "You won because of your effort and obedience." And when Wadjda was asked about his plans to use the prize money, he excitedly replied, "I'm going to buy a bicycle!", his teacher's reaction changed dramatically. Disappointment was evident, indicating that Wadjda's dream was not in line with the community's expectations. The teacher then said firmly, "Women don't deserve to use bicycles, this prize will be donated to our brothers and sisters in Palestine." Not only does this decision limit Wadjda's dream, but it also reflects how society prioritizes collective values over individual desires, especially that of a girl.

The scene where Wadjda wins the Qur'an memorization competition and her desire to buy a bicycle is rejected by her teacher reflects the tension between individual change and conservative social norms. Wadjda, through her attempt to own a bicycle, represents a small but significant attempt at social reform in a cultural context that limits women's freedom. The bicycle, for Wadjda, is not just an object, but a symbol of the freedom and equality she yearns for, something that is considered inappropriate in the eyes of her teacher and her social environment.

Her teacher's rejection of Wadjda's choice, saying that bicycles are "not appropriate for girls" and that the prize money should be donated to Palestine, reflects the society's resistance to social

<sup>39</sup> Gülşah Sarı, "International Perspectives on Feminism and Sexism in the Film Industry," in *A Feminist Perspective Analysis of Gender in Cinema of Saudi Arabia: Wadjda* (Turkey, 2021): 15. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-1774-1.ch004>

change. The society depicted in the film prioritizes collective and traditional norms over individual aspirations, especially those of women.<sup>40</sup> On the one hand, the decision to donate the prize money to Palestine can be seen as a form of greater social solidarity, but on the other hand, it also shows how Wadjda's personal dreams are suppressed by strict cultural norms.

This scene shows that social reform in Wadjda begins at the individual level, with Wadjda's desire to transcend rigid gender boundaries. Although she succeeds in demonstrating perseverance and hard work through winning the Qur'an memorization competition, her freedom to use the fruits of her own efforts remains restricted by social structures that emphasize control over women's roles. This illustrates that the social change represented by Wadjda is still in its early stages, with great challenges ahead to transcend traditional norms.



**Figure 5.** *New Equilibrium* in the Movie

Based on Figure 5 shows that there is 1 data that reflects the existence of New Equilibrium. Starts at minute 1.30.58. On the dialog:

آمل أن يناسب رغباتك

(*May it be as you wish*). (Wadjda, 1.30.58)

On a night full of sadness knowing that Wadja's father decided to remarry a woman of his grandmother's choice, in the middle of the wedding crowd, Wadjda's mother gently called her daughter. With a warm gaze, she expresses her pride and affection towards Wadjda upon hearing the news of her daughter's victory. The atmosphere becomes intimate as they talk. Wadjda's mother gave her a special gift, a bicycle that Wadjda had longed for. Wadjda's face lights up when she receives the bicycle, it is not just a gift, but a symbol of freedom and the achievement of her dreams. In this scene, Wadjda gets her bicycle through her own effort and determination, and her mother supports her decision, despite previous conflicts about this. The scene illustrates a small but significant social change, a shift in thinking within the family, which reflects the hope for wider change in society.

Despite this happy moment, there is still an awareness of the conservative norms that limit women. Wadjda knows that her dreams and freedom still have to face challenges from society. The scene ends with Wadjda riding her bicycle vigorously down the street, portraying courage and the desire to pursue dreams. This moment shows that although challenges still exist, Wadjda now has the tools to fight for her freedom. Nearing the end of the movie, and marking the creation of a state

<sup>40</sup> J Chante, "For Us, Heaven Is Green": Resistance Symbolism in *Wadjda* and *Offside*," Essex Student Journal 13, no. 1 (2021): 1–11. <https://publications.essex.ac.uk/esj/article/id/105/>



of new equilibrium, where there is some kind of resolution or stable change compared to the previous condition.<sup>41</sup>

Wadjda's acceptance of the bicycle, previously impossible in her social context, becomes a symbol of small social reforms, although the movie does not depict major changes outside the family environment.

