

EMERGING SOCIO-POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

Direct and Indirect Consequences of the Saudi Arabia National Dialogue Process

Submitted by Mark Colin Thompson, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arab and Islamic Studies, January 2012.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to assess the extent to which the Saudi Arabia National Dialogue and activities of King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue (KACND) represent a viable attempt to address socio-political issues; whether the ongoing National Dialogue process accurately reflects the aspirations and concerns of contemporary Saudi society; what its impact on socio-political development may be; and how it relates to wider regime strategies and to the evolution of the Saudi polity.

The thesis examines KACND's institutions, practices and impacts, as well as Saudis' perceptions of all these. It does so by embedding the analysis in a survey of the evolution of broader Saudi socio-political dynamics; drawing in particular on Gramsci, it asks whether the system is moving from a form of patrimonial state to one of ideological hegemony, and whether the KACND is a catalyst in this transition or may even be part of the apparatus that is driving this transition, including its indirect or unintended effects.

To that end, the thesis examines the mutual relationship between KACND and the key Saudi social constituencies, with their attendant issues. In particular, it explores the extent to which the KACND's activities directly and indirectly impact on internal cross-constituency communication and discourse in the Kingdom.

The thesis explores the legitimisation of state-society dialogue in Saudi Arabia, focusing on the direct and indirect consequences of the National Dialogue process with reference to the role and activities of KACND. It examines the expanding activities of KACND, including the evolving range of issues discussed as part of the institution's activities, and the scope of participants. It highlights the shift from ideology-based National Dialogue Meetings such as on national unity and women's rights, to service-based National Dialogues such as on employment and health. It also examines the newly established Cultural Discourse and assesses the impact of this initiative as a space for ideological debate.

The study is based on extensive fieldwork in Saudi Arabia from 2009 to 2011, referencing information and official documentation not previously available, and

drawing on findings from a wide range of focus groups, interviews, and participant observation with National Dialogue participants, KACND officials, government ministers, lawyers, journalists, scholars and members of minority constituencies

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACPRA:	Saudi Political Rights Association
ARAMCO:	Saudi Arabian Oil Company
ASDA'A:	ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller
BBC:	British Broadcasting Corporation
CEO:	chief executive officer
CfBT:	Centre for British Teachers
DGI:	Directorate of General Investigation
EST:	estimated
EU:	European Union
GCC:	Gulf Cooperation Council
GID:	General Intelligence Directorate
GSN:	Gulf States Newsletter
HRW:	Human Rights Watch
ISI:	Institute for Scientific Information
KAAU:	King Abdulaziz University
KACND:	King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue
KAUST:	King Abdullah University for Science and Technology
KFCRIS:	King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies
KFU:	King Faisal University
KFUPM:	King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals
KPI:	Key Performance Indicators
KSU:	King Saud University
MBC:	Middle East Broadcasting Corporation
MEMRI:	The Middle East Media Research Institute
MENA:	Middle East and North Africa

MP:	Member of Parliament
NCAAA:	Saudi Stages in Accreditation for New Institutions Responsible to the Ministry of Higher Education
NGO:	non-governmental organisation
SAR:	Saudi Arabian Riyal
NSC:	Saudi National Security Council
NSHR:	National Society for Human Rights
OIR:	The Organisation of the Islamic Revolution
PMU:	Prince Mohammed bin Fahd University
PSU:	Prince Sultan University
RCCI:	Riyadh Chamber of Commerce and Industry
SABIC:	Saudi Basic Industries Corporation
SANG:	Saudi Arabian National Guard
SCCI:	Saudi Confederation of Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture
SHRC:	Saudi Human Rights Commission
SUSRIS:	Saudi-US Relations Information Service
SWOT:	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
TQM:	Total quality management
UAE:	United Arab Emirates
UK:	United Kingdom
USA:	United States of America
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WTO:	World Trade Organisation

INTRODUCTION

National dialogue, state-society dialogue and demands for socio-political reform have been discussed widely since the advent of the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ in early 2011, in a highly visible intensification of a longer-running trend. The Arab world had, until then, come to be seen in the public eye as well as in much of academia, as an exceptional case where successive ‘waves of democratisation’ appeared to have no grip and authoritarianism proved especially persistent. The Arab Spring shattered this view, although by the same token at least some of the monarchies in the Arab world remained less perturbed. Even here, though, discussion proliferated and regimes reacted in diverse ways.

Citizens across the Arab world have been questioning the lack of access to state actors and institutions in addition to the narrow degree of participation in the political process. Whilst the internal dynamics of individual nations vary greatly, many of the societal issues and problems currently being highlighted, such as unemployment, women’s rights, youth aspirations, increased cost of living and education, resonate with societies across the region including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

However, in the Saudi context and prior to the Arab Spring, specific programmes had already been initiated to address these concerns under the umbrella of a process often referred to simply as the ‘National Dialogue’, organised by an institution named The King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue (KACND; in Arabic normally referred to as *majlis al-hiwar al-watani*).

KACND has its supporters and detractors both inside and outside Saudi Arabia. However, the role of the institution is often either misinterpreted or misunderstood by foreign observers and indeed sometimes within Saudi society. Whilst the annual National Meetings for Intellectual Dialogue attract most attention, the institution is also responsible for a wide variety of other dialogue-related activities that involve individuals across the Kingdom and at all societal levels. The aim of this thesis is to assess the extent to which the activities of KACND and National Dialogue process represent a viable attempt to address socio-political issues and whether the on-going

dialogue process accurately reflects the aspirations and concerns of contemporary Saudi society. This study attempts to advance our understanding of Saudi Arabia's National Dialogue institution and to appraise its significance by examining its various forums and activities as well as attitudes of participants, observers and critics.

This can only be done fruitfully as part of an examination of the changing nature of Saudi politics and the Saudi state. Drawing in part on the existing literature on that subject and in part on the dichotomy between the patrimonial / patriarchal state on the one hand, and on Gramscian ideological hegemony on the other, the study addresses the extent to which the Al Sa`ud have been able to engineer an evolution from the former to the latter. KACND, in other words, is one prism through which to view an interpretation of wider aspects of Saudi political evolution. Given the almost complete dearth of work on the subject of the National Dialogue itself, this thesis will keep a tight focus specifically on this topic; but it does so within an awareness of these wider questions.

Whilst the regional turmoil has undoubtedly highlighted the importance of societal change and the intertwined political and socio-economic grievances, not to mention the danger they could pose to internal stability, individuals within institutions such as KACND have been aware for a number of years that a constructive and 'hands on' approach in dealing with these problems was required. 'Dialogue' is interpreted by the institution as a vital and safe channel for freedom of opinion and positive expression and involves the discussion of ideas which benefit the creed, principles and traditions of the Kingdom (KACND 2005a, p. 13). According to official statements, KACND's mission is to promote a 'culture of dialogue'. Indeed, it is acknowledged that since its establishment in 2003 KACND has attempted to debate contentious socio-political issues by bringing individuals together from across the Kingdom. In fact, in recent years KACND has been expanding the scope of the entire dialogue structure and process in order to include greater numbers of participants and debate a broader range of issues.

RATIONALE

The idea for this research originated in 2008 whilst I was teaching at the Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG) School of Signals located in eastern Riyadh. I noticed that during classroom breaks there was far more debate of previously 'taboo' subjects

amongst the student cadets, which contrasted with the type of conversational topics, discussed by other Saudi students earlier in the decade. Interestingly, these discussions often attempted to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of various controversial societal issues and even if the debate became heated there appeared to be a tacit acknowledgement that agreeing to disagree was an acceptable option.¹ These cadets, aged 18—22, were all members of traditional SANG tribes that form the backbone of the corps, tribes such as the Qahtanis, the Shammaris and the Onaizis. In general it is fair to say that, prior to their acceptance at the school, most of the cadets had received only a rudimentary education and for this reason did not possess a great deal of general knowledge as well as not being very worldly. Therefore, this situation was intriguing not least because the participants did not belong to the educated elite and yet clearly some form of dialogue legitimisation had filtered through to them. Furthermore, this raised the wider question of who was responsible for this development and how it had been achieved. In consequence, I began to take an interest in KACND and endeavoured to discover more about the institution, its activities and place in the Saudi socio-political arena.

In the early stages of my research I became aware that the activities of KACND and the effectiveness of the National Dialogue process were frequently dismissed as irrelevant and that an unfashionable perception of the dialogue was prevalent in some circles. However, it appeared that this dismissal was supported mainly by the argument that the recommendations from the National Meetings were not implemented and this rendered the entire endeavour meaningless. From my own experience of living and working in the Kingdom this seemed a typical example of the over-generalisations that are often utilised to discuss far more complex issues pertaining to the rapidly developing Saudi socio-political and socio-cultural environment. In addition, outside of Saudi Arabia KACND was only being discussed within a very narrow academic window and this appeared to ignore the ‘national’ concept of the dialogue process. Whilst Saudi academics are invited to participate in the institution’s forums, the dialogue process as a whole is meant to encompass all societal constituencies and for this reason, I believe that the dialogue process needs to be researched and analysed in a ‘national’ sense. Therefore, I decided to approach the topic by looking at a number of issues surrounding

¹ For example, the cadets discussed issues such as the opening of cinemas and allowing women to drive.

the dialogue process and more specifically at KACND and the National Dialogue process itself:

- What were the reasons behind the legitimisation of state-society dialogue?
- What happens when the state legitimises discussion of previously taboo topics?
- Is the National Dialogue process viewed as legitimate by Saudi society?
- Why is the state promoting greater cross-constituency dialogue?
- Is National Dialogue simply ‘window-dressing’ and a smokescreen to hide the inadequacies of government policies?
- What was the reason behind the shift from ideology-related dialogue to service-related dialogue?
- Does KACND have a long-term vision?
- How crucial is the perceived non-implementation of National Meetings recommendations?
- To what extent will the dialogue training programmes have an impact on the formation and expansion of civil society?
- What could be the role of KACND and the National Dialogue in a post King Abdullah Saudi Arabia?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PRIMARY SOURCES FOR THE STUDY

This study takes an essentially empirical approach to the subject matter, but that approach is illuminated by a conceptual approach and framework.

Conceptual approach

As a starting point, this study considers the concept of (neo) patrimonialism as it is often used to describe the patron-client network character of Saudi polity. It explains how the monarch organises the regime around himself personally, maintaining other members of the elite in a relationship of dependence on his personal grace and good favour; in the case of Saudi Arabia, it is necessary to substitute the monarch with that of the ‘collective’ power structure of the extended Al Sa`ud family. The modern Saudi state has been traditionally studied using concepts such as patrimonialism and / or neo-patrimonialism and whilst this facilitates an understanding of the socio-cultural and historical-political nature of the Saudi state, it may not accurately convey more recent developments regarding the changing nature of Saudi politics and the Saudi state.

For this reason, the study moves on to discuss Gramscian ideological hegemony, whereby a ‘common will’ is established between a dominant class and other subaltern classes. It discusses how the power of the hegemonic class is founded on the consent of the subaltern classes, but significantly, this hegemony is established by methods and means other than the use of violence or outright coercion. Moreover, if Gramscian hegemony is applied to the Saudi state, is it possible to identify a specific type of Al Sa`ud hegemony that is being established over Saudi society, one that has the ultimate purpose of creating a sense of national identity; one that adheres to an identity manufactured by the Al Sa`ud regime? This question leads to an examination of KACND and the National Dialogue process asking whether the institution could be viewed as a conduit for such reciprocal discourse, facilitated by the invitation to selected individuals whose intermediation is deemed appropriate in order to disseminate the dominant hegemony. By firstly looking at patrimonialism and then examining Gramscian hegemony, this provides a framework to ascertain to what extent the Al Sa`ud have been able to engineer an evolution from the former to the latter.

Fieldwork

This thesis is based on doctoral fieldwork in the Kingdom conducted from October 2009 to January 2011. This fieldwork employed a number of methodologies, the principal ones being (1) interviews in a variety of locations with approximately 100 individuals (as listed in Appendix I); (2) four focus groups in Riyadh (two of KACND participants; two socio-political discussion groups) two in Qatif (socio-political discussion groups), one in Jeddah (political dissidents) and one in Najran (socio-political discussion group); and (3) the collection of official documentation, both for internal and for external use – the vast majority of which has not been brought together before. The interviews and focus groups were conducted throughout Saudi Arabia with amongst others: participants in the National Dialogue activities listed (male and female), KACND officials, government ministers, lawyers, journalists, focus groups and members of minority constituencies.² Interviews took the shape of both individual and joint question and answer sessions — including informal participation in a number of majlises. Focus groups comprised between four and twelve participants. The author has respected the wishes of the interviewees and focus group members who, unless named in this study, asked to remain anonymous. Official documentation from KACND

² See Appendix I

was used in order to place the participants' recollections and viewpoints in context, explore the evolving official view, and establish basic factual information. In addition, email communication, websites and discussion forums also provided primary material for the study.

Choice of interviewees

I decided that, in order to build a network of contacts that would facilitate extensive interviews in various locations, it was necessary to return to Saudi Arabia on a full-time basis. Having already lived and worked in the Kingdom since 2000³ this was fairly easy to achieve as I had previously been offered a teaching position with Prince Sultan University (PSU) in Riyadh. From the outset I made it clear to PSU that I intended to carry out doctoral fieldwork, but that it would not interfere with my work commitments. The one year contract with PSU provided adequate time to build trust with institutions such as KACND and establish my contacts. In the first instance it was my previously established connections who opened the initial doors and provided contact details. Naturally, I has a list of individuals I hoped to meet, KACND Secretary-General Faisal Al Mu`ammar being one of them, as I understood that he was the key to accessing KACND. Originally, I had a target number of fifty principal interviews, but by the end of my teaching contract I had been able to interview a great many more individuals. Fortunately, the vast majority of my interviewees were more than ready to discuss the National Dialogue and related issues as well as being happy to recommend other contacts.⁴ This necessarily injected an element of randomness into the interview procedure, which resulted in many last minute journeys to locations outside Riyadh, but at the same time directed me towards individuals who ultimately made a significant contribution to my fieldwork. In addition, although I prepared several generic question sets, I quickly became aware that it was beneficial to 'follow the flow' once the interviewee highlighted areas important to him/her.⁵

As I was conducting an exploratory study, my approach was necessarily far less structured than a confirmatory one. In addition, it was apparent that in the Saudi context

³ Employment contracts with Saudi Arabian Airlines and the Saudi Arabian National Guard.

⁴ My shortest interview lasted approximately an hour and my longest, with a focus group in Riyadh, seven hours.

⁵ See Appendix II. Very few of the interviews were recorded as most of the interviewees were either not comfortable with this method or declined to be taped. This necessitated copious note taking and rewriting of notes immediately after the interviews.

my fieldwork needed to be open to unsuspected phenomena which may have been concealed by what Miles and Huberman term 'prior instrumentation' (1984, p. 42). Despite already having a number of contacts, due to the interconnectedness of Saudi society and importance of personal connections, I was fully aware that it would be necessary to adopt to a greater degree a chain referral, or snowballing approach in order to penetrate hitherto difficult to access constituencies. This procedure involved recruiting individuals for interviews or group discussions by means of informal contact between them. Furthermore, I was also acutely aware that a degree of trust needed to be established at the earliest stage of my fieldwork so that the interviewees would feel comfortable to suggest others known to them who might similarly be eligible and / or have something interesting to contribute about the subject.⁶ This was particularly true when it came to interviewing Saudi women as without 'snowballing' it would have been extremely difficult to make the necessary connections let alone set up interviews (often in 'unusual' locations). As Atkinson and Flint explain:

The main value of snowballing is as a method for obtaining respondents where they are few in number or where some degree of trust is required to initiate contact. Under these circumstances, techniques of 'chain referral' may imbue the researcher with characteristics associated with being an insider or group member and this can aid entry to settings where conventional approaches find it difficult to succeed (2001, p. 3).

Throughout the interview process I attempted to listen to as many opinions as possible with individuals from a diverse range of Saudi constituencies and I sought out participants in order to achieve a balance wherever possible based on gender, religious beliefs, regional variations and attitudes, whether positive or negative to KACND and the dialogue process. This balance was dependent on, and influenced by, access to various constituencies and the constraints imposed by Saudi social norms.

It was important to keep in mind the 'National' aspect of the dialogue process, and not limit discussion to either academics in Riyadh or KACND officials. With this and the need to interview a diverse range of participants in mind, I travelled extensively during the interview process in order to increase my network of interviewees. As the writing up process developed I became aware of gaps in my fieldwork relating to areas that had not

⁶ The surest and fastest way to establish a network of contacts within the Kingdom is to be given personal mobile numbers. In my case, very few people appeared to respond to email requests for an interview, whereas a text message or a phone call almost always secured an interview. This underlined the importance of trust and establishing a reputation as an honest and trustworthy researcher with a respect for Saudi culture and social norms. Without this trust, it is doubtful that personal numbers would have been provided.

been sufficiently explored and social groups that had not been included. Fortunately, due to an invitation from the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies (KFCRIS), I was able to return to Saudi Arabia in early 2011 and this allowed me to conduct the necessary additional interviews as well as follow-up meetings with already established contacts.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

There is very little academic research concerning KACND and the National Dialogue process. The little that has been written is included in broader studies and relates solely to the National Meetings for Intellectual Dialogue.⁷ Therefore, this study attempts to examine the dialogue process in its entirety and highlight previously little-known aspects. It also draws heavily on the experience of individuals who have either participated in a KACND-sponsored forum or who have formed opinions from observation of the institution's activities. It is hoped that this background allows an interesting and distinct group of Saudi voices to be heard with regards to the role of KACND and the effectiveness of the National Dialogue process.

The research questions animating this study, then, are the following:

1. Is the Saudi state experiencing a transition from a patrimonial system of government to one based on a hegemonic form, i.e., acquiescence as a determining factor of state coercion or enforcement?
2. If this is indeed the case, does the creation of a state-sponsored institution such as KACND (alongside the expansion of the *majlis al-shura* and creation of professional syndicates) fit this hypothesis? In other words, is it possible to interpret the institutionalisation of socio-political discourse as a conduit that will enable the Al Sa'ud regime to move beyond a patrimonial / neo-patrimonial / clientelistic system of government towards a more sophisticated framework, albeit one now based on hegemonic power?

⁷ See, for example Ammoun, C., 2006. The Institutionalization of the Saudi Political System and the Birth of 'Political Personnel'. In: A. Khalaf and G. Luciani, eds. *Constitutional Reform and Political Participation in the Gulf*. Dubai: Gulf Research Centre: 213—40; Hertog, 2006. The New Corporatism in Saudi Arabia: Limits of Formal Politics. In: A. Khalaf and G. Luciani. *Constitutional Reform and Political Participation in the Gulf*. Dubai: Gulf Research Center, pp. 241—75.

3. Does the institutionalising of socio-political discourse through forums such as the National Dialogue signify an attempt to steer existing internal forces into structured channels in order to control issues and actors relating to state-society dialogue? Might newly established institutions such as KACND and corporatist bodies such as the professional associations help facilitate a bottom-up political discourse thus influencing the top-down state-controlled space? Or might these attempts at greater socio-political participation create conflict with the Al Sa`ud regime, prompting a reinforcement of the regime's authoritarian traits?

4. The incorporation of a hierarchical structured Saudi society into the civic domain through the creation of new institutionalised forums appears to have been promoted by reformist elements within King Abdullah's circle of power. Of course, in reality any promotion of reform raises the issue of Huntington's 'the king's dilemma' (1968) whereby newly educated constituencies begin to question the recognised status quo by demanding greater government accountability and transparency. Therefore, could 'reform' inadvertently facilitate the creation of new political spaces? Could an independent local vision emerge, forged between an amalgamation of existing state actors and non-co-opted groupings?

5. Indeed, do internal social-political and socio-economic forces exist that are operating outside of the state-co-opted spheres of influence? If so, how can these internal forces / actors be analysed and within which 'spaces' are they operating? Are these spaces included in the parameters of the existing political spectrum, and if so, then do they still constitute a degree of political or institutional opening within the autocratic structure of the Saudi state?

6. Notwithstanding opposition from certain constituencies, the bottom line is to what extent the Al Sa`ud takes this new discourse seriously. Could it simply be a smokescreen, staged to conceal the actual political agendas of the competing princely power circles? Or, as some observers believe, is the Al Sa`ud using these occasions to 'test the waters' before embarking on a radical socio-political overhaul? (Raphaeli 2005, p. 523)

7. Intentions apart, is it possible for a state to remain hegemonic once it allows society to mobilise and develop its own agenda? Once this happens is the state's power relative to the status of society? One source argues that in reality the road to democracy

in Saudi Arabia might already be in place.⁸ Another believes that the general atmosphere in the Kingdom has changed and therefore the goal of KACND is being achieved — indeed a change in dialogue equals a change in atmosphere.⁹ Many point out that the overall socio-political environment in the Kingdom is transforming.¹⁰

8. In sum: is a niche, however small, being carved in the existing Saudi political space? Do KACND and the National Dialogue process have the potential to represent something meaningful in the Kingdom and how is it possible to evaluate the impact of a controlled national discourse on government decision-making? Furthermore, is there a climate of opinion emerging from the National Dialogue process that is independent of the state-controlled discourse, and therefore, should the National Dialogue process be viewed as intrinsic to a wider programme of change or a reflection of an independent process? Is it also conceivable, or indeed possible, that the National Dialogue can provide a conduit whereby actors from across the spectrum of Saudi society can find their own common denominators that will facilitate greater participatory politics? Could this, in turn, lead to gradual enhanced political and institutional opening within the dynamics of the Al Sa`ud political system?

OVERVIEW AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The first two chapters provide the conceptual and empirical framework for this study. Chapter one considers whether the Al Sa`ud state structure is moving beyond a recognised form of neo-patrimonialism towards a position whereby ideological hegemony plays a defining role in the socio-political and socio-cultural environment of the Kingdom; it does so with reference both to writings about the patrimonial state and to Gramsci's theory on hegemony. Chapter two fleshes this out by examining the relationship between state and society, and broader Saudi political dynamics, homing in on key state and non-state actors.

Chapter three then looks at the establishment of KACND, as well as the rationale and stated mission of the institution. It examines the National Meetings for Intellectual Dialogue and other lesser-known dialogue related forums and activities, including an

⁸ Interview by author with Subject 63, political activist (Qatif: 18.01.11).

⁹ Interview by author with Subject 19, lawyer, ex-judge, owner of Arab Network for Research and Publishing (Riyadh: 21.06.10).

¹⁰ Including in interview by author with Subject 50, KACND official (Riyadh: 10.01.11).

overview of the newly established Cultural Discourse and the dialogue training schemes.

The fourth chapter focuses on the ways in which the National Dialogue process might be modifying and / or expanding socio-political space through greater societal participation and inclusion in KACND meetings and forums. It considers the role of KACND in relation to issues of legitimacy and loyalty and discusses the Cultural Discourse and its deliberations on the dominant ideology, the effect of globalisation on Saudi society and the vital issues of tribalism, Saudi regionalism and intellectual classification. It also looks at the perspectives and aspirations of religious minorities to the National Dialogue process.

The fifth chapter examines the pivotal issues of women's rights and KACND female participation referencing KACND participants, elite women and the Vice-Minister for Girl's Education. It also discusses the institution's youth policies and activities and how these relate to education, Saudization and unemployment as well as KACND initiatives linked to the Ministry of Education and schemes such as the King Abdullah Scholarship programme. Finally, it looks at how National Dialogue process is being used to absorb societal discontent as well as the institution's relationship with the so-called 'conservative' nature of Saudi society.

In chapter six the impact of the National Dialogue process is examined, such as cross-constituency connections and the extent of institutional interaction between KACND and other Saudi socio-political bodies. It discusses whether the informal and the unintended impacts may perhaps be at least as important as the formal and intended ones. It also looks at the relationship between KACND and the media as well as and the issue of human rights. It considers the ways in which the National Dialogue process may be influencing concepts of Saudi national identity and finally, it discusses the necessity of implementing a viable dialogue evaluation process.

The conclusion draws together the main themes and patterns that emerge from the evidence, and returns to the research questions set out here.

CHAPTER ONE

THE TRANSITION FROM A PATRIMONIAL STATE TO A HEGEMONIC STATE

Since its inception in 1932, the modern Saudi state has been traditionally studied and interpreted through a prism of concepts such as patrimonialism and / or neo-patrimonialism, in addition to patriarchalism and / or neo-patriarchalism. Whilst the use of these concepts facilitates an understanding of the socio-cultural and historical-political nature of the Saudi state, they might not accurately convey more recent developments and transfigurations within the Saudi state power structure, and the changing relationship within Saudi class stratification. However, as a starting point, it is useful to examine and interpret the nature of the Saudi state with reference to a patrimonial / patriarchal or neo-patrimonial / neo-patriarchal model.

CONCEPTS

Neo-patrimonial states

In ‘neo-patrimonial’ states the ruler organises the regime around himself personally, maintaining other members of the elite in a relationship of dependence on his personal grace and good favour. For this reason, the concept of neo-patrimonialism has been used to describe the patron-client network character of Saudi polity, as politics dominates the relationship between the state elites, economics, socio-cultural factors and, more especially, the nature of Islam (Ayubi 1995, pp. 164 – 67; Sharabi 1988). Most specifically, it is tied to the person of the absolute ruler and to the realm of prerogative and favouritism surrounding him. In the case of Saudi Arabia, it is necessary to substitute the ‘person’ of the absolute ruler with that of a ‘collective’ power structure that not only comprises the monarch, but also the most senior princes, many of whom have their own fiefdoms and constituencies that form an integral part of the overall state structure; in particular, Princes Nayef and Salman exemplify this structure.¹¹

¹¹ Respectively, Minister of the Interior and Minister of Defence. Prince Salman also remains de facto Governor of Riyadh. Although there were rumours in 2011 following the death of Crown Prince Sultan that Prince Khaled Al Faisal was going to replace Salman as Riyadh governor, this proved incorrect as acting governor Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz assumed the position. An individual close to Salman’s

A patrimonial state is one that possesses advanced administrative capabilities, but is still, in terms of ethos, tied to the ‘political’ factor in general (Ayubi 1995, p. 164). In the case of Saudi Arabia, the advanced administrative capabilities of the Kingdom include the bureaucratic functions of the state and public institutions, which employ a plethora of civil servants who are closely tied to the individual power structures of the various Al Sa`ud-run state ministries. For this reason, Hertog argues that the Saudi state possesses higher levels of ‘stateness’ and bureaucratic levels than many other countries. Further, he posits that one theory alone is inadequate to capture the dynamics of the Saudi socio-political and economic environment; although as politics dominates economics and personal relations explain a great deal about those politics, this then fits a ‘neo-patrimonial’ model. Patrimonialism, along with clientelism, has, Chaudhry says (1997, p. 191), often been used to describe the social effects of the domestic deployment of state-controlled rents, but in this respect the term fails to recognise the ability of modern organisational institutions to develop and mature, as has occurred in Saudi Arabia; the Saudi Confederation of Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture (SCCI) being but one example. Notwithstanding, Hertog argues that for the Saudi state to develop, the state needs to cultivate new links to society, but that the mechanisms for this do not appear to be present at the moment. Thus, Hertog proposes a combination of different approaches when analysing the contemporary dynamics of Saudi political economy: an amalgamation of rentier and distributive state theories, in addition to a patron-client analysis and an examination of neo-patrimonialism (Hertog 2005c, p. 141).

Neo-patriarchal society

In a neo-patriarchal society, the individual is still primarily influenced by *asabiyya*, that is, by tribal tradition and group loyalty, namely family, tribe, and / or sect. Thus, by being patriarchal, the discourse of the state aims at subjugation rather than information (Ayubi 1995, p. 167). Although Islam remains the Kingdom’s ruling ideology, tribalism and kinship ties constitute another underlying dimension to the formation of the modern Saudi state. According to Champion, tribal psychology continues to permeate Saudi

family comments that Prince Sattam is known to be a pleasant personality, but according to the source he has little ambition. Therefore, Sattam was given the post along with another far weaker deputy in order to be able to remove them both at a convenient time in the future. In fact, Prince Salman continues to act as the capital’s governor; for example, several days after officially stepping down he decided that Riyadh’s private schools should refrain from promoting mixed gender classes. In addition, on 18 November Prince Salman announced that he was shifting his weekly Riyadh meeting with citizens (Arabic: *majlis*) from Monday to Sunday. Interview with Subject 51, political-science lecturer King Saud University (KSU) (Riyadh: 21.11.11).

society, although the author prefers the term ‘neo-tribal’ or ‘familialism’ as they better describe this imprint of *asabiyya*, i.e., tribal solidarity, in modern Saudi Arabia (2003, pp. 70—71). The Kingdom’s transition from a rural society to a predominantly urbanised one may have modified the manner by which traditions and kinship solidarity are perceived; therefore the question is not whether these traditional bonds have been loosened, but rather whether they have been strengthened in a manner that reflects the contemporary socio-political and socio-cultural environment.

Far from being a rigid structure, the tribe possesses a significant capacity for adaptation to social change and, although kinship solidarity is cherished, it does not obstruct the tribe’s economic and political interests. Moreover, the major tribal associations are based on both kinship groups and regional alliances so that in Arabia, tribe and state complement rather than contradict each other (Ayubi 1995, p. 244). In discussing tribe and state, Al Rasheed argues:

One myth is the state reflects tribal coalitions. The reality is that today the only tribe which practices political tribalism in Saudi Arabia is that of the Al Sa`ud. Over the past one hundred years the Al Sa`ud has evolved from being a family into a tribe. Saudi society continues to hold onto the social and identity aspects of tribalism, but no political tribalism is evident. Sections of Saudi society adhere to the ethos of the tribe but do not exhibit the political aspect of tribalism (2006a, p. 1).

However, there are tribes who identify themselves in a political fashion, for example the Al Otaibi. Non-Saudi visitors to Riyadh have often wondered why the digits ‘501’ appear as graffiti on the capitals walls with no way of knowing that the digits represent the Al Otaibi. This manifestation of tribal identity is a political statement made to highlight the positions occupied by tribal members, or perceived lack of, in the Kingdom’s state institutions.

Governing systems

In Saudi Arabia, as Hertog explains, state-building has comprised the creation of patron-client relations and the imposition of a ‘large state’ on society (Hertog 2010, p. 17). Moreover, governing systems, where they can be found, are usually based on tradition, customs and convention, rather than religious principles (Nabulsi 2006b, p. 25). However, Hamzawy argues that reformers in Saudi Arabia and experts outside the country need to question their negative understanding of traditional politics (2005b, p. 2), as despite traditional values remaining prevalent in Saudi society, all aspects of

society have been transformed by a great many outside influences. Thus, traditional systems should now be viewed as ‘neo-traditionalist systems’, or post-traditional, as the nature of politics develops according to the socio-political climate in any given period (Nonneman 2006, p. 3). In addition, several commentators have raised the issue of gradualism when discussing contemporary Saudi politics, as reforming authoritarian polities follow a gradual path and this is an uneven process which entails the creation of new spaces where citizens learn how to assert their rights and learn the institutionalisation of public choice as the governing principle of the state-society relationship.¹² Nonetheless it should be stressed that gradualism is not synonymous with political stagnation (Hamzawy 2005b, pp. 1—2). Hence, it is necessary to identify and to distinguish the any newly created spaces occurring in a socio-political environment and to analyse whether or not these processes are altering the distribution of power within the political system or simply constitute empty cosmetic gestures designed to placate the regime’s critics. Therefore, do concepts such as patrimonialism, or neo-patrimonialism, so frequently used to describe Arab Gulf states, accurately reflect the structure of the contemporary Saudi state and the roles of the dominant Al Sa`ud regime and Saudi society at large? Or is, in fact, a new hegemonic system emerging?

This chapter asks whether the Al Sa`ud state structure is moving beyond a recognised form of neo-patrimonialism towards a position whereby ideological hegemony plays a defining role in the socio-political and socio-cultural environment of Saudi Arabia. Therefore, this study’s theoretical framework aims to examine the concept of hegemony in order to identify any possible trends that might imply a transition from Saudi neo-patrimonialism towards the development of an Al Sa`ud style hegemony in the Kingdom, in addition to the creation of a new form of political society and its subsequent influence on Saudi civil society. At the outset, it is necessary to ask not only what constitutes a hegemonic state, and the nature of its distinctive features, but also how it comes into being. Is the concept of hegemony, or interpretations of hegemony, relevant to contemporary Saudi Arabia? If it is possible to identify aspects of hegemony that are relevant to a study of the modern Saudi state, then is it possible to discern the nature of an Al Sa`ud hegemony and its related power structure, culture and discourse?

¹² However, in the context of Saudi Arabian history, change and development in society has moved extremely fast since the state’s inception in 1932 — and continues to do so; a fact often overlooked by western observers, but not by many Saudis themselves.

Conversely, what aspects and / or interpretations of counter-hegemony are relevant to contemporary Saudi Arabia? If an Al Sa`ud hegemony dominates both the socio-political and civic domains, then is this hegemony being challenged, and if so, by whom and in what manner?

DEFINING THE SAUDI STATE

The current body of Saudi specific literature emphasises the ‘top-down’ nature of the Saudi political system, indicating that all significant policy decisions emanate from the recognised Al Sa`ud power circles (Al Rasheed 2005, p. 199), or concentric circles of influence (Glosemeyer 2004, p. 141). Scholars are currently debating the extent of Saudi ‘political modernisation’ and ‘economic liberalisation’,¹³ with a divergence of opinion on whether a great deal, or very little, has occurred within the existing formal structures (Hertog 2004, p. 1). However, Nonneman notes that the nature and extent of debate in Saudi Arabia regarding expanding elections to the *majlis al-shura* also indicates a changing political culture that may support longer-term political evolution (2006, p. 35). Indeed, when analysing Saudi socio-political evolution, it would appear that the challenge is not to describe a perfect process that will almost certainly not take place. Indeed, when analysing Saudi socio-political evolution, it would appear that the challenge is not to describe a perfect process that will almost certainly not take place, but to distinguish these partial steps as ones that are not cosmetic, but ones that may alter the distribution of power and influence the political system (Ottaway 2008, p. 3).

The Al Sa`ud monarchical institution

Al Rasheed maintains that since its creation in 1932, the dominant narrative of Saudi Arabia has been one of state formation and state transformation (2002, p. 1). In their study on the state and the monarchy, Kostiner and Teitlebaum concur, although they strongly emphasise that this state-building process is inextricably linked the evolution of the Al Sa`ud monarchical institution (2000, pp. 131—32). The Al Sa`ud monarchical institution is, according to Abir, often classified as an absolute monarchy, dominated and reliant on the rentier nature of the Saudi economy. Nevertheless, a more appropriate description of the Saudi state is of an oligarchy whose pillars are the extended Al Sa`ud family, and the religious establishment, i.e., the ‘*ulama* and *umara*’ (Abir 1993, p. 7),

¹³ These generalised terms are frequently utilised to describe processes that are in reality far more complex and contradictory.

and therefore, the Kingdom possesses many of the characteristics of a ‘parental state’ whereby the policies of the Al Sa`ud regime attempt to shape and guide Saudi society. Additionally, the role of the Al Sa`ud is said to manifest itself on three levels: as a ruling institution, as a royal family and as an institution that integrates with the Wahhabi *‘ulama* (Kostiner and Teitelbaum 2000, pp. 132—33). Indeed, Cordesman argues that, contrary to western perceptions, the Al Sa`ud is not an absolute monarchy in the western sense either. More exactly, the Al Sa`ud adheres to a form of Saudi political tradition based on social consensus and pragmatism rather than ideology (2003, p. 132), and for this reason it has been argued that the role of the Al Sa`ud closely resembles that of an authoritarian political party operating within a one party state (Niblock 2006b, p. 14). Therefore, although it is axiomatic in some circles to refer to the Saudi regime as an absolute monarchy, the Al Sa`ud monarchy does not operate along the lines of a ‘traditional’ autocratic monarchical institution, and as Gause rightly notes (2004, p. 1), many attempts at assessing the status of the Al Sa`ud fall into the trap of being too schematic about a more complex and nuanced reality.

A more precise description and function of the Al Sa`ud regime is arguably that of an ‘arch-distributor’ (Hertog 2005c, pp. 137—138), in that the function of the regime is to monitor ties between the dominant core elites, major patron-client networks and subaltern classes. This transformation from a traditional tribal monarchy into a ruling political institution with its role of ‘arch-distributor’ has resulted in the Al Sa`ud maintaining complete control over state bureaucracy and state institutions (Herb 1999, p. 3). This process of political power consolidation intensified during the reign of King Khalid (1975—82), with those princes occupying senior ministerial posts, in particular the Al Sudairi brothers, reinforcing their ministerial powerbases.¹⁴ As a result, as Long notes, national politics is not played out within in the realms of the Al Sa`ud family per se, but through the national ministries (2002, p. 94), in particular at the Ministry of the Interior, headed by the powerful Prince Nayef. At its most extreme, this system has created a number of institutional, regulative and distributive ‘fiefdoms’ sometimes with overlapping areas of jurisdiction (Hertog 2005c, p. 116). Individual princes have facilitated this process by strengthening personal control over associated political capital, in other words, money, prestige, networks, military and secret service capacities

¹⁴ The Sudairi brothers are often referred to as the ‘Sudairi seven’. They are the sons of King Abdulaziz’s influential wife Princess Husa bin Ahmad bin Muhammad Al Sudairi: King Fahd, Prince Sultan, Prince Abdulrahman, Prince Nayef, Prince Turki, Prince Salman and Prince Ahmad.

(Glosemeyer 2004, pp. 148—49). These forms of political clientelism are a product of centuries-old ideas of privileges and confusion between the national state apparatus and those who are manipulating it (Salameh 1987, p. 207) and in this situation, the state may assume more despotic characteristics so that politics is conducted through informal networks. Nonetheless, these informal networks and structures are not usually oriented to the public realm and to national political processes (Hertog 2004, p. 18).

Patronage and Corporatism

Patronage and clientelism are practices that integrate the individual vertically into social life on the basis of conformity, of accepting the legitimacy of the status quo and becoming trained to its accepted rules of conduct (Ayubi 1995, pp. 166—67). In Saudi Arabia, the ruling family established a national patron-client relationship with the Saudi populace as a whole, and as the sole recipient of the state's oil rent, the Al Sa`ud soon assumed the aura of a 'super-tribe' within the state structure. State-sponsored patron-client networks were established within Saudi society with the aim of 'clientelising' the Saudi population en masse and this state-sponsored political clientelism manifested itself in the creation of the Saudi social contract (Champion 2003, p. 78). Within these processes, two varieties of clientelism emerged: political and administrative. Political clientelism can be categorised as large clienteles, aggregate groups or actors who operate at a systemic level and who influence broader policy issues, whilst administrative clientelism can be defined as a more personal process that often involves micro-political involvement between bureaucrats and businessmen. The same process may also occur at a lower hierarchical level, and may still involve individual princes, but the process does not usually factor in broader political questions. Thus, in these situations, clientelism and 'vertical dependency' are informal ties through which services and some goods are exchanged between people of unequal status (Hertog 2005c, pp. 122—23).

In analysing and interpreting clientelism in the Kingdom, the concept of corporatism has been used to describe the involvement in these political and administrative processes. Corporatism may be understood as a solidaristic social and political ideology, or a type of political regime with certain distinct strategies, or as an explanatory and interpretive method of studying state-society relations. Some view corporatism as merely a political sub-system, opposite to pluralism, based on the process of 'interest intermediation' via

the state. ‘Corporatism’ is not an easy concept to define as it may contain all sorts of shades of meaning, but Ayubi provides one of the most pertinent explanations defining corporatism as a particular set of questions pertaining to state-society relations, characterised by an articulation of modes of production and / or by a fluid and overlapping social configuration (Ayubi 1995, p. 189). Ayubi argues that corporatism illustrates a likely political consequence of articulated modes of production and variegated class maps by which individuals and classes do not interact with the state directly, but through intermediaries (1995, pp. 183—84). Corporatism is premised on the proposition that it is not possible or desirable to establish absolute political and ideological dominance of one class or group in society, and in this regard it differs from a Gramscian, or neo-Gramscian, concept of hegemony where the dominance of one class or group in society is possible.

Ayubi points out that Arab societies possess variegated and fluid class structures that are not monolithic and static (1995, p. 175). In the Saudi socio-political process of elites and / or classes, horizontal stratification is merged with vertical differentiation, i.e., tribe/sect/ethnie, and vertical forms of state organisation and dependency are better explained by using a map of policy or organisational circles. The role and functions of these policy circles can be illustrated by locating them within a model of three concentric circles of influence (Glosemeyer 2004, p. 141):

- The Principal Circle: This comprises the most powerful and influential members of the ruling Al Sa`ud.
- The Second Circle: This includes less powerful members of the ruling family, leading members of the religious establishment, plus influential and upwardly mobile academic/bureaucratic technocrats.
- The Third Circle: This amalgamates constituents from all elite grouping who wield little power, but are nevertheless in a position to influence decision-making.

Hertog’s assessment of the Saudi state is that it remains a strongly authoritarian, highly centralised system where societal and functional groups are controlled and arranged by the state. (2005c, p. 115). However, he argues

The state, for our purposes, should not be understood as a unified actor with unified interests, but rather as an institutional conglomerate which, although strongly hierarchical in many respects, creates sets of different, ‘local’ material stakes within itself and between parts of it and societal actors. It creates a ‘political field’ in and around which politics is negotiated.

In this case, the state can be categorised as comprising the various Al Sa`ud factions, or power circles, and the constituencies that are linked to each individual power circle through the mechanisms of political clientelism. Together, these circles and constituencies can be referred to as Saudi political society. Hertog argues that ‘corporatism’ offers the best framework to capture this top-down nature of Saudi politics, because the concept illustrates the limiting and orchestrating of state-society participants, the exclusivity of politics, and the segmentation of group representation through state actors (2004, p. 3). Although corporatism here may explain the ‘top-down’ nature of Saudi politics, does corporatism adequately capture the relationship between the dominant class, in this case Saudi political society, and the subaltern classes that occupy the lower rungs on the ladder of vertical dependency? If a broader understanding of both ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ socio-political processes is required, then is it possible, and more relevant, to apply a Gramscian concept of hegemony to the Saudi state? Might a Gramscian concept of hegemony capture the evolving nature of the Saudi Arabian socio-political and socio-cultural environment?

GRAMSCI'S CONCEPT OF HEGEMONY VIS-À-VIS SAUDI ARABIA

The usage of the term ‘hegemony’ in this thesis applies to the concept as formulated by Antonio Gramsci and subsequently analysed and interpreted by both scholars of Gramsci and / or neo-Gramscian theories of hegemony as opposed to the original meaning derived from ancient Greek scholars. The term hegemony originates from Greek *hegemonia* ‘leadership’, from *hegemon* ‘leader’, from *hegeisthai* ‘to lead’ and is the concept a Marxist would use to describe a world-view whose effect is to consolidate the dominance of one economic class over another into cultural permanence. Ayubi (1995, p. 164) asks whether it could be that the failure of Arab regimes to sustain their legitimacy in the context of the modern nation-state is due to their inability to adapt the long-standing system of ‘direct’ rule of government to the more indirect method of ‘hegemony’, which is more suited to achieve class domination in the contemporary differentiated nation-state. At its simplest, hegemony can be said to mean moral and philosophical leadership which is attained through the active consent of major groups in society (Bocock 1986, p. 11).

Whilst there can be no definitive word on the Gramscian concept of hegemony, it has been noted that one of Gramsci’s central achievements is to have developed and woven

together all the various strands of hegemony for its innovative application on the civil, social, national, and international political, cultural and economic planes (Boothman 2008, p. 47). That is, Gramsci tried to explain the power dynamics and power differences within society and to demonstrate how power persists and endures over time (Fontana 2008, p. 84). According to Forgacs, Gramsci recognised that existing concepts of power did not adequately express the detailed analyses of forms of political power; in particular, concrete relations between social classes and political representation and the cultural and ideological forms in which social antagonisms are contested or regulated and dissipated (1988, p. 189).

In Gramscian theory, ideological hegemony can generate political power for elites not by totally subordinating the political consciousness of subordinate social classes, but by offering ordinary people plausible explanations for complex social phenomena that direct them towards courses of action favoured by the elite (Kollmeyer 2005, p. 14). The usage here of ideological hegemony refers to Gramsci's second usage of the term hegemony meaning the pre-eminence or supremacy that a state, social group, or as Fontana argues, even an individual may exercise over others (2008, p. 81). Moreover, it also denotes the organisation of the cultural, moral and ideological consent of the population to the prevailing political and economic system, and, as the concept of hegemony is closely associated with the state, as well as being both social and ideological, it allows greater scope for the study of coalitions and alliances among classes and groups, i.e., 'socio-historic blocks' (Ayubi 1995, p. 32). It is this factor, namely the analysis of coalitions and alliances among classes and groups that is most relevant to this examination of the contemporary Saudi state.

The economy, the state and civil society are recognised as the three terms that form the foundation for the conceptualisation of hegemony (Bocock 1986, p. 33) and scholars note that Gramsci uses this concept of hegemony specifically to describe the functioning of a modern state (Sassoon 1980, p. 113). Sassoon states that the achievement of state power is of particular significance since it brings the possibility of an extension and full development of the hegemony, which is already partially in existence (1980, pp. 116—17). Ultimately, the state, inclusive of all its hegemonic aspects, bestows prestige on its founders in addition to the concrete historical unity of the leading class and the relations between the state, or political society, and civil society. Most importantly, Gramsci insists that true hegemony could only be exercised by a class that was dominant

economically (Cuneo 2008, p. 2); in this investigation, this would refer to the rentier nature of the Al Sa`ud regime. Therefore, Gramsci's conception of the state as 'hegemony armoured by coercion' is in fact a theoretical consideration that applies to any form of class rule, regardless of the nature of the political system and configuration of state power (Sassoon 1980, p. 110). However, examining Gramsci's concept of hegemony in isolation obscures his definition of the state, as Gramsci is attempting to portray the different dimensions of reality between the economic, political and cultural. Gramscian hegemony identifies the supremacy of a singular group or class over subaltern groups or classes, but significantly, this hegemony is established by methods and means other than the use of violence or outright coercion.¹⁵ That is to say, in Gramscian hegemony a 'common will' is established between a dominant class, the hegemonic, and other subaltern classes, whereby the power of the hegemonic class is founded on the consent of the subaltern classes (Fontana 2006, p. 27; Haugaard 2006b, p. 47). To be precise, the modes of hegemony of a class are related to the way in which masses of people are organised in the economy and the way in which these organised masses relate to the state (Sassoon 1980, p. 116). Within the state, dominant and subaltern classes can be described as social entities that are defined by the relationship of their members to the means of production. A class is both a category of similarly situated individuals and under suitable conditions, and a cultural and political agency. In addition, classes can be further defined by their access to political power, consumption habits, status in society as well as dress, speech and religious characteristics (Richards and Waterbury 2008, p. 40). According to Gramsci, it is the realm of politics, including the economic sphere, that represents the highest historical development of a class and that the state is a 'class state', i.e., the state becomes the instrument of a class that creates conditions under which a certain class can fully develop:

It acts in the name of universal interests within a certain field of constantly changing equilibria between the dominant class and the subaltern groups. The interests of the subordinate groups must have some concrete and not simple ideological weight; otherwise the interests of the dominant class would be merely economic-corporative. The definition of the highest development of a class consists of its ability to represent universal interests (Sassoon 1980, p. 119).

These universal interests are represented through the formation of a discourse that incorporates an 'internal logic' (Haugaard 2006b, p. 49) that unites people into a shared mode of interpretation and subsequently, reinforces particular relations of domination.

¹⁵ In this scenario as Haugaard notes (2006b, p. 54) the concept of outright coercion can take the form of a threat of violence, or more importantly, the threat of material deprivation.

Gramsci explains that, while social groups become dominant when they exercise power, they must lead as well, regardless of the fundamental group's hold on power. Thus, rather than holding on to power, the hegemony of a class derives from the social pressure for it to lead in order to remain dominant. Additionally, a class comes to occupy the dominant class position by obtaining supremacy in the economic organisation of society; measured by ownership of and control over the productive assets of society (Ahmet 2003, p. 324), and therefore, it is possible to refer to a dominant class that provides direction within a state as the 'leading' class:

It is true that the state is seen as the organ of one particular group, destined to create favourable conditions for the latter's maximum expansion. But the development and expansion of the particular group are conceived of, and presented, as being the motor force of a universal expansion, of a development of all the 'national' energies. In other words, the dominant group is co-ordinated concretely with the general interests of the subordinate groups, and the life of the state is conceived of as a continuous process of formation and superseding of equilibria (on the juridical plane) between the interests of the fundamental group and those of subordinate groups – equilibria in which the interests of the dominant group prevail, but only up to a certain point, i.e., stopping short of narrowly economic-corporate interest (Gramsci 1971, p. 182; Forgacs 1988, pp. 205—6).

In Gramsci's view, the supremacy of a social group manifests itself through domination as well as intellectual and moral leadership through the exercise of power and the group's ability to lead (1971, pp. 57—58). He argues that hegemony presupposes that account is taken of the interests and tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised. This necessarily involves compromises so that the leading class 'should make sacrifices of an economic-corporate kind' (Gramsci 1971, p. 161). This reinforces his argument that although hegemony is ethical-political, it must also be economic in that it describes the economic control taken by the leading group over the state's economic activity. Accordingly, Sassoon explains that the essential economic function of the leading class remains. It needs to have a precise knowledge of the relationship of different groups that are allied under the hegemony of the dominant class, so that it can formulate its tactics whilst taking into consideration the ethical and cultural form of the hegemony of its opponents / subordinates, and also the economic consequences which provide the limits or boundaries of compromises by the leading group (1980, p. 116).

It is possible to refer to three models within Gramsci's concept of hegemony (Bocock 1986, pp. 28—30). The first model identifies hegemony being exercised through cultural and moral leadership in civil society, with the state as the arbiter of coercive power through the state security apparatuses. The usage of the term 'civil society' here

includes groupings from the private sector and organisations that are not part of the mode of production, or state funded, whereas the usage of the term ‘political society’ is generally used to refer to the ‘State’. So Gramsci states that hegemony is exercised within civil society and domination and command is exercised in political society (Fontana 2006, p. 29), but hegemony necessarily includes the concepts of both political society and civil society (Sassoon 1980, pp. 110—11). Focussing on the role of civil society, Gramsci identifies institutions in the religious, educational and cultural realms that play a role in influencing national politics.¹⁶ In the second model, hegemony is exercised in the state as well as in civil society, and in the third model, the distinction between civil society and the state is blurred, or, according to some observers, even lost (Bocock 1986, p. 29), due to Gramsci referring to the state as political society plus civil society. The state here is understood to comprise not only the apparatus of government, but also the private apparatus of hegemony or civil society; ‘hegemony belongs to private forces, to civil society, which is ‘State’, too, indeed is the state itself’ (Gramsci 1971, p. 261). Hence, it is the second model, where hegemony is exercised in the state as well as in civil society that most likely parallels the current hegemony in Saudi Arabia, with its emphasis on crucial institutions in education and the law in the exercise of hegemony. This second model also includes physical coercion in the form of police, prisons and the introduction of law (Bocock 1986, p. 29).

Although Gramscian theory contrasts political society with civil society, as Joseph notes (2002, pp. 29—30), it is necessary to identify and qualify what is meant by political society and what is meant by civil society in any given context in order to establish where hegemony is located and where hegemony operates. In Joseph’s view, this leads to three separate conceptions of hegemony:

1. Hegemony is located within civil society while coercion is confined to the state.
2. The state includes both political society and civil society; hence civil society loses its independence.
3. State and civil society are distinct, but hegemony operates across both (2002, p. 30).

Joseph prefers the third interpretation, as it is consistent with the view that the more consensual aspect of hegemony combines with the more coercive role of the state (2002, p. 30). Gramsci believed that the general notion of the state incorporates elements that

¹⁶ This version of ‘civil society’ is not always easy to identify in Saudi Arabia due to the processes of co-optation and the overlapping of formal and informal socio-economic and political networks.

need to be referred back to the notion of civil society. He links these two elements to refer to the 'integral state' or the combination of hegemony with coercive power. That is, political society and civil society, hegemony protected by the 'amour of coercion' (Gramsci 1971, p. 263; Bocoock 1986, p. 28).

Sassoon, noting the achievement of state power can only come after the establishment of hegemony in society, explains the establishment of this hegemony to Gramsci's historical moments of political consciousness (Gramsci 1971, pp. 180—82). Sassoon summarises these as the first moment being at an economic-corporate level, where members of the professional group are conscious of its unity and homogeneity, and of the need to organise it (Sassoon 1980, pp. 117—18). In the second moment, consciousness is reached of the solidarity of interests among all members of a social class, but still in the purely economic field. In the third moment, an awareness of one's own corporate interests, in their present and future developments, transcends the corporate limits of the purely economic class, and can, and must, become the interests of the subordinate groups, too.

Significantly, it is in the second moment that the problem of the role of the state arises, but only in terms of attaining politico-juridical equality with the ruling group; i.e., the right is claimed to participate in legislation and administration, even to reform these, but with existing fundamental structures (Gramsci 1971, p. 181). The third moment is the most important and most purely political. It is here that a class sees its role in establishing hegemony within a society, and the one in which actual hegemony is created (Gramsci 1971, pp. 181—82). In light of this Gramscian tripartite system, Bobbio refers to the moment hegemony, or of consensus, which is called civil society, and the moment of domination or of force which is called the state (1989, p. 78). In other words, the state as force: political society and dictatorship versus the state as consent: civil society and hegemony.

Is it possible to identify an emerging hegemony within the modern Saudi state that adheres to some Gramscian definitions of hegemony?¹⁷ If so, does hegemonic theory apply because it describes an on-going process being implemented by the regime in relation to Saudi society at large, or only to certain constituencies? Are institutions and

¹⁷ It is interesting to note that some have argued that a process of marginalisation, in this case prison, was directly responsible for Gramsci's formation of the concept of hegemony (Bocoock, 1986).

forums such as KACND and the National Meetings for Intellectual Dialogue, as well as related initiatives, acting as conduits for attaining politico-juridical equality with the ruling group, i.e., the right to participate in legislation and administration, even to reform these, but with existing fundamental structures?

THE STATE AS EDUCATOR: DOMINANCE, PERSUASION AND THE ORGANISATION OF CONSENT

Hegemony is, according to Cerny (2006, p. 81), a particular type of power, in other words, the power of a disproportionately preponderant actor within a wider system. Referring to a threefold typology of different overlapping and interacting types of power (Lukes 1974, p. 25), Cerny categorises the three dimensions of power as relational power, structural power and infrastructural power. The third face of power, that Cerny labels infrastructural power, is most relevant to an examination of the concept of hegemony. This is because infrastructural power involves the internalisation of power in the understanding, world views, habits, attitudes and behaviour of subaltern classes. These classes have been subjected to the exercises and disciplines of power by the dominant class so as to reinforce the norms of the powerful ‘dominant’ on the powerless ‘subaltern’, i.e., to incorporate the subaltern classes into the processes of their own subjection (Cerny 2006, pp. 81—82). Three steps are provided to describe infrastructural hegemony that is created, however inadvertently, from the bottom-up by subaltern classes that lack relative power (2006, p. 82):

1. The internalisation from below of values that legitimate the distribution and exercise power in the current system.
2. The adoption from below, especially when this is done proactively, of behaviour patterns that embed the power structure in everyday life, such as active support for the norms of the system.
3. The spread and convergence of such patterns across social and political cleavages and boundaries so as to form a ‘common sense’ of how the world works, again from below.¹⁸

These three processes constitute a form of hegemony from below; a Gramscian hegemony, as the hegemony derives from the ideas and practices of social groupings and actors who act within a socio-political or socio-cultural context (Haugaard 2006a, p.

¹⁸ By taking each point consecutively, it will be possible to examine and contrast each premise with the socio-political environment in Saudi Arabia.

13). Therefore, this type of infrastructural hegemony facilitates an understanding of both ‘state’, top-down, and bottom-up hegemonic processes.¹⁹

Fontana (Fontana 2008, pp. 92—93) interprets Gramscian hegemony as the state presenting itself as ‘ethico-political’ in that it represents universal moral values and is the conduit for rational and objective principles independent of narrow socio-economic and socio-cultural interests. As state power issues from civil society, it is argued that the ethical nature of the state is represented by a dominant class that is ‘open’ and not by a closed caste (Durst 2005, p. 179). Therefore, this inclusive class is able and willing to integrate individuals from subordinate groupings into its general ranks. Thus, as Haugaard states (2006b, pp. 35—36), it is this ‘proper relationship’ between state and civil society, and between dictatorship and hegemony, that enables the state to appear as ‘ethico-political’. That is, the state does not impose itself over society; rather it absorbs its cultural force from it:

Every state is ethical in as much as one of its most important functions is to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces of development, and hence to the interests of the ruling classes (Gramsci 1971, p. 258).

Thus, the state appears rational and hegemonic (Haugaard 2006b, pp. 35—36) and the dominant class is capable of absorbing society and assimilating it to its own cultural and economic level so that the state becomes an ‘educator’ (Gramsci 1971, p. 260). In Gramscian hegemony, the concept is broader precisely because it emphasises the state’s role as an educator, both in the realms of cultural and ideological consent (Ayubi 1995, p. 7). Moreover, the state can act as an educator on two specific levels (Fontana 2006, p. 35). Firstly, in material terms, the state facilitates economic, technological and scientific production by establishing stable, predictable, or regular procedures and supporting structures. Secondly, in cultural terms, the state utilises a hegemonic influence over moral and cultural issues, based on a persuasive and rational discourse. As has been noted, the creation of dominant class hegemony is a product of state power utilised to influence the subaltern’s worldview so that it corresponds to that of the leading class.

¹⁹ It is the bourgeoisie, according to Gramsci, who are the first class to move from coercive power to hegemonic power, and this in turn makes them substantially more powerful than any previously dominant class (Haugaard 2006a, p. 5). In the case of Saudi Arabia it is possible to substitute the term ‘bourgeoisie’ with the Arabic *hadar*, the sedentary urban merchant class, as opposed to the nomadic *badu*.¹⁹ Originally, the Al Sa’ud family were Najdi *hadar*, landowners, tradesmen and camel hirers, the central Arabian equivalent of the Gulf coast merchant families, and not as is popularly assumed descended from a Bedouin tribe (Menoret 2003, p. 50).

Additionally, an educational process can be established so that subaltern groups become socialised into the dominant group's ideology. In turn, this leads to a perceived reality, whereby a natural order of things is established (Haugaard 2006a, p. 6).

It is the intellectuals, who in a Gramscian sense act as agents of reciprocal communication, who connect political and civil society (Fontana 2006, p. 29). The stability, legitimacy and persistence of the overall socio-political system is achieved by means of moral, intellectual and cultural systems formulated by intellectuals who are the organisers of the hegemonic persuasion and consent. The intellectuals act as mediators between the dominant and subaltern classes, acting as deputies and exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government. Gramsci refers to them as 'organic', a group from the various intellectual strata who have benefitted from further or higher education (1971, p. 12). It is these intellectuals who, courtesy of their educational status and socialisation, unintentionally disseminate the dominant hegemony (Haugaard 2006a, p. 7).

Therefore, in Saudi Arabia, forums such as those provided by KACND and the National Dialogue process could be viewed as a conduit for such reciprocal discourse, facilitated by the invitation to selected intellectuals whose mediation is deemed suitable in order to disseminate the dominant hegemony. However, in the case of Saudi Arabia, to what degree is the Al Sa`ud prepared to integrate, rather than co-opt subordinates? Or is co-optation a prerequisite to integration?

If the concept of hegemony is applied to the Saudi state, is it possible to identify a specific type of Al Sa`ud hegemony that is being established over Saudi society, one that has the ultimate purpose of creating a sense of national identity; one that adheres to an identity manufactured by the Al Sa`ud regime? Western perceptions of Saudi Arabia as a single homogenous entity are erroneous. The Kingdom comprises not only distinct areas and regions, but also tribes and sects. Is it then possible, that as part of the hegemonic process, that the Al Sa`ud are attempting to use state-sponsored forums as a conduit to forge a more integrated Saudi identity? The creation of a culturally and socially homogenous Saudi Arabia would appear to be one of the regime's ultimate goals, even if its creation is at the expense of the Kingdom's natural diversity. Indeed, it is said that this heterogeneity contributes to domestic pressures for greater socio-political reform. Therefore, by inviting many of the disparate grouping, many of whom

are normally marginalised and on the outskirts of Saudi society, into a state-controlled 'national' forum, the regime are nominally giving marginalised actors a voice, relieving some of the domestic dissent and pressure, whilst simultaneously tying these heterogeneous groupings into an Al Sa`ud led national endeavour.

Some commentators point to the issue of national diversity as the source of the major schism within the greater ruling family, as opposed to the more conventional stated reasons, such as the on-going succession question or the kerbing of the powers of the religious police (popularly referred to as the *hai`a*) (Yamani 2008, p. 2). Whilst some members of the Al Sa`ud recognise that the Kingdom is home to diverse tribes and sects, other family members insist on conformity and limiting the boundaries of Saudi national identity. A national consciousness, the sense of belonging to a Saudi nation, has taken time to develop,²⁰ notwithstanding the accelerated formation of the Saudi state and modernisation of its infrastructure. Despite the establishment of a Saudi National Day²¹ and other state initiatives, the concept of nation is not as advanced as in other Arab states, that is to say that the concept of the Arab nation has not yet reached the level present in either Egypt or Syria (Vassiliev 1998, p. 479).

It is necessary to consider the relationship between ideas of nation, locality and historical identity vis-à-vis the socio-political and economic reality of the 'state'. Notions of 'state' and perceptions of 'nation' and 'locality' become blurred as the Al Sa`ud seek to create a historical narrative and the idea of a national territorial state. Al Rasheed argues that despite the fact that the Al Sa`ud dominate the material infrastructure and resources of the Kingdom, it has become increasingly important for the regime to influence the symbolic realm of ideas and create visions of the past, present and future (2005, p. 188).

Whilst examining the transformation of a Saudi patrimonial state into a hegemonic one, how is the role played by the current monarch interpreted? King Abdullah is frequently referred to as having 'reformist' tendencies, but it is doubtful whether any reformist measures are intended to weaken the position of the Al Sa`ud or jeopardise stability in the Kingdom. Thus, it can be argued that since the beginning of his de facto reign, as the then crown prince under the incapacitated King Fahd, the present monarch has been

²⁰ Salame reminds us that in Saudi Arabia blood links take precedence over attachment to land.

²¹ Saudi National Day: 23rd September

instrumental in the development of the Al Sa`ud hegemony. After all, it is King Abdullah, as the crown prince, who established forums for structured and controlled socio-political discourse within the state structure, by accepting petitions and initiating the National Dialogue in 2003. Nevertheless, with regard to state power, the present king constitutes but one actor in a pool of multiple actors within the extended Al Sa`ud family each embedded in a state or quasi-state institution. These different power circles are frequently responsible for sending mixed messages to both their domestic constituencies and external allies resulting in contradictions from these mixed messages that have undermined the coherence of the state as the Saudi state 'began to embody an unprecedented contradictory pluralism' (Al Rasheed 2008, p. 17). Hence, it is no longer sufficient to consider a centre in control of the periphery, but rather, to consider a struggle between multiple centres and related state-society actors and interlocutors. For this reason, it may not simply be a case of top-down political actions occurring, but rather a variety of factors emanating from all levels of Saudi class stratification that may be creating a confluence across the overlap between the official forums for legitimised state-society dialogue and the informal socio-political networks.

If the formation of this Al Sa`ud hegemony is viewed in a 'successful' light, in other words as having produced a largely acquiescent Saudi population, then how might this influence the actions and decisions of major actors within the larger Al Sa`ud family with regard to critical socio-political and cultural issues? Could a conflict within the ranks of the senior Al Sa`ud groupings, or power circles, inadvertently create counter-hegemony within the greater Al Sa`ud hegemony? And if so, is it at all possible to identify individuals who might head an opposing force? How, and where, would a realignment of political groupings occur, and which constituencies would it most affect?

Regardless of the current debate regarding the nature and extent of change in Saudi Arabia, or lack thereof, a generational transition is happening and this could be linked to the demographics of the Kingdom. The Al Sa`ud must be aware of this demographic shift and of the dangers of having a growing restricted, restless and bored young population. Although it would appear that significant attempts are being made by the government to increase and improve higher education, indeed linking it to the Saudization programme,²² a better informed, more media savvy youth is naturally going

²² Saudization refers to the national policy of promoting employment of Saudi nationals and reducing the number of foreign workers. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter five.

to have higher expectations concerning their career prospects and place in society. In addition, satellite television, the Internet and Bluetooth / infrared technology has revolutionised the manner in which Saudis are now able to communicate. This technology, widely and cheaply available to anyone in the Kingdom, is hugely popular. Moreover, despite attempts of state censorship, it has allowed many Saudis a degree of freedom unheard of until recently, as circumnavigating the heavy hand of the authorities is relatively simple.²³ Indeed, as information technology opens up the world to the general Saudi populace, the more an awareness of the social and work conditions under which their peers operate in other Arab states, such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE), will develop. Furthermore, if another Gulf society is seen as taking great strides towards 'modernity' in the twenty-first century world, whilst managing to maintain its national identity and Islamic traditions,²⁴ then many in Saudi Arabia may question the rationale for continuing socio-cultural restrictions within their own society.

The Al Sa`ud regime does not have to rely solely on the coercive power of the state or even its direct economic power to rule; rather, through its hegemony, expressed in the civil society and the state, Saudi society could be persuaded to accept the system of beliefs of the Al Sa`ud and to share its social, cultural and moral values. For this reason, the Al Sa`ud could be said to represent a hegemonic class that exerts consensual control, as opposed to overt coercive control, over a Saudi society that has voluntarily assimilated the worldview of the regime. That is to say, the Al Sa`ud elite structure has transformed itself into a 'class' that has succeeded in persuading other Saudi classes that consent has been given by the majority of the population to a specific direction suggested by those in power as being in best interests of the Al Sa`ud nation-state. The central question remains as to whether the Al Sa`ud has been able to create and establish a lasting hegemony, one that will guarantee the successful use of state power on behalf of the sectional interests of the dominant / fundamental class; namely the extended Al Sa`ud family and its constituency.

²³ Popular fiction, such as *Girls of Riyadh*, highlighted the manner in which this communication has become possible and when driving through downtown Riyadh or Jeddah, it is possible to witness the numerous displays of email addresses and mobile numbers on the cars of young men. In addition, although the state blocks 'inappropriate' websites, setting up a proxy server is easy and the locations of proxy sites are common knowledge amongst Saudi youth.

²⁴ For example, the Sultanate of Oman comes to mind.

CONCLUSION: HEGEMONY AND ITS CHALLENGERS: MANAGING COUNTER-HEGEMONY?

According to Haugaard, the key to counter-hegemony is to formulate a vision which is consonant with the everyday social practices of the subaltern classes. In this sense, counter-hegemony is a form of consciousness-raising whereby discursive form is given to existing social practices (2006a, p. 7). Scholars of Gramsci's concept of counter-hegemony note that within the politics of a given state there exists the possibility within civil society for the formulation of an alternative conception of political order that is opposed to the prevailing hegemonic system (Lentner 2005, p. 748).

In Saudi Arabia, Crystal argues that 'the government has achieved a degree of hegemony by successfully insisting that ever important decisions be cast in religious terms' and that 'setting the parameters meant that the regime could decide what issues were debated' (Crystal 2009, pp. 52—53). However, the Al Sa`ud still faces challenges within these parameters, as state authority is not recognised as the sole source of legitimacy. Nonetheless, Crystal believes that this hegemony gave the regime a tactical advantage as 'liberal opponents were thrown off until they could find a way to cast their own arguments in an Islamic framework', so that any opposition was required to contest the regime using the same frame of reference (2009, pp. 52—53). Hence, it is necessary to consider circumstances that might foster the formation of an opposing system in Saudi Arabia and the sort of foundation that would be required in order to establish a successful counter-hegemonic movement. Could it emerge from a socio-economic base that involves an overlap of economic forces and existing informal socio-economic networks, or is it more likely to evolve from religio-political groupings in the Kingdom? Gramsci argues that a transformation in socio-economic circumstances does not itself prompt political reform. Rather, such a transformation can only set the conditions in which such changes become possible. However, it is the 'relations of force' at the political level that facilitate change or reform, i.e., the degree of political organisation, the strength and organisation of an opposition, the strength of political alliances and their political consciousness and the preparation of struggle on the ideological terrain (Forgacs 1988, p. 190).

One of the ways in which Gramsci conceptualised hegemony was 'economic', which translates as the dominant mode of production in a territory at a specific moment in

time. In Saudi Arabia, it is oil and gas production, alongside related industries including the petrochemical industry, which underpins the Saudi mode of production, and power in a given state, is about access to, or control of the dominant means of production through means of coercion, persuasion or patronage. The state uses patronage to maintain its centralised base through appointments to key public offices, land grants and allocations, and the granting of permits and licences for importation and trading (Ayubi 1995, p. 232). However, this has led to the emergence of an over-developed Saudi state with a large compliant bureaucracy, an over-staffed military, as well as an internal security apparatus that protects private interests whilst encroaching on civil society. In Saudi Arabia, the ruling regime controls and manipulates officialdom and through it, power in society utilising a policy of coercion and co-optation. This is implemented through the state's economic, political and cultural and ideological structures in order to benefit the regime's policies and agenda. As Lentner notes, the labels 'predatory state' or 'dictatorship' are used to describe political systems organised to serve private interests (2005, p. 737), but hegemony differs from such terms as power, domination, subjection and dictatorship (Fontana 2008, p. 80), even though it is the 'state' which is able to operate the instruments of coercion, or if necessary violence, through the offices of the state security apparatus.²⁵ Nonetheless, although the Al Sa'ud represent a powerful monolithic ideology, one that is economically powerful, in reality, the regime may be 'papering over the cracks' in order to hide dissension within Saudi society.

Is it true, as Fontana argues (2006, p. 27), that in one sense Gramsci used the concept of hegemony in describing political failure? And can we view the creation of hegemony as a substitute for a more pluralistic system, therefore denoting a lack of socio-political sophistication on the part of the dominant class? But, however we view a hegemonic process, it is necessary to interpret a Gramscian concept of hegemony as meaning the organisation of consent that is connected to the processes and mechanisms by which knowledge and beliefs are first produced and then disseminated, and this is the crux of the matter as it represents the 'conception of the world' and its subsequent dissemination throughout the populace (Fontana 2006, p. 43). Additionally, it should be remembered that Gramscian hegemony presupposes power over others; power that is not reducible either to physical coercion or economic resources, as neither the control of the state's

²⁵ In Saudi Arabia, this includes not only the armed forces and police, but also the Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG) and the Committee for the Commanding Virtue and Prohibition of Vice, through the actions of the *mutaween*. As has been noted, hegemony implies consensual power coupled with coercion.

coercive resources, nor control of the means of production is sufficient to explain domination (Haugaard 2006b, p. 46). Although as Haugaard notes (2006a, p. 5), the theoretically pertinent question is why do subaltern groups consent to their own domination if it is contrary to their own specific interests?

Hegemonic leadership involves developing and sustaining intellectual, moral and philosophical consent from the subaltern social constituencies of a nation, and it necessarily incorporates an emotional element as well (Bocock 1986, p. 37), in that the leadership must address the sentiments of the people and not appear remote and cut off from national sensibilities. Therefore, if some Western perceptions of the opinions of Saudis towards the Al Sa`ud regime are inaccurate, or simply too generalised, then how does this correspond with the views of some Al Sa`ud observers who argue that there is widespread dislike of the current regime amongst the general population in all regions of the Kingdom?²⁶ The events of the 2011 Arab Spring have undoubtedly caused concern for the Al Sa`ud as many of the societal grievances highlighted by the political upheavals in the region are as relevant to the Kingdom as to its neighbours. However, to date, predictions of the fall of the regime have proved to be erroneous, and the 'domino effect' has not materialised in the Gulf States.²⁷ That said, it is still too early to fully assess the impact of these events on Saudi society although the government appears to have finally woken up to the potential danger posed by unemployment, societal frustration and increased interaction between disparate Saudi constituencies. But equating societal grievances and the related demand for better governance with a call for regime change does not reflect either the current socio-political situation or the aspirations of a great deal of Saudi society. The legitimacy of the Al Sa`ud is not questioned by large sections of society and King Abdullah remains popular. Indeed, as Peterson suggests, 'anecdotal evidence suggests that most Saudis do not want a different political system; they just want the present system to be fairer and more responsive' (Peterson 2002, p. 67).

²⁶ It is imperative to recognise an agenda that indicates bias supporting one side of the political argument or the other.

²⁷ It would seem that a degree of 'wishful thinking' frequently replaced objectivity in some of the commentary accompanying the events of the Arab Spring.

CHAPTER TWO

STATE AND SOCIETY: KEY STATE ACTORS, NON-STATE ACTORS AND CONSTITUENCIES

In 2011, a key political debate centred on the long-term outcome of socio-political reform and economic liberalisation as the Saudi state endeavoured to respond to an increasingly diverse range of societal voices by incorporating some of these within its highly stratified power structure. A central question concerns the validity of specific reform steps undertaken by the government and whether these steps are merely cosmetic measures. Ottaway maintains that Saudi Arabia should not be dismissed as an example of complete stagnation as small changes may be significant (2008, p. 14). But rather than any process of democratisation, it would appear that the contemporary Saudi state is undergoing a process of increased state-society consultation that in turn is leading to selective socio-political participation through the avenues of state-sponsored institutions such as KACND. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to examine state dynamics and actors involved in state-society consultation and socio-political participation. It will endeavour to identify socio-political and socio-cultural trends in Saudi state-society discourse and will examine how these trends relate to the activities of KACND. This will assist in determining whether the National Dialogue process reflects socio-political and religio-cultural trends in Saudi state-society discourse, or whether as a state-run institution it simply mirrors state-manufactured issues and concerns as argued by some scholars and observers.¹ Firstly, this chapter will discuss the underlying nature and dynamics of the state focussing on issues related to rentierism, legitimacy and security. Then it will look at the succession issue and recent Al Sa`ud developments, referencing Wahhabism, tribal issues and the liberal trend, followed by a discussion of socio-political reform.

¹ See, for example Al Rasheed, M., 2010. *A History of Saudi Arabia*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 246; Yamani, M., 2007. *Saudi Arabia's Theatre of Reform*. Bonn: Qantara.de., p. 1.

THE UNDERLYING NATURE AND DYNAMICS OF THE STATE

Saudi political dynamics

Saudi political dynamics can be categorised into three important areas: the country's political culture, its political ideology and the Saudi decision-making process (Long 2002, p. 88). The decision-making process has long been dominated by the power circles and individual constituencies of the senior princes, although the creation and expansion of formal political structures has widened the number of participants in recent years. Indeed, due to the lack of formal political institutions and groupings, the Al Sa`ud regime has been obliged to create official institutions from scratch in order to contain perceived threats and co-opt potential opponents that threaten the stability of the regime. Undoubtedly, the creation of formal political institutions since modern-day Saudi Arabia's inception in 1932 has made the state's operations more orderly, but according to Long, it has not fundamentally changed the political system. That is, the concepts of consensus (*ijma*) and consultation (*shura*) still constitute the heart of this system. Long states:

In the oil age, the consultation-consensus system is under heavy pressure. Government operations are too large and too complicated for this traditional, personalised process always to work effectively or fairly. Nevertheless, for any sustained increase in political participation, it seems necessary for some form of the consultation-consensus process to be present (2006, pp. 192—194).

In fact, as Seznec point out, Saudi Arabia has a pre-existing culture of consultation and discussion in that the leadership is used to negotiation within its own constituency, and at times others. This is inherited from the Bedouin and Arab traditions of *majlis* (Seznec 2002, p. 39).² Al Sa`ud (2003a) claims that the *shura* process of consultation, as exhorted by the religion of God, is deeply rooted in the Islamic principles of Saudi government, thereby enhancing the religious legitimacy of the leaders.³ The Qur'an stipulates that *ash-shura* should be applied in both the political and personal lives of Muslims, but though a leader is obliged to practice *ash-shura*, the actual process is open to adaptation according to specific circumstances and requirements, i.e., the socio-economic and political environment of Saudi Arabia. Al Sa`ud argues that *ash-shura* as a political and social phenomenon has not emerged as a result of the social conditions

² Al Sa`ud explains that this refers to an open meeting that is held between government officials and citizens 'in the manner of members of a family' (2003b, p. 56).