**Table 1.** Analysis of Key Elements in Wadjda Film related to Social Reforms

No.	Elements	Description	Symbol/Representation	Relevance to Social Reform
1.	Wadjda Figure	A 10-year-old girl who is determined to buy a bicycle despite being forbidden by social norms.	Wadjda's Character in the Movie	Representation of a young generation of women who defy the traditional boundaries that restrain women in Saudi Arabia.
2.	School	Wadjda's school faced strict rules that prohibited women from doing many "free" things.	School as a symbol of social control.	It symbolizes that educational institutions are used to reinforce patriarchal rule, but can be a means for social change.
3.	Qur'an Memorization Competition	Wadjda decided to enter a Qur'an memorization competition to earn money to buy a bicycle.	The Qur'an as a means to social ends (paradox).	Education can be a tool to achieve personal freedom even if it was originally intended to enforce social norms.
4.	Bicycle	A bicycle that Wadjda really wanted but was deemed inappropriate for a girl.	A symbol of freedom, equality and change.	The bicycle became a powerful visual symbol of women's struggle for freedom and against gender-restrictive norms.
5.	Competition Results	Although Wadjda won the memorization competition, the money went to charity, not to buy a bicycle.	Social rejection of women's desires.	Despite Wadjda's success, the end result reflects how women are still prevented from achieving full freedom.
6.	Teacher Mother Figure	A principal who upholds strict rules and controls the behavior of female students.	Symbol of patriarchal authority represented by women	The principal shows how women in positions of power can help reinforce the patriarchal system.
7.	Mrs. Wadjda's Household	A household where Mrs. Wadjda loses authority due to her husband's social status.	Gender injustice in patriarchal households.	Mrs. Wadjda's household demonstrates gender injustice in the context of marriage and women's domestic life in Saudi Arabia.

<sup>41</sup> Patrice Flynn, "Metaphors of Resistance : What the Film Wadjda Says about Present-Day Saudi Arabia as Seen from the Perspective of a Female Guest Worker" 4, no. 3 (2015): 55–60. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14303/irjass.2015.015>

Based on Table 1 shows 7 symbols that reflect social reform, represented by the character of Wadjda, School, Qur'an memorization competition, Teacher Mother Character, Mrs. Wadjda's household as symbols of freedom, these symbols have different characters. Symbol 1 (Table 1, No. 1) The character Wadjda represents the young generation of women in Saudi Arabia who are starting to fight against social norms that limit their freedom. Her desire to buy a bicycle, a symbol considered appropriate only for men, shows resistance to the gender stereotypes that are deeply rooted in Saudi society. Social reform in Saudi Arabia starts with the younger generation demanding their rights to have greater freedom. The bicycle in Wadjda becomes a symbol of freedom and emancipation, indicating the shifting role of women in Saudi society. The bicycle becomes a metaphor for Saudi women's struggle for greater freedom and equality.<sup>42</sup>

#### 1. School

Symbol 2 (Table 1, No. 2) The school represents that it serves as a symbol of norms that inhibit women's behavior. In it, Wadjda and her friends are taught not to attract male attention, reflecting society's expectation that women should hide and be invisible. This is seen when girls at school play without the courage to be seen by men who work on rooftops far away from them. Despite the restrictions, the school is also a place for empowerment. Wadjda enters a Qur'an recitation competition as a way to raise money for a bicycle, which symbolizes her desire for freedom and independence. The competition highlights her perseverance and courage in going against social norms. The Social Reform reflected in the symbol of the Bicycle is the Contrast with Male Authority, The interaction between Wadjda and the teachers illustrates the power dynamics in the education system. Although she often faces resistance, her spirit demonstrates her defiance of male authority and traditional expectations of femininity.<sup>43</sup>

#### 2. Qur'an Memorization Competition

Symbol 3 (Table 1, No. 3) Qur'an memorization competition represents that participating in a Qur'an memorization competition provides motivation to win prize money that he will use to buy a bicycle. This illustrates that religious education, although taught to uphold traditional norms, can be used as a means to achieve the goal of personal freedom. It shows how Saudi women use the opportunities available in the education system to challenge the social restrictions imposed on them. Education is one of the effective tools for women in patriarchal countries to gain freedom and challenge traditional norms. In the movie Wadjda, education is not only used to reinforce traditional gender roles, but also as a tool for young women to challenge these restrictions.<sup>44</sup>

#### 3. Bicycle Symbol

The green bicycle Wadjda wanted was a symbol of freedom and independence. In a Saudi Arabian society that restricts women's movement, Wadjda's dream of riding a bicycle is a statement of resistance against rigid norms. The bicycle becomes a metaphor for the freedom of movement that women and girls in Saudi Arabia do not experience, as Haifaa al-Mansour explains that "the bicycle symbolizes the freedom of movement that does not exist for women and girls in Saudi Arabia". The bicycle in Wadjda's film is also a symbol of feminist modernity because it represents

<sup>42</sup> Doris Hambuch, "Liberating Bicycles in Niki Caro's *Whale Rider* and in Haifaa Al Mansour's *Wadjda*," *Imaginations: Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies* 10, no. 2 (2020): 13–27. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17742/image.oi.10.2.9>

<sup>43</sup> Chante J, "For Us, Heaven Is Green': Resistance Symbolism in *Wadjda* and *Offside*," *Essex Student Journal* 13, no. 1 (2021): 1–11. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5526/esj64>

<sup>44</sup> Muassomah Muassomah et al., "Femininity and Masculinity in Arabic Words: Gender Marking in Muslim Cosmology," *Langkawi: Journal of The Association for Arabic and English* 7, no. 2 (2021): 182. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31332/lkw.v7i2.3130>

the ambitious dreams of a young girl that she realizes through assertiveness and perseverance. The bicycle is not only a tool for Wadjda but also a model of modern attitude towards women for a new generation of men.<sup>45</sup> Symbols like the bicycle can be a means to represent larger social changes. In the context of Wadjda's film, the bicycle is a symbol of women's struggle to break free from patriarchal control and claim personal freedom. The bicycle is chosen as a symbol of freedom for Wadjda in the film because, in contrast to other vehicles, Simplicity vs. Luxury Other vehicles, such as cars, are often associated with social status and wealth. A bicycle, on the other hand, is a simple and affordable means of transportation. This creates a strong contrast between Wadjda's aspirations for personal freedom and larger social norms. By choosing a bicycle, the movie shows that freedom doesn't always have to be expensive or complicated; sometimes, it can be as simple as the desire to ride.

#### 4. Competition Results

The results of this competition show how education can be a tool of empowerment for women. Wadjda participated in the competition to earn enough money to buy a bicycle, a symbol of freedom and independence. Although she faced many obstacles, including social norms that prohibit women from owning a bicycle, Wadjda's efforts reflect her determination to transcend these limitations.<sup>46</sup> It shows that education can provide opportunities for women to achieve their dreams, even in an unsupportive environment. Wadjda's victory in the competition also challenged the prevailing gender norms in her community. Although the proceeds were supposed to be used to buy a bicycle, the prize was eventually donated because teachers and the community did not agree with Wadjda's wishes. This reflects how society often stands in the way of women's aspirations, but also shows that individual voices can spark change. In this context, the movie invites viewers to consider the importance of supporting women's rights and giving them a voice. The competition also serves as an inspiration for the younger generation, especially women. By showing how Wadjda struggles and does not give up despite facing many challenges, the movie conveys the message that the fight for freedom and equality is important. Wadjda sets an example for other girls that they can pursue their dreams despite social restrictions.

#### 5. Mrs. Teacher (Principal)

Ms. Hussa, as the school principal, illustrates how women can also hold positions of authority in a patriarchal society. However, the way she organizes the school and educates her students often reflects restrictive social norms. For example, she emphasizes the importance of keeping the female voice as part of the *aurat*, showing how education is often used to maintain conservative norms. Ibu Hussa acts as a barrier to Wadjda's aspirations when she refuses to give Wadjda the prize money from the Qur'an memorization competition because of her plans to buy a bicycle. Instead of giving the prize, Ibu Hissa decides to donate it elsewhere, which demonstrates how educational institutions often serve to maintain social norms that limit women's freedom. Although Ibu Hussa acts as an educational authority, her approach often conflicts with Wadjda's aspirations. She forbids Wadjda from owning a bicycle, reiterating the view that bicycles are not for women. This reflects the conflict between supposedly empowering education and restrictive social norms. In the context of social

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<sup>45</sup> Muassomah Muassomah et al., "The Portrayal of Gender in the Arabic Construction," *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 11, no. 5 (2022): 255–65. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36941/ajis-2022-0140>

<sup>46</sup> Laily Fitriani and Muassomah Muassomah, "Gender Inequality Within a Family: The Representation of Women's Novel in Social Media," *LiNGUA: Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa dan Sastra* 16, no. 1 (2021): 111–24. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18860/ling.v16i1.10681>

reform, Mrs. Hissa's character demonstrates the challenges faced by women in positions of power when they are trapped in a patriarchal system.

#### 6. Mrs. Wadjda's Household

Ms. Wadjda, as a woman caught up in patriarchal norms, illustrates the challenges faced by many women in Saudi Arabian society. She struggles to meet the expectations of her husband and society while trying to provide support to her daughter. In this context, the household becomes symbolic of the restrictions imposed on women, where they often have to negotiate between personal desires and family responsibilities. Mrs. Wadjda tries hard to maintain the harmony of the household even though she herself feels pressured by the situation, including the possibility of her husband remarrying because she does not have a son. Mrs. Wadjda's character also reflects the contradictions in the role of women in the family. She is a strong figure yet trapped in restrictive traditions. Although she wants to give her daughter freedom, she is also bound by norms that require her to remain obedient to her husband. This shows how women can be agents of change in the family while still struggling against existing restrictions.<sup>47</sup>