³ According to Al Sa`ud, Shariah denies legitimacy to any Muslim government that does not render decisions based on *ash-shura*.

experienced by Saudi society, but rather as practiced as a religious duty (2003a, p. 81). *Shura* comprises three elements: the person consulting, the subject in question and the advisor. These three elements benefit a state by establishing a strong relationship between the rulers and ruled, which in turn leads to political cooperation between the nation and its leader, and as a result of this cooperation the leadership is able to utilise society's capabilities effectively (2003a, p. 74). Nevertheless, the increased influence of the state over Saudi society has resulted in demands for greater political participation and government accountability. Moreover, Saudi society's capabilities have been enhanced by the vast expansion in education which has resulted in a more coherent demand for socio-political participation.⁴ For this reason, Al Sa'ud says, society is now able to articulate its concerns in 'abstract and theoretical terms' as opposed to 'personal appeals for individual favours' (2003a, p. 80).

Rentierism

As Beblawi explains a rentier economy is one where wealth creation centres on a small fraction of society (1987, p. 51), in the case of Saudi Arabia this involves oil. In the Kingdom oil exports remain the dominant mode of production, and power in a given state is about access to, or control of the means of production, in this case the Kingdom's oil reserves, through means of co-optation and / or coercion, persuasion and / or patronage. The state utilises patronage to maintain its centralised base through appointments to key public offices, land grants and allocations, and the granting of permits and licences for importation and trading (Ayubi 1995, p. 232). However, this has led to the emergence of an over-developed Saudi state with a large compliant bureaucracy, an over-staffed military, as well as an internal security apparatus that encroaches on civil society. In Saudi Arabia the ruling regime controls and manipulates officialdom and through its power in society employing a policy of coercion and co-optation. This is implemented through the state's economic, political, cultural and ideological structures in order to benefit the regime's policies and agenda. In a rentier state context the Saudi regime is able to balance or form societal groupings mainly through co-optation, but it can be argued that the regime by and large acts in accordance with the values and interest of the population and upholds the traditional local interpretations of Islam. However, Nonneman suggests this process also helps explain the survival of sufficient political space for civil society to function and develop (2006,

⁴ Education is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

pp. 6—8). Nevertheless, continuing political stability in Saudi Arabia constitutes a major phenomenon in a region plagued by conflict.⁵ Despite periodic crises, the regime appears to be able to stabilise the country whilst drawing support, or co-opting, both the opposition and domestic critics in times of crisis.

In 1999, Okruhlik questioned the traditional interpretations of rentierism, many of which are still used in the contemporary literature regarding oil and democracy. Okruhlik examines the nature of the Al Sa`ud state and the regime's responses to opposition and dissent, and places these issues within the context of rentier state theory. She argues that the perception that externally derived rent breaks a linkage between people and state is erroneous as the distribution of the rent, or withholding of rent, is clearly a political act that impacts on the Al Sa`ud regime's authority and legitimacy (1999, p. 300). Okruhlik argues that rentier theory needs to be redefined by drawing linkages between state strategies, political acts and their consequences for the varying Saudi constituencies. Most importantly, she contends that it is not desirable to regard the advent of the oil age as determining the nature of the contemporary Saudi state, but rather as an additional factor, albeit a significant one, in the on-going process of state development and the state's relationship with society (1999, pp. 308—9). Okruhlik believes that the 'political' must be reasserted when analysing rentier states as the manner in which rents are deployed informs us of the relationship between ruler and ruled as well as the decisions that are made that impact on political transformation and economic growth. She observes that it is not a question of the simple receipt of oil revenue, but rather the choices made on how to utilise the rent as 'money does not spend itself'. According to her, 'the rentier framework has proven inadequate in elucidating the rise of dissent because it reifies the state and overemphasises state resources and autonomy from the social consequences of expenditures'. It is a misconception to state that within a rentier state the proceeds from the rent can be used to co-opt and stifle opposition and dissent completely. Rent alone does not buy the support and loyalty of different societal groupings; at best it purchases temporary complacency (1999, p. 297).

⁵ See, for example comments by former British ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles: <http://www.saudibrit.com/2011/10/16/opportunity-arabia-8-conference-sir-sherard-cowper-coles-responding-to-the-challenge/>

As already noted, the current body of literature on Saudi politics emphasises the ‘top-down’ nature of the Saudi political system, indicating that all significant policy decisions emanate from the recognised Al Sa`ud power circles (Al Rasheed 2005, p. 199), or concentric circles of influence that surround the princely power-bases (Glosemeyer 2004, p. 141). Hertog (2008) argues that fragmentation of state and society is a result of Saudi Arabia’s rentier history as Saudi bureaucracy is disjointed and there is a lack of powerful intermediary structures within the political system. With regard to domestic Saudi interests, the centralisation of decision-making power by senior Al Sa`ud facilitated a hub-and-spoke system of politics centred on the royal family and ‘defined by large-scale employment of redundant and often unmotivated staff’ (2008, p. 656) who communicate vertically with through patronage networks as opposed to horizontal peer-institutional lines of communication. The fragmented bureaucracy resembles a divided government or fragmented party system, and this fragmentation makes it more difficult to change the political status quo (2008, p. 671). Furthermore, Hertog argues that World Trade Organisation (WTO) related economic reforms were delayed by internal fragmentation within the Saudi political system as well as lack of political space and institutional capabilities. Moreover, due to oil-based state building, the rapid expansions of state institutions under the patronage of individual princes continue to operate without a common denominator. As such, ministries and other state institutions communicate little amongst themselves, thereby remaining strongly centralised and insular. In consequence, ‘horizontal structures of coordination are underdeveloped’ (2008, p. 656), exacerbated by the fact that most major actors have few clear interests beyond their defensive reflexes (2008, p. 671). According to Hertog, ministers are bent on maximising their regulatory turf vis-à-vis other institutions (2008, p. 658).⁶

Legitimacy

Niblock argues that in recent years Western observers have tended to neglect the importance of legitimacy considerations in Saudi politics and therefore, by default, the sources of legitimacy from which the regime draws its support (2006b, p. 8). As the dividing line between civil society and the state in Saudi Arabia is less clearly defined than in a democratic state, it is imperative to identify these sources of legitimacy be they

⁶ Nonetheless, a member of the *majlis al-shura* believes that these princely fiefdoms do not constitute a serious problem as they are contained within the system as a whole, and for this reason, he contends that those who claim that this issue is very problematic do not fully understand the internal political situation. Interview by author with Subject 69, writer and member *majlis al-shura* (Riyadh: 21.06.10).

ideological, religious or socio-traditional. These sources of legitimacy can also help pinpoint specific sections of the population, i.e., the Saudi constituencies, to whom the regime may turn to for support in times of socio-political unrest. Indeed, those constituencies that are close to the political leadership will probably also share some of the regime's perceptions of its own legitimacy⁷ (Niblock 2006b, pp. 8—9). Furthermore, by identifying the Al Sa`ud sources of legitimacy, it is possible to understand the roles the various constituencies play in the delicate interweaving of civil society, in addition to the private and public sectors within the circles of cooperation surrounding the Al Sa`ud (Niblock 2006b, p. 13). With regard to religious legitimacy, the regime has attempted to legitimise its rule through the usage of Islamic symbolism and language, and these permeate every aspect of Saudi state-society dialogue. However, the danger of politicising religion in this manner becomes apparent when Islam subsequently provides the lexis utilised by both state officials and the Islamist constituency. In this way, opposition to the regime attacks the Al Sa`ud on the very ground from which the state draws its legitimacy. In addition, according to an Al Sa`ud critic, the state's use of historical legitimacy no longer works; he believes that for the regime there are only two possible future options, 'like a fork: either you give basic rights or lose everything'.⁸ Hence, it is argued that the leadership of the Kingdom now faces major challenges, and a failure by the Al Sa`ud regime to respond to the prerequisites of the new era amounts to a gamble with the political stability of the state (Al Dakhil 2006b, p. 1).

Referring to notions of leadership and its role in Saudi Arabia, in 2005 Interior Minister Prince Nayef bin Abdulaziz claimed that in reality the Kingdom does not have a royal family as the nation only has one ruler and all Saudi citizens are his subjects.⁹ In the opinion of a well-known liberal commentator¹⁰ this view can be explained if one considers that the contemporary Saudi state combines elements of tribalism, i.e., tribal identity, with elements of an authoritarian patriarchal or neo-patriarchal 'shaikh state', and features of a modern state. It is possible to examine how these elements interact through an examination of language and actions, but a deeper examination will reveal

⁷ Niblock identifies the sources of legitimacy as: ideological, traditional, personal, eudaemonic and democratic/structural (Niblock 2006b, pp. 9—13).

⁸ Interview by author with Subject 41, ACPRA political activist (Riyadh: 02.01.11).

⁹ Interview by author with Subject 29: He attributes this 2005 comment to Prince Nayef following the arrest of petitioners and reformers.

¹⁰ Interview by author with Subject 20, journalist and liberal (Riyadh: 01.07.10).

that this usage is only symbolic as it refers to *wali al-amr*.¹¹ This is because, despite the existence of a modern bureaucratic state, i.e., formal state structures and modern institutions, the modern state is merged with a shaikh-based state. However, this ‘merged’ state never solely operates as a dictatorship and therefore cannot be categorised as such. This combination can be termed a *mashaikha* state where the decisions made by the government copy and / or mirror the needs of the Saudi people. The *mashaikha* concept best describes the modern Saudi state because in *mashaikha* societies an individual does not need to obey, a person can refuse to obey, but said individual must live with the consequences and be judged by society.¹² Therefore, it is a truism that the modern Saudi state has its own elements of dictatorship, with the added elements from the *mashaikha* state, but with these dictatorial roots emanating from the modern state as opposed to the traditional shaikh state. Hence, the liberal journalist argues that it is incorrect to maintain that Saudi Arabia is a political dictatorship, as is the case in Syria, but it is possible to state that a Saudi social dictatorship exists, one based on historical socio-tribal norms, and therefore in ‘beducracy’ there is a form of Saudi democracy combined with a form of Saudi dictatorship.¹³

It is important to differentiate between ‘power’ and the ‘state’ when discussing the division of power in Saudi Arabia as the concept of the Saudi state and Saudi state functions are two different things.¹⁴ Therefore, the elite circles in power need to believe in the state itself and not the source of their own power. In addition, loyalty to the state in Saudi Arabia is less than that in other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states because there is a lack of either a defined position in terms of obligation and rights for Saudis; the rights of a Saudi differ according to status and this destroys legitimacy and the concept of citizenship.¹⁵ The majority of Saudis neither own their own home nor have any chance to buy land, thus elite land-owning monopoly kills the notion of true citizenship and harms any notion of national identity. A successful Riyadh lawyer argues that as the major political players define the behaviour of Saudi citizens, there is no real meaning in citizenship and it is impossible to find a single answer to any

¹¹ The term *wali al-amr* can be interpreted as ‘one who has power or responsibility’ and although not exclusively a political term, it has become synonymous with the Al Sa’ud Al Ashaikh (Wahhabi) alliance in Saudi Arabia.

¹² The term *mashaikha* can also be interpreted as ‘the opposite of you do not see anything but what I see’.

¹³ Subject 20 cites an historical social example: the Saudi shaikh and his slaves eating and living in the same place, whereas in Egypt, the Levant or Europe, this would not have happened as the concept of slavery was different from that in the Arabian Peninsula.

¹⁴ Interview by author with Subject 19, lawyer, ex-judge, owner of Arab Network for Research and Publishing (Riyadh: 21.06.10). He maintains that this division must be understood in a negative way.

¹⁵ Ibid.

question that aims to explain the definition of ‘Saudi’.¹⁶ However, with regard to national identity, another viewpoint is that those in Saudi Arabia who are advocating a new nationalism are only those individuals and / or constituencies who are currently discriminated against, i.e., these individuals are pushing for nationalism in case the government loses power and ‘the law’ becomes stronger.¹⁷

Since King Abdullah assumed the throne in 2005, interpreting the role of the bureaucracy and the *mashaikha* state concept has proved problematic according to one individual.¹⁸ This liberal journalist contends that the king took a leaf out of Prince Salman’s¹⁹ book by establishing independent institutions such as the National Society for Human Rights²⁰ (NSHR), the Kingdom’s only official and independent human rights organisation, and the *janadriyah* festival.²¹ In his opinion, firstly Prince Salman and secondly King Abdullah realised that if these institutions were created within the government structure they would not be able to function effectively. Therefore, King Abdullah recognised that if it was not possible to fix something from the inside, it needed to be rebuilt from the outside. To achieve this aim, the king’s first action was to establish committees in order to create an initial ‘window for understanding’. Once completed, King Abdullah was then able to state ‘I do whatever my people like’ and thus, the king went from being a director to a communicator. Hence, the king is attempting to be a decision-maker, but in reality is a decision-taker, despite being hampered by the lack of assertiveness in Saudi society.²²

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Interview by author with Subject 69, writer and member *majlis al-shura* (Riyadh: 21.06.10).

¹⁸ Interview by author with Subject 20, journalist and liberal (Riyadh: 01.07.10). He argues that Saudis ‘do not have bureaucracy in their minds as this is a new phenomenon’. The large bureaucracy in the Kingdom, as elsewhere in the world, often has a momentum of its own, but it remains to be seen whether new integrative institutions such as the *majlis al-shura* can force the sometimes self-absorbed bureaucracy towards more integrated planning and policy implementation. For greater detail, see, Hertog, S., 2005. *Fiefdoms and Bureaucrats: Building the Saudi State*. London: Saudi-British Society, Previous Lectures at The Saudi British Society, pp. 1—2.

¹⁹ Prince Salman bin Abdulaziz is one of the ‘Sudairi seven’ brothers and former Governor of Riyadh and since November 2011 Minister of Defence.

²⁰ Established in March, 2004.

²¹ *Janadriyah* Festival is a national heritage and folk cultural festival. Located 45 kilometres outside Riyadh, *Janadriya* plays hosts to the cultural festival annually. Traditional activities, including folk dances, camel races, arts and crafts exhibits as well as poetry readings are showcased for the entire duration of the festival. It lasts for two weeks and is organised by SANG.

²² Interview by author with Subject 20, journalist and liberal (Riyadh: 01.07.10).

Security

When the primary state security mechanism is faced with internal dissent or threat, the Al Sa`ud are known to resort to direct methods of coercion and repression. These institutions are generally acknowledged to be under the direct control of the Ministry of Interior, i.e., the police and domestic security intelligence organisations (*al-mabahith al-`aamma*), whereas Prince Salman controls the religious police (*hai'a* or *mutawwa`een*), an arm of the Committee for the Commanding of Virtue and Prohibition of Vice (Champion 2003, pp. 287—89).²³ According to AbuKhalil, in terms of national security, and particularly since the domestic terror attacks of 2004, the security services can act arbitrarily, free from constitutional restraint. AbuKhalil asserts that they are allowed to openly threaten and punish Saudi citizens precisely because these institutions are direct and obedient servants of the Al Sa`ud (2004, p. 81), although Ayubi argues that the Saudi regime is not cruelly repressive when compared to more ‘democratic’ Arab regimes (1995, p. 231).²⁴ However, with regard to security, two overlapping languages are being spoken that are contradictory and also ‘unspoken’.²⁵ For example, Prince Salman commands the *hai'a*, and by extension society, whereas Prince Nayef supervises passports and the like under the auspices of the Interior Ministry. As legal contraventions are not completely clear, for this reason an individual might be arrested by Prince Salman, but released by Prince Nayef or vice-versa and a Riyadh-based liberal journalist suggests that this constitutes part of the ‘duality’ of the Kingdom.²⁶ Indeed, Al Rasheed argues that the regime survives because it is authoritarian and coercive and continually co-opts opponents who potentially represent an independent source of leadership (2005, p. 212—13), which, in consequence, undermines any independent source of legitimacy amongst the Saudi constituencies.

The problem of political reform became a serious issue when the Al Sa`ud was confronted with armed Islamic activism. However, Molavi notes that although many

²³ King Abdullah’s recent moves to limit, or at least curtail, the power and influence of the *hai'a* are perceived as an acknowledgement of the dislike exhibited by many educated segments of the Saudi population towards the religious police. However, a complete removal of powers from the *hai'a* and / or their disappearance from the streets of Saudi Arabia is unlikely, and according to some Saudis, undesirable. Indeed, it is better that the *hai'a* exist and operate legally under the supervision of the *ulama* and Al Sa`ud, than the possible alternative which could see small groups of radical conservative men perform the so-called duties of the religious police voluntarily; better to have a state-monitored Commission, despite the unpopularity of many of its doings, than vigilante style policing on the streets of the Kingdom.

Interview by author with Subject 51, political-science lecturer KSU (Riyadh: 10.12.09).

²⁴ In this case referring to pre-Arab Spring regimes.

²⁵ Interview by author with Subject 20, journalist and liberal (Riyadh: 01.07.10).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Saudis supported the al-Qaeda stand on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, relations with the USA and invasion of Iraq, this did not translate into a broad-based internal opposition movement and there was no evidence to suggest that Saudis preferred to live under a bin Laden than King Abdullah (2006, p. 1—3). The Riyadh compound bombings and attacks on foreign and government interests forced a re-appraisal in Saudi attitudes to religious extremism vis-à-vis their relationship to the state as the domestic unrest and violence of the kind witnessed in 2003—4 shocked and greatly alarmed the Saudi ruling elite. During this period, most Saudi citizens were also unnerved by the threat to domestic security, preferring to see the continuance of the status quo within the Kingdom. Pre-Arab Spring, Al Sa`ud critic Al Rasheed concurred with the views of other scholars that the regime was not on the verge of collapse despite an erosion of the leadership's cultural and religious credentials and the fact that the ruling elite was failing to adhere to the popular cultural and religious notions related to leadership (2005, p. 212). It is her opinion that the survival of the Al Sa`ud is neither a factor of good governance nor weak opposition, but due to the authoritarian and coercive nature of the regime. Opposition has been repressed and those individuals who represent a threat to the status quo are co-opted and integrated into the power circles (Al Rasheed 2005, p. 213).

THE SAUDI MONARCHICAL STATE AND REFORM

The Succession Issue

Throughout 2011 the health of King Abdullah and the recurring rumours concerning the ill-health of Crown Prince Sultan continued to raise concerns of how a post-Abdullah Saudi Arabia might evolve.²⁷ A recognised line of succession has been in place since the reign of King Faisal,²⁸ nevertheless, the horizontal brother-to-brother line of succession is drawing to its natural conclusion and as a result, a degree of uncertainty surrounds the future roles of the principal circles of power. For one thing, Bronson notes that King Abdullah's biological clock is ticking: he was eighty-seven in 2011, and therefore the Kingdom is in a race against time if the King's reforms are going to be

²⁷ Depending on the source, the king is either described as healthy and retains all his mental capabilities or is lucid for only short periods of time.

²⁸ At that time, Princes Khalid, Fahd and Abdullah were the designated numbers two, three and four and in recent years Saudi society understood that Princes Sultan (now deceased), Nayef and Salman occupied these positions. This order of succession was demonstrated by the copious number of posters showing the senior Al Sa`ud in hierarchical position that adorned public buildings all over the Kingdom upon Crown Prince Sultan's belated, but much heralded, return to Riyadh on 22 November 2010.

successfully implemented (2006, p. 1). Lippman also points out that the Al Sa`ud ‘have to be aware of their own fragility’ and that the family needs to give the impression of being in control so that society feels ‘no cause for alarm’ (SUSRIS 2010a, p. 3). Although the collective health of the king and senior princes remains a cause for concern, the exact details of the succession remain a closely guarded state secret. The popular argument goes that if King Abdullah is sincere in encouraging reform, he will nominate a reformist successor, but there is always the possibility that more reactionary elements may prevail. Although Prince Khalid Al Faisal has been suggested as a future king (Henderson 2010, p. 2), this does not necessarily make him a definite contender for the throne, but the prince’s increased visibility reaffirms his position within a tight circle of influential advisors surrounding King Abdullah.²⁹ More interesting is the possibility that Prince Khalid could become king, but in the capacity of a figurehead, with real power and responsibility for decision and policy making in the hands of senior princes at the ministries. This would not be unprecedented as a similar situation occurred during the reign of the late King Khaled bin Abdulaziz (1975—1982) when power was wielded by the Sudairi brothers. Therefore, Prince Khalid could prove to be a compromise candidate and acceptable public face of the family.³⁰

²⁹ It was noted that the transfer of Prince Khalid Al Faisal from the position of governor of Asir province to the highly influential position of governor of the Makkah-Jeddah region indicated a significant promotion for the prince; one that moved him closer the centre of power.

³⁰ In 2011 the Saudi public was becoming increasingly exasperated by the perceived inability of both the central government and Jeddah municipality to deal effectively with the recurring floods in the port city. This frustration was not confined solely to Jeddah residents, but spread to individuals from all walks of life, representing all constituencies. Even Shia in Qatif voiced incredulity to this writer at the on-going Jeddah debacle. The devastating floods that hit Jeddah in November 2009 (and to a lesser extent in January 2011) resulted in considerable loss of life and damage to the city’s failing infrastructure. Significantly, as floods ravaged the city, videos and commentary were uploaded onto YouTube by angry Jeddah residents before the government had time to issue an official statement. These images were viewed throughout the Kingdom pre-empting the official assessment of the situation’s severity. Sources in Saudi Arabia acknowledged that the senior Al Saud ministers and princes were taken by surprise as for the first time in Saudi history the government was forced to react to events rather than dictate the agenda. In addition, this exposed the corruption that many Saudis believe exacerbated the severity of the flood waters as well as unleashing direct criticism of the government and its ill-prepared response to the disaster. In 2012 the situation appears to have been turned around and the Al Sa`ud is highlighting an important public relations success. On 30 November 2011 Prince Khalid Al Faisal opened 14 flood defence projects in the areas most badly affected in 2009 and 2011. Interviewee Subject 51 maintains that the prince pressed for the work to continue 24 hours a day, 7 days a week so that the projects could be completed within 110 days. This source notes that a visible commitment to the project by a senior prince — strongly backed by the king — was necessary in order to reassure Saudi society and emphasise the government’s competence. Another interviewee at KSU notes that with regard to the flood projects, many people believe that the king extended his stay in Jeddah after *hajj* to observe the progress of these projects and more importantly to be seen doing so. The source also points out that a few days ago Prince Khalid Al Faisal stressed to the press that he was happy that these flood projects had been completed as they were among four things that Prince Khaled had promised to achieve when he was appointed as the governor of Makkah. Indeed, the prince promised the people of Jeddah the following: draining the highly polluted and potentially dangerous Al Musk Lake, generally cleaning up Jeddah and disposing of accumulated rubbish, making potable water available through a new system of pipes and building an

It is still assumed that a predetermined set of power circles will determine the succession,³¹ but discussion with regard to socio-political reform and the response of the Al Sa`ud to societal demands continues to be overshadowed by the issue of the succession, notwithstanding the formation of the Allegiance Commission (Arabic: *hay'at al-bay'ah*).³² In addition, neither the *majlis al-shura* nor the *majlis al-wuzara*,³³ despite representing the executive and legislative authorities, has any say in the transfer of power; their exclusion means that all constitutional matters pertaining to the succession remain independent of the other state institutions.

Western sources frequently highlight divisions within the Al Sa`ud, but the family appears to understand that what is ultimately at stake is the perpetuation of the dynasty. As a result, different factions, including those of King Abdullah and the Sudairi brothers, have developed political mechanisms in the form of checks and balances to deal with each other. Indeed, the smooth transition between crown princes in 2011 would seem to ‘suggest careful and prudent planning’ by the senior Al Sa`ud members (Kern and Reed 2011, p.1). Undoubtedly, rumours of divisions within the family are based on truth, however others point out that consensus amongst the Al Sa`ud is normally reached, often through ‘bandwagoning’ and this will eventually pave the way for a smooth succession (Herb 1999, pp. 45—49). Indeed, it is argued that friction and conflict between senior member of the Al Sa`ud is exaggerated;³⁴ King Abdullah and the senior princes work hand in hand and are seen to do so.³⁵ This has led to the

efficient sewage system. He announced that these had all been accomplished although the parlous state of Jeddah’s roads remains an issue. Interview by author with Subjects 51 and 90 (Riyadh: December 2011).

³¹ See, for example, Al Rasheed, M., 2005. Circles of Power: Royals and society in Saudi Arabia. In: P. Aarts and G. Nonneman, eds. 2005. *Saudi Arabia in the Balance*, pp. 185—213.

³² The Allegiance Commission established in December 2007 by King Abdullah: a group of 35 leading princes, sons and grandsons of the Kingdom’s founder King Abdulaziz who meet privately to discuss the succession issue and select the future king and crown prince. The committee’s remit is to decide the succession after the deaths of Abdullah and Sultan. However, there is no guarantee that a future monarch will honour the committee’s recommendations. For greater detail, see, for example, Al Badi, A., 2008. Institutionalising Hereditary Succession in Saudi Arabia’s System of Governance System: The Allegiance Commission. *Arab Reform Initiative Arab Reform Brief 20* [online]. Available at: <http://www.arab-reform.net/spip.php?article1232>

³³ The Council of Ministers, also called the Cabinet, advises the king and facilitates the country’s development. It represents twenty-two different government ministries and is presided over each week by the king or his deputy. The Cabinet is responsible for drafting and overseeing implementation of the internal, external, financial, economic, education and defence policies as well as the general affairs of the State. The Cabinet consists of the Prime Minister (the king), the Deputy Prime Minister (the Crown Prince, who currently is also a Minister with portfolio), twenty-one other ministers with portfolio and seven ministers of state.

³⁴ Interview by author with Subject 58, Dean, King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM) (Al-Khobar: 21. 03.10).

³⁵ King Abdullah appeared to be sending a coded message when both the king and the late Crown Prince Sultan were photographed with a group of female KACND participants following the Eighth National

suggestion that the king has had a golden opportunity to create what would in effect be the fourth Saudi state, in the form of a constitutional monarchy (Al Dakhil 2006b, p. 3). However, this seems unlikely given that the Al Sa`ud is seen as lacking a supreme head because the king must act in consensus with the senior princes, and by extension the Al Sa`ud family, through the Royal Family Council and Allegiance Commission.

Precise analysis pertaining to the political activities of the Al Sa`ud is impossible as the family zealously guards its privacy and internal dealings. Many eminent Saudi observers concur that supposition remains the best, and indeed only option, when attempting to predict future outcomes regarding the succession issue. Indeed, Gause³⁶ maintains that most political analysis concerning the succession is irrelevant as the family keeps its cards very close to its collective chest and consequently, analysts examine conjecture at best. Furthermore, many foreign commentators are not aware that the succession issue is far less contentious inside the Kingdom where the natural order of family members is recognised and understood accordingly.³⁷

The Al Sa`ud: 2010—12 developments

In February 2011 King Abdullah returned to Saudi Arabia following a three month medical stay abroad although concerns for the king's health remain.³⁸ His homecoming was marked by the announcement of a SAR 40 billion financial package for the Kingdom's development fund,³⁹ but pro-reform elements were said to be frustrated that the financial package distracted society from the issues of corruption and unemployment (Murphy 2011a, p. 2). In June of the same year, Crown Prince Sultan departed the Kingdom for medical treatment overseas.⁴⁰ In late March 2009, King Abdullah formally appointed his half-brother Prince Nayef to the post of second deputy

Dialogue in Najran. The image was widely distributed in the global media. See, for example Al Shayeb, J., 2010b. *Women's Rights Gain Focus in Saudi Arabia*. Arab Reform Bulletin / CarnegieEndowment.org, p. 1

³⁶ Discussion with Professor Gregory Gause (Subject 72) and Subject 81 (Riyadh: 17.03.10).

³⁷ To Saudis this natural order explicitly indicates the order of succession.

³⁸ The king entered hospital again in Riyadh for a recurring back problem in October 2011. He was accompanied to the hospital by his sons Miteb, Abdulaziz, Misha'al and Prince Nayef. See Kenner, D., 2011. *What gerontocracy looks like*. Washington, DC., USA: Blog Foreign Policy/Foreign Policy.

³⁹ The fund provides interest-free loans to Saudis who want to get married, build homes and / or start small businesses.

⁴⁰ Significantly, Sultan not only suffered from cancer, but also has advanced Alzheimer's, and was apparently totally absent-minded, thereby ruling out any possibility of him succeeding Abdullah. Several of the author's sources confirmed that even before his death Sultan was no longer regarded as heir to the throne. There was also said to be conflict about who should become the next Minister of Defence with both Prince Khalid bin Sultan and Prince Abdurrahman bin Abdulaziz keen to assume responsibility although Abdurrahman appeared to be in a stronger position in early November, 2011.

prime minister.⁴¹ The King's age, overseas visits and Sultan's ill health necessitated this move, but dissenting comments by Prince Talal bin Abdulaziz⁴² concerning Prince Nayef's appointment indicated that there were diverging views within the Al Sa`ud as to the future direction of the Kingdom (Gulf States Newsletter 2009, p. 3). In 2009, Nayef's appointment as Deputy Prime Minister may have had more bureaucratic significance than political, as from an administrative position the Kingdom required a figurehead when King Abdullah travelled abroad, and with the health of the crown prince in doubt, there was a need to fill any internal leadership vacuum.⁴³ Politically, the appointment increased Nayef's chances of becoming crown prince despite persistent questions about the prince's health.⁴⁴

The Arab Spring has presented the Al Sa`ud with a complex set of problems. Nevertheless, it appears that in response to the regional unrest and perceived threat to internal stability the family has closed ranks, to a greater degree, and in late 2011 Prince Nayef was reported to have become one of the king's closest advisers. Indeed, the king is said to have consulted Nayef regarding the proposed appointment of women to the *majlis al-shura* and asked him to explain the decision to the senior *'ulama*.⁴⁵ Another close advisor, Prince Miqrin bin Abdulaziz,⁴⁶ is jointly responsible with the king for

⁴¹ Interior Minister Prince Nayef bin Abdul Aziz remains a divisive figure to some both in terms of how he is perceived within the Kingdom and by outside forces.

⁴² During the power struggle between King Saud bin Abdulaziz and his half-brother, the heir apparent Prince Faisal bin Abdulaziz in the 1960s, more liberal voices began to be heard from among the Saudi princes. One of the most vociferous was Prince Talal bin Abdulaziz, father of the well-known business tycoon Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, a former member of the 'Free Princes Movement' that in the 1960s made an aborted attempt to democratise the Kingdom. Following his return to Saudi Arabia from exile in Egypt, Prince Talal, for the most part, toed the family line, stressing that although Saudi Arabia is a civil state; the Kingdom was founded on the basis of Islamic canon law. However, it is known that Prince Talal is close to King Abdullah, and therefore it is likely that that some of the same proximity applies to Prince Alwaleed. Since the King's accession to the throne, the prince has occasionally released provocative and politically sensitive statements, albeit censored in the Saudi press, but freely available in the western media. Prince Talal called for the formation of Saudi political parties, stating that the decision on how to organise this process had not been taken and that it would depend on the greater regional political situation. In addition, as Niblock notes, Prince Talal is the only one of the senior princes who has consistently advocated free elections and a constitutional monarchy. See Niblock, T., 2006b. *Saudi Arabia: Power, Legitimacy and Survival*. Oxon, United Kingdom: Routledge, p. 110.

⁴³ Witness the king's medical trip to the USA in November 2010 and Prince Nayef's subsequent official supervision of the *hajj*.

⁴⁴ The Sudairis are rumoured to have gathered significant support from the members of the Allegiance Commission. (However, this information, like so much to do with the inner dealings of the Al Sa`ud, is based on supposition rather than hard facts). In the summer of 2011, it was rumoured that the king and Al Sa`ud were considering other candidates for the position of crown prince. All the prospective candidates were said to be in good health, but all over the age of seventy-five (Author's sources).

⁴⁵ Author's sources (October, 2011).

⁴⁶ Prince Miqrin bin Abdulaziz is a younger son of King Abdulaziz and head of the Saudi General Intelligence Directorate (GID), the prince is rumoured to be an intimate of King Abdullah, along with his brother Prince Abdulillah, and most significantly is in good health. He is popular along with Prince

Yemeni affairs and has been liaising with the highly influential Prince Mohammad bin Nayef⁴⁷ on a special committee established in March 2011 to deal with the Saudi response to internal ramifications of the Arab Spring.⁴⁸ Other recent significant Al Sa`ud developments include:

- In November 2010, Prince Miteb bin Abdullah assumed his father's role as SANG commander and became a member of the Council of Ministers.
- Prince Abdulaziz bin Abdullah was appointed deputy foreign minister on the recommendation of Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al Faisal.
- In 2011, Prince Turki Al Faisal assumed the role of international Al Sa`ud spokesperson. The prince delivered numerous speeches detailing the family's position with regard to the Arab Spring and emphasised Saudi 'exceptionalism'.⁴⁹
- Princess Adila bin Abdullah and her husband Education Minister Prince Faisal Bin Abdullah Bin Muhammad emerged as a 'power couple' and were said to influence the king's decisions such as the appointment of Nora Alfaiz to the Ministry of Education.
- In June 2011, Abdelaziz bin Fahd, the favourite son of the former king, either voluntarily resigned or was fired from his post as head of the cabinet affairs court.⁵⁰
- Also in June 2011, the Court for Cabinet Affairs was merged with the Royal Court and with the king's confidant Khalid Al Tuwajiri being appointed head of the new court and given ministerial rank (See: GSN 2011, p. 3).
- In July 2011, Prince Saud bin Nayef was appointed adviser to the Second Deputy Prime Minister and to the Assistant Minister of Interior for Public Affairs.⁵¹ This reinforced the

Salman bin Abdulaziz. Interview by author with Subjects 27 and 52, Prince Sultan University (PSU) male undergraduates (Riyadh: 2010).

⁴⁷ Influential Assistant Minister of the Interior: The prince has been considered a significant player in the Kingdom's political arena. However, in early 2012 a source in Riyadh argued that Prince Saud bin Nayef is now 'the new strong man of the strongest ministry' and has overtaken Mohammed bin Nayef in importance.

⁴⁸ Author's sources.

⁴⁹ See, for example <http://www.youtube.com/user/gulfresearchmeeting#p/u/0/3CCLNtVaooI>; <http://www.charlierose.com/view/interview/11898>; <http://susristube.com/2011/07/10/hrh-prince-turki-bin-faisal-al-saud-to-speech-at-the-maxwell-school/>

⁵⁰ This depends on the source. With regard to the younger members of the Al Saud, the third generation of the family is becoming more involved in political issues. Subject 51 cites two examples: the first is that two of them have become members of the Allegiance Committee although they are both fairly old. The second is that the fathers and grandfathers of the younger princes take them to meetings and conferences which usually signifies a first step in giving them greater responsibility. Without a doubt, there is growing competition amongst the third generation for political influence; however, the history of the Al Saud has taught the family that a failure to control rivalries not only damages the dynasty, but also the Kingdom's stability. Interview by author with subject 51, political-science lecturer KSU (Riyadh: 12.12.11).

⁵¹ As the former ambassador to Spain the prince helped to organise the inaugural King Abdullah Interfaith Dialogue in Madrid in 2008.

‘Nayef’ faction at the ministry, which also includes the crown prince’s brother deputy interior minister Prince Ahmad bin Abdulaziz.⁵²

Crown Prince Sultan died in the United States on 22 October 2011 following a lengthy illness and, as expected, with the approval of the Allegiance Committee, the king appointed Nayef as crown prince. Overseas coverage of Prince Nayef’s appointment highlighted his ‘hard-line conservatism’ and alleged anti-reform outlook. Although some commentators noted that Nayef maintains a good relationship with foreign powers and is respected for his aggressive counter-terrorism efforts, this was generally overshadowed by the coverage of Nayef’s proximity to the ‘Wahhabi’ religious establishment. The prince is certainly known for these ties to the *‘ulama*, a fact that is usually interpreted in a negative fashion in the western press. However, due to the historic alliance between the Al Sa`ud and the religious establishment, a senior family member within the upper echelon of princes needs to have a close relationship with the *‘ulama* no matter how unpalatable that may be to outside parties. Therefore, although the new crown prince’s conservatism and ‘hard-line’ approach may not be to western tastes, in reality, his conservatism mirrors the conservatism prevalent in large sections of Saudi society.⁵³

Although Prince Nayef does not enjoy the same popularity as the king, he is known to be diligent and is also considered a ‘clean pair of hands’ because he is not tainted by corruption in comparison to some other princes.⁵⁴ King Abdullah is much admired by society for the same qualities; therefore, even though the new crown prince is not especially popular, he is nonetheless respected. Additionally, due to the national

⁵² Prince Ahmad bin Abdulaziz is one of the Sudairi seven. At a seminar at the Houses of Parliament, Robert Lacey claimed that the prince is a serious contender for the throne (London: February, 2011). In early 2012, another senior royal Prince Bandar bin Sultan Bin Abdulaziz was reported to be in the US undergoing treatment for health problems — either a back problem or recurring depression. In the meantime Vice-Interior Minister Prince Ahmad Bin Abdulaziz is said to be taking over the position of Secretary-General of the Saudi National Security Council in place of his nephew Bandar. An author’s source who works for the Royal Court commented that Prince Ahmad is recognised as efficient and competent, although he is not seen as a public figure. According to the source as a competent and ‘behind-the-scenes’ prince, in the past Ahmad has been overshadowed by Nayef so his appointment as Secretary-General seems plausible. Although many Saudis believe that being the second (or even the third or fourth) man in the Ministry of Interior is more prestigious and influential than any other position.

⁵³ A great deal of Saudi related political analysis simply fails to factor in the views of different Saudi constituencies. Rather it all too often concentrates on the views of a small, albeit vociferous, minority who do not speak for society as a whole. A lack of knowledge of what makes the different elements of society tick, i.e., the accepted social norms, means that this type of political analysis will necessarily reflect the political stance of the western writer as opposed to an informed perspective based on the opinions of Saudis themselves.

⁵⁴ Interview by author with Subject 51, KSU political-science lecturer (Riyadh: 09.10.09).

aversion to chaos and unrest (Arabic: *fitna*), many Saudis believe a hard-line approach is not necessarily considered a bad thing if it helps to maintain stability in the Kingdom. Certainly, there are younger Saudis, liberals and political activists who are concerned about the now distinct possibility of a King Nayef. A member of the Saudi Political Rights Association (ACPRA) recently claimed that Nayef informed a meeting that women would not drive in his lifetime.⁵⁵ This appears to confirm the prince's alleged opposition to women's rights and yet it was Nayef as Interior Minister who approved identity cards for women. One point of view holds that this contradictory behaviour appears to show that Nayef is not as 'reform adverse' as some would like to think although many would strongly disagree. However, even if Prince Nayef is not completely anti-reform, it appears that he draws the line when he feels that societal stability is threatened. For the time being, it appears that Prince Nayef will simultaneously support the king's reform agenda whilst brooking no outright dissent. In other words, it will be business as usual.

Prince Salman bin Abdulaziz was appointed Defence Minister in early November 2011 thereby confirming his position in the succession.⁵⁶ The prince announced that 'transparency and frankness' (Ghafour 2011c, p. 1) would mark his tenure as defence minister and, according to a well-placed Riyadh source this can be interpreted as a clean break with some of the highly unpopular practices of the late Prince Sultan's era. Additionally, as a new minister with little knowledge of his new position, it is also plausible that Salman wants to learn as much as he can from the key figures in the ministry.⁵⁷ This new more open policy demonstrates an attempt to distance himself from his predecessor's style and to show that he has the vision and the skills to make the Ministry of Defence more efficient in its new form.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Interview by author with Subject 41, ACPRA political activist (Riyadh: 02.01.11).

⁵⁶ Prince Salman's sardonic character is said to resemble his father's and the prince has long been one of the most popular members of the Al Sa'ud.

⁵⁷ Interview by author with Subject 51, KSU political-science lecturer (Riyadh: 12.11.11). According to this source, this is to avoid listening to only one particular clique within the ministry and to ensure that other key figures are not ignored.

⁵⁸ Ibid. He explains that in Riyadh 'everyone knows that Prince Salman is very diligent and punctual' as demonstrated by his daily appearance on the capital's North Ring Road on his way to work. In addition, the prince has a reputation as an attentive reader of letters and reports, a practice that has helped make Salman one of the most well-connected senior princes. The Saudi public can also see that the prince pays attention to popular opinion by his frequent interaction with current debate. For example, he engages in public discussions by writing articles and sending comments to Saudi newspapers and other media outlets. Interestingly, Salman is known to possess a developed sense of history and, as the source notes, this is important for any leader. The prince has been advocating the teaching of 'objective' Saudi history courses at university level, but so far is still facing resistance from entrenched hard-line officials in some senior university positions. Prince Salman is also known for his approachability and it is noted that when

In December 2011 the six-nation GCC concluded its two-day summit in Riyadh. During the summit, King Abdullah appeared tired and at times distracted and this apparent fatigue was noticed by the other delegates and was widely commented on in Saudi society.⁵⁹ Unconfirmed rumours persist that the king may travel abroad for further medical treatment, but there is concern that should the king return to the USA or Morocco for health reasons there is the distinct possibility that he may die abroad. Indeed, the recent death of Prince Sultan whilst away from the Kingdom highlighted the likelihood of this happening. It should also be remembered that during the king's convalescence in Morocco earlier in 2011 it was rumoured that King Abdullah came close to dying although at the time this was denied in the strongest terms by Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al Faisal. However, the 'no smoke without fire' scenario did little to reassure the Saudi population, particularly as the king's health is said to be in better condition than that of Crown Prince Nayef.⁶⁰ Although Prince Salman has appeared robust since taking up his new ministerial position, in the past Salman's health has had a tendency to fluctuate although this could be attributed to the fact that the defence minister is a heavy smoker.⁶¹ In addition, Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al Faisal's health remains a cause for concern and there is still the possibility that Saud may stand down and his place may be taken by his brother Prince Turki Al Faisal.⁶²

The extent of reform

Scholars are currently debating the extent of reform in the Kingdom, be it socio-political modernisation or economic liberalisation, with a divergence of opinion on whether a great deal, or very little, has occurred within the existing formal structures (Hertog 2004, p. 1). Nonneman suggests that in Saudi Arabia, socio-political reform is a gradual process symbolised by the expansion of state-sponsored institutions such as the *majlis al-shura* and KACND. This reform process, he argues, is not being advanced by grand gestures but by 'the habit-forming effect of even limited exercises in political

a group of senior princes attend the same public event, Salman will often arrive early in order to talk to the participants. In addition, he appears to be particularly keen on engaging with young Saudis. Needless to say, this approach has made the prince very popular with the younger constituency, a move that is extremely important, not to mention politically astute, in a country where approximately seventy per cent of the population is under the age of thirty.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid. In early 2012, Prince Nayef was abroad for medical treatment, rumoured to be either for cancer and / or open-heart surgery. Furthermore, the source stated that medical treatment abroad for Defence Minister Prince Salman cannot be ruled out.

⁶¹ Ibid. In addition, other senior Al Sa'ud members also chain-smoke, including the king despite his public anti-smoking stance.

⁶² Ibid.

participation and discussion' (2006, p. 36). A neo-traditionalist system, or Nonneman says more precisely, a post-traditional state using neo-traditionalist forms and methods (2006, p. 5) in Saudi Arabia combines elements of tradition and modernity that link the rulers and ruled as part of a wider socio-political environment that includes a measure of 'social pluralism'. If this is the case, then as Wurm asks (2008a, p. 3), is it possible to identify small changes that have started to alter the distribution of power and character of the political system? It has even been argued that if a free election⁶³ were to be held in the Kingdom today with three parties contesting this election, the Royal Family, the Islamists and 'Western Reform Oriented', then the Royal party would probably win fifty to sixty per cent of the popular vote (Weston 2008, p. 8). How true and / or how likely this may be is open to speculation, but in all probability popular support for the Al Sa`ud is underestimated by many of the regime's critics, in particular by those outside Saudi Arabia.⁶⁴

Reform and society

The deeply conservative nature of the Saudi population is often cited as an obstacle to the implementation of socio-political reforms, and Islamic extremism 'though controlled, [is] a strong presence in society' (Ottaway and Hamzawy 2009, p. 26). However, as Okruhlik argues, this is a convenient myth propagated by the regime in order to preserve the political status quo, as it allows the Al Sa`ud to provide space for socially conservative forces to thrive, whilst simultaneously limiting space for other groups (2009, p. 91). Indeed, the Al Sa`ud frequently point out, most notably to its Western audience, that it is the 'reformers' within the regime who are being held back by popular resistance to further modernisation, rather than vice-versa.⁶⁵ Furthermore, the Al Sa`ud protest that both western governments and media are frequently misinformed about the Kingdom and indeed hold entrenched, biased views. That said, Saudi public opinion appears to be split as to which party is more pro-reform, the

⁶³ Indeed, the 2005 municipal elections made a tangible impact on the Saudi population; especially since they were the first elections to be held in the Kingdom since 1932.

⁶⁴ In an article published in *Foreign Policy* just prior to the anticipated March 2011 'Day of Rage' in Saudi Arabia, Al Rasheed claimed that the Kingdom was ripe for revolution. A photograph of Saudi youths demonstrating headed the article, unfortunately, the editors chose to use a picture that in reality showed young Saudis celebrating the return of King Abdullah and this somewhat blunted the article's message. See Al Rasheed, M., 2011. *Yes, It Could Happen Here: Why Saudi Arabia Is Ripe for Revolution*. Washington, DC.: Foreign Policy.

⁶⁵ This viewpoint was vociferously supported by Daniel Kawczynski MP, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Saudi Arabia (UK) at a Human Rights Watch event 'Britain and Saudi Arabia: must economic and security interests always trump human rights?' — and opposed by Madawi Al Rasheed. London, October 2011. Attended and discussed with Subject 74.

government or population. Low political awareness and mobilisation in the Kingdom are also cited as factors affecting the pace of reform (Hertog 2006, p. 275) with an apparent lack of overtly political platforms, aside from groups such as the so-called Liberal Trend.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, others point to the increased nature and extent of public debate at all levels within Saudi society and Saudi media. In fact, according to an ACPRA member,⁶⁷ society has become interested in talking about political reform and the association recognises and applauds King Abdullah's attempts to initiate reform (ACPRA 2010, p. 1).⁶⁸ The official recognition of ACPRA demonstrates a growing tolerance both from the government and society towards the idea of socio-political reform and nowadays it can be said that ACPRA constitutes an internal opposition group to the regime.⁶⁹ In terms of the Al Sa`ud autocracy and the oft cited assertion that reforms are nothing more than 'pseudo-democracy' (Yamani 2007, p. 2), Wurm (2008a) cites Huntington's theory that both reform and repression are needed to distract from the citizens' lacking political participation (1968, pp. 190—91) and that the Al Sa`ud regime is stronger as a result of the 2002—5 political reforms as the reform process has not adversely affected either regime or societal stability.

Terminology

A broad range of terminology has been employed to describe Saudi socio-political and economic actors and their role in the Kingdom's economic and socio-political development. Nevertheless, many of these terms, while seeking to define a particular platform or agenda, are in fact either too generalised, or more importantly, do not accurately reflect the realities of these platforms and / or actors within Saudi polity. While terms such as 'liberalisation' and 'democratisation' imply that a reform process is underway, in the Saudi context these terms might not accurately describe the actors, decision-making processes or policies involved. Whilst an easier option might be to

⁶⁶The Liberal Reformist Platform includes secular-minded lawyers, university professors, intellectuals, political activists, and journalists.

⁶⁷ Interview by author with Subject 41, ACPRA, and Institute of Diplomatic Studies (Riyadh: 13.07.10).

⁶⁸ 'Initially the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA) will take this opportunity to applaud your attempts for political reform. We believe that the most important reform step you have given to this country is the protection of political reform advocates. This, however, is not enough, but the advocates of political reform may view this step as initial rain drops that precede the heavy rains. Due to the fact that that political reform must start from the grassroots of the people, constitutional reform advocates have to continue their peaceful struggle and show utmost willingness to sacrifice whatever it takes. Furthermore, we are convinced that those who walk down the right path would eventually reach their sought destination'.

⁶⁹Subject 41 also states that 'harassment from the government is minimal and we are operating from within the Kingdom'. It is interesting to note that this senior ACPRA official works for the Institute of Diplomatic Studies, which comes under the umbrella of the Foreign Ministry.

arrange and / or 'label' groupings in Saudi Arabia within neatly defined parameters including Islamo-liberals, moderate Islamists, liberal reformists, progressive democrats and moderate Al Sa`ud reformist elements, there is a danger that these terms are attempting to neatly categorise disparate groupings into categories that conform to recognisable and understood politico-economic and / or socio-economic bodies present within a the western body of literature on Saudi Arabia. In order to avoid overly western oriented categorisations, it may be more fruitful to attempt to locate Saudi socio-political actors within a framework that takes into account the diverse range of Saudi opinions, in other words, a position that references the Kingdom's cultural, economic, historic and socio-political realities. In order to better comprehend both the socio-cultural views and political positions of these groupings, one needs to qualify terms such as 'moderate' issues be they socio-political, religio-cultural or economic. Indeed, a Saudi actor's position on one specific issue could be perceived as moderate, if we qualify 'moderate' by a western standard, but the same position could be viewed as 'radical' by individual Saudi constituencies, e.g., supporting a Saudi women's right to drive. In addition, an actor's 'moderate' stance on one particular issue could be counter-balanced by a more conservative stance on another, such as a moderate economic position versus a conservative socio-cultural position. Therefore, it might not be possible to locate a Saudi actor's perspective accurately within such limited western-oriented socio-cultural and / or socio-political terminology.

Societal actors

New approaches are required when analysing and interpreting the changing nature of Saudi state and society, as the Saudi state is struggling to control emerging actors and networks and the spread of new socio-political thought, culture, lifestyles and tastes (Al Rasheed 2008, p. 24). Yet the emergence of multiple actors within the existing political system does not necessarily signify a weakening of the Al Sa`ud state as the regime controls the means of coercion and the distribution of oil rents. Is it possible to argue that co-optation and greater inclusion of Saudi society into the realm of the administration are the same, or can we differentiate between these developments and identify the emergence of a different, and perhaps more sophisticated process? If previously marginalised segments of society are now being invited to participate in forums such as the National Dialogue meetings, this can be interpreted as another example of the well-documented Al Sa`ud policy of co-optation. On the other hand, it

could be understood as a newer process that allows the regime to control anti-Al Sa`ud discourse by legitimising the dissent as part of a national programme. If this is indeed the case, it is necessary to look at the role of individuals and groupings that are being drawn into this new process in order to understand how they regard this development and the new opportunities and venues open to them. Therefore, it may be possible to distinguish between outright co-optation in the tradition Al Sa`ud sense, and a newer, less heavy-handed form of social inclusion into the state-sponsored socio-political debate.

Recent reform measures in Saudi Arabia have stemmed from power relations between the principal political actors and these relationships have determined both the scope and pace of socio-political reform and economic liberalisation (Hamzawy 2008, p. 189). Hamzawy categorises these principal groupings as the Al Sa`ud, the religious establishment, liberal reformists, moderate Islamists and remnants of Islamic Awakening. He believes that it has been the partial convergence of these groupings and the support of 'moderate' members of the Al Sa`ud that has pushed the reform process forward. In fact, one recent step saw a limited convergence of the platforms of the so-called liberal reformists, moderate Islamists, conservative *'ulama* clerics and moderate Al Sa`ud members who have helped sustain the reform process in a number of key areas (Hamzawy 2008, p. 197). Therefore, a central issue when analysing Saudi state-society dialogue is on the one hand identifying the socio-political and economic actors who operate as part of the state and on the other, the actors representing varying segments of society. In consequence, it becomes necessary to establish precisely who the state at any given time wishes to engage in discussion and the rationale behind this dialogue. This necessarily includes an understanding of the motives and goals behind both individual state and non-state actors and / or individual constituencies.

Saudi society should not be categorised as wholly passive as, even in a highly structured society, individuals and groups are very adept at using the existing informal structure to further their interest's vis-à-vis the state, but these kinship and patron-client relationships are not equivalent to formal structures of political interest mediation (Hertog 2004, p. 18). By using the informal structures, new societal groupings have created a business class, or 'dependent bourgeoisie', that thrives on state contracts, licences and subsidies that are granted through a plethora of different institutions (Hertog 2005c, pp. 118—19). In recent years the Kingdom has witnessed the

establishment of new economic bodies such as SCCI that are becoming involved in the national policy-making process. Niblock comments that the Al Sa`ud 'have always been willing to cede administrative responsibility' to individuals based on merit in particular when the princes' expertise was lacking (1982, p. 110). The incorporation of previously marginalised, but highly qualified, often Western-educated, Saudi technocrats into these institutions has meant that hopes have been raised that voices from outside the core elite circles will now have the opportunity to participate in the national decision-making process.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, although the presence of a cohort of Western-educated technocrats is frequently cited in Saudi related literature as an indicator of the so-called reform process, Hertog notes that this group is not organised as a political force' despite the technocrats being placed in the higher echelons of Saudi bureaucracy (2008, p. 657).

In political terms, the new educated technocrats can be categorised as firstly, those Saudis who come from ordinary backgrounds and have acquired higher education and / or technical training, and secondly, those who supplemented their own expertise with their own family connections (Kechichian 2001, p. 50). Niblock highlights the crucial role currently being played by those Saudis who have the necessary professional skills and technical expertise to serve the increasing needs of the state. Most significantly, the senior individuals in this group gain access to the political leadership decision-makers in the course of their work. In consequence, as their advice and practical abilities are needed, so they gain influence (Niblock 2006b, p. 16). In addition, Niblock notes that the positions held by the new technocratic elite are not only within the relevant ministries, but also in key economic corporations and institutions (2006a p. 8), e.g., Saudi Basic Industries Corporation (SABIC). Hence, Hertog contends that this new constituency is beginning to penetrate the major circles of influence via several access points where formal and informal politics are intertwined as these arguably tend to boost these institutions' influence (2004, p. 18). These access points include institutions such as the *majlis al-shura*, and SCCI, in particular the dynamic Jeddah branch (Glosemeyer 2004, p. 157).⁷¹ Nevertheless, these institutions have a tendency to act as little 'states within the state', which can result in very efficient bureaucratic islands, but

⁷⁰ However, while a majority of Saudi business leaders may have no political profile per se, they often take sides on issues of political importance or engage in 'political games'. For this reason, it is claimed that among All modern sectors of Saudi society, only business appears to be emerging as a serious negotiation partner for the regime. See, for example Hertog, S., 2004. *Building the Body Politic: Emerging Corporatism in Saudi Arabia*. Paris: Chroniques Yemenites, pp. 1—22.

⁷¹ Glosemeyer says that by all accounts, competition to join these associations both within existing elites and emerging elite forces is fierce.

also lead to failures of coordination and fragmentation (Hertog 2005b, p. 2). That stated, it is the manner in which these actors and institutions operate and their actual position and influence within the state structure that needs to be analysed in order to ascertain whether a policy of greater inclusion and consultation is indeed being implemented by the Al Sa`ud, especially as until recently, when it came to granting key, second-level positions to those who were not members of the Al Sa`ud, they were usually given to fellow Najdis (Bradley 2005, p. 21).

Class stratification

In the case of Saudi Arabia, Western concepts of class have only become relevant since the implementation of oil-boom development and modernisation programmes and because of these factors new classes are developing out of the traditional 'classless' nature of Arabian society (Champion 2003, p. 111). Additionally, when investigating Saudi social class stratification it is important to identify whether classes have evolved naturally or whether they been artificially manufactured by the state to serve its own agenda and reflect the socio-political requirements of the ruling regime. In the case of Saudi Arabia, vertical forms of organisation and dependency are often replaced by policy circles or circles of influence so that any analysis of the role these circles play needs to be located within a framework where their relative position and influence in respect of other circles, classes and groupings can be examined (Ayubi 1995, pp. 166—67). Indeed, according to Jones, in order to 'understand politics and the political system in the Kingdom today, and to forecast its future, it is essential to examine the strategic political relationships being forged between the state and domestic groups (2005, p. 1). Moreover, traditional identity patterns and loyalties may be re-adjusted by the inclusion of new identities based on common economic or political interests in place of traditional kinship ties. The emergence of new groupings within state institutions would suggest that societal changes are occurring and the key elite structures may themselves be in a process of transformation.

The Al Sa`ud may be attempting to steer rather than impose change from above, and this has resulted in gradual transitions of elite groupings from one circle of influence to another (Glosemeyer 2004, p. 141). If this is the case, then the nature of Saudi class stratification may also be changing and this may be in part due to the massive growth of urbanisation in the Kingdom that has been the principle factor behind the substantial

changes in social classes and social relations (Menoret 2003, p. 157). Thus, when analysing classes and groups in the Kingdom it can be argued that existing patterns of Saudi vertical dependency and class stratification might be strengthening, rather than weakening as a result of these new common interests. In addition, it is possible that the emergence of an Al Sa`ud hegemony will influence a new variety of Saudi state-sponsored corporatism; one that does not replace the existing kinship-tribal ties or patron-client relationships, but rather, repositions the major actors and groupings within a socio-political hegemonic corporatism. Consequently, locating the sources of change and any newly created access points within the Al Sa`ud power structure is paramount in order to facilitate a better understanding of this process.⁷²

Reform or development?

When discussing state-sponsored institutions, including KACND, a Riyadh-based focus group⁷³ is in agreement that on the one hand King Abdullah and Prince Salman believe in KACND and the dialogue process, municipal elections and increased human rights. On the other hand, Prince Nayef does not find any of these acceptable. Hence, the issue is not whether the Al Sa`ud is serious about reform, but rather, what does the leadership understand and mean by reform? According to one Al Sa`ud critic,⁷⁴ King Abdullah says ‘development’ but means ‘reform’, and development is better than nothing, whereas Prince Salman believes in ‘development’ but not ‘reform’; Prince Nayef talks about ‘reform’ but means ‘development’ although does not want either because he wishes to maintain the status quo. Indeed, Wurm claims that Prince Nayef believes that no change is necessary in Saudi Arabia, but the prince does concede that there is ‘scope for development’ (2008a, p. 7). In other words, it can be argued that these individuals all believe in the state, but each has his own interpretation of the meaning of ‘the state’. Nonetheless, with regard to the senior Al Sa`ud and Saudi Arabia, in the final analysis it remains a case of *L’Etat c’est moi*.⁷⁵

⁷² Lukes maintains that the search for sources of change within a power structure highlights these access points, the winning coalitions, the pivots, the levers, the bastions and the weak links by which desired societal changes may be brought about, or prevented. See, Lukes, S. Introduction. In: S. Lukes. ed. 1986. *Power*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Basil Blackwell Ltd, p. 15.

⁷³ Interview by author with focus group including a liberal, a Shia, a Salafi and an Ismaili (Riyadh: 01.07.10).

⁷⁴ Interview by author with Subject 41, ACPRA, and Institute of Diplomatic Studies (Riyadh: 13.07.10).

⁷⁵ Interview by author with focus group including a liberal, a Shia, a Salafi and an Ismaili (Riyadh: 01.07.10).

A recent study on democratisation in the Muslim World notes that whilst the introduction of municipal elections in Saudi Arabia produced excitement, this optimism may have been misplaced as the elections may have helped sustain the status quo rather than promote greater democracy (Volpi and Cavatorta 2007, p. 106).⁷⁶ Others argue that while there appears to be a lack of strategy in reform programmes and schedules, this is in fact tactical rather than strategic as there is no legal basis for reform, no legal bills to govern any political reform and socio-political reform is dominated by Al Sa`ud 'personal projects' such as King Abdullah University for Science and Technology (KAUST). It would appear that the Al Sa`ud regime has succeeded both in retaining its power and regime stability through the reform process, but does this process translate into a possible liberalisation of autocratic structures? According to Hamzawy, since 2002 Saudi Arabia has witnessed 'unprecedented political dynamism' (2008, p. 187) and this implies 'elements of a significant opening' in authoritarian Saudi politics. This assertion has been challenged by many Saudi observers who maintain that the essential status quo remains, i.e., the Al Sa`ud retain all instruments of power. However, Hamzawy argues that although the grip of the regime has not loosened, the introduction of a wide ranging discourse has introduced dynamism and openness into state-society dialogue. The reform of the *majlis al-shura*, the 2005—11 municipal elections, legislation of human rights organisations and professional syndicates, educational reform, and lastly the establishment of KACND are examples of 'the growing margin of freedom of expression in the public space' in the Kingdom (Hamzawy 2008, pp. 198—204).

Even though it is easy to dismiss Saudi Arabia as a country where no significant political reform occurs as a result of power remaining in the hands of the Al Sa`ud, Ottaway argues that reform is nevertheless happening (2008, p. 14), and that although these reform processes may seem small, they need to be evaluated in context and on a case-by-case basis in order to assess their impact on society. This reform process has created a form of 'institutional opening' within the autocratic system (Ammoun 2006, p. 217) and through a process of institutionalisation,⁷⁷ the Al Sa`ud regime is opening

⁷⁶ The low turnout at the 2011 municipal elections has been attributed to a lack of belief in the system as the elections were not expected to deliver any significant results.

⁷⁷ According to Ammoun, there have been three phases of institutionalisation: unification phase under King Abdulaziz, modernisation phase under King Faisal and opening phase under King Abdullah (Ammoun 2006, p. 217).

itself up to society.⁷⁸ As a result of this institutional opening, the Kingdom has witnessed an increase in political personnel from the middle classes, i.e., the second stratum, who ‘act as mediators between the oligarchy and population’ (Ammoun 2006, p 222). It is also important to ascertain whether any reforms have resulted in a liberalisation of the autocratic structures, and if so, to what extent, as this may indicate a process that could transform a highly bureaucratic religio-central form of politics based on direct authority to a more participatory one. Hence, Wurm argues that identifying the ‘triggers’ that have prompted the Al Sa`ud into tentatively creating and / or expanding state-sponsored institutions facilitates a greater understanding of the current state of political reform in Saudi Arabia (2008a, pp. 3—4). Nonetheless, with regard to the socio-political developments, Wurm believes that a combination of foreign and domestic issues can be identified as the root causes behind the reform process (2008a, pp. 4—11). These have included external pressure from the USA following the 9/11 attacks, although Hamzawy argues that it is better for successive US administrations to advocate ‘modest goals and promote them consistently, rather than grand rhetoric about democracy that cannot be backed by a clear policy’ (2008, p. 230). Indeed, a number of root causes behind the reform process can be easily identified such as internal threats in the form of terror attacks,⁷⁹ generational change in the Al Sa`ud, poverty, educational deficiencies, and unemployment and underemployment. Furthermore, many of the issues have taken on greater significance since the outset of the Arab Spring as rather than the unrest being framed in Islamic terms it has been the socio-political issues such as employment and women’s rights that have set the agenda in neighbouring states. It would appear that this has been recognised by elements in the government as greater emphasis has been placed on some of these problems, in particular employment and related Saudization, in recent months. However, other underlying issues such as Wahhabism and tribalism still pose challenges for the regime and society.

⁷⁸ In this instance Ammoun refers to Saudi society as a single unit and does not refer to the processes of segmental inclusion or marginalisation as practiced by the Al Sa`ud, e.g., Shia and women.

⁷⁹ Saudi deputy interior minister Prince Mohammed bin Nayef was attacked on 28th August 2009. As GSN noted ‘never has Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula got so close to killing a major Saudi prince, let alone the man who has done more than any other to eradicate their networks in the Kingdom’ See, Gulf States Newsletter Special Report, 2010. *Politics, Succession and Risk in Saudi Arabia*. Hastings, UK: GSN, p. 51.

WAHHABISM, TRIBAL ISSUES AND THE LIBERAL TREND

Wahhabism and the state as programmer

Wahhabism became an issue for the West, in particular the USA, following the events of 9/11. However, western perceptions of Wahhabism and its role and influence in Saudi Arabia are frequently erroneous and do not reflect the historic nor contemporary relationship between the *'ulama* and the Al Sa`ud. Wahhabism places 'no substantial barriers against Saudi Arabia's relationships with outside powers' (Gause III 2009, p. 143) even though the *'ulama* do not necessarily support Al Sa`ud policy. The *'ulama* leave no doubt as to the right of the rulers to rule, and the duty of the ruled to obey, but the Saudi regime and the Wahhabi religious *'ulama* are linked by more than just political expediency. The descendants of King Abdulaziz and Abdul Wahhab intermarried over several generations and today the two respective families, the Al Sa`ud and Al Ashaikh, constitute a powerful partnership. The religio-political relationship between the senior members of the *'ulama* who outwardly support the Al Sa`ud, constitutes one of the cornerstones on which the regime bases its claims to legitimacy. As Jones argues, the relationships that the Al Sa`ud has cultivated with some of its boldest and oldest political adversaries in the *'ulama* are now of great importance to the future of the Kingdom (2005, p. 1). Gause explains that although the *'ulama* have been very influential in Saudi cultural life; the religious ideals of Wahhabism were translated politically into a state ideology in which the primary duty of the Saudis was to obey their rulers (2005, p. 2). For this reason, Wahhabism stresses the importance of allegiance to the ruler and disloyalty is regarded as a sin. Western sources often fail to appreciate this characteristic of Wahhabism, an aspect that can be interpreted as an ambiguous relationship with the Al Sa`ud. To all intents and purposes, the Wahhabi *'ulama* supports the Al Sa`ud regime in order to ensure its continued funding and maintain religious hegemony. For this reason, the official *'ulama* has never developed a comprehensive political theory as it is dependent on the Al Sa`ud for its existence, to be exact, it has been co-opted. Therefore, the *'ulama* have pretty much constrained themselves to what is going on around them' (Gause III 2005, p. 2).

Popular adherence to the principles of the Wahhabi doctrine is also often cited as being another obstacle to further socio-political reform, although in Saudi Arabia, religion as interpreted by the state, is instrumental in defining the parameters of the public sphere and the guidelines for public conduct (Hashem 2007, p. 21), and not Islamic principles

per se. Dekmejian argues it is an oversimplification to equate Saudi Arabia solely with Wahhabism as, despite the doctrine's position as the source of Al Sa`ud legitimacy, other diverse social forces, both traditional and modern, influence Saudi socio-political dynamics (2003, p. 400). In this respect, regional differences need to be examined along with regional interpretations of Islam as resistance in the provinces to the imported Najdi-Wahhabi ideology remains strong, in particular in areas such as the predominately Shia Qatif, and Ismaili Najran. In the Hijaz and Asir the liberal merchant families and Asiri tribes have never fully embraced Wahhabism or Najdi dominance and opposition is manifested by a low-level struggle for regional identity. In cosmopolitan Jeddah, commentators note how you cannot help be struck by the remarkable resilience of cultural identities and strongly rooted communities, despite the strange, faceless rule of Wahhabism over all public life (Bradley 2005, p. 39). Opposition to the Saudi state has frequently manifested itself in tribal resentment at the domination of the Al Sa`ud and their perceived moral deviations, particularly as these are in direct contravention to the teachings of Islam, and more especially to the state-sponsored Wahhabi doctrine (AbuKhalil 2004, p. 164).⁸⁰

Gause reflects on the apparent paradox between the tenets of Wahhabism and official Al Sa`ud policy with particular reference to foreign policy and Saudi-Western relations (Gause 2009, pp. 135—36). He notes that, despite castigation from Salafi opponents, the Al Sa`ud have been able to overcome these formidable ideological constraints and maintain close relations with the outside powers. In addition, Gause dispels the notion of Osama bin Laden's Wahhabi principles, noting that bin Laden's thinking was more influenced by Qutbist teachings as opposed to official Wahhabi thought. The continuing stability of the Al Sa`ud state is a prerequisite for the continuation of the *'ulama's* power within that state 'both in terms of personal interests and in terms of their corporate interest'. As Gause astutely notes, 'the *'ulama* have become agents of the state; their fortunes and religious projects are directly linked to the continuation of Al Sa`ud rule in Arabia' despite the official *'ulama's* dislike for the Al Sa`ud-US oil for security relationship (Gause 2009, pp. 135—36).

⁸⁰ It is also argued that current socio-political discontent in the region threatens the fragile unity of tribal allegiance to the Al Sa`ud regime (Saleem Shahzad 2004, p. 2).

The Saudi state is not an educator, but rather a programmer and this programming begins in childhood, according to a prominent intellectual.⁸¹ In his opinion, Wahhabism ‘programmes’ society; hence society has to be ‘reprogrammed’ in order to accept change, reform, modernisation and / or westernisation. This programming includes the inability to consider a life without the money from oil and only to accept living on what oil provides.⁸² However, he concedes that some individuals are able to re-programme themselves, but this depends on an individual’s character and critical thinking ability. In addition, society is unable to be creative because it has not been trained to be creative. He also believes that whilst the rest of the world is moving forward, Saudi Arabia is moving backwards, although this regression has slowed in recent years. However, even within important institutions in the Eastern Region, such as the Saudi Arabian Oil Company (ARAMCO) and King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM), there is a fear to speak out about socio-political issues as people are concerned about losing their jobs. Indeed, in the past this fear was so extreme that individuals would not even discuss these issues with their spouses. He claims that this situation indicates the ‘deletion of ideas concerning humanity’ that is so entrenched in government programming. The main problem is that through state programming, society has come to accept issues such as the segregation of the sexes as the norm and indeed, society has learnt, or been programmed, to practice self-censorship.⁸³

Najd

Najd, in central Arabia, is the heartland of the Al Sa`ud and the Wahhabi doctrine. It is the regime’s traditional powerbase and provides core tribal support for the Al Sa`ud Al Ashaikh alliance. During the reign of King Fahd, economic power was transferred from the Hijazis to the Najdis as banking headquarters were moved to Riyadh and the state took control of the *hajj* and *umrah*, whilst in the 1970s the inflow of oil-rents facilitated a programme of modernisation that helped create powerful centralised administrative machinery in the Saudi capital. According to Craze, in the Saudi rentier state, the Najdis assumed the role of the bourgeoisie ‘co-opted by the government and dependent on the state’s benevolence’ (2006, p. 2). From the eighty plus tribal groupings new classes

⁸¹ Interview by author with Subject 69, writer and member *majlis al-shura* (Riyadh: 21.06.10). This Wahhabi programming, through religion and education, is so strong that ‘even a stone would be programmed’. However, maybe it is not possible to re-programme culture as cultural change is difficult.

⁸² However, in the 1980s the Kingdom had to borrow money when the oil price crashed so there is a precedent for this situation in recent memory.

⁸³ Interview by author with Subject 69, writer and member *majlis al-shura* (Riyadh: 21.06.10).

emerged, the most significant being those from the Najdi constituency, and the functions of these new classes were determined largely through the state's sectorial development programmes (Chaudhry 1997, p. 161). The Najdi bureaucratic-commercial elite established itself at the apex of the business community through patronage networks of kinship-based partnerships, and the use of *wastah*.⁸⁴ Today the interaction between the Najdi constituency and the Al Sa`ud regime is sometimes difficult to define due to a lack of recognisable leadership within the constituency. However, as Niblock points out, the Al Sa`ud continue to benefit from their special relationship with the Najdi population to the detriment of other national regions (2006b, p. 15). Today the traditional Najdi business-commercial elites have been supplemented by a younger generation of western educated, or western style educated, technocrats. Al Rasheed notes that the wealth of these new constituencies often came from selling services to the state, but this technocratic constituency is now able to initiate its own commercial ventures and participate in other important patron-client networks. While initially many of these new networks were blessed by the state, some have started to directly challenge the socio-political status quo, even though the restrictions placed on political participation mean that they must now search for alternative channels to transform their material capital into a symbolic capital (Al Rasheed 2006b, p. 1).

Tribal issues

One way to interpret the increase in tribalism in the Kingdom in recent years is to comprehend it as a form of protection and networking in the absence of middle-ground institutions in the Kingdom.⁸⁵ This lack of an intermediate strata means that there is nothing or no one to protect the individual from the state and for this reason people turn back to tribal and kinship ties as a form of societal protection and security. Kostiner points out that tribal values distinguish between the government and the state, the former, the leaders, being considerably more popular than the latter (1990, p. 246). In addition, the Al Sa`ud have integrated the country's leading tribes through a network of marriages, so that many of their relatives and tribesmen related by kinship are also absorbed into the network of business companies as partners / managers or in the tribal based SANG. Naturally, these interrelationships provided by the marriage networks benefit both the royal individual and his tribal relatives. The ruling Al Sa`ud utilise the

⁸⁴ More powerful than mere connections or influence, more effective than bribes, *wastah* is said to permeate all levels of Saudi society; in the author's experience ordinary Saudis frequently complain about a lack of *wastah*.

⁸⁵ Interviews by author with Subject 51, political-science lecturer KSU (Riyadh: 2009 –11).

various mechanisms of state security to protect their regime and the regime designates a vital role in its political structure to the tribal corps as it provides a loyal source of recruitment to the state's military and security services (Ayubi 1995, pp. 242—43). A long tribal tradition of buying loyalty and allegiance is facilitated through the distribution of the royal purse to the tribal heads, and the awarding of government contracts to the various groups and branches of the royal family.

In contemporary Saudi Arabia, new status categories based on education and economic advantage have begun to undermine the importance of tribal affiliation to status and this has started to have a homogenising effect on social integration. A KSU professor and acknowledged expert on tribal issues,⁸⁶ points out that as 80 per cent of the kingdom is tribal and even the monarch is part of the system, it is important to acknowledge tribal concerns, in particular as most of the personnel in the forces, i.e., security, Interior Ministry and SANG are of tribal origin. It is this professor's opinion that the most important issue is not tribalism itself, but rather the mobilisation of the tribal system. This mobilisation is being promoted by individuals operating at senior administrative levels within the ministries, but according to him not necessarily with the support of the senior princes.⁸⁷ He states that the elite officers in SANG do not come from the traditional backbone of the guard,⁸⁸ but instead use the tribal system to protect their own personal system of interests. The professor explains that Saudi Arabia can be likened to five separate countries and within these countries there are regional issues with their own customs and traditions. If an individual has a problem that needs solving, then he will start with his own family and quite possibly will work for / with his family or clan and this occurs parallel to the interests of the state.⁸⁹ Therefore, mobilisation of small groups of families in their practices is tribal in nature and the professor argues that it is not the Al Sa`ud but rather the people directly below the royal family who are trying to mobilise tribal power.

⁸⁶ Interview by author with Subject 87, professor KSU (Riyadh: 17.07.10).

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ For example: The Al Qahtani, Al Otaibi and Al Shammari.

⁸⁹ Interview by author with Subject 87, professor KSU (Riyadh: 17.07.10). There is an important differentiation between the terms clan and tribe. Clan interests refer to the clan and its links through friendships, colleagues, marriage and hometown and / or village. Nowadays clan also refers to those in high positions of power who oppress others and have no interest in the nation and are only interested in looking after the interests of their clan. Furthermore, it is possible to say that ministries have now become clan-based. Unfortunately, although high positions within ministries should be allocated on merit, this does not happen. Rather, the minister will want to know an individual's family and regional background, sect in order to ascertain said individual's worth. He also states that clerics have their own National Dialogue agenda.

Tribalism is getting stronger, suggests a well-known female Jeddah-based radio journalist,⁹⁰ because the Kingdom has tolerated it for so long. In her opinion the Al Sa`ud treat the hardliners with ‘kid gloves’ because tribal power and tribal structures remain particularly resilient. She remarks that forty years ago anyone could join the military or national guard, but during King Fahd’s reign the method of selection shifted and it became an issue of tribal or religious affiliation. In the past, high-ranking officers often originated from the regions, but this changed and the policy of selecting so called ‘pure Saudis’ from the tribes commenced, otherwise an individual would not be accepted in the military or SANG. According to her this gives strength and power to the tribes and that is damaging because if the state is trying to establish the legitimacy of the kingdom, this creates inequality.⁹¹

A KSU lecturer says that Saudi Arabia is witnessing ‘the rise of the south’ with the traditional domains of the bureaucracy, society and army being taken over by southern tribes, for example, the Al Qahtani. Therefore, it is necessary to ascertain how these tribes perceive their relationship with the Saudi state and the Najdi elite; in particular as allies of the Najdis their role may be to contain Hijazi influence.⁹² However, not everyone considers the so-called rise of the south an issue this was not planned, but rather some consider it a result of individuals already in place within ministries and the military. For some it is far more important to consider the influence and position of the Eastern Region as it is the only powerful region in the Kingdom.⁹³ Indeed, regionalism might not constitute a major issue, rather historical and traditional elements remain important as different regions are concerned with ‘interests and rights’ and these may be far more significant.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Interview by author with Subject 70, former General Director of Jeddah Radio / Ministry of Information (Jeddah: 06.07.10)

⁹¹ In July 2010 Subject 70 believed that any KACND debate concerning tribalism was unlikely to happen for at least five years. However, surprisingly, KACND convened a Cultural Discourse on tribalism in December of the same year (See Chapter Four). She also believes that the past culture must be regained, and this is possible if the king and government desire it to happen. She cites the example of Saudi ARAMCO remarking that the company is successful and equality recognised because people are judged on merit and this is company policy. Subject 70 notes that even in ARAMCO there are instances of nepotism, but according to her these are unavoidable.

⁹² Interview by author with Subject 51, KSU political-science lecturer (Riyadh: 29.10.09).

⁹³ Interview by author with Subject 69, writer and member *majlis al-shura* (Riyadh: 10.06.10).

⁹⁴ Interview by author with Subject 37 and brother (Dammam: 10.07.10).