The character of Wadjda's father reflects the strong patriarchal expectations in Saudi Arabian society. Although he loves his wife, his desire for a son drives him to remarry. This shows the pressure women face in families, where having a son is considered more valuable. Mrs. Wadjda felt threatened by her husband's decision to remarry, which illustrates how women are often victims of social norms that favor men. This reflects the gender injustice that still exists within family structures and society. Mrs. Wadjda tries to maintain her position in the family while facing the fact that her husband will marry a second wife. She struggles to provide support to Wadjda, even though she herself feels distressed. In this context, the household becomes symbolic of the restrictions imposed on women, where they have to negotiate between personal desires and family responsibilities. Although Wadjda's mother does not have the power to change her husband's decision, she still tries to give her daughter freedom by supporting Wadjda's desire to own a bicycle.

The symbolism of domesticity in Wadjda reflects the complexity of women's roles in Saudi Arabian society. Through the struggles of Wadjda's mother and her father's decision to remarry, the film illustrates the challenges women face in maintaining their position amidst patriarchal norms. Despite restrictive social boundaries, the movie also shows the potential for empowerment and hope for change through support among family members. As such, Wadjda is an important tool to encourage discussion on social reform and women's rights in Saudi Arabia.

This research advances scientific understanding by illustrating how films like Wadjda serve as a mirror and critique of social reforms in Saudi Arabia's conservative culture. Through Tzvetan Todorov's narrative framework, the study highlights how individual actions, as exemplified by Wadjda, can inspire wider dialogues on women's empowerment and personal liberties. It also underscores the significance of media as a potent platform for promoting social awareness and driving cultural change.

Despite its contributions, the study has notable constraints. Its focus on a single film limits the scope for broader generalizations, and its primary attention to narrative aspects overlooks crucial cinematic components like visual and auditory elements, which could enrich the analysis. Future studies should consider examining a diverse range of films to better understand recurring themes

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<sup>47</sup> Febyanti Fadhliatul Rizqi, "Gaya Bahasa Perempuan Arab Saudi dalam Film Wadjda: Kajian Sosiolinguistik Bahasa dan Gender," *LINGUISTIK: Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra* 8, no. 4 (2023): 735. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31604/linguistik.v8i4.735-744>

and delve deeper into the synergy between storytelling and cinematic techniques in delivering social critiques. Investigating the real-world influence of such films on public perspectives would also be a valuable direction for further exploration.

## Closing

The film demonstrates how individuals can play a vital role in driving social change within a conservative society. Wadjda, as the protagonist, symbolizes the ambitions of the younger generation to push back against societal limitations. Through the stages of equilibrium, disruption, recognition, resolution, and new equilibrium, the film highlights Wadjda's journey of overcoming obstacles and achieving personal aspirations, offering a glimpse of hope for broader societal transformation in Saudi Arabia. This research is particularly valuable as it explores the transformative power of media, especially film, in addressing critical social topics such as gender equality and human rights. It emphasizes the relevance of media as a tool for raising awareness and inspiring cultural shifts in a rapidly changing global landscape. In addition, the study establishes the importance of its findings to the scientific community by contextualizing them within prior research on social reform and cinematic analysis. By applying Tzvetan Todorov's narrative theory, this research provides a novel contribution to the existing body of knowledge. It underscores the capacity of individual stories, such as Wadjda's, to influence larger societal changes. Within a realistic framework, this study demonstrates that media can act as a driving force for significant social reform, offering a detailed exploration of the relationship between culture, gender, and societal evolution in conservative contexts. As such, Wadjda transcends being merely a film; it serves as a profound reflection of the ongoing social transformations in Saudi Arabia and an inspiring example of the potential for reform through personal narratives.

## Acknowledgment

On this occasion, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to those who have provided support and contributions throughout the process of this research. First of all, I would like to sincerely thank my advisor and second author in this research, Prof. Muassomah, for all the guidance, support, and patience she has given. Her mentorship has not only been invaluable in terms of the technical aspects of the research but also in guiding me to always think critically and creatively. I also extend my heartfelt thanks to my parents, who have always offered their prayers and moral support. Without them, I would not have reached this point. Their love and sacrifices are the source of my strength in facing every challenge. I would also like to thank my friends and colleagues, both on and off-campus, who have provided inspiration, constructive discussions, and unwavering enthusiasm. In particular, I want to thank the Tabaraka Family, who have always been there during the creation of this research. Last but not least, I extend my gratitude to all those who have assisted, either directly or indirectly, in completing this task, including those who have provided access to references, data, and valuable materials. Finally, I hope this research can make a positive contribution to knowledge and to readers. May all efforts and prayers be rewarded abundantly by Allah SWT.



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