The liberal trend

Bolder elements of the Saudi media sense tensions, indecision and timidity on the part of the extended Al Sa`ud family; so much so that some media voices have been asking whether the aspirations of the political movement that was active in the 1950s and 1960s, but quashed during the reign of King Faisal, may be reawakening in the newly established current forums of state-society dialogue. Indeed, there might be a return to the markedly more open and vibrant period of discussion that occurred during the 1970s, which has sometimes been unfavourably compared to the current intellectual Saudi discourse (Al Khedr 2007, pp. 1—4). During 1970s a period of openness and debate occurred as a result of the societal changes brought about by the sudden influx of wealth. However as Al Khedr notes, the debate in the 1970s did not facilitate either a social or state enlightenment in the broader sense despite transformations in the educational sphere:

When the current surge in global religious awakening emerged, society was not shown to have been educated to a level that can be considered modern – despite the educational revolution that had preceded it, and which had reduced the rate of illiteracy considerably. Despite the emergence of modern-minded elites, equipped with high academic standards of education, the enlightenment did not happen (2007, p. 1).

The reality is that political change rarely comes solely at the initiative of the government, that is, top-down, without any prompting or domestic triggers from below. The crucial point is to recognise, identify and analyse the cause and effect of these triggers.

Saudi society can be divided between the liberals and Islamists, but Lacroix points out the former remains an understudied group (2010, p. 1). The liberals, or Liberal Trend (*al-tayyar al-librali*), represent individuals and groups who advocate reforms within the existing monarchical order. Quilliam suggests that the main advocates of liberal reform are western-educated businessmen who seek accommodation with the existing system and are wary of outright confrontation with the state (2003 p. 40). Following the events of 9/11, the relaxation of control of public socio-political discourse facilitated vigorous debate amongst intellectuals and leaders of the Saudi constituencies. Dekmejian believes that this policy doubly benefitted the then Crown Prince Abdullah as it provided an internal outlet for social discontent, whilst at the same time placating some of the more strident critics abroad (2003, p. 404). The Liberal Trend encompasses

former dissidents from the suppressed secularist and socialist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the ‘liberal professions’,⁹⁵ and a small, but important, group from the so-called moderate Islamists and former Islamists known as *mutahawwilun*.⁹⁶ In addition, Dekmejian notes that the Saudi Liberals ‘have consciously placed themselves outside the official Islamist framework by seeking an alternative vision of societal development’ (2003, p. 401).⁹⁷ Post 9/11, the liberals split into two factions: a) social liberals who believe in social and cultural reform and b) political liberals who believe that socio-cultural reform must go hand-in-hand with political reform (Lacroix 2010, p. 3).⁹⁸ However, according to a KSU professor, the liberal label, whether cultural or political, causes problems in society because when it is used society believes liberals are denying religion. Hence, if an individual refers to himself as liberal or secular, society misinterprets the meaning and understands atheist and ‘that is a terrible thing in Saudi Arabia’.⁹⁹

In 2003, members of the Liberal Trend presented a petition to the then Crown Prince Abdullah entitled the *Strategic Vision Statement* or *Vision on the Present and Future of our Nation*.¹⁰⁰ The one hundred and four *Vision* signatories represented an impressive group of highly educated individuals who possessed both ‘intellectual competence and creative powers’ (Dekmejian 2003, p. 413); qualities that could be utilised constructively in helping to shape the Kingdom’s future.¹⁰¹ The petition was drafted by Abdullah Al Hammed, a liberal Islamist from Riyadh, Mohammed Said Tayyeb, a liberal lawyer from Jeddah, and Jafar Al Shayeb a Shia social activist from Qatif. The

⁹⁵ For example: Academics from non-religious institutions, writers, bureaucrats, journalists, businessmen and lawyers.

⁹⁶ Lacroix identifies these individuals as literally ‘those who have changed’.

⁹⁷ Subject 41 claims that there are no real liberal groups in the Kingdom as they are only ‘behavioral liberals’ who for example claim to want to liberalise women, but in reality this is not true. He maintains that these groups fail to blame government policies; they always blame society and / or the media for socio-political problems.

⁹⁸ Social liberals include amongst others *majlis al-shura* member Ibrahim Belaihi, the writers / journalists Abdulrahman Al Habeeb, Abdullah Bakhit, Turki Al Hamid and Shaker Al Nabulsi. Political liberals include amongst others scholars and academics such as Mohammed Said Tayyeb, Matrook Al Faleh, Abdulaziz Al Dakhil and Khalid Al Dakhil.

⁹⁹ Interview by author with Subject 87, professor KSU (Riyadh: 17.07.10). He aims to lecture on the true meaning of liberal in the Kingdom as it is his opinion that the term liberal does not mean denying religion, but rather talking about freedom.

¹⁰⁰ For further detail, see, for example Sager, A., 2005. Political Opposition in Saudi Arabia. In: P. Aarts and G. Nonneman, eds. *Saudi Arabia in the Balance: Political Economy, Society, Foreign Affairs*. London: Hurst, pp. 246–49; Menoret, P., 2003. *The Saudi Enigma: A History*. London: Zed Books, p. 217; Glosemeyer, I., 2004. Saudi Arabia: Dynamism Uncovered. In: V. Perthes, ed. *Arab Elites: Negotiating the Politics of Change*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, p. 163.

¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, the Saudi Liberals possess no external sources of support, although it is assumed that the liberals have the backing of Prince Talal bin Abdulaziz. However, the prince is barred from holding office due to his involvement in the Free Princes Movement in the 1960s.

Strategic Vision Statement comprised five basic principles that were intended to constitute the basis for a comprehensive national dialogue and contained detailed analysis of both internal and external challenges to the Kingdom as well as recommendations for socio-political and economic reforms. Most significantly, the signatories aspired to give the *majlis al-shura* power to legislate and means of control (Wurm 2008, p. 7). Over forty of the signatories were invited to a discussion with Crown Prince Abdullah, and according to Al Shayeb¹⁰², the meetings were productive and the attendees found Crown Prince Abdullah to be supportive of their demands (2005, p.1).

TOWARDS A NATIONAL DIALOGUE

Three possible scenarios have been contemplated regarding the future direction of the Kingdom: the power of the Al Sa`ud erodes and a power vacuum emerges; the conservative elements of the Al Sa`ud will prevail in the struggle for succession; the modernisers will prevail in the struggle for succession (Wurm 2008a, p. 26). However, Cordesman argues that within the political economy it is social, economic and military transitions that will impact on the shape of the country's future rather than the internal politics of the Al Sa`ud (2003, p. 3). But the inescapable reality is that the Saudi economy is still absolutely dependent on the petroleum sector, and with oil prices and weapons contracts under discussion, western governments will resist promoting any drastic change to the Saudi status quo. That said despite the Kingdom's abundant material wealth, not to mention human resources, commentators wonder whether the Al Sa`ud have the commitment and desire to face and overcome the challenges of the future; challenges that include poverty, corruption, unemployment, and reforming the judicial system.¹⁰³

Nonetheless, members of the Al Sa`ud, in particular King Abdullah, appear to have recognised the necessity of finding a common denominator, one which would link the Kingdom's varying socio-political platforms so as to address the country's pressing

¹⁰² Al Shayeb was a Shia delegate at the Fourth National Dialogue Meeting. He is also a prolific writer and social commentator.

¹⁰³ Various interviews by author with multiple subjects (Saudi Arabia: 2009—11) including Subject 41, ACPRA and Institute of Diplomatic Studies (Riyadh: 13.07.10). He also highlights unemployment and gives an example of how unemployment relates to regional issues. According to him, the regime supported the former Mubarak regime in Egypt by providing greater employment opportunities for Egyptian men in the Kingdom. Indeed, he states that 'Mubarak used to beg the Al Sa`ud to take more Egyptian workers'.

social problems. The then Crown Prince Abdullah nominated himself to act as intermediary between state and society by founding KACND and, according to Glosemeyer, ‘fulfilled his role as the ruler who mediates between conflicting members of society in a rather sophisticated form; instead of keeping the different groups apart he brought them together’ (2005, p. 226). Nonetheless, it was the ‘intellectual’ representatives of these groups who were invited to participate in the crown prince’s newly formed dialogue. In 2003, during a turbulent time, the stability and legitimacy of the Kingdom’s socio-political system was underpinned by moral and intellectual support from the invited intellectuals. From this it is possible to surmise that Crown Prince Abdullah recognised that the various intellectual strata could, in the ‘organic’ Gramscian sense (1971, p. 12), act as agents of reciprocal state-society communication by connecting various parts of political, religious and civil society (See, Fontana 2006, p. 29). By participating in the National Meetings, these intellectuals assumed the role of mediators between a state institution, in the form of KACND, and their respective constituencies. As Haugaard notes, it is these intellectuals who, courtesy of their societal and educational status, ‘unintentionally’ disseminate the dominant hegemony (2006a, p. 7) by acting as facilitators of hegemonic persuasion and consent and with regard to KACND’s forums, it is the principal National Meetings for Intellectual Dialogue that most closely reflect this process.

It can also be said that an Al Sa`ud policy of selection and co-optation continues to determine the integration of societal groupings and constituencies into its administration thus creating an illusion of greater socio-political participation.¹⁰⁴ Hence, in this scenario the establishment of KACND could be interpreted as part of a greater Al Sa`ud project, in other words, the formulation of a Gramscian ‘common will’, whose aim is to absorb societal frustration and lead an acquiescent society in a national discourse, albeit one that still largely suits the regime’s agenda. Thus, KACND resembles a corporatist institution whereby the National Dialogue process constitutes increased Al Sa`ud hegemony with the purpose of leading an acquiescent society in a national discourse, albeit one that is still largely suits the regime’s agenda, i.e., attempting to reach out to new constituencies whilst simultaneously integrating them into a top-down hegemonic structure. Simultaneously, the Al Sa`ud may be attempting to target and co-opt specific

¹⁰⁴ Ammoun refers to ‘institutional opening’ as opposed to democratisation as this infers that institutions are opening up and thus becoming closer to society, which in turn may create favourable conditions for the establishment of a state-society political pact (2006, pp. 217—18).

constituencies by integrating them into the top-down socio-political structure and this selective integration would support the argument that it was never the intention of the Al Sa`ud to allow Saudi society in its entirety to be represented by the new quasi-corporatist institutions such as KACND (Hertog 2006, p. 253).

The stated goal of KACND and the National Dialogue process is to create a constructive dialogue between the state and disparate sections of society; one that operates within a national framework and includes previously marginalised groupings and this initiative should be applauded.¹⁰⁵ In addition, this form of state-society debate is the first form of institutionalised expression within the top-down Saudi government apparatus and therefore is deserving of serious examination. The next chapter looks at the genesis of KACND, the National Meetings for Intellectual Dialogue as well as the growth and development of dialogue related activities in the Kingdom.

¹⁰⁵ Interview by author with Subject 12, planning advisor ARAMCO (Al-Khobar: 16.06.10). She argues that so long as the economic good times continue then reform can progress, but if economic bad times materialise then it is possible that the 'undecided' could turn towards the extreme right. According to her Saudi society can be divided into three sections: the extreme right, i.e., the religious hardliners who are only concerned with issues of 'heaven and hell', the extreme left, i.e., the so-called liberals, and the great 'undecided' in the middle, that is, the majority of the population.

CHAPTER THREE

THE GENESIS OF THE KING ABDULLAH CENTER FOR NATIONAL DIALOGUE

In the late 1990s, the noted Saudi anthropologist Mai Yamani interviewed a broad cross-section of the Kingdom's youth, aged 15—30, in order to gauge the hopes and aspirations of a new generation of Saudis. Yamani constructed a composite, Muhammad (2000, p. xvii) who represented the beliefs, ambitions and frustrations of this new generation. In the days before the legitimisation of state-society dialogue in the Kingdom, Muhammad reflected on the societal debate he witnessed on a visit to Cairo:

In the open, in tea and coffee houses, we saw Egyptians openly discussing and debating political issues. It had never occurred to me before that ordinary people need to discuss such issues among themselves. I mean, if they are not the ones who are ruling the country, why should they bother themselves with such issues? What impact would they have? (2000, p. xvii)

More than a decade has passed since 'Muhammad's' comment and without a doubt public debate has increased in Saudi Arabia as a result of the convergence of the communications revolution and King Abdullah's state-society dialogue initiatives. In August 2010, Gulf States Newsletter (GSN) argued that 'things are not what they were in Saudi Arabia' citing the 'striking transformation in the culture of public discourse and debate', despite the lack of reform in the formal political structures (2010, p. 1). In addition, the 2011 'Arab spring' highlighted the lack of effective state-society dialogue in the region, thus, it is necessary to assess the changes in Saudi societal debate more than a decade after Yamani's composite. It is also essential to ascertain to what extent Saudis are publicly and / or privately discussing socio-political issues and whether the legitimisation of state-society dialogue has begun to address the aspirations of a very young Saudi population in the twenty-first century. For this reason, the activities of KACND and the National Dialogue Meetings need to be evaluated so as to measure the extent of their contribution to more open discussion concerning pressing socio-political and socio-cultural issues.

As previously discussed the 2003 petitions sent to the Al Sa`ud regime demanded socio-political reform and Kechichian argues that at this point public discourse took on a new

dimension as the manifestos redefined the manner in which Saudis were able to access authority (2008, p. 241). In addition, the 2003 Riyadh terrorist attacks deeply shocked both the government and Saudi society and led to calls for an initiative that could counter extremism in the Kingdom. Subsequently, on 30 June 2003 the then Crown Prince Abdullah accepted the conclusions of the first National Meeting for Intellectual Dialogue a gathering of intellectuals from a diverse range of Saudi constituencies. As Menoret notes, for the first time in the history of Saudi Arabia confessional diversity was formally recognised (2003, p. 217). In order to facilitate intellectual and national dialogue, the headquarters of KACND were established in Riyadh¹ to replace the commission for National Reconciliation. Official government bulletins announced that KACND was founded with the aim of promoting a culture of dialogue, developing a constructive way of life and strengthening the bonds between different sections of Saudi society. Minister Faisal Al Mu`ammar,² Secretary-General of KACND, declared that one of the main purposes of the institution was to convey the 'pulse of the Saudi street' to the King (Qusti 2008, p. 1). According to official KACND literature, the institution seeks to create a new environment which will facilitate dialogue among various sections of the society with the aim of promoting public interest and consolidating national unity

¹ The year after the First National Meeting, the headquarters of King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue (KACND) were established in Riyadh. In 2010 these headquarters were demolished and are in the process of being completely rebuilt for the institutions tenth anniversary in 2013. The new KACND headquarters will comprise three towers. One of the towers will house KACND and the other two rented out so that KACND will have an endowment, i.e. be self-funded and not reliant on government money. KACND officials say the three towers will be completed by 2014.

² For many years Al Mu`ammar has been widely acknowledged to be one of King Abdullah's principal advisors. On 13 December 2011 King Abdullah announced a mini-reshuffle in the Saudi Arabian Council of Ministers. Former Deputy Minister for Education, Faisal Al Mu`ammar, was appointed to the post of Advisor to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and KACND Secretary-General in the rank of Minister. Al Mu`ammar is a familiar name to Saudi observers and he has enjoyed access to the king since his days as crown prince. Indeed, a female academic at KSU points out that Al Mu`ammar is ex-SANG something he shares with many in the king's immediate circle. The source also believes that Al Mu`ammar's commitment to the king's project of promoting greater tolerance and cross-constituency dialogue was strengthened by the involvement of one of his relative's sons in terrorist activities. Al Mu`ammar also has strong ties to other senior princes such as Defence Minister Prince Salman and is known as a consummate networker. As well as occupying the position of KACND Secretary-General since the establishment of the institution in 2003, Al Mu`ammar is currently President of the King Abdulaziz Public Library in Riyadh and manages the new King Abdullah Interfaith Dialogue Center due to open in Vienna in 2012. Therefore, elevation of the KACND post to ministerial level appears to firstly, confirm the king's trust in Al Mu`ammar and secondly, raise the profile of an institution close to the king's heart. The new Interfaith Dialogue has links to a number of similar international organisations and Subject 94, a director of the British Co-exist Foundation who has known Al Mu`ammar for several years, states that the minister is an impressive operator, though not without his critics. In addition, this source believes that the work undertaken by both KACND and the Interfaith Dialogue is potentially extremely important for the Kingdom. Interview with Subject 94 (London: 30.11.11).

based on the Islamic faith. Crown Prince Abdullah announced in a televised speech that King Fahd had approved the establishment of KACND, and it was hoped that the institution would ‘secure a channel for the responsible expression of opinion’ (Arab News 2003a, p. 1). As the crown prince asserted, whatever the outcome of the National Dialogue, ‘there is no life for us without Islam and no glory without the homeland’s unity’ and he further emphasised that ‘we will not accept the abuse of the principles of religion and we also reject any tampering with our national unity’ (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia 2003, p. 2).

KACND explains that these aims can be achieved by realising the following objectives:

1. Consolidating national unity within the framework of the Islamic faith and deepening it further through comprehensive National Dialogue
2. Contributing toward the presentation of the true image of Islam inside and outside the country based on moderation through constructive dialogue
3. Tackling social, cultural, political, economic and educational problems using dialogue channels and its mechanisms
4. Promoting the concept and characteristics of dialogue within the society and turning them into a method for dealing with various types of problems facing the society
5. Encouraging the largest possible number of people to take part in the dialogue and to further strengthen the role of civil societies with the aim of ensuring justice, equality and freedom of expression within the framework of the Shariah law
6. Reactivating the National Dialogue in close collaboration with the relevant establishments (KACND 2009g).³

In addition, KACND aims to expand the scope of the National Dialogue in order to include greater numbers of participants and a broader range of issues to be debated. However, all the KACND official literature emphasises that discussions on national and state matters, along with subsequent recommendations and conclusions, must enhance adherence to the Islamic faith and confirm national unity. The official discourse claims that that the National Dialogue ‘will become a historic achievement that contributes to the creation of a channel for objective expression’ (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia 2003, pp. 1—2). It is hoped that this cross-societal dialogue will be able to address many of the issues and problems affecting Saudi society:

It aims to establish and disseminate the culture of dialogue in society, discuss national issues which affect the life of the Saudi citizen and take part in the development of the nation through enabling the participation of different groups,

³ For more information see SUSRIS where KACND’s origins, mission and process are explored in this video documentary: <http://susristube.com/2010/12/28/king-abdul-aziz-center-for-national-dialogue/>

intellectual tendencies and social institutions through the mechanisms and mediums of dialogue (KACND 2006b, p. 13).

Notwithstanding the official line, scepticism, both within and outside Saudi Arabia, surrounds the role, validity and activities of KACND and the National Dialogue Meetings, with particular emphasis on the status of the National Dialogue in the Kingdom's socio-political process. The National Dialogue is frequently described as being nothing more than a state sponsored public-relations exercise whose principle function is to absorb societal frustration and for this reason it has been labelled 'pseudo-democracy' and political theatre (Yamani 2007, p. 1), as it would appear that the institution has little or no influence on government policy or decision-making. Yet even the most vociferous detractors admit that the National Dialogue may resonate, to varying degrees, with the Saudi population and more importantly these same commentators declare that any form of national / state-society dialogue is better than none.⁴ Indeed, Al Rasheed, no supporter of Al Sa`ud initiatives, contends that KACND forums are not simply 'window dressing' as the institution has provided the first opportunity for Saudis from all backgrounds to debate 'important topics long considered taboo' (2010, p. 246). Furthermore, the deliberations have brought interlocutors who previously were unwilling to engage with each other (Sager 2005, p 255). Aarts points out that the dialogue allowed 'for Saudi norms, an impressive range of opinions' to be heard even if the initial forums took place behind closed doors (2007, p. 251). It is also recognised that even within the constrained parameters of the National Dialogue process there is an indication that the Kingdom's changing socio-political context has made the Saudi government aware that a different response to societal frustration and needs is required (Nonneman 2006, p. 10).⁵ In addition, the regional events of 2011 have exposed the dangers of ignoring societal grievances in the Internet age. Therefore, the key question is to what extent the Al Sa`ud and governing elites are aware of the pace of societal change and how they intend to respond, or not, to this phenomenon.

Despite frequent criticism of KACND, since King Abdullah's accession the National Dialogue process has facilitated unprecedented open discussion (see also: Wurm 2008a, p. 11) and even though the parameters of the National Dialogue are tightly controlled,

⁴ Interview by author with Subject 20, journalist and liberal (Riyadh: 01.07.10).

⁵ Interview by author with Subject 70: She argues that society is changing fast and that the Al Sa`ud family are either not aware of the extent of this change or maybe do not care, because they believe that the Kingdom is completely under their control. Interview by author with Subject 70, General Director of Jeddah Radio / Ministry of Information (Jeddah: 06.07.10).

KACND has created a new forum where varying segments of Saudi society, in particular constituencies from outside the recognised elite circles, have been able to express their views. Supporters of the National Dialogue argue that the main purpose of the meetings is to promote socio-cultural understanding and tolerance, not only between different segments of the Saudi population, but also between regions and religious sects. As such, the inclusion of the Shia and Ismaili minorities is frequently cited as an example.⁶

Indeed, the first three National Dialogue Meetings ‘touched on sensitive subjects that were never previously brought up in Saudi Arabia, and induced reforms that would shake the ideological and social bases of the Kingdom’ (Ammoun 2006, pp. 234—38). American academic Bronson was initially sceptical about the relevance of the National Dialogue (2006, p. 1), dismissing the meetings as ‘Al Sa`ud window dressing’. However, on a visit to the Jeddah Economic Forum she noted that many Saudis disagreed with her, explaining that the National Dialogue process accurately represented the ‘way things were done’ in Saudi society and that it is considered important to be invited to the meetings. Gause also recognises that the government sponsored National Dialogue is an important step in the right direction towards a more liberal route, albeit a small step (2004, p. 2), even though the process can also be interpreted as a strategic measure to channel societal discontent whilst simultaneously maintaining control over the content and pace of reform (Wurm 2008a, p. 15). Nevertheless, it is possible to argue that the creation of the National Dialogue, along with the 2005 and 2011 municipal elections should be valued as steps towards greater political participation in the Kingdom. Indeed, Wurm asserts that the National Dialogue process ‘may look small from the outside, but it has enormous magnitude from the Saudi perspective’ (2008a, p. 18).

This research aims to demonstrate the range and depth of the National Dialogue by drawing on interviews with individuals involved in the process as well as official documentation and comment. In order better to understand the National Dialogue and its significance, this chapter now focuses on the principal National Dialogue Meetings followed by an examination of the shift from ideology-related themes, such as national

⁶ For many Saudis the televised audience between King Abdullah and the Shia participants represented their first exposure to the minority Shia sect and many Saudi citizens were unable to identify the Shia delegates when they first appeared on Saudi national television.

unity and women's rights, to service-related themes such as employment and education. It then previews the newly established Cultural Discourse, separate from the National Dialogue proper, but associated with it, before discussing KACND's dialogue training initiatives.

THE NATIONAL MEETINGS FOR INTELLECTUAL DIALOGUE: FORUMS, STRUCTURE, GOALS, RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to analyse the evolvement of state-society dialogue in Saudi Arabia, it is necessary to examine both state-sponsored institutionalised dialogue and discourse occurring within informal socio-political networks so as to identify threads that may link the two processes. As this research shows that the formal and informal dialogue processes overlap; an examination of the state-sponsored National Dialogue Meetings is required in order to identify key areas of divergence. In addition, the range and background of the participants and the location of the National Meetings need to be taken into account in order to measure societal response with regard to the principal socio-political issues being either addressed, or ignored, by the official discourse.

Between 2003 and 2010 eight National Dialogue Meetings were convened with another planned for 2012.⁷ At these meetings there is a predetermined agenda and participation is by invitation only although attendance is optional. Initially, the meetings were held roughly once a semester; however, since 2006, due to the increase in preparatory meetings held in multiple locations and an increase in participants, both in number and range, the National Dialogue meeting has become an annual event:

- 2003, Riyadh: First National Meeting, Reinforcing National Unity
- 2003, Makkah: Second National Meeting, Extremism and Moderation, a Comprehensive Methodological Perspective
- 2004, Madinah: Third National Meeting, Women: Rights, Duties and their Relationship to Education
- 2004, Dhahran: Fourth National Meeting, the Youth Issues, Reality and Aspirations
- 2005, Abha: Fifth National Meeting, Ourselves and the Other, the National Vision for Dealing with World Cultures

⁷ These National Meetings do not including the Cultural Discourse or other KACND forums which are discussed later in the chapter and in Chapter Four.

- 2006, Al-Jouf: Sixth National Meeting, Education, Current Situation and Means of Development
- 2008, Qasim: Seventh National Meeting, Work and Employment, a Dialogue between Society and Work Related Institutions
- 2010, Najran: Eighth National Meeting, Health Services, a Dialogue between the Society and Health Institutions
- 2011, Ha'il: Ninth National Meeting, the Media and Society, Reality and Paths to Development

The forum is usually spread over three days in order to allow sufficient time to discuss a variety of specific issues related to the main theme and to date the issues debated can be divided into ideological and service issues.⁸ According to Secretary-General Al Mu`ammar, the amount of freedom granted to the invited participants who represent different social segments of Saudi society has been ‘unprecedented’ (Qusti 2007, p. 1). Al Mu`ammar states that, ‘no boundaries’ exist within discussions raised at the National Dialogue meetings although the issue of self-censorship, i.e., the implicitly acknowledged ‘red lines’ is one that many dialogue participants acknowledge.⁹ Al Mu`ammar adds that in order for the National Dialogue meetings to be constructive ‘it was necessary that all civic institutions be represented in a forum to give their point of view’ (Qusti 2007, p. 1). Furthermore, an indirect consequence of the meetings has been the establishment of new inter-regional and inter-sectarian ties as well as the opportunity for cross-constituency networking. However, as already noted participation in the National Dialogue continues to be by invitation only.¹⁰

First National Meeting for Intellectual Dialogue Reinforcing National Unity

The First National Dialogue meeting, described as ‘an intellectual think-tank’ (Raphaeli 2005, p. 522), convened on 15 – 18 July 2003 at the King Abdulaziz Public Library, a month after the first terrorist attack in Riyadh. The meeting’s agenda was greatly

⁸ Interview by author with Subject 68, writer, KACND participant (Jeddah: 05.07.10): KACND contacted Subject 68 after she submitted her CV online. She states, ‘At that time you were considered one of the elite because you were chosen to participate in a meeting’. According to her KACND ‘creates a thumbprint’ by bringing everything of its own to a meeting— including its own chairs. In addition, each participant is given a complete set of KACND literature and seated alphabetically (arranged by Saudi ladies). Each participant is given a paper stating what could be discussed and instructed that the proceedings would take two contributions from the female side and then two from the male side and so on.

⁹ Various interviews by author with multiple subjects (Saudi Arabia: 2009—11).

¹⁰ The consequences of this policy are discussed in later chapters as well as in the conclusion.

influenced by the recent terrorist activity as well as the occupation of Iraq (Al Rasheed 2010, p. 244). The meeting was chaired by the president of the *majlis al-shura*, Shaikh Salih Al Husayyin (now KACND president). Crown Prince Abdullah, in his opening message to the meeting¹¹, urged Saudis ‘to engage in a dialogue that respects the opinions of others’ although this was interpreted by some observers as a veiled warning to the Wahhabi hardliners that greater tolerance towards other religious sects was now expected (Weston 2008, p. 435). The initial four day meeting comprised 30 ‘*ulama* and intellectuals¹² from all regions of the Kingdom including Wahhabi and non-Wahhabi Sunnis, Twelver Shia, as well as Sufi and Ismaili adherents. Many in the dominant ‘*ulama* considered the presence of these groups heretical and several members of the informal religious establishment refused to attend.¹³ The then governor of Makkah, Prince Abdul-Majid bin Abdulaziz, represented the Al Sa`ud along with senior government representatives and members of the Saudi media. None of the figures from the official Wahhabi establishment were invited, a decision that has been interpreted as a willingness by reformist elements surrounding King Abdullah to marginalise the Wahhabi hardliners (Lacroix 2005, p. 17). Two main themes linked the issues discussed: a) National Unity and the Role of Scholars and b) Relations and International Treaties and the Effect of Understanding them on National Unity.

The issue of national unity covered religious radicalism and extremism, social order, morals, the rights and responsibilities of women, the need to integrate youth into the national economy, freedom of expression, international relations with regard to Saudi national unity and contemporary fatwa and religious edicts and ‘the ways and means for linking them with realities on the ground’ (KACND 2003b, p. 1; See, Sakr 2008, p. 393). Hertog notes that as this meeting had the function of a trial run, it had the broadest remit of any of the meetings prior to 2005 (2006, p. 250). For the first time in the history of the Kingdom, dialogue was initiated between the different ideological and religious Saudi groupings and this move was perceived in some quarters as a break with the monist Wahhabi discourse that had previously dominated state-society dialogue. Accordingly, the first session was said to reflect an ‘intellectual buoyancy’ present in

¹¹ See Appendix III

¹² See Appendix IV.

¹³ Saffar Al Hawali, an Awakening Shaikh, refused to attend and mix with ‘deviant’ Muslims, a position that was supported by many in the religious establishment. However, another influential Awakening Shaikh, Salman Al Awda, did attend and famously was seen to give the Shia cleric Hassan Al Saffar a ride in his car. See, for example Weston, M., 2008. *Prophets and Princes: From Muhammad to the Present*. Hoboken: USA, John Wiley and Sons, Inc., p. 435.

the Kingdom in 2002—3 (Ammoun 2006, p. 236). A number of the January 2003 *Vision for the Present and Future of the Nation* signatories participated in the first meeting, although it is likely that this was an attempt by the Al Sa`ud to co-opt, or at least monitor, actors considered to be verging on outright dissent by containing them within the structure of a state-sponsored institution.¹⁴ The presence of Shia delegates, including Shaikh Hassan Al Saffar, at the meeting has been explained as a move to prevent, or guard against, a spill-over of Shia assertion from Iraq following the US led invasion. Indeed, Saudi Shia felt emboldened to call for an end to discrimination and request a statement from the Al Sa`ud affirming respect for all the Kingdom's religious sects (International Crisis Group 2004, p. 16).

It was agreed at the First National Meeting that the KACND would be established in order to expand the circles of participation in future National Meetings and to prepare, organise and conduct the necessary research to facilitate the Saudi national discourse whilst adhering to, and taking pride in, the Kingdom's Islamic creed (KACND 2006b, p. 5). The meeting advocated a 'culture of dialogue' that encouraged contact amongst youth from different backgrounds and viewpoints, a culture of dialogue that would be fostered by the establishment of centres, clubs and libraries in all areas of the Kingdom so as to assist Saudi youth to acquire a broader knowledge (KACND 2003b, p. 1).

The First National Meeting concluded by adopting a charter that acknowledged the Kingdom's intellectual, religious and spiritual diversity and advocated greater political participation and reform within the Saudi political system. In addition, the charter criticised one of the Wahhabi juridical pillars, the principle of *saad al-dhara*, that is, the blocking of means: actions that can lead to sin must themselves be prohibited, which as Lacroix notes remains the state-Wahhabi rationale behind prohibiting women drivers in the Kingdom (2005, p. 17). The session culminated in the Al Sa`ud conceding to one of the reform demands and announcing elections to the municipal councils in 2005. However, in 2003, the proceedings and recommendations of the First National Meeting remained secret (Hertog 2006, p. 250); they were eventually published in 2005 as part of official KACND literature.¹⁵

¹⁴ These individuals included Salafi Shaikh Salman Al Awda and Professor Matrook Al Faleh from KSU. Al Awda was imprisoned in the 1990s for criticising the regime and Professor Al Faleh was most recently detained from May 2008 to January 2009.

¹⁵ Available in Arabic and English: See Appendix III.

*Second National Meeting for Intellectual Dialogue
Extremism and Moderation: A Comprehensive Methodological Perspective*

The Second National Meeting convened in Makkah between 27 December 2003 and 1 January 2004. Due to the persistent terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia, the agenda focussed on rising Islamic militancy and ways to combat this extremism and related religious fanaticism. In attendance were fifty-seven participants,¹⁶ including nine women who, due to the strict segregation of the sexes in the Kingdom, participated in the proceedings via close-circuit television link. Significantly, the meeting included religious leaders from varying Islamic schools of thought ‘a rare and very recent acknowledgement of the diversity of religious interpretations in the Kingdom (Prokop 2005, p. 79). However, criticism was directed at the singular focus of the fifteen research papers¹⁷ discussed, which, according to Dr. Turki Al Hamad, contradicted the intended nature of the dialogue (Arab News 2004h, p. 1). Despite criticism concerning the appointment of researchers to present papers at the meeting, it was pointed out that these research papers were meant to serve as a framework for the discussions so that the participants were free to discuss whatever topics they deemed suitable. The chairman, Shaikh Salih Al Husayyin, noted that the Saudi socio-political reform process could be assisted by the integration of free National Dialogue into the Saudi way of life so that the opinions of ordinary citizens could be made available to decision-makers (Arab News 2003b, pp. 1—2). According to one participant, this was achieved as the forum’s success was marked by objectivity and mutual respect (Arab News 2004f, p. 1). A scholar at KSU and KFCRIS¹⁸ who participated in the Second National Dialogue noted that the meeting was interesting in that it allowed interaction between people who would not normally meet, including senior Salafis and the Shia Shaikh Hassan Al Saffar, but as the recommendations were not followed up and ‘everything requires a royal decree before anything is done’ this in his opinion made the discussions fairly meaningless. The fact that the dialogue sessions were closed to the public provoked a great deal of criticism including censure from the *majlis al-shura* and national press. In response to this criticism Al Mu`ammar argued that the dialogue was experimental and thus should be conducted in private (Sakr 2008, p. 393), but Abeer Mishkhas in the Arab News commented that this contradicted the purpose and objective of holding a

¹⁶ See Appendix V. These intellectuals included members of the *‘ulama*, psychologists, sociologists, educators, economists, businessmen, journalists and petition signatories.

¹⁷ See Appendix V.

¹⁸ Interview by author with Subject 79, Scholar and Second National Dialogue participant (Riyadh: 04.04.10) and Subjects, 25 and 26 (Jeddah / Riyadh 2010—11).

National Dialogue Meeting where a variety of ideas are discussed. However, Mishkhas remarked that the holding of the forum was a step in the right direction (2004a, pp. 1—2) despite the fact that the meeting's recommendations were not published.¹⁹

The meeting supported government measures to halt the recent terrorist attacks by enlisting support from individuals and groups from all walks of life. Certainly, the focus of the Second National Meeting concentrated primarily on combating extremism, but there was also related discussion concerning the need to overhaul the educational system, the fair distribution of wealth in the Kingdom, and cultivating an atmosphere of tolerance and moderation among Saudi youth. In addition, the participants called for an acceleration of the political reform process and a widening of public participation in the governing of the Kingdom. The recommendations²⁰ included greater public control over the national budget, elections for both the national and regional consultative councils, and encouraging the establishment of trade unions, voluntary groupings and civil societies. The participants also called for improved channels of communication between the government and general public, in addition to a separation of power between the three branches of government (KACND 2003c, p. 1). Finally, increasing the role of women in society was discussed with a recommendation for 'the establishment of a specialised national organisation entrusted with the task of looking after the needs of women, children and family' (KACND 2003c, p. 1). It was proposed that the subsequent National Meeting should focus on the role of women in Saudi society and the need for women to play a larger and more prominent role in everyday life. However, discussion of women's rights would be closely linked to Saudi religio-societal norms and as if to emphasise this point, following the meeting, King Abdullah met the delegates and denounced 'ultraconservative and unduly liberal demands as inappropriate' (Hertog 2006, p. 251). The king declared that 'we must not forget that this country does not allow anyone to tamper with its Islamic faith under the guise of the freedom of expression, or any other name (KACND 2005a, p. 55).

¹⁹ It should be noted that the recommendations reached at the conclusion of each meeting are only advisory and not legislative. There have been discussions regarding the implementation of these recommendations, but as of yet this process has not been formalised. See, Qusti, R., 2007. National Dialogue Chief Says No Boundaries in Forums. Jeddah: *Arab News*, pp.1—3.

²⁰ See Appendix IV.

*Third National Meeting for Intellectual Dialogue
Women: Rights, Duties and their Relationship to Education*

Despite women constituting nearly sixty per cent of university graduates, they comprise only fourteen per cent of the workforce²¹ and women's unemployment rate is four times that of men (Human Rights Watch 2011a, p. 1). This fact can be blamed on the array of religiously-inspired restrictions that impede a woman's ability to work and / or contribute more meaningfully to Saudi society. Faisal Al Mu`ammar, declared:

The importance of this meeting emanates from the fact that today Saudi women play a vital role in the on-going development all over the country. They occupy a prominent place in society which was bestowed on them by Islam. Today Saudi women are participating in various fields of economic activities along with their men folk (KACND 2004b, p. 1).

The Third National Meeting, held in Madinah in 12—14 June 2004, was structured around eighteen research papers²² and subdivided into four major themes: Women's Rights and Religious Duties, Women and Society, Women and Employment and Women and Education.²³ Two precedents were set at this forum: numerical gender equality amongst the participants and verbatim reporting of the deliberations (Sakr 2008, p. 393). Although female delegates comprised fifty per cent of the seventy participants,²⁴ observers argued that the delicate social nature of the topic with regard to Saudi society not only limited the scope of the discourse, thus constraining the meeting's recommendations (Ammoun 2006, p. 236), but also confirmed Saudi societal conservatism. In addition, the meeting was segregated, with men and women in separate rooms linked by closed-circuit television, although this segregation was challenged by some as being unnecessary considering the attitudes of this type of cultured elite at a national gathering (Arab News 2004e, p. 1). As if to confirm this conservatism, the chairman of the meeting, Shaikh Salih Al Husayyin, stressed that 'a woman is man's natural partner in life and women's willingness to perform their role properly in society would determine the fate of the nation' (KACND 2004b, p. 1). However, the Shaikh also stated that treating women justly in line with Shariah teaching is a societal obligation.

²¹ This percentage is triple the rate in 1992.

²² See Appendix VI.

²³ As defined by the officially recognised relationship between Saudi women and Wahhabi interpretation of Islam.

²⁴ See Appendix VI.

It was noted that within Saudi society there had been increased calls to ease restrictions that make women dependant on male relative in all aspects of their lives and that for purely economic reasons a great many of these restrictions needed to be lifted (Arab News 2004a, p. 1). The decision to devote a National Meeting to women's rights raised expectations that reform backed by societal, religious and governmental consensus could be achieved, but the presence among the delegates of a greater number of conservatives than reformers ensured that results were limited and recommendations suitably vague. The balance between moderates and conservative delegates was criticised by Dr. Suhaila Hammad, a member of the National Human Rights Association (NHRA) who believed that the majority selected to attend the National meeting were of a more conservative nature despite moderates being in the majority in the Kingdom. It is doubtful whether anyone can prove that Saudi 'moderates' outnumber 'conservatives', but according to the Saudi Press Agency some of the sessions were tumultuous (See, Al Rasheed 2010, p. 247; Arab News 2004c, p. 1—2). During the meeting, there were heated exchanges between participants on issues such as legal rights of women, women's concerns in the workplace and girl's education. During one of the sessions, a woman objected to an item published in a state school textbook referring to women as 'weak creatures in need of guardians' that provoked a strong reaction from the male participants 'who argued that women were already afforded more rights than they are entitled to' (Coleman 2010, p. 221). Dr. Muhammad Al Arifi from the Teachers' College in Riyadh infuriated the women delegates by supporting this stance. Indeed, his remarks reduced one female delegate to tears and Dr. Wafa Al Rasheed, director of the United Nations Programme in Riyadh, said that as a mother she feared for her children 'if this extremist spirit dominates' (Al Midwahi 2004, p. 1). The International Crisis Group (ICG) quotes Suhaila Hammad, an outspoken and forceful defender of women's rights from an Islamist perspective, as saying the meeting 're-enforced the domination of men over women' and that 'those who organised the dialogue appear to have come under pressure from the conservative current. As a result they invited only a few moderates' (2004, p. 17).

As a result of sexual segregation in the Kingdom, all the discussions were male-led with an overrepresentation of *'ulama* and conservatives among the delegates. Hertog notes that for liberal-minded participants the meeting appeared stage-managed, to such an extent that some delegates walked out. Moreover, delicate issues such as a woman's legal status and right to drive were ignored (2006, p. 251). In contrast, the meeting

recommended that the government should allow a woman to study and work without a male relative's permission, establish a female branch of the judiciary to deal solely with female issues and, due to the continuing ban on driving, provide an up-to-date, secure public transportation system. Participants of both sexes called for a review of the taboo shrouding local customs governing women's lives, although some argued, women as well as men, that it was these customs that provided a Saudi sense of identity (Arab News 2004e, p. 2). The journalist Abeer Mishkhas commented on the references to western influences on women and the need to resist them as if western forces were attempting to lure Saudi women away from their traditional values. This line of thought, Mishkhas noted, is prevalent in the Kingdom as she claims that Saudi society is prone to criticise other societies arbitrarily (2004c, p. 1).

Although the recommendations were made available to the general public, they had to be government-approved before publication.²⁵ However, in some quarters these recommendations were criticised as being vague and meaningless as they failed to address problems head-on. Instead of concrete measures, high-sounding recommendations,²⁶ strategies and plans, as well as the establishment of councils and specialised bodies, constituted the final recommendations, i.e., 'words not actions' (Al Fawzan 2004, p. 1). In particular, young Saudi women were said to be mostly critical of the session as most of the female delegates were aged between forty and sixty, when the most of the Saudi population is under twenty-five, and these delegates were discussing issues such as a women's right to drive which seemed 'shallow and unnecessary' compared to more pressing matters such as limited job opportunities for women (Arab News 2004j, pp. 1—2). Indeed, one political activist argues that the National Dialogue Meeting concerning women was conducted entirely through the prism of Islam and did not address social issues through social debate.²⁷ Following the meeting King Abdullah had a separate audience with the female delegates who submitted an alternative set of recommendations which the King promised to consider and it is claimed that 'by meeting these women, King Abdullah let everyone know that he approves of women working outside the home' (Weston 2008, p. 436). Indeed, Jeddah based radio journalist Samar Fatany argued that the Madinah meeting reflected the regime's opinion that

²⁵ See Appendix VI.

²⁶ The Madinah meeting called for broadening the scope of women in public life. However, a year later women were excluded from the 2005 Municipal Elections.

²⁷ Interview by author with Subject 63, Shia writer and political activist (Qatif: 09.04.10).

women, in partnership with Saudi men, are an integral part of the socio-political reform process (Arab News 2004b, pp. 1—2).

On the first day of the Third National Meeting, former journalist and Ismaili businessman²⁸ asked for an explanation as to why male and female delegates were seated in different rooms at a meeting on women's rights (Bashir 2004, p. 1). He remarks that this question caused consternation both in the meeting and the media and that the issue ended up monopolising the three day forum; in his words 'it became the issue of the meeting'. When asked whether the Third National Meeting achieved anything concrete, he maintained that it is necessary to consider Saudi society and the way society and culture operate, that is, an individual would think that he/she is not completing an action because of the outcome of a particular National Meeting. According to him and the director of KACND's women's centre,²⁹ the Third National Meeting realised a number of factors, but in a manner 'of opening windows' so that it may not have been immediately apparent that anything concrete was achieved. They argue that the meeting paved the way for the appointment of Norah Alfaiz as Deputy Minister for Girl's Education, the introduction of female identity cards and current discussion regarding gender segregation.³⁰ In addition, following the Madinah meeting, although not apparent to the general public, many more prominent Saudi women started to be selected for visiting delegations to foreign countries.³¹

*Fourth National Meeting for Intellectual Dialogue
The Youth Issues: Reality and Aspirations*

At the Fourth National Meeting forty participants³² discussed issues related to the question: What are the problems and expectations of young people here in the Kingdom and what are the problems they are facing? (KACND 2004e, p. 1) The Meeting convened in Dhahran in the Eastern Province on 7—9 December 2004 and was organised around four themes: Youth and Education; Youth and Work; Youth and Culture; Youth and National Identity, but the deliberations were less heated than those at the Madinah forum (Al Rasheed 2010, p. 245).

²⁸ Interview by author with Subject 82, Ismaili activist (Najran: 11.07.10).

²⁹ Interview by author with Subject 54, Director Women's Centre KACND (Riyadh: 21.06.10).

³⁰ Interview by author with Subjects 54 and 82 (Riyadh and Najran: 07.10).

³¹ For example: Dr. Thuraya Al Arrayed from Saudi Aramco who was a recent delegate on a visit to the British House of Lords and a participant at the BBC Doha Debates in Qatar.

³² See Appendix VII.

Considering the demographic reality of contemporary Saudi Arabia and the acknowledged problem of the ‘youth bulge’, the Fourth National Meeting should have achieved more concrete and focussed results as this meeting was considered to have been well-organised, with related preparatory meetings and discussion in the national press. Prior to the principal National Dialogue Meeting, senior *‘ulama* and youth experts joined 650 young participants of each gender, twenty-five male and female from each region aged between sixteen to twenty-five, selected from secondary schools and universities, for the preparatory workshops and meetings in all thirteen administrative regions of the Kingdom (KACND 2005a, p. 76).³³ Nonetheless, this youth grouping was criticised for being uninformed about national events as well as being too random and non-representative of the Kingdom as a whole, despite the fact that this National Meeting was possibly the most thoroughly prepared session so far (Hertog 2006, p. 252).³⁴ At a meeting in the Eastern Province sixty-two young men and women expressed their dissatisfaction with the out-dated Saudi educational system and the lack of properly qualified teachers. According to a paper delivered by an engineering student, the curricula were almost totally irrelevant to the needs of the job market, as at that time some eighty-two per cent of graduates specialised in humanities and religious studies whilst those in applied science and medicine accounted for only ten per cent of graduates (Mishkhas 2004b, pp. 1—2).³⁵ In addition, opposition was voiced to closed-door debates as students were unable to follow the session from their homes or educational institutions (Arab News 2004k, p. 1). The press reported candid and lively discussions and young Saudi women spoke frankly about their exclusion from society and lack of say in public matters (Qusti 2004, p. 1). As Mishkhas commented, as much as the National Dialogue was welcomed, and as much as people hoped that the findings would be utilised in order to create a new atmosphere of frankness and openness in the Kingdom, it made no sense to keep the discussions closed.³⁶ Mishkhas also noted that the Saudi media coverage was broadly similar, a result of the media carrying the official press release, and that if the media was not

³³ According to KACND, selection was based on school grades, professions and life circumstances.

³⁴ A website was introduced to complement the session and a directory of 20,000 workshop supervisors, intellectuals, clerics and writers, was compiled.

³⁵ The lack of graduates with scientific and technical qualifications is being addressed through the establishment of institutions such as the co-educational King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) to be run by Saudi ARAMCO in a purpose built campus north of Jeddah.

³⁶ Although the first two forums were closed to the media, KACND organisers bowed to public pressure and allowed media access to the preparatory sessions and the principal meeting starting with the third forum on ‘Women’s Rights’ in Madinah.

allowed to participate freely in the dialogue, which reflects a lack of trust, then the effectiveness of the National Dialogue was considerably reduced (2004b, p. 1—2).

The final recommendations³⁷ included establishing a higher commission for manpower resources in order to deal with the issues of unemployment and transformation of the process of Saudization. In addition, there was a recommendation for the establishment of a special fund for the benefit of coming generations that would be the responsibility of both state and private sectors, and a committee was set up at Crown Prince Abdullah's court to follow up on the recommendations. A preparatory session held in Riyadh called for enlightening youth on the Kingdom's basic regulations including the Basic System of Government, the Regional Council System and the Shura Council System (Arab News 2004k, p. 1). As Hertog notes, one of the meeting's recommendations was the establishment of student unions, however in 2011 the status of any future unions remained unclear (2006, p. 252).³⁸

One positive, and ultimately far-reaching, outcome from the first four dialogues was the decision to hold preliminary meetings, open to the Saudi press, in all regions of the Kingdom in order to pave the way for the principal National Dialogue Meeting. On the negative side, the meeting was criticised as, unlike earlier meetings, it did not bring any fundamental innovation to the Saudi educational system, despite the importance of the subject, and as no channels existed by which young people could contact leaders. Despite the fact that the meeting recommended an overhaul of the Kingdom's education system in order to meet the country's need for a highly skilled manpower supply, the recommendations did not address the issue of the prevalence of religious education or the nature of the Saudi educational curriculum. Ammoun labels this the 'trivialisation of the National Dialogue which was compounded by not seeing the implementation of the meeting's recommendations' (2006, p. 237). However, within the Kingdom it was noted that the session had addressed very important issues and that it was necessary to include young people in the consultation process. In other words, 'they will one day be society and the future belongs to them' (Mishkhas 2004b, p. 2).

³⁷ See Appendix VII.

³⁸ KAUST has a Graduate Council and most universities have a variety of student clubs. Discussion regarding future student unions is on-going; see, for example a survey conducted at KFUPM: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/XNMMT9H>

*Fifth National Meeting for Intellectual Dialogue
The National Vision for Interaction with World Cultures*

Convened in Abha from 13 – 15 December 2005, seventy participants³⁹ (thirty-five male and thirty-five female) from various societal groupings including Sunni and Shia, liberals and conservatives, attended the Fifth National Meeting that discussed the final formulation of a National Vision for interaction with world cultures ‘Ourselves and the Other’.⁴⁰ Preceding the main meeting, KACND organised thirteen preparatory sessions in various parts of the Kingdom⁴¹ which were attended by approximately 780 participants. These participants compiled a list of nearly a thousand Shariah-related, cultural, political and economic recommendations which were submitted to the KACND organising committee in preparation for the Abha meeting (KACND 2005b, p. 3). The intended aim of the sessions was to allow participants to clarify their perceptions of the ‘other’, the non-Saudi whether Arab, Muslim or Westerner (Arab News 2005c, p. 1). An information database of more than 60,000 applicants was compiled through the KACND website and, according to KACND Secretary-General Al Mu`ammar, over ninety per cent of participants⁴² were chosen after reviewing their applications online (Arab News 2005d, p. 1). However, the proliferation of academics, deans, and vice-deans of faculties was criticised as these participants in the National Dialogue had not yet applied recognised ‘methods of dialogue’ within their own institutions, let alone allowed the establishment of a student union, students’ club or an alumni association.⁴³ It was argued that this demonstrated a lack of trust in the younger generation especially as many of their current students represented the future of the Kingdom (Al Matrafi 2005, p. 1—2).

The sessions took place in public and for the first time were televised live by *Al-Ekhbariya*. According to *Asharq Alawsat*, the discussions took place in an honest and transparent manner (2005, p. 1) although one commentator wondered why there was segregated seating at a National Dialogue Meeting when medical conferences,

³⁹ See Appendix VIII.

⁴⁰ Interview by author with Subject 35, SANG University (Riyadh: 20.07.10): she first participated at the Fourth National Meeting. At the meeting, the participants were invited to nominate future National Dialogue subjects, and it was Dr. Al Murshid who suggested the topic ‘Ourselves and the Other’ which became the central topic of the Abha Meeting. She believes that this meeting led directly to the foundation of King Abdullah’s Interfaith Dialogue.

⁴¹ These were convened in all administrative regions of the Kingdom: each meeting comprised thirty male participants and thirty female participants per region.

⁴² The participants included individuals from the government and private sectors, businessmen, women and the unemployed.

⁴³ Saudi students abroad have students’ clubs.

exhibitions and managerial seminars often have mixed seating (Al Matrafi 2005, p. 2). According to Hertog, this meeting, which had intellectuals discuss dialogue with other cultures, did not attract great news coverage, thus apparently deflating expectations, and much of the coverage it did receive commented on the secretive and bland nature of the sessions⁴⁴ (2006, pp. 252—53). Another viewpoint stressed that those who underrated the achievements of the forum were missing the point as the issues discussed would not have been allowed to be publicly debated in the same manner five to ten years previously. According to the same source, by calmly discussing the challenges facing Saudi society, the necessary steps are being taken in order to allow society to adjust not only to a changing world, but also to the diversity within the Kingdom itself. At the end of the forum, a senior Shia cleric had a private word with King Abdullah and was informed by the monarch ‘be patient as this reform process will take a long time’.⁴⁵

The meeting’s objectives included clarifying the foundations and common denominators upon which relations between different cultures are built and promoting an awareness of world cultures. It was believed that by defining the religious and cultural parameters for interaction with differing civilisations this would contribute to human development and create a shared Saudi ‘national vision’ (KACND 2006b, p. 27). The recommendations of the Fifth National Dialogue Meeting took the form of a policy document named the ‘National Vision’. The meeting adopted a proposal for a national vision based on the following criteria: humanistic principles, Shariah-based principles, cultural interaction, social interaction, political interaction and economic interaction.⁴⁶ A first draft of the ‘National Vision’ policy paper was presented to the forum participants for amendments before being handed to the media. This final document *Ourselves and the Other: A National Vision for Interaction with World Cultures* was published by KACND⁴⁷ (2005b) and distributed through the offices of both government and private institutions including the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowments, Call and Guidance, the Ministry of Culture and Information, the universities, and civil society institutions such as the chambers of commerce, scholarly organisations, research centres and media establishments (KACND 2005c, p. 1).

⁴⁴ Subject 12, ARAMCO, participant Fifth National Dialogue (Al-Khobar: 16.06.10): According to her away from the official sessions the debate was heated and at times confrontational.

⁴⁵ Interview by author with Subject 37 and *majlis* (Dammam: 10.07.10).

⁴⁶ See Appendix VIII.

⁴⁷ Ibid. Available in Arabic, English and French and as an online pdf download.

On the one hand, there were contradictory opinions regarding this National Dialogue with some expressing contempt for the way in which the meeting had been directed, whilst others stated that the results were positive and that the forum acted as a ‘social training tool, not only for speakers, but also for participants’. On the other hand, all the participants agreed that it was a positive step to televise the proceedings and it distinguished this forum from previous ones (Arab News 2005a, pp. 1—2). The dominance of extremist beliefs in the Kingdom’s education system was strongly attacked by many participants, who cited how Saudi society suffered from the intolerance of one religious school, i.e., a dominant ideology that denounced all others (Arab News 2005b, p. 2). Well-known Sunni cleric Salman Al Awdah called on the government to participate to make the dialogue a meaningful exercise because although the government organises the dialogue it is not represented in the dialogue itself. Al Awdah also questioned the ‘absence of the common man’ as National Dialogue affects his/her own immediate interests (KACND 2008a, p. 1). Nevertheless, some participants believed that, due to global political tensions, this was not the time to raise the issue of differences amongst Saudi societal groupings (Arab News 2005e, pp. 1—2).

*Sixth National Meeting: Education for Intellectual Dialogue
Education: Current Situation and Means of Development*

The Sixth National Meeting aimed to analyse the Kingdom’s educational state of affairs in order to examine ways in which national education could be developed and improved. Officials from KACND emphasised that the selection of education as the theme of this National Dialogue was directly linked to the recommendations made at previous forums where the issue of the Saudi educational system had been hotly debated (Arab News 2006g, p. 1). According to KACND Deputy Secretary-General,⁴⁸ the fact that this occurred directly partly refutes populist claims that National Dialogue recommendations are never acted upon. This session, convened in Al-Jouf on 28 – 30 November 2006, was preceded by thirteen preparatory meetings in all administrative regions of the Kingdom attended by over a thousand representatives. Faisal Al Mu`ammar explained that the main purpose of these meetings was to widen the circle of dialogue, ‘particularly the topic of education as it touches every family in the Kingdom’ (Arab News 2006f, p. 1). At a preparatory meeting in Abha, sixty-five educational experts of both sexes discussed developing the infrastructure of university education so as to develop a healthy balance between theory and application allowing individual

⁴⁸ Interview by author with Subject 50, KACND Deputy Secretary-General (Riyadh: 14.06.10).

institutions to have the financial and administrative authority to implement their own academic and research programmes. In addition, it was recommended that an internal academic accreditation scheme and independent university evaluation centre be established (Arab News 2006d, p. 1).⁴⁹ During the preparatory meetings, issues discussed also including discrimination in textbooks, improving the quality of education and equipping institutions with new technology. According to one of the participants, the Ministry of Education was beholden to consider the idea of introducing the different schools of theology to Saudi students (Arab News 2006c, p. 1).

During the main National Meeting, fifteen separate sessions were convened, some of which were attended by the Ministers of Education and Higher Education, the Governor of the General Organisation for Technical Education and Vocational Training, university rectors, deputy ministers and government officials from related ministries,⁵⁰ along with scholars and intellectuals of both sexes. Prince Mohammad University (PMU)⁵¹ sent nine participants to this meeting, but according to a PMU female participant⁵², although managers and teachers from other educational institutions were present at the session she attended, there were no students from other universities. She believes that that this was a mistake as students must participate and whilst she can understand why students might be excluded from employment related National Meetings, she does not see why this should be the case with education as ‘this is a student’s chance to talk’.⁵³ Nonetheless, the Sixth National Meeting made her think about the problems in Saudi education and she identifies the rote learning method common in most Saudi schools, the emphasis on examinations and the lack of critical thinking as problems that affect not just education in school, but also in the home. At the meeting she advocated the need for more technology in schools as there was none in state schools at that time, only in the private sector institutions, and the need for more English to be taught in Saudi schools, in particular a higher quality of English language teaching and teachers. In addition, she maintains that teachers need to understand the

⁴⁹ The NCAAA accreditation scheme was established in 2010 and private institutions such as PSU in Riyadh applied for this new academic accreditation in order to be able to compete with established institutions such as KSU and KFUPM.

⁵⁰ These included Interior, Finance, Economy and Planning, Labour, Culture and Media and Civil Rights.

⁵¹ Eastern Province Governor Prince Mohammad bin Fahd bin Abdulaziz Al Sa`ud.

⁵² Interview by author with Subject 15, student PMU and Subject 14, lawyer (Dammam: 15.07.10).

⁵³ This was the first meeting Subject 15 attended and she was initially concerned about speaking in front of other people, especially a large group of people. However, as the meeting progressed she began to feel more comfortable and this gave her the confidence to speak and attend other meetings and conferences.

purpose of education because ‘if teachers do not understand the purpose of education then why do they come to school? Is it only to earn a salary?’

Before submitting their final recommendations, the participants affirmed that Islam constituted both the foundation for education in the Kingdom and national unity, and that education is considered the main pillar for economic and socio-political development.⁵⁴ Dr. Khalid Al Sultan,⁵⁵ president of KFUPM, whose engineering graduates are considered as good as those of anywhere in the world (Niblock and Malik 2007, p. 209), claimed that international academic recognition constituted the most important factor. The president cited the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) ranking as an example, which at that time placed KFUPM among the top one hundred universities (Arab News 2006h, p. 1). However, it was agreed that a new ‘vision’ was required to deal effectively with the changing nature of Saudi demographics, the economic environment, the media, cultural openness and the influence of these factors on the educational process. Religious education was criticised due to its hegemonic role in academic institutions, marginalising all other subjects included in the core curriculum, including those required to learn and succeed. Regardless of the fact that Saudi Arabia’s critics accuse the educational system of being a breeding ground for extremist thought, the participants recognised a need to implement a strategy that would determine a new direction for education in the Kingdom (Arab News 2006e, p. 1) along with increased development in the information and communication technology sector, in particular technical knowledge related education (KACND 2006c, p. 1). In order to advance the Saudization policy, the head of the General Institute for Technical Education and Vocational Training announced that the government intended to allocate SAR nine million to establish 191 technical and vocational centres across the Kingdom by 2010 (Arab News 2006a, p. 1). The meeting identified a number of issues that posed challenges for primary, higher, vocational and technical education, including: government policies, curricula, performance assessment, admissions, upgrading teaching skills, teaching methodology, scientific research, financing and the relationship with the private sector (KACND 2006c). The final recommendations⁵⁶ based on both the principal and preparatory meetings were presented to the relevant ministers.

⁵⁴ See Appendix IX.

⁵⁵ Dr. Khalid Al Sultan’s brother is Deputy Secretary-General of KACND.

⁵⁶ See Appendix IX.

*Seventh National Meeting for Intellectual Dialogue
Work and Employment: Dialogue between Society and Work Related Institutions*

In 2007 KACND Secretary-General Al Mu`ammar acknowledged that the issue of employment constituted one of the most pressing issues for Saudi Arabia and that the Seventh National Meeting was designed to discuss the Saudi job market and employment opportunities for the Kingdom's citizens (Arab News 2007a, p. 1).⁵⁷ The Seventh National Meeting was convened in order to discuss cultural and social challenges relating to employment issues, Saudization, unemployment, work culture and foreign labour. Al Mu`ammar also stated that the forum would discuss ways to enable women to play a wider role in the Kingdom's economic life (Arab News 2008b, p. 1). The then Labour Minister, Ghazi Al Gosaibi, stated that after consultation with religious scholars, intellectuals and the Supreme Economic Council, it was agreed that no Islamic strictures prevented women from working, but added that women needed to work in appropriate environments without the risk of being exposed to harassment (Arab News 2008a, p. 1). The organisers noted that the economic boom had changed many Saudis' perceptions towards work ethics and certain professions. In the process, society had transformed itself from a mainly trading and agrarian entity into a workforce currently employed by the government and private sectors (KACND 2007a). However, the labour minister indicated a dilemma faced by the ministry which on the one hand stood between the demands of the rapid economic development, and on the other hand a socio-economic obligation to provide jobs for a growing number of young people who preferred employment in the public sector because of job security, higher salaries and more vacations (Arab News 2008a, p. 1).

Five preparatory meetings were held in universities, colleges and labour institutions in a number of the Kingdom's cities prior the principal National Dialogue Meeting on employment issues in Qasim 22 – 23 April 2008.⁵⁸ At these preparatory sessions over 5,000 male and female students held discussions with representatives from the public and private sectors in an attempt to formulate a picture of Saudi youth perception and opinion concerning these sectors. In addition, over 7,000 students attended communication and dialogue skills workshops and over 1,000 selected students

⁵⁷ In 2007, the official unemployment figure was nine per cent. This estimate was for males only and the unofficial figure was much higher. In 2010 the official rate was estimated to have risen to 10.8 per cent with an unofficial figure estimated at 25 per cent. Youth unemployment is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

⁵⁸ See Appendix X.

discussed employment prospects with businessmen, managers, academics, media professionals, financiers and economic experts. These discussions focussed on Saudization, work culture, environment and ethics, the role of the private and public sectors in employment, the relationship between the quality of graduates and needs of employers, labour committees and rights of employees, standardisation of working hours, unemployment, and employment fields open to female employment in addition to clarifying the meaning of *ikhtilat*, i.e., the mixing of the sexes.⁵⁹ A participating member of the *majlis al-shura* argued that Shariah does not prevent women from working so long as they do not mix with unrelated men, and therefore, companies need to allocate separate working sections (Arab News 2008c, p. 1). In addition, discussions on employment related issues were held with the Ministries of Labour, Civil Services and Economy and Planning, as well as directors from the Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry (KACND 2007a, pp. 1—2).⁶⁰ Unemployment was identified as the most pressing issue as the participants believe that unemployment threatens the social fabric of a nation, for which they blamed cultural factors and a lack of coordination between educational institutions and the market's requirements.⁶¹ The participants called for a mechanism that would harmonise the relationship between education and the marketplace (KACND 2007a, p. 3).⁶²

*Eighth National Meeting for Intellectual Dialogue
Health Services: A Dialogue between Society and Health Institutions*

The Eighth National Meeting convened in Najran on the 8 – 10 April 2010 and was attended by seventy participants.⁶³ Al Mu`ammar hoped the meeting would result in significant improvements to the health service as demanded by society. The principal meeting followed a series of preparatory meetings where the agenda for the main meeting was decided. Abdullah Al Rabeah, Minister of Health, said that this was an opportunity for positive interaction between the ministry and society (Aal Ja'ra and

⁵⁹ Meijer explains that *ikhtilat* 'demarcates the battle lines between reformists and conservatives. Any attempt to diminish its enforcement is regarded as a direct attack on the standing of conservatives and Islam itself (2010, p. 81).

⁶⁰ There is a partnership between the Saudi Education Ministry and KACND.

⁶¹ In July 2007, a group of Saudis established a society for the unemployed 'Rights without Borders for All Unemployed Saudis'.

⁶² With regard to unemployment, in July 2007, the *majlis al-shura* rejected a proposal to provide unemployment benefit to Saudis by 64 votes to 38; at least 76 votes must be cast in favour of a proposal before it will be passed. See, Arab News, 2007b. *Unemployment Issues Focus of Abha Confab*. Jeddah: Arab News, pp. 1—2.

⁶³ See Appendix XI.

Mueedi 2010, p. 1).⁶⁴ The preparatory forums were attended by government and health service representatives and were broadcast live on *Al-Ekhbariya* news channel (KACND 2009b). Holding the National and Preparatory Meetings in different locations is very important, according to a participant.⁶⁵ Initially, she questioned the need to attend one of the preparatory forums in Al-Kharj, but after the meeting she realised that the preparatory meetings made society feel part of the National Dialogue process due to the wide range of attendees. In addition, she believes that convening the Eighth National Meeting in Najran ‘put the city in the picture’ and Najran felt proud to be part of the country. ‘No one’ she claims, ‘in the Kingdom is neglected, and even smaller cities are involved in the National Dialogue process and this really makes a big difference’.

The Eighth National Meeting was subdivided into four main topics: reality of health sectors, legal and social aspects of health sectors, financing health services and the role of civil society institutions (KACND 2010b). The seventy participants discussed the lack of emergency services, the need of government support for the private sectors, lack of coordination among government and private sectors, patient education, the need for more qualified women in the health service, the need for female security workers to document and monitor female abuse cases, and the need for establishing women-child care centres. A KSU medical lecturer believes that seventy participants were more than capable of addressing the range of issues at the forum, but she argues that more students and employees from both the public and private sectors from all administrative regions in the Kingdom should have been present. The meeting’s recommendations, she says, had already been established during the preliminary meetings and subsequently, at the subsequent National Meeting, the participants ‘highlighted the common threads’. In other words, at the preparatory meetings all the ideas and issues were discussed and catalogued, so that the delegates at the National Meeting were able to state ‘this is what the Kingdom thinks’ and this process explains the development of the National Dialogue project.

⁶⁴First Preparatory Meeting: Al-Kharj (17.03.2009); Second Preparatory Meeting: Khamis Mushait (05.05.2009); Third Preparatory Meeting: Al-Qurayat (02.06.2009); Fourth Preparatory Meeting: Yanbu (12.10.2009); Fifth Preparatory Meeting: Al-Qatif (11.11.2009).

⁶⁵ Interview by author with Subject 42, Al-Kharj preparatory meeting and Najran participant, KSU (Riyadh: 29.06.10).

A female participant at the Eighth National Meeting⁶⁶ believes that the choice of subjects for discussion at this meeting was valuable and the quality of the participants' contributions was generally high. However, she states that some of the participants 'were passive and only listened' and believes this constituted a wasted opportunity. Both the meetings and discussions were highly organised and when a particular participant wanted to contribute something to the discussion the individual pressed a button and was allowed to speak for three minutes. After three minutes the chairperson resumed the general discussion.⁶⁷ According to this female participant, the three day event allowed sufficient time for discussion of the issues and the division of time between different meetings and subjects was also adequate. In addition, she believes that participants at the National Meeting were able to get to know each other, in particular those from different cities and regions. In addition, she claims that if a participant wanted to discuss a specific point, then he / she was obliged to study this subject prior to discussing it at the meeting, thus she believes that this process helped to 'enrich the proceedings'. On the negative side, she claims that some of the participants 'were not to the point or did not stick to the specific subject matter as they simply wanted to talk and listen to their own voices'. The meeting concluded with a demand for greater equitable distribution of health services throughout the regions and more interaction between health and educational institutions (Al Obayah 2010, p. 1).

*Ninth National Meeting for Intellectual Dialogue
The Media and Society: Reality and Paths to Development*

Preparations are underway for the Ninth Nation Dialogue Meeting to be held in Hail. Al Mu'ammam announced that the topic had been chosen due to its direct relation to Saudi society and that all aspects and forms of media, including new media, would be included in the meeting's agenda (KACND, 2010c). In 2011, preparatory meetings took place in Al-Khobar, Taif, Dammam and Abha.⁶⁸ KACND Deputy Secretary-General says the forum will aim to combine elements of ideological and service related issues and will include all types of media including new media.⁶⁹ He contends that 'the media is the battlefield with the conservatives claiming that the liberals control the media and the liberals arguing that the conservatives control the mosques'. He believes the

⁶⁶ Interview by author with Subject 21 and Subject 22 (Najran: 10.07.10).

⁶⁷ This 'three minute' rule appears to be the norm at KACND meetings.

⁶⁸ See Appendix XII.

⁶⁹ Interview by author with Subject 50, KACND Deputy Secretary-General (Riyadh: 10.01.11).

conservatives have a louder voice because they are more organised and have more funds but they do not represent the majority.

In conclusion, by following the progression of the National Meetings in chronological order, a discernible pattern emerges: a move away from discussing ideological issues towards service-related issues.

THE SHIFT FROM IDEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE TO SERVICE DIALOGUE

One of the more contentious issues surrounding the predetermined agenda of KACND meetings was the perceived shift from ideological debate, such as extremism, to service-related discussion, such as health. Whilst the official explanation regarding this change cites public support for service-related dialogue on KACND website feedback, many believe that other reasons, including political ones, better explain this move away from sensitive ideological topics. Whilst complaints and increased apathy from some circles greeted the service-related meetings, others argue that as a service-related dialogue concentrates on one particular issue, e.g., employment, this discussion is able to bring people together regardless of ideological background. Therefore, by gathering individuals from all sides in order to concentrate on one particular issue, this focuses the individual on a specific topic and thus it is argued that ideological issues and divides are forgotten.⁷⁰ Indeed, supporters of service-related dialogue maintain that many critics of KACND fail to recognise this point. Nevertheless, there appears to be little or no consensus regarding the impact of the shift on the current National Dialogue process as a whole as the viewpoints of specific groups vary considerably depending on constituency interest.⁷¹

Whilst the first three National Dialogue Meetings were seen as an attempt to examine and expose some of the serious ideological issues facing the Kingdom, debate surrounds the decision to move to service-based issues. Interviews for this study reveal a significant difference of opinion on the perceived move to service-related forums. A Riyadh-based lawyer and publisher⁷² argues that both ideological and service dialogues

⁷⁰ Interview by author with Subject 12, social commentator and ARAMCO official (Al-Khobar: June 2010).

⁷¹ Various interviews by author with multiple subjects (Saudi Arabia: 2009—11).

⁷² Interview by author with Subject 19, lawyer, ex-judge, owner of Arab Network for Research and Publishing (Riyadh: 21.06.10).

are important for their own reasons, but the most critical measurement for both types of dialogue is the seriousness in terms of success in dealing with different issues as this will in turn help create public opinion. One academic⁷³ contends that the differences between the two types of dialogue are crystal clear as, in his opinion, many Saudis follow ideological dialogue with greater enthusiasm as they consider the most pressing problems facing society to be ideological in nature.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, there is a serious challenge facing the dialogue process with regard to the service meetings vis-à-vis the legitimacy of the National Dialogue process.⁷⁵ Other individuals disagree, and, according to a Jeddah-based radio journalist,⁷⁶ the National Dialogue should only be concerned with ideological issues and should not discuss service issues as this is not the role of KACND. In her view, service issues should be discussed by the government, and relevant ministries should conduct research into these service issues and subsequently implement new policies. However, it is also argued⁷⁷ that all constituencies in the Kingdom need to discuss both ideological and service issues in order to at least to narrow down the differences between them. Indeed, a female KSU lecturer and KACND participant⁷⁸ believes that it is correct and necessary to discuss both issues, but each in its own context. Certainly, if the Ministry of Health had organised its own conference on health services in the Kingdom, then there would have been no real criticism as no individual within the ministry would criticise the ministry's own services and / or role. This is where KACND can play a crucial role as the institution is able to criticise government ministries and services because KACND is officially outside the government sector. In sum, in all likelihood a ministry will not criticise itself, but KACND is able to do this.

A well-known Riyadh-based liberal journalist believes the rationale behind the shift to service-based dialogue can be attributed to voting on the KACND website.⁷⁹ He points out that there is voting for and by the general public regarding issues related to the National Dialogue on the website and for this reason he claims that forty-two per cent of

⁷³ Interview by author with Subject 33, lawyer (Riyadh: July 2010).

⁷⁴ Subject 42 states that 'of course, both are important because they have to talk about this because we are in Saudi Arabia'. She believes that a meeting on employment issues could have an 'ideological section', but not be dedicated to a complete three day meeting.

⁷⁵ Interview by author with Subject 19, lawyer, ex-judge, owner of Arab Network for Research and Publishing (Riyadh: 21.06.10).

⁷⁶ Interview by author with Subject 70, General Director of Jeddah Radio / Ministry of Information (Jeddah: 06.07.10).

⁷⁷ Interview by author with Subject 68, writer, KACND participant (Jeddah: 05.07.10).

⁷⁸ Interview by author with Subject 42, KSU (Riyadh: 29.06.10).

⁷⁹ Interview by author with Subject 20, journalist and liberal (Riyadh: 01.07.10).

online voters wanted a service-based dialogue as opposed to an ideological one. Therefore, KACND cannot change its current policy and goals, as a majority of people voted for these despite the fact that the institution cannot dictate policy at a specific ministry as the remit of KACND is only concerned with dialogue.⁸⁰ Another argument is that the ideological-service shift only happened because KACND was looking for subjects to discuss and the National Dialogue organisers were simply looking for new themes.⁸¹ Therefore, it is possible to state that KACND started as a large idea and for three years KACND solely selected prominent academics to participate, but then its policy changed and as a result the institution has shrunk as a concept due to the specifying of the subjects and implementation of serviced-based National Meetings. This specifying of the subjects has altered the nature of the dialogue and moved it away from the serious ideological issues affecting the Kingdom. However, in a parallel development, the media started to discuss these major ideological issues and problems and this was highly significant as the media emerged as a more critical voice than KACND. In all probability it was a political decision to discuss technical rather than ideological issues, because important ideologically issues were intentionally avoided.⁸² Hence, a liberal journalist suggests that the shift from ideology based dialogue to service dialogues transformed KACND into a commercial institution that ‘talks like a professional’ and this position does not create or maintain either state legitimacy or loyalty to the state.⁸³

A Najran-based businessman⁸⁴ argues that the National Dialogue moved away from the ‘hot issues’ after the fifth National Meeting because the government was concerned that the direction of the National Dialogue was leading to ‘a point of no return’, one that the government neither desired nor liked, and more significantly, KACND was in danger of developing ministerial tendencies.⁸⁵ In other words, the regime needed to slow the process down and it achieved this by switching the National Dialogue from ideological to service-based topics. This argument is supported by a Shia cleric and fifth National

⁸⁰ According to Subject 20, the shift from an ideological-based dialogue to a service-based dialogue resulted in Dr. Saleh Alkhatlan from KSU quitting his role as a consultant to KACND.

⁸¹ Interview by author with Subject 87, KSU (Riyadh: 17.07.10).

⁸² Interview by author with Subject 19, lawyer, ex-judge, owner of Arab Network for Research and Publishing (Riyadh: 03.01.11).

⁸³ Interview by author with Subject 20, journalist and liberal (Riyadh: 01.07.10).

⁸⁴ Interview by author with Subject 82, Ismaili activist, ex-journalist and participant at the third National Meeting (Najran: 11.07.10).

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Dialogue participant⁸⁶ who concurs and notes that whilst the first three National Meetings were important, the direction of the National Dialogue process was deliberately changed after these forums to routine work-related issues because in his opinion they would provoke less controversy in the media.

KACND's agenda is different from the goals of disparate minority constituencies, but this is acceptable if the institution is able to address and solve national service problems.⁸⁷ However, when KACND and the National Dialogue departed the 'national scene' and started selecting individual issues rather than focussing on the national agenda many people lost faith with the process. Indeed, at the outset of the National Dialogue process, discussion between different constituencies was the first priority, but after the first three National Dialogue meetings, the course of the dialogues was deliberately redirected.⁸⁸ During the first three meetings a liberal voice was able to emerge, but the conservative hard-liners blocked the liberals with the support of the Ministry of the Interior. As a result, the Interior ministry used 'security' as a way to side-line the National Dialogue process.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the cross-constituency dialogue started in the first three meetings continues, albeit outside of the official KACND framework, and this fact demonstrates that official state-society discourse differs from the reality of what is happening in unofficial cross-constituency dialogues.⁹⁰

Society may complain about the service dialogues, but it is pointed out that these service-based meetings bring people together from all sides, and because a service-based dialogue concentrates on one particular service issue, this focuses the individual on a specific topic and thus, ideological issues and / or divides are forgotten.⁹¹ In other words, service dialogues bring people together regardless of ideological background and this is the rationale behind the service dialogues even though many critics of KACND fail to recognise this. Thus, it may be true that KACND no longer adheres to its original principles and that current issues have moved away from the core ideological subjects that were discussed in the first few National Meetings, but a dean at KFUPM believes that does not signify a lessening of the importance of the National Dialogue process as

⁸⁶ Interview by author with Subject 37 and *majlis* (Dammam: 10.07.10).

⁸⁷ Interview by author with Subject 13, activist (Riyadh: 28.06.10).

⁸⁸ Interview by author with Subject 73, Shia writer and journalist (Safwa: 08.04.10).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Interview by author with Subject 12, ARAMCO (Al-Khobar: 16.06.10).

the direction of KACND may return to the previously discussed core ideological themes.⁹²

It would appear that the perceived shift from ideological discussion to service related topics damaged KACND's credibility with the public at the same time as the institution's activities were expanding. It appears that KACND took note of the criticism as well as the public apathy concerning the service forums, hence, a return to ideological topics was deemed necessary, but outside the parameters of the principal National Meetings. In 2009 the Cultural Discourse (*al-hiwar al-thaqafi*) was inaugurated.

THE REALITY OF CULTURAL DISCOURSE AND ITS FUTURE HORIZONS: AN OVERVIEW

The Cultural Discourse is a new initiative that operates outside of the parameters of the official National Meetings and it takes its name from the first forum held in the Eastern Province in December 2009. At that time many KACND observers assumed that the Al-Ahsa Cultural Discourse forum was part of the series of National Meetings (1—9); however this was not the case as the first Cultural Discourse was intended to act as a pilot for a new series of ideological-cultural forums. Prior to the first forum, KACND Secretary-General Al Mu`ammar explained that the purpose of the Cultural Discourse was 'to activate the role of civil society institutions in tackling and treating cultural issues' (KACND 2009c, p. 1) and it would appear that the success of the Al-Ahsa meeting, underlined by increased media and public interest in the proceedings, prompted KACND to quickly convene a second forum in Riyadh, followed closely by another in Jeddah.⁹³ There was then a delay of a year before the fourth forum, again in Riyadh, in late December 2011. In contrast to the most recent service-based National Dialogue Meeting on health, the Cultural Discourse has examined ideological-based issues ranging from the dominant ideology vis-à-vis Saudi society, national identity, the effects of globalisation on Saudi identity and most recently, the sensitive issue of tribalism and Saudi society.⁹⁴ According to KACND, the participants include

⁹² Interview by author with Subject 58, Dean of General Studies, KFUPM (Al-Khobar: 06.03.10).

⁹³ At the new Cultural Discourse meetings, the participants only have three minutes to speak, as at a National Meeting, but do not present papers.

⁹⁴ The Cultural Discourse and related issues are discussed in greater depth in Chapters four and five.

intellectuals, scholars, writers and educated Saudis from all different cultural and intellectual spectrums (Arab News 2010a, p. 1).

The Cultural Discourse Meetings:⁹⁵

- Al-Ahsa: 22 – 23 December 2009
The Reality of Cultural Discourse and its Future Horizons
60 male and female participants
- Riyadh: 1—2 June 2010
Identity, Globalisation in National Cultural Discourse
70 male and female participants
- Jeddah: 29 – 30 December 2010
Tribalism, Regionalism and Intellectual Categorisations and their Influence on National Unity
Seventy male and female participants
- Riyadh: 29—30 December 2011
*The Concept of Reform and Development in Saudi Society*⁹⁶
54 participants: 25 male and 29 female

The Cultural Discourse is one of the most effective forums established by KACND, according to a well-known intellectual and member of the *majlis al-shura*,⁹⁷ but he wonders whether the discourse will be able to achieve much and he asks if the discourse represents ‘an old house that gets redecorated and renovated, but essentially remains the same old house?’. Nonetheless, in his opinion, KACND should focus on this Cultural Discourse despite his belief that the whole exercise is probably only being done for ‘external purposes’, i.e., to placate western governments and their interests.⁹⁸ A Najrani businessman dismisses the forums as a sideshow because they were convened to ease media pressure. In his opinion, following the Fifth National Meeting and continuing to the eighth, the media and society started to question the role of KACND and wondered why the institution was not fulfilling its original role, i.e., its 2003—4

⁹⁵ See Appendix XII.

⁹⁶ At the time of writing, the forum’s documentation had not been finalised. However, see Almunajjed, M., 2012. Eighth (sic) National Dialogue on Reform, Development. *Arab News* [online]. Available at: <http://arabnews.com/opinion/columns/article557864.ece?service=print>; KACND 2011d, Center to Hold the 4th Cultural Discourse in Riyadh. *King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue* [online]. Available at: http://www.kaend.org/eng/news_descr1.asp?idd=550

⁹⁷ Interview by author with Subject 69, writer and Shura Council Member (Riyadh: 15.06.10).

⁹⁸ Subject 69 believes that these efforts to satisfy western external forces ultimately fail as western governments fail to comprehend fully the internal situation in the Kingdom. In fact, Belaihi argues that western governments have a greater understanding of the internal situation in Iran than that of Saudi Arabia.

designated role.⁹⁹ He argues that the Cultural Discourse has not replicated the role of the initial National Dialogue Meetings in 2003 – 4 and the same ‘hot issues’ are no longer being discussed in 2011. Therefore, the Cultural Discourse is failing to address the important ideological and / or socio-cultural questions and rather focusing on marginal issues. Indeed, one of the key questions concerning the formation of the Cultural Discourse centres less on its significance as a venue for ideological dialogue, and more on the possibility that in reality the discourse only constitutes a rarefied ‘cultural club’.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, KACND will continue the Cultural Discourse because otherwise ‘what is KACND being paid for?’¹⁰¹

The real reason behind the establishment of the Cultural Discourse is that the hard-line conservatives do not like discussing critical ideological issues and prefer to ‘let them go’ according to a Riyadh journalist.¹⁰² He maintains that the conservative hard-liners will not accept other arguments or even related lexis in particular when discussing sectarian issues. The hard-liners argue that terms such as ‘left-wing’ and ‘nationalism’ should not and / or cannot be used in a Saudi context, so for this reason conservative hard-liners cannot express themselves effectively within existing forums.¹⁰³ Consequently, establishing the Cultural Discourse placed contentious issues such as these in a framework outside the official National Dialogue Meetings, thus, it is hoped that the Cultural Discourse will provide an environment that facilitates greater cross-constituency dialogue and understanding. The KACND Deputy Secretary-General¹⁰⁴ notes that during the Riyadh Cultural Discourse the hardliners and ‘extreme’ liberals came together and that this situation was markedly different from the initial Cultural Discourse in Al-Ahsa where, according to the Deputy Secretary-General, the meeting was very tense. Thus, there was improved and better communication and acceptance than in the Al-Ahsa dialogue. Nevertheless, the Cultural Discourse is but one initiative and it is impossible for KACND to satisfy all the people all the time, therefore, maintaining the institution’s overall goal is more important.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ Interview by author with Subject 82, Ismaili activist (Najran: 11.07.10).

¹⁰⁰ Interview by author with Subject 19, lawyer, ex-judge, owner of Arab Network for Research and Publishing (Riyadh: 21.06.10).

¹⁰¹ Interview by author with Subject 82, Ismaili activist (Najran: 11.07.10).

¹⁰² Interview by author with Subject 20, journalist and liberal (Riyadh: 01.07.10).

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Interview by author with Subject 50, KACND (Riyadh: 14.06.10).

¹⁰⁵ Interview by author with Subject 20, journalist and liberal (Riyadh: 01.07.10).

KACND: DIALOGUE TRAINING PROGRAMMES AND COMMITTEES

National dialogue, state-society dialogue and demands for socio-political reform are issues that have been discussed widely since the advent of the Arab Spring in early 2011. Citizens across the Arab world have been questioning the lack of access to state actors and institutions as well as the narrow degree of participation in the political process. Whilst the internal dynamics of individual nations vary greatly, many of the societal issues and problems currently being highlighted, such as unemployment, women's rights, youth aspirations, increased cost of living and education, resonate with societies across the region including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. However, in the Saudi context, prior to the Arab Spring, specific programmes had already been initiated to address these critical concerns under the umbrella of the National Dialogue institution and process. Whilst the regional turmoil has undoubtedly highlighted the importance of these issues, not to mention the danger they could pose to internal stability, individuals within institutions such as KACND have been aware for a number of years that a constructive and 'hands on' approach in dealing with these issues was required. The end result of their concerns and discussions was the establishment of 'dialogue training programmes' that aim to address societal concerns and open constructive channels of communication between institutions and societal constituencies.

KACND: 'grassroots' activities

It is KACND's stated goal to establish a deep-rooted culture of dialogue throughout Saudi Arabia thereby increasing awareness of the importance of dialogue at all societal levels.¹⁰⁶ Since the establishment of KACND, the institution's activities and forums have expanded significantly and it is not only this continuing expansion that is noteworthy, but rather the greater numbers of participants involved throughout the Kingdom. These activities have developed into a wide range of dialogue-related forums, committees, publications, and increased coverage on live television and now include:

- The Cultural Discourse
- Media and dialogue seminars
- Training in the Culture of Dialogue, e.g., Family Dialogue¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Interview by author with Vice-Minister for Girls' Education Norah Alfaiz, senior ministry staff and Subject 54, KACND women's director (Riyadh: 14.07.10).

¹⁰⁷ See KACND, 2008b. *Rules and Principles of Effective Dialogue*. Riyadh: King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue.

- Letters of Dialogue and Bridges publications¹⁰⁸
- The Youth and the Future and Youth Committee
- Ambassador Project and *Bayader* volunteer work
- Dialogue Caravan and Cafe
- International Scouts
- Youth database
- *Tawasul* database
- KACND intellectual database
- *Face to Face* Interview Series
- External Dialogue Programme
- KACND Website: Arabic, English, French and Spanish¹⁰⁹
- Research and Studies
- Publications in Arabic, English and French
- KACND Library and audio-visual programmes

This rapid growth in the institution's activities includes involvement in the design, implementation and evaluation of university orientation programmes such as those at PSU and KSU in Riyadh where there have been approximately 9,000 KSU communication skills trainees. KACND is also developing an Intercultural Dialogue following a visit from UNESCO officials to the headquarters in March 2010 and the subsequent establishment of formal links between the two institutions. In addition, the future *hajj* programme aims to share the principles of dialogue with pilgrims so as to increase dialogue awareness in the Muslim world. Other areas under development include a dialogue-training strategy targeting the religious police (*hai'a*), issues pertaining to Intellectual Security and a KACND sponsored study of National Unity at Imam Mohammed Saud University.¹¹⁰

KACND: Dialogue training programmes

Education constitutes one of the key issues for the Kingdom and according to KACND this was the rationale behind the appointment of Secretary-General Faisal Al Mu`ammar to the post of Deputy Education Minister in February 2009 as it demonstrated to society the link between KACND and the Ministry of Education. The directors of KACND maintain that the aim of the institution is to direct strategy for the Kingdom in political, economic and ideological fields through training programmes that target schools, universities and mosques.¹¹¹ For this reason, the current five year dialogue training

¹⁰⁸ All the dialogue training material is available in PDF form on the KACND website: http://www.kacnd.org/view_center_researches.asp?id=1&keywordd=&crit=&step=

¹⁰⁹ There is now a KACND Facebook page in addition to the comments forum (Arabic) on the KACND website.

¹¹⁰ Interview by author with Subject 50, KACND Deputy Secretary-General and senior KACND staff (Riyadh: 22.04.10).

¹¹¹ Ibid.

programme with a target of five million individuals is currently being offered in these establishments.¹¹² In fact, according to KACND Deputy Secretary-General, the institution is unable ‘to keep up with the demand for dialogue training’.¹¹³ The director of KACND women’s centre¹¹⁴ believes one of the institution’s most important roles is teaching people how to manage and prioritise social issues, therefore the institution is attempting to fulfil this role through a combination of training programmes, committees and publications in order to nurture and spread of the values of tolerance and acceptance.¹¹⁵ During these training programmes, dialogue skills are practiced with emphasis on patience, tolerance and listening to others. Up until January 2012, more than 800,000 trainees had attended dialogue programmes given by approximately 2,500 trainers focussing on the following programmes:¹¹⁶

- Developing Communication Skills in Dialogue: includes 1,885 trainers, more than 11,000 programmes and approximately 800,000 trainees. According to KACND trainers this ‘reminds people of the Islamic values of dialogue as it is something within our culture and religion’. KACND uses its ‘Letters of Dialogue’, a series of publications written in simple readable language, making them suitable for everyone. The objective of these publications, written by experts, academics, scientists and researchers is to spread the culture of dialogue within society to facilitate subjects and topics related to effective dialogue for the target audience as well as encouraging reading in society. These small pamphlets, 15—20 pages, have been distributed in schools, universities, airports and other public places throughout the Kingdom.¹¹⁷
- Educational Dialogue: includes 367 trainers, 92 programmes and approximately 11,000 trainees. This programme is suitable for all educational stages and levels, including basic teacher training skills such as classroom management.
- Family Dialogue: includes 166 trainers, 600 programmes and approximately 25,000 trainees. KACND says this programme is aimed at promoting constructive dialogue between husbands and wives, parents and children. This programme helps families to create a positive atmosphere by helping them to communicate more effectively,

¹¹² The participants attitude to the dialogue training is tested before a training programme and then again afterwards.

¹¹³ KACND is now selling its dialogue programmes to other countries, most recently to a dialogue centre in Beirut, Lebanon. Other countries interested in the Saudi dialogue programme include Japan.

¹¹⁴ Interview by author with Subject 54, KACND Director Women’s Centre and personal assistant to Director Women’s Centre KACND (Riyadh: 21.06.10). The director established KACND women’s centre in 2005 after the Madinah National Meeting.

¹¹⁵ KACND trainers state that it was due to dialogue training that Sunnis and Ismailis met for the first time in a very long time in Najran in 2006.

¹¹⁶ Latest data supplied by KACND training department: January 2012.

¹¹⁷ Interview by author with Subject 32, senior KACND Female Trainer and Trainers; Subject 80, female lecturer Imam University and Subject 53, female KACND Youth Committee member(s) (Riyadh: 26.06.10).

understand dialogue skills and express feelings. However, according to the KACND trainers, parent and child training is the most difficult programme to conduct.¹¹⁸

- Youth and the Future: 6 workshops and 235 participants.
- Future Vision for the Development of Education: 100 workshops including 2,500 participants.

Alfaiz maintains Saudi society does not fully understand the role and function of KACND, at least ‘not yet’, even though a great many individuals have been given the opportunity to participate in its forums.¹¹⁹ For this reason, KACND’s new trainers are working with female students in Asir and Riyadh provinces, and Alfaiz says that the goal is to train five million female students in dialogue techniques over the next five years.¹²⁰ In addition, there are currently five separate programmes in Riyadh involving pupils from six years of age through to high school and pre-university level. The director of KACND women’s centre organises these female educational training programmes in conjunction with Alfaiz, including three ‘Effective Dialogue Training Kits’ programmes for students and mothers, teachers and students, as well as consultants and administrators. An academic who attended a dialogue training programme comments ‘in attending this dialogue seminar I noticed that both students and professionals are taught the same processes’. In her opinion, this is a good idea as KACND should not differentiate between the two as eventually the students will become professionals so ‘this gives the students a jump start and the professionals a brush up on past skills that have gone forgotten’.¹²¹ Nonetheless, Alfaiz acknowledges that the male training programme must not be overlooked as men require the same training as female students so both long and short-term dialogue training plans are needed. For this reason, numerous KACND workshops now deal with important social issues and links to and within society have been established that did not exist before. So far these workshops have focussed on topics such as education, youth and cross-cultural dialogue and have provided excellent opportunities for exchanging ideas. The workshops have also helped select themes and prepare participants and for the ideological and service-based annual National Dialogue Meetings.

¹¹⁸ The family programme also travelled to predominantly Shia Qatif in the Eastern Province.

¹¹⁹ Interview by author with Vice-Minister for Girls’ Education Norah Alfaiz (Riyadh: 14.07.10).

¹²⁰ In 2010 this project was piloted in Riyadh and Asir Provinces with the results of the pilot schemes forwarded to Alfaiz.

¹²¹ Interview by author with Subject 60, female academic and KACND participant (Eastern Province: 21.07.10).

There are currently three major dialogue programmes at university level and in the near future KACND, in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, hopes to introduce a compulsory state university entrance programme. Indeed, according to the director of the women's centre, many university lecturers have benefited from the dialogue training sessions with their students and students' families. She cites the example of a female professor at KSU who says that the dialogue training programme process significantly changed her attitude toward colleagues as, prior to the dialogue training, she used to select individuals for committees who agreed with her. However, she now seeks out alternative opinions, even from individuals who disagree with her perspective.¹²² The regional head for the Ministry of Education in the Jeddah, Makkah and Taif administrative region¹²³ oversees the KACND training programme 'Effective dialogue: how to deal successfully with people' aimed at students, teachers, families, administrators and company managers'. This programme also targets personnel from the Grand Mosque in Makkah because the security detachments should be 'highly educated as they are dealing with people coming to the House of God and therefore this programme is very important due to the uniqueness of the Makkah region in the Kingdom'. She maintains the dialogue training process has been a success because it has taught both men and women to communicate effectively with family members at home as well as 'individuals from the outside world'

KACND: trainers and participants

Even though KACND is attempting to incorporate more societal groupings into its programmes, the institution's trainers believe KACND 'should reach out to more people' as, in their opinion, the 'age of resistance to dialogue' has passed. They maintain that more people are asking to participate as nowadays involvement has become better-known and thus more popular. Indeed, a Riyadh university lecturer recognises this change from 'resistance to acceptance of dialogue' saying that initially her students were reluctant to participate, but in her opinion, due to the efforts of KACND, the situation has improved and nowadays her students take the initiative in the dialogue training sessions.¹²⁴

¹²² Interview by author with Subject 54, KACND Director Women's Centre (Riyadh: 21.06.10).

¹²³ Interview by author with Subject 7, regional head and supervisor for the Ministry of Education (female) Jeddah, Makkah and Taif administrative region (Jeddah: 07/07.10).

¹²⁴ Interview by author with Subject 42, KSU female lecturer College of Medical Science (Riyadh: 29.06.10).

The trainers argue that dialogue training constitutes a preventative measure against societal problems such as spousal and child abuse. They explain that when trainers travel around the Kingdom, ‘citizens in remote areas can now witness these issues being debated in front of them’ and this demystifies taboo topics. Another new programme will be introduced that focuses on pre-marriage / engagement dialogue aimed at preventing spousal abuse and slowing the current divorce rate. KACND hopes this will become a legal requirement for both men and women in the near future.¹²⁵ According to KACND trainers one of the most rewarding features of their work is this opportunity to travel around the Kingdom as the process of travelling throughout Saudi Arabia teaches them a great deal about their country.¹²⁶ In addition, KACND trainers have had the opportunity to meet individuals from many Saudi societal constituencies whilst attending events such as the Riyadh International Book Fair in 2010 and 2011 when around 120 people took part in KACND dialogue programmes (KACND 2011b, p. 1). Indeed, it is said that everyone who participates in the dialogue training or meetings ‘starts a relationship with KACND and this relationship is reciprocated by the institution’.¹²⁷

A dynamic principal in the Eastern Province assists KACND on its dialogue training programmes. In 2004 she started her own dialogue programmes before joining KACND as it was her own dialogue initiatives that led to her involvement with the institution.¹²⁸ In her opinion, there is a need for courses in ‘citizenship skills training’ in order to ‘break the ice between people and make people accept each other’ as these are essential in order to create ‘good Saudi citizens’. She noticed that the family dialogue training programmes started in the Eastern Province in 2010 had a positive effect on relationships between parents and children as this training triggered a domino effect, i.e., from family to student to teacher to educational institution. According to her, the 2010 dialogue training programme was effective and made a difference because ‘KACND reached the mothers in the house and the mothers are the key’:¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Interview by author with Subject 50, KACND Deputy Secretary-General and senior KACND trainers (Riyadh: 22.04.10).

¹²⁶ Interview by author with Subject 32, senior female KACND trainer (Riyadh: 26.06.10).

¹²⁷ Interview by author with Subject 80, female lecturer Imam University (Riyadh: 26.06.10).

¹²⁸ Interview by author with Subject 44, Eastern Province female elementary / high school principal (Al-Khobar: 15.07.10). KACND women’s director informed her ‘you are ahead of us’, therefore she says KACND recognise that ‘I am effective, they trust me and I can influence people’

¹²⁹ This point was reiterated by Subject 68, another KACND participant and female writer in an interview with the author. She believes that ‘the mother is the key to all of these issues in order to mould effective citizens’ (Jeddah: 05.07.10).

If we are going to see a better future it will start from the mothers. So we need to give women more space and trust. The National Dialogue is a one hundred per cent a good move, but there is still resistance and this resistance may continue long into the future, perhaps for twenty years. So it is important to believe in the culture of dialogue and really do something because some people are asked to participate in KACND meetings, but they do not always really believe in the dialogue process. I hope the dialogue training will influence the new generation, but if we are not careful this generation will flunk because of us.

Therefore, the principal believes ‘it is necessary to look for and select people who can make a difference even though we need to remember that everyone uses the dialogue process for their own purposes’. For this reason, a dialogue participant suggests, the role of KACND is ‘not to supervise the meetings but to facilitate the meetings’, and the role of the participants ‘is not to be careful of what they are saying, but rather be careful and respectful of whom they are speaking to during the meeting’.¹³⁰

KACND: The Youth Committee

Following the recommendations of the Fourth National Dialogue Meeting and the acknowledgement of the crucial role played by youth in society, the KACND Youth Committee was established as a volunteer-based body to initiate better communication between the institution and youth. The main role of the Youth Committee and its members, aged sixteen to twenty-five, is to activate youth participation in KACND’s activities and programmes, to contribute to achieving KACND’s goals amongst young people and to spread and reinforce a culture of dialogue. It also encourages Saudi youth participation in its different activities and promotes youth representation at international forums and meetings.¹³¹ A female member of the youth committee who participated at the Fourth National Dialogue Meeting says that the youth element at this meeting comprised individuals from the Youth Committee, universities and high schools.¹³² As a participant, she felt ‘responsible, mature and part of society’. She also explains that the Youth Committee is now represented at all National Dialogue Meetings and ‘even contributes to the recommendations’. She points out that ‘the Youth Committee must have at least two to five participants from the host city at each national meeting as this is a KACND stipulation’. For example, at the Eighth National Meeting in Najran the

¹³⁰ Interview by author with Subject 35, Assistant Dean for Female Education, Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG) University (Riyadh: 20.07.10).

¹³¹ See ‘Youth Committee’, KACND’: <http://www.kacnd.org/eng/YouthCommittee.asp>

¹³² Interview by author Subject 15, with female Youth Committee member and student at Prince Mohammed University (PMU) (Dammam: 15.07.10).

youth delegation consisted of four medical students whilst at the last Cultural Discourse meeting in Jeddah there were two male and two female youth participants.

KACND: The Dialogue Caravan and Dialogue Café

The Dialogue Caravan was launched by the Youth Committee and the young Saudis who run the committee emphasise that they are completely responsible for its organisation and related activities.¹³³ They say that the main goal of the Dialogue Caravan is to spread the culture of dialogue in the regions, in particular dealing with issues of national identity and they maintain that ‘it is clear that the participants understand this’. They describe how, when the caravan travels from village to village, residents stop it and ask for KACND literature. A senior youth committee member says that for people in the provinces, the main surprise is the appearance of the caravan itself, a convoy of colourful jeeps, particularly ‘as there is no Internet or even TV in these remote villages’. He says ‘the villagers feel happy that KACND has come to them, because the villagers tell us that we are the only organisation that visits and remembers them’.¹³⁴

The Dialogue Caravan finished traveling around the eastern part of Riyadh province in January 2011 thereby completing a trip around the entire province. A female member of the youth committee remarks that it was noticeable that there was ‘a lot more female participation, commitment and enthusiasm than male’ and at one point received homework completed by twenty-one females, but only three boys.¹³⁵ She says the 2010 pilot programme travelled to various municipalities and villages in the Riyadh administrative region including the towns of Al-Kharj, Al-Majmaah and Al-Zulfi, where three programmes were offered over a three- day period.¹³⁶ For example, in Al-Kharj in October 2010, three programmes were run involving seventy-seven young women and one hundred young men.¹³⁷

¹³³ Interview by author with Subject 23, senior male KACND Youth Committee member (Riyadh: 18.01.11).

¹³⁴ Ibid. At first Subject 23 was a volunteer and was subsequently asked to join KACND full-time. There are two full-time young men, two part-time and full-time young women.

¹³⁵ Interview by author with Subject 32, senior female KACND Youth Committee organiser (Riyadh: 18.01.11).

¹³⁶ Interview by author with Subject 32, senior KACND Female Trainer and Trainers and female KACND Youth Committee members (Riyadh: 26.06.10).

¹³⁷ KACND estimates the average age at these meetings as 60 per cent under 20, 70 per cent under 25 and 40 per cent under 15.

- A university entrance programme. In the near future this programme will be expanded to other municipalities including Makkah, Hail, Qasim and Al-Khobar where it will encompass rural villages and high schools.
- A programme for parents that focussed on effective dialogue with children.
- The Youth Dialogue Café with a hundred and thirty participants.

At the Dialogue Café the participants select a chairperson and then discuss a chosen subject. Individual KACND trainers are partly responsible for the materials used and a great deal of this material originates from information gathered at previous sessions. According to a senior youth committee member, these young people, usually around thirty to thirty-five members, decide to come to the café 'because they feel free and there is nothing to hide during the discussions'. Significantly, discrimination due to tribal background is frequently on the Dialogue Café agenda and other popular topics include bad and unexpected life experiences, national identity and 'Saudianness', although he says the young people mainly concentrate on their own identity issues. When the Dialogue Café is held in Riyadh, members of the *majlis al-shura*, journalists, government and university officials are invited to speak about topics ranging from the socio-cultural to sport. As a follow up to these discussions, on Fridays the Imam of the local mosque addresses the issues discussed and relevant KACND literature is also distributed. KACND initiated a second phase of the above in other municipalities in 2011, firstly throughout Riyadh province and then moving to other administrative regions.

KACND: The Ambassador Project

This project comprises four aspects that aim to foster respect, acceptance and understanding of other cultures as well as reinforcing common values between the Kingdom and other expatriate nationalities.¹³⁸

- The scholarship training programme offers communication skills to students going abroad on the King Abdullah Scholarship Scheme through workshops and lectures. It hopes to promote positive cultural dialogue among Saudi students studying abroad and to encourage effective dialogue in presenting Saudi Arabia and Islam in a

¹³⁸See 'Ambassador Project', KACND: <http://www.kacnd.org/eng/TheAmbassadorProject.asp>

manner that reaches out to other cultures thereby creating a positive image of Saudi society.¹³⁹

- The project also organises youth delegation meetings that target young people visiting the Kingdom as well as exchange visits by Saudi delegations. Saudi students go on exchange programmes abroad such as the Anglo-Saudi ‘Two Kingdoms Programme’, in addition to students participating in youth conferences (Tunis¹⁴⁰, Cairo, Vienna and Geneva). KACND says that a Human Rights organization in Sweden has shown interest in adopting the programme under the umbrella of the European Union (EU).
- A programme that strengthens communication and relations between Saudis and expatriates living in the Kingdom through cross-cultural meetings among secondary and high school students from different cultural backgrounds.
- Convening meetings between Saudis and expatriates living in the Kingdom, including health sector personnel, educators, business people and housewives. It hopes to strengthen positive citizenship within Saudi society as well as tolerance between Saudis and other nationalities resident in or visiting the Kingdom.

The Ambassador Project currently involves Saudi students and non-Saudi students, including British, Indian, Turkish, Japanese, Canadian, Pilipino and American exchange students. In April 2011 the programme had already conducted twenty-three dialogue sessions between Saudis, expatriates and delegations in the Kingdom (KACND 2011c, p. 1). In early 2011 expansion of the Ambassador Project included twelve meetings between Saudi and international schools in Riyadh. These meetings started with pupils only, but now include parents. KACND points out that many of the international students at these meetings were born in the Kingdom and therefore consider Saudi Arabia to be their home.

In January 2011 a four-day Education Symposium was convened in Riyadh.¹⁴¹ It was opened by Minister of Education Prince Faisal bin Abdullah and the Ministry of Education asked KACND to select students from the Ambassador Project to participate in the symposium’s workshops (Khan 2011, p. 1.). At a Ministry of Education meeting that preceded the conference forty-three male and female students discussed quality of

¹³⁹ In May 2011 there were an estimated 130,000 King Abdullah Scholarship students. Interview by author with Faisal Al Mu`ammar (Paris: 11.05.11).

¹⁴⁰ Four members of the youth committee were nominated to attend the main conference in Tunis 20-21 November 2010. An online link between the KACND website and the conference was provided. In Tunis delegates participated in the Muslim Youth Conference and the 36 workshops held before the main event.

¹⁴¹ The First International Conference of TQM in K-12 Education, 8—11 January, 2011.

education. In addition, six male and female presenters, presented research papers at the symposium on their perceptions of education in the Kingdom. According to a senior KACND trainer, the students' involvement was 'well-received and they felt empowered'.¹⁴² She stresses 'the students requests were very specific' and their message was to 'improve the quality of education by including the use of more technology; bring cultures together; foster character building by promoting extra-curricular activities such as book clubs, volunteer work, and drama'. In addition, KACND plans to publish twenty-four of these research papers and worksheets in pamphlet form in order to distribute them to schools and relevant ministries. The next stage of the Ambassador Project will include greater cooperation with the Ministry of Education and increased expansion beyond the Riyadh region, in particular into Jeddah schools throughout 2011—12.

KACND: Bayader Volunteer Programme

At present, the *Bayader* Programme has more than 800 volunteers (male and female) and aims to enhance effective citizenship by promoting youth participation in spreading the culture of dialogue.¹⁴³ It hopes to attract youth interested in volunteer work and provide young people with the opportunity to develop their skills through effective participation in KACND's programs and activities. The programme was first launched at a certified trainers meeting that included thirty-four members and other KACND organizing committees. Recently, the programme has focussed on parent-child communication training programmes as well as the general youth programme.

KACND: Youth Symposiums

In December 2010 Saudi Arabia hosted a youth symposium in partnership with KACND entitled the 'Muslim Youth and Cultural Dialogue'. It was held in Riyadh to coincide with UNESCO's 'Youth Year' and participants attended from international youth groups and interested parties. Two weeks before this conference a meeting was convened at KACND that included ten male and females participants who selected the conference themes. In addition, 240 participants were invited to a symposium in preparation for the conference and this was divided into three parts: building capacities, challenges facing youth and social participation mechanisms. KACND says that

¹⁴² Interview by author with Subject 32, KACND senior female trainer (Riyadh: 18.01.11).

¹⁴³ See 'Bayader Volunteer Programme': <http://www.kacnd.org/eng/Bayader.asp>

participants all came from different backgrounds and each individual gave a fifteen minute speech that was followed by a general discussion. Over two days there were four sessions including 'youth only' sessions. Some of these sessions took the form of informal dialogue cafes as well as workshops and seminars; the proceedings were broadcast live via the conference website. At these youth conferences, it is KACND's intention to involve as many famous people as possible who are interested in Muslim youth development. KACND hopes that future conference proceedings will be in Arabic and English; however KACND trainers think that the workshops will probably be in Arabic only. The youth age range at these conferences is sixteen to twenty-five with an equal number of males and females as per KACND rules. Volunteers for the conferences are chosen by the Youth Committee using the online KACND youth database and this mirrors the procedures used for selecting participants for both preparatory and National Dialogue meetings. KACND also hopes to establish a 'Saudi National Youth Meeting' in 2012, which, if successful, could become an annual event. This forum will not be part of the series of National Dialogue Meetings, but instead will be a separate venture in much the same fashion as the Cultural Discourse. This new initiative will be completely organised by the Youth Committee who 'will decide and arrange everything'.¹⁴⁴ In addition, the Ministry of Education has requested that the Youth Committee compile a list of recommendations from these forums and present these to the ministry via KACND.

Other youth related activities include cooperation with the International Scouts organization who asked KACND to select participants to be part of delegations to Korea in 2008, Brazil in 2010 and a visit to Sweden in August 2011. Another new initiative is the January 2011 'Bridges' programme aimed at the youth market: a collection of short stories in pamphlet form with a variety of inter-cultural and inter-religious concepts embedded in the narratives. These pamphlets are also being distributed to non-Saudis in Riyadh.¹⁴⁵ KACND has also said that it will concentrate more on youth issues and one of the goals is to create 'dialogue as lifestyle' in the young population. For this reason, a programme was initiated for the Ministry of Education in November 2010 that included a hundred workshops with participants from all social constituencies. There are also new updated dialogue training guidelines for both the parents and teacher programmes

¹⁴⁴ Interview by author with senior KACND staff and KACND Youth Committee members (Riyadh: 10.01.11).

¹⁴⁵ Interview by author with Subject 50, KACND Deputy Secretary-General (Riyadh: 10.01.11). KACND stresses that these programmes are non-profit.

as well as recognition by the institution that existing KACND school and university projects need to be transformed into more ‘cooperative projects’.¹⁴⁶

KACND: Databases

The KACND the Youth Database includes more than 20,000 names, many of whom have participated in some form of KACND, and according to the institution, the database represents a wide range of societal constituencies. KACND also monitors the number of hours volunteers give the institution and the most active members are chosen for suitable workshops and / or national and international symposiums, frequently with links to various ministries including education, information and foreign affairs. For example, eighteen youth workshops were held in nine major Saudi cities in early 2011 where both male and female participants discussed their hopes and aspirations. The findings were presented to Ministry of Economy and Planning and are being used to formulate a ‘Saudi National Strategy for Youth’ that will be presented to the Ministry by the KACND training department.¹⁴⁷

The *tawasul* database enables technical communication on the web between KACND and its qualified male and female dialogue trainers thus facilitating an exchange of knowledge, experience and information. By registering on this database, trainers can benefit from special services such as KACND training project publications and updates of current training initiatives as well as inviting other trainers to participate in future projects.¹⁴⁸ In addition, the various databases help people to contact the institution and keep in touch, hence, according to the trainers, the activities of KACND promote a culture of dialogue and are ‘everyday becoming more well-known’.¹⁴⁹

The Intellectual Database includes curricula vitae and contact details of Saudi scholars, intellectuals, academics, economists, socialists and educators of both sexes. The purpose of the database is to draw on their combined intellectual experience through participation and contributions to the institution’s forums, programmes and activities in order to facilitate the deepening of a culture of dialogue. KACND states that the project

¹⁴⁶ Interview by author with Subject 50, KACND Deputy Secretary-General and senior KACND staff, senior female trainers and KACND Youth Committee members (Riyadh: 18.01.11).

¹⁴⁷ Interview by author with Subject 83, KACND training department (Riyadh: 10.01.11).

¹⁴⁸ See, ‘Tawasul’, KACND: <http://www.kacnd.org/eng/Tawasul.asp>

¹⁴⁹ Interview by author with senior female trainers and KACND Youth Committee members (Riyadh: 18.01.11).

is under the supervision of the Secretary General who appoints a supervisor for each administrative region of the Kingdom.¹⁵⁰ However, a female participant at the Eighth National Dialogue contends that KACND often selects a qualified individual from the database and then asks this candidate to suggest four or five additional participants. Consequently, she says that the whole selection process is often reduced to ‘having good relationships’. She cites her own experience when KACND located her CV on the database, selected her to participate and then asked her if she knew any other suitable participants. For this reason she believes that KACND currently relies too heavily on former participants and their connections or relationships in the selection process for meetings and seminars.¹⁵¹

KACND: Training department and government ministries

In 2010 KACND was asked to set up and manage dialogue training workshops for a number of ministries including education and planning.¹⁵² The KACND training department began holding dialogue workshops involving focus groups from specific constituencies such as university students, military officers and technocrats in order to gather information related to the future aspirations of each individual group. There were an initial eighteen different focus groups from eighteen different constituencies: eighteen men and ten women per group.¹⁵³ As well as asking the participants to complete a questionnaire, these workshops were recorded, with the participants’ permission, and the discourse analysed by the KACND training department. The data gathered from these workshops is forwarded to the relevant ministry in order to help construct new strategies. The training department stresses that the discussions are open and the participants are made aware that the initiative is linked to the Ministry of Education. The end result of this procedure is the identification of common societal themes and trends with the information compiled in both hard and soft copies and distributed to the relevant ministries. The workshops were held in thirteen regions and discussed the theme of ‘Future aspirations in the next ten years’ as well as hopes for future generations. The results from the first group of meetings were delivered to the Ministry of Education in December 2010. A similar procedure was undertaken to produce a ‘Saudi Youth Strategy’ with forums taking place in nine major Saudi cities. There were twenty groups of ten male and ten female participants aged between fifteen

¹⁵⁰ See, ‘Intellectual Database’, KACND: <http://www.kacnd.org/eng/daleel.asp?id=14>

¹⁵¹ Interview by author with Subject 22, female KACND participant (Najran: 10.07.10).

¹⁵² There have been approximately 100 workshops and these are non-profit with only fees covered.

¹⁵³ Interview by author with KACND training department (Riyadh: 10.01.11).

and twenty-five. Again the theme was future aspirations and the training department identifies common regional trends such as demands for increased human rights and the opening of cinemas.

KACND: Examples of Studies and Memorandums

KACND conducts its own research and publishes books, leaflets and studies that are available to the general public.¹⁵⁴ However, studies prepared by KACND have been criticised as being ‘written by academics for academics’ (Hertog 2006, p. 252). Nevertheless, these studies should not be dismissed out of hand as one of their aims is to reveal Saudi societal awareness of the activities and performance of KACND as well as the degree to which society understands the role, goals and aspirations of the institution.

In 2006, three years after the founding of KACND, a study was commissioned to determine society’s awareness of the National Dialogue process.¹⁵⁵ The findings of this study were published in Arabic and English¹⁵⁶ and made available online on the KACND website. In order to gauge public opinion regarding the activities of KACND and the national meetings, the consultative committee set three objectives so as to facilitate this research:

1. Measurement of the extent to which Saudi society understands KACND’s tasks and activities as well as the institution’s ability to clarify its mission.
2. Measurement of the extent of Saudi society’s satisfaction with KACND’s activities and previous National Dialogue Meetings.
3. Identification of the sources from which Saudi society derives its knowledge of KACND and the standard of information available to society (KACND 2006a, p. 9).

A study questionnaire was compiled and distributed to Saudis in a wide variety of locations throughout all administrative regions including, universities, schools, markets, public parks, mosques and cafes, so as to reach as wide a cross-section of society as possible. Following the distribution and collection of the questionnaire, data was analysed at KACND in order to ascertain the participants’ gender, profession and educational level. The majority of the participants were aware of the institution’s goals, in particular ‘establishing the principle and conduct of dialogue’ and ‘consolidation of national unity within the framework of the Islamic creed’ (KACND 2006a, p. 18). It

¹⁵⁴ The literature is also available online.

¹⁵⁵ The study focuses on the first four National Dialogue Meetings (2003—6).

¹⁵⁶ KACND has its own in-house translation team.

was also noted that interest in the National Dialogue proceedings increased with each meeting, and that this in turn attracted greater in-depth media coverage, thus facilitating increased societal awareness of the institution's activities. However, the participants stressed the importance of televised proceedings rather than print and / or Internet coverage.

Regarding individual issues and the recommendations of the National Dialogue Meetings, the fourth meeting on youth issues' was considered to be the most important subject chosen for dialogue, followed by the third meeting on women. The fact that these two topics were deemed to be of greater importance to society than the issues discussed during the first two National Meetings is interesting as it contradicts the opinion of some academics that have highlighted the ideological nature of those forums. Indeed, findings from Zogby's *Six-Nation Arab Opinion Poll* illustrate how the Saudis polled rated health care top of eleven issues facing the Kingdom with political participation last (2010, pp. 114—15). KACND's study would appear to reflect everyday domestic concerns over issues such as unemployment, gender inequality and the marginalisation of certain societal groupings (KACND 2006a, pp. 21—24). In another poll, the *Arab Democracy Barometer* (Arab Reform Initiative, 2012), approximately half of the Saudi respondents indicated that a combination of unemployment, high inflation and poverty constitutes the most important challenge facing the Kingdom. The issue of 'enhancing democracy' was given low priority.¹⁵⁷

An Agreement Memorandum was signed in 2008 between KSU in Riyadh and Shaikh Salih Al Husayyin, Head of the National Convention for Intellectual Dialogue at KACND (KSU 2008, pp. 1—2). The aim of the Memorandum is to promote the culture of dialogue and spread its concepts amongst the student body. The Agreement is also aimed at promoting intellectual and cultural consciousness emphasizing the culture of dialogue that is embedded in the Islamic faith and Saudi national values. These include the principles of tolerance, communication and moderation. This Agreement Memorandum between a prestigious university and KACND hopes to propagate the culture of dialogue among various national institutions and expand the scope of partnership in order to include citizens by:

¹⁵⁷ The survey reflects pre-Arab Spring attitudes as the data for was collected 5—6 January 2011 from 1405 random respondents 'representing the general Saudi population'.

- Engaging each party in promoting and updating social dialogue in Saudi Arabia
- Encouraging individuals and institutions to make use of national work plans by establishing cultural partnerships with each other
- Engaging consultative dialogue with the concerned non-governmental organisations through the formulation of laws and regulations (KSU 2008, p. 1).

CONCLUSION: A MISINTERPRETED PROCESS?

Is KACND a viable institution? According to Saudi journalist Mishkhas, the National Dialogue, which depends on trust, frankness and independent free minds, is a much needed step toward a society that can talk openly, discuss frankly and deal honestly with present day realities as KACND has promoted all types of topics for discussion and provided new avenues for people's aspirations (2004d, p. 1). Therefore, an examination of the individual National Dialogue Meetings not only highlights issues that are considered by the government to be of importance to the Kingdom's future, but simultaneously reflects both societal concerns as a whole and those of individual constituencies. For this reason, some in the media have noted that a society that is seeking to develop itself has to be honest with itself and not shy away from confronting its problems in order to solve them (Alawsat 2005, p. 2). In other words, individuals and constituencies are agreeing to disagree and it can be argued that this process constitutes a sign of growing societal maturity:

There is fortunately a lesson we Saudis are learning from these forums, something we were previously ignorant of: how to sit down and discuss our differences and concerns in a civilised way. Another equally important lesson is that it is all right for people to have different opinions and for us to respect those opinions (Qusti 2004, p. 1).

Al Khedr comments on the vibrant and open discussion occurring in the Kingdom on the choice between a 'civil state' and 'religious state' which has partly been fuelled by the state promoted media campaign against violence and extremism. However, he believes that unless Saudi society becomes enlightened, the debate surrounding the Kingdom's future direction will be confused as each individual constituency attempts to make reality suit its own individual requirements (2007, pp. 1—4).

In late 2011 KACND estimated that more than a million Saudis had been involved in one way or another with its programmes in both the public and private sectors.¹⁵⁸ Although the dialogue-training programmes are relatively new, making it too early to judge their effectiveness and overall impact, the reach of the programmes into society, in particular by targeting women, youth and minorities, has provided a new platform for legitimised state-society discourse. This dialogue training process, one that has penetrated deeper into Saudi society, would seem to resemble infrastructural power as described by Cerny (2006, pp. 81—82) in that the dialogue training process involves an ‘internalisation of power’ in the understanding, world views, habits, attitudes and behaviour of society within the Al Sa`ud top-down system. Moreover, as previously noted, this type of infrastructural hegemony facilitates an understanding of both ‘state’, top-down, and bottom-up hegemonic processes. By actively engaging a variety of Saudi constituencies in proactive dialogue training forums this on-going process appears to have the goal of establishing societal behaviour patterns that actively promote support for the norms of the current political system, i.e. KACND is facilitating the embedding of the power structure in everyday life. In other words, KACND’s dialogue training initiatives could be providing a means by which to legitimise the distribution and exercise of power in the current political system, thereby forming an approved ‘common sense’ of how the Saudi socio-political system works. Indeed, many of KACND’s senior management have strong ties to SANG and by extension to the king and his circle. Therefore, KACND management’s ‘world view’ most likely reflects that of King Abdullah.

Vice-Minister Alfaiz argues that KACND has given Saudis a chance to sit together and this has had a positive impact on society because it has reached all ages, sects and backgrounds.¹⁵⁹ Alfaiz believes that the culture of dialogue has become, and continues to become, deep-rooted in Saudi society. She maintains that ‘KACND’s activities take the weight from the Education Ministry’s shoulders and allow us to concentrate on other things’, but emphasises that the government still needs KACND because there is a great deal to achieve. However, a regular KACND contributor stresses that the institution needs to ‘work more in the streets and in the media’ and there is a need for more

¹⁵⁸ In particular, the most popular programme: communication skills, which is constantly under development and is evaluated and updated every two years.

¹⁵⁹ Interview by author with Vice-Minister for Girl’s Education Norah Alfaiz, senior ministry staff and Subject 54, KACND women’s director (Riyadh: 14.07.10). In her opinion, the National Dialogue should include both Saudis and non-Saudis in the Kingdom, individuals in social associations, as well as embassy staff, both Saudis abroad and foreign staff at foreign embassies in Saudi Arabia.

programmes, in particular more constructive student dialogue programmes, because students are not polishing their minds so the National Dialogue process needs to be ongoing, sending messages to the brain.¹⁶⁰ KACND's activities are also too centralised, hence it should be the case that the institution does not wait for people to come to it, but rather goes to them (KACND 2009o, p. 1). The focus on youth is also emphasised by a KSU lecturer and KACND contributor who now divides her two-hour seminars into equal sections so that her students have an opportunity to voice their opinions.¹⁶¹ She says that, in the past, students were wary of participating in discussions as they believed they would be blacklisted if they spoke their minds. Now, her students want to discuss and listen to a variety of domestic and international issues. She maintains that 'one of the most important aspects of dialogue training is that it teaches you to listen' and listening to others has helped her students develop intellectually. This is one of the main areas where KACND has opened doors and released previously untapped potential in society. For this reason, Alfaiz argues that the institution should get more people involved in its activities, in particular greater numbers of university students and school pupils:

Within an educational context, one of the main achievements of KACND is that it has been able to reach students at all levels, through principals, faculty and families; we should listen to the students as many of them have not yet had the opportunity to participate. Youth is the future, therefore it is important to understand how dialogue can help them. We also need to listen to the unemployed in addition to individuals from both the private and public sectors. All these individuals need to provide their own input'.¹⁶²

Although the annual National Dialogue Meetings receive the lion's share of media coverage, the policy of promoting a culture of dialogue at a grassroots level throughout Saudi Arabia may, in the long-term, prove more beneficial for society than the annual formal gatherings. The National Dialogue process may leave much to be desired, but by legitimising socio-cultural discourse at all societal levels and allowing discussion of once taboo topics, KACND's programmes are facilitating greater openness which can only have a positive effect on Saudi society. KACND has persuaded society that somebody is listening and this process has forced society to start considering serious and

¹⁶⁰ Interview by author with Subject 7, regional head and supervisor for the Ministry of Education (female) Jeddah, Makkah and Taif administrative region (Jeddah: 07/07.10).

¹⁶¹ Interview by author with Subject 42, KSU female lecturer College of Medical Science (Riyadh: 29.06.10).

¹⁶² Interview by author with Vice-Minister for Girl's Education Norah Alfaiz, senior ministry staff and Subject 54, KACND women's director (Riyadh: 14.07.10).

problematic issues.¹⁶³ Nowadays, Saudis are asking questions regarding societal issues and most importantly, requesting follow-up mechanisms and solutions, a viewpoint supported by a Ministry of Education consultant:

Society wants more from KACND because we need to talk more, but talking about education through KACND is a result in itself as in 2003 we needed this institution to promote debate, but now KACND should think about new initiatives. For example, at the moment KACND only discusses the problems, but what is needed are methods to address the problems and methods to find solutions to the problems. There should be greater follow-up to the discussions until the solutions to the problems become more apparent.¹⁶⁴

The Al Sa`ud may be trying to use the dialogue process to create functional groups, however, according to Glosemeyer, following each National Dialogue Meeting new relationships have been formed between political decision-makers and leading elements in the public sector and this represents the societal aspirations for greater political participation in the national debate, less corruption, more system efficiency and better all-round governance (2004, p. 160).¹⁶⁵ In addition, a focus group organised for this study points out that ‘national dialogue’ in the Kingdom is not taking place in a political crisis as it is in Lebanon or Iraq, that is, the Saudi National Dialogue is unique because there is no conflict in the Kingdom.¹⁶⁶ KACND’s activities have undoubtedly facilitated new cross-constituency and inter-sectarian relationships involving a wide cross-section of Saudi society throughout all the regions of the Kingdom; linked to the debate on important topics long considered taboo, these are achievements in themselves (Al Rasheed 2010, p. 247). Nevertheless, whilst agreeing that the impact of the National Dialogue meetings should not be dismissed, Aarts warns against overestimating their importance highlighting their ‘elite’ nature (Aarts 2011, p. 33). Undoubtedly, this is correct, but this overlooks the possible impact of the dialogue process in its entirety. In the opinion of a *majlis al-shura* member, the National Dialogue process constitutes a ‘huge step’, not just because the dialogue has helped to absorb societal frustration in the

¹⁶³ Interview by author with Subject 35, Assistant Dean for Female Education, Saudi Arabian National Guard (SANG) University (Riyadh: 20.07.10).

¹⁶⁴ Interview by author with Subject 4, female Ministry of Education consultant (Riyadh: 20.07.10).

¹⁶⁵ Interview by author with Subject 19, lawyer, ex-judge, owner of Arab Network for Research and Publishing (Riyadh: 21.06.10). According to the Bertelsmann Transformation Index ‘the public overwhelmingly perceives the royal family as corrupt. Transparency in government accounts is virtually non-existent. The public assumes that the royal family manipulates civil and criminal justice procedures, government funds, property rights, and contracts’ (2012).

¹⁶⁶ Focus group discussion including Subject 20, journalist and liberal, Subject 48, Ismaili activist, Subject 3 and Subject 84, Shia activist (Riyadh: 01.07.10). The king made the decision to establish the National Dialogue because of the events of 9/11 and that this decision was a societal / governmental combination

Kingdom, but also because it established the idea that everyone can be involved.¹⁶⁷ A university professor stresses that KACND participants and trainees are encouraged to speak freely and most importantly, agreeing to disagree has become the norm.¹⁶⁸ As one KACND participant comments, ‘the meetings and seminars are important and freedom of speech exists even though it is controlled within a very small space, but what we say to each other away from the official space is often more significant’.¹⁶⁹

The chapter has suggested that KACND dialogue training workshops and forums, as well as the cross-constituency dialogue they are fostering, may be acting as agents for increased socio-political dialogue and societal reform that is creating a perspective that frames socio-cultural and socio-political issues within a national framework rather than a sectarian or regional one. In consequence, in the long-term, these ‘grassroots’ initiatives may prove more significant than the more high-profile National Meetings although it is also possible to argue that dialogue training does not constitute national dialogue, rather it constitutes technical support for society.¹⁷⁰ Whilst some may disparage the annual National Dialogue Meetings, it should be stressed that the dialogue-training programmes are aimed at diverse constituencies with different requirements and aspirations. For this reason, the National Dialogue process should be interpreted on multiple levels, taking into account the range of its meetings and programmes as well as the background of the different participants and trainees. Without a doubt, one of KACND’s roles has been to respond to societal concerns and frustration, but within a state controlled process and one adhere’s to the Al Sa`uds hegemonic agenda in terms of monitoring and directing the content and pace of societal reform. Nevertheless, the National Dialogue process has provided a new avenue for expression of opinion during a time considerable social transformation.

¹⁶⁷ Interview by author with Subject 24, *majlis al-shura* member (Jeddah: 07.07.10).

¹⁶⁸ Interview by author with Subject 58, Dean at King Fahd University of Minerals and Petroleum (Al-Khobar: 04.03.10).

¹⁶⁹ Interview by author with Subject 82, KACND participant and Ismaili activist (Najran: 11.07.10).

¹⁷⁰ Interview by author with Subject 19, lawyer / ex-judge / Owner of Arab Network for Research and Publishing (Riyadh: 21.06.10).

CHAPTER FOUR

SAUDI NATIONAL DIALOGUE AND SAUDI CONSTITUENCIES

I: DOMINANT IDEOLOGY, POLITICAL SPACE AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

KACND AND POLITICAL SPACE: A PLACE AT THE TABLE?

This chapter focuses on the ways in which the National Dialogue process might be modifying and / or expanding socio-political space through greater societal participation and inclusion in KACND meetings and forums. It also examines the roles of the dominant ideology and its relationship to the National Dialogue process. It considers the role of KACND in relation to issues of legitimacy and loyalty and discusses the new Cultural Discourse, in particular the debate related to the dominant ideology, the effect of globalisation on Saudi society and the vital issues of tribalism, Saudi regionalism and intellectual classification (Arabic: *tasneef*). It then examines the perspectives and aspirations of religious minorities to the National Dialogue process.

The rationale behind the National Dialogue is to facilitate a convergence of ideas and opinions, therefore, ‘hard-liners’ as well as the Hijazi liberal elite have their place in the forum as they represent a Saudi constituency. Each constituency has been given a very clear message that everyone has to accept each other as they are because ‘the aim behind the National Dialogue was never to defame or offend, but to be honest and listen to the opinions of all participants’ (Alawsat 2005, p. 2). In addition, by initiating the National Dialogue, the Al Sa`ud also demonstrated that it was willing to recognise religious pluralism, to a degree, and if necessary subordinate Wahhabism to dynastic interest (Commins 2006, pp. 207—8). The role of KACND is to diffuse tensions, establish state-society dialogue and deliver loyalty (Al Rasheed 2010, p. 246) although society is sometimes resistant to reforms imposed from above. Reform measures emanating from the king’s circle may not always be explicitly spelt out, but they are nonetheless, understandable.¹

¹ For example, see photos in the Saudi press of King Abdullah’s face-to-face meeting with Shaikha Mozah of Qatar in Riyadh and his meeting with female delegates at the Eighth National Dialogue in Najran. The images were interpreted as signalling the king’s support for greater women’s rights:

Undoubtedly, the Saudi state uses the National Dialogue for political means with reform sanctioned and led from the very top, i.e., from King Abdullah and his advisors. Indeed, in Gramscian hegemony it is not enough for the dominant social group to exercise power; it must lead as well, regardless of the fundamental group's hold on power (Gramsci 1971, p. 182; Forgacs 1988, pp. 205—6). Thus, although the state is perceived as the organ of the Al Sa`ud, creating favourable conditions for the royal family's political and commercial interests, Gramsci argues that the dominant group, in this case the Al Sa`ud, is synchronised with the day-to-day interests of the subordinate constituencies. Hence, state polices, here, the National Dialogue process, can be interpreted as a continuous process of formation between the interests of the Al Sa`ud and those of subordinate groups, i.e. Saudi society. It was King Abdullah (as crown prince) who directly established KACND in order to increase state-society communication at a time when the Al Sa`ud was facing internal threats. Since that time although attendance remains optional (but by invitation only) the issues debated by KACND have been deliberately prescribed by the authorities, with the king's approval. For this reason, Al Sa`ud critics point to the 'official face' of the dialogue and the implication that all KACND participants work for the Kingdom, thus it is argued this negates the relevance of the discussions.² In addition, the one-sided nature of official state-society discourse in the Kingdom has an ideological bias based on an Al Sa`ud hegemony and therefore, individuals and their social rights are often neglected and / or marginalised. On the other hand, the establishment of KACND was supported by many individuals and constituencies because the institution filled a gap in the socio-political framework, although this approval is tempered by the reality of conflicting ideologies in the Kingdom.³ Indeed, the importance of the National Dialogue was recognised in that it needed to become the first platform for societal constituencies to discuss relevant societal issues.⁴ Thus, in 2003/4 the National Dialogue process was welcomed as a window of opportunity as it is was seen to represent what society actually required even

http://www.saudiembassy.net/latest_news/news03211001.aspx;

<http://arabnews.com/saudiarabia/article48738.ece>

² Interview by author with Subject 67, human rights activist and dissident (Jeddah: 08.07.10). He asserts that KACND is only about 'meetings, discussions' and he cannot see or feel anything tangible, in other words 'it is just official talk'. With regard to the National Dialogue, Subject 67 says that the well-known liberal Mohammed Tayyeb approached the Al Sa`ud and asked the king to establish some sort of state-societal dialogue over twenty years ago. However, this plan was more along the lines of a *diwaniya*, i.e., more traditional and less governmental / official. Local versions of the *diwaniya* are particularly active in Qatif, but less so in Riyadh and Jeddah.

³ Interview by author with Subject 37 (Dammam: 10.07.10). Subject 37 hosts a salon (*diwaniya*) in Dammam.

⁴ Interview by author with Subject 19, lawyer, ex-judge and owner of Arab Network for Research and Publishing (Riyadh: 21.06.10).

if it occurred within parameters strictly controlled by the state and was being utilised to disseminate Al Sa`ud hegemony.⁵

At first, the exact purpose of KACND caused some confusion as for years the government had warned society of the dangers of interacting with ‘the other’, and then, in a volte face, suddenly urged society to engage with that ‘other’. This confusion was compounded by societal concern with domestic security as a result of the terrorist attacks in 2003/4.⁶ Prior to the National Dialogue, societal components always used to interact with each other either directly through an Al Sa`ud conduit or government agencies so the regime was able to ‘balance’ these societal components.⁷ Nowadays, modern realities, technology and social-networking websites such as Facebook and Twitter, are bringing both people and ideologies into contact so the regime is starting to take notice of society and ‘they are aware of what is being said about them’.⁸ For this reason, the National Dialogue can be interpreted as an attempt to control society because Saudi society is developing and progressing at a faster pace than governmental reform.⁹ Hence, the National Dialogue may have been created to control communities because society perceives dialogue in a different way from the government, in particular the way that the National Dialogue can be used by different communities to express ideas of community reform as opposed to governmental reform.¹⁰

Opinion surrounding the National Dialogue process can be divided into two distinct categories: the first expected a great deal from the National Dialogue, but it is now disappointed and feels that the process is useless.¹¹ The second could be considered political or intellectual and had the same hopes and aspiration as the first; however this category understands that the outcome may be slight and therefore understand the necessity of utilising and pushing the dialogue process as much as possible. In other words, investment in the dialogue is required in order to open doors and to reach out to

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Interview by author with Subject 69, writer and *majlis al-shura* member (Riyadh: .10.06.10).

⁷ Subject 41 argues that an apartheid system operates in Saudi Arabia and this system operates at many levels and across constituencies and groupings both Saudi and non-Saudi.

⁸ Interview by author with Subject 41, political activist (Riyadh: 13.07.10). He jokes that living in Saudi Arabia ‘is like living in the dark ages, but in the twenty-first century’. He believes that the regime is afraid of the power of the Internet, especially when they travel to Europe, and are no longer under state protection. His comments to the author were made in early January 2011, before the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions and before the current debate surrounding the role of the Internet in the Arab world.

⁹ Interview by author with Subject 77, Shia writer and activist and Cultural Discourse participant (Qatif: 08.04.10).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Interview by author with Subjects 47 and 56 plus 7 Shia Activists (Qatif: 09.04.10).

other groups, and it is possible that the most significant impact of the process might be this indirect impact.¹² Another issue is the government's awareness of societal connections in the Kingdom. It is said that the government has detailed knowledge of societal exchanges, especially those concerning KACND participants, because the participants are close to the regime and, in fact, sometimes part of the government.¹³ However, different constituencies wanted to cease being separate and meet for discussions. In fact, prior to the National Dialogue disparate groupings were already coming together and it is possible that Crown Prince Abdullah was responding to this reality when he convened the first National Meeting, as even without KACND this type of discourse would have happened due to the communications revolution.¹⁴ Thus, KACND made this process easier as, prior to its establishment, it was difficult for different ideological groupings to meet due to lack of opportunities although it is probable that the Al Sa'ud initiated the National Dialogue process so as to control the debate.

National Dialogue as a Tool of Democracy

Montagu points out that civil society is everywhere in the Kingdom and that socio-political debate takes place 'within groups of broad, informal structures and relationships' (2010, p. 69). Furthermore, she maintains that the National Dialogue 'is the new tool' that can facilitate 'political discussion and civil society engagement' (2010, p. 78). A former member of the Saudi Arabian Human Rights Commission (SHRC) and *majlis al-shura* delegate believes that the importance of the National Dialogue is the way it is being used to aid the process of societal transformation.¹⁵ For this reason the dialogue process constitutes a step forward, not just because the process has absorbed frustration in the kingdom, but also because it has provided greater opportunities for participation in state-society debate. Certainly, the king also benefits, but the dialogue's importance does not lie solely with the issues discussed; it is the process of the National Dialogue that is significant because dialogue constitutes a tool of democracy.¹⁶ From a cultural perspective the National Dialogue is important because traditionally in Saudi tribes and families, everyone listens to the leader, and in this case KACND was endorsed by the king. In addition, the National Dialogue process has made

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Interview by author with Subject 9, Shia cleric and Cultural Discourse participant (Qatif: 10.07.10).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Interview by author with Subject 24, *majlis al-shura* member (Jeddah: 07.07.10).

¹⁶ Ibid.

people accept issues such as human rights, and not just through the prism of Islam, but rather through the example of other societies. Dialogue has also brought many benefits such as the acceptance and recognition of women's and children's rights, in particular the taboo issues of spousal and child abuse (see Human Rights Watch 2010, p. 21) and this is significant as this recognition has taken place in both conservative and Bedouin societies.¹⁷ Saudi society is under huge pressure from other Muslim societies due to being the centre of Islam and this is where KACND is important as it helps Saudis to accept that they part of the wider world. Nowadays, in the opinion of the *majlis al-shura* member Saudi acceptance of foreigners, particularly workers, is increasing along with recognition of their rights and the fact that 'they are not working for us, but with us'.¹⁸ In the last five to six years, the National Dialogue has helped Saudi society to open up significantly and start understanding and confronting huge problems and challenges such as those posed by globalisation and modernisation.

The Saudi socio-cultural landscape has changed according to one argument so most Saudis would like to be a united society irrespective of socio-religious background; this desire shows the world that Saudis may be different from each other, but are still united.¹⁹ In addition, the ceiling on the limits of freedom of speech was already in place and remains high and this has allowed people to discuss previously taboo subjects freely. Hence, it is true that society may be taking the first steps, but it is on the right track. Unfortunately, the national media does not always reflect this trend as it prefers to focus on sectarian issues and conflict. Nor do media sources discuss these issues in the same way as KACND or indeed society; indeed, some editors undermine the expansion of socio-political space by thinking that discussing these problematic issues in some way damages society.²⁰ However, there must be a serious effort to mobilise society, and attempt to address the serious issue of co-optation, as the regime uses co-optation to control society, through oil and rent, thus maintaining the status quo.²¹

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. He says 'not so long ago everything was closed, but now everything is completely open'

¹⁹ Interview by author with Subject 24, *majlis al-shura* member (Jeddah: 07.07.10).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Interview by author with Subject 41, ACPRA political activist (Riyadh: 13.07.10).

KACND AND THE DOMINANT IDEOLOGY

Religion and the state

A lack of enthusiasm for serious socio-religious reform is blamed on the continuing alliance between the Al Sa`ud and Wahhabi scholars. As the Wahhabi *'ulama* provides the basis for the religious legitimacy of the Al Sa`ud, the government 'attempts to reduce the pressure for reform by measures which are inadequate, but which do not diminish the position of powerful scholars too significantly' (Steinberg 2006, p. 1).²² This might explain why the role of religion in daily life has been enlarged at the expense of other issues, so a concern is the misinterpretation of religion in Saudi daily life and how it is marginalising particular groups in Saudi society.²³ That said the coexistence of religion and state is not questioned by most Saudis, rather some ask which manifestations have what relation to the state (Okruhlik 2009, p. 104). In addition, the limited interaction with non-Muslims, due to the lack of tourism and with the majority of Westerners living in compounds, strengthens the Wahhabi tenet of loyalty and disassociation (*al-wala' wa'l-bara*), thereby increasing a sense of isolation from a non-Saudi world (Hegghammer 2010, p. 231).²⁴ In addition, as Steinberg explains, since the founding of the modern Kingdom the followers of Wahhabiya have imposed their religious ideology on the Kingdom and malign as infidels those who do not follow the Wahhabiya meticulously and accept the doctrine's theoretical views without reservation (2011, p. 1).²⁵ Indeed, until recently Saudis were indoctrinated to accept a single religious concept until King Abdullah decided to acknowledge all schools of Sunni thought, breaking the monopoly of the Sunni Hanbali Wahhabi School.²⁶ However, Shia author Fouad Ibrahim contends that 'dividing the Saudi state into minorities and majorities is a misconception' as the Kingdom is a state of minorities. The Sunni Shia divide is too simplistic as 'the Wahhabis do not even recognise Sunnis as true Muslims', because 'it is only the Mazhab religious school that they recognise', accusing all others

²² Following 9/11, Wahhabism was blamed for promoting extremism in the Kingdom. However, Prince Salman bin Abdulaziz claims there is no connection between the term Wahhabi, which he claims is derogatory, and the original teachings of Al Wahhab. See, MEMRI, 2010b. Special Dispatch No. 2953 - Saudi Arabia/Inter-Arab Relations. *MEMRI*, 4, p. 1.

²³ Interview by author with Subject 77, Shia writer and activist (Qatif: 08.04.10).

²⁴ Hegghammer says that of the 800 Saudi militants studied for his 2010 book only a handful had met Westerners. When the author worked for the Saudi Arabian National Guard School of Signals (located in Eastern Riyadh) most of the young cadets had never come into contact with Westerners. These cadets were mainly from Al Qasim and had rarely travelled outside of their region.

²⁵ Steinberg points out that the Wahhabi religious establishment was able to impose its views on the conquered territories, including the predominantly Shia areas in the East because both religious scholars and the Al Sa`ud shared the same negative opinion of Shi'ism (2011, p. 1.)

²⁶ Interview by author with Subject 77, Shia writer and activist (Qatif: 08.04.10).

of innovation and deviation; this makes both Wahhabis and Hanbalis minorities within the Kingdom (Abedin 2006, p. 64). Thus, any break with Hanbali hegemony bodes well for the future because this shows that the king's decision has made a difference. In fact, the king has denounced all forms of extremism and racism, in addition to promoting moderate Islam because 'he, as a Saudi citizen, feels that he should try to advance this message'.²⁷ Some argue that nowadays the idea of tolerance and dialogue is becoming deep-rooted in society despite the efforts of the extreme right against those Sunnis such as Shaikh Al Harbi and Shaikh Nasser Al Amri who are calling for moderation.²⁸ According to one Shia activist, Al Amri thinks politically, even though he is a pious man in religious terms, and recognises the need for political pragmatism and compromise. Al Amri asserts that he is against Shia for political reasons rather than religious reasons declaring 'we do not call them *kafir*²⁹ in general, but we point to the differences from the right path'.³⁰ This demonstrates a more moderate stance than in the past and appears to be a trend towards greater tolerance. The Shia may be seen as the principal opposition, but in political terms not religious ones. This differentiation could signify an important new trend; therefore, maybe it is necessary to distinguish between political and religious discrimination against the Shia and the consequences of both in future inter-sectarian dealings.³¹ Another significant reform-minded individual is the influential Sunni cleric and Muslim scholar Salman Al Awdah. A onetime critic of the Al Sa`ud, Al Awdah has exhibited moderate tendencies for a long time although his influence may have waned since the 1990s (Jones 2009, p. 113). Al Awdah appeared to be strengthening his links to the liberal constituency by participating in forums such as the National Dialogue although this was also seen as government co-optation as the Al Sa`ud was attempting to benefit from the cleric's popularity (Steinberg 2005, p. 34).

Wahhabism defines religious, social and educational standards, in other words, it regulates the rhythm of the national life of the Kingdom (Habib 2009, p. 64). Ibrahim Belaihi, regarded as a prominent and new advocate for tolerance, 'whose writings are now standing up in defiance of the dogmatic religious shaikhs who consider themselves

²⁷ Interview by author with Subject 24, *majlis al-shura* member (Jeddah: 07.07.10). He believes that fatwas should be criminalised, because all these fatwas achieve is damage to Saudi society.

Subject 24 argues that if he 'didn't feel real space in society' he would be unable to propose this policy to the *majlis al-shura*, 'I couldn't do this'.

²⁸ Interview by author with Subject 63, Shia writer and political activist (Qatif: 09.04.10). Al Amri was one of the first major Salafi leaders to recognise and accept the political role of Hamas, Hezbollah and Turkey.

²⁹ Rejection of faith.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

to be the only true voices of Saudi culture and knowledge' (Nabulsi 2006a, p. 280), asserts that Wahhabism in the Kingdom possesses more power than any other doctrine in Saudi history. In his view, Wahhabism remains a weapon that the government needs to use and control although parts of the weapon can misfire or fail, thus endangering the entire socio-political state structure.³² He argues that Wahhabism does not address real life issues as it only preaches loyalty to the Wahhabi doctrine and the Wahhabi state.³³ Thus, Saudi society has not been educated to work, only to be loyal to state Wahhabism and to accept that all that matters are notions of paradise and hell.³⁴ In his view 'this is the spirit of a herd, not a team and a herd that cannot free itself from the captivity of the prevailing culture' (MEMRI 2010a, p. 2). However, Hegghammer demonstrates that it is not religiosity per se that has been responsible for hard-line religious views and actions, but rather that the religious sphere in the Kingdom provides a large space for political mobilisation because it has not been subject to direct control by the state:

The ideological nature of the Saudi state has ensured political support for religious activity, and the oil rent enables the state to afford the luxury of a massive unproductive religious sector. In its ideal form, the Saudi religious sphere is self-regulating and keeps citizens apolitical and obedient (2010, p. 232).

Nevertheless, whilst it has become increasingly possible to criticise the dominant ideology, and even criticise government bodies, the problem remains that it is very difficult to criticise the origins of the dominant ideology.³⁵ This fact constitutes the understood and unwritten red line in any cross-constituency state-society dialogue in the Kingdom and indeed, it is a felony to criticise the origins of the dominant ideology even though some of its recognised members are starting to voice their own criticisms of Wahhabism.³⁶ Indeed, Commins maintains that Wahhabism is being challenged and its message diluted by 'broader changes in the production of culture' in particular exposure to millions of other Muslims and the proliferation of electronic media thus spelling the end of Wahhabi hegemony (2009, p. 50).

³² Ibid. Subject 69 states that the chief weapon is ignorance and when ignorance flourishes it encourages greater ignorance.

³³ Subject 69 says one of the reasons is that individuals go to the mosque five times a day.

³⁴ Interview by author with Subject 69, writer and *majlis al-shura* member (Riyadh: 10.06.10). He specifically referred to Wahhabism and not Salafism during the interview. Okruhlik defines 'Wahhabi' as referring to the official religious orthodoxy in Saudi Arabia, 'Salafi' as referring to believers in society who follow the way, but are not tied to the state '*ulama*, and 'neo-Salafi' those who promote political change through social change (2009, pp. 92—93).

³⁵ Interview by author with Subject 9, Shia cleric and Cultural Discourse participant (Qatif: 10.07.10). Indeed, during KACND's first Cultural Discourse in December 2009, reference was made to the 'dominant ideology'; however Wahhabism is not actually named in any of the documentation.

³⁶ Ibid.

The state and the religious establishment

One of the most significant trends in the official religious call (*dawa*) of the state has been a desire to establish a clear demarcation between the state and the religious establishment.³⁷ On numerous occasions in recent years King Abdullah has intervened to halt the implementation of controversial court rulings and denounce inflammatory religious statements. In 2010, the king decreed that only members of the Council of Senior Islamic Scholars were allowed to issue fatwas as many of the more contentious ones were a major source of embarrassment to the Kingdom (See, for example Dorsey 2010; Whitaker 2010; Boucek 2010). The government is at odds with Wahhabiya according to one *majlis al-shura* member (despite the fact that the Al Sa`ud is responsible for this predicament) and it is not the first time that the regime's alliance with Wahhabiya has proved problematic for the government; therefore, it is attempting to limit the power and influence of the Wahhabi establishment.³⁸ Okruhlik argues that although the Al Sa`ud could not remain in power without the support of the *'ulama*, the religious establishment is neither independent, nor is it superior to the state, but rather is has become a bureaucratized institution dependent on Al Sa`ud largesse (2010, p. 390).³⁹ For this reason, one activist contends that the religious establishment always follows the political establishment.⁴⁰ Hence, elements within the regime are said to be attempting to shift societal loyalty away from Wahhabism toward the state itself. Whilst it is true that the regime used to be supportive of Wahhabism, nowadays the government wants to act alone and thus, needs society to show loyalty to the state.⁴¹ In the final analysis, the regime will not separate itself completely from Wahhabism as it fears the loss of legitimacy and cannot imagine itself separate; 'almost as though the regime and Wahhabism are conjoined twins'.⁴² A controversial opinion holds that this problem can only be dealt with effectively by outside powers; therefore, Western governments must convince the Saudi regime that it is able to detach itself from the hard-line Wahhabi establishment and simultaneously deny Wahhabism its monopoly on religious

³⁷ Interview by author with Subject 63, Shia writer and political activist (Qatif: 09.04.10).

³⁸ He referred to the 1979 siege of the Grand Mosque in Makkah. Interview by author with Subject 69, writer and *majlis al-shura* member (Riyadh: 10.06.10).

³⁹ Okruhlik comments that King Abdullah reminds the *'ulama* of their subservient position.

⁴⁰ Subject 66 says that it was the religious establishment that ousted King Saud in favour of King Faisal and that one of the main problems that emerged after the removal of King Saud was the arrival of 'Egyptian ideology'. In addition, Saudi political authority and religious authority are inherited and the Salafis do not want the Al ash-Shaikh family to continue inheriting this authority indefinitely.

⁴¹ However, this is the king's goal and not necessarily that of his brothers and this might explain the reason the king prevaricates with the reform process.

⁴² Ibid.

authority.⁴³ More specifically, the government must have sole control over state power so that it can provide adequate services to society and in turn gain the societal loyalty it craves. For this reason, the government needs to ‘de-Wahhabise’ and reform the entire state system if it wishes to establish a new Saudi nationalism.⁴⁴

After 2007, the king relegated the religious establishment to a supporting role on the national stage and bared it as an institution that directs government policy.⁴⁵ This was to prevent the *‘ulama* from becoming too influential and having the ability to stir up trouble, therefore it was necessary for the regime to ‘fragment’ the religious establishment.⁴⁶ A Riyadh focus group organised for this study says that one method used by the king to weaken the state-religious establishment relationship was the establishment of the Allegiance Committee. The group claims that in the future the Committee will sideline the *‘ulama* with the result that senior clerics will be excluded from the succession debate and decision-making process.⁴⁷ In their opinion this constitutes one of the most important developments in Saudi Arabia during the past five years and although it may not appear to be particularly significant now, its effects will be felt in the long-term; this they argue is the king’s ultimate strategy.

Steinberg notes that there has been continual tension between more radical Wahhabi elements and more pragmatic members of the religious establishment who are close to the government (2005, p. 13). Additionally, the growing separation between the state and the religious establishment has also been compounded by the dividing and splintering of the Salafi trend into groups which is weakening it; Lacroix categorises these groups as the new Sahwa, Islamo-liberals and neojihadis (Lacroix 2011, p. 262).⁴⁸ There are those who have remained loyal to the teachings of Al Wahhab, for example many of the young clerics, and those official *‘ulama* who have held important positions as advisors to the royal court. Derided as *‘ulama* of the sultans’, they have been

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Belaihi does not believe that any new Saudi nationalism exists, only loyalty to Wahhabism. In March 2010, a KSU professor told the author that students who had just graduated from high school were far more dogmatic in their views than those who had attended KSU for a few years. It would appear that many of the students utter ‘official’ views, i.e., a Wahhabi bias taught during their school years. He maintains that it is not only the state that is trying to differentiate itself from its traditional ally; the religious trend also wants to distinguish itself from the state, but in both cases the political grouping in each is in a minority.

⁴⁵ Interview by author with Subject 63, Shia writer and political activist (Qatif: 09.04.10).

⁴⁶ Here he was referring to the Iranian religious establishment in 1979.

⁴⁷ Interview by author with focus group including Subject 20, liberal journalist and *janadriya* organiser, Subject 38, *Al-Jazeera* newspaper journalist, Subjects 66, 88, 89 and activists (Riyadh: 05.01.11).

⁴⁸ *Al-Sahwa Al-Islamiya* (Islamic Awakening).

attacked for issuing fatwas based on political pragmatism (Al Rasheed 2010, p. 228). However, a Riyadh-based Ismaili activist contends that there is a realisation that the hard-liners within the religious establishment have done a great deal of damage to their constituency and for this reason a new generation of young, university educated clerics has started to form new groups and is attempting to reach out to other sects.⁴⁹ These young clerics include Shaikh Ahmed bin Abdulaziz bin Baz who is respected because of his father, the late Grand Mufti Abdulaziz bin Baz, but who has expressed very different opinions from those of his father. He believes that the religious establishment is in crisis due to the fatwa controversy and to overcome this situation the *'ulama* would need to be 'tolerant towards the various Islamic schools of thought and reexamine religious law in light of current reality' (Admon 2010, p. 1).⁵⁰ According to an article published by the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), responses to bin Baz's statements were mixed with some commending him for addressing sensitive subjects, but others feeling that these issues should not be openly challenged (Admon 2010, p. 1).⁵¹ This suggests that this is a generational divide and that older members of the *'ulama* consider their younger generation incapable of understanding the issues (Dorsey 2010, p. 2). Others claim that some senior religious figures are distancing themselves from the teachings of Al Wahhab as, in many articles and books, the late Grand Mufti Abdulaziz bin Baz is portrayed as a more important scholar than Al Wahhab because the latter's 'narrations are not precise and his points weak'.⁵² Values that originated with Al Wahhab are being modified and even though this process has been occurring for more than thirty years, since 2001 the process has accelerated.⁵³ It is claimed that his distancing from the teachings of Al Wahhab equates a new Salafi trend, one without the backing of state power.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Interview by author with Subject 13, Ministry of Petroleum and Ismaili activist (Riyadh: 28.06.10).

⁵⁰ Interview by author with Subject 63, Shia writer and political activist (Qatif: 09.04.10). According to this source Ahmed bin Baz's position is not strong as he does not represent a specific institution.

⁵¹ Interview Subject 63 maintains that these 'neo-Salafis' have been issuing their own fatwas directed against the old Salafi guard and it is claimed that there is a split coming as many young Salafis are doing things for money and / or media attention. For example, appearing on Saudi, Qatari and Kuwaiti television and publicly meeting with other religious groupings. He cites a recent visit by three young Shia men to Al Awdah and Issa Al Ghaith as an example of his on-going 'moderation'. This moderate process is supported by some young Salafis. For example, in 2010 three young Salafis protested against Makkah professor Shaikh Mohammed Al Saidi insisting on their need as Salafis to depart from the position of hatred which they blamed on the traditional Salafi trend. They also recognised the necessity of treating Shia as citizens because Shia citizens are considered hard-working, but Al Saidi disagreed and urged them not to sacrifice their beliefs.

⁵² Interview with Subject 63, political activist (Qatif: 19.01.11).

⁵³ Interview by author with Subject 55, human rights activist (Qatif: 18.01.11).

⁵⁴ Interview with Subject 63, political activist (Qatif: 19.01.11).

It can be said that the religious establishment is segmented between the two branches of the political establishment and its related institutions. The two branches are the 'moderate' and the 'conservative' and these are reflected in the religious establishment where there are also two identical branches.⁵⁵ This demonstrates that the religious establishment has little actual unity and this situation is being exacerbated by an Al Sa`ud divide and rule policy.⁵⁶ This also implies that should the political establishment fragment then the religious establishment will reflect this, i.e., fragmentation in the religious establishment reflects fragmentation in the political establishment and this is based on practical mechanisms. Hence, if an individual in the political establishment chooses a moderate path, there will be someone in the religious establishment who mirrors this path.⁵⁷

KACND: Promoting state legitimacy and loyalty

The National Dialogue process has uncovered 'the failure of the government', suggests a prominent Riyadh lawyer, and Saudi society is also disappointed by the failure of the state. Hence, the core function of KACND should be to create and maintain both state legitimacy and loyalty to the state regardless of the complicated relationship between KACND and governmental bodies.⁵⁸ State-society debate needs to resolve socio-political issues and problems such as unemployment, because the overall idea is to create jobs and manage the distribution of wealth even though the state may disagree with this argument and is doing little anything to address these issues. In addition, there has been no deep or serious focus on these issues in the government's agenda till now including the absence of a project dealing with the management of human resources in

⁵⁵ Interview by author with focus group including Subjects 20, liberal journalist and *janadriya* organiser, Subject 38, *Al-Jazeera* newspaper journalist, 66, 88, 89 and activists (Riyadh: 05.01.11). One of the group points out that in historical terms it is possible to compare Saudi Arabia and Japan. Both nations have what he calls a 'rational royal family' and Saudi religious institutions are similar to Japanese ones in the late 19th century. If you compare Japan and the Kingdom it is possible to say 'that they have not yet reached the point where the religious state cannot function'.

⁵⁶ Interview by author with Subject 41, ACPRA and Diplomatic Institute (Riyadh: 05.01.11). He says there are strong influences from the regime, that is, divide and rule, but does not know exactly who in the regime wants this. With regard to fragmentation, he states that if you are a junior cleric you are paid well and thus, expected to follow the official teaching and toe the line. It is important to remember that the Deans of the Islamic Universities are linked to the Interior Ministry and that is how the ministry controls them.

⁵⁷ Women's rights also constitute an extremely sensitive issue for the religious establishment. Indeed, the religious establishment has always had a negative stance toward women even though the government uses the suppression of women as a *prid per quo* to pacify the religious establishment. However, the issue of women driving distracts from the real issues such as corruption, poverty and unemployment. Subject 41 quotes Prince Nayef as saying 'as long as I am alive no woman will drive in the Kingdom'. Interview by author with Subject 41, ACPRA and Diplomatic Institute (Riyadh: 05.01.11).

⁵⁸ Interview by author with Subject 19, lawyer, ex-judge, owner of Arab Network for Research and Publishing (Riyadh: 21.06.10).

the government itself, i.e., no serious development of public policy or development of human resources to achieve these goals.⁵⁹ In fact, the public institution in charge of governmental human resource training has remained exactly the same for the past twenty years. If the state cannot develop governmental bodies then the eventual outcome will be outsourcing which will cause a major problem with distribution of wealth. This fact reflects a lack of care in the government bodies, no clear reasoning and most importantly, very little change or no change in cabinet members and high ranking officials. Indeed, management corruption constitutes a major problem in the Kingdom as the Saudi elite and many societal constituencies select their leaders not by merit, but by *wastah*.⁶⁰

Although KACND has made an impact on state-society dialogue, this impact has not matched societal expectations because of the huge government bureaucracy that absorbs problems and change. These bureaucratic procedures make life difficult for citizens and both the leadership and KACND need to increase loyalty to the state as well as making society care about citizenship.⁶¹ Indeed, state-society dialogue should be pre-planned carefully, but thus far KACND has not done this as there is no shaping or designing of resolutions. If the institution had pre-planned, then KACND would have helped society to believe in the state itself. Therefore, KACND has missed a valuable opportunity to develop civil society and also to strengthen the state although it is still not acceptable in the public sphere to be overly critical of the state.

There are major issues the National Dialogue process should confront including discussion of serious issues affecting the state, e.g., legitimacy and loyalty. Furthermore, the power elites need to believe in the state itself, that is, state concepts reflected in rights and obligations as well as state functions, and not simply the source of their own power.⁶² For this reason, it is argued that there must be a differentiation between the understanding of power and the state. In this respect, the new Cultural Discourse is an achievement as it goes some way to addressing these issues, but does

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Interview by author with Subjects 4 and 5, educational consultant and Al Sa`ud intimate (Riyadh: 20.07.10).

⁶¹ Interview by author with Subject 19, lawyer, ex-judge, owner of Arab Network for Research and Publishing (Riyadh: 21.06.10).

⁶² Ibid. He maintains that, unfortunately when discussing the division of power in Saudi Arabia, this must be understood in a negative way

this forum constitute ‘national dialogue’ as recognised by society, the government and KACND?

THE CULTURAL DISCOURSE

The Cultural Discourse aims to demonstrate the institution’s commitment to its social role and duties and KACND hopes that the new forum will provide an environment that facilitates greater cross-constituency dialogue and understanding (KACND 2009c, p.1). For this reason, the institution aims to convene a Cultural Discourse every six months in locations across the Kingdom. For the foreseeable future, participants will be confined to the intellectual elite, however as the series of meetings progress, the range of participants could widen depending on the chosen topic for discussion. Since its founding, the Cultural Discourse has allowed more contentious issues, such as tribalism, to be discussed within a separate framework from the official National Dialogue meetings, but once again participation is by invitation only and so far has been restricted to educated Saudis, intellectuals, scholars, and writers. The Cultural Discourse took a particularly surprising turn in its third meeting in Jeddah, when the issues of tribalism, regionalism and intellectual classification and their impact on national unity were incorporated into the agenda. Up until this point, it was generally agreed that the state-sponsored KACND would avoid discussion of these issues as they were considered to be too contentious and political. However, the possibility of future discussions related to these issues was not ruled out although this was deemed unlikely to occur in the near future.⁶³ Hence, the announcement that KACND had decided to convene such a meeting in Jeddah in late 2010 was both seen as both unexpected and rather daring. KACND stressed the extreme importance of the forum, but the fact that the institution was allowed to debate these sensitive issues in public would seem to suggest an official acknowledgement of the problems that the exploitation of tribalism and regionalism could potentially pose to national unity.

KACND describes the Cultural Discourse as the intellectual influence on society and for this reason the forum aims to represent social movements and societal transformation by discussing intellectual influence on society and the way in which it relates to individual constituencies:

⁶³Interview by author with Subjects 70 and 71, journalists (Jeddah: July 2010).

Describing the discourse as ‘cultural’ is to distinguish it from other discourse, such as the political discourse, since this discourse is determined by what scholars, propagandists, thinkers, authors, artists, and others who are called ‘intellectual leaders’, meaning those who interact knowledgeably with the issues of the society and nation (KACND 2009d, p. 1).

KACND hopes that this new forum can represent diversity in the Kingdom whilst simultaneously promoting national unity and fostering a moderate national discourse that ‘expresses Saudi society and the tolerance of Islam’.⁶⁴ Secretary-General Al Mu’ammar announced the Cultural Discourse would convene for the first time in Al-Ahsa governorate in December 2009 and would constitute a ‘continuation of the National Meetings’, but these debates would demystify the features of Saudi cultural discourse and ‘activate the role of civil society institutions in tackling and treating cultural issues’ (KACND 2009d, p. 1). In response to societal misgivings following the National Meetings recommendations, at the end of each discourse a final statement and list of findings will be published as opposed to the customary recommendations. For Saudi society, the perceived non-implementation of recommendations has become somewhat contentious so the term is now being dropped as it is hoped that a ‘final statement’ and ‘meeting findings’ will provide a more accurate summary of the Cultural Discourse forums. Unsurprisingly, it appears that KACND is attempting to deflect some of the criticism it has received as a result of the apparent non-implementation of its recommendations so this policy will be implemented for all subsequent National Meetings although it remains to be seen whether society and the media will differentiate between ‘recommendations’ and ‘meeting findings’.

In contrast to recent service-related National Dialogues, the three Cultural Discourse meetings (Al-Ahsa, December 2009, Riyadh, June 2010 and Jeddah, December 2010) have examined issues ranging from religious ideology in relation to Saudi society, national unity, the effects of globalisation on Saudi identity and most recently, the sensitive issues of tribalism, regionalism and intellectual classification in Saudi society. The importance of this new forum relates to the perceived reopening of an ideology-related discourse and in general, this new initiative appears to have been well-received.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the decision by KACND to establish a separate forum for debate on socio-cultural and ideology-related issues raised questions in some quarters. According to a Riyadh focus group organised for this study, the decision was based on the need for ‘a

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Various interviews by author with multiple subjects (Saudi Arabia: 2009—11).

gradual approach to these sensitive issues so that this discourse would not create problems for the country'. However, some individuals remain sceptical of the Cultural Discourse as they believe that this forum is a sideshow established as a result of media and societal pressure to reopen ideological discussion. Indeed, there are reservations regarding the stated role of KACND and concerns voiced that in reality the Cultural Discourse constitutes a rarefied cultural club as opposed to a significant forum for ideology-related debate.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, a Riyadh-based journalist and well-known liberal argues that KACND is now in a position to respond to media criticism that highlighted the cessation of ideological debate in favour of service-related dialogue.⁶⁷ For a few years KACND neglected its original objectives so it did not feel pressured to discuss these ideological issues until these issues were raised on a regular basis in the Saudi media, but now KACND can reply 'we did what you asked' although that said, the institution lacks confidence at times and is not sure what it wants to, and can, achieve.⁶⁸

As the proceedings and issues debated in the Cultural Discourse meetings are little known outside Saudi Arabia⁶⁹ and hitherto only partially documented in English, the following pages will summarise the topics discussed in the three convened forums in order to highlight important issues that are now included, or have been reintroduced, in KACND discourse.⁷⁰

The First Cultural Discourse

The Reality of Saudi Cultural Discourse and its Future Horizons

Convened in Al-Ahsa on 22—3 December 2009, sixty-two participants from the worlds of Saudi literature and academia discussed issues such as globalisation, inter-cultural relations, inter-sectarian relations, national identity, and proposals by which KACND 'can provide a guarantee of self-expression for all currents of thought' (Al Subei'i 2009, p. 1). The two day meeting was divided into four sessions (KACND 2009f):

⁶⁶ Interview by author with Subject 19, lawyer and ex-judge (Riyadh: June 2010).

⁶⁷ Interview by author with Subject 20, lawyer, journalist and twelve members of a *diwaniya* (Riyadh: January 2011).

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ The proceedings of the forums were televised on Saudi television and some of these can be viewed online at www.kacnd.org. See, for example, the Jeddah Cultural Discourse 2010: www.kacnd.org/center_videos.asp?step=1and_vid_id=75

⁷⁰ Documentation provided to the author by KACND. The Al-Ahsa documentation has been translated into English, but the Riyadh and Jeddah documentation is only available in Arabic.

Session I: The recent scene of the Saudi cultural discourse and its current direction

Diversity and variety are features of Saudi cultural discourse and although this discourse is affected by both domestic and international influences, the forum argued that the dominant discourse remains preeminent. The participants noted that whilst a religious basis forms the core of Saudi cultural discourse, this discourse is not based on social unity, and there is an absence of transparency with regard to racial, regional and ideological issues. In addition, they agreed that contradiction, isolation and inconsistency hamper the formation of a unified Saudi cultural discourse and extremist thought in the form of 'abusiveness and offensiveness' remains present in all cultural streams. Political interference also has a negative impact on cultural discourse according to the forum and this is exacerbated by the failure of the media in spreading cultural discourse to all societal constituencies. With regard to education the participants highlighted deficiencies in the current education system and the absence of deep-rooted cultural awareness in young people, which lead directly to a weak cultural discourse. They maintained that this can be blamed on the education system relying on rote learning rather than fostering critical thinking and this same problem can lead indirectly to 'misuse of the Internet' by impressionable youth (KACND 2009f).

The forum argued that a culture not based on religion produces an unbalanced society, but also noted that dissimilarity has been a feature within Islamic society since the early days of the Prophet's companions. Unfortunately, in the opinion of the participants in Saudi society, the power of a 'dominant discourse' has produced an extremist ideology, one built on accusations of disbelief, and this discourse excludes other Saudi cultural streams. They pointed out that these negative accusations frequently prevent voices from outside of the dominant discourse being heard in the public domain and targeting these non-mainstream constituencies through the misuse of fatwas to exploit specific socio-political situations ignores diversity in Saudi society. Indeed, the forum contended that it may be necessary to revise existing fatwas that hinder societal progression and ensure that religious issues are handled only by those delegated to do so, i.e., by a recognised authority. Therefore, the delegates affirmed that Saudi cultural discourse needs to move away from dominance and accusation towards greater tolerance and acceptance, but that the establishment of a new dialogue should not be viewed as an 'implicit accusation of the dominant religious stream' (KACND 2009f, p. 2). At the same time they argued that new values such as dialogue, human rights, diversity and

tolerance will not be able to become deep-rooted in society unless there is an attempt to dismantle concepts that disregard these values. The forum also pointed out that the monopoly of the dominant discourse often means that Saudi intellectuals receive more recognition abroad than in the Kingdom.

The forum came to the conclusion that the collective Saudi intellectual elite lacks organisation and is not always aware that as individuals they have more in common with each other than differences. Although the Cultural Discourse relates to intellectual thought, the forum established that at whilst an intellectual elite may have the loudest voice, this voice is not necessarily the most effective and may also suffer from 'arrogance and egotism'. It was agreed that these negative traits can cause societal misunderstanding and by implication social problems. Thus, the participants suggested that the intellectual elite should relate intellectual thought and culture to everyday reality, in particular societal requirements and aspirations related to socio-economic development. They also stated that it is necessary for the intellectual elite to critically examine non-Saudi trends and, even though an individual may admire certain trends, it is imperative to judge these in the context of what could be beneficial for Saudi society. Hence, in the delegates' opinion, practical cultural discourse, one influenced by social realities, needs to take precedence over theoretical discourse whilst bearing in mind that society approves of security and rejects change imposed from above.

The forum recommended that KACND must strive to promote genuine and effective dialogue that allows all voices and opinions to be heard as genuine dialogue facilitates mutual respect despite individuals holding differing viewpoints on issues such as women's rights. Furthermore, transparency and sincerity should be encouraged; disagreement must be recognised as a legitimate right within the parameters of identity, privacy and national identity. Nonetheless, the participants concluded from this session that the Saudi cultural scene is in recovery (2009f, p. 8).

Session II: Cultural institutions and their influence on cultural discourse

In the opinion of the participants, Saudi media can be divided into two categories: conservative and 'another that demands variety and the right to disagree' (KACND 2009f, p. 11). It was agreed that media institutions represent the basis of knowledge strategies and provide the framework for the cultural discourse; for this reason media

institutions should be freed from ‘partiality’. Freedom of publishing is a ‘public demand’, but the forum argued that this freedom is not boundless. The participants noted that media organisations are very close to current cultural trends even though certain institutions avoid interacting with cultural institutions. The contradiction between the role of the Ministry of Information and how its activities are covered in the media was highlighted although the forum acknowledged that there had been an improvement in the way the media is moving closer to addressing societal aspirations. Opposition voices must also be given a voice within existing institutions according to the participants and space for private non-governmental institutions must be allowed, i.e., not under the supervision of the Ministry of Information. The forum also acknowledged there is the potential for ‘agitation’ in the media, in particular in the new media and technology which are hard to control, but the forum warns that Saudi cultural discourse must not fall into the trap of simply being ‘instant messaging’ (KACND 2009f).

As a result of the debate, the forum maintained that Islamic ancestral discourse has transformed itself into a developmental discourse that will impact on the current cultural discourse. That said, the delegates noted that the Kingdom’s mosques still represent the most influential institution in society, but this influence can be interpreted in either a negative or positive light depending on an individual perspective. However, it was recommended that coexistence between the majority and minorities must be promoted whilst maintaining the rule of law, religious unity, and national identity. According to the forum, cultural discourse in the Kingdom has undergone three distinct phases: unconsciousness, naïve unconsciousness and finally mature consciousness. The participants believed that these must be meaningful and understood as individual concepts, not simply as notional items on the educational curriculum. The participants argued that education can help create a moderate cultural discourse and constitutes a primary concern for the health of the Kingdom, thus schools are the first step in achieving intellectual security (KACND 2009f, p. 12). Unfortunately, in the opinion of the forum, higher education is being tailored solely to the requirements of the job market thus ignoring the benefits a rounded curriculum, plus a bloated bureaucracy hinders education development along with low-calibre teaching. According to the delegates, studies related to humanities and culture including art, literature and music are neglected in Saudi universities and schools. They also believed that educational institutions are also failing to provide a suitable environment for healthy debate between

students and these factors stifle student ambition and creativity. With regard to educational, cultural and media institutions, it was agreed that the level of interaction between these bodies and Saudi citizens is too low, therefore, only the elite benefits and the general public is marginalised. For this reason, the forum recommended that the role of KACND needs to be increased so that it can act as a point of reference for the former and / or an independent authority be established, with the approval of the *majlis al-shura*, to regulate the activities of these institutions. Furthermore, the forum identified the delay in not implanting the recommendations from previous KACND National Meetings as posing ‘an intellectual dilemma’, but the participants did not elaborate as to how this situation could be rectified.

According to the participants, cultural institutions are not able to fulfill their role for a number of reasons. Firstly, official control over their activities often oppresses freedom of expression, e.g., the confiscation of literature on religious grounds. Secondly, the impact of specific institutions is weakened by lack of freedom. Thirdly, priority is often given to the historic or traditional rather than promoting greater knowledge acquisition. Fourthly, current cultural discourse discriminates against women and even blocks a woman’s religious rights. Next, due to the fact that no national cultural vision exists, media and educational institutions often follow contradictory agendas. Finally, contradictions and double standards in the messages emanating from the media and educational bodies have produced a society that suffers from loss of identity and cross-constituency conflict (KACND 2009f).

Session III: The issues of Saudi cultural discourse

This session was devoted to current notions of Saudi identity and whether identity remains constant or is subject to change. It also discussed diversity, particularity and privacy. The forum reaffirmed the importance of Islam, the Qur’an and Arabic as indispensable elements of national identity whilst acknowledging a pre-Islamic identity in the region. As Saudis, they maintained that this Islamic identity links the Kingdom to Muslims everywhere as well as linking Saudis to all humanity (KACND 2009f, pp. 14—15). The participants also pointed out that identity can have a ‘duplicate nature’, i.e., hereditary and acquired, past and future, conservativeness and creativity, but if religious identity is ignored or neglected then this undermines national identity

(KACND 2009f p. 19). Therefore, the forum noted that a distinction needs to be made between country and government vis-à-vis country and nation.

The meeting also examined diversity in the Kingdom and agreed that a common national identity cannot be achieved without recognition of Saudi diversity. However, in the opinion of the participants, a common national identity is hindered by the issues of tribalism, regionalism and intellectual classification and leads to over-generalising, categorizing and stereotyping (KACND 2009f, p. 16). The forum argued that an agreed definition of the terms identity and patriotism should be established in order to assist the intellectual elite make a convincing case regarding social identity. The forum decided that identity is linked to religion, culture and education whereas patriotism relates to rights and obligations, equality, justice, freedom of expression, and coexistence under the law. It was decided that patriotism can be defined as an ‘idea built upon sharing a country’ and significantly they argued that it is meaningless ‘if a citizen does not have the right to question those in charge’ (KACND 2009f, p. 18). The delegates noted that pride in national identity is patriotic, but it was also pointed out that patriotism can be harmful if interpreted incorrectly or hijacked by ideologically dangerous trends.

The debate on ‘Saudi particularity’ asked whether it should be understood as being religious, cultural or conservative. According to the forum, other Muslim states view the Kingdom as a ‘religious instructor and champion’ due to the custodianship of the Holy Mosques and this adds to Saudi particularity. However, whilst Saudi particularity can be celebrated as part of the Saudi cultural discourse, it can lead to feelings of superiority and self-importance. Nonetheless, the participants argued that Saudi particularity can be defined by a lack of openness and reticence and this unsatisfactory image is the one often presented to non-Saudis. Therefore, according to the forum, the Kingdom must learn to present its particularity in a better light by studying the examples of other nations such as the USA and Japan. In addition, it was noted that ‘privacy is what distinguishes the nation’ and whilst this is linked to the Kingdom’s geographical location, privacy must not be equated with either isolation nor should it be solely interpreted in terms of gender segregation.

Session IV: Future aspirations of the Saudi cultural discourse

The forum maintained that a Saudi cultural discourse should be transparent and must protect the privacy and the Islamic identity of the Kingdom whilst constructing a national culture that enhances national identity (KACND 2009f, p. 29). However, it was agreed that some cultural outcomes do not represent Saudi reality and the liberal and / or secular trends cannot succeed if they oppose a religious culture. The forum argued that the repetitive accusation that the religious stream eliminates other streams does not correspond with the dominant presence of other streams in media platforms and cultural institutions (KACND 2009f, p. 22). The first mission of the Cultural Discourse, according to the delegates, should be to energise and develop society by recognising societal realities and highlighting social issues. It was recommended that firstly, the Cultural Discourse should also maintain its position in the face of any intellectual, ideological or sectarian discrimination in addition to any inappropriate foreign influence. Secondly, the Cultural Discourse should help create a positive Saudi national image overseas and not one that is seen to discriminate against women and minorities. Thirdly, it should acknowledge societal diversity as a national resource and the importance of culture as an element of national unity (KACND 2009f, pp. 21—24).⁷¹

The forum recommended that educational institutions adopt a new policy to promote humanities and allocate teaching time for social services, and greater reading should be encouraged into to promote transparency between different cultures. It also recommended establishing educational centres and programmes that foster national identity and providing neighbourhood practical training as trust needs to be enhanced between the intellectual elite, cultural groupings and the nation. Civil society, women and youth need to play a bigger role in society according to the delegates, hence the achievements of Saudi women need to be highlighted and the role of Saudi business women and their rights, including inheritance rights, should be emphasised more. It was agreed that youth is also marginalised and young people need to be including in state-society dialogue as well as in any form of cultural discourse. The participants said that

⁷¹ The participants were particularly keen to develop knowledge of ‘petroleum culture’ in educational institutions. Saudi Arabia has relied on revenues from the petrochemical industry and the import of nearly all consumer products. This leads to a disregard for natural resources, such as potable water supplies, and an absence of recycling schemes. Recycling is almost unknown in Saudi Arabia, and petroleum culture has led to a ‘throw away’ society, particularly among the young, who form a large part of the population. The cultural discourse participants called for an educational dialogue on the consequences of petroleum culture that would involve Saudi citizens. Of primary concern is the need to educate young Saudis about the consequences for society. But, decision-makers are concerned that the use of clean energy might lead to lower oil revenues at a time of population growth and increasing urbanisation.

attributing blame for social problems to new technologies used by youth, such as instant messaging, is a mistake because these new technologies can be utilised for the greater good. According to the group, youth lack identity and therefore as young people comprise seventy-five per cent of the population it is the duty of society to foster pride in national identity and culture. The forum also raised the issue of petroleum culture and emphasised that it must be understood by youth, thus, a culture of petroleum related to dialogue needs to be established and developed in society (KACND 2009f, p. 24).

Friction between some of the participants is highlighted in the documentation by frequent differentiations between ‘we’ and ‘they’, and the forum stressed that insulting others during the meeting constituted a crime and that the language used by some of the participants ‘indicates that we are still at square one in our dialogue with regard to dealing with the ‘Other’ (KACND 2009f, p. 28). Lastly, it was recommended that KACND should publish the Cultural Discourse findings and where possible translate the documents so that they are available to an international audience.⁷²

Final Statement and Comment

The participants recommended that the future agenda of the Cultural Discourse include meetings dedicated to the renovation of Saudi cultural discourse, globalization, national identity, construction of a national project, relations with other cultures and civilizations, and cultural discourse and its relationship with Islamic ideology. It was also suggested that KACND establish workshops involving representatives of different areas of expertise, intellectual sectarian and regional backgrounds, in order to collaborate with educational, cultural, media and non-governmental bodies. In conclusion, the participants emphasised that KACND should guarantee a fair and balanced dialogue, one that represents all Saudi constituencies, as this process should contribute to enhancing diversity as a source of societal strength and development (2009, p. 2). With regard to final recommendations, the participants stated that these are not necessary as the dialogue and issues debated are able to stand alone.⁷²

One important and interesting point made during this forum related to the role of the media. According to the scholar Abdullah Al Ghadhami, intellectuals and KACND wield very little influence over socio-cultural and socio-political reforms. Rather it is

⁷² About 25 per cent of the Cultural Discourse documentation has been translated into English. However, some of the official translation needs to be clarified.

‘press opinion writers and columnists’ who have the greatest influence along with ‘those expressing free opinion’ (Al Subei’i 2009, p. 1). However, Al Mu’ammar declared at the forum that KACND has brought the culture of dialogue to the mosque, family and school and these constitute the three most important institutions in the Kingdom. He added that the institution, which estimates that it has already reached over a million Saudis, aims to involve an additional eight million Saudis in the next three years (Al Subei’i 2009, p. 1). This is certainly an ambitious target, but it remains to be seen whether KACND has the vision to achieve this goal.

*The Second Cultural Discourse
Identity and Globalisation in the Saudi Cultural Discourse*

The second Cultural Discourse ‘Identity and Globalisation in the Saudi Cultural discourse’ was held in Riyadh on 18—19 June 2010. The 70 participants discussed the main themes of privacy, citizenship and the effect of globalization on Saudi society (Afit 2010b, p. 1). The two day meeting was divided into four sessions (KACND 2010a):

Session I: Privacy and Saudi society

This session discussed the concept of Saudi ‘privacy’ and its relationship to the nation and society as well as privacy related to political allegiance and stability. The forum agreed that Saudi notions of privacy stem from the nation being built on the basis of religion and governance of Islamic law. It was also agreed that privacy involves respect for elders, irrespective of money or position, personal morality and personal appearance as well as imposing duties on the individual, Saudi religious life and the Kingdom’s position in the Islamic world. The forum affirmed that Saudi society is distinguished by its religious heritage and spatial privacy, and in religious terms these are viewed as positive attributes. Hence, Saudi notions of privacy belong to Islam and are not compatible with evolution (KACND 2010a, pp. 1—2). However, the delegates noted that this concept of privacy should not be used as a justification for enforced isolation or resistance to change, especially as the younger generation is now exposed to global influences to such an enormous degree. Therefore, it was agreed that there needs to be a reduction in personal and national privacy, to be replaced with greater openness to the outside world.

In Saudi society some aspects of this privacy have been used negatively or to hide ‘interests’ whether individual or group according to the participants. For example, they argued that this traditional understanding of privacy is used to marginalise and subordinate women. The forum maintained that in order to identify and clarify the concept of privacy the first step involves the definition of human rights (KACND 2010a, p. 3); however this does not mean imposing a uniform identity in the community, but rather accepting diversity and avoiding any attempt to export of radical or extremist ideology.

Session II: Citizenship and the cultural discourse in Saudi Arabia

The participants argued that Saudi cultural discourse confuses the concept of citizenship with a spatial concept.⁷³ The forum also noted that Saudi Arabia suffers from a conflict of interests between elites related to classification, marginalisation and lack of freedom of expression and, whilst it may be true that the majority of Saudis remain silent about these issues, this silence does not necessarily indicate consent (KACND 2010a, p. 4).

Citizenship should begin at home and, according to the participants, the idea of single citizenship in Saudi Arabia emerged with the creation of the modern state. The meeting agreed that citizenship is an integrated system based on individual rights and duties that imply individual rights vis-à-vis state duties, i.e., satisfy individual needs whilst enhancing a national loyalty. Although the concept of citizenship is not always clear cut, the forum pointed out that citizenship includes love of the homeland, national heritage and geography. It was also argued that citizenship is about an individual’s relationship with the state and respect for order and public property. It is also related to the citizen himself and other citizens and the greater world, but love of the homeland is at the core of citizenship. In addition, the participants stressed that citizenship is the relationship between an individual and policy, whereas nationalism is between the individual and the land. Citizenship is both a private and state matter according to the forum, but can be deepened by involving the individual in public affairs through civil society institutions. However, the delegates commented that tribal affiliation should not be a prerequisite for Saudi citizenship even though socio-cultural and religious discourse linked to tribalism has contributed to a proper understanding of citizenship. The delegates defined the prevailing concept of citizenship as political loyalty,

⁷³ Unfortunately, the documentation does not make a distinction between passport citizenship (*jinsiyya*) and democratic citizenship (*muwatana*).

belonging to the community as well as a sense of citizenship dependent on economic, physical and intellectual security. According to the forum, citizens, civil rights and institutions have a role in decision-making through state-society dialogue, but in the Kingdom this process is missing. Above all, the participants affirmed that true citizenship comes from faith in Allah, Islam and respect for others. The forum also agreed that as there is no significant relationship between Saudi citizens and the cultural discourse; there is a lack of discussion on religious, cultural and socio-political issues (KACND 2010a, pp. 4—5). With regard to youth, the delegates said that cultural openness needs to be monitored so that citizenship is not equated with unregulated freedoms that could lead to chaos (Arabic: *fitna*), and true citizenship could be enhanced by compulsory military service after high school. It was argued that citizenship should celebrate multiculturalism and diversity, and aspects of ideological differences need to be relinquished in order to establish true citizenship. The Ministries of Islamic Affairs and Information should pay more attention to the needs of Saudi youth, according to the forum, plus it is the media's responsibility to promote good citizenship (KACND 2010a).

The meeting agreed that any elite cultural discourse must take into account new trends, e.g., Facebook, in order to interact with Saudi youth, and should also encourage community partnerships to promote national unity. It was argued that deficiencies in the educational curriculum can be directly related to deficiencies in sense of citizenship. In addition, the delegates pointed out that extremist thinking has been allowed to hide behind the curriculum and this has damaged the concept of citizenship at a national level. In the forum's opinion, Saudi citizenship is seriously damaged by corruption in state institutions and the problematic issue of women's rights. There is also a lack of discourse on national development, and the lack of participation in state-society dialogue represents a threat to the nation. Therefore, the participants argued that it would be beneficial to put forward proposals rather than simply stating views and these proposals should be published and made available to society. Finally, the forum affirmed that citizens deserve dignity, equality and freedom.

Session III: Globalization and Saudi society and the cultural discourse in Saudi Arabia

Although globalisation creates valuable opportunities, the participants felt that misconceptions make society fearful of its influence. The forum pointed out that Saudi

society's attitude to globalisation can be divided into three categories: moderate acceptance, openness and rejection — rejection is often categorised by fear and is linked to anti-orientalism and anti-colonialism. Nonetheless, it was agreed that globalisation should not be seen as a new phenomenon as the Arab world's assimilation of Ancient Greek culture can be understood as globalisation as well. Therefore, the forum maintained that globalisation needs to be examined carefully and at all levels and the role of an Islamic nation must not be limited to absorption alone as the problem is not globalisation per se, but rather how Saudi society interacts with it (KACND 2010a, pp. 8—9). Hence, according to the delegates, the main challenge for Saudi society is the effect of globalisation on education and the media, particularly as both are now subject to the requirements of modern technology. They argued that it is pointless and illogical to resist globalisation so it must be dealt with positively and with clarity in order to strengthen Saudi values and protect national identity, in particular in relation to youth. Thus, in their opinion, young people need to find alternatives that are able to stem the tide of globalisation, in particular in its American form. The participants agreed that youth can do so in an Islamic context and this can be achieved by establishing family and youth programmes, youth clubs, community service and voluntary associations.

The forum believed that when examining globalisation, the danger is to treat disparate cultures as though they are one. For example, according to the participants western globalisation often does not take into account religious sensibilities such as belief in the Hereafter. It was argued that thinking about globalisation in a positive way enables a positive Saudi voice to be heard internationally. The meeting also noted that the proliferation of English in education and the media, often to the detriment of Arabic, is a result of globalisation, thus, negative globalisation can be diluted by teaching Arabic and by cherishing the language. The delegates noted that it is important to remember that Islam is global, even though Islam is not equated with globalisation, and that it is possible to counter globalisation through the 'Arabisation' of science and knowledge. The forum agreed that the effects of globalisation need to be studied in order to immunise youth against its worst aspects.

The participants were concerned about the globalisation of the Arab world, but here they probably meant westernisation, and felt that the Muslim world had already been able to communicate a Muslim-centric message effectively. They argued that globalisation is the rule of a dominant culture over subjugated peoples, i.e., cultural

colonialism which is more dangerous than economic globalisation, and voiced concerns that this could turn the Kingdom into a consumer society and adversely alter Saudi identity. Conversely, the forum noted that the growing popularity of the veil in the West is also an example of globalisation. In addition, the delegates said that King Abdullah's Interfaith Dialogue is a good example of tolerant Saudi thought being spread by globalisation, therefore, positive globalisation must rely on mutual understanding and the sharing of common interests.⁷⁴

Session IV: The future of cultural discourse in Saudi Arabia: privacy, citizenship and globalization

The participants emphasised the role that intellectuals can play in guiding society and understanding the effects of tribalism and globalisation. It was argued that Saudi cultural discourse should improve its use of new technology and recruit media and sports stars in help spread its message and bridge the generation gap between the intellectual elite and youth. In addition, the delegates believed that there was a need for logical solutions based in reality as opposed to extended theoretical debate. It was noted that citizen journalism will be part of a new Saudi cultural discourse and this can be seen on the Internet where more freedom of expression exists than in the tradition print media. Saudi domestic political decision-making can be influenced positively by increased freedom of speech and expression, and this can be achieved under the umbrella of KACND (2010a).

The participants agreed that Saudi cultural discourse should be defined by a new agreed code and there should be a transfer of expertise from KACND to the Center for Strategic Studies, and the Ministries of Education, Culture and Civil Service should be responsible for the development of Saudi cultural discourse (KACND 2010a, p. 15). The forum decided that there was a need for a collective effort and for independent cultural institutions and cultural empowerment. They also agreed that cultural discourse must address the issue of female marginalisation and male dominance. It was hoped that all of these should be implemented by KACND as in the past government institutions failed in this respect.

⁷⁴ Refer to KACND, 2010d. *The Initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, for Inter-Religious and Inter-Cultural Dialogue: Echoes and Attitudes*. Riyadh: King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue.

Final Statements and Comment

The issue of citizenship was clarified in line with an Islamic two-tier concept of citizenship, i.e., regional and world (See, KACND 2009j, p. 3), and identity, openness and globalisation were also successfully discussed at the Cultural Discourse.⁷⁵ It has been suggested that, as a result of the Riyadh forum, more important socio-cultural issues are now being discussed and the participants are becoming more accustomed to dialogue and most significantly, finding consensus and agreeing to disagree.⁷⁶ Indeed, according to some observers, Sheikh Issa Al Ghaith, a known conservative, gave a statement that many liberal participants supported (much to the liberals surprise).⁷⁷ However, a participant noted that there was too much emphasis on the first two issues despite the fact that they are inter-connected and the different parties and participants were not given enough focus or direction from the organisers.⁷⁸

During the Cultural Discourse all groups discussed ‘Saudi particularity’ with relation to the dominant ideology, despite the fact the more conservative participants stated that this Saudi particularity must not be changed; Saudi particularity, or exceptionalism, needs to remain ‘unique’ notwithstanding the discussions on the influence that globalisation may be having on identity and citizenship issues. However, during the meeting the consensus appears to be ‘we are all Saudis but express our Saudi identity in different ways’.⁷⁹

The Third Cultural Discourse: Tribalism, Regionalism and Intellectual Categorisation: Their Influence on National Unity

At the third Cultural Discourse held in Jeddah 28–9 December 2010 the 70 participants discussed the issues of tribalism, Saudi regionalism and intellectual classification with regard to their influence on national unity (KACND 2010e, pp. 1—16). KACND Deputy Secretary General acknowledged the sensitivity of the topics, but warned of the dangers to society, including increased ‘factionalism and fragmentation’ if the issues were not discussed openly (Asharq Alawsat 2010, p.1). The participants were asked to consider to what extent these issues are deep-rooted in Saudi society as well as how society views and understands these issues. The forum also discussed the impact of

⁷⁵ Interview by author with Subject 54, director KACND Women’s Centre (Riyadh: 21.06.10).

⁷⁶ Interview by author with Faisal Al Mu’ammam, Secretary-General KACND (Riyadh: 11.04.10).

⁷⁷ Interview by author with Subject 50, KACND (Riyadh: 14.06.10).

⁷⁸ Interview by author with Subject 9, and brother (Qatif: 10.07.10).

⁷⁹ Ibid.

these issues on society, in particular potential conflict between personal loyalties and the future of the Kingdom in a diverse society tribal society such as Saudi Arabia (Afit 2010a, p. 1). The two-day meeting was divided into three sessions.

Session I: Tribalism and its Impact on National Unity

The participants contended that social cohesion constitutes a strategic factor in strengthening national unity and they agreed that one way of achieving this is by encouraging civil society institutions to promote the interests of citizens in place of traditional tribal methods as the modern state is based on civil society institutions (KACND 2010f). According to Article 13 (26) of the Saudi system of government, human rights are framed by Islamic law and not by tribal affiliation. The meeting maintained that methods to combat the negative aspects of tribalism are still at a theoretical stage although the notion of dissolving tribal identity contributes to the strengthening of the state as does the unifying laws related to coexistence, thus, facilitating the transition from a tribal stage to a national stage. The participants highlighted problems related to administrative favouritism and cited this as a motive for tribal intolerance in that certain tribes are favoured over others. They decided that tribal identity is a social phenomenon equivalent to the concept of the family, but closer ties to the nuclear family are one of the best ways to decrease tribalism. In addition, in their view the family has an important role in nurturing the individual and encouraging the individual to be self-reliant and for this reason the family should interact with the community to either modify or maintain the existing social order. They decided that conflict between tribal interests and national interests can be avoided if an individual's point of reference is the nuclear family rather than the tribe.

The participants believed that tribalism impacts negatively on women as it delays and blocks marriages to non-tribal members, indeed, they argued that this issue should be put to a referendum.⁸⁰ It was also their opinion that satellite channels often promote tribal interests and / or severe tribal bias to the detriment of the individual's rights and the deepening of tribalism through media sources should be discouraged as, at times, the media has been guilty of heightening intolerance and maximising differences between individuals and groups.⁸¹ In addition, the forum noted that the lexis of the tribe needs to be examined and inappropriate slogans and vocabulary removed. In fact, the

⁸⁰ The forum did not elaborate on how or when a referendum could be conducted.

⁸¹ This applies to both traditional media and Internet websites.

participants asserted that government ministers in neighbouring Gulf States should ban satellite channels that can be picked up in the Kingdom, which incite tribal intolerance. Furthermore, the media should be responsible for the development and deepening of religious and socio-cultural concepts in society.⁸²

According to the participants, promoting citizenship is the state's duty. In addition, the size and diversity of the Kingdom must be acknowledged so that the state can unite disparate communities and warn against the spread of racist tribal ideology. They strongly believe that discrimination based on tribal identity in both the private and public sectors must be abolished and an association of Islamic and national counter-intolerance established. Furthermore, the participants stated that transparency and accountability must be established in all institutions to achieve the goal of fostering national unity and strengthen the on-going dialogue process. They recommended that special researchers should be employed to examine the role of tribalism in Saudi society and Islam, and the historical role that the tribes played in the unification of the Kingdom should be emphasised. Finally, the forum emphasised highlighting the positive role that tribal identity can play in society.

Session II: Regionalism and its Impact on National Unity

The participants affirmed that the Saudi state is based on religious principles and not regional or tribal ones, and whilst it is natural for an individual to identify with either sect or tribe, the individual should not be allowed to become fanatical about this exclusive identity; for this reason, the concept of the true religion should be promoted (KACND 2010f). The forum highlighted the fact that diversity and regional differences contribute to the wealth of the nation both socially and culturally, therefore discrimination in all forms needs to be eliminated as national unity is not simply desirable, but rather a matter of survival. It was also noted that regionalism and tribalism should not be interpreted as dangerous concepts, but rather the loyalty factor within each can be transferred to loyalty to the homeland; this loyalty to national unity is then handed down from generation to generation. The participants noted that pride in tribal or regional allegiance can also be transferred to national allegiance so that regional and tribal affiliations can be strengthened in order to consolidate national security and border protection. That said, they acknowledged that pride in a region can

⁸² It was also agreed that the war on terror has exacerbated tribalism.

encourage positive regional competition, hence, finding the correct balance for regional development promotes real citizenship. However, it was the forum's opinion that any negative aspects of regionalism are not as serious as those of tribalism.

The participants pointed out that a concentration of services in one specific area, and a monopoly of officials from one region or tribe exacerbates regionalism and is detrimental to national cohesion. It also means that opportunities in terms of employment and services are unequal. In addition, they noted that there is a danger that high-placed state officials exploit their positions by favouring their own regions and / or districts so regional employment policies must be free from discrimination. According to the forum, not providing the basic requirements for a dignified life based on regional discrimination damages the national vision and for this reason development plans should consider regional specificity, priorities and requirements. However, the participants stressed that regional heritage and culture must be preserved so that they can contribute to the diversity of national culture. The forum decided that a national committee that deals with regional and sectarian discrimination should be established and legislation passed to combat racism and promote societal recognition of religious pluralism and equal rights. The forum also maintained that sectarian and ethnic discrimination should be criminalised, community awareness regarding these issues increased, and individuals should be encouraged to state their views regarding taboo issues. The participants suggested that it would be constructive to convene meetings where tribal and regional leaders can debate important issues and promote their own culture.

The forum looked at how other countries deal with regional and sectarian problems as well as how they were able to achieve national unity and overcome strife. The participants discussed ways and methods used by other nations which might benefit the Kingdom and believe Saudi leaders should also draw on the lessons of the past as at that time regionalism was considered less problematic. Regarding education, it was decided that a review of the national curriculum is necessary so as to increase its effectiveness and foster notions of national unity amongst youth. At the same time, the participants pointed out that regional culture and identity can be framed within national identity and the curriculum should state that tribal and / or regional identity does not necessarily contradict national cohesion.

Session III: Intellectual Categorisation and its Impact on National Unity

According to the participants, discrimination and intellectual classification are innate human traits and can be found everywhere including in the contemporary media. Hence, in their opinion it is necessary to promote a culture of acceptance with regard to intellectual pluralism, religious edicts as well as tribal norms and laws (KACND 2010f). The meeting considered that the objectives and sources of cultural pluralism need to be understood in order to avoid incorrect classifications. It was suggested that diversity and intellectual differences should be blended towards the creation of new trends so as to avoid conflict between current intellectual trends and ensure media freedom without prejudicing Shariah law.

The participants asserted that religion forms the basis of Saudi national identity, but a distinction should be made between religious doctrines and modern intellectual thought. The participants affirmed that Islam is understood to constitute the true measurement with regard to religious and intellectual human classification in the Kingdom and subsequently discussed whether religious classification of the individual is permissible and / or acceptable, e.g., Muslim and non-Muslim, believer and infidel, unbeliever and idolater. The meeting debated whether it is permissible and / or acceptable to deny people their religious identity and whether this denial is a result of ignorance of the origins of religious beliefs coupled with arrogance and feelings of superiority. The forum argued that criticism of religious discourse should not be equated with criticism of religion; however, religiosity can be confused with socio-cultural habits and norms. It was agreed that for this reason fanaticism may be a product of these accumulated norms, therefore, religious discourse in society related to socio-cultural issues needs to be monitored. The participants stated that it was also important to recognise the language of new forms of knowledge and technology but these should be interpreted with reference to Islam. For this reason, it was decided that scholars and scientists should be encouraged to study and revise ideas that are incompatible to religion, but religion should not infringe on culture and vice-versa. It was agreed that international conventions on human rights should be respected but understood in the context of Islam. Nonetheless, the forum stressed that condoning religious conflict by hiding it behind the acceptance of diversity and intellectual pluralism is dangerous. In the opinion of the participants solutions must be found to narrow the gap between religious thought and liberal thought, even radical liberal thought, as conflict between the two

weakens the community and hampers societal and national progress. The forum stated that the media can assist by influencing intellectual thought in Friday sermons and conveying these messages to society, however, actions in violation of the constitution of the state infringe on the policies of the state and according to the participants internal security is paramount to society.

It was maintained that intellectual pluralism does not exist in Saudi society, but the media can play an important role in promoting the positive aspects of pluralism and intellectual, tribal and sectarian diversity. In addition, the participants noted that educational institutions and literary clubs can influence greater societal acceptance of intellectual thought and literary and cultural clubs should encourage debate and welcome all societal sectors. Finally, it was recognised that young people are being exposed to a plethora of new concepts and ideas, but do not possess the critical thinking skills to evaluate them effectively, therefore, societal collaboration and cohesion are necessary in order to assist young Saudis in comprehending new concepts and ideas. On a more critical note, the forum pointed out that cultural institutions and the names of those who represent the Kingdom internationally remain unchanged despite many instances of incompetence. In addition, the participants commented on the absence of evaluation and accountability in Saudi institutions and how this factor weakens those institutions.

During the opening session Saudi writer Essam Yamani criticised websites and blogs that promote racism and hatred against certain Saudi constituencies. He stated that racist comments used to describe immigrants coming to the Arabian Peninsula by sea (Arabic: *tarsh bahar*) and *hajj* leftovers (Arabic: *baqaya hujjaj*), a phrase used to describe grandchildren of Muslim pilgrims who performed *hajj* and never returned home, 'would only disrupt national unity' (Al Shareef 2010, p. 1). In their final statement the participants called for the abolition of all inherited forms of racist discourse and discrimination. Nonetheless, the forum questioned whether these issues should be addressed by institutions, society or individuals although *majlis al-shura* member Muhammad Rida Nasrallah said that the Shura council had already recommended establishing private societies to eliminate racist affiliations (*ibid*).

Reaction and Comment

In general, the debate surrounding the Jeddah Cultural discourse was positive, but some individuals highlighted the paradox of holding a forum on tribalism because in effect it was putting the tribes on trial, as at the same time the state frequently stages festivals that celebrate and promote tribalism. One of the participants, Abdulmohsim Al Qahtani, President of the Jeddah Literary Club, commented that it required courage to address these issues due to their sensitivity with regard to pride in tribal, regional and sectarian identity (SUSRIS 2010b, p 1). However, some of the participants warned that an increasing tribal role could threaten national unity (Al Hakim 2010, p. 1) and emphasised the need to promote effective citizenship and strengthen civil society institutions in order to reduce tribal influences (Abdullah and Al Ruwais 2010, p. 1). The state uses the idea of the tribe for political motives and, according to a member of ACPRA, Prince Mishaal bin Abdulaziz, the head of the Allegiance Commission, has promoted tribalism for at least five years and the state provides high social status to the tribal leaders, ‘on the one hand they are discussing the problems created by tribalism whilst on the other they are feeding it’.⁸³ Hence, he suggests either the discussion surrounding these issues may not be serious or certain leaders are trying to disturb the waters on their own terms; in other words, within the regime some individuals are pro societal reform whereas others are trying to pull back from any reform initiatives. A senior KACND official believes there also needs to be a clear definition of what tribalism actually means so that this issue can be addressed correctly because he believes a conflict of interests exists between the individual, the tribe and the state.⁸⁴ He cites an example from the Jeddah meeting when one participant mentioned how a tribe paid SAR 20 million blood money to another tribe. The KACND official argues that if this type of practice persists, the loyalty of the individual will naturally lie with the tribe and not the state.⁸⁵

At the forum a member of the Jeddah Literary Club advocated a more open ideological mindset following deliberations about whether classifying people according to their

⁸³ Interview by author with Subject 41, ACPRA political activist (Riyadh: July 2010). He says that if the tribes were free they would be able to operate in the same way as a non-governmental organisation (NGO). See ACPRA, 2009. Declaration for Establishing the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association. ACPRA [online]. Available at: <http://www.humriht-civsoca.org/news.php?action=show&id=90>

⁸⁴ Interview by author with Subject 40, KACND public relations manager (Riyadh: January 2011). He remarks that the forum also discussed the issue of the ‘left behind’ that involves many individuals whose families originated from other countries, but who feel discriminated against and part of a ‘second grade tier’ in the Saudi system.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

ideological perspectives is inappropriate and if it affects their image in society (MEMRI 2010c, p. 1). Intellectual categorization is a Salafi and religious idea and Saudi regionalism and tribalism are mainly media trends according to a Shia political activist. Hence, it is argued that the Jeddah Cultural Discourse was an attempt by KACND to be ‘topical and fashionable’ because society is fed up with the glorification of tribalism and this meeting provided an opportunity to initiate a positive discourse in the media and society.⁸⁶ Therefore, KACND may come out against tribalism and regionalism, but in the past the institution was also guilty of legitimising problems related to these issues.⁸⁷

Reaction to the Cultural Discourse

The establishment of the Cultural Discourse in 2009 and the decision to hold two additional forums in relatively quick succession during the following year appears to suggest that KACND was willing to respond to criticism that it was no longer addressing issues deemed important to Saudi society and to counter increased apathy that had greeted its most recent service-related National Dialogue Meetings. This development could also be interpreted as attempt to reinvigorate the dialogue process by including both individuals and constituencies absent from the dialogue process since the shift from ideology-related debate to service-related forums. In consequence, the establishment of the Cultural Discourse marked a return by KACND to ideologically orientated themes and discussions that have resonated with Saudi society once again.

A liberal journalist noted, in discussion with the author at an informal evening gathering in Riyadh (Arabic: *diwaniya*) in January 2011, ‘Al Mu`ammar refused to discuss intellectual classification at the Al-Ahsa Cultural Discourse in 2009, but only a year later KACND is discussing this issue at another formal meeting’. Some individuals argue that KACND’s discussion of tribalism, regionalism and intellectual classification was a direct response to the media debate surrounding these issues.⁸⁸ They suggest the media is responsible for prompting KACND and society to recognise and discuss these issues — what the participants interviewed at the Riyadh *diwaniya* already mentioned term ‘movement as ideas’. In other words, because the media admitted that intellectual

⁸⁶ Interview by author with Subject 63, political activist and human rights activist (Qatif: 18.01.11). He says it could encourage debate about tribalism, especially as Prince Misha’al publicly recognised that the exaggeration of tribalism has become a socio-cultural problem.

⁸⁷ Interview by author with Subject 37, Shia cleric and brother (Dammam: 10.07.10).

⁸⁸ Interview by author with Subject 20, lawyer and journalist and ten members of his *diwaniya* (Riyadh: January 2011).

classification was a problem, this prompted KACND to stop ignoring the issue and to accept the it, despite the fact that ‘the people in charge of KACND are technocrats and care only about their salaries; they don’t have a vision so everything is cosmetic’ and therefore, regarding the future of ideology-related discourse it is necessary to separate ‘people who can see from those who cannot’ as there is a need for real seminars discussing real issues.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the author’s *diwaniya* interview group maintained that the Cultural Discourse can be effective because ‘it is a side way around the ideas’ and is able to distance itself from the dominant ideology and this, in their opinion, is the real objective of the forum. Thus, it is better to have the Cultural Discourse happening as ‘a side issue’ because it means that the discussions are still progressing and according to them the main idea is not to stop the dialogue. In addition, the Cultural Discourse involves individuals from many constituencies and, in the group’s opinion, society is asking for this to happen more often. Furthermore, the Cultural Discourse is significant because it represents the first formal opportunity to discuss these issues and simply raising these issues is significant in itself. This new forum has allowed individuals to say publicly ‘I am a liberal’ and this is a first for this type of forum, so a liberal journalist concedes that although it is not a big achievement he believes it is a starting point.⁹⁰ A noted writer, member of the *majlis al-shura* and KACND critic contends that whilst the Cultural Discourse could be the institution’s most effective initiative, he worries that ultimately the forum will not be able to break free from the official parameters imposed on it.⁹¹ Indeed, KSU Professor Marzouk Tenbak remarked that despite the best efforts of KACND, including the Jeddah Cultural Discourse, ‘we do not find that the results equal the effort’ (Al-Arabiya 2010, p. 1).

For the foreseeable future it appears the Cultural Discourse will remain an ‘elite discourse’, but the meetings will be evaluated on a regular basis to judge whether expansion and greater societal inclusion is appropriate.⁹² However, in the opinion of a KACND official, the Jeddah meeting should have included all societal constituencies as the issues discussed ‘touch everyone’.⁹³

⁸⁹ In addition, they say other formal and prestigious institutions are starting to use the same lexis as KACND, e.g., the media now refers to what used to be called ‘dissident ideas’ as opinion.

⁹⁰ Interview by author with Subject 20, lawyer and journalist and ten members of his *diwaniya* (Riyadh: January 2011).

⁹¹ Interview by author with Subject 69, writer and *majlis al-shura* member (Riyadh: June 2010).

⁹² Interview by author with Subject 40, KACND public relations manager (Riyadh: January 2011).

⁹³ Some feel that the range of Jeddah participants were representative of Saudi society; they ‘were a good group’.

KACND AND SECTARIANISM: THE ROLE AND PERSPECTIVES OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

Since the beginning of his reign, King Abdullah has lessened the marginalisation of the Shia population by including individuals such as Shaikh Hassan Al Saffar in the National Dialogue process and periodically ordering the release of Shia political detainees. However, in 2011 the relationship between religious minorities and the state, in particular the Shia, appeared to have deteriorated. According to Jafar Al Shayeb, former chairman of Qatif Municipal Council, the government used to deal with the Shia as a political question, but now it is dealt with as a security issue so there is no political opening (GSN 2011, pp. 1—7). Indeed, up until the unrest in Madinah in February 2009, and more recently the advent of the Arab Spring, many Shia individuals believed that the situation vis-à-vis the Shia community and the government had improved even though some felt that this was due to pressure from the West.⁹⁴ In contrast, the Ismaili individuals interviewed for this research in Najran Province in 2010 held far more pessimistic views with regard to state-society discourse, government accountability and sectarian problems.

Amongst various contentious issues raised by religious minorities in interviews and focus group discussions for this research were: allegiance to the state, Wahhabiya, educational reform and viable honest state-society discussions. For example, many individuals said that it is possible to show allegiance to the Saudi nation state, and even to the ruling family, but it is not necessary to pay allegiance to a Wahhabi doctrine as its legitimacy is not recognised by many Saudis.⁹⁵ Indeed, the Shia community has become used to living with the Wahhabi doctrine taught in schools and parents have long told their children to ignore it and ‘resist state-dogma’ (Yamani 2009, p. 2). Education is the key issue in the fight against sectarianism, especially at elementary and high school levels, and sectarianism is recognised by many Saudi constituencies, not just the Shia, as the main obstacle to reform.⁹⁶ Opinion is divided with regard to the effectiveness of the National Dialogue process in respect of these educational issues although the consensus appears to be that the dialogue process is better than none at all. A focus group organised for this study in Eastern Province threw up a number of interesting

⁹⁴ Focus group discussion with Subjects 47, 56 and 7 Shia Activists (Qatif: 09.04.10). These individuals wondered what would happen to discriminated minorities in the Kingdom if this pressure or focus were to stop.

⁹⁵ Various interviews by author with multiple subjects (Saudi Arabia: 2009—11).

⁹⁶ Interview by author with Subject 29, political activist (Riyadh and Qatif: 29.03.10 / 08.04.10).

perspectives to illustrate this point. In the past due to the size of the Kingdom there were no channels available to discuss regional or sectarian issues. However, the National Dialogue process and increased openness in the Saudi media have allowed people to understand that the Saudi state is not ‘one culture only’ and for the first time people see themselves as real, i.e., they were ‘able to discover themselves’ on the national stage as a direct, or indirect, result of the National Dialogue process.⁹⁷ According to this group, the National Dialogue was originally understood as a dialogue between religious groups and not a dialogue amongst citizens. They argue that societal demands primarily come from citizens and not religious groups and yet KACND has often dealt with citizens solely on religious grounds as opposed to socio-political and / or socio-cultural ones. Hence, socio-political reform should involve people who are aware of day-to-day requirements and not just traditional norms and values. In addition, the group maintains that there is a gap between non-state elites and the government regarding the parameters of reform as many Saudis expected the National Dialogue process to constitute part of a socio-political reform process⁹⁸ although as Wurm points out the Al Sa`ud is less inclined to dialogue when reform demands go beyond the ruling family’s ideas (Wurm 2008b p. 22). Minority religious leaders argue that whilst there are many pressing issues in Saudi Arabia, the most important is sectarianism.⁹⁹ Another focus group organised for this study hosted by the author in Riyadh in January 2011 made clear that, although there is an awareness of other sects within Saudi society, sectarian issues are only dealt with vaguely by KACND dialogue training because KACND does not state clearly that there are different societal sects and ideologies. One of the participants commented: ‘sectarianism is only a general idea and the new goals of the dialogue training appear to constitute a safety net for bureaucratic reasons only’.¹⁰⁰

The government should use the National Dialogue process to promote Islamic virtues and Saudi leadership amongst Muslim countries in order to ensure that all Muslims are treated fairly and in the same manner as Saudis during *hajj* and *umrah*. It is argued that, as the Kingdom is unique amongst Muslim nations, the government should ensure that Saudi Arabia returns to the real Islam and not the doctrine represented by either state Wahhabism or ‘bin Ladenism’. This is because people pay the price for extremist

⁹⁷ Focus group discussion with Subjects 47, 56 and 7 Shia Activists (Qatif: 09.04.10).

⁹⁸ Interview by author with Subject 63, Shia writer and political activist (Qatif: 09.04.10).

⁹⁹ Interviews by author with 43, Shia political and religious leader (08.04.10); Subject 9 (Qatif: 10.07.10).

¹⁰⁰ Focus group discussion with author including Subjects 3, 20, 48, and 84 (Riyadh: 01.07.10).

actions and sectarian conflict and not the government.¹⁰¹ Some argue that the National Dialogue process is of no real consequence, but at the same time say that the meetings are important in themselves and for this reason, it is necessary to return to the principle behind the National Dialogue process in order to bridge the gap between the government and minority sects.¹⁰² KACND should answer the question of national diversity and it is argued that the king and government recognise this problem, but the king's beliefs should not control the entire community although it is his right to state his opinion, but others have rights as well.¹⁰³ Certainly, it is not expected that individuals will agree with everyone, or vice-versa and the government should adopt this attitude so as to treat everyone fairly. The real problem is that the government needs to recognise individual rights without duress and the National Dialogue should deal with specific issues. For example, at the Fifth National Meeting, 'Us and the Other', the question should have been how to qualify 'us' rather than the 'other' because the idea should have been 'I will not neglect you and you will not neglect me', i.e., this must be understood as a mutual process.

National Dialogue and the Shia

The Saudi Shia comprises approximately 10 to 15 per cent of the Saudi population, around two million people, and comprises 75 per cent of the population in the oil-producing Eastern Province.¹⁰⁴ The concentration of Saudi Shia in and around the oil-fields remains a source of concern for the Al Sa`ud regime (Salameh and Steir 1980, p. 21). Although Saudis from all parts of the Kingdom have moved to the Eastern Province, resulting in the Shia losing their demographic preponderance, Menoret argues that whilst the Sunni and Shia populations do not really mix, they do share the same ruling circles, the same media and universities (2003, p. 179). Routinely branded as heretical by the Wahhabi establishment, the Shia have been denied freedom of religious expression, excluded from public life and discriminated against in the socio-political and economic fields. Nasr contends that this explains why there no recognised Saudi Shia elite exists, leading to the absence of senior Shia officers in the armed forces and

¹⁰¹ Interview by author with Subject 37, Shia cleric (Dammam: 10.07.10).

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ The Shia population is mainly concentrated around the oasis towns of Qatif and Al-Ahsa. There is also a minority Shia population in Asir, Riyadh, Makkah and Madinah.

security services, not to mention in the higher echelons of government (2006, p. 236—7).¹⁰⁵

The Shia unrest in Madinah in the spring of 2009 and the more recent demonstrations throughout 2011 in the Eastern Province were reminiscent of the disturbances in the Kingdom in the late 1970s. In November 1979, the SANG were called in to quell a Shia rebellion in Qatif when at least seventeen were killed. Jones dispels the notion that the rebellion was primarily a response to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, but rather, was more directly linked to a combination of ideology and continuing neglect and marginalisation experienced by the Saudi Shia at the hands of the state (2006, p. 214). The violence was of particular concern to the government, coming as it did in the same period as the seizing of the Grand Mosque in Makkah by Juhayman Al Otaibi and his followers, particularly as dissent and opposition crossed religious lines to encompass Islamist and nationalist leftist groupings¹⁰⁶ in the Qatif and Al-Ahsa regions.¹⁰⁷ Then, as now, the state operated a policy of marginalisation, excluding certain societal segments from the distribution of rents, whilst simultaneously squandering vast wealth on personal and unnecessary military expenditure. Jones argues that the Al Sa`ud have sought to develop the Kingdom through modernisation whilst simultaneously marginalising adversaries from the process, thus inadvertently creating the structural conditions for politicisation and the political lexicon by which these adversaries expressed their frustration. Jones also notes that then, as now, the Al Sa`ud raised expectations by engaging in a public discourse regarding the modernisation of the Kingdom, ‘whereas in reality it marginalised many of the benefits, creating a powerful situation in which stark contrasts divided the winners and losers’ (2006, p. 214).

Following the fall of Saddam Hussein’s Sunni regime in Iraq, an emboldened Saudi Shia population called for the end of discrimination and a halt to attacks from the Wahhabi *‘ulama*. As Nasr notes, the Shia did not wish to secede from the Kingdom, but they wished for a seat at the table (2006, p. 238). However, a statement by Shaikh Nimr

¹⁰⁵ In 2005, two additional Shia members were appointed to the *majlis al-shura*, bringing the total to a paltry four out of the one hundred and fifty delegates. In 2012 according to Hassan Al Saffar, there are five Shia members from Qatif and Al-Ahsa in the *majlis al-shura* and one Ismaili. However, currently the Shia population of Madinah does not seem to be represented.

¹⁰⁶ The Organisation of the Islamic Revolution, Communist Party of Saudi Arabia, Union of Democratic Youth, Worker’s Committee, League of Democratic Women, League of Students in Saudi Arabia, Assembly of Saudi Citizens.

¹⁰⁷ The traditional Arabian Peninsula place names were replaced by the Al Sa`ud regime after the formation of modern-day Saudi Arabia. Qatif and the Al-Ahsa oasis are now incorporated in the Eastern Province, although this term is used primarily for bureaucratic purposes by the majority of Saudi citizens.

Al Nimr¹⁰⁸ in March 2009, ‘our dignity is more precious than the unity of this land’, was considered a challenge to the territorial integrity of the Kingdom by Saudi authorities and of a Shia desire to secede (Human Rights Watch 2010, p. 30). As if to emphasise their exclusion from the Saudi decision-making process, a group of 450 Shia notables¹⁰⁹ compiled a four page document entitled *Partners in the Nation* which was presented to Crown Prince Abdullah asking to be recognised as Saudi citizens and allowed freedom of religious expression. Abdullah met with eighteen of the signatories and expressed sympathy with their problems, promising that a national dialogue would be held that would include representatives from all the Kingdom’s religious sects (Al-Shayeb 2005, p. 1). Three months after Crown Prince Abdullah received the Shia petition he invited 35 individuals from different religious backgrounds to a meeting in Riyadh where the issue of fundamentalism and its effects was discussed.

The ‘Shia issue’ first became a national issue as a result of the National Dialogue process, i.e., sectarian discrimination was discussed for the first time as a national issue.¹¹⁰ Hence, the dialogue process provided the first opportunity for Saudis to recognise ‘themselves’ as one nation without having to worry about the government’s opinion because a ‘mutual understanding was reached which facilitated an acceptance of each other as we are’.¹¹¹ For this reason, many in the Shia community saw the National Dialogue as an opportunity to interact with other Saudi constituencies despite the known limitations of the official forums and process.¹¹² In 2010, one activist noted that being openly Shia had become less problematic since 2003.¹¹³ However, many individuals recognise that the dominant group is often reluctant to discuss important sectarian issues and they are also aware that the future of the National Dialogue is dependent on a stable political environment; however, they continue to wonder whether overt political issues can ever be discussed openly, and whether a debate on sectarian issues would be possible at all without the National Dialogue.¹¹⁴ Shia leader Shaikh

¹⁰⁸ Following this sermon, Al Nimr went into hiding, but called again for political reform in February 2011. Again in 2011, Al Nimr challenged the authorities by declaring that ‘we are loyal to Allah and not to Saudi Arabia and its royal family’ (MEMRI 2011, p. 1).

¹⁰⁹ The petition signatories were of both sexes and included business people and intellectuals.

¹¹⁰ Interview by author with Subject 63, Shia writer and political activist (Qatif: 09.04.10).

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² According to KSU lecturer Subject 51, within the Shia community it is necessary to distinguish between the traditional land owning class and the peasants, i.e., within a traditional feudal society.

¹¹³ Interview by author with Subject 29, political activist (Riyadh and Qatif: 29.03.10 / 08.04.10). At that time, he said that Shia websites were not blocked and photographs and articles concerning Saudi Shia regularly appeared in national newspapers.

¹¹⁴ Interview by author with Subject 77, Shia Islamic writer and activist (Qatif: 08.04.10).

Hassan Al Saffar participated in the first two National Meetings and this was seen ‘as an implicit recognition of the Shia as a community that needed to be integrated and respected’ although some believed that his participation simply ‘reinforced the Saudi narrative’ as the state integrated the leaders of the Shia opposition into the political process (Ibrahim 2006, pp. 216—32). Al Saffar maintains that the first three National Dialogue meetings were important and that the concept of national dialogue is an important step forward as it could lead to political participation (See Fandy 1999, p. 209), but the lack of implementation of methods and recommendations remain areas for concern.¹¹⁵ He emphasises the problem of the Sunni monopoly, especially in the areas of equal opportunities and employment, and he also believes that there is a lack of will amongst politicians to activate meaningful dialogue between sectarian groupings in the Kingdom.¹¹⁶ The lack of socio-cultural forums such as *thulatha* in Qatif¹¹⁷ is another problem along with the general lack of civil society in the Kingdom. In his opinion national unity can only work if there is political willingness, but currently there is hesitation and the cross-constituency dialogue situation remains very weak.¹¹⁸ Al Saffar argues that this hesitation and lack of willingness by the government to confront serious socio-political issues manifest themselves in different ways including the postponed municipal elections.¹¹⁹ In order to acknowledge the legitimacy of National Dialogue, the meaningful future direction of KACND must be clarified so that it is possible to see the effect of the National Dialogue on local issues.¹²⁰ Furthermore, Saudis must ask

¹¹⁵ Interview by author with Subject 43, Shaikh Hassan Al Saffar, Shia political and religious leader (Qatif: 08.04.10).

¹¹⁶ Ibid. In addition, an unofficial human rights activist told the author that he had been promised a position in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but because he is Shia his application was ignored even though senior Shia figures interceded on his behalf.

¹¹⁷ A socio-cultural forum held every Tuesday in Qatif, *muntada al-thulatha* is sponsored by lawyer and activist Jafar Al Shayeb. The forum started in 2001 and plays host to leading intellectuals from different ideological backgrounds. Papers discussed at the meetings have been distributed online and are widely read. Fouad Ibrahim noted that the salon acquired a significant reputation at national level as the majority of Saudi thinkers and political activists have attended the meetings (Ibrahim 2006, pp. 216—17). In fact, according to Shia activists in Qatif the Salafis consider these forums unofficial dialogue channels to represent a ‘successful intervention by the Shia’. Focus group discussion with author including Subjects 3, 20, 48, and 84 (Riyadh: 01.07.10).

¹¹⁸ At a 2011 meeting of the *thulatha* forum, Sunni political activists attended, but a Shia leader wondered ‘if we demand our rights, can we be united or will every sect and tribe go alone?’ (Amos 2011, p. 2)

¹¹⁹ At the time of speaking, the municipal elections were still postponed from 2009.

¹²⁰ A Qatif journalist notes that in January 2011, Issa Al Ghaith, hardline consultant to the judiciary, visited Shaikh Hassan Al Saffar and commented that reform / dialogue with regard to the Shia should be treated as a national issue and not a sectarian issue. In other words, individual groups should be treated within a Saudi national framework and not a sectarian one. For this reason, the journalist argues Shia should engage more in national issues such as women’s rights and the Jeddah floods. He thinks that individual groups such as the Shia must realise that, by identifying with national issues, their own identity will not be threatened rather both the Shia and Saudi national identity will be strengthened. But he asks to what extent the Saudi Shia constituency can change, or is willing to change its political identity and whether this would alter its relationship with other foreign Shia groups in countries such as Kuwait and

whether the National Dialogue equates freedom of speech and if the dialogue can change the current status quo.¹²¹

The National Dialogue process is not going forward and the pool of participants is not widening according to a Qatif focus group brought together for this study.¹²² This is due to a power struggle between the dominant constituency and minorities as the Salafis stand to lose both power and benefits if the National Dialogue succeeds. The non-implementation of the recommendations is seen as a failure as many of them could have proved beneficial had they been enacted into law. If these recommendations were reflected in state laws, they would assist different constituencies and sects in their daily lives.¹²³ Furthermore, the ability and desire of different constituencies to participate in the National Dialogue process differs greatly as certain constituencies were forced to take part in the National Dialogue even though particular groupings still refuse to accept the validity of other sects. This constitutes a ‘double-faced dialogue’ as dominant elites were unhappy to see the establishment of the National Dialogue and thus have worked to restrict the dialogue process from the outset.¹²⁴ Shia participants are willing and able to change their ideological stance, suggest the Qatif focus group, but the Salafis are unable, or reluctant, to do the same. In fact, Shia groups have gone the furthest in the National Dialogue process in terms of greater understanding of other groupings.¹²⁵ Moreover, the dominant group understands that it does not need to compromise and therefore sees any dialogue process as irrelevant to its current political and ideological position.¹²⁶ However, although some Shia activists welcome the dialogue process, they feel frustrated by the lack of progress and also believe that it cannot be counted on.¹²⁷

Lebanon?¹²⁰ The journalist wrote an article about this issue that was originally appeared in a liberal publication in Kuwait. He was surprised to find it included on a Salafi website in Saudi Arabia with a positive comment. The journalist also believes that KACND needs to develop into a think-tank. Interview by author with Subject 61, Shia journalist and human rights activist (Qatif: 16.01.11).

¹²¹ Interview by author with Subject 43, Shia political and religious leader (Qatif: 08.04.10). In addition, he wants KACND to examine how ‘modernisation affects traditionalisation’ and whether different sectarian communities can interact with each other and if so at what level.

¹²² Focus group discussion with Subjects 47, 56 and 7 Shia Activists (Qatif: 09.04.10).

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Subject 37 claims the Wahhabis who disagree with the government’s National Dialogue are the only group who is not discriminated against and that everyone else who is not a Wahhabi fights against this frustration and fights for change.

¹²⁵ Focus group discussion with Subjects 47, 56 and 7 Shia Activists (Qatif: 09.04.10).

¹²⁶ In the opinion of a Jeddah human rights activist, the Shia leadership is more educated than the Salafi leadership, but ‘the Shia is more active and has more political projects’ whereas ‘the Sunni only want to die and go to heaven’. He thinks that there is a constructive relationship between the Shia and the liberal trend although he asserts that ‘if the Shia had power then the situation in the Kingdom could be worse than the current situation under the Sunni’. Interview by author with Subject 67, human rights activist and dissident (Jeddah: 08.07.10). Indeed, an Ismail activist contends that it is better to have the Shia ‘inside

Eastern Province developments 2011—12

In the Eastern Province Prince Nayef's appointment as crown prince received a respectful, albeit muted reception from the Shia leadership. Saudi newspapers reported that on the death of Prince Sultan condolences were received from senior Shia clerics. However, although the king has made overtures to the Shia leadership over the years, most recently in March 2011 when he met a delegation of Shia family members, Nayef is generally distrusted and disliked. The fact that Eastern Province Governor Mohammed bin Fahd has strong personal links to Mohammed bin Nayef and by extension to the Ministry of the Interior also causes disquiet.

Nevertheless, headed by Shaikh Hassan Al Saffar, the leadership's strategy has been to reassure the Al Saud of Shia loyalty to the Kingdom, in other words, 'we are Saudi first, Shia second'.¹²⁸ Al Saffar realises that if the Shia leadership is perceived to be acting against the national interest then this would only confirm what the majority Sunni population assume, or have been indoctrinated to think, that the Shia population is essentially an Iranian fifth column not to be trusted. In addition, Iran only seeks to exploit the unrest, according to some press reports, and is indifferent to the eventual fate of the Shia population (Al Otaibi, 2012, p. 2). For this reason, it appears the Shia leadership has been attempting to contain protests in the Eastern Province; protests linked mainly to human rights grievances, in order to stop any of the protests developing into an anti-government campaign. Despite sermons from known firebrands such as Shaikh Nimr Al Nimr who at the end of October 2011 called for the Shia to show allegiance only to Allah rather than the nation or the Al Sa'ud (MEMRI 2011, p. 1) the leadership has publicly supported moderate statements by pragmatic clerics such as Shaikh Faisal Al Awami (Rasid News Network 2011, p. 1). Al Awami publicly praised the National Dialogue initiative and emphasised that minority communities cannot impose policies on the state, but they can contribute effectively to state-society dialogue. Aarts points to an apparent divide between 'negotiators' such as Al Saffar and Al Shayeb and 'rejectionists' such as Al Nimr and Hamza Al Hasan (2011, p. 38). A KSU lecturer who visited Qatif at this time maintains:

rather than outside as they are very vocal'. Interview by author with Subject 13, Ministry of Petroleum and Ismaili activist (Riyadh: 28.06.10).

¹²⁷ Subject 37 claims that individuals are embarrassed to accept KACND invitations because of this frustration.

¹²⁸ Interview by author with Subject 43, Shaikh Hassan Al Saffar, Shia political and religious leader (Qatif: 08.04.10).

The existence of hardliners (such as Al Nimr) provides a good political opportunity for the rest of the Shia actors (such as Al Saffar) to present themselves to the government as the "wise voice" of the Shia, who seek dialogue and able to reach a compromise. In a semi-feudal community like Qatif, such political manoeuvres and tactics are enhanced by family-class competition.¹²⁹

This 'wise voice' is sending messages aimed at both the hard-liners within the government and the more radical Shia elements, calling as it does for religious tolerance from all sides — and warning that the schism between the two sides could widen if cool heads do not prevail.

On-going tensions in the sensitive oil-producing Eastern Province were exacerbated on 13—14 January 2012 when security forces allegedly killed a young Shia protester and wounded three others. According to the Shia *Rasid* news security forces opened heavy fire late after protesters threw stones at a police vehicle in Awamiya village, the scene of continuing unrest between predominantly young Shia men and the authorities (Rasid News Network 2012, p. 1). The situation deteriorated further after a member of the security forces was shot dead on 15 January in the same area. Tensions have been running high in Qatif, where Awamiya is located, for a number of months and according to a moderate Qatif based Shia socio-political activist the situation has worsened due to a complete lack of dialogue between the Shia authorities and the Saudi government.¹³⁰ The source points out that well-known Shia public figures, such as prominent academic Dr. Tawfiq Al Saif, have frequently complained about the absence of real dialogue taking place at this sensitive time. Furthermore, the continuing Awamiya disturbances are putting increasing pressure on the Shia leadership, and by default the Shia population, with regard to their perceived loyalty — or lack of — to the Kingdom. Local leaders such as the Shaikh Hassan Al Saffar and mayor Abdul Haleem Al Kidar have condemned the violence, blaming 'misguided' individuals (Arab News 2012, p. 1) whilst attempting to reassure the authorities that the majority of the population remain 'good Saudi citizens'.

Without a doubt, more moderate Shia voices are deeply concerned about the on-going unrest because they are aware that powerful forces within the Interior Ministry will continue to use the disturbances to support the argument that 'Shia disloyalty' to the Al Saud state is being fomented by Iran in order to destabilise internal Saudi security. It is

¹²⁹ Interview by author with Subject 51, KSU political-science lecturer (Riyadh: 12.12.09).

¹³⁰ Interview by author with Subject 29, political activist (Qatif: 20.12.11).

believed that there are individuals in the Interior Ministry who are content to see a breakdown in communication between the Shia leadership and the government at this time as this undermines 'liberal' attempts to include religious minorities in King Abdullah's 'National Dialogue' project.¹³¹ Undoubtedly, the Shia leadership faces a delicate balancing act in the coming months, on the one hand trying to keep channels of communication open with the government and on the other placating its own constituency. A KSU lecturer notes that 'the Bahraini factor demonstrated to the Shia that Saudi government is operating a carrot and stick approach and thus, it is up to them to choose which they prefer'.¹³² That said the bottom line appears to be an attempt by the Shia leadership to maintain stability in the Eastern Province which would benefit all parties concerned.

Najran Province and the Ismailis

Discrimination is the norm in the Kingdom and no Shia or Ismaili can hold high office in the government although there are people searching for a strategy to put an end to religious discrimination in the Kingdom. The appointment of Prince Misha'al bin Abdullah as governor of Najran Province¹³³ has improved the overall situation according to some Najranis, but Ismailis continue to identify who 'is one of ours', e.g., in the police, and 'who is one of theirs'.¹³⁴ Nevertheless, the government continues to close all Ismaili mosques during Eid because of different religious calendars and stopped giving permits for the building of new mosques.¹³⁵ Although Najran is the third largest province in the Kingdom with the fifth largest population, there was no regional university until Najran University was founded in 2006, but according to a group of Najrani political activists the university started with a false agenda and employment discrimination against Najranis has remained an issue.¹³⁶ In addition, the group argue

¹³¹ Interview by author with Subject 61, Shia human rights activist and journalist (Qatif: 20.12.11).

¹³² Interview by author with Subject 51, KSU political-science lecturer (Riyadh: 12.12.09).

¹³³ Prince Mishaal bin Saud, former governor of Najran Province who was replaced by Prince Mishaal bin Abdullah in March 2009. Prince Mishaal bin Saud 'did not represent the good side of the royal family' and this was demonstrated by the Najran Holiday Inn incident in April 2000 and the 'five months of pain that followed when hundreds of people were imprisoned and forcibly moved to Jeddah and Riyadh'. Interview by author with Subject 13, Ismaili activist, Director of Information in the Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources (Riyadh: July 2010).

¹³⁴ Interview by author with Subject 13, Ismaili activist, Director of Information in the Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources (Riyadh: July 2010).

¹³⁵ Ibid. Subject 14 believes that the Al Sa'ud 'are not attached to the people although the Najranis loved King Saud because he visited Najran city and province'. He also believes that Najranis must protect their own heritage and sectarian beliefs and he cites examples of an Ismaili mosque being closed in the Eastern Province and harassment in June-July 2010 against Ismailis in Sharourah that has sparked a tribal movement against the perpetrators.

¹³⁶ Focus group discussion with Subject 10 and 3 Ismaili activists (Najran: 09.07.10).

that the situation in the province has not changed since the founding of KACND in 2003, despite the opening of the university. They point out that in Najran it is impossible to meet or indeed do anything without the police checking up on an individual. Indeed, visitors to the city noted that in mid-2010 Najran ‘felt occupied’ and there was an atmosphere of resentment and extreme wariness.¹³⁷ Despite the Eighth National Dialogue Meeting being held in Najran, Human Rights Watch comments:

Faced with official hostility, it is no surprise that Ismailis are not able to participate in local decisions by holding high office in the governorate. The five year old National Dialogue established at the behest of then Crown Prince Abdullah to promote conciliation on controversial and sensitive topics invited only a few Ismailis to participate. In 2006 one of those participants was fired from her job after delivering remarks highly critical of Wahhabi authorities in Najran. Ismailis, who protest publicly, write petitions, or speak to the media risk arrest and periods in prison (2008, p. 3).

In 2006, twenty individuals from Najran formed the ‘Committee for the Intellectuals of Najran’.¹³⁸ Many of these individuals worked for the government and they started this Najrani regional movement in order to reach out to the government on its own terms. The committee struggled for about twelve years, publishing booklets and pamphlets both domestically and abroad and even approaching Crown Prince Abdullah, Prince Nayef and his sons and indeed all the ministries. In recent years, meetings with Najrani intellectuals and other regional groups have taken place and the Najranis have met with individuals and groups in Qatif as well as in Riyadh where they have bi-annual meetings. There are also weekly meetings called the ‘Saturday Gathering’ where liberals gather, regardless of religious affiliation, to converse and there were monthly meetings with individuals from four other provinces; these lasted a year until many of the participants joined various ministries. However, Najrani activists continue to be discriminated against and an Ismaili activist claims a prince objected to the appointment of a Najrani to the official SHRC because the individual was calling for the rights of his own people even though the individual affirmed that he was very proud to be Saudi.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Interview by author with Subject 89, Counsellor Politics and Culture, German Embassy (Riyadh: 20.07.10). The author noticed this tense atmosphere during a visit to Najran in July 2010.

¹³⁸ Interview by author with Subject 13 (Riyadh: July 2010). Although a club for intellectuals was established in Najran, Subject 13 said that in 2010 there were no private salons (*diwaniya*).

¹³⁹ Focus group discussion with Subject 10 and 3 Ismaili activists (Najran: 09.07.10) and interview by author with Subject 13 (Riyadh: July 2010). Ibid. Subject 13 claims his appointment to the *majlis al-shura* was cancelled ‘simply because he was an Ismaili activist’. He was interrogated, but the authorities could not find anything against him. However, he is not allowed to write or publish anything that makes reference to his current job title and the Ministry of the Interior informed him that ‘he is not allowed to hold any sensitive position’. Although for an Ismaili Subject 13 holds a fairly high government position, he is says that promotion is out of the question.

During discussions with Ismailis in Najran seven major issues affecting Najran Province and the Ismaili community were identified:¹⁴⁰

- The policy of settling Sunni Yemenis in the province in order to equalise population statistics, i.e., a fifty to fifty per cent ratio, between Sunnis and Ismailis (see Hammond 2008). This is a major issue and an extremely contentious one that sparked large protests by members of the military, farmers and intellectuals; ‘In the end, the government slowed down the settlement process when King Abdullah discovered that Prince Mishaal bin Saud was being bribed by the Yemenis’.¹⁴¹
- Seizure of private land by the princes in order to establish a Najran cement company, but excluding Najranis from the business. However, Najranis were successful in stopping a Najran mining company from taking Ismaili land.
- Employment discrimination and blocking admission to military colleges and institutions.
- Bring back all the able Najranis following the Holiday Inn Incident; ‘many able people moved away, but some preferred to stay in the Eastern Province, Riyadh or Jeddah and therefore, did not return’.¹⁴²
- Slow down the Wahhabi process in Najran province.
- Attract business to Najran.
- Honour the agreement between King Abdulaziz and the Najrani shaikhs.

A focus group organised for this study in Najran were particularly incensed by the twelve Yemeni settlements in Najran and the rumoured ‘Wahhabi indoctrination’ taking place in these camps. They complained that this issue is being ignored by the West despite the fact that, in their opinion, these camps are a breeding ground for extreme indoctrination and radicalisation. For this reason, one member argued that there is no

¹⁴⁰ Interview by author with Subject 13, Ismaili activist, Director of Information in the Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources (Riyadh: July 2010). Subject 13 is among those who write petitions and speak to the media. He joined a movement called ‘Future 104’ and this resulted in the first national petition that called for socio-political reform and dialogue, harmony and national awareness of what constitutes a Saudi. The second petition he signed managed to gather over nine hundred signatories and the third petition *The Nation Is for All and All for the Nation* called for an ‘individuality based national identity as opposed to a religious based national identity’. Sectarianism was the subject of the third petition and its signatories included 1,200 Ismaili, 300 Shia and 300 liberals; Crown Prince Abdullah responded to this petition by establishing KACND. However, he points out that despite the petition and founding of KACND, discrimination continued and ‘at that time the leading Najrani activists knew in the end that the National Dialogue would go nowhere’. He says that following the submission of the third petition in 2005, the signatories were harried by the authorities until King Abdullah ordered that the harassment cease as, according to Subject 13, the king declared ‘none are to be touched’. Previously, he met with Prince Abdulaziz bin Abdullah and informed him of the harassment ordered by Prince Misha`al bin Sa`ud in 2000.

¹⁴¹ Subject 13 claims that the Houthi conflict on the border with Najran improved after Crown Prince Sultan returned to the Kingdom, and this was due to a sudden influx of Sultan’s cash.

¹⁴² Interview by author with Subject 13, Ismaili activist, Director of Information in the Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources (Riyadh: July 2010).

longer any support for western political policies, even though in the past society and in particular the youth, used to support western values. He emphasised that there is no longer support for western values because of the hypocrisy of those values.¹⁴³ In addition, the problems in the Kingdom stem from top-down policies and without the current situation all individuals and differing groups would get along.¹⁴⁴ These activists argue that the National Dialogue is not for Najranis because KACND is an elitist institution which does not involve ordinary people and in their opinion is primarily for propaganda purposes in order to impress the West. Although one activist argues in the strongest terms that there is nothing positive to say about KACND, he concedes that the informal dialogue triggered by the national debate in universities and the media is probably important. He asserts that in a society where there are rules you do not need a national dialogue, but in Najran there are no rules so in his opinion the National Dialogue means nothing.¹⁴⁵

The Popular Dialogue

The Popular Dialogue, a new unofficial forum, was formed because some of its participants felt that the National Dialogue had failed. These individuals decided to form their own body as they did not feel comfortable in KACND meetings so preferred to meet in separate groups according to either religious affiliation and / or preference and simply because the personal contact is enjoyable. The Popular Dialogue comprises Saudis from different religious sects and it is argued that these groups are not in denial regarding the scale of the sectarian problem, but they are attempting to find common ground where there are no derogatory names, labels and above all no interference. This new initiative started in May 2010 and the first meeting took place between Sunnis and Ismailis in the Ismaili quarter in Riyadh. Furthermore, it is hoped that reciprocal meeting will occur in each sectarian quarter, i.e., Shia, Sufi, Ismaili, Sunni and vice-versa, and the realisation of these goals may put an end to accusations of apostasy (Arabic: *takfir*) as well as harmonising a national call for equality.¹⁴⁶ After the conclusion of all the reciprocal meetings, the stated goal of the Popular Dialogue will be to form a united group and it is hoped this group will be able to address the media when

¹⁴³ Focus group including Subject 10 and 3 Ismaili activists (Najran: 09.07.10).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Interview by author with Subject 13, Ismaili activist, Director of Information in the Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources (Riyadh: July 2010). He points out that when the *majlis al-shura* was due to discuss *takfir* in March 2010, the Interior Ministry intervened and cancelled the discussion.

the Popular Dialogue will be unveiled nationally for the first time. An application form has already been distributed, calling for interested parties to join the new dialogue, however, the participants expect problems regarding government recognition and are pragmatic enough to realise that they need ‘princely approval’ in the form of an Al Sa`ud patron. Therefore, an official committee representing the dialogue will be formed called ‘The Social Movement against Discrimination’ in order to attract the patronage of a senior prince. Prince Misha`al bin Abdulaziz, the head of the Allegiance Commission may assume this position, as he has apparently shown some interest although at the time of writing (January 2012) this has yet to be confirmed.¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, there are some differences within the Popular Dialogue as the Sunni members want to meet each sect separately and have the media present at each individual meeting although the organisers think that the separate forums should all be concluded before the final media meeting. That said, the Popular Dialogue wishes to remain separate from KACND although there is a movement to combine elements of the National Dialogue and these informal dialogues, but it remains to be seen whether this will be possible’.¹⁴⁸

CONCLUSION

The issues KACND must address include helping to foster greater understanding between diverse societal groupings as well as assisting these constituencies reach points of understanding and build societal components regardless of religious affiliation. Although the National Dialogue process has not brought minority groups nearer to the centre of power, it has triggered discussion so that society and the media are talking about these issues such as human rights, individual rights, discrimination, employment opportunities, or lack of, decision-making and power sharing’.¹⁴⁹ In reality, KACND was not established to solve these problems as it does not have a ministerial remit, but it would appear that there has been a failure of communication between the institution and

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. He notes that Najran’s Zaidi community numbers around 2000.

¹⁴⁸ Subject 67, a Jeddah human rights activist, says these unofficial forums are more active than government sponsored bodies because ‘we can meet many different people and can express ourselves freely’. He held his own *diwaniya*, but it was closed in May 2010 because he invited individuals from outside of the Kingdom, including members of Amnesty International and other human rights groups. Interview by author (Jeddah: 08.07.10).

¹⁴⁹ Interview by author with Subject 87, KSU Professor (Riyadh: 17.07.10). However, he says that although indirect dialogue is occurring, little is happening to improve the overall situation and this may be because ‘most people in Saudi Arabia do not say exactly what they think because maybe they are trying to be polite’ although he acknowledges that despite ‘absolute rule in the Kingdom’ the triggering of indirect dialogue is a direct consequence of the National Dialogue.

disparate constituencies such as religious minorities needs to be rectified.¹⁵⁰ This is crucial because Saudi society in its entirety is facing real challenges and problems; therefore society expects a government institution, any government institution, to resolve these issues.¹⁵¹

At the 2010 Riyadh Cultural Discourse, Dr. Issa Al Ghaith, advisor to the Ministry of Justice and one of the key figures in the dominant ideology, was openly critical of Wahhabism. In this instance he was in a minority not only because he criticised the dominant ideology, but also because he was a lone voice; thus the problem with discussing the dominant ideology is that too many KACND participants remain silent on this issue.¹⁵² In addition, it is true that at KACND forums members of the dominant ideology are often in a minority compared to other constituencies, but the central issue is that this minority has too much political influence. Some assert that the hard-line Wahhabi establishment is working against the National Dialogue, or at least trying to hijack the process, as it recognises that the National Dialogue could undermine its power base.¹⁵³ As Nonneman argues the very presence of once marginalised groups such as the Shia legitimates both their role and the principle of pluralist dialogue, ‘thus in effect breaking the long-held Wahhabi endorsed principle that only their school had a legitimate voice’ (2004, p. 1). The ‘*ulama* also recognise that the state elite has changed its mind about the National Dialogue process and has acknowledged the different elements and forces in Saudi society. Since 2003 this argument has applied to the more conservative elements of the elite as this elite wants to absorb these forces in society and redirect or influence the activities of KACND and the National Dialogue process as a whole.¹⁵⁴ However, as KACND has the backing of King Abdullah, the institution must attempt to send a clear message to the hard-liners that the monarch is prepared to move ahead with his reform agenda with the backing of other senior members of the Al Sa`ud.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ KACND officials have admitted to the author that this is an issue that needs to be addressed. Unfortunately, they say that society thinks KACND possesses real ministerial power, but it does not so it cannot respond to societal demands.

¹⁵¹ Interview by author with Subject 9, Shia cleric and brother (Qatif: 10.07.10).

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Interview with Subject 29, Shia political activist (Riyadh and Qatif: 29.03.10 / 08.04.10).

¹⁵⁴ Interview by author with Subject 9, Shia cleric and brother (Qatif: 10.07.10).

¹⁵⁵ He also wonders if the National Dialogue is being used by King Abdullah and his circle to construct a new national consensus regarding what it means to be Saudi; in other words, one that is moving away from the hard-line state approved Wahhabi identity. In his opinion, if this is the case, then maybe it is no longer in the interests of the regime to be too closely identified with the traditional Wahhabi-Al Sa`ud alliance.

The National Dialogue process has facilitated cross-constituency communication and started a viable discussion between groupings and minorities. Indeed, KACND declares ‘its task is to offer a platform so that Saudi people can meet and discuss the future of the country. That is our true role’ (Saudi Gazette 2011b, p. 1), rather than the presumed ministerial role it does not play. This dialogue opening is a considerable achievement as it has brought different parties closer to each other, and reduced conflict between different constituencies. For this reason, the National Dialogue process could assist in building a national consensus, but this would necessarily involve a degree of government involvement.¹⁵⁶ In summarising KACND’s most important accomplishments, the centre succeeded in bringing together some representatives of different religious sects for the first time in modern Saudi history and that is recognised as an achievement although it is evident that KACND needs to place greater emphasis on inter-sectarian dialogue as this ‘one thorny issue’ causes the most problems for national cohesion.¹⁵⁷

Many individuals believe that the National Dialogue process has already proved beneficial as it emerged at a time when cross-constituency and inter-sectarian dialogue was necessary. Nevertheless, in their opinion it will take time for society to absorb modernisation as tribal culture has built up over time and religious doctrine is still used to order and control people.¹⁵⁸ Moreover, the predominance of the dominant ideology, or ‘one way of thinking’, attempted to force society to believe that everyone has to think the same way. This dominant ideological thinking created an undercurrent in society that some hold responsible for the promotion of extremism and spread of terrorism. Therefore, when KACND first appeared ‘it was the right time as there was a gap that needed to be filled as even inside the home there was no dialogue; we did not know what our children were thinking’.¹⁵⁹ Nowadays, many issues are now being discussed within society precisely because they were discussed at KACND forums and these discussions were also relayed through the media. In other words, the dialogue process legitimised the discussion and with the help of the media this has raised awareness of these issues in society.¹⁶⁰ An example of this awareness was when the King opened the Family Protection Society dedicated to spousal and child abuse. Subsequent to the

¹⁵⁶ Interview by author with Subject 63, Shia writer and political activist (Qatif: 09.04.10). He maintains that this process is helping form a new national cultural viewpoint

¹⁵⁷ Interview by author with Subject 33, academic and political activist (Riyadh: 12.06.10).

¹⁵⁸ Various interviews by author with multiple subjects (Saudi Arabia: 2009—11).

¹⁵⁹ Interview by author with Subject 42, KSU lecturer and KACND participant (Riyadh: June 2010).

¹⁶⁰ Interview by author with focus group (Riyadh: July 2010).

establishment of the institution it was possible for society to admit that family abuse problems exist in the Kingdom because the king sanctioned societal and media discussion regarding this topic.

Participation in the National Dialogue process should influence politics as well as culture, especially for discriminated groups such as the Shia, according to one cleric, so that the National Dialogue becomes more than a snapshot and garners influence on a continuous basis throughout society.¹⁶¹ Issues discussed at the meetings should not only affect the direct participants, but also filter down to their constituencies. Indeed, the Eastern Province Shia and Sufi groups in the Hijaz are insisting on a continuation of the dialogue under the umbrella of KACND as they believe that the institution has become the recognised and correct channel for cross-constituency dialogue. In fact, KACND plans to initiate a new programme, an inter-sect dialogue which will include smaller meetings to facilitate smaller discussions, something that KACND vice Secretary-General believes will be beneficial for society.¹⁶² It may be that change in the short term will only be achieved through the National Dialogue, but unofficial discussions prompted by the official forums have facilitated greater cross-constituency understanding. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that whilst the Shia religious leadership feels able, and is able to speak out, the Ismaili religious leadership is less outspoken as if it is are afraid to speak out due to the imposition of Sunni outsiders in positions of authority, that has created tension in Najran Province.¹⁶³ Therefore, it appears that members of the Shia community have made a conscious effort to utilise the National Dialogue process for their own benefit, but it does not appear that the same has happened in Najran. In a similar vein, within the parameters of a National Dialogue forum, a degree of self-censorship is imposed by the participants as they understand the limits and therefore will not push the boundaries; this can be understood as demonstrating a lack of real freedom of speech without which there can be no meaningful discussion.¹⁶⁴ Indeed, a delegate at the Fifth National Dialogue meeting in Abha noted that the other participants recognised ‘red lines’ that were understood not to

¹⁶¹ Interview by author with Subject 9, Shia cleric and Cultural Discourse participant (Qatif: 10.07.10).

¹⁶² Interview by author with Subjects 50 and 65, KACND officials (Riyadh: 10.01.11).

¹⁶³ Interview by author with Subject 89, Counsellor Politics and Culture, German Embassy (Riyadh: 20.07.10).

¹⁶⁴ Interview by author with Subject 79 scholar and Second National Dialogue participant (Riyadh: 04.04.10). He wonders if this is cowardice, fear or simply complacency.

be crossed even though these red lines are not always clear and can be interpreted differently.¹⁶⁵

Although it is too early to assess the overall impact of the Cultural Discourse, the very fact that the forum was established raises important questions related to the development of KACND. If the institution was indeed reacting to criticism from society that it no longer fulfilled a viable, or even identifiable, role due to the perceived lack of ideology-related discussions, then did KACND management actively decide to initiate and promote long-term far-ranging ideological discussions, albeit outside the parameters of the principal National Meetings, in order to respond to this criticism? Or was the establishment of the Cultural Discourse simply a knee-jerk reaction to bad press? In other words, was it a reaction rather than a programme for serious debate with vision and intent. Indeed, KACND is frequently criticised for a perceived lack of vision, for reacting to events rather than setting an agenda and thereby selecting topics for discussion in an ad hoc fashion. Thus, the issues discussed in the Cultural Discourse forums may have been received favourably by society and the media, but if the new forum is seen to follow the same pattern as the National Meetings, i.e., drift away from sensitive topics, then any initial enthusiasm for the Cultural Discourse could quickly be replaced by similar societal apathy and frustration that greeted the service-related National Meetings. It is true that the role of the institution is to promote effective dialogue, but if KACND fails to transmit its message to society that its forums are helping to create a more open and tolerant space in the Kingdom, then no amount of well-meaning discussion will change the perception that the debates do not achieve any consequential results. It would be a great pity if this were to happen as undoubtedly there is a need for an official venue where sensitive or previously taboo issues such as tribalism can be discussed in a transparent manner. KACND is able to provide that venue and for this reason alone both the institution and its new Cultural Discourse are important and need to be taken seriously as the discussions provide both space for dialogue as well as the opportunity for increased cross-constituency and inter-sectarian interaction.

¹⁶⁵ Interview by author with Subject 37, Shia cleric (Dammam: 10.07.10).

CHAPTER FIVE

SAUDI NATIONAL DIALOGUE AND SAUDI CONSTITUENCIES II: KACND AND SOCIETAL CONSTITUENCIES

This chapter examines the pivotal issues of women's rights and KACND female participation as well as the institution's youth policies and activities. Regarding the former, it also discusses the female perspective of the National Dialogue process and aspirations for the future, referencing KACND participants, elite women and the Vice-Minister for Girl's Education. Regarding youth policies, the chapter explores how these relate to education, Saudization and unemployment as well as KACND initiatives linked to the Ministry of Education and schemes such as the King Abdullah Scholarship programme. The chapter then addresses the argument that the National Dialogue process is being used to absorb societal discontent and frustration as well as the institution's relationship with the so-called 'conservative' nature of Saudi society.

KACND AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN

The Current Status of Saudi Women

The family unit and kinship ties constitute one of the pillars of Saudi society. Okruhlik points out that in Saudi Arabia social norms are rigidly defined and 'identity with and loyalty to one's family, is of critical importance' as loyalty to the family structure remains intrinsically linked to the Al Sa'ud state, i.e., 'the private family reinforces the public family' (2005, p. 154). Okruhlik writes that social norms and religious interpretation are fused so that the protection of a women's honour is aligned with the protection of the nuclear family. She stresses that, as the nuclear family constitutes 'society's core institution and is expected to obey and serve the state', women bear the brunt of social expectations (2005, p. 154). In discussing the historical importance of the family to Saudi social norms, Moaddel notes:

Because the family is the immediate context of early gender socialisation, explaining attitudes toward polygamy and wife obedience is important. This is so because such attitudes may give legitimacy to the practices of polygamy and the institution of male dominance in the family. Understanding the social determinants of these attitudes provides insights into the social structure of Saudi society and the processes of cultural change (2006, p. 94).

Saudi women need permission from fathers, brothers, husbands or guardians to do what women in other countries do unthinkingly as part of their everyday lives. This includes permission to attend school, to obtain a passport, to attend university, to work, to get married, to be admitted to hospital, to obtain an official government identity card, to buy property or a car, as well as permission to travel abroad (Mishkhas 2005a, pp. 1—2). In Saudi Arabia women are permitted to work only if three conditions are fulfilled: the primary care of the women's husband and children is met, women work only within specific conditions that do not conflict with existing customs and women's work is 'restricted to employment suitable for the female nature' (Almunajjed 2006).¹ Nonetheless, Almunajjed argues that the status of Muslim women in general and Saudi women in particular is misunderstood, misconceived and distorted in much of the western media.² She argues that the role of women in the Kingdom needs to be placed in a Saudi context, one that references the Kingdom's history, the rights of women in Islam, legal rights, education, employment and business. Almunajjed contends that Islam is not opposed to the emancipation of women³, but that 'a strict interpretation of Islam, together with traditional social beliefs, rigid local customs, severe norms and patriarchal values, remain obstacles to the development of Saudi women' (2006, p. 33). Although the standing of women is influenced by strong social customs and local traditions, some traditions such as the wearing of the veil and strict segregation in Saudi society, whilst having negative connotations in western eyes, are viewed by many in the Kingdom as a sign of status and form of protection. Indeed, following the Fourth National Dialogue on women's issues in Madinah, Abd Al Rahman Al Rashed, former editor of London-based *Asharq Alawsat*, in a column entitled 'A men's dialogue about women' wrote:

¹ After years of campaigning women were finally allowed to start work in lingerie shops following the Labour Ministry's mandatory directive to appoint Saudi saleswomen in shops selling women-only products starting on 4 January 2012. More than 28,000 women have applied for jobs (See Lippman 2012). This brings to an end the most bizarre example of gender mixing in the Kingdom.

² In interviews with the author many Saudi ladies complained that they were often misquoted or misinterpreted by western media sources.

³ Almunajjed says the Qur'an gives women equal, but not identical rights to men, be those personal, civil, social, political, educational and professional (2006, p. 33).

The dialogue showed that the foreigners were wrong in assuming that the restrictions imposed on women were governmental decisions. It proved to everyone that they were indeed rooted in social restrictions and that laws were merely an interpretation to an existing reality. I realise that it is difficult for a foreigner to understand existing traditions, especially those that predetermine everything for women, such as sitting in the back seat of a car, but this is a way of life that has nothing to do with the world outside of the borders of Saudi Arabia although it has become today the subject of discussion between the two generations (Dankowitz 2004, p. 3).

It is this coexistence of the traditional and the modern in various aspects of social and commercial life that presents the greatest challenge to contemporary Saudi women. Nevertheless, Almunajjed considers that the elite Saudi women have broken the barriers of rigid tradition and constitute a combination of traditional and contemporary socio-economic forces (2006). Although the elite is narrow in terms of family background, education and societal position, many elite women have extensive experience of the western world and hope to build a bridge between western and Arab cultures. As such, these elite women should be regarded as one of the Kingdom's 'strategic reserves in terms of skills and social development' (Almunajjed 2006, pp. 4—6). The answer to increased societal participation by women lies in reforming the education system, the introduction of more moderate and more open-mindedness into national policy, and assisting qualified women develop within the labour market and these measures will improve the status of Saudi women as 'vital agents of development in Saudi society' (Almunajjed 2006, pp. 30—33).⁴ Almunajjed argues that Islam is not opposed to the emancipation of women, but that 'a strict interpretation of Islam, together with traditional social beliefs, rigid local customs, severe norms and patriarchal values, remain obstacles to the development of Saudi women'.

Empowering women has become a priority for the Kingdom's political activists, according to Jafar Al Shayeb, due to the 'relative liberal position taken by King Abdullah on fostering the role of women in Saudi society' (2010b, p. 1). The appointment of the first female minister Norah Alfaiz⁵ in spring 2009 as Deputy Minister for Girls' Education, the highest-level government post yet to be filled by a

⁴ Princess Noura bin Abdulrahman University for Women in Riyadh (originally planned as King Abdullah University for Women until he decided that his late aunt's name was more appropriate) is according to Almunajjed one of the largest centres for female higher education in the world with fifteen colleges, 12,000 employees and the capacity to enrol more than 40,000 student (2012, pp. 1—2).

⁵ Norah Alfaiz is the first female member of the Saudi Arabia Council of Ministers. She gained a Master's Degree in education Utah State University in 1982. After she returned to the Kingdom she became principal of Prince Alwaleed bin Talal's Kingdom Schools and director of the women's section at the Administration Institute in Riyadh.

woman, along with the first Saudi female cultural attaché to Canada, have both been cited as examples of progress towards increased female participation in Saudi affairs. However, others have claimed that these were token appointments, aimed as much at the Kingdom's external critics as placating the female constituency at home.⁶ Journalist Fatany contends that Saudi businesswomen have made significant achievements, but society remains reluctant to acknowledge women as capable of assuming leadership roles and the concept of female political participation remains hindered by cultural obstacles and discriminatory laws prevalent in the system (2009, p. 96). In fact, for many years Saudi women have been lobbying for a seat in the Council of Ministers (Al Fardan 2009, p. 1) as well as demanding a greater voice in the SCCI, seats in the *majlis al-shura* and participation in the municipal elections.⁷ Following the postponement of the 2009 municipal elections and in light of possible repercussions from the Arab Spring, a decision was made to hold the elections in 2011 and Minister for Municipal and Rural Affairs Prince Mansour bin Miteb was rumoured to be in favour of female suffrage. However the government decided that women would be barred from standing and voting because 'we are not ready for the participation of women in these municipal elections' although Election Commissioner Abdul Rahman Al Dahmash promised that women will be allowed to vote in the next elections (Arab News 2011a, p. 1). Nadya Khalife, a women's rights researcher argues this blatant sex discrimination is an insult to millions of Saudi women and 'the government cannot expect Saudi women to believe that a lack of preparation is behind the denial of their rights to political participation' as this was 'a preposterous excuse in 2005, and even more so now' (Human Rights Watch 2011b, p. 1). Indeed, some incumbent council members pointed out they did not object to women's participation in the 2011 elections as there are 'a number of municipal issues which are purely female-oriented and need women's input' (Humaidan 2011, p. 1).

In September 2011, during his inaugural address for the third year of the fifth session of the *majlis al-shura*, the king announced that women would be allowed to nominate themselves for membership of municipal councils and have the right to vote in the next round of municipal elections scheduled for 2015. More significantly, he also proclaimed that female delegates will be welcomed into the *majlis al-shura* when the next session

⁶ Interview by author with Subject 41, ACPRA political activist (Riyadh: 13.07.10).

⁷ The municipal elections were first held in 2005, postponed in 2009 and finally held again in 2011.

begins in 2013.⁸ Dr. Abdullah bin Mohammed Al Ashaikh emphasised that this ‘wise decision comes in recognition of the fact that Saudi women have achieved a high degree of education, competence and expertise in various disciplines (Al Rasheed 2011, p. 1). Depending on the point of view, the news was greeted in what, Nora Alfaiz called a ‘breakthrough for Saudi women’ (Ghafour 2011b, p. 1) or, from a more sceptical angle, as simply paying lip service to the issue of women’s rights in order to buy time. Henderson noted that ‘some caution is necessary’ as the rulings are not due to come into effect until 2013 and 2015 respectively and King Abdullah might be dead by then, therefore a future King Nayef who is known for his more conservative views is likely to have a different attitude to female socio-political participation (2011a, pp. 1—2). However, it was interesting to see that the known 2011 rapprochement between the king and Prince Nayef meant that King Abdullah was able to ask Prince Nayef to persuade the *‘ulama* to accept this ruling and this also refutes the constant allegation that Nayef is opposed to all the king’s reform measures. In addition, it appears that more moderate members of the *majlis al-shura* were able to convince their more hard-line counterparts to pass a resolution recommending that women be granted the vote earlier in the month, thus paving the way for the king’s formal announcement (Baqzai 2011, p. 1). Needless to say, it is still too early to assess the impact of the ruling, but it will undoubtedly provide an opportunity for greater female participation in future state-society dialogue.

The issue of women drivers remains a contentious one in Saudi Arabia⁹, but it can be argued that the topic garners more exposure externally than in the Kingdom, and thus it is deemed to be a ‘priority’ for Saudi women by the western media.¹⁰ However, within the Kingdom, many Saudi women consider other issues to be of greater importance, such as education and employment, than whether or not they are able to drive. Female members of KACND remark that contrary to western perceptions, ‘not driving has not stopped women from progressing in the Kingdom’.¹¹ Vice-Minister for Girl’s Education

⁸ The British Ambassador to Saudi Arabia who was present at the session said the speech was ‘received very warmly’ in the chamber, Saudi-British Society seminar (London: 12.10.11).

⁹ In a 2009 interview to the Saudi press, Princess Amira, the second wife of Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, complained that as a holder of an international driving licence she was allowed to drive in every country in the world except her homeland. Subject 71 told the author that she considers the issue to be of paramount importance.

¹⁰ Foreign car manufactures are said to be lobbying hard for women to drive in Saudi Arabia. With the credit-crunch and environmental concerns, the sale of ‘gas-guzzlers’, SUVs and the similar has declined sharply in the western markets. Therefore, the potential market offered by Saudi women drivers is highly attractive to the automobile industry.

¹¹ Interview by author with Subject 54, Director Women’s Centre KACND and personal assistant to Director Women’s Centre KACND (Riyadh: 21.06.10).

Alfaiz says that she drove in the US for four years, but her ministerial position precludes her role highlighting this particular issue, rather her role is to prepare society to understand and accept the government's future socio-political reforms (Abdulaziz 2010, p. 13). KACND sometimes conducts polls in Saudi society and often the results reveal that many people do not want to see women driving so although the king pushes for change, some sections of society resist and continue to resist.¹² Indeed, Saudi analyst Lippman believes most people in the Kingdom are opposed to women driving (2011, p. 5). Western media sources frequently highlight attempts at greater women's empowerment in the Kingdom according to Montagu, but the less well-known male role in supporting increased reform is often overlooked. She cites the examples of judges, lawyers, businessmen, civil servants, princes and doctors in addition to backing female participation in the municipal elections by Shariah judges (2010, p. 80). Nevertheless, even male advocates of human rights in the Kingdom are sometimes guilty of chauvinism, with the opinion that Saudi women are not willing to work together and are not willing to make sacrifices to improve their lot despite the recent move to create an NGO in the Kingdom that will look solely at women's rights.¹³ This chauvinism is yet another hurdle that Saudi women will have to overcome.

Increased unemployment among women shows that there is still a long way to go and the old systems need to change. It would seem that the king supports increased women's rights, but the government appears to be either unable or unwilling to move forward.¹⁴ Indeed, Al Rasheed maintains that the government 'still resists formally opening the public sphere to women, although it is gradually giving them limited space in public events and the media' (2010, p. 247):

King Abdullah has encouraged women's education and entry into the workforce, and tolerated increased visibility of women in public, but most of his gestures have been symbolic, with no institutional or legal affirmation. For example, he allowed a photograph of himself surrounded by more than thirty-five female participants in the Eighth National Dialogue in Najran¹⁵ not wearing face covering to be published

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Interview by author with subject 41, ACPRA political activist (Riyadh: 13.07.10).

¹⁴ Interview by author with Subjects 4 and 5, consultant Ministry of Education (Riyadh: 20.07.10).

¹⁵ The report states erroneously that this was the seventh National Dialogue Meeting. In addition to King Abdullah, the late Crown Prince Sultan also appeared in the *Okaz* photograph, but this photograph was taken when the women visited Riyadh a month after the forum. The release of the photograph after the National Dialogue meeting appeared to send a message that the some senior members of the Al Sa'ud are in agreement on the issue of relaxing gender segregation. According to one source this was timed to coincide with the decision by the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice to reinstate *hai'a* Makkah head Shaikh Ahmed Al Ghamdi who had questioned whether Islam in fact required gender separation (Kapoor 2010, p. 1).

on the front page of *Okaz* newspaper. What loosening has taken place reflects both changes in social attitudes and government policies. This debate has led to looser application of sex segregation in public places like restaurants and shopping malls (Human Rights Watch 2010, p. 18).

According to a Jeddah-based journalist even though the process is slow, and the government admits there is a problem, KACND discussion of women's rights is a step in the right direction despite resistance from the religious establishment.¹⁶ This resistance manifests itself in many ways particularly as female visibility in Saudi media, both as subjects and producers, challenges the religious establishment for whom 'Islamic teaching meant that there is something called a women's nature which strictly limits what they are allowed to do' (Sakr 2008, p. 390).

The discussion of women's issues in the National Dialogue forums constitutes a sign that the government has changed its attitude towards women and this is a new approach in the attitude of the government.¹⁷ Prior to this, in 2002, the then Crown Prince Abdullah met with a senior executive at Saudi ARAMCO, and a group of selected women from all different fields in a private meeting in order to discuss women's issues and each participant presented her own point of view depending on her area of specialization. The King listened attentively according to one attendee who commented that 'he is sincere and he cares'.¹⁸ As Okruhlik points out, the king appears to have given 'quiet permission for women to continue pushing the boundaries in the realm of gender rights' without issuing a royal decree that 'puts the authority of the Al Saud squarely behind women' (2010, p. 408). Indeed, a woman close to the king's family says that King Abdullah's personal consultant Khalid Al Tuwajjre chooses both male and female participants for the National Dialogue; individuals who can talk effectively about their own areas and who can make valuable contributions.¹⁹

¹⁶ Interview by author with Subject 70, former General Director of Jeddah Radio (Jeddah: 06.07.10). She followed in the footsteps of her mother who worked in Saudi radio in the 1960s.

¹⁷ Interview by author with Subject 87, KSU Professor (Riyadh: 17.07.10). Others hold more pessimistic views stating that it is good to have a formal National Dialogue institution but so far the outcome has been nothing, so far no concrete results. Referring to women's rights, Subject 87 points out that many Saudis thought after three or four months something would happen, but nothing did and therefore ask why we should continue if nothing happens'. Indeed, he believes that Norah Alfaiz only obtained her position 'because they, the clan, want a woman in a top position'.

¹⁸ Interview by author with Subject 12, ARAMCO (Al-Khobar: 16.06.10). By sheer coincidence, this meeting took place on the same day as the notorious Makkah girl's school fire which provoked public outrage throughout the Kingdom.

¹⁹ Interview by author with Subject 7, Ministry of Education (Jeddah: 07.07.10). She is regional head and supervisor for the Ministry of Education (female) Jeddah, Makkah and Taif administrative region (Jeddah: 07/07.10). She is also an advisor for Freedom House and works on Middle East and North Africa (MENA) issues related to women's rights.

A number of the Al Sa`ud princesses have also become increasingly outspoken including Princess Adila bin Abdullah Al Sa`ud, Princess Loulwa Al Faisal²⁰ and Princess Basma bin Saud Al Sa`ud²¹ who writes a column for the government newspaper *Al Madinah*. Princess Adila, the king's favourite daughter, plays an active role in public life and, according to Stenslie, enjoys considerable influence with her father as well as her husband, education minister Prince Faisal bin Abdullah bin Mohammed. Many Saudi women hope that this influence will push forward the reform process, however more conservative elements have criticised the education minister as they believe he is being overly influenced by his wife (2011, pp. 71—72). Additionally, the Minister of Education and his deputies Faisal Al Mu`ammar and Norah Alfaiz are said to be unable to implement far reaching educational reforms to because of resistance from the hardliners within the Ministry of Education.²² In her column, Princess Basma a social activist, criticised and questioned the values and methods of the religious police, going as far to say that women are being targeted maliciously due to a lack of government control over the *hai'a* and her comments provoked a fierce debate in the media (Kapoor 2010, p. 2). Another Al Sa`ud, Princess Haila bin Abdulrahman bin Farhan, Director of the Women's Section of the Riyadh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI), backs the activities of KACND and says 'women intellectuals have gone much farther in support of the National Dialogue as they consider dialogue as one of the necessities of life like air and water' as constructive societal dialogue can maintain channels of communication between individuals and groups who 'subscribe to widely differing viewpoints'. In her opinion, the institution has revived a long-standing tradition of societal dialogue and she believes that Saudi women 'stand shoulder to shoulder with men in tackling major challenges facing not just their womenfolk, but also the whole of society' (KACND 2009a, p. 1). In addition, the princess has established effective networks between Saudi women investors and business women and is said to 'embody King Abdullah's reforms and openness, working to dispel myths about Saudi women' (Asia-Pacific Business and Technology Report 2010, p. 1).

²⁰ See Palau, M.G., 2007. *Leaders of Saudi Arabia*. Riyadh: Leaders Publishing Corporation, pp. 202—3.

²¹ See Milmo, C., 2011. The Acton princess calling for reform in Saudi Arabia. *The Independent* [online]. Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/news/the-acton-princess-calling-for-reform-in-saudi-arabia-6284225.html?origin=internalSearch>

²² Interview by author with Subject 70, former General Director of Jeddah Radio (Jeddah: 06.07.10). She says one of the problems they face is cultural because Saudi culture dictates that if the ruler desires something to happen, then it will. However, she declares 'all of us pray that the king will stay alive because we are aware of struggles within the family'.

KACND: Women's Centre

KACND women's center works in tandem with its male counterpart organising the National Meetings and training programmes.²³ In addition, four female KACND members attend joint KACND - Ministry of Education committees where they select projects they judge to be beneficial for the ministry and these are then presented to Vice-Minister for Girls' Education Norah Alfaiz. The director of the women's center maintains that this type of project shows that KACND is providing Saudi women with a forum that facilitates greater inclusion into debate on women's issues, thus arguing that KACND is more female-tolerant than most other institutions in the Kingdom; a fact that many women in Saudi Arabia apparently appreciate.²⁴ According to her, Faisal Al Mu'ammam opened the door for the National Dialogue in the Ministry of Education and he supports women and gives them chances based on qualifications and merit; indeed, 'he fights to give the ladies opportunities'. Therefore, she strongly believes that Saudi women must seize the opportunity presented to them by KACND because the Kingdom needs female leaders so women must face the challenges and not wait for others to do this for them.

Gender equality constitutes the most emotional of all reform issues being debated in Saudi Arabia and Saudis are extremely divided on this issue according to Hamzawy. Notwithstanding the hard-line position of the religious establishment that women be excluded from almost all the public sphere, Hamzawy notes that female intellectuals and scholars who have participated in the National Dialogue conferences 'voiced their concerns with an unprecedented daring resolve' (2008, p. 208). After receiving female participants from the Sixth National Dialogue Forum, King Abdullah declared that Saudi women play a great role in the Kingdom's development and 'make fruitful contributions toward the country's comprehensive progress in various sectors' (Arab News 2006b, p. 1). Through discussion and dialogue the National Dialogue process has created a new channel for self-expression, that is assisting women in Saudi society, and this process has taught women to speak and interact with people and will improve the future for

²³ In fact, the Director of the Women's Center comments that the themes of all the National Dialogue Meetings are decided upon after discussion in the women's section.

²⁴ Interview by author with Subject 54, KACND Director Women's Centre (Riyadh: 21.06.10). In 2010 she visited Oxford 'Said Institute' with the Ministry of Education leadership programme where thirty Saudi male and female participants from the ministry took part in seminars and lectures concentrating on seven projects with Subject 54 specialising in educational dialogue. When completed, these seven research projects will be presented to the Ministry of Education.

Saudi women.²⁵ This process has been predominantly positive according to a Ministry of Education supervisor who argues that it has contributed to greater numbers of Saudi women joining institutions and working in many different fields as well as prompting the government to respond more positively towards women's issues.²⁶

Unfortunately, following the siege of the Grand Mosque in 1979, a new conservatism was allowed to emerge in the Kingdom. KACND's women's centre aims to utilise dialogue training to return to the pre-1979 more open and communicative era, in order to foster, greater tolerance and acceptance of others.²⁷ KACND women's center believes that a great deal was achieved in terms of language and acceptance of others during the period between the Madinah National Dialogue in 2004 and the Riyadh Cultural Discourse in June 2010. The institution was able to assess the difference as many of the Riyadh Cultural Discourse female participants also participated at the Madinah forum. In addition to the issues mentioned in Chapter Three²⁸, the Madinah meeting recommended that women be allowed to sit as judges in family courts so that decisions regarding female and family issues are not the sole jurisdiction of male judges. Doumato maintains that this forum led to reform in the judicial system and since 2007 three Saudi institutions now allow women to study law (2009, p. 3). Women have been invited to other conferences including the first conference of Saudi intellectuals held in Riyadh in September 2004. This conference included a session entitled 'Cultural role of Women', although as with the National Dialogue sessions, women participated through close-circuit television (Arab News 2004a, p. 1).²⁹ However, despite gender segregation for the women present at these KACND forums there is 'for Saudi norms, an impressive range of options' (Aarts 2004, p. 8). At the Al-Kharj preparatory meeting on health services, one participant was impressed by women's participation at the meeting³⁰ so KACND policy regarding female participants appears to be about finding ways to promote greater female participation even if the women do not want to mix

²⁵ Interview by author with Subject 35, female academic and KACND participant (Riyadh: 19.07.10).

²⁶ Interview by author with Subject 7, Ministry of Education (Jeddah: 07.07.10).

²⁷ Interview by author with Subject 54, Director Women's Centre KACND and personal assistant to Director Women's Centre KACND (Riyadh: 21.06.10).

²⁸ See Chapter Three p. 94.

²⁹ As previously noted the National Dialogue Meeting on women's issues in Madinah in 2004 included female delegates, albeit participating via close-circuit television.

³⁰ Interview by author with Subject 42, KSU health lecturer (Riyadh: 29.06.10). She noted that the women were seated in a separate room, but in her opinion, in reality many of the women present would not have been comfortable in a mixed room.

with the male participants.³¹ Other female academics and business women are often invited to be on welcoming committees at KACND when foreign groups visit the Kingdom, such as the groups from US Congress and a visit from Liz Cheney, former US Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs (2005—6).³² Cheney's controversial visit prompted one KACND contributor to state that KACND needs to carefully select and vet invited guests so as to identify those with predetermined agendas so as to avoid inviting individuals who come, but are not ready to listen.³³

KACND and female participation

Vice-Minister for Girls' Education Norah Alfaiz feels the image of Saudi women in society is changing although Saudi women have a responsibility to change this image themselves, hence, only through discussion of women's issues will society be able to understand the situation better and become convinced of the need for greater female participation in the public and private sectors.³⁴ She believes that if more women participate in conferences such as the National Dialogue, then society will better understand the current position of Saudi women. Of course, more women are needed in government and she believes more women should become involved in all aspects of the National Dialogue process and ideally work with the Ministry of Education to help advance KACND's goals. In her opinion, mothers at home also need to be included in the dialogue process, because she considers the mother's role, and by extension the

³¹ Interview by author with Subject 7, Ministry of Education (Jeddah: 07.07.10). At these KACND meetings female participants are evenly divided between tables with a central computer for each group. One participant comments that ladies are particularly careful regarding what they say at meetings because 'the individual is aware that her opinion is important and therefore, needs to be honest'. She also points out it was at the Fifth National Meeting in Abha that 'society first heard ladies speak in public'.

³² Interview by author with Subject 35 (Riyadh: 20.07.10). According to Subject 35, Liz Cheney greatly annoyed many of the Saudi female participants, all of whom were top flight academics and professionals, by her insistence on solely focussing on the rights of the Saudi Shia and ignoring the issue of Saudi women's rights.

³³ Subject 35 is a frequent and active contributor to KACND. She first participated in a session on youth employment and was subsequently a participant at the Madinah Women's Rights meeting. She teaches at the SANG University and KSU for Health Sciences in the nursing and dental departments. She initiated courses where male teachers teach female students and vice-versa, but due to gender segregation rules her superior was concerned about adverse reaction from students and their families. In fact, she says her students enjoy the diversity; coming from middle-class families they do not find this situation strange. SANG University is open to all students irrespective of background, not only from National Guard families.

³⁴ Interview by author with Vice-Minister for Girls' Education Norah Alfaiz, senior ministry staff and KACND women's director (Riyadh: 14.07.10). At the time of this interview Alfaiz was acting Education Minister.

father's role, is essential to national well-being.³⁵ The regional head and supervisor for the Ministry of Education (female) for five areas in the Jeddah, Makkah and Taif administrative region believes the National Dialogue process has been a success because it has taught both men and women to communicate effectively with individuals from the outside world as well as family members at home.³⁶ However, she sadly acknowledges that the stereotype of Saudi women is widespread as women are only seen as home makers who raise their children and look after the household.³⁷

Before becoming involved with KACND many female participants are unfamiliar with their assigned roles and in fact are also unacquainted with the mechanics of the dialogue process. One participant comments that when she attended her first session, she realised that some participants came pre-prepared with what they wanted to say instead of taking part in a dialogue and at this point she understood that it was more important for the meeting to take the form of a seminar discussion rather than a series of individual presentations. Thus, the role of KACND should be not only to supervise the meetings but it should also facilitate the meetings, and the role of the participants is not to be careful of what they are saying, but rather be careful and respectful of whom they are speaking to during the forum.³⁸ A SANG University female lecturer explains that, before her involvement with KACND in 2004, her colleagues and students had little or no knowledge about the institution and its activities, but nowadays, due to her commitment to KACND, the situation has been reversed.³⁹ At one point she was asked

³⁵ Alfaiz says Saudi women will now be allowed to teach primary school boys in grades one to three, i.e. boys of up to ten years of age because she considers the education of children between the ages of three and six to be crucial.

³⁶ Interview by author with Subject 7, Ministry of Education (Jeddah: 07.07.10). She has lived and worked all over Saudi Arabia and is extremely well-connected (Subject 54 commented that Subject 7 'is the Kingdom'). Subject 7 is an advisor for Freedom House and works on MENA issues related to women's rights and gave a presentation to members of Britain's House of Lords when they visited Riyadh. She also wrote a paper for Qasim University on the effects of dialogue on people. Amongst her duties, she oversaw the KACND training programme 'Effective dialogue: how to deal successfully with people' to students, teachers, families, administrators and company managers'. This programme also targeted personnel from the Grand Mosque in Makkah because the security detachments should be 'highly educated' as they are dealing with people coming to 'the House of God' and she believes 'this programme is very important due to the uniqueness of the Makkah region in the Kingdom'. She says there is a greater need for mutual understanding due to the wide variety of people and nationalities that come to Makkah on pilgrimage and many of these people 'are coming together as a new generation'.

³⁷ Subject 7 noted the problem of 'Saudi misrepresentation' when she attended a conference where one of the key-note speakers loudly criticised the Kingdom without ever having visited Saudi Arabia. Sadly, this is an all too common occurrence.

³⁸ Interview by author with Subject 35, SANG University lecturer (Riyadh: 20.07.10).

³⁹ Subject 35 holds a Master's Degree from the University of Michigan and a doctorate from Yale where she was also a research and teaching assistant. She is a certified trainer with Saudi Stages in Accreditation for New Institutions Responsible to the Ministry of Higher Education (NCAAA) although she initially trained at KSU and KFUPM. She was Associate Dean at SANG University.

to give a presentation on the National Dialogue to her faculty, but felt that it was better to have KACND's female director address the university directly because being part of the National Dialogue requires not only active participation, but also being proactive in helping to disseminate information.⁴⁰

The National Dialogue has created a new channel for self-expression and according to many women interviewed for this study this will also help the role of women in society because the Saudi woman uses dialogue in all aspects of her life. Indeed, the dialogue process has taught women to speak and interact with people and this can only help the future of Saudi women in general.⁴¹ This type of dialogue has been very encouraging and it is claimed that the government has started to respond positively towards women's issues and, in consequence, more Saudi women are joining a variety of institutions and working in many different fields.⁴² A KACND participant says when she attended a dialogue seminar she noticed that both students and professionals were taught the same processes. In her opinion, this is a good idea as KACND should not differentiate the two as eventually the students will become the professionals so this gives the students a jump start and the professionals a brush up on past skills that have gone forgotten.⁴³ However, each generation has its own issues that suit the age and its responsibilities; therefore, it is not logical that the same notions of dialogue are applied for the mature working woman and young women as levels of maturity and responsibilities vary greatly between the two categories.⁴⁴

In 2004 a dynamic principal of a female elementary and high school in the Eastern Province started her own dialogue programmes and it was these that led to her involvement with KACND. She claims that KACND recognised the quality of her courses and her effectiveness and for this reason she has gained the trust of the institution as the management recognise that she has the ability to influence individuals

⁴⁰ At the 2004 Madinah meeting on women's issues, the participants were invited to nominate future dialogue themes and it was Subject 35 who suggested the topic 'Us and the Other' which was selected as the for the Fifth National Dialogue Meeting. Subject 35 also says that this meeting led directly to the foundation of King Abdullah's Interfaith Dialogue between Islam, Christianity and Judaism.

⁴¹ Interview by author with Subject 7, Ministry of Education (Jeddah: 07/07.10).

⁴² Ibid. She gives the example of a very nervous Ismaili lady who attended a National Meeting for the first time. This lady said 'I thought nobody liked me as an Ismaili, but after attending the meeting I feel proud to be a Saudi'.

⁴³ Interview by author with Subject 60, female academic (Eastern Province: 21.07.10).

⁴⁴ Interview by author with Subject 49, female academic (Riyadh: 19.07.10).

in a positive way.⁴⁵ This dialogue training was required as there was a need for training courses in citizenship skills in order to break the ice between people and promote greater tolerance and acceptance, in other words, utilise effective dialogue training skills in order to create 'good Saudi citizens'.⁴⁶ In addition to supervising these courses, since 2003 she has also been running a month and a half long female summer camp. In the first year she had only sixty-five students, but this increased dramatically to a current cohort of 1,500 in 2010. Prior to the camp, an open day was held at ARAMCO headquarters that attracted 1,902 potential candidates and nowadays the headmistress handpicks her staff of twenty-one who administer and teach KACND training programmes that aim to create community awareness through the summer camp's activities. Importantly, families believe in the training programme therefore the organisers understand that they have a great responsibility because people trust them with their children.

Saudi girls think that it is always wrong to express their feelings, according to the headmistress, and for this reason she attempts to discuss taboo subjects such as love with her students. In 2009 KACND family dialogue training programmes were started in the Eastern Province and she noticed that this had a positive effect on relationships between parents and children as the dialogue training triggered a domino effect: from family to student to teacher to educational institution. She also believes that the 2010 dialogue training was effective and made a difference because KACND reached the mothers in the house and the mothers are the key.⁴⁷ In her opinion, mothers are responsible for an improved national future so women need to be given more space and trust. Indeed, the National Dialogue is seen a positive step forward by many women, but there is still societal resistance to the dialogue process and this resistance may continue long into the future, perhaps up to twenty years. In addition, the headmistress stresses that it is important to make people believe in the culture of dialogue because when some individuals are asked to participate in the KACND meetings they do not really believe in the dialogue process. Therefore, it is necessary vet and select people who can make a difference even though it is necessary to bear in mind that everyone uses the dialogue

⁴⁵ Subject 60 did not attend the original KACND dialogue training sessions because the women's director informed her 'you are ahead of us'.

⁴⁶ Interview by author with Subject 44, Ministry of Education / female educator (Al-Khobar: 15.07.10). Each year she gives a speech based on one of these issues.

⁴⁷ This point was reiterated by writer and Subject 68, KACND participant in an interview with the author. She believes that 'the mother is the key to all of these issues in order to mould effective citizens' (Jeddah: 05.07.10).

process for their own purposes. Nevertheless, individuals need to consider Saudi Arabia rather than their own interests because, when a person puts the interests of the nation above his or her personal interests, then personal values begin to translate into love of the Kingdom and its people despite the fact that sometimes a Saudi does not know his or her rights even though these rights are written as law.⁴⁸

The position of women has improved in the Kingdom and that the attitude to women is changing slowly especially as women now run companies and work in many different fields.⁴⁹ In fact, the government may be preparing a woman to become a senior minister for the first time following the appointment of Norah Alfaiz as vice-minister. Alfaiz is said to be paving the way for a senior princess such as Princess Al Johara bin Faisal or Princess Adila bin Abdullah to take over as overall Minister for Education from Prince Faisal bin Abdullah bin Mohammed.⁵⁰ It is said that Alfaiz's principal role has been to prepare society to accept a women minister, but initially the post needed to be filled by an individual who was not an Al Sa`ud. There is speculation that should Princess Al Johara or Princess Adila be appointed as Minister of Education this would widen the reform process due to the power of the princess and in consequence, benefit society. In fact, it is claimed that an important princess already drives in Jeddah, therefore once something is done by a senior princess it provides the opportunity for others to follow suit.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Interview by author with Subject 44, Ministry of Education / female educator (Al-Khobar: 15.07.10). She cites an example from her own work environment of a manager who retired, but rather than select an open-minded candidate for the job, the authorities including Vice-Minister for female education Norah Alfaiz, chose a conservative over the many younger, qualified and sometimes 'more liberal candidate'. In her opinion, this problem is not only political, but also linked to tribal and personal affiliations and proves to her that the authorities should change their position as the rules were written fifty years ago. She also maintains that a Saudi woman applying for a job can be hurt by allegations as to whether a woman is one hundred per cent Saudi. She also believes that salaries should be based on merit and be performance related.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid. Prince Faisal was formerly deputy chief in the General Intelligence Directorate and now Minister of Education. The prince is from a different branch of the ruling family and is married to Princess Adila bin Abdullah making them a recognised 'power couple' in the Kingdom

⁵¹ This information might have come from Subject 4 who according to Subject 44 'uses the royal family to get things done. If she wants to do something she just makes a call, but always with the best intentions'. Subject 4 works for the Ministry of Education and has been working with CfBT Education Trust, UK assisting Ofsted training in the Kingdom. Subject 4 received her doctorate from Ain-Shams University, Cairo in 1995, and is the first Saudi female to do so, although at that time she was living in Kuwait and commuted. Subject 4 is extremely well-connected, especially to the Al Sa`ud as her father was one of the companions of King Abdulaziz. Subject 5, her husband, used to be a business partner of Prince Alwaleed bin Talal and is currently the owner of the Saudi Planet Hollywood franchise.

Coleman acknowledges that critics dismiss the National Dialogue as little more than window dressing, but relates a conversation with journalist Sabria Jawhar who believes that KACND has ‘made a big change as the institution gave women permission to talk’. Jawhar says that ‘Saudi women work in the shadows, but do not want to live in the shadows anymore. Saudi women need equality, as long as it falls within the Shariah (2010, p. 221). Furthermore, she maintains that women agree on the need for change, but, as Saudi Arabia is a young nation, reform must be implemented step by step and, as Hill points out, and the women interviewed for this study confirmed, Saudi women desire progress that is in keeping with the Kingdoms traditional values (2011, p. 3).

The Vice-Minister’s View

Vice-Minister for Girls' Education Norah Alfaiz maintains that KACND has done an excellent job because it has reached all people, ages and regions in addition to reaching people who have different backgrounds, i.e. from other sects, and this, in her opinion, has given Saudis a chance to sit together, positively impacting on society.⁵² She believes that KACND also needs to reach people outside the Kingdom, both Saudis and non-Saudis as well as non-Saudis within the country. She also believes that a whole host of disparate individuals should be included in the National Dialogue including those in social associations, non-Saudi students in international schools as well as embassy staff; both Saudis abroad and foreign staff at foreign embassies in Saudi Arabia and even prison inmates and those in rehabilitation programmes. Alfaiz claims that the wives of Saudi ambassadors can also act as powerful messengers for society.⁵³ Alfaiz says other KACND achievements include KACND being directly responsible through the National Meetings for the establishment of Saudi Arabia National Day⁵⁴

Alfaiz maintains the Fourth National Dialogue Meeting on Women’s Rights achieved a great deal regarding the role of women in Saudi society as in her opinion this meeting led to the issuance of the National Identity Cards for women and of course, was a major factor leading to her appointment as vice-minister.⁵⁵ Alfaiz also states that the image of Saudi women in society is changing and that Saudi women themselves have a

⁵² Interview by author with Norah Alfaiz, Vice-Minister for Female Education: (Riyadh: 14.07.10) with Subject 54, (KACND), Subject 39 and Subject 76, female Ministry of Education officials.

⁵³ She cites the example of the wife of the Saudi Ambassador to China who is very active in the Beijing diplomatic community and Alfaiz witnessed her many activities when she visited the 2010 Shanghai Expo and a women’s conference in China. The Saudi Arabian pavilion at the 2010 Shanghai Expo attracted over five million visitors.

⁵⁴ 23rd September.

⁵⁵ At the time of this interview Alfaiz was acting Education Minister (July 2010).

responsibility to change this image, hence, only through discussion of women's issues will society be able to understand the situation better and become convinced of the need for greater female participation in the public and private sectors. She believes that 'if more women participate in conferences such as the National Dialogue, then society will better understand the current position of Saudi women'. In addition, Alfaiz believes that mothers at home need to be included in the National Dialogue process, because she believes the mother's role is very important to national well-being.⁵⁶ Alfaiz says more women are needed in government and that more people should become involved in all aspects of the National Dialogue and ideally work with the Ministry of Education to help advance KACND's goals.

In Alfaiz's opinion, Saudi society does not fully understand the role and function of KACND; at least not yet, even though large numbers of individuals have been given the opportunity to participate in its forums. For this reason KACND's new trainers are working with female students in Asir and Riyadh provinces, and the goal is to train five million female students in dialogue techniques over the next five years. However, she acknowledges that the male training programme must not be overlooked as men require the same training as female students, and that both long and short-term dialogue training plans are needed. With this in mind, numerous KACND workshops tackle important social issues and links to and within society established that did not exist before. So far these workshops have covered topics such as education, youth and cross-cultural dialogue and provided an excellent opportunity for the exchanging of ideas. The workshops have helped prepare participants and themes for the National Meetings both the ideological and service National Dialogues as well as encouraging general discussion. It is hoped that in the future topics such as child abuse will be discussed. In her opinion, KACND should get more people involved in its activities in particular greater numbers of university students and school pupils. Alfaiz argues:

Within an educational context, one of the main achievements of KACND is that it has been able to reach students at all levels, through principals, faculty and families; we should listen to the students as many of them have not yet had the opportunity to participate. Youth is the future, therefore it is important to understand how dialogue can help them. We also need to listen to the unemployed in addition to individuals from both the private and public sectors. All these individuals need to provide their own input'.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ A point reiterated by many female interviewees for this study.

⁵⁷ Interview by author with Norah Alfaiz, Vice-Minister for Female Education: (Riyadh: 14.07.10).

Alfaiz believes that the culture of dialogue has become, and continues to become, deep-rooted in Saudi society. She maintains that KACND's activities lighten the work load for the ministry and allow the ministry's staff to concentrate on other things, but she stresses that the government still needs KACND because there is a lot that need to be achieved.

KACND AND YOUTH ISSUES

Demographics

Saudi demographics are central to understanding some of the most pressing societal issues facing the Al Sa`ud regime in the immediate future. Foremost is the growing unemployment issue that poses one of the biggest problems for the government as it attempts to find a solution to its demographic problem or so called 'youth bulge'.⁵⁸ In 1980 the Kingdom's population numbered seven million, whilst the current population is estimated at nearly 27,000,000 including 5,576,076 non-nationals (July 2011 EST.), with 82 per cent of the population living in urban settings.

The Kingdom's age structure:

- 0-14 years 29.4 (male 3,939,377/female 3, 754,020), (2011 EST.)
- 15-64 years 67.6 per cent (male 9,980,253/female 7,685,328), (2011 EST.)
- 65 years and over 3 per cent (male 404,269/female 368,456), (2011 EST.)
- Median age 26.4 years for men and 23.9 years for women (2011 EST.)
- Population growth rate of 1.536 per cent (2011 EST.) (Central Intelligence Agency 2011, p. 3).

These demographic statistics are directly linked to issues and problems of persistent unemployment, increased urbanisation aggravated by the oft-cited youth bulge. These constitute problems that the regime needs to address in order to prevent unrest and increased *jihadi* recruitment. To further exacerbate the problem political commentators note that society is changing far more rapidly than the government and the regime realise and the Al Sa`ud does not seem to be fully aware of the extent of this rapid change, in other words the government is ignorant of what is going on in society.⁵⁹ An

⁵⁸ Interview by author with Subject 41, ACPRA, and Institute of Diplomatic Studies (Riyadh: 13.07.10). He argues that there is a link between demography and societal frustration and that as 'resentment grows in society, people write polite letters to the newspapers, but they are then usually ignored. After that, these same people start to hit out'.

⁵⁹ Interview by author with Subject 63, Shia writer and political activist (Qatif: 09.04.10).

Al Sa`ud critic concurs and argues that the regime remains unaware of societal change due to the fact that power is intoxicating.⁶⁰

To the wider world, the events of the 2011 Arab Spring highlighted the region's societal grievances and pressing social issues, in particular problems related to demographics. As with Tunisia and Egypt, many of these same issues also affect the Kingdom as young Saudis, often well-educated and media-savvy, are faced with poor employment prospects, enforced gender segregation and constraints on freedom of expression. Indeed, in early 2011 the political turmoil in the region was followed avidly throughout the Kingdom by a generation of young Saudis who, up until that point, had rarely followed the news from neighbouring countries. In January 2011 the author observed how these young Saudis followed the regional unrest with great interest; watching the demonstrations on 24-hour rolling news in coffee shops, restaurants and even gyms.⁶¹ In the evenings, men of all ages, relatives and friends, gathered in the traditional meeting rooms to watch and discuss the unfolding events in Tunis and Cairo on the communal television. The Arab Spring sparked open discussion both amongst Saudis and Arab expatriates in the Kingdom and the related comment and debate in the domestic media and online forums continues to be lively to this day.

Another concern for the government is that young Saudis are now connected to the world in ways that would have been unthinkable five years ago. They are also more knowledgeable about life outside the Kingdom and, as Murphy notes, more outspoken as the Internet offers them protection through its anonymity (2011, p. 2). In 2010 it was reported that there had been a huge increase in online participation on social networks such as Facebook and Twitter; the 2010 Twitter usage increased by 440 per cent in the Kingdom in comparison to a 95 per cent increase worldwide (Atwood 2011, p. 1). Whilst some commentators note that nowadays Saudis have almost unlimited access to Western information sources, it is contact with other Arab peers, in particular in neighbouring Gulf States that is more significant. For example, a young woman in Riyadh is now fully aware of the rights and opportunities enjoyed by her peers in Kuwait or Abu Dhabi where these young women can work alongside men, drive cars and, in Kuwait, vote and stand for election without jeopardising their Islamic identity.

⁶⁰ Interview by author with Subject 41, ACPRA, and Institute of Diplomatic Studies (Riyadh: 13.07.10).

⁶¹ Observation by author (Riyadh, Al-Khobar and Qatif: January 2011).

All of which leads young Saudi women to wonder why they cannot enjoy the same opportunities at home.

Underlying these developments is a growing generational divide and the crucial fact that the 2010 census showed that seventy per cent of the Saudi population is less than thirty years of age whilst those in elite positions are often several generations older:

Blogger Saeed Al Wahabi has this really interesting post about the generational divide in Saudi Arabia between the leadership and the population. Al Wahabi did some simple math to calculate the average age for officials in different parts of the government, and these are some of his findings: the average age of ministers is 65; the average age of governors is 61; and the average age of Shura Council members is 61. Similar numbers are found when we try to see the ages in the Supreme Judicial Council, the Supreme Ulama Council, and even members of KACND. Now compare the aforementioned numbers with these two numbers: 70 per cent of the population is under 30, and average age of Saudi citizens is 19 years old (Al Omran 2011, p. 1).

As events in the Arab world unfolded throughout 2011 many senior government officials and media commentators were compelled to turn their attention to the problem of youth unemployment and the alarming realisation that this could constitute a ticking time-bomb that threatens the Kingdom's stability and future.

Employment and the Saudization Drive

The economic, political and social implications of mass youth unemployment, as well as related underemployment, have raised the spectre of socio-political unrest, or *fitna*, so that lack of jobs is now acknowledged to have become a matter of urgency. In April 2011 Banque Saudi Fransi issued a report stating that unemployment reached ten per cent in 2010 with the highest ratio of thirty-nine per cent in the twenty to twenty-four age group (Al Mualimi 2011, p. 1). At the 2011 Fifth Global Competitiveness Forum held in Riyadh, Labour Minister Adel Fakieh warned that Saudi Arabia has to create five million jobs by 2030 and that if the situation in the job market is not addressed urgently, unemployment will increase dramatically and rapidly. In order to meet the needs of new Saudis coming onto the job market, an estimated five million new positions by 2030, that is a quarter of a million jobs a year, will need to be created over the next twenty years, primarily in the private sector (Cousins 2011, p. 1). To achieve this, the economy needs to grow eight per cent annually according to Khalid Al Falih, president and CEO of Saudi Aramco (Murphy 2011, p. 3). Unfortunately for the government, according to findings from the 3rd ASDA's Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth

Survey conducted in December 2010 and January 2011, ‘the biggest study of its kind of the region’s largest demographic’ (Mohamed 2011, p. 1), seventy-nine per cent of Saudi youth surveyed aged eighteen to twenty-four would prefer to work for the government as opposed to working in the private sector (2010, p. 20).⁶² However, this proposed job creation scheme involves male employment only ignoring the fact that there is also a need to provide jobs for women. In fact, increased urbanisation and high rents in the major cities are starting to make female employment an economic necessity for many young families as a single male bread-winner may not earn enough to cover the essentials, in particular in an expensive city such as Riyadh. In addition, the government’s desire to include more women in the workforce means that at least 100,000 further jobs a year will be required on top of the male quota. This is a tall order by any standards and the attempt at expanding the female workforce has been met with resistance from religious conservatives as demonstrated by the hard-line response to the proposal by Prince Alwaleed bin Talal’s Kingdom Holding company to employ female cashiers at its Panda supermarket chain in Jeddah in 2010.⁶³ Dr Hind Mohammed Al Ashaikh, Professor of Economics at the Riyadh Institute of Public Administration,⁶⁴ argues there is no limit to employment opportunities for women as society’s needs for goods and services should generate these positions, but the problem is not female employment, rather how to incorporate women into the Kingdom’s public life as without this the nation’s economic development will be hindered (KACND 2009k, p. 1).

In January 2011 Saudi economist Abdulrahman Al Homaid advocated the Saudization of the entire retail sector. Al Homaid argued that as the economically important retail sector is monopolised by foreigners, a complete employment transfer to a Saudi workforce would create tens of thousands of jobs in the short-term (Arab News 2011b, p. 1). However, salary differentials, the government encouraging employers to pay Saudis more, and sacking the foreign workforce ‘en masse’ could prove extremely chaotic and counter-productive. The January 2011 this ‘retail theory’ was dismissed by one government critic who argued that it will not happen, because in reality the regime

⁶² Better news for the Saudi government: ninety per cent of youth surveyed displayed ‘entrepreneurial aspirations’ and said they intend to start their own businesses within five years (ASDA’A 2010: 20).

⁶³ In May 2011 a few female cashiers continue to work in Jeddah supermarkets, but other companies had halted female recruitment.

⁶⁴ Dr Hind Mohammed Al Shaikh is a former professor of economics at King Faisal University (KFU).

tolerates unemployment and in fact is trading off prosperity with unemployment.⁶⁵ In addition, he maintains that the government has no grip on the Saudization programme because once a state has rent seeking tendencies it is difficult for it to do anything different with the result that preserving the rent could lead to underdevelopment. Consequently, unemployment will remain a problem because most big businesses are owned by the Al Sa`ud and the princes prefer to employ non-Saudis; even taxi companies are owned by the Al Sa`ud.⁶⁶ The bottom line is that failed government policy is to blame for these problems and this in a year when an estimated half-a-million high school and college seniors graduated. According to some Saudi economists, the government must implement two policies immediately in order to deal with the problem. Firstly, the flow of cheap foreign labour must be slowed down as it is forcing Saudis out of private sector jobs and secondly, the government must create more high-skilled, high-waged jobs (Knickmeyer 2011, pp. 1—3).

However, in 2011 the Ministry of Labor launched a new initiative ‘Nitaqat’ (Ranges) to replace the existing Saudization programme. The goal of Nitaqat is to boost the nationalization of private sectors jobs by providing Saudi nationals with a more rapid and better standing in the labour market. Labour Minister Adel Fakeih says:

Saudi Arabia has a young population and this exerts pressure on the labour market due to the increased numbers of young Saudis coming into the working age. Unemployment is a serious issue with diverse negative implications that could affect the country’s socioeconomic stability (Jabarti 2011, pp. 1—6).

Whereas the former Saudization programme required all employment sectors to enforce a blanket quota of 30 per cent nationals, the new initiative has more flexible rules that are dependent on the size of the company. Fakeih claims the new system is more dynamic than its predecessor because it derives its nationalization quotas from actual business performance. However, its arrival was greeted by alarm in some parts of the employment sector as it could jeopardise the current status of guest workers.

Another employment related problem is that young Saudi men are often unwilling to relocate within the country to find a job, as Bosbait and Wilson note ‘there is a marked preference for Saudis to work close to home’ reflected in strong kinship ties and obligations (2005, p. 542), therefore, it is unthinkable for many men to move away from

⁶⁵ Interview by author with Subject 41, ACPRA political activist (Riyadh: 05.01.11).

⁶⁶ Ibid.

family and relatives. In the case of Saudi women, Foley notes a 2010 campaign to encourage Saudi women to work as cooks, cleaners and housemaids ‘failed because most Saudis could not accept the idea of Saudi women working for other Saudis’ (2010, p. 197) or carrying out domestic or manual work considered to be beneath Saudis and the responsibility of the expatriate workforce. Furthermore, Lippman points out that employers say young Saudi men have ‘an overdeveloped sense of their own worth in the marketplace and an underdeveloped commitment to work’ (2011, p. 2). Indeed, what does the future hold for very wealthy Saudi youth, such as those students who attend PSU? They are on average around twenty years old and many have no concept of the value of money.⁶⁷ Certainly, the role of the rentier state cannot be overlooked and the concern is whether the issue of a post-oil Saudi Arabia is discussed in the highest circles, or in fact, do those in the highest circles really care.⁶⁸ How would a drastic change in the rentier state system affect today’s youth if or when the oil revenue either stops or more likely decreases rapidly?⁶⁹

At the National Dialogue Meeting on employment in Dhahran, a young female participant noted that, in comparison to the education forum, there were fewer delegates and a lot more empty chairs.⁷⁰ In her opinion there was little excitement and arguments broke out between groups of graduates and unemployed female graduates who became so frustrated that some of them started crying. Eastern Province Governor Prince Mohammad bin Fahd attended the meeting and exacerbated the situation by informing the unemployed female graduates that their predicament was due to the fact that maybe they were not skilled enough to get jobs, in other words, he was saying it was the fault of the graduates that they were still unemployed and not the fault of the government. The participant commented that there appeared to be no logical response from the regime, nor did the government inform the unemployed graduates that a solution would take time, but the authorities were willing to help.

⁶⁷ Discussions with Subjects 27 and 52, PSU business students (Riyadh: 2010).

⁶⁸ Interview by author with Subject 69, writer and member *majlis al-shura* (Riyadh: 21.06.10).

⁶⁹ Related questions need to be asked as to whether a city such as Riyadh could function if insufficient government funds are available as the city imports staggering amounts of potable water in order to survive in the middle of a desert. In addition, what would happen if funds were no longer available to cover the cost of the expatriate workforce of all nationalities and professions?

⁷⁰ Interview by author with Subject 15, PMU student and KACND participant ((Dammam: 15.07.10). She says she felt bad for these female graduates and notes that at another work related seminar the atmosphere was the same

Saudization is itself a problem because it is seen as the only solution. In fact, partial Saudization is generating problems of its own and even if full Saudization becomes a reality, it will still be difficult to create 200,000 jobs a year.⁷¹ For this reason, ordinary Saudis and the private sector will have to accept the idea of cheap labour and production or they will have to stay at home and remain unemployed. In addition, most government investment is in industry, but this has been slow and can only provide employment for 50,000 graduates a year, mainly in petro-chemicals. Saudi Arabia needs more investment and the government needs to decide the principal route the economy will take in the future, i.e., service, industry or tourism, and this will require a different relationship with foreign powers. In addition, the activist suggests that the *hajj* is seen as a burden by the government, but it must be looked at as an opportunity to provide additional jobs and therefore the current ten day visa policy needs to be relaxed.⁷² This means that the government will have to rethink its policy as tourism equals opening the doors, whereas security equals closing the doors and for this reason tourism as a potential economic sector will have to change its philosophy. However, the KACND Deputy Secretary-General believes youth must be made to understand employment in its broadest sense so that job-seekers neither limit their field of work nor dampen their entrepreneurial spirit. He maintains that what matters most is the ability to change the work culture, as success in changing the work culture will open new work horizons and stimulate the ambitions of the Kingdom's youth (2009, p. 2).

Promoting education: the 'king's dilemma'

The Saudi government is educating its young population with the vast majority attending higher educational institutions in the Kingdom and the best students being sent to study overseas, sponsored by the King Abdullah Scholarship scheme. In April 2011, Minister of Higher Education Dr Khaled Al Anqari announced a new twenty-five year plan for the development of higher education declaring that the higher education budget has increased threefold and represents twelve per cent of the Kingdom's total budget (Al Harithy 2011, p. 1). In 2012 SAR 137.9 billion was allocated to education and training in order to convert the Kingdom into a knowledge-based society by 2022 (Saudi Gazette 2012, p. 1). Naturally, this educational process is raising the hopes and aspirations of young Saudis, but this raises the question of how these students, not to mention the Master's and Ph.D. students returning home, are going to be gainfully

⁷¹ Interview by author with Subject 63, writer and political activist (Qatif: 18.01.11).

⁷² Ibid.

employed. In addition, it seems unlikely that a highly educated and motivated cohort of female Ph.D.s will simply be willing to get married and start families. Another factor is that, unlike many nationalities who study overseas, the vast majority of Saudis return home as culturally there is little or no interest in settling permanently outside the Kingdom. Thus, even carefully managed social reform can lead to out-of-control change and the case of Al Sa`ud educational policy provides a classic example of the 'king's dilemma' (Ottaway and Dunne 2007, p. 4) when reforms from the top increase demands for more radical change from the bottom. For this reason, Power contends that the monarchical elites are walking a tightrope (2012).

The link between post-education employment opportunities and lack of jobs has already resulted in demonstrations in Riyadh and Jeddah in 2010 by unemployed teachers and graduates from teacher-training colleges (Gulf States Newsletter 2010, p. 1). The demonstrations highlighted the issue of employment related training. Indeed, a Riyadh headmaster points out the paradox of the government opening colleges and expanding student numbers when ultimately the government is unable to provide jobs for the large number of graduates. He says this makes people feel that the state says we will educate them, but if they cannot find a job then the state steps back, and this is breeding frustration and anger.⁷³ In 2006 a Ministry of Education consultant who participated at a KACND preparatory meeting on education in Riyadh recognised that there were many problems with education in the Kingdom and therefore, she considered it to be an appropriate time for change within the Ministries of Education. The meeting provided her with a platform and says she spoke frankly regarding what she perceived as the principal educational problems by informing the forum about what she felt about the then state of Saudi education.⁷⁴ However, in her opinion the overall education system is currently in good hands and she is sure that Education Minister Prince Faisal can and will do more because she claims the prince promised King Abdullah that in thirteen years' time Saudi Arabia would become a technology-based society. This helped the king to understand that, for Saudi Arabia to advance, the king firstly needed to implement educational reform and he required Prince Faisal in the Ministry of

⁷³ Interview by author with Subject 75, Riyadh elementary and high school headmaster (Riyadh: 09.01.11).

⁷⁴ Interview by author with Subjects 4 and 5, consultant Ministry of Education (Riyadh: 20.07.10).

Education along with Deputy Minister Norah Alfaiz and former Deputy Minister Faisal Al Mu`ammar to achieve this.⁷⁵

The state established the National Dialogue because there was a lack of institutional dialogue in daily life according to a Riyadh headmaster and so the establishment of KACND was positive because the institution has helped to develop institutional roles in society.⁷⁶ However, the current educational curriculum has not assisted this development and one of the main reasons for this has been because of resistance from educational personnel. In addition, the youth-oriented National Dialogue programmes within educational institutions have so far failed to reach their intended target because of rejection from principals and teachers mainly due to religious ideology.⁷⁷ Poor educational standards are also cited as a major issue by a Jeddah-based journalist.⁷⁸ Prior to the founding of KACND there was apparently a serious lack of family dialogue, but the state promotion of inter-family dialogue has not yet reached a successful point and for this reason both staff and students suffer the consequences in educational institutions due to the lack of dialogue within families. Nowadays, the Ministry of Education has started to emphasise the importance of the culture of dialogue in schools and this prompted the headmaster to implement his own dialogue training programmes that mirror those at KACND.⁷⁹ He trained himself and his teachers in dialogue culture and the value of listening to students so that the students are able to comprehend the same values in ways that reflects their own beliefs. In his opinion:

There is still a very traditional bureaucratic way of doing things, in other words, the school receives orders from ministries and implements them, but there is no method of evaluating the results. Also, there is no mechanism to emphasise the

⁷⁵ As part of her commitment to education, Subject 4 works for an organisation similar to that of the Prince's Trust in the UK, i.e., one that helps young people establish their own businesses. The organisation is headed by Prince Abdulaziz bin Abdullah and assisted by Princess Adila bin Abdullah. Subject 4 volunteers her time in Riyadh although the organisation operates Kingdom wide and other individuals either volunteer time or donate funds. She also organised a conference and seminar for Princess Adila that dealt both with male and female employment issues. However, an individual, whether male or female, must be unemployed to benefit from the scheme.

⁷⁶ Interview by author with Subject 75, Riyadh elementary and high school headmaster (Riyadh: 09.01.11).

⁷⁷ Ibid. That said, rejection may be too strong a word as many educational staff members do not have sufficient training and / or personal development to fulfil the programme's goals and train students effectively.

⁷⁸ Interview by author with Subject 2, journalist, TV presenter (Jeddah: 06.07.10).

⁷⁹ Interview by author with Subject 75, Riyadh elementary and high school headmaster (Riyadh: 09.01.11). In addition, he cares about dialogue training so much so that he sent some of his students to interview Faisal Al Mu`ammar about their educational aspirations. However, he claims his experience as a member of the educational elite does not reflect the situation in most state schools.

importance of these ministerial directives so we have our own evaluation process that involves three actors in the school: students, teachers and parents.⁸⁰

Prior to this evaluation process there were no opportunities to hear any of these actors' voices, but the implementation of the dialogue training skills has lessened the problems and deepened the culture of dialogue although it is necessary to identify the borderline between the interests of a) the school, b) the pupils and c) institutional demands. Furthermore, it is desirable to establish individual educational goals, i.e., every student should become acquainted with his / her rights and duties.⁸¹

A female participant representing PMU at the National Dialogue meeting on education felt disappointed after the forum because the meeting did not find solutions or recommend changes; in her opinion it simply discussed the issues with no concrete outcome. Interestingly, in the years since this National Meeting the participant's opinion changed and nowadays she no longer feels disappointed because she recognises that in the last three years there have been educational changes that resulted directly from the National Dialogue forum.⁸² For example, changes occurred in text books and educational material, plus older teachers were retired to allow newly qualified teachers to be hired; teachers who understand modern life and in particular understand young peoples' requirements and aspirations.⁸³ The participant points out that nowadays companies require English and computer skills, but many female students do not have these skills because they were not taught in school. This is the reason that private universities such as PMU and PSU teach these essential skills and are able to send students directly into the workplace after graduation.⁸⁴ A KSU lecturer and KACND participant conducts two-hour lectures that are divided into two equal sections so that her students have an opportunity to express themselves. She says in the past students were wary of joining in discussions as they believed they would be blacklisted if they spoke their minds. However, she discovered that her students have a great deal of

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Interview by author with Subject 15, female student PMU and Subject 14 (Dammam: 15.07.10).

⁸³ Ibid. She says in the past, Saudi universities did not allow female students to wear anything but black or white, but now there is more freedom. Her internship at the Dammam Chamber of Commerce proved to her that she already possesses more of these skills than many of her colleague some of whom have worked at the Chamber of Commerce for over ten years. She attributes her ability to operate effectively in the work environment to the curriculum at PMU with its emphasis on these skills and weekly student presentations. Subject 15 also attended the National Meeting on health in Najran, but not as a participant, this time she accompanied a male family member who was participating.

⁸⁴ Ibid. PSU in Riyadh offers male students work placements in banks and finance companies. Very often, after graduating, the students are offered full-time position with these companies.

interest in both domestic and world affairs and wish to discuss and share opinions with both staff and their peers. In consequence, one of the most important aspects of dialogue training is that it teaches an individual to listen and listening to others has helped her students develop intellectually. This is one of the main areas where KACND has opened a lot of doors and released previously untapped potential in society.⁸⁵

The King Abdullah Scholarship Programme

In 2011 any discussion related to youth issues and education inevitably touches on the merits of the ‘King Abdullah Foreign Scholarship’ programme. In March 2011 it was estimated that 106,000 Saudis had received scholarships to pursue higher studies at reputable institutions in countries such as the USA, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Egypt, India, Malaysia and China (Ghafour 2011, p. 1).⁸⁶ Total spending on the scheme will reach SAR 20 billion by the end of 2012 according to Deputy Education Minister Abdullah Al Moussa with the number of scholarship students staying around 120,000 (Ghafour 2011, p. 1). It is generally acknowledged that the scheme and the king’s intentions are positive; however opinion appears to be divided as to both the short-term and long-term effects of the scholarship programme on the Kingdom’s long-term development. The scholarship scheme is generally well-regarded as those students studying abroad will return to the Kingdom having been exposed to other cultures and society.⁸⁷ It is hoped these students will have learnt to think critically during their studies overseas as it is claimed that they are unable to learn how to do this in the current Saudi high school and university system.⁸⁸ Consequently, when the scholarship students return to the Kingdom it is anticipated that they will be able to promote change as these individuals will have a collective experience of living and studying in twenty-eight different countries.⁸⁹ It is hoped that within four to five years subsequent to their return, significant changes will start to be seen in society and these will be attributed to a collective attitude that will impact on women’s rights, respect for time-keeping and time management, and the value of money, as well as study and life skills. In other words, the students will come back with a new outlook, but all being

⁸⁵ Interview by author with Subject 42, KSU health lecturer (Riyadh: 29.06.10).

⁸⁶ Students on foreign scholarships in 2011: 47,397 BA Degree, 22, 370 MA Degree, 5,026 Ph.D. and 1,835 fellowship courses. Percentage of students per host country: USA thirty per cent, UK fifteen per cent, Canada eleven per cent, Australia eight per cent, Egypt six per cent.

⁸⁷ Various interviews by author with multiple subjects (Saudi Arabia: 2009—11).

⁸⁸ Interview by author with Subject 70, former General Director of Jeddah Radio (Jeddah: 06.07.10).

⁸⁹ Interview by author with Subject 7 (Jeddah: 07.07.10). She has helped to prepare King Abdullah Scholarship female students for their study sojourns overseas, and this has included KACND dialogue training courses.

well they will also have more respect for Saudi Arabia and will appreciate what they have here as well as valuing the relative safety in the Kingdom.⁹⁰

Despite the fact that King Abdullah Scholarships are important and could prove beneficial to Saudi society in the long-term, if the state does not implement significant reforms soon after these students return, there will be a disaster according to one source.⁹¹ She argues that forty to fifty per cent of these students will be eligible for leadership positions and warns if the state does not provide these then what alternative, if any, can the government provide? Hence, there must be a new policy specifically directed at these returning scholarship students because otherwise, if they come back to the Kingdom and nothing changes, then this will be a recipe for upheaval as the state will be unable to control the negative fallout. It is true that there are available positions at ARAMCO in the Eastern Province, but the company cannot employ all of these individuals. In the worst case scenario there will be serious consequences as the authorities do not seem to be aware of the repercussions that could occur when and if the scholarship students return en masse.⁹² Nevertheless, in the long-term the King Abdullah Scholarships might not prove to be very effective as in the opinion of one writer most Saudi students take Saudi society and culture with them when they travel abroad and fail to integrate with the host country's culture.⁹³ It has also been pointed out that Saudi students do not stand for elections in foreign universities and this is disappointing as if they did, it would help cultivate democratic principles amongst the scholarship students. Furthermore, if Saudi students fail to interact with other cultures and return home with much the same viewpoint as when they departed the Kingdom, at best this will only help maintain the status quo.⁹⁴ On the other hand, if Saudi society gains five per cent from the one hundred thousand plus students on the programme, then that will constitute an achievement and the programme will be considered to have been worthwhile, but it is also argued that the programme will not necessarily produce

⁹⁰ Subject 7 says King Abdullah is 'a very great man. When you meet him you feel as though he is your father' and 'he is very kind and close to us, because this love comes from the inside'. She also comments on King Abdullah's immediate family 'who are all the same' remarking that when she recently visited the king's sister in hospital and stayed with her the princess drove to and from the hospital in a car without security. She says that 'whilst we need protocol, we need love for the royal family and king more, and we feel it'. She says 'I think that it is nice to feel safe, because you are secure inside'.

⁹¹ Interview by author with Subject 44, Ministry of Education / female educator (Al-Khobar: 15.07.10).

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Interview by author with Subject 73, Shia writer (Eastern Province: 08.04.10).

⁹⁴ Interview by author with Subject 79, scholar and 2nd National Dialogue participant (Riyadh: 04.04.10). He says Saudi universities do not have societies to the same degree as western universities.

beneficial results.⁹⁵ On a negative note, one *majlis al-shura* member does not think the scholarships will be of assistance to society as the students will return to the Kingdom ‘more closed than before they left’ leaving no discernible effect on society.⁹⁶ In reality, the rationale behind the King Abdullah Scholarship Programme is to maintain or improve living standards and this explains the significant lack of students enrolled in humanities programmes in the Kingdom and also those being sent abroad on scholarships. He claims that those students who pursue humanities only do so to gain the certification and not to improve their critical thinking ability.⁹⁷

The current Saudi high school and university system is often criticised for neglecting to teach critical thinking skills. Students are frequently ‘taught’ to pass examinations with very little emphasis on the important transition to university education or requirements of the workplace. The King Abdullah Scholarships certainly provide the opportunity to acquire the skills needed to fill this critical gap. Overseas Saudi students, particularly those on post-graduate and research degrees, frequently attend intensive pre-sessional and in-sessional academic study skills modules as part of their university education. Not only do these students learn to think objectively, but they are also taught how to operate effectively within an academic environment, for example, use of data-bases, referencing systems and the serious issue of avoiding plagiarism. The best of the students return to Saudi Arabia equipped with solid academic credentials from highly reputable institutions. More importantly, many of these newly qualified students are able to transfer their skills to the workplace. In addition, exposing Saudi students to foreign culture and society is seen as a chance to broaden young minds, a clever step some suggest, and this combined with rigorous academic training will hopefully vindicate the scholarship scheme.⁹⁸ Certainly, high hopes are being placed on the eventual outcome of the scheme and on the impact that the ‘best and the brightest’ may have on Saudi societal development. It would seem that the scholarship scheme will prove beneficial to both its recipients and society as a whole although it is difficult to predict the subsequent long-term effects.

⁹⁵ Interview by author with Subject 73, Shia writer (Eastern Province: 08.04.10).

⁹⁶ Interview by author with Subject 69, writer and member *majlis al-shura* (Riyadh: 21.06.10).

⁹⁷ Subject 69 also believes that a ‘typical Saudi mother wants her son to become an Imam or caller, rather than a scientist or professor’. He cites the example of a Saudi doctoral researcher who studied engineering in Germany and now works for the Ministry of the Interior. He says that this individual is now ‘primarily concerned with writing research papers on religious issues rather than engineering’ and he does not consider this to be an isolated case.

⁹⁸ Interview by author with Subject 70, former General Director of Jeddah Radio (Jeddah: 06.07.10). She says that ‘the king is in a hurry to get things done’.

Youth: Social Issues and Marginalisation

The National Dialogue Meetings would appear to form part of an organised pattern of specific groupings and issues being singled out and organised by the Al Sa`ud, i.e., socio-political marginalisation, to the detriment of Saudi society as a whole which is 'not supposed to be included' (Hertog 2006, p. 253). Conceptually, the National Dialogue appears like an attempt at instant corporatism of different segments of Saudi society. They are not quite functional groups in a narrow technical sense, but are seen to occupy distinct roles in society. Hertog argues that the National Dialogue process puts people in different categories, selected individuals perceived as representatives, and licenses limited debates in a predetermined organisational framework (2006, p. 253). In addition, in any examination of the dynamics of Saudi Arabian socio-politics it is not only necessary to identify the principal actors in the political leadership, their circles of support and the conditioning factors that influence the regime's policy decisions, but it is also imperative to identify those sections of the population who are marginalised either for political, religious or economic reasons. Therefore, the issue of marginality is relevant when examining Saudi Arabia because it deals with the lack, or limited nature, of participation not only in the political, but also in the socio-economic sphere. It implies a limited and distorted degree of insertion into the productive system, e.g., unemployment, underemployment, as well as a limited and distorted degree of insertion into the consumption system and into the cultural system (Ayubi 1995, p. 181).⁹⁹

In Saudi Arabia marginalisation is most often associated with religious minorities, but it also applies to young unemployed Saudis of both sexes. The unemployment rate amongst Saudi women is particularly alarming, according to *Asharq Alawsat*, and is rising at a faster rate compared to male unemployment due to limited opportunities for women (Al Zaydi 2010, p. 1).¹⁰⁰ Unemployment produces a number of psychological effects and Dr Fahd Al Yahya, a consultant psychiatrist, says this factor causes women to feel marginalised (2011, p. 1). Furthermore, the social reality of young Saudi males is often overlooked as the problems facing Saudi women garner much greater attention in the international media and, accordingly, the marginalisation of young unmarried males

⁹⁹ The Saudi government is engaged with this issue, especially employment generation and poverty reduction as outlined in the 8th five-year plan for achieving Saudi Arabia Vision 2025. See, for example, Emtairah, T., A. Al Ashaikh, et al. (2007).

¹⁰⁰ 75 per cent of unemployed women in Saudi Arabia are university graduates and 90 per cent hold degrees in teaching and education. Less than five per cent end up in the business sector, which has among the lowest proportion of female representation in the world (Al Awsat 2011, p.1).

in Saudi society is frequently ignored. Young single men are unable to mix with the opposite sex, are banned from entering shopping-malls unless accompanied by a female relative and, with almost no form of public entertainment available, this inevitably creates social tensions that often lead to serious societal problems. The link between unemployment and marriage has been highlighted by Dianne Singerman of the American University School of Public Affairs. She points out that in Arab society adulthood equals being married; therefore unemployment makes it difficult for many young men to get married which in turn leads to social exclusion and a state of limbo she terms 'waithood' (2007, pp. 7—8). Not all Saudis are wealthy, many need to work and whilst a job provides a salary it also benefits the individual by providing an alternative social network to the family one.¹⁰¹ If young Saudi males are stuck at home, bored, with no job prospects, unable to marry because they cannot afford a dowry or rent, the accumulated social, economic and sexual frustration can result in problems such as apathy, substance-abuse and radicalisation.¹⁰² This frustration and boredom is also acknowledged as a determining factor in the Kingdom's appalling traffic accident statistics as young men with nothing to do resort to street racing and speeding: 6,000 deaths, 40,000 injuries and 300,000 recorded accidents amounting to an economic loss of SAR thirty-four billion a year (Al Orabi 2011, p. 1).

Health issues are also paramount and with young people comprising so much of the population it is crucial to address problems related to the health of young Saudis including increasing obesity and diabetes, and the huge social and economic problems they create. It is argued that there is no strategic plan to either address or examine these problems, rather a head in the sand mentality, and for this reason the National Dialogue meetings could provide the most appropriate venue to highlight and debate these serious issues.¹⁰³ Although solving these problems it is not the role of KACND or the dialogue process, it is important to discuss issues such as obesity, unemployment and extremism

¹⁰¹ A few years ago western expatriate workers were initially surprised to see young Saudi men employed as supermarket cashiers in places such as Carrefour, working hard and looking happy.

¹⁰² The author worked with young male Saudis aged 19—24 in two very different institutions. Firstly at the Saudi Arabian National Guard School of Signals in Riyadh (2007—8) where the cadets mainly come from the Al Qahtani, Al Otaibi, Al Shammar and Al Onaizi tribes. These young men were from fairly poor backgrounds. Secondly, at PSU in Riyadh (2009—10) an institution that specialises in business courses for children of the Saudi elite. Needless to say, most of the students were very wealthy, with some from the Al Sa'ud, but they shared many of the same problems of marginalisation, frustration and boredom as their peers in the National Guard.

¹⁰³ Interview by author with Subject 35, female academic and KACND participant (Riyadh: 19.07.10). Unfortunately, she says, at these meetings 'nobody refers directly to social problems and political problems'.

openly as they are all interconnected and impact negatively on Saudi society.¹⁰⁴ KACND is able to provide both the venue and expertise to address these serious problems.

It is said that for young Saudis both at home and abroad there are only two recognisable societal categories: firstly the liberals who want to change everything, and secondly the religious conservatives who believe that nothing need change, in other words, there is no recognisable middle ground.¹⁰⁵ Hence, for a young person there is a great deal of frustration because the future is not clear and the government appears to have no strategic thinking and no vision for long-term prospects; there is a lot of talking, but no real progress.¹⁰⁶ The powerful elites might be aware of change, but there is a contradiction between this awareness and their personal interests, therefore, any awareness necessarily reflects their own concerns. Access to the Internet has changed the way young Saudis think and relate to the outside world, especially, as previously noted, they are able to see what their peers are doing in other neighbouring Arab states. Nonetheless, the youth issue is paramount as, due to the Internet, young people are aware of the possibilities available and becoming more outspoken via online forums and chat rooms, and if necessary they will probably stand up for their rights. Indeed, in a recent editorial Prince Alwaleed bin Talal noted that for any reform to be effective, the younger generation needs to be included especially as youth 'has become increasingly intertwined with its counterparts in other parts of the world' (2011, p. 1). Therefore, addressing the youth issue could yield positive results if dealt with appropriately, but a negative result is inevitable if job opportunities do not materialise and unemployment increases. It is evident that the elites do not always consider the opinions of Saudi youth, or pay attention to the issues youth is discussing, even though some members of the elites are aware that young people are moving far away from the system, but the same leaders are failing to consider the implications. A King Abdullah Scholarship student in the UK believes the government should give women and youth more employment opportunities as well as providing them with outlets to express their opinions freely as the government needs to hear from them especially since

¹⁰⁴ Subject 35 states 'I was lucky to be part of the National Dialogue'. Indeed, she claims that as no money is paid to the participants this proves that they attend because they genuinely care and love their country.

¹⁰⁵ Interview by author with Subject 93, King Abdullah Scholarship student (Riyadh: 17.07.10).

¹⁰⁶ Interview by author with subject 87, KSU professor (Riyadh: 17.07.10) and discussions with Subjects 27 and 52, PSU business students (Riyadh: 2010).

approximately 50 per cent of the population is female and well-educated, job-seeking, but currently frustrated and bored.¹⁰⁷

Despite the fact that society and participants disagree on whether KACND should focus on ideological debate or service related discussions, in reality it is youth issues that are paramount because it is argued that young people are the ones who will eventually take the lead and for this reason it is necessary to educate them to appreciate and respect the nation.¹⁰⁸ Youth problems stem from the fact that, rightly or wrongly, young Saudis feel neglected and for this reason there is a feeling of not being able to participate; not being part a common national vision so KACND needs to tap into this and exploit it.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, educators, trainers and especially people who have the will to advance societal change should be made responsible for youth policy. Although a considerable investment in youth is needed, input from parents should be actively encouraged so that they encourage less gender segregation, more respect and fairness by males to females, and make sure that young people are responsible for their actions. According to one educator, Saudi youth is caught between two opposing attitudes. On the one hand, youth is either ignored or marginalised, and on the other, youth is blamed for social ills by an adult population that does not believe that mistakes should be made or forgiven as only perfect sons or daughters are desirable.¹¹⁰ This female educator explains the reason she promotes an open day at her school in order allow the pupils to relax and voice their opinions:

Usually they are always being blamed for things and this makes the young think that there is a perfect ideal individual and only right and wrong with nothing in between. However, if you give pupils the space and the opportunity to interact with staff and when they believe in you they in turn give you their best. A pupil I know is full of anger against Saudi society because he was abroad so outside of our society and observing the Kingdom from outside and he became full of frustration which leads to a feeling of loss of power, and that in turn results in individuals lashing out at society. We must also not forget that the young know a lot more about modern technology than the older generation and if a young man or woman wants to get back at an adult, particularly a female, they will secretly take a photograph at school and then post it on the Internet without the adult's knowledge.

¹⁰⁷ Interview by author with Subject 93, King Abdullah Scholarship student (Riyadh: 17.07.10).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Interview by author with Subject 68, KACND participant and writer (Jeddah: 05.07.10). Subject 68 says that it was Subject 7 who initially nominated her to Subject 54 as a potential KACND candidate. Subject 68 praises many of the KACND organisers calling Faisal Al Mu'ammam a 'much diversified character' and Subject 54 'a person who know how to communicate'.

¹¹⁰ Interview by author with Subject 44, educator Ministry of Education (Al-Khobar: 15.07.10).

Thus, it is essential to understand what young Saudis are thinking so that teachers can begin to understand and address these youth related issues effectively. Subsequently, it is hoped that the knowledge gained will filter up through schools and colleges to the upper echelons of the Ministry of Education. Sadly, society's relationship with its young people may have been better in the past, however, it is important to recognise that many of today's problems emanate from feelings of anger and marginalisation in addition to problematic male relationships with the mother and female relatives, and in fact, women in general.¹¹¹

KACND: ABSORBING SOCIETAL FRUSTRATION?

There are a number of societal problems with that appear to be relevant to most Saudi constituencies and, as noted, these are contributing to a sense of marginalisation that ultimately leads to greater societal frustration. In Najran a female KACND participant points out that although employment was the subject of a previous National Dialogue Meeting she feels this issue and other social problems need to be revisited and discussed on a regular basis.¹¹² Indeed, KACND needs to answer social frustration by directing people to useful practices, for example, a greater emphasis on education and agriculture as there is too much emphasis on reflecting back to traditional things, such as tribal norms and practices rather than looking forward.¹¹³ Along with employment the most frequently cited include:

- Expensive land prices
- Affordable housing to rent,
- The high cost of living as this is increasing on a monthly basis
- Sectarian discrimination
- Corruption and *wastah*

In Saudi Arabia there are hidden issues that contribute to societal frustration such as poverty and corruption. Society is sometimes reluctant to address these issues despite the negative impact they have on the national interest. Indeed, poverty is largely concealed or ignored even though it affects a large number of people in various regions

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Interview by author with Subject 22, KACND participant and Subject 21 (Najran: 10.07.10). Subject 22 says unemployment is considered a grave problem with an estimated 11 per cent rate in the provinces, excluding women.

¹¹³ Ibid. She also argues that the 'state education high school achievement test' which is given after high school exams prevents most pupils from going to university.

of the Kingdom.¹¹⁴ Poverty is a critical issue, but society is reluctant to discuss it freely and the wealth gap between rich and poor remains a huge problem. For example, a female KACND participant points out that in Asir Province there are villages which now include large numbers of holiday properties owned by wealthy urban residents. In 2010 an Asiri widow was discovered living in one of these villages with her two sons and daughter. The boys shared a single pair of shoes and this meant that only one son could go to school at any given time. She argues that this level of poverty existing alongside the villas of the rich ‘out of towners’ could partially explain increased radicalisation amongst young men and the subsequent growth of extremism, that is, a boy of eighteen in this type of situation becomes frustrated, angry and radicalised and believes he has nothing to be afraid of losing. In consequence, socio-political problems caused by people living in this kind of misery imply that the issue of poverty must be discussed. However, KACND is unlikely to discuss poverty in the near future because the state does not want society to see the full extent of this problem and in addition, discussing poverty would expose issues such as major corruption and inefficiency, issues that could embarrass a great many individuals in senior government positions.¹¹⁵

The regime employs a process of co-optation to absorb societal frustration and thereby side-lines societal demands and there is a viewpoint that this process needs to be analysed in great depth in order to assess the relationship between the absorption of societal problems vis-à-vis co-optation and its impact on daily life.¹¹⁶ In a similar vein, it is argued that the political elites are attempting to use the National Dialogue process to absorb societal forces and frustrations. Not only that, the political elite also wishes to redirect KACND’s activities and, by extension, the National Dialogue process as a whole in order to further their own interests. Although the National Dialogue is an appropriate measure for this time, the politics of the Al Sa`ud government remains Islamic so there are still protracted sectarian problems. In addition, the Al Saud system continues to exploit tribalism to wield power so, as KACND is a government institution, maybe the dialogue process does so as well.¹¹⁷ The National Dialogue is important

¹¹⁴ Interview by author with Subject 70, former General Director of Jeddah Radio (Jeddah: 06.07.10). In 2005, King Abdullah shocked the royal court and society with an impromptu visit to a Riyadh slum. Subsequently, he announced measures to alleviate poverty in the Kingdom as well as tackling taboo subjects such as drug addiction and prostitution.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Interview by author with Subject 19, lawyer, ex-judge, owner of Arab Network for Research and Publishing (Riyadh: 21.06.10).

¹¹⁷ Interview by author with Subject 38, male journalists *Al-Jazeera* Newspaper (Riyadh: 23.01.11). They are concerned that the dialogue process focuses too much on issues related to sectarian differences and / or

because it has absorbed societal frustration, but the dialogue process should start addressing the Wahhabi problem and discuss more youth related issues. In particular the National Dialogue needs to encourage young people to think, but unfortunately the man on the street often knows nothing about the National Dialogue even though it is quite possible that he would probably be interested to find out more about KACND.¹¹⁸ Therefore, if the dialogue process fails to address widespread societal frustrations and fails to make itself known to a wider audience, then it is in danger of becoming ‘only theatre’.¹¹⁹

Although the government has set in motion a reform and modernisation programme, some complain that this programme is too vague. Certainly, the 2010 cabinet reshuffle was important and the new Ministry of Education positions were also notable, as it is argued that King Abdullah’s popularity was waning before the reshuffle and educational appointments.¹²⁰ That said increasing social problems remain the chief cause for concern because social frustration is not being answered. In fact, the family in the traditional sense is not being threatened by globalisation or modernity, but by societal frustration.¹²¹ The extended family which is so important to traditional Saudi culture is being undermined by a myriad of social problems including the issue of women driving, scholarship students returning from studies abroad ‘slipping back into accepted ways’, the lack of an intermediate strata to assist the government with reforms, as well as the failure to side-line or ignore the conservative hard-liners who are acknowledged to be better organised and have greater resources’.¹²² Additionally, many young Saudis, particularly urban ones, no longer relate to the traditional religious rhetoric as they are now too interconnected to the larger world via new technology.

women’s rights. They say their friends think that the National Dialogue is a positive step and they all have a positive image of it, but believe that the media is not really interested in the National Dialogue and that is why it is not broadcast at peak times. According to one of the journalists, KACND is creating a new notion of national unity and people are starting to understand the National Dialogue process and its goal, i.e., to be allowed to be a Saudi regardless of tribe or sect. He says most of his friends believe this because they see sectarian leaders meet and discuss their differences and remarks and this demonstrates the emergence of a more open era. Hence, KACND can make people aware of socio-political issues so that citizens know how to engage effectively within society: ‘The National Dialogue process can be compared to a football match: you see the goals and remember them, but you forget the mid-field teamwork that set up the goal and made it possible. The National Dialogue is the work you forget, but it is creating the goals’.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. During an interview by author with two young SANG officers, when asked for their opinion of the National Dialogue they were both unfamiliar with the activities of KACND.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Interview by author with Subject 71, journalist and broadcaster (Riyadh: 03.01.10).

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid. According to Khaled Almaeena, husband of Subject 71 and former Arab News editor-in-chief, ‘the hard-liners are not concerned with Western influence, but by Shia unrest’. Comment to author (Riyadh: 03.01.10).

The press frequently publishes articles concerning violence in schools and frequent instances of road rage are symptomatic of youth frustration. Most significantly, many warn that continued segregation of the sexes is undermining Saudi society. Whilst the state may be attempting to respond to societal demands and aspirations, it is not always clear exactly who the political elite is attempting to address, a problem which is sometimes exacerbated by confusion over recognised representatives of a given constituency and the forums these individuals utilise to convey their message.¹²³ In addition, societal frustration is worsened because KACND participants do not always reflect Saudi society in its entirety and more young people need to be drafted into the dialogue process.¹²⁴ Regrettably, many of KACND's discussion topics seem to rehash familiar themes and sometimes the participants do not follow up or even question the non-implementation of the recommendations. Even those individuals who supported the National Dialogue from the outset are concerned with its progress. Great hopes were invested in the National Dialogue, but so far little has come of it and for some, including a well-known female journalist, the concern is that the process has been hijacked by hard-liners.¹²⁵

Establishing a culture of dialogue

KACND public relations manager, who is also responsible for publishing and receiving delegations, admits that until recently there was a lack of communication between KACND and society, but in his opinion this situation is improving.¹²⁶ A new KACND public relations programme is currently in the pipeline that will be implemented in phases over three years to coincide with the opening of the new KACND headquarters in 2013 for the tenth anniversary of the institution.¹²⁷ In addition, a new survey assessing public knowledge of the institution's activities will be conducted and the findings will be summarised point by point. Financial assistance will be provided by the private sector in order to help spread the culture of dialogue and KACND will also solicit financial support for publicity campaigns in shopping malls; these campaigns aim to decrease the understanding gap between KACND and society. Furthermore, it is

¹²³ For example, some might argue that in the Shia case Hassan Al Saffar is the principal representative, whereas others identify more strongly with Nimr Al Nimr.

¹²⁴ Interview by author with Subject 71, journalist and broadcaster (Riyadh: 03.01.10). She concedes that the preparatory meetings might be more representative of Saudi society, but she also cites the example of colleagues who participated in the National Dialogue, but did not ask why the recommendations they submitted were not acted upon.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Interview by author Subject 40, KACND public relations manager (Riyadh: 22.01.11).

¹²⁷ Ibid. The new KACND headquarters will include the biggest conference centre in the Kingdom.

important to get society better acquainted with the institution because society does not understand the role or mission of KACND, in other words, individuals do not know about KACND's activities and programmes and whether or not these could be beneficial to society. Even though KACND's dialogue training programmes do not always produce tangible results, the public-relations manager argues that the effects of the programmes will be felt in time without forcing reform and unwanted change on society.¹²⁸ To aid the dialogue process KACND needs to employ researchers to reveal what has been accomplished by studying past recommendations and identifying not only the institution's achievements, but also where it has failed to deliver on its promises. However, KACND stresses that its role stops at this point, i.e., it stops with the recommendations and / or final statements, as the institution does not have a ministerial remit, rather it is a centre for dialogue. However, the ceiling of freedom in the Kingdom has increased; therefore, KACND officials believe the institution is in a position to solve many societal problems.¹²⁹

It is also the responsibility of KACND's public relations manager to invite both ministers and deputy ministers to visit the institution so that they can better understand its role and activities. KACND understands that it cannot change all the problematic issues in the relevant ministries, but the institution can help to raise awareness of these issues by assisting communication between the ministries and communities, which in turn can help improve ministerial performance and accountability. An example of how the dialogue process can influence ministerial policy was captured on live television during the Al-Jouf preparatory meeting for the Eighth National Dialogue on health services. This incident involved a local man who complained that there was no central hospital with specialist departments in the city. Therefore, when one of his relatives fell ill, and because he was unable to get the correct treatment in Al-Jouf, he was forced to turn to his Jordanian tribal relatives who subsequently arranged for treatment in Jordan; this necessitated a payment of SAR 40,000 for a Jordanian air ambulance. He asked the meeting how the government could expect loyalty to the state when a citizen is forced to search for medical treatment abroad due to lack of facilities in his own country. The Health Minister was present at this meeting and, after listening to the man's concerns, and partly as a result of this occurring on live television, the minister returned to Al-Jouf a few months later with a government commitment to build a central hospital

¹²⁸ Interview by author Subject 40, KACND public relations manager (Riyadh: 22.01.11).

¹²⁹ Ibid.

including all the necessary specialist departments in the city. KACND maintains that this proves the dialogue process can produce results as a lone voice at this meeting was ultimately able to change the Kingdom's health policy. Nevertheless, KACND recognises that it must not be seen 'to tread on ministerial toes'.¹³⁰

The head of KACND's newly established Department of Partnership and Cultural Relations hopes that this department will help spread and expand the culture of dialogue amongst government bodies and NGOs by focusing on individuals in ministries and universities.¹³¹ In addition, this department aims to spread the culture of dialogue and foster tolerance in society, most importantly in different Islamic schools of thought; this is necessary as for KACND to advance, as it needs to make everyone in the Kingdom aware of different values and accept diversity and cultural differences. If KACND can achieve change and get society to accept the values of others, or even implant values, then this will be the institution's greatest achievement.¹³² For this reason, KACND has established partnerships with various private and public institutions including those in the more traditional and conservative parts of the Kingdom such as Qassim University (Al Awadh 2010, p. 1).

Some former KACND participants believe that now is the time to inform society of the true meaning of the National Dialogue process. One way to do this would be to establish and heavily promote a KACND television channel that would broadcast all year round and not just during the National Meetings.¹³³ The establishment of a special KACND satellite channel, maybe in conjunction with the popular Middle Eastern television channel *MBC1* that highlights relevant issues and dialogue training programmes, could also help to activate relationships with authors, writers and journalists. This would expose the institution to society thereby facilitating a greater understanding of the National Dialogue process. In fact, KACND points out that there is already a programme on *Al Arabiya* called 'Arab Dialogue', but the Kingdom needs a

¹³⁰ Ibid. This incident was subsequently included in the KACND official report. In addition, Subject 40 maintains that it is not enough for KACND to keep working on the same level and the 'next level should be debates and seminars, i.e., KACND developing into a think-tank although at the moment KACND does not possess any features of a think-tank'

¹³¹ Interview by author with Subject 65, KACND official (Riyadh: 18.01.11).

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Interview by author Subject 40, KACND public relations manager (Riyadh: 22.01.11). He contends that a distinction can be made between National dialogues such as the youth meeting, which was primarily between the government and youth, and the Madinah meeting, which was between society and government. He argues that 'this process can be interpreted as a bridge in both directions' that reaches out to all society.

‘Saudi Dialogue’ programme and it needs to be effective, relevant and strong.¹³⁴ KACND envisages that this type of programme could attract sponsors to cover expenses and would include a media campaign to support the activities of the institution. It could be shown weekly for a three-month period and would be presented by an appointed KACND spokesperson, someone who could be recruited from the worlds of sport, media, and entertainment, for example a famous shaikh or singer such as Mohammad Abdu.¹³⁵

The National Dialogue process needs to be on-going, sending stimulating messages to society about the changing relationship between state and society. One female participant discusses this change:

If I want to change an idea, if I like my country, I can change it if I feel that it belongs to me. Nowadays, some of us understand that this change must be achieved, but that this change must come from inside. We need friends from inside the Kingdom and from all over the world. Teaching people is a very noble mission and if we follow our Islamic principles we will be happy and reach the goals needed to instil a concept of dialogue in every village, city, house and tent in the desert. We want to be good human beings, not only for the government or political institutions, but also for ourselves’.¹³⁶

However, KACND needs to connect more with everyday individuals and those working in the media. There is also a need for more dialogue training programmes, in particular more constructive student programmes because at present it is argued that students are not developing their critical thinking abilities sufficiently. In spite of the sheer size of the Kingdom, KACND’s results have been commendable and the institution’s activities will continue to increase because dialogue is necessary in every house so that peace and tolerance can be promoted.¹³⁷

Whilst a culture of dialogue has taken root in Saudi society, this may have happened by accident, and was not part of a pre-determined agenda.¹³⁸ Nonetheless, although it is recognised that KACND was established for honest reasons, nowadays the regime prefers to maintain the status quo because it fails to realise that the majority of the

¹³⁴ Interview by author Subject 40, KACND public relations manager (Riyadh: 22.01.11).

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Interview by author with Subject 7, Ministry of Education (Jeddah: 07.07.10). In her opinion, although every area in the nation is different, ‘love for King Abdullah’ unites differing regional groupings.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Interview by author with Subject 82, Ismaili activist and KACND participant (Najran: 11.07.10). He claims that many people use the culture of dialogue concept to protect themselves after issuing inflammatory statements by saying ‘we are in the time of the National Dialogue started by King Abdullah’.

population no longer live in the past. During the Eighth National Dialogue in Najran, KACND Deputy Secretary-General was asked by a local businessman the reason the institution insisted on categorising everyone and why the participants do not mix with the local population when they travel to a different city or region. In other words, why come to Najran and spend all this money when it would have been cheaper to remain in the capital. At that time, the vice secretary-general acknowledged these concerns, but despite the opportunity provided by the National Dialogue forums for the man in the street to meet specialist, academics and officials, it is argued that this only happens rarely. It would appear that this situation persists due to state control over the dialogue process all the way up from the preparatory meetings to the National Meetings and this is the problem; freedom of speech exists, but it is controlled within a very small space.¹³⁹

KACND and conservative society

As the Arab Spring unfolded in early 2011 calls for major political changes, even regime change, were voiced from both inside and outside the Kingdom. Some pointed out that these voices represent a minority, albeit a vociferous one, but unlike the majority of Saudis these individuals had access to a variety of media outlets and did not necessarily represent the vast majority of the population; ‘a tweet or two by a young, foreign-educated, Saudi woman resentful of her lack of rights does not make a Riyadh spring’ (Henderson 2011, p. 1).¹⁴⁰ Although a planned ‘Day of Rage’ on 11 March 2011 failed to attract significant support, a fact attributed to the exceptionally large security presence on the streets of most major Saudi cities, it was also pointed out that Saudi society was unsure and suspicious of both the identity and motives of those planning the demonstrations and ‘have first chosen to clarify what it is they want for the country’ (Al Nafjan 2011, p. 1).¹⁴¹ Indeed, whilst many Saudis undoubtedly nurse genuine social grievances, these do not automatically translate into demands for regime change or even begin to question the legitimacy of the Al Sa`ud (Obaid 2011, p. 1). A youth activist and founding member of *mowatana*¹⁴² says ‘youth here are impatient, they want people to be held accountable, but we do not want people to go to jail: ‘we want a positive

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ It was also pointed out that Twitter usage primarily represents this constituency, whereas Facebook attracts a wider audience across the Kingdom.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴¹ This blog cites public mistrust Al Sa`ud critic Sa`ad Al Faqeh and says: these types of calls no longer have support within Saudi Arabia. See <http://saudiwoman.me/>

¹⁴² Citizenship: an organisation dedicated to using the Internet to build a civil society in the Kingdom.

dialogue' (Law 2011, p. 3). Thus, it would appear that the majority of young Saudis desire reform, but not revolution, at home (Murphy 2011, p. 1) and, according to Jeddah blogger Mahmoud Sabbagh, what the Kingdom needs are small steps toward greater democracy and a new kind of freedom (Zacharia 2011, p. 2). Whilst this may be considered an unpalatable fact to the most hardened critics of the regime, it nevertheless necessitates distinguishing between the accepted societal norms of Saudi society and socio-political aspirations of individual constituencies; blanket generalisations do not reflect or do justice to the Kingdom's social diversity. In addition, the Al Sa'ud frequently argue, some would say ad infinitum, that Saudi society is not ready for dramatic change because it remains essentially conservative in its views with reformist elements of the regime arguing that it is society itself that holds back reform in the Kingdom.¹⁴³ This statement is probably neither true nor false as the reality, like most issues in the Kingdom, is far more complex, but the official perspective is often used as an excuse to delay reform.¹⁴⁴ But others argue that the culturally conservative Saudi society is also resistant to dramatic reform and 'reticent toward unpredictable change' (Obaid 2011, p. 1). Internal and religious values as well domestic demands drive Saudi society and for this reason:

Each successive Saudi government has had to struggle with the tensions between religious and social custom and the need for change. The Saudi popular commitment to conservative Islamic values has steadily evolved in the process, but the Saudi monarchy must move slowly and carefully, it must constantly demonstrate its religious legitimacy and commitment to Islam, and every reform produces an inevitable series of challenges and resistance (Cordesman 2011, p. 4).

Indeed, a Saudi human rights activist maintains that it is society rather than the government that restricts freedom in the Kingdom in addition to there being very few true liberals. Furthermore, whereas in other states society asks the government for greater socio-political freedoms, he argues in Saudi Arabia the opposite is true.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ See comments by Prince Saud bin Abdulmusin bin Abdulaziz, governor of Hail Province since 1999 'Inside The Saudi Kingdom', BBC: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wk_mvSp1xmA

¹⁴⁴ Interview by author with Subject 73, Shia Writer (Eastern Province: 08.04.10)

¹⁴⁵ Interview by author with Subject 67, human rights activist (Jeddah: 08.07.10). He is a human rights activist who runs www.humanf.org a forum for Saudi liberals¹⁴⁵. This website is blocked by the Saudi government, but still managed over six million hits between April and July 2010. Indeed, there are approximately 100,000 hits on a daily basis. The website is viewed both inside and outside the Kingdom, but is especially linked to the activities of Human Rights Watch (HRW), although Subject 67's focus within the Kingdom is 'fighting Islamic people'. In 2010 he was not allowed to leave the Kingdom as a result of his activities with his human rights website and in addition, he was forced to live in the United Kingdom for a period¹⁴⁵. The judge who prosecuted him was a member of the *hai'a*, but Subject 67 states that the government would not allow him to be imprisoned but on the other hand the government will not

Indeed, the Saudi elite might push for reform, but Cordesman argues that few signs point to Saudi popular conservatism suddenly giving way to a more secular society or form of government (2011, p. 5).

In Saudi Arabia there is ideological thinking and behaviour and, because of this ‘Bedouin thinking’, many people see everything directly connected to nature with the result that most issues do not need vision, discussion or study according to a Riyadh *diwaniya*.¹⁴⁶ The members of this *diwaniya* believe that KACND only reflects society on a small scale as nowadays even liberals cannot say what they believe as there is a limit to self-expression in society. With regard to important issues such as gender segregation and fair distribution of wealth, many societal elements do not want to recognise individuals and / or groups as liberals, but would rather say that someone is an open-minded person, or indeed, an open-minded Saudi. For this reason, society does not want to, or prefers not to, use terms such as communist, Shia or liberal. Therefore, members of the *diwaniya* argue it is not possible to talk seriously about these social issues because if an individual says that he is a liberal, then people will reject this label and claim it is unacceptable because everyone is Saudi.¹⁴⁷ They attribute this to Saudis being a tribal people and, after the establishment of the Kingdom in 1932; this led to one solid Saudi idea that influences any discussion of social issues and differences. This type of discussion frightens people and in consequence they do not want to acknowledge these differences. Moreover, even when an individual attempts to explain these differences, society rejects the argument because firstly, society believes that ideological dialogue is not tangible and secondly, society cannot understand it so any ideological dialogue appears irrelevant. For this reason, sometimes it is impossible for an individual to express him / herself, not because of the government, but because of society. Another important reason is the fear of social conflict or *fitna*. In March 2011, an entry on the Crossroads Arabia blog stated ‘Saudis have a strong aversion to chaos’, the result of the Kingdom’s history and religious admonitions to avoid *fitna* (2011, p. 2). The journalist Shobokshi concurs, maintaining that Saudis have always been ‘careful to remind the outside world that the country’s security and stability represent a red-line that cannot be transgressed’ (2011, p. 1) Individuals also understand what the King

allow him to travel abroad at the moment. He also runs a private English language school in Jeddah, but his political activities are kept hidden from most of his staff and all the pupils.

¹⁴⁶ Focus group discussion including Subject 20, journalist and liberal, Subject 48, Ismaili activist, Subject 3 and Subject 84, Shia activist (Riyadh: 01.07.10).

¹⁴⁷ Subject 20 says that greater freedom is needed and this can only be achieved through education although the curricula must be changed by educational specialists.

wants, or think they know what he wants, members of the *diwaniya* suggest, so the red lines exist and people understand not to cross them.¹⁴⁸

Scepticism and societal resistance to the National Dialogue process are natural and happen in every community.¹⁴⁹ However, in the Saudi context it is necessary to ask whether this scepticism and / or resistance to the dialogue process in Saudi society is socio-culturally based.¹⁵⁰ This is because it is believed that certain sections of society see the National Dialogue as a threat because dialogue is associated with Western concepts and for this reason some people mock and disparage KACND. The Riyadh *diwaniya* members also argue that there are many layers of meaning in the dialogue, for example, people have issues against other individuals and groups, or even amongst themselves, not just with the government. Furthermore, even though dialogue can start to bring equality due to the participation of many different constituencies, it is natural that there will always be winners and losers. However, it is important not to minimise the differences, but instead understand the problem, in other words, an individual will change the way he deals with another individual according to the context. A Shia member of the *diwaniya* states that this dialogue process can be compared to an orchestra, that is, the space they occupy in the whole picture, as the dialogue may not change an individual's core ideas, but before the dialogue process started there was only the government solo in the harmony and now it is possible to hear different tunes in the national orchestra.¹⁵¹

Some question whether society really believes in the dialogue process and also whether the government really wants to know what society thinks. At the same time others are attempting to identify the government's true objective in founding KACND.¹⁵² It might be that KACND simply provides an opportunity for people to speak; however, there may also be a hidden government agenda, and by default a hidden KACND one; an aspect of the agenda being the reduction of cross-constituency differences in order to justify the visibility of the dialogue process. Might it be that another aspect of the hidden agenda these individuals have inadvertently identified is the creation of

¹⁴⁸ Focus group discussion including Subject 20, journalist and liberal, Subject 48, Ismaili activist, Subject 3 and Subject 84, Shia activist (Riyadh: 01.07.10).

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Interview by author with Subject 20, journalist and liberal (Riyadh: 01.07.10). He notes that these problems are not being tackled at their root 'like a well with bilharzias'.

¹⁵¹ Focus group discussion including Subject 20, journalist and liberal, Subject 48, Ismaili activist, Subject 3 and Subject 84, Shia activist (Riyadh: 01.07.10).

¹⁵² Ibid.

dominant class hegemony? If there is a hidden government agenda linked to the dialogue process, is this characterised by the formulation of an Al Sa`ud hegemonic process that aims to influence society's world view so that it corresponds to that of the ruling royal family? Indeed, it has already been noted that the state can employ a hegemonic influence over moral and cultural issues, one that is based on a persuasive and rational discourse. Therefore, because KACND provides a venue and an opportunity for people to debate, this could be comprehended as a process whereby Saudi constituencies become socialised into the Al Sa`ud's ideology through the official 'rational discourse' in the form of the National Dialogue. The desired outcome of the National Dialogue process being the creation of Haugaard's 'perceived reality' in which both a common will and natural order become established (2006a, p. 6). Nevertheless, aside from the implications of a state dialogue process that disseminates the official hegemony, there is a strong belief amongst many individuals and societal constituencies that the idea of dialogue must become deep-rooted in Saudi society, and by extension, in the extended and nuclear families as well. It is possible that from this point onwards KACND could move on to bigger and better initiatives, providing it has the will and desire to do so.¹⁵³

The National Dialogue process has moved beyond the resistance stage because there is more acceptance and understanding of the place of dialogue in Saudi society.¹⁵⁴ In fact, the more society understands KACND's role the closer the institution will get to society and once there is more acceptance of minorities, then there will be less social neglect and an easier path to a peaceful society. It is important to remember that that a decade or more ago it was difficult to have a conversation regarding domestic sectarian issues or gender segregation, especially in a public place, whereas nowadays this is possible and this illustrates the emergence of a growing tolerance within society.¹⁵⁵

CONCLUSION: FORGING LINKS TO SOCIETY

Asharq Alawsat columnist Hussein Shobokshi was fired after writing an article around the time of the Riyadh terrorist attacks in 2003 that imagined a future for women's rights in the Kingdom. Nowadays, he 'marvels at how much more open discussions on

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Interview by author with Subject 42, KSU health lecturer (Riyadh: 29.06.10).

¹⁵⁵ This situation was pointed out by a Shia activist in conversation with the author in the lobby coffee shop of the *Al Khozama* hotel — a very public place — in central Riyadh in 2010.

women's rights have become since the National dialogue' and comments 'that article would not even cause a stir today' (2010, pp. 219—22). Many elite Saudi women agree that there has been some movement on women's rights, indeed, compared to the position of Saudi women ten or fifteen years ago it is possible to see that some progress has been made; women's rights have improved, albeit slowly. This change may have been gradual, but all reform takes time and needs planning and good leadership.¹⁵⁶ KACND may discuss a lot of important issues, but some believe the institution needs to focus more on women's rights because discussion at the Madinah National Dialogue was insufficiently daring and these issues also need to be discussed in towns and cities all over the Kingdom.¹⁵⁷ Women do not want to be invisible so the dialogue process is important because it gives them a recognised Saudi female voice.¹⁵⁸ A member of the *majlis al-shura* believes the Kingdom must create more space for women and start treating them as citizens and for this to happen there will have to be fundamental changes in education, religious thinking and women's rights.¹⁵⁹ Nowadays many Saudis agree with this view thereby demonstrating how the National Dialogue process has developed, but this process may take time even though it is essentially on the right track.¹⁶⁰ Admittedly, there are people who feel that these changes and reforms may have an adverse effect on the stability of the Kingdom, but it is likely that the opposite is happening and that in reality the National Dialogue and related societal reform give the Kingdom strength even if the this process is not tangible. Although it is not possible to measure the effects of dialogue, according to one dialogue participant the current discussion between liberals and conservatives in the media demonstrates progress and that society is moving forward.¹⁶¹

One problem highlighted by this study's female interviewees is that a great many women still do not know what KACND represents and do not even know what the centre stands for or its mission.¹⁶² Therefore, KACND's achievements need to be highlighted and the on-going activities of KACND should receive more publicity and be

¹⁵⁶ Interview by author with Subject 7, Ministry of Education (Jeddah: 07.07.10).

¹⁵⁷ Interview by author with Subject 15, KACND participant and student PMU (Dammam: 15.07.10).

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Interview by author with Subject 24, member *majlis al-shura* (Jeddah: 07.07.10). He says 'the National Dialogue started as a seed, grew into a plant, has been watered and become a tree'.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Interviews with various women (Saudi Arabia: 2009—11) and interview by author with Subject 68, KACND participant and writer (Jeddah: 05.07.10). She thinks that certain societal groupings 'should be given a hand if they want to be pulled up', but readily admits that 'a lot of segments of society do not want change', but she asserts that 'the umbrella for KACND is what people want'.

advertised in order for the institution to feel closer to the country; for example more KACND television advertisements. As one participant comments, KACND has been successful and most of the women she knows have participated in a KACND meeting, but the process has to go beyond the elite. Think-tanks should be established by women for ordinary women so that the whole process can be more inclusive. In addition, KACND needs to become better known in schools as this is very important. KACND should target youth so that this process becomes sustainable; in other words the institution has to reach out more. KACND may be achieving its stated goals, but there is a glass ceiling and the institution needs to address social problems by asking the middle-class and working-class what they need in order to absorb the issues because in KACND 'is like a sponge' so it is able to absorb frustration.¹⁶³ The National Dialogue process now needs to be taken a step further and even though some think that KACND should not move into overtly political areas, the institution is currently considering a forum dedicated to corruption to be held in 2012. This which would necessarily be political in nature and take KACND into new territory. Certainly corruption is a highly contentious issue, but discussing it would raise the institution's profile and help KACND to regain some of its lost credibility with the general public. Whether the leadership of KACND is confident enough at the moment to push against the red lines remains to be seen, but doing so would align the institution with large sections of society, in particular youth, who are doing just that.

One of the principal achievements of the National Dialogue process is that it has given more space to minorities and recognised them as Saudis. This demonstrates that dialogue is the first step that leads to decisions that can be firstly accepted by society and then implemented by the leadership.¹⁶⁴ However, the main issue is to try and motivate society to become more active, but it is claimed that many individuals in Saudi society are reluctant to demand their rights and this includes intellectuals.¹⁶⁵ That said, it is noted that the leadership is dealing with issues such as women's rights including driving and employment, by opening a space where scholars and society can discuss and consider the issues carefully.¹⁶⁶ This will allow society to appreciate, consider and assess the pros and cons of each individual issue and then come to a decision, but forcing the issues and changes upon society will only lead to rejection. Thus, the reform

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Interview by author with Subject 41, ACPRA political activist (Riyadh: 05.01.11).

¹⁶⁶ Interview by author with Subject 24, member *majlis al-shura* (Jeddah: 07.07.10).

process must be systematic and the government and society need to be careful in order to avoid ad hoc decisions which could lead to societal instability.¹⁶⁷

According to a female activist, 'Saudi Arabia is holding back the whole region. Because it is a country with weight, and the largest in terms of population and area, it affects the progress of other Gulf countries' (Dunne 2008, p. 1). This holding back could be related to issues of intolerance and extremism and this in turn causes some Saudis to reflect on recent history:

The head of KACND is Shaikh Salih Al Husayyin who is a religious shaikh so this tells us that the king cannot make any moves concerning KACND without the support of the religious establishment. In fact, we are in medieval times due to the power and authority of these religious groups who are in reality more powerful than the king himself. This is the power of extremism and how do you fight extremism and terrorism without fighting these religious groups? We feel even the Al Sa`ud is afraid of them. Sadly, in King Faisal and Queen Iffat's¹⁶⁸ time it was not like this. When I attended *Dar Al-Hanan* (the house of knowledge) I used to play tennis and participate in drama. That was nearly forty years ago and now forty years later we are still discussing whether these activities are *haram* (forbidden) or not.¹⁶⁹

But it is hoped that establishing an effective culture of dialogue will reverse this trend and that is the reason the National Dialogue process should continue. It is said that the Al Saud is trying to move away from the religious hardliners, albeit very slightly and carefully, because the family knows that the hardliners can cause great problems.¹⁷⁰

Undoubtedly, elements of society blame KACND for the non-implementation of the National Dialogue recommendations and therefore a missing link exists between the two because KACND has not disseminated either correct or accurate information to society regarding the recommendations. In addition, KACND needs stronger public relations so as to inform society of its mission. Nonetheless, KACND has arguably made society feel that somebody is listening and this can only be positive.¹⁷¹ This in turn has forced society to think about serious and problematic issues, ones that society had never previously considered, with the result that people are now asking questions

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. He says we must not burn all our bridges and we must not repeat the same mistakes as the Soviet Union.

¹⁶⁸ King Faisal's influential wife Iffat bint Ahmed Al Thunayan, mother of amongst others Foreign minister Prince Saud Al Faisal, former ambassador and KFCRIS head Turki Al Faisal and dean of Iffat Women's University in Jeddah, Princess Loulwa Al Faisal.

¹⁶⁹ Interview by author with Subject 70, former General Director of Jeddah Radio (Jeddah: 06.07.10)

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Interview by author with Subject 68, writer and KACND participant (Jeddah: 05.07.10).

regarding these issues and most importantly, asking about the follow-up mechanisms. This demonstrates that there has been a real change, even if society is not yet ready to realise or absorb all of the changes that have occurred because of the National Dialogue process. For state-society dialogue to advance improved educational standards are required and KACND needs to advertise its mission, but at the same time the society also needs to be able to locate and understand the information provided by the institution.¹⁷²

Opinion remains divided over the significance of the recent announcement by King Abdullah that women will be allowed to stand and vote in the 2015 Municipal Elections as well as becoming members of the currently all male *majlis al-shura*. As noted, the 150 member appointed *majlis al-shura* will welcome female delegates from the next session due to commence in 2013. Many were surprised by the King's inaugural address at the opening of the latest session of the *majlis al-shura*. It was described as unexpected and framed within a backdrop of supposition and rumour so beloved by many observers of the Kingdom. However, in early September *Asharq Alawsat* reported that the *majlis al-shura* had passed a resolution calling for 'all necessary measures' to be taken to allow Saudi women to participate in the 2011 and future municipal elections (Baqzai 2011, pp. 1—2). The draft resolution was put forward by Dr. Zuhair Al Harthy, a progressive council member with a Ph.D. from the University of Kent, UK and former member of the Saudi Commission for Human Rights (SCHR). The issue was debated in the council and the motion passed with a majority vote. This vote took place more than four weeks before the king's official announcement and subsequently, the recommendation was forwarded to the king for approval. Therefore, the ruling was not such a surprise to those following the activities of the consultative council.

Saudi women were not allowed to vote in the first municipal elections in 2005 and were barred from the round of municipal elections held on 29 September 2011 although it is hoped that they will be able to participate in 2015. As previously noted, the planned 2009 elections were repeatedly postponed and many believe that it was the upheaval of the Arab Spring that prompted the government to finally hold the delayed vote. Undoubtedly the turmoil in neighbouring states, in particular the demands of youth and

¹⁷² Interview by author with Subject 35, female academic and KACND participant (Riyadh: 19.07.10). On a positive note, she says applications from potential KACND female participants no longer require a male signatory on the application form, at least in practice, as the KACND computer has been programmed to accept the form with the guardian's signature left blank.

women, has coloured the government's approach to crucial issues such as women's rights, unemployment and Saudization. However, there is no guarantee that the 2015 municipal elections will take place or that women will have the vote. Therefore, the appointment of female members to the *majlis al-shura* may prove to be more significant in both the short and long-term. There is already a pool of highly-qualified, dynamic Saudi women who are more than ready to become active council participants. Indeed, debating issues such as the right to drive from within the council, as opposed to in the media, could prove to be a major factor in alleviating the marginalisation of Saudi women. The council already has approximately a dozen female advisors at committee level and the Chairman of the *majlis al-shura* has confirmed that initial procedures paving the way for female delegates are nearing completion (Al Rasheed 2011, p. 1). The move also appears to indicate recognition by some council members that the body needs to acquire greater societal legitimacy. In order to achieve this, the council must be seen to be listening to the aspirations of Saudi society, both men and women, and be willing to discuss contentious and previously taboo issues such as a recent session on sexual harassment in the workplace (Al Saheil 2011, p. 1).

Norah Alfaiz, the first Saudi female minister, has laid the groundwork for other Saudi women to assume future governmental roles. In addition, women are highly active and effective participants in many institutions including the Saudi Chambers of Commerce. There are also renowned journalists such as Samar Fatany, Amira Kashgari and Dalal Dia who have championed the cause of greater female socio-political participation in the Kingdom's affairs for many years. In addition, the public debate surrounding greater women's access to social services, equal pay and better employment opportunities is said to be supported by many high profile and outspoken Saudi men (Hill 2011, p. 3). As discussed earlier, some royal ladies have also assumed a higher profile, most notably King Abdullah's influential daughter Princess Adila who is said to have been behind the decision to appoint Norah Alfaiz to the position of deputy minister. Princess Loulwa Al Faisal, sister of foreign minister Saud Al Faisal, supports women being allowed to drive and has attended the World Economic Forum in Davos. During a recent keynote speech at a Clinton Global Initiative Event in New York, Princess Amira, wife of Kingdom Holding Company Chairman Prince Alwaleed bin Talal stated that it was impossible for society to 'go back' to a situation where there is no freedom of speech and no socio-

political participation as nowadays the ‘channels of communication are wide open’.¹⁷³ It is true that King Abdullah’s support for greater female participation in the country’s development is recognised by many prominent Saudi women, but they understand that it is up to them to seize the opportunity.¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, many also acknowledge that Saudi social norms and the ‘Saudi way’ of doing things both need to be respected. Indeed, whilst Saudis of all ages desire increased socio-political reform, more government accountability, improved human rights and opportunities for all, they also recognise that viable long-lasting reform needs to be acceptable to society and compatible with the Saudi way of life. Women, youth and individuals from all Saudi constituencies have found a voice and whilst they are not calling for major political revolt, they want their voice to be heard.

¹⁷³ See, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfmIx8VOKSU>

¹⁷⁴ Interview by author with Subject 68, writer and KACND participant (Jeddah: 05.07.10). He believes the social reform process to be Al Sa`ud led and both ‘societal and external influence on this process are nil’. Regardless of what people say or think about the king’s reform initiatives it is argued that a future Al Sa`ud monarch will necessarily have to follow the same path as the only other alternative is to delay the inevitable, i.e., continuing the reform process. Therefore, there appears to be some consensus that Prince Nayef will eventually become king, barring an incapacitating illness or death, followed by Prince Salman (or some say Prince Ahmad bin Abdulaziz) and the succession will be very smooth and peaceful because a suitable individual will appear from the ranks of the Al Sa`ud and the mufti and Salman will designate the succession with the family’s blessing.

CHAPTER SIX

INDIRECT CONSEQUENCES OF THE SAUDI NATIONAL DIALOGUE

In previous chapters attention focussed on the formal, ostensible aims and dynamics of KACND and the dialogue process. This chapter examines whether the informal and the unintended impacts may perhaps be at least as important as the formal and intended ones. Firstly, it looks at the role KACND has played in facilitating increased informal cross-constituency dialogue in the Kingdom. It then highlights the issue of a perceived lack of interaction between KACND and other socio-political institutions and explores the hypothesis that this may constitute a deliberate policy. It also looks at the relationship between KACND and the media as well as and the issue of human rights. It considers the ways in which the National Dialogue process may be influencing concepts of Saudi national identity and finally, it discusses the necessity of implementing a viable dialogue evaluation process.

KACND: CONNECTING THE KINGDOM?

An unintended consequence of the National Dialogue process has been the establishment of new cross-constituency and inter-sectarian connections across Saudi Arabia. This development is significant because Saudi Arabia is a ‘remarkably groupie country’ where associational life is not only deeply implanted, but also thrives (Montagu 2011, p. 5). The National Dialogue process, I will argue, has become an example of associational life, facilitating an increasing web of connections that is providing informal opposition to the Al Sa`ud’s vertical, patrimonial control as well as assisting horizontal but traditional discussion (*shura*). In addition, this discussion promotes ‘cross-cutting middle class groups bound by similar interests’ intertwining social, ethnic, cultural and religious constituencies (Montagu 2010, p. 72). By bringing together groups of people from all regions and constituencies, this chapter will show that KACND has provided both the opportunity and space for the formation of new relationships amongst individuals who might otherwise not have met. Indeed, one KACND participant contends that the discussions amongst the participants over coffee

are more informative than the official discussions in the meeting room.¹ Friendships are made and views shared by both individuals and groups and these relationships continue long after the specific KACND forum concludes.² Following KACND forums the participants invite each other to gatherings and there is a growing feeling amongst them ‘that we are all in the same boat’.³ In the past the traditional tribal system and social-geographic realities undoubtedly discouraged these types of cross-constituency relationships; arguably it would have been well-nigh impossible for these same connections to have happened prior to the establishment of KACND.⁴ Nevertheless, the establishment of Kingdom-wide connections remains an elite phenomenon, even if supporters of the dialogue make the point that these connections between different societal groupings have improved markedly since the establishment of the dialogue process, notwithstanding objections and resistance from the religious hardliners who continue to be as powerful and uncompromising as ever.⁵ Certainly, following the founding of KACND in 2003 and during the internal security crisis of 2004, the government was put under a great deal of pressure from both from internal and external forces and therefore at that time the regime did not consider the future implications of these National Dialogue Kingdom-wide connections.⁶

The forming of such connections, as well as increased understanding of inter-regional and sectarian differences, constitutes a major KACND success.⁷ Whilst the parameters of KACND’s activities are clearly defined, this apparently has not infringed on informal dialogue amongst the participants and undoubtedly these new informal relationships, whether personal or organisational, have facilitated greater socio-cultural, regional and sectarian understanding.⁸ Indeed, according to a Jeddah educator, at KACND meetings and workshops even if nothing concrete is accomplished, important connections are

¹ Interview by author with Subject 82, Ismaili activist (Najran: 11.07.10).

² Interview by author with Subject 21, KACND participant (Najran: 10.07.10). Subject 21 points out that during the meeting everyone was accepted regardless of personal backgrounds; this impressed her very much and she was very proud to be part of this dialogue forum. Away from the official proceedings she was able to meet people with whom she is still in contact via mobile telephone and email.

³ Interview by author with Subject 82, Ismaili activist (Najran: 11.07.10).

⁴ An argument made in the interview by author with Subject 24, *majlis al-shura* member (Jeddah: 07.07.10).

⁵ Interview by author with Subject 70, female General Director of Jeddah Radio (Jeddah: 06.07.10). This comment refers to the National Meetings and does not take into consideration the connections being formed at all societal levels under the umbrella of the dialogue training skills initiatives.

⁶ Interview by author with Subject 82, Ismaili activist (Najran: 11.07.10).

⁷ An assessment shared for instance in an interview with the author with Subject 44, educator and KACND contributor (Al-Khobar: 15.07.10).

⁸ Various interviews by author with multiple subjects (Saudi Arabia: 2009—11).

made.⁹ The establishment of these connections has been a major consequence of the dialogue process as they have facilitated the building of new ideas, the narrowing of differences and the spreading of tolerance. There is also a recognised ‘spill over’ effect as ideas and arguments are transferred from KACND’s forums back to the participants’ constituencies. In addition, one of the major benefits at a KACND meeting is the interaction between people with different educational backgrounds, i.e., people can benefit from each other’s experiences and education.¹⁰

Regions and groups

One dialogue participant observes that before attending a KACND meeting in Najran she knew very little about the city, province or its people, but the forum allowed her to better understand the Najrani way of thinking and better understands the needs of the people.¹¹ This view is supported by an Ismaili Najrani woman who participated at the Eighth National Meeting in the city and considers the establishment of connections to be significant because she also noticed how the other KACND participants came to Najran with little experience or knowledge of the province, just as she admits to having little experience and knowledge of other regions.¹² These two participants had their misconceptions drastically corrected as a result of the Najran forum and interactions. Hence, the formation of inter-regional connections, as well as inter-sectarian ones, is prompting individuals to reconsider long-standing assumptions and traditional regional bias. It is also highlighting a particular region’s strengths and weaknesses. In fact, participation at several KACND forums convinced one woman of the uniqueness of the Eastern Province which is ‘more of a cocktail’ in terms of individual talent and experience than other regions.¹³ However, she notes that few individuals from this region, however talented, find themselves in high-level administrative positions. The government could clearly benefit from transferring high-calibre individuals from the Eastern Province into other regions. Although this happens to a degree, there appears to be a policy that promotes Najdi individuals to decision-making positions in Riyadh, but conversely does not select equally qualified candidates from the Eastern Province. This

⁹ Interview by author with Subject 68 writer and KACND participant (Jeddah: 05.07.10).

¹⁰ Interview by author with Subject 21, Ismaili businessman (Najran: 10.07.10).

¹¹ Interview by author with Subject 44, educator and KACND contributor (Al-Khobar: 15.07.10).

¹² Interview by author with Subject 22, Ismaili KACND participant (Najran: 10.07.10).

¹³ Interview by author with Subject 44, educator and KACND contributor (Al-Khobar: 15.07.10).

might constitute a governmental balancing act in order to maintain a perceived Najdi hegemony in the capital.¹⁴

The informal process of creating new spaces for the formation of connections and discussion is not without its problems. This ‘opening’ continues to be hampered by the authorities due to the continuing dominance of the majority Sunni constituency and the space it is given by the government.¹⁵ Moreover, connections remain predominantly between individuals rather than groups with a greater number of personal relationships formed, according to one Jeddah-based human rights activist.¹⁶ Nonetheless, increased individual contact is also important in order to expose people to different political and / or religious ideas.¹⁷ There are also fewer advantageous connections between groups because at the moment their goals are different and some individuals are afraid to meet as part a group because of potentially adverse reaction from the government; that said religious groups do meet more frequently in Jeddah than liberal and / or human rights groups. The relationship between liberals and Shia is said to be constructive at unofficial forums although this particular Jeddah activist is wary of greater Shia involvement in the socio-political or cultural arena. In his opinion, a Shia monopoly on power would be worse than the current situation under the Sunni. Nevertheless, the Shia leadership is generally considered to be better educated than its Salafi counterpart and it is recognised that the Shia leadership is more active and with more political projects and forums, whereas at least this activist views the Sunni movements’ leadership, as only wanting ‘to die and go to the virgins’.¹⁸

INSTITUTIONAL INTERACTION

As KACND has neither power nor a precise institutional function it is unable to interact with the rest of the Saudi political system, thus, much is made of the ‘political isolation’ of KACND and the National Dialogue Meetings, in particular the fact that no official interaction occurs between the institution and other legitimised Saudi political and / or

¹⁴ Interview by author with Subject 67, human rights activist and dissident (Jeddah: 08.07.11).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid. He says if he brings or invites another group to Jeddah then ‘people will be afraid’. He gives an example of the well-known socio-political Muhammed Tayeb going to Qatif to meet Shaikh Hassan Al Saffar and this meeting provoked an angry reaction from the government, but according to the activist Princes Nayef and Salman were unable to do anything to stop the meeting.

¹⁷ Ibid. The activist says he is also aware that some people ‘just want to show off’ and do not hold serious socio-political or religious views.

¹⁸ Ibid.

economic bodies (See, Ammoun 2006, p. 234; Hertog 2006, p. 265). As such, KACND is unfavourably compared to other official institutions, for example the *majlis al-shura*, as unlike KACND the Consultative Council possesses a function and is endowed with institutional powers (Ammoun 2006: p. 234). Ammoun refers to the National Dialogue as an ‘aborted institution’ noting that recommendations issued at the end of each National Dialogue have not been supported by other Saudi socio-political institutions and according to Ammoun these recommendations have thus far gone unheeded. Consequently, in his and other critics’ view, the National Dialogue remains at the margins of the Saudi political system as it has neither power nor a precise institutional function (2006, pp. 234—35). Hence, this lack of interaction between KACND and other socio-political institutions proves that KACND does not and cannot have influence over any decision-making. Indeed, Ammoun maintains that KACND ‘has neither power nor a precise institutional function making it unable to interact with the rest of the Saudi political system’ thus, the institution is consigned to the margins of the political system supported only by King Abdullah (2006, p. 234). Hertog elaborates by pointing out that the KACND, as well as other professional associations, ‘have the potential to feed into policy-making in their respective fields’, but so far have been ‘too anaemic to function as effective conduits of information’ (2006, p. 265). This is fair criticism to a point; however it overlooks other possible reasons why the remit, or the effect, of KACND lies outside of recognised circles of authority.

The lack of interaction between socio-political institutions such as the KACND and *majlis al-shura* is seen by some as not a deliberate policy, but rather a consequence of a lack of vision.¹⁹ In fact, it is claimed that KACND and other institutions are now being run as businesses with vested interest controlling them in order to maximise personal profits and this deters any form of interaction.²⁰ Furthermore, within the Saudi political system this lack of formal institutional interaction results from the lack of an adequate framework between institutions, i.e., no one knows precisely where the limits lie between individual institutions.²¹ Another viewpoint is that the newly created institutions do not interact as they are being allowed to develop and in a way ‘assessed’.

¹⁹ Various interviews by author with multiple subjects (Saudi Arabia: 2009—11).

²⁰ Interview by author with Subject 79, academic and 2nd National Dialogue participant (Riyadh: 04.04.10).

²¹ Interview by author with Subject 63 Shia Writer and political activist (Qatif: 09.04.10).

Hence, depending on the outcome of the assessment, the future course of the institutions will then be plotted.²²

Saudi socio-political institutions might not interact, but it is noted that the various Chambers of Commerce are independent and active; although it is said that the Chambers of Commerce do not speak for society at large as their members only represent the business class.²³ This raises the question of Chambers of Commerce participation in the National Dialogue and whether active participation has been encouraged or, rather, the independence of the chambers and KACND might be a deliberate policy of maintaining institutional isolation.

KACND - majlis al-shura

A member of the *majlis al-shura* admits there is little or no direct interaction between KACND and the consultative council, but believes that indirect interaction will increase.²⁴ Presently, there is no substantive interaction between KACND and the *majlis al-shura*, other than channels of consultation between the two institutions.²⁵ Moreover, in the future there is the possibility of a formal link between KACND and the *majlis al-shura* as there is said to be great respect in the Shura Council for the dialogue institution as a result of the impact of its activities on society. For this reason KACND does not, in the view of one *majlis* member, need to be wholly independent as it is enough for KACND to continue to open its doors to society as its role is to teach people how to communicate effectively.²⁶ On the other hand, even if the *majlis al-shura* was connected in some fashion to KACND this link would not necessarily produce results.²⁷ There is limited interaction between ‘princely fiefdoms’, hence no effective national vision or plan, let alone implementation. Still, ideas might trickle down from joint KACND – *al-shura* sessions and quite possibly some senior princes have started to think about future connections between socio-political institutions.²⁸

²² Interview by author with Subject 51, KSU political-science lecturer (Riyadh: 12.12.09).

²³ Interview by author with Subject 71, female journalist (Riyadh: 03.10.10).

²⁴ Interview by author with Subject 24, *majlis al-shura* member (Jeddah: 07.07.10).

²⁵ Interview by author with Subject 82, Ismaili activist (Najran: 11.07.10).

²⁶ Interview by author with Subject 24, *majlis al-shura* member (Jeddah: 07.07.10).

²⁷ Interview by author with Subject 37, Shia cleric (Dammam: 10.06.10).

²⁸ Interview by author with Subject 73, Shia writer (Eastern Province: 08.04.10).

KACND - ministries

KACND Secretary-General Al Mu`ammar's former position as Deputy Education Minister and the interaction between KACND's women's centre and the Deputy Minister for Girl's Education demonstrate that the institution has a voice in at least one ministry and in consequence in the educational decision-making process.²⁹ Indeed, Madawi Al Rasheed, a known sceptic of Al Sa`ud institutions notes that so far the government's social, religious and educational reforms have incorporated aspects of KACND recommendations indicating a link between the dialogue forums and policy-making (2010, p. 247). In addition to dialogue training workshops that the institution organises for ministries such as education and planning, KACND also forwards formal letters containing meetings findings to the relevant minister. It seems clear certain ministries are dismissive of KACND although it is said that individual ministers respect these memorandums. Furthermore, many officials recognise that the institution has no real power and that KACND is dependent on its source of patronage.³⁰ Individuals such as Faisal Al Mu`ammar and senior staff in both KACND men's and women's sections are close to the king through their connections to SANG, but being close to the king does not mean that KACND or its officials are part of the government. What it does signify is that King Abdullah is a monarch who wants to hear to voices from outside the official government arena.³¹

Maintaining autonomy

Whilst the relationship between the National Dialogue and governmental bodies is complex, and communication between socio-political institutions will develop, these institutions will continue to avoid discussion of all explicitly political issues.³² However, any developing interaction will depend on how KACND interprets issues and whether KACND has the will and ability to create effective interaction. Of course there should be greater interaction with other institutions such as universities and the SCCI; an exchange of views through dialogue is extremely important and should not be limited

²⁹ Interview by author with Subject 38, journalists *Al-Jazeera* Newspaper. The two journalists maintain that the Ministry of Education does not have much interest in a relationship between KACND and *state* schools only private ones. (Riyadh: 23.01.11).

³⁰ Interview by author with Subject 20, journalist and liberal (Riyadh: 01.07.10). He says that when the then Crown Prince Abdullah established KACND it was Chairman Shaikh Salih Al Husayyin who received the call from the first prime minister to initiate the first National Dialogue Meeting. Interestingly, it is claimed he conferred with Prince Sultan first. In addition, Al Habeeb notes that 'the top man, Al Hussein, rambles during his speeches and does not know when to stop due to his advanced age'.

³¹ Interview by author with Subject 42, female lecturer KSU (Riyadh: 29.06.10).

³² Interview by author with Subject 19, lawyer (Riyadh: 21.06.10).

to a small group of people.³³ Certainly, KACND is in touch with other institutions in the Saudi society. It has signed many agreements to cooperate with Saudi universities under the auspices of the Ministry of Education to spread the culture of dialogue and it can point to several achievements, for example, notes one academic, strengthening national unity through dialogue.³⁴ On the other hand, there is a strong argument against incorporating KACND into the official government arena because the National Dialogue process arguably *needs* to remain separate from other socio-political institutions as it gets its strength from being separate.³⁵ In fact, there is a strong argument for KACND's autonomy free from political interference by other government bodies.³⁶ However, this autonomy should not rule out constructive interaction that might strengthen the role of the institution:

It is important for KACND to have its own autonomy as the institution needs freedom to build its own programme without pressure from other socio-political institutions. However, as there is little civil society, there is little support from other socio-political intuitions and this makes it difficult. Whilst it is necessary to note that KACND is related to the King and its autonomy is good, but at the same time a source of weakness for the future. However, the people who run KACND see legitimacy coming from the state and therefore, this facilitates a lack of independence and vision by the leaders of the National Dialogue'.³⁷

The most visible sign of interaction between KACND and the state are the audiences granted to the participants with King Abdullah that usually follow one of the annual National Dialogue Meetings.³⁸ These audiences also underline the king's patronage and continued interest in the dialogue process. In Saudi Arabia individual projects, sometimes referred to as vanity projects, are established by kings and senior princes. These initiatives flourish whilst the main sponsor is either alive or in a position of power, but once the main sponsor departs centre stage then the project no longer holds the attention of the sponsor's successor; witness the lower profile of KFUPM after King Fahd's passing.³⁹ Therefore, KACND could lose significant access to power and patronage following the succession of the next king.⁴⁰

³³ Interview by author with Subject 60, female educator (Eastern Province: 23.06.10).

³⁴ Interview by author with Subject 49, female academic (Riyadh: 18. 07.10).

³⁵ Interview by author with Subject 9, Shia cleric (Qatif: 10.07.10).

³⁶ Interview by author with Subject 42, female lecturer KSU (Riyadh: 29.06.10).

³⁷ Interview by author with Subject 20, liberal journalist and *diwaniya* (Riyadh: 01.07.10).

³⁸ Interview by author with Subject 35, female lecturer SANG University (Riyadh: 20.07.10).

³⁹ Various interviews by author with multiple subjects (Saudi Arabia: 2009—11).

⁴⁰ Discussions with Subject 95, academic (Riyadh: 2010—11). This could quite possibly apply to KAUST as well in the post Abdullah era. People ask why KAUST is separate from other Higher Educational institutions and apparently this annoys some people as they are not happy about the 'special' status KAUST enjoys. Interview by author with Subject 12, ARAMCO official (Al-Khobar: 16.06.10).

KACND: MEDIA FREEDOM AND HUMAN RIGHTS

KACND and the media

In March 2011 the *majlis al-shura* called for raising the ceiling on media freedom in a manner that is commensurate with the Kingdom's regional and international standing:

This is not the first time that Riyadh has faced calls for granting media freedom, and this comes at a time when Saudi Arabia is experiencing unprecedented social mobility, supported by well-known social networking websites, which are now being used to express public opinion in a more open manner than the official media (Al Saheil 2011, p. 1).

Increased media freedom has been attributed to a significantly improving dialogue between people that filters down through society although there is some debate regarding the extent of media freedom and whether in reality it has either stalled or regressed⁴¹ although others maintain that there has always been freedom of speech and 'light' censorship in the press.⁴² In addition, new information technology has opened up new opportunities for pursuing cultural activities in a more independent fashion, however, often the opposite is occurring as cyberspace is being turned into a medium for spreading slander and advancing the causes of sectarianism and tribalism (KACND 2009e, p. 2).

From the time of KACND's founding and during the period of the first three National Dialogue Meetings freedom of speech in the media increased, but arguably when pressure on the government decreased so did the extent of media freedom; this situation was reflected in the institution's decision to switch from ideology-based discussion to service-based dialogue. In addition, as the government does ultimately control the media, the issue of self-censorship vis-à-vis the understood red lines must not be discounted; this might help to explain why societal reform continues to move slowly forward and not as fast as many wish;⁴³ there are still many 'closed issues' that are not discussed. As a Human Rights Watch report puts it:⁴⁴

⁴¹ Interview by author with Subject 82, Ismaili activist (Najran: 11.07.10).

⁴² Interview by author with Subject 71, female journalist and broadcaster (Riyadh: 03.01.10).

⁴³ The media in the Kingdom can be divided between the official established media and the growing parallel media on the Internet.

⁴⁴ Interview by author with Subject 61, Shia human rights activist and journalist, Subject 86, Shia human rights activist, Subject 28, Shia writer and Subject 1, Qatif historian (Qatif: 08.04.10).

Although Saudis today are freer to criticise their government, both in media and in public pronouncements, red lines, largely arbitrary, remain. Challenging the religious ideology underpinning the Kingdom's identity remains taboo, as does criticising named officials, especially princes. Criticism of institutions and policies is tolerated if it does not propose changes to the political system of absolute monarchical rule. Organising to lobby for political change still leads to swift government repression, and the country still lacks a law permitting non-governmental organisations. There are no legal bases to protect the right to free expression, making gains in free speech subject to government whim (2010, p. 2).

Indeed, with regard to the National Dialogue process, many human rights activists argue that if the regime is interested in freedom of expression, then the regime should allow people to speak freely during KACND forums.⁴⁵

KACND has attempted to incorporate more women and minority groups into the dialogue process and this has been acknowledged by media sources. By incorporating women's rights and minority issues into the process, KACND not only prompted debate on the topics, but also on the question whether the forums should be shared with the wider public or convened in private (Sakr 2008, p. 393). At the time of the second National Meeting in December 2003 Al Mu`ammar argued that the proceedings should take place behind closed doors due to their experimental nature, but voices in the media and *majlis al-shura* disagreed. As Sakr notes, by the time of the third National Meeting there was a 'verbatim reporting of exchanges and photographs of men and women involved in the debates' despite gender segregation at the forum. Due to this media coverage two precedents were established: numerical equality between male and female participants and publicising the content of the debate. In consequence viewers of the state-owned *Al-Ekhbariya* were able to witness women proposing amendments to the forum's recommendations (2008, pp. 393—94). That said, there is little doubt that women and minorities continue to form the two main constituencies in Saudi society who are primarily being excluded.⁴⁶

Whilst it is of paramount importance that issues related to these constituencies are addressed, and while they have been widely discussed in the press since at least the second half of the 2000s, it is often to the detriment of other important issues as many writers only focus on women's rights and *salafiya*.⁴⁷ However, it can also be argued that journalists are frequently not writing about equal opportunities for women per se, or

⁴⁵ Interview by author with Subject 41, ACPRA political activist (Riyadh: 13.07.10).

⁴⁶ Interview by author with Subject 77, Shia writer and academic (Qatif: 08.04.10).

⁴⁷ Interview by author with Subjects 87 and 93, KSU professor and son (Riyadh: 17.07.10).

indeed of a woman's right to drive, but rather use the issue as a socio-political touchstone. Hence, the issue of women's rights becomes contextualised as an area of contention between the liberal reformers and conservative religious establishment in the media as opposed to being about the actual rights themselves. In addition, the same journalists may deny *salafiya*, but it is not always clear to the reader what exactly these writers are denying: religiosity or a political belief system. On the other hand, whilst the issue of women's rights is important, and there have been wide-ranging discussions in the press particularly the advent of the 2011 driving campaign, some maintain that this is a 'good media story' and does not constitute the worst problem confronting Saudi society.⁴⁸

Dr. Sameera Qattan of the Jeddah-based Arab Open University maintains that when discussing KACND and the dialogue process the media continues to pay greater attention to the views of intellectuals and other prominent individuals. Since one of the basic principles of dialogue is to reach society in its entirety, the Saudi media should, she feels, address the problems facing youth, the elderly and low-income groups as these groups have not been allowed to express their opinions fully (KACND 2009n, p. 1). Many active dialogue participants believe that the media can play a constructive role in deepening public participation in the institution's activities by paying greater attention to the dialogue forums and training initiatives. One local suggestion has been that the media could devote more articles to the importance of the dialogue process and explain that objective dialogue facilitates stronger ties of friendship and tolerance (KACND 2009n, p. 1—2).

In the opinion of those attending a Riyadh *diwaniya* in 2010, bureaucrats are not 'brave' in comparison to journalists or writers,⁴⁹ but the members conceded that KACND Secretary-General Al Mu`ammar, who they consider an arch-bureaucrat, proffered an invitation to journalists and writers alike to participate in KACND's forums and air their views on the dialogue process. Al Mu`ammar stressed that the king never said what they should say, but in fact said: 'do whatever you like'.⁵⁰ Yet, KACND has been subjected to a great deal of criticism in the last few years with many journalists criticising the institution despite having little knowledge of its activities. According to a

⁴⁸ Interview by author with Subject 42, female lecturer KSU (Riyadh: 29.06.10).

⁴⁹ Interview by author with Subject 20, liberal journalist, Subject 48, Ismaili activist, Subject 3, Salafi thinker, subject 84, Shia activist (Riyadh: 01.07.10).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

well-known liberal journalist, the situation improved when the same writers began to understand the role of KACND and subsequently admitted that previously they had not known about the activities of the institution; hence some of their articles had misrepresented KACND.⁵¹ Although critical of KACND, some individuals who were active in public life did not show an interest in participating in the dialogue process saying that the gatherings were not up to standard which he believes was incorrect and short-sighted (KACND 2009m, p. 1). Additionally, the institution is still relatively new and thus it is not likely that Saudi society as a whole, including the media, would understand or appreciate its role and functions as a dialogue centre. Although it is evident that many Saudis have access to the dialogue through live T.V broadcasting.⁵² Therefore, many would understand at least in part the aims of the dialogue process and discuss them in their social gatherings. Full appreciation of the dialogue process requires greater familiarity with the assumed agenda of the enterprise which is not as clear as it should be now.⁵³ Hence, without a doubt there is misinterpretation in the media regarding the role of KACND, but some continue to argue that although KACND is aware of its shortcomings it fails to interpret the mood of the domestic press accurately or address its questions in a satisfactory manner.⁵⁴ It remains to be seen whether the Ninth National Dialogue on media issues, due to be convened in 2012, will go some way towards rectifying these problems.

Human Rights

NSHR was established in 2004 by a group of forty-one intellectuals who obtained a decree of appointment from the king (El Fegierly 2008, p. 1). The society is recognised as being more independent of government than the SHRC which is regarded as the regime's watchdog (Montagu 2011, p. 9). A former member of NSHR maintains that when the UN Human Rights Commission asked to come to the Kingdom it was the NSHR that persuaded the government to allow the visit as, in the commission's opinion,

⁵¹ Madawi Al Rasheed comments on the lukewarm reception given to the Fifth National Dialogue in the media. Participants were allegedly 'sleepy' and disengaged. Al Rasheed wonders whether the participants had come to the conclusion that the sessions were 'futile' or did the reporting deliberately disparage the participants 'and their apathy' in order to send some sort of message (2007, p. 236).

⁵² There are short 30 second commercials being broadcast by KACND on the following issues: family dialogue, dialogue at the mosque and Imams, dialogue in school and sport and electronic dialogue Interview by author with Subject 50, KACND official (Riyadh: 14.06.10).

⁵³ Interview by author with Subject 33, academic (Riyadh: 16.07.10).

⁵⁴ Interview by author with Subject 20, liberal journalist and *diwaniya* (Riyadh: 18.01.11).

the Kingdom had nothing to hide;⁵⁵ thus, it was claimed that this demonstrated tangible reform in Saudi Arabia.⁵⁶ Certainly, there were high expectations when the commission was founded, but subsequently it proved to be nothing more than a bureaucratic department with a limited role in defending human rights (National Declaration for Reform 2011, p. 4). In fact, a common complaint is that some of the representatives of NSHR do not even recognise basic human rights in Saudi Arabia.⁵⁷ In 2010 the *majlis al-shura* established a new human rights and petitions committee whose goal is to educate and create an awareness of dialogue in society by initiating dialogue-related seminars and workshops (Human Rights Watch 2010, p. 6). The most important issue it will tackle is to make society aware of women's and children's rights, in particular the taboo topic of violence towards women and children. The new committee aims to promote the teaching of dialogue skills through the mosques as there are approximately 64,000 of these across the Kingdom where sermons are made on a daily basis.⁵⁸

Four main areas directly linked to human rights are central to the king's reform agenda: women's rights, freedom of expression, judicial fairness and religious tolerance (Human Rights Watch 2010, p. 1). Other pressing issues facing the Kingdom include corruption, poverty and the usage of 'corrupt' religious texts. Some opponents claim that these critical issues are in fact related to the malfeasance of the government because in essence the main problem is what an ACPRA spokesperson calls the lawlessness and ruthlessness of the regime.⁵⁹ ACPRA assists political prisoners in mobilising them to sue the Interior Ministry and believes that it has succeeded in breaking down fear of the ministry.⁶⁰ Montagu maintains that ACPRA tries to work with the Al Sa'ud 'knowing that the family is not homogenous it tries to encourage reform-minded princes and acts as a two-way channel for ideas' (2011, p. 9). In fact, ACPRA concedes that there is now increased tolerance as demonstrated by the existence of two human rights organisations within the Kingdom.⁶¹ In January 2011 a communique was issued by ACPRA

⁵⁵ Mai Yamani cites an estimated 8,000 political prisoners being held without trial or representation (2011, p. 1).

⁵⁶ Interview by author with Subject 24, *majlis al-shura* member (Jeddah: 07.07.10).

⁵⁷ Interview by author with Subject 63, Shia writer and political activist (Qatif: 09.04.10).

⁵⁸ Interview by author with Subject 24, *majlis al-shura* member (Jeddah: 07.07.10), with input from Subject 16, former judge (Jeddah: 07.07.10).

⁵⁹ Interview by author Subject 41, ACPRA political activist (Riyadh: 13.07.10).

⁶⁰ This does not include terrorists or those with links to foreign sources.

⁶¹ Interview by author Subject 41, ACPRA political activist (Riyadh: 13.07.10). The spokesperson also notes that positive changes have taken place and these reforms must be taken into account. Indeed at the time of writing (July 2010), there was a case pending against the Ministry of the Interior. Here he mentions a case of a deliberate hit and run incident involving a prince whereby an innocent man was left permanently paralysed; Subject 41 was taking this man's case.

condemning Prince Nayef in the strongest terms. It called for him to be sacked from his position of Saudi Minister of Interior and subsequently prosecuted. In addition, it demanded that the prince's 'accomplices', namely, officers of the Directorate of General Investigation (DGI), interrogators, prison wardens, and judges also be prosecuted for systematic human rights violations (See ACPRA 2011). Even political liberals in Qatif felt that this overstepped the mark, and that it represented only a 'minor trend', but understood in the Saudi context it was possible to say that it benefitted the media in that it may have made some commentators more out-spoken, i.e., if an organisation accuses the Kingdom's recognised number three of human rights violations then maybe this facilitates acceptable criticism of everyone else below his position'.⁶²

A human rights activist and dissident believes, along with many of KACND's critics in and outside of the Kingdom, that because KACND is controlled directly by the regime the institution does not constitute a public organisation.⁶³ The main problem, he argues, is that all KACND participants are selected by the government and although the participants can discuss issues freely, the forum is no different from other government meetings. Indeed, these government approved individuals routinely toe the line by declaring that 'everything is fine in the Kingdom', a situation he feels is mirrored in KACND meetings.⁶⁴ In addition, the government controls access to groups and organisations and even if an individual has a well-established relationship with associations such as 'Human Rights Watch' (HRW) only individuals approved by the government are invited to official human rights seminars and discussions.⁶⁵ Furthermore, a great many individuals are excluded from KACND's activities because the government either does not like, or will not accept, their views especially if they speak out on women's, human and sectarian rights. For this reason, unofficial forums are more active than government sponsored bodies as it is possible to meet a variety of people from all walks of life and talk freely. However, participation in these unofficial forums is monitored by the government and a Jeddah based human rights *diwaniya* was closed down by the government in May 2010.⁶⁶

⁶² Interview by author with Subject 63, Shia writer and political activist (Qatif: 09.04.10).

⁶³ Interview by author with Subject 67, human rights activist (Jeddah: 08.07.10). At the time of writing Subject 67 had had his passport confiscated and was forbidden to travel. See <http://www.frontlinedefenders.org/node/2281>

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid. Subject 67 was number three on the list of individuals that HRW wished to meet when a delegation visited the Kingdom,

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Without a doubt increased awareness of the human rights issue in Saudi society, and the fact that it has been highlighted by the events of the Arab Spring, has placed the government's policy towards human rights under the spotlight. Demonstrations by minorities such as the Shia in the Eastern Province and women outside the Interior Ministry in Riyadh demanding the release of political prisoners have been uploaded onto YouTube and forwarded to international human rights organisations.⁶⁷ These demonstrations have not called for regime change; rather the protestors have demanded greater government accountability and a more transparent judicial process. In an era of instant messaging and rolling 24 hour news the Saudi government should be aware that dealing with dissent in the Kingdom is no longer a purely internal issue.

KACND: SAUDI NATIONAL IDENTITY

Dr. Wafa Al Rasheed, a former United Nations Development Program coordinator in Saudi Arabia, believes an inferiority complex exists amongst some Saudis:

We are not a hopeless society; we are a very diverse one. The whole world believes that all Saudis think and speak the same way; this is not true. We have people with different accents, backgrounds and cultural beliefs. We have a rich cultural heritage, and when fusing our beliefs with different viewpoints and ideas, a healthy society can be created (Arab News 2004d, p. 2).

Indeed, there is debate regarding the definition of whom or what is 'Saudi' and disagreement is rooted in the fact that it appears almost impossible for Saudis from all backgrounds to agree on the same answer.⁶⁸ Furthermore, Saudi national identity is often framed in terms of how the Hijazi and Shia constituencies conceptualise their attitude to the Najdi elite.⁶⁹ When senior princes and public figures were, in interviews by a journalist, asked the question 'Why does Saudi Arabia exist?' — their failure to come up with a satisfactory answer or explanation led him to conclude that the government, and to a degree society, does not understand the nature of Saudi identity.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ See, for example, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nMTm8N9vahM>;
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZxLdCuy2pf8&feature=related>

⁶⁸ An impression confirmed in an interview by author with Subject 29, political activist (Riyadh and Qatif: 29.03.10 / 08.04.10).

⁶⁹ Interview by author with Subject 51, KSU political-science lecturer (Riyadh: 12.12.09), confirming author's observation over more than a year of informal interaction with a cross-section of Saudis.

⁷⁰ Interview by author with Subject 2, journalist, former TV presenter (Jeddah: 06.07.10). Subject 2 was a television presenter who had a 'dialogue' programme that started in 2003. He now runs the Bridges 'cultural café' in Jeddah where he hosts book clubs and discussion groups for men and women. The café incorporates a library and profiles of famous Saudi Arabian cultural personalities, both past and present, who are often unknown to ordinary Saudi citizens. His father came to Saudi Arabia on pilgrimage over a hundred years ago from Urumqi in China.

In recent years Saudi scholars have been discussing the possible emergence of a Saudi national project, or *watania*, and whether this could lead to the creation of a new national identity. An unexpected result of the dialogue process has been the flowering of informal discussions linked to Saudi national identity.⁷¹ But KACND has not dealt specifically with this issue although concepts of citizenship were discussed within the parameters of the Cultural Discourse.⁷² The confluence of constituencies under the auspices of KACND has resulted in the discovery of mutual common-ground and the identification of issues which represent an area of concern not only for specific groupings, but for all parties present at the KACND forums. This process is still in its early stages so uncertainty surrounds what might constitute such a new Saudi identity; the arguments and discussions regarding its nature are still on-going. However, the very idea of national identity is not clear, even to the main figures involved as each separate constituency is developing its own idea of what constitutes ‘national identity’.⁷³ In addition, muddled concepts of national identity can be attributed to the lack of information regarding other Saudi constituencies, or indeed, assumptions and misunderstandings. Additionally, the major political players attempt to define the behaviour of Saudi citizens so ‘citizenship’ often has no real meaning and diversity is not reflected in the government.⁷⁴

A prominent Shia political analyst maintains that the concept of citizenship does not simply mean having a valid identity card, but rather it denotes a system of equal rights and equal responsibilities. At present, he argues, Saudi citizens are answerable in the main to the religious culture in the Kingdom which is a culture of duty and not of rights; therefore if the concept of national identity is to change, there needs to be a move away from a culture of duty to a culture of rights.⁷⁵ He believes that the government cannot expect an individual to be loyal to the state if the individual does not receive rights and in consequence, argues that it is necessary to differentiate between loyalty to the state, which is transient, and loyalty to the nation which is permanent.⁷⁶ However, this ignores

⁷¹ Interview by author with Subject 9, Shia cleric (Qatif: 10.07.10).

⁷² See 2010 Riyadh Cultural Discourse p. 156.

⁷³ Interview by author with Subject 29, political activist (Riyadh and Qatif: 29.03.10 / 08.04.10).

⁷⁴ Interview by author with Subject 19, lawyer, ex-judge, owner of Arab Network for Research and Publishing (Riyadh: 21.06.10).

⁷⁵ Interview by author with Subject 63, Shia writer and political activist (Qatif: 05.01.11).

⁷⁶ Ibid. He also says that it is also possible to differentiate between the concept of a ‘romantic nation’ and ‘material nation’; the romantic relates to patriotic feelings towards the nation-state, i.e., heartfelt emotions, whilst the material relates to protection provided by the nation-state. In addition, ‘nationalism’ and feelings towards the nation-state can be determined by land and territory, a social contract and citizen participation vis-à-vis the welfare state.

the traditional culture of respect for authority, or ‘leading families’, which the Al Sa`ud have cultivated, as well as traditional values such as social status, personal connections and kinship ties. As Nonneman suggests, the Al Sa`ud has used ‘these themes to build and instruments derived from them’ to reinforce the regime’s legitimacy and instruments of control (Nonneman 2008, pp. 4—5). He argues that the way in which ‘tribal’ and ‘traditional’ culture have been reshaped and directed by the Al Sa`ud has to be recognised. In addition, elements of the ‘traditional’ have also been reinterpreted by the different constituencies and along with demographic, societal and economic change, Nonneman says that this has transformed the Saudi state into a ‘neo-traditionalist’ system (2008, p. 4).

As explained in Chapter one, Saudi Arabia comprises distinct areas and regions, in addition to tribes and sects. However, despite talk of ‘accepting national diversity’ the Al Sa`ud through hegemonic state policies and initiatives appears to be pursuing the vision of a culturally and socially homogenous Kingdom, one devoid of dissent. However, there is a danger for the regime that a manufactured Saudi identity may not in the long-term adhere to the one desired by the Al Sa`ud. Thus, one way of avoiding this scenario is for the Al Sa`ud to ‘open up’ its power circles and allow individuals from outside the family to integrate into its general ranks. By displaying a willingness to promote individuals of suitable merit to key positions, the government establishes a ‘proper relationship’ between itself and society as opposed to imposing ‘the state’ over society. This promotes an acceptable concept of national identity whilst allowing the state to appear as ‘ethico-political’ (Haugaard 2006b, pp. 35—36), thus blurring the line between dictatorship and hegemony. It is possible to identify this hegemonic process at higher government and administrative levels in addition to within the intermediate stratum, e.g. KACND management. At a lower level, the invitations proffered by KACND to previously marginalised constituencies to participate in the National Dialogue simultaneously bind these diverse groupings into the Al Sa`ud hegemonic process.

However, it can and has also been argued that in Saudi Arabia those who are advocating a new nationalism are those constituencies who are currently discriminated against; they are pushing for nationalism, according to a member of the *majlis al-shura*, because they

believe the government will lose power and ‘the law’ will become stronger.⁷⁷ In the course of a lecture at King Faisal University (KFU) in Dammam in 2006, the prominent scholar Shaikh Salman Al Awdah, of the so-called ‘Sahwa’ or Islamic ‘awakening’ movement – who was originally associated with the non-violent opposition but participated in the 1st and 2nd National Meetings for Intellectual Dialogue, attempted to correct what he saw as attempted to clarify misconceptions about ‘nationalism’. He dismissed the ‘fanatical’ adherence of ‘ultra-nationalists’ to Pan-Arabism or nationalism as opposed to belonging to the Islamic nation, asserting that ‘homeland’ and ‘nationalism’ both refer to a group of people living in one country in which they share a number of common values including religion (KACND 2008a, pp. 1—2).

In 2006 King Abdullah highlighted the link between accepting diversity and national unity by speaking of differences as a source of ‘ideological categorisation’ implying that it represents a threat to national unity (Al Dakhil 2006a, p. 163).⁷⁸ According to a recent telephone poll conducted by KACND, Saudis accept diversity in the Kingdom (Saudi Gazette 2011, p. 1) with approximately fifty-four per cent of respondents⁷⁹ stating that diversity has a positive effect on Saudi culture (KACND 2011a, p. 1). However, this message is not always reflected ‘on the ground’ even if concepts of national identity are shifting from the Wahhabi-style profile.⁸⁰ Indeed, in 2005 Glosemeyer noted that the Saudi population no longer defined itself as belonging to the Wahhabi community, but increasingly as citizens of the Saudi state (2005, p. 231). Huge celebrations held for the National Day in 2010 (23rd September) as part of what has been identified as Saudi ‘nascent nationalism’ suggested that ‘Saudiness’ appears to have strengthened despite objections from the conservative religious authorities who previously opposed any expression of fidelity to the state (Obaid 2011, p. 2).⁸¹ What must not be overlooked is the critical role Islam plays in Saudi identity as arguably the greatest influence in the country: it shapes family relationships, the education system, the social fabric, future aspirations and the manner in which Saudis view life itself (Yamani 1997, p. 4). A 2003 survey found that Saudis consider religion as the most important element of their

⁷⁷ Interview by author with Subject 69, writer and *majlis al-shura* member (Riyadh: .21.06.10).

⁷⁸ See 2010 Jeddah Cultural Discourse on Intellectual Classification, p. 168.

⁷⁹ The survey conducted on 30.06.11 polled nearly 700 individuals from various regions of the Kingdom. KACND established the polling unit in 2006 and plans to expand the number of statistical surveys. The panel of experts who analyse the findings has also developed a computer programmes to assist with statistical analysis.

⁸⁰ Interview by author with Subject 29, political activist (Riyadh and Qatif: 29.03.10 / 08.04.10).

⁸¹ As noted in Chapter three, according to Alfaiz, KACND was responsible through the National Meetings for the establishment of the National Day and in her opinion this has had a positive impact on society Interview by author with Deputy Minister for Girls’ Education Norah Alfaiz (Riyadh: 14.07.10).

identity with territorial nationalism coming a distant second (Moaddel 2006, p. 85).⁸² That said, there are diverse religious practices yet only the state supported Wahhabi doctrine is structurally empowered, as Okruhlik points out, although private religious beliefs are diverse, public discourse is dominated by the state sanctioned Wahhabism (2010, p. 392).

The dialogue process is having repercussions with regard to notions of Saudi identity due to the fact that the process is directly linked to debate on a convergence of themes including education, the economy and even information available outside the Kingdom. The National Dialogue process may be affecting ideas of national identity because discussion of individual rights within KACND parameters has fostered the idea that the participant is ‘speaking for the Kingdom’ as opposed to either a constituency or sects.⁸³ Therefore, issues once framed solely in regional or sectarian terms such as unemployment are now being framed in national terms and this has been attributed to the on-going dialogue process.⁸⁴ In other words, people are starting to discuss the Saudi community as a whole and it is argued that this is a new beginning, a new idea; ‘We are one country, one people, and even if an individual does not believe this individual says this now’.⁸⁵ A lecturer at KSU College of Medical Science believes that KACND has a role to play in discussions on national identity, even if it should not be a major one.⁸⁶ However, if national identity becomes a KACND goal then the institution should try to establish a way of ‘introducing this concept to the younger generations’. She also thinks that in all probability it is minorities who have more to gain from debate on national identity and therefore this issue could be framed in a National Meeting by specific minority concerns.⁸⁷ Arguably, KACND has already raised issues of ‘loyalty’ to the state, albeit indirectly, due to the fact that each individual involved in the dialogue process plays has a role and this ultimately reflects on the individual’s perception of national identity. Indeed, participation in the dialogue process may have exposed Saudis

⁸² The Pan Arab Research Center carried out the survey in the Kingdom using a multi-stage probability sampling procedure. The sample included 1,026 Saudi citizens and 500 foreign residents (equal numbers of men and women) from the northern, southern, central, eastern and western regions.

⁸³ Interview by author with Subject Subjects 87 and 93, KSU professor and son (Riyadh: 17.07.10).

⁸⁴ For instance in author’s discussions with Subjects 47 and 56, Shia activists at a *diwaniya* (Qatif: 29.03.10).

⁸⁵ Interview by author with Subject Subjects 87 and 93, KSU professor and son (Riyadh: 17.07.10).

⁸⁶ Interview by author with Subject 42, female lecturer KSU (Riyadh: 29.06.10). Subject 42 participated in the preliminary National Dialogue Meeting on Health in Al-Kharj and in the National Meeting in Najran In addition she has participated in many KACND seminars and welcoming committees for visiting overseas dignitaries, e.g., US congress visit to Riyadh in April 2010 as well as the two previous visits.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

to issues that divide communities, but the process has also highlighted common ground as well as societal concerns that are relevant to all the Kingdom's constituencies thereby indirectly strengthening the notion of national unity.

EVALUATING THE DIALOGUE PROCESS

A bureaucratic institution?

Increased societal apathy and disappointment with the formal National Dialogue Meetings process can be attributed to the perceived shift from issues of primary ideological importance, as clearly stated in then Crown Prince Abdullah's opening KACND speech (KACND 2003a, p. 1), to more secondary service-based issues. However, as also noted, KACND returned to discussion of ideological issues with the establishment in 2009 of the Cultural Discourse and the hope is expressed within the institution that it will revisit previously debated themes at future forums.⁸⁸ Frequent reappraisal of critical issues should be encouraged as the domestic socio-political environment in Saudi Arabia remains fluid and ever-changing. In its initial stages KACND was considered to be within King Abdullah's direct sphere of influence as most senior officials were formerly affiliated to SANG. However, as of 2011, KACND is thought of as part of the larger government apparatus instead of being solely connected to the king.⁸⁹ Hence, KACND senior management is part of government officialdom implying that senior officials need to take the opinion of the Sudairi circle into consideration; some argue that KACND should be attempting to include Prince Nayef's people within its organisational structure.⁹⁰ In addition, the position of KACND Secretary-General was somewhat diluted as a result of his appointment to the position of Deputy Education Minister and whilst this directly linked the Ministry of Education to KACND, it also implied that the remit of the Secretary-General was being spread too thinly across a broad and diverse range of issues.⁹¹ This would seem to have been rectified by the position of KACND Secretary-General being elevated to ministerial status in late 2011 as well as Al Mu`ammar's current role as special advisor to the king. However, KACND is seen by some as a predominantly bureaucratic institution with

⁸⁸ Interview by author with Subject 50, KACND Deputy Secretary-General and senior KACND staff (Riyadh: 22.04.10).

⁸⁹ Interview by author with Subject 82, Ismaili activist (Najran: 11.07.10).

⁹⁰ Ibid. Furthermore, it is recognised that in the Kingdom bureaucrats can have two or three faces: 'one they present to you, one to me and the other the one they present to the top man and this one is a beautiful face that pleases him'.

⁹¹ Interview by author with Dr. Aldamer, Subject 58, KFUPM academic and dean (Al-Khobar: 04.03.10).

Secretary-General Al Mu`ammar not only responsible for the dialogue institution, but also the King Abdulaziz Public Library and the new King Abdullah Interfaith Dialogue Center due to open in Vienna in 2012.

It is certainly desirable that society becomes better acquainted with the outcomes of the National Dialogue process and whilst it is acknowledged by participants that the dialogue process as a whole has been ‘progressing’, there is scepticism concerning the outcome of the process; in other words, where is the return on the investment in establishing the dialogue? Participants note that they are given the opportunity to speak to the king following the National Meetings, but often wonder what this and the meeting itself actually achieve. Furthermore, the apparent lack of a dialogue evaluation process suggests that few, if any, methods are being used to measure the effectiveness of the dialogue.⁹² For this reason, Dr. Aldamer, a KACND participant and a Dean at KFUPM, contends that the entire organization of KACND needs to be restructured.⁹³ Firstly, he suggests, a committee should be established to discuss the National Dialogue topics and this would include relevant experts. Secondly, as potential topics for discussion are selected by KACND in consultation with senior royals and their officials, it would be beneficial if a survey were conducted in Saudi society in order to ascertain which topics are considered of primary importance. This survey could either include open-ended questions or a short-list of possible topics and could be conducted within Saudi higher educational institutions to determine which issues are relevant for both students and faculty. Dr. Aldamer also recommends the founding of committees that would deal with the following issues:

- Looking at the findings of each preparatory meeting, and National Meetings in order to write clear and concise recommendations by organizing the materials and findings
- Committees should be established to liaise between KACND and the relevant ministries, indeed, some committee members could be part of the ministry, thus enabling the meeting’s recommendations to be passed directly to the relevant ministers for implementation
- Committee members could include non-Saudis who are experts in their respective fields

⁹² Interview by author with Subject 68, female writer and KACND participant (Jeddah: 05.07.10). She says that if the dialogue process is not being measured then ‘it is blowing in the wind’.

⁹³ Interview by author with Subject 58, KFUPM academic and dean (Al-Khobar: 04.03.10).

In addition, the remit of the preparatory meetings needs to be widened according to one dialogue participant and she also suggests the possibility of ‘under-preparatory meetings’ as these could incorporate less-educated members of society into the process.⁹⁴ It would also be advantageous if more volunteers become involved in the running of KACND in place of government officials, thus helping to maintain the institution’s independence.⁹⁵

Initiating an evaluation process

The first stage in setting up a National Dialogue Meeting is when KACND contacts relevant individuals to organise seminars in order to prepare the groundwork for the National Dialogue preparatory meetings.⁹⁶ One of these organisers described how she formed a committee of ten males and four females to look at potential themes and issues for discussion at the 2010 health forum in Najran.⁹⁷ This process included collecting and analysing data, suggesting thematic topics, preparing booklists and compiling surveys to be conducted Kingdom-wide. Upon completion of these activities the five preparatory meetings were then scheduled in five different regions.⁹⁸ The organiser says that at every stage in the KACND process she became aware of the effort put in by the institution’s staff, but following the Najran forum and after reviewing the entire dialogue process she could not help wondering about the apparent lack of evaluation and follow-up mechanisms. In fact, in her opinion the Najran forum would have been an ideal time for KACND to have implemented some type of evaluation process. For example, the institution could have used ‘benchmarking’ to evaluate its performance as well as its educational role and management style.⁹⁹ In addition, a ‘Strengths, Weaknesses,

⁹⁴ Interview by author with Subject 68, female writer and KACND participant (Jeddah: 05.07.10).

⁹⁵ Interview by author with Subject 82, Ismaili activist (Najran: 11.07.10).

⁹⁶ Interview by author with Subject 35, female lecturer SANG University (Riyadh: 20.07.10). The organiser says that at present, would-be participants submit an application and are then chosen by Faisal Al Mu`ammar and his team. She stresses the participants are not paid so this proves that they attend because they genuinely care and love their country. With regard to female participants, these days KACND application forms do not need a male signatory, at least in practice, as the computer has been programmed to accept the form with the guardian’s signature left blank.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ See p. 107.

⁹⁹ A benchmark is a point of reference against which something may be measured. In the higher education context a benchmark is usually either (1) a level of performance, resources, or outcome against which an institution or group might be compared, or (2) the specification or codification of comparable processes. Benchmarks may be (1) defined for an institution (or sub-institution unit) as targets, possibly on continuous basis (2) the basis of comparison between two or more institutions (or sub-institutional units) (3) specifications of processes that can be compared as a basis for identifying, for example, optimum effectiveness, efficiency or transparency. Benchmarks’ are sometimes specified in ‘contracts’ such as student charters. They tend to be quantifiable and restricted to measurable items, including the presence

Opportunities and Threats' (SWOT) analysis could have been applied as part of an evaluation process in order to identify institutional weaknesses, locate the origins of threats and check if stated goals had been achieved or not.¹⁰⁰ In other words, an evaluation of that kind would verify whether the institution's goals provide the tools to reach its stated vision.¹⁰¹ Another option would be the introduction of Key Performance Indicators (KPI) in order to establish benchmarks to monitor quality assurance.¹⁰² The next obvious step would be to look at the future direction of KACND on its tenth anniversary in 2013 as this would be an opportune time for a comprehensive evaluation of the entire National Dialogue process and re-evaluate the focus and direction of the institution. Whilst there is no doubt that many improvements do indeed need to be made, KACND staff is aware of this and have confidence in what they are doing.¹⁰³

Other formal seminars attended by KACND participants could serve as templates for future KACND meetings; a good example being a seminar on the development of human resources in the Makkah / Jeddah region in 2007. The discussions focussed on infrastructure and the development of a strategic twenty-year plan to address related issues.¹⁰⁴ There were ninety male participants and thirty female participants (not segregated) including Prince Abdullah bin Faisal Al Sa`ud and the Dean of King Abdulaziz University (KAU). Discussion took place in small seminar groups followed by group briefings and the findings were immediately recorded on a computer network so that the data could be simultaneously shared via computers. After the completion of this process a strategic phased plan was developed which one of the participants describes as 'A-B-C planning'. Faisal Al Mu`ammar was present at this

or absence of an element of service or a facility. Benchmarking tends to be a voluntary activity engaged in by institutions:

(Quality Research International):<http://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/benchmark.htm>

¹⁰⁰ The SWOT analysis is an extremely useful tool for understanding and decision-making for all sorts of situations in business and organizations. SWOT is an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. The SWOT analysis headings provide a good framework for reviewing strategy, position and direction of a company or business proposition, or any other idea:

<http://www.businessballs.com/swotanalysisfreetemplate.htm>

¹⁰¹ Interview by author with Subject 35, female lecturer SANG University (Riyadh: 20.07.10).

¹⁰² Interview by author with Subject 42, female lecturer KSU (Riyadh: 29.06.10). In theory Key Performance Indicators (KPI) provide a series of measures against which internal managers and external investors can judge the business and how it is likely to perform over the medium and long term. Regrettably it has become confused with metrics; if we can measure it, it is a KPI. Against the growing background of noise created by a welter of such KPI concepts, the true value of the core KPI becomes lost. The KPI, when properly developed, should provide all staff with clear goals and objectives, coupled with an understanding of how they relate to the overall success of the organisation. Published internally and continually referred to, they will also strengthen shared values and create common goals: <http://www.ibisassoc.co.uk/key-performance-indicators.htm>

¹⁰³ Interview by author with Subject 35, female lecturer SANG University (Riyadh: 20.07.10).

¹⁰⁴ Interview by author with Subject 68, female writer and KACND participant (Jeddah: 05.07.10).

strategic planning meeting. There would seem to be no reason to stop KACND adopting a similar seminar process.

It has been suggested that KACND needs more focus and, quite possibly, now stages too many different types of dialogue forums and events. Hence, the institution should not progress to the next stage in its development until it has established a 'first house'. It needs to evaluate its own performance and focus on three or four specific areas for improvement as this would prove to be more beneficial than continually expanding its activities into different areas and events. Following the fifth National Meeting in Abha, the director of KACND women's center remarked that it would be a good idea to slow the dialogue process so that an evaluation could be done to establish what KACND had achieved. It was suggested that this would demonstrate both the positive and negative aspects of the National Dialogue process whilst simultaneously providing more focus. Undoubtedly, such an intervention in this case could prove beneficial as it would allow evaluation and subsequent changes and / or modifications to be made in the dialogue process. However, as one participant points out, halting the dialogue process completely might have broken the cycle, thus making society forget about KACND.¹⁰⁵

The dialogue's recommendations

This lack of evaluation applies to the dialogue process and not to the separate issue of the official recommendations because, although the recommendations are forwarded to the relevant ministry once the National Meeting ends, the responsibilities of KACND are complete. Nevertheless, following the Najran forum many of the participants argued that it was the responsibility of KACND to pressure the Ministry of Health to enact the recommendations. However, one of the forum's organisers strongly disagreed and wrote to the participants explaining that this was neither the responsibility of KACND nor within its remit.¹⁰⁶ The participants replied asking for a clarification of KACND's role so the organiser reiterated that the institution's task is to facilitate debate on serious issues and that is its one and only role. In other words, the National Dialogue meetings should be a step towards examining important societal issues, that is, to shed light on the problem; the role of the dialogue is not to solve the problem. Certainly, a ministry can and should utilise the findings included in the recommendations, however, this is not the responsibility of KACND even though the institution provides all this

¹⁰⁵ Interview by author with Subject 35, female lecturer SANG University (Riyadh: 20.07.10).

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

information free of charge to the ministry. Therefore, in reality, the Ministry of Health has no excuse not to heed and act on the recommendations, but as discussed earlier, the institution must be careful not to trespass on ministerial territory.¹⁰⁷

It can be argued that KACND has accomplished the legitimisation of dialogue, but the same cannot be said concerning the legitimisation or legalisation of the recommendations. In fact, a great many individuals would like to know what happens to the recommendations after they are forwarded to the relevant ministry because, according to one participant, even if one per cent is implemented then that at least constitutes a step forward.¹⁰⁸ From another perspective, KACND provides the government with an agenda, but this still does not fully explain the non-implementation of the recommendations.¹⁰⁹ The greatest contribution the institution can make to the Kingdom is to turn the recommendations submitted by various national forums into practical plans of action. As these recommendations are the results of long deliberations by experts and embody valuable human experience they must be made part of the Kingdom's reform plan. KACND should be allowed to work with other socio-political bodies such as the *majlis al-shura* with the aim of utilising the recommendations to enrich the nation's reform programme (KACND 2009, pp. 1—2). For this reason, the entire process needs to reach higher channels because even though Al Mu`ammar delivers the recommendations to the relevant ministries, it does not hide the fact that ministers should attend the National Dialogue meetings and then 'follow-up' the meeting and recommendations. Media attention and live broadcasts of the proceedings have created increased awareness amongst citizens of the importance of dialogue and as a result, society has become more familiar with the process of dialogue, but as the recommendations are not seen to be implemented then this continues to impact negatively on KACND. Although one participant argues that dialogue is a skill and hence the dialogue itself is more important than the recommendations¹¹⁰ this cannot disguise the fact that the perceived irrelevance of the recommendations is negating the significance of the dialogue process. It is plainly not enough that the institution claims that many of the recommendations have been implemented 'indirectly'. Rather concrete results directly linked to the National Dialogue are needed in order to validate KACND's role as an effective conduit for state-society dialogue.

¹⁰⁷ Interview by author with Subject 40, KACND public relations manager (Riyadh: 11.01.11).

¹⁰⁸ Interview by author with Subject 68, female writer and KACND participant (Jeddah: 05.07.10).

¹⁰⁹ Interview by author with Subject 82, Ismaili activist (Najran: 11.07.10).

¹¹⁰ Interview by author with Subject 22, KACND participant (Najran: 10.07.10).

CONCLUSION

Christian Koch recently argued that the GCC states pride themselves in the relative stability they have been able to provide their populations over the past decades (SUSRIS 2011, p. 1). However, in the western media this policy of maintaining stability is frequently interpreted, often negatively, as preserving an autocratic status quo. The Al Sa`ud monarchical state is portrayed as being 'reform adverse' not to mention highly resistant to the ripple effects of the on-going Arab Spring. A serious look at the current Saudi socio-political environment shows that this is clearly not the case as the government has implemented reforms that acknowledge that the political climate within the Kingdom is changing. Indeed, a KSU political analyst believes that the Arab Spring has played a part in influencing some of the recent socio-political and economic developments.¹¹¹ According to him there is a growing awareness amongst the elite that Saudi stability could be threatened if socio-political issues such as unemployment (and related under-employment) are not handled effectively in the short-term.¹¹² For this reason the Saudi government will need to show that it has the capability to adapt in a shifting political environment in order to counter such political challenges. This KSU academic credits King Abdullah, Defence Minister Prince Salman, and Makkah Governor Prince Khalid Al Faisal as the key actors behind socio-political and economic reform with able support from individuals such as Adel Fakieh, the Minister of Labour. Often overlooked is Crown Prince Nayef who is a driving force in the area of economic liberalisation. Prince Nayef he is said to believe that socio-economic reforms will help create and maintain stability thereby reducing the need for further far reaching socio-political reforms. In this respect, the crown prince appears to be emulating the stance taken by the Chinese government in the post-Tiananmen Square era whereby the opportunity to prosper in a freer economic environment took precedence over the widening of socio-political space. However, economic liberalisation on its own will not address the aspirations of Saudi Arabia's predominantly young and increasingly vociferous population.

¹¹¹ Interview by author with Subject 51, KSU political-science lecturer (Riyadh: 15.12.11).

¹¹² Interview by author with Subject 51, KSU political-science lecturer (Riyadh: 15.12.11). Furthermore, he states that in the long-term, with the Islamists apparently gaining decisive ground in many parts of the Arab world, there is the risk that Islamist factions will attempt, either directly or indirectly, to delegitimise the Al Sa`ud regime.

One significant challenge facing KACND is finding a way to make Saudi society understand its role, in particular its importance as a ‘dialogue center’, that is, with the emphasis on dialogue and informed debate. It is not the intended role of the institution to assume the responsibilities of a ministry, and it is unlikely ever to do so. Yet the perception among Saudi society is that KACND is a decision-making body.¹¹³ An argument one hears made is that society is not yet ‘mature’ enough to understand and differentiate between socio-political institutions or to understand that a dialogue centre simply concentrates on dialogue. One academic proponent of this interpretation attributes it to the fact society is used to the head of the tribe being the ruler.¹¹⁴ However, clearly it is the case that while there is a societal expectation that KACND should have ministers put its recommendations into place, there is little awareness that this alone would not solve or indeed answer all of society’s demands. Another reason given to explain why the current state-society dialogue is often misunderstood by society is that this type of dialogue does not exist in a tangible box or frame, and therefore, it cannot be accurately measured. According to one KACND contributor:¹¹⁵

KACND is not physical as we realise and it is very difficult to measure the unphysical. However, KACND can act as an X-ray, digging deep into the problem, but if KACND is not taken seriously by the ministries and other government institutions then we have to ask where it is going. We can summarise the activities of KACND by saying that it is similar to a container of water, leave it and the water will go stagnant, but if you move the water with your finger it will have a beneficial effect. Saudi society is that finger.

There have been indirect consequences as a result of exposure to the National Dialogue process in the media and on television, one being that KACND has made society feel that somebody is listening, and this can only be positive. Additionally, society has been forced to think about serious and problematic issues never considered before.¹¹⁶ In consequence, Saudis are now asking questions regarding these issues and most importantly, asking about evaluation and possible follow-up mechanisms which demonstrates that a real change has occurred.¹¹⁷ On the other hand, a female KACND participant feels that society as a whole may not be ready to realise or absorb the changes that have taken place as a result of the dialogue process.¹¹⁸ She advocates

¹¹³ Interview by author with Subject 42, female lecturer KSU (Riyadh: 29.06.10).

¹¹⁴ Interview by author with Subject 87 (Riyadh: 17.07.10). He says this explains the non-parliamentary consultative nature of the current *majlis al-shura*.

¹¹⁵ Interview by author with Subject 35, female lecturer SANG University (Riyadh: 20.07.10).

¹¹⁶ Interview by author with Subjects 47 and 56, Shia activists plus 7 other activists (Qatif: 09.04.10).

¹¹⁷ Interview by author with Subject 35, female lecturer SANG University (Riyadh: 20.07.10).

¹¹⁸ Interview by author with Subject 68, female writer and KACND participant (Jeddah: 05.07.10).

providing greater assistance to certain societal groupings, but admits that some constituencies are frightened of change and therefore reject societal reform out of hand. KACND itself understands that one way to counter this problem is to provide improved educational materials about the dialogue process and the necessity of making these more readily available to the general public, i.e., about what KACND is and what it does. Although KACND has achieved some success, there is a glass ceiling and the institution needs to absorb more social problems. It also needs to ask the middle and lower-classes about their aspirations so as to absorb these problematic issues.¹¹⁹

Without a doubt KACND has connected groups in the Kingdom; however, it is important to note that these connections are based on the idea of the shared belief in the need for dialogue rather than any official or actual KACND policy. The institution has been facilitating connections between people and this in turn has nurtured new relationships thus breaking down barriers between constituencies. The most significant ramification of this process is that it creates a new socio-political space where individuals can discuss common issues.¹²⁰ Thus, it is argued that on-going societal discussion makes the individual more aware of others and he will find that maybe he has more in common with other than he previously imagined. In consequence, the dialogue process has been identified as a determining factor in bringing people together and starting a viable informal parallel 'national dialogue' between different constituencies and this trigger, albeit unintended, represents a considerable achievement.¹²¹

The dialogue process has already proved beneficial as it emerged at a time when cross-constituency dialogue was much needed. Nevertheless, it will take time for society to absorb modernisation, according to one KSU lecturer, as religious doctrine is still used to order and control people.¹²² Supporters of dialogue interviewed for this research believe that the predominance of the dominant ideology in the Kingdom has persuaded society that everyone needs to think in the same fashion. In their collective opinion, society does not and should not have to think in a one-dimensional fashion as this is detrimental to societal development. In fact, they suggest, that this dominant ideological thinking created an undercurrent in society that should be held responsible for the

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Interview by author with Subjects 47 and 56 plus seven other Shia activists (Qatif: 09.04.10).

¹²² Interview by author with Subject 42, female lecturer KSU (Riyadh: 29.06.10).

promotion of extremism and related spread of terrorism. Therefore, when KACND first appeared ‘it was the right time as there was a gap that needed to be filled as even inside the home there was no dialogue; we did not know what our children were thinking’.¹²³ It seems clear from the evidence presented thus far, that many issues are now being discussed within society precisely because they were discussed at the National Dialogue meetings and this was relayed through the media and from there into various other venues such as *diwanis* and online forums. In other words, the dialogue process helped legitimise the discussion and with the assistance of the media this has raised awareness of these issues in society.¹²⁴ An example of such awareness was the establishment of the Family Protection Society as this made it possible for society to admit that family abuse problems exist in the Kingdom because the king sanctioned societal and media discussion regarding this topic. In addition, the first four National Meetings allowed the liberal voice to emerge as, prior to the establishment of KACND, frequently individuals did not feel sufficiently confident, or indeed brave enough, to discuss these taboo issues, but these initial four meetings dramatically improved the overall situation. The concern with issues such as women’s rights and education that one now observes was not widely present before the establishment of KACND.¹²⁵ This marked improvement in public discourse and media freedom is not something tangible that can be measured, but it is a real achievement nonetheless.

KACND itself acknowledges that it does not disseminate enough information to society and that it needs better public relations so as to inform society of the rationale behind its meetings and activities.¹²⁶ Indeed, even after receiving an invitation from the institution many individuals are either unclear or unfamiliar with their duties as a KACND participant and frequently know little about the actual dialogue process. One participant noted that when she attended her first session, other participants appeared to have come pre-prepared with what they wanted to say instead of taking part in a constructive dialogue session. She quickly realised that it was important for the meeting to take the form of a participatory seminar rather than a series of individual presentations. Consequently, the role of KACND should not simply involve supervising dialogue forums, according to one female participant and organiser, but rather facilitate active

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ This is also the view of Subject 20, liberal journalist, interviewed by author at his *diwaniya* (Riyadh: 01.07.10).

¹²⁵ Interview by author with Subject 82, Ismaili activist (Najran: 11.07.10).

¹²⁶ Interview by author with Subject 11, KACND assistant to Al Mu’ammar (Paris: 11.05.11).

discussions and the role of the participants is not to be careful of what they are saying, but to be careful and respectful of whom they are speaking to during the meeting.¹²⁷ In addition, KACND needs, in the opinion of a KSU lecturer, to extend the reach of its advertising and clarify its message, which can also be achieved by officials giving more informative interviews and lectures in the media and at selected institutions.¹²⁸ Even though the current television advertisements are a good idea, a female dialogue participant says that a great many women still do not know what KACND represents or indeed its stated mission. She believes the institution must also reach beyond the elite and target women from all constituencies and classes; in other words the centre has to reach out more so that everyday women can be included into the process. In fact, she says many people do not even know the dialogue center exists so there needs to be more publicity and advertisements in order for the centre to become better-known to the Kingdom.¹²⁹

In late 2011 an observant Riyadh academic claimed that the atmosphere ‘on the streets’ in Saudi Arabia had changed dramatically as a result of the Arab Spring.¹³⁰ Furthermore, although the vast majority of Saudi citizens remain loyal to the Al Saud and do not question the legitimacy of the regime, people are becoming increasingly concerned about a range of societal problems. There is building frustration within many Saudis, according to him, and for this reason the government needs to implement policies that address this frustration. As previously noted, unemployment, the uneven pace of reform, women’s rights and youth issues, and more recently the contentious issue of affordable housing are some the most pressing problems facing the Al Sa`ud. Arguably, the problems confronting the issues of women’s rights and youth aspirations are starting to be given greater attention both in the media and by the government. In this respect, KACND deserves some of the credit through its promotion of dialogue training skills programmes such as family dialogue and student / faculty dialogue programmes. However, up until the advent of the Arab Spring, one participant noted that there was ‘no common national passion’ amongst youth and therefore this is an area that KACND needs to nurture and develop.¹³¹ KACND also needs to become better-

¹²⁷ Interview by author with Subject 35, female lecturer SANG University (Riyadh: 20.07.10).

¹²⁸ Interview by author with Subject 42, female lecturer KSU (Riyadh: 29.06.10).

¹²⁹ Interview by author with Subject 68, female writer and KACND participant (Jeddah: 05.07.10). KACND has achieved success, according to her, and she remarks that most of the women she knows have participated in a KACND meeting.

¹³⁰ Interview by author with Subject 90, assistant to Faisal Al Mu`ammar (London: 15.12.11).

¹³¹ Interview by author with Subject 68, female writer and KACND participant (Jeddah: 05.07.10).

known in schools and should target youth so that the dialogue process becomes sustainable.¹³² Although KACND provides youth-centric forums and programmes, many young Saudis feel neglected as there is a feeling of not being able to participate fully in the national debate. Indeed, with young people comprising the bulk of the population it is crucial to address youth related issues although concerns continue to be raised that there is a lack of strategic planning that will examine and address youth related problems.

Certainly, KACND has helped in connecting constituencies across the Kingdom and has established connections with other socio-political institutions such as the Ministry of Education. However, in order for KACND to raise its profile and garner greater respect from society the institution needs to be seen to be more pro-active in highlighting and advancing the outcomes of its forums. Indirect results from the dialogue process are important, but they do not validate either the non-implementation of the recommendations or the lack of evaluation of the dialogue process. Simply falling back on the excuse that KACND is a 'dialogue center only' will not suffice and will certainly not address the growing concerns of an increasingly knowledgeable and worldly society.

¹³² Interview by author with Subject 35, female lecturer SANG University (Riyadh: 20.07.10).

CONCLUSION

AN INSTITUTIONALISED FORM OF EXPRESSION OF OPINION

This study argues that the National Dialogue process constitutes a preliminary state response to societal needs and societal demands, however incomplete. Given the nature of the Saudi state, it must be recognised that dialogue between the state and individual constituencies strengthens the status quo and ruling Al Sa`ud regime. Nevertheless, there is more freedom in Saudi Arabia than ever before and this is because there has been a convergence of forces that are transforming the whole system linked to awareness by certain individuals in power, especially the king, of these forces. Although power remains top-down in the Kingdom, this study has shown that opportunities for bottom-up influence and horizontal interventions into the Al Sa`ud chain of vertical dependency are taking place. Within the Saudi socio-political arena the number of voices and opinions being heard has increased and the dialogue process has assisted this transition by providing a venue for hitherto unheard voices. In addition, King Abdullah and members of his circle have approved the expansion of the dialogue process, indeed, KACND Secretary-General Faisal Al Mu`ammar's recent appointment as special advisor to the king confirms the monarch's support for the institution. Indeed, King Abdullah appears to be different from many of the other senior Al Sa`ud members because the king has demonstrated that he believes in the state itself and in the ethics of the state. This is a new phenomenon for the Kingdom, in particular as most of the king's peers believe in individual princely power as opposed to state power. Certainly, the king takes the dialogue seriously although at this point it is impossible to speculate as to the direction the process may, or may not, take under a future monarch.

KACND as a conduit for hegemonic power?

Hertog's argument (2005) that KACND resembles a corporatist institution is a valid one. In this 'corporatist' manifestation KACND and the National Dialogue can be interpreted as part of a process that contributes to an increased Al Sa`ud hegemony; one that has the purpose of leading an acquiescent society in a controlled national discourse. Indeed, this study recognises that the dialogue process still largely suits the regime's agenda, i.e., integrating intellectuals into a state-society debate; reaching out to new constituencies whilst simultaneously assimilating them into a top-down hegemonic

structure. But is this process any different from the traditional one? It is true that since the creation of the modern Saudi state the Al Sa`ud government has operated a system of 'including' selected societal constituencies in order to ensure stability and strengthen state power, therefore it could be said that the current dialogue process is simply a replication and / or continuation of traditional state-society bi-lateral communication. It is also true that the Al Sa`ud continue to exploit patronage networks to include particular societal groups within the princely spheres of influence. However, this perspective, whilst historically correct, ignores the fact that in recent years a deeper hegemonic penetration of society has occurred. Simply put, the dialogue process has been different because it has cast a wider societal net. Individuals and / or groupings from previously marginalised constituencies have been brought into the dialogue process, for example, the 'moderate' Shia leadership grouped around Shaikh Hassan Al Saffar, and to a greater or lesser extent these constituencies now have a stake in on-going state-society dialogue deliberations.¹ Hence, in terms of Gramscian hegemony the relationship between the Al Sa`ud and society has shifted beyond the traditional neo-patrimonial model to a more sophisticated process that has the ability to permeate further down into specific societal constituencies. This is partly due to the creation, in recent years, of an increasing intermediate stratum that continues to include the educated and professional groups that traditionally comprise sections of the Al Sa`ud's patronage networks. Nowadays, the intermediate stratum is partly represented by many of the professionals who work for socio-political institutions such as KACND. In this respect, the establishment of these socio-political institutions is creating bridges between the traditional power elites via this growing intermediate stratum, in the form of, amongst others, middle-management personnel and educational staff. Significantly, this intermediate stratum has access to lower-level or formerly marginalised societal constituencies that have not been incorporated into state-society discussions before, thus deeper societal penetration has occurred. Ultimately, in tandem with expanding media reporting, not to mention the burgeoning use of social media,² this situation has created a growing awareness of socio-political issues throughout the Kingdom. Therefore, from the perspective of the Al Sa`ud there is an increasing need to filter the idea of a 'common will' through the various levels of class stratification and in order to access disparate Saudi constituencies and channel this political awareness. However, in actual fact, this increased awareness is transmuting at an astounding pace into detailed and

¹ Whether through KACND or other 'dialogue' initiatives.

² This growing phenomenon requires serious research.

informed discussion, particularly through online forums, although as this study has pointed out, it is not certain that the power elites are aware of the scale and speed of cross-societal communication and the subsequent effect this is having on social transformation. In addition, despite the fact that there is evidently an attempt to steer internal forces into a controlled dialogue that is hegemonic in nature, the spill-over from the dialogue process cannot be regulated. This study has shown that it is here in the spill-over area that new socio-political spaces are being created, such as the Popular Dialogue, and as interviews conducted for this research found, discussions in majlises and diwanis across the Kingdom are vibrant and thought-provoking.

It has been observed that in Gramscian hegemony a 'common will' is established between a dominant hegemonic class and other subaltern classes, whereby the power of the hegemonic class is founded on the consent of the subaltern classes. One of the most productive methods of spreading the common will is through education, thus, in Saudi Arabia, it is in this area that the Gramscian hegemonic concept of the 'state as educator', in terms of cultural and ideological consent comes into force. Indeed, in Chapter five, reference is made to the Kingdom's commitment to extending education opportunity to all Saudi society. This commitment is reflected in the 2012 \$144 billion budget of which 26% is allocated to public, higher education and workforce training. In addition, \$3.2 billion is allocated to the King Abdullah Scholarship Programme and \$2.5 billion towards the planned construction of new 'university cities'.³ This educational policy reflects the state's hegemonic influence as an educator in material terms, i.e. the facilitator of economic, technological and scientific production and also in moral and cultural terms. Therefore, the utilising the dialogue process as part of the Kingdom's overall educational strategy might constitute a tool that helps to cement this common will. The continuing strong links between the Ministry of Education and KACND, characterised by personal relationships, underscore the supplementary role of the dialogue training programme and initiatives as part of this overall process.

The first National Dialogue meeting in 2003 involved 30 invited individuals. As pointed earlier in this study, nine years later KACND estimates that more than a million people have been involved with the institution in some way. Hence, in a relatively short period the concept of dialogue and demystification of taboo issues have taken root in society to

³ Not forgetting the new Princess Nora bint Abdulrahman University, the world's largest female university; it aims to enrol up to 40,000 students.

a degree that is now often taken for granted. The number of individuals touched by the dialogue process illustrates how constituencies have been incorporated into the existing state-society discourse, even if, as emphasised in this study, participation in the principal National Meetings and forums continues to be by invitation only. The study has also highlighted the Dialogue Training schemes' penetration of Saudi society and the impact that these schemes could be having on building and enriching civil society as well as acting as a conduit for the dissemination of an Al Sa`ud hegemony. Therefore, by bringing disparate groupings, many formerly on the outskirts of Saudi society, into a state-controlled dialogue process, the Al Sa`ud is nominally allowing marginalised actors a voice in the national debate on important societal issues. Certainly, this process helps to relieve some of aspects of domestic dissent and internal pressure, and appears to constitute part of an Al Sa`ud led national endeavour to bring heterogeneous groupings together, under the umbrella of KACND, in order to reinforce national identity. Indeed, it is likely that the ultimate purpose of an Al Sa`ud hegemony over society is instilling a new sense of national identity, a 'Saudiness' that nevertheless adheres to an identity manufactured by the Al Sa`ud regime. Its most potent symbol is Saudi National Day and the celebrations that have become increasingly popular with every passing year across the Kingdom. Arguably, KACND and the National Dialogue process also play a part in promoting this new 'Saudiness' and inclusivity.

SUMMARY OF MAIN EMPIRICAL CONCLUSIONS

This study has cast new light on KACND and the dialogue process in Saudi Arabia, first, by documenting in detail its institutions, processes and discussions; second, by providing the first systematic and representative survey of perceptions about it of different sectors of Saudi society; and third, by setting forth eight findings in particular, that had not thus far been identified or that in some cases contradict previous commentary. Four of these eight come under the heading of positive findings about the KACND and the dialogue process, and concern the substance and perception of its effects in:

- Legitimisation of dialogue and breaking taboos
- Connecting society
- A venue for a national voice
- Promoting an acceptance of diversity

Two further findings come under a more negative heading, again both in terms of substance and perceptions:

- Societal disappointment with, and resistance to, the functions of KACND
- A lack of vision and the need for evaluation of KACND

Two final findings, which in part intertwine with the last two, concern significant misperceptions amongst foreign observers as well as amongst both participants and wider society about KACND and the dialogue process:

- The extent and nature of KACND's interaction with other institutions
- Misinterpretation of the nature of the KACND's role and the dialogue process

Below, each of these is elaborated on briefly.

Legitimisation of dialogue and breaking taboos

Overall, this study establishes that the legitimization of dialogue is hugely important. Although the National Dialogue process may not be delivering on specific issues, to dismiss the process as insignificant is to ignore the emergence of underlying social forces that the National Dialogue process has facilitated. In 2003, at the start of the National Dialogue process, and at a difficult period in the Kingdom's history, the deliberations resembled more of a national argument. However, over the course of the last eight years the concept has developed into a dialogue and this is acknowledged to be a very positive development. The first three National Meetings, ideological in nature and generally considered the most significant of the eight so far convened, allowed a liberal voice to emerge as, prior to the establishment of KACND, there was reluctance, and indeed fear, to discuss taboo issues such as extremism openly. Undoubtedly, these initial meetings dramatically improved the overall situation. This marked improvement in public discourse and, although media freedom is not something tangible that can be measured, it is a real achievement nonetheless because nowadays there is a belief in issues such as women's rights and education that was not there before the establishment of KACND.

Even though there is disquiet concerning the selection of KACND participants, and by extension the omission of others, the dialogue process is transported outside of the parameters of official KACND forums when these individuals return to their respective constituencies. If previously taboo issues are put on the table at an official forum, then this in turn sends a powerful message to all constituencies as the impact of these discussions filters down through society. This filtering down process is not something that can be controlled by the Al Sa`ud or the religious establishment. Significant outcomes can result from the concept of the dialogue, as opposed to the continuity of the dialogue, and for this reason it is said that many senior princes are uncomfortable with the legitimisation of dialogue as they see it as a threat to the status quo.

The National Dialogue may constitute a state response to societal needs and societal demands, even if this state-society dialogue strengthens the status quo and ruling Al Sa`ud regime. In addition, disappointment and frustration pertaining to the dialogue process can be attributed to a desire for more rapid socio-political reform. As a range of Shia activists suggested in discussions with the author, on-going societal discussion makes the individual more aware of others, thereby revealing to the individual that maybe s/he has more in common with other than s/he previously imagined. This study suggests that one of the most significant ramifications of this process is that it has created new socio-political spaces where individuals can discuss common issues. To denigrate the entire dialogue process and dismiss it as insignificant is to ignore the emergence of underlying social forces that the National Dialogue has facilitated. If everyone has an opinion about the National Dialogue process, even a negative one, then this might indicate that the process has achieved relevance amongst various Saudi constituencies. Indeed, one of KACND's most important achievements is that even if the institution ceases to exist in its present form, or a future monarch closes it by official decree, a culture of dialogue has emerged in the Kingdom; one that has achieved its own mechanisms and autonomy. In addition, issues once framed solely in regional or sectarian terms, such as unemployment, are now being framed in national terms and this has been attributed to the on-going dialogue process.⁴ In other words, people are starting to discuss the Saudi community as a whole and it is argued that this is a new beginning; a new idea, 'We are one country, one people, and even if an individual does not always

⁴A view supported during a focus group discussion with Subjects 47 and 56, plus seven other Shia Activists (Qatif: 09.04.10).

believe this, the individual says this now'.⁵ Furthermore, KACND has already indirectly raised the issue of loyalty to the state because each individual involved in the dialogue process plays a role and this ultimately reflects on the individual's perception of national identity.

Connecting society

The evidence presented in this thesis shows that the National Dialogue process has been a determining factor in bringing people together and starting a viable informal parallel 'national dialogue' between different constituencies and this trigger, albeit unintentional, represents a considerable achievement.⁶ There is little doubt that KACND has connected individuals and groups across the Kingdom although it is important to note that these connections are based on the idea of dialogue rather than any official or actual KACND policy.⁷ By facilitating connections between people, this in turn has nurtured new relationships thus breaking down barriers between constituencies. This is essential because when discussion is on-going in society then people will find common ground and this in turn leads to societal transformation. The process has reinforced the concept of constructive dialogue with organizations and individuals inside the Kingdom and this is acknowledged as being an important, if not the most important achievement of this process.

This study has argued that the National Dialogue process, including the Cultural Discourse, appears to form part of a systematic pattern of specific groupings and issues being singled out and organised by the Al Sa`ud, i.e., a process of socio-political organisation that places people in different categories within a structural framework.⁸ Yet the evidence presented also shows that an indirect consequence of the dialogue process as a whole has been the formation of new cross-constituency and inter-sectarian relationships. By bringing individuals together from different constituencies for the formal meetings and discussion, KACND has also been responsible for establishing parallel informal channels of communication across the Kingdom. Indeed, while the formal agenda constitutes the rationale of the dialogue forums, as multiple interviewees for this study affirmed, it is the informal discussions over coffee after the meetings often

⁵ Interview by author with Subject 87, KSU professor (Riyadh: July 2010).

⁶ A conclusion again confirmed by Ibid.

⁷ A view also offered by Subject 24, *majlis al-shura* member (Jeddah: July 2010).

⁸ This fits Hertog's presentation of the broader structural framework of Saudi Arabia's political economy (Hertog 2006, p. 241—45).

cement longer lasting relationships.⁹ This study has shown that, despite absolute rule in the Kingdom, the triggering of indirect dialogue is a direct consequence of the National Dialogue process.¹⁰ This informal, indirect discussion is reflected in contemporary societal debate; hence, helping to solve political problems and fostering greater understanding between diverse societal groupings constitute areas where KACND is well placed to assist. In fact, the dialogue process has already helped societal groupings to reach points of understanding and build societal components regardless of religious affiliation. Nor should the actual discussions be ignored, as simply putting contentious topics such as tribalism and intellectual categorisation on the table helps demystify previously taboo areas. This conclusion supports Al Rasheed's view that the National Dialogue process should not be dismissed as 'window dressing' as the process has facilitated debate on important and hitherto taboo issues and this in a state where top-down decision-making has been the norm is an achievement in itself (2010, p. 247).

A venue for a national voice

As previously discussed, KACND has been instrumental in bringing people together, and for this reason it is necessary to highlight the physical space that the institution continues to provide for impartial and 'free' debate. This study shows that although the parameters of KACND and the National Dialogue are tightly controlled, they have nevertheless, created a new forum where varying segments of Saudi society, sometimes from outside the recognised elite circles, are able to express their views. This chimes with Nonneman's argument that despite its limited remit and impact on Saudi society in general, the fact that previously taboo subjects are being discussed and marginalised societal groupings have been invited to participate, e.g., the Shia and women, the National Dialogue Forum represents a significant development in Saudi state-society discourse (2008, p. 11). Whilst the establishment of KACND has not brought minority groups nearer the centre of power, a striking finding of this study is that the National Dialogue has triggered discussion so that nowadays discussing these issues, i.e., human rights, individual rights, discrimination, employment opportunities or lack thereof, decision-making and power sharing has become common place and this is significant. One argument is that national unity is the rationale behind the dialogue; however, in the final analysis the principal role of the dialogue process is that it is the first institution to give previously overlooked sections of Saudi society a voice.

⁹ Various interviews by author with multiple subjects (Saudi Arabia: 2009—11).

¹⁰ A view supported by, for example, Subject 87, KSU professor (Riyadh: July 2010).

Promoting an acceptance of diversity

This study establishes that there is a greater awareness of the culture of dialogue in society along with the need for greater tolerance and acceptance of Saudi diversity. People are starting to accept the opinions and views of others and a space has been created where the needs and views of ‘the man on the street’ can be heard. Therefore, it is imperative that the deliberations and recommendations from all KACND forums should be made available to society to digest, comprehend and discuss. In order to change attitudes in a tribal society address related cultural problems it is necessary to break down walls and create space and KACND can do this even though society has not been trained to accept this yet. The institution aims at removing the roots of extremist thought in the Saudi society and all the centre’s dialogue sessions, conferences, and symposium concentrate on studying and treating the causes and impact of extremism in order to suggest methods and treatments to cure and protect society from the dangers of intolerance and bigotry. By promoting an acceptance of diversity the institution has been able to achieve the following:

- Strengthening national unity through the National Dialogue
- Treating and addressing social, cultural, educational and national issues through dialogue
- Widening participation of all societal members in the dialogue
- Deepening the culture of dialogue amongst Saudis
- Crystallizing strategic visions for the National Dialogue and its mission

Indeed, when discussing the National Dialogue process in its entirety, what has occurred must be viewed in a positive light despite the shortcomings of the mechanics of the dialogue process itself.

Societal disappointment and resistance

This study establishes that large sections of society are disappointed and frustrated with the dialogue process as they see no tangible benefits; thus, a central question is whether society has faith in the dialogue process. In addition, individuals and constituencies cannot see any results and for this they blame the perceived non-implementation of the recommendations. The recommendations issue has raised a suspicion that the institution is a public relations exercise, fuelled by the fact that the government chooses the participants, which explains the reason why, in the eyes of some, a realistic state-society

dialogue has not materialised. In consequence, a great many people are pessimistic about the future role of KACND. Opinions voiced in a Qatif focus group highlighted the fact that initially the National Dialogue process raised hopes in general, and not just hopes related to government issues, but unfortunately society now feels frustrated as the service-related debate surrounding issues such as health has failed to answer societal needs. Accordingly, many Saudis have questioned the relevance of the dialogue process in terms of what has, or has not been gained, and whether the dialogue process can resolve social problems and provide concrete benefits. Hence, KACND needs to avoid the misconception that the dialogue process only benefits the elites to the detriment of the general public.

This study has revealed that many participants whilst welcoming a National Dialogue are nevertheless concerned about the viability of the dialogue process and the inclusion of all Saudi constituencies. For this reason, the widening of the pool of participants for the National Meetings and Cultural Discourse would benefit the dialogue process as a whole. In addition, better publicity for the dialogue training schemes could assist KACND in persuading society that the institution is listening, and responding to, societal concerns. However, at this stage is probably too early to assess the long-term results of the dialogue in its entirety, but if KACND expands the number and range of participants and improves its publicity then it would be possible for KACND to say that the government really does want to know what society thinks and that the dialogue process does not constitute simply an opportunity for people to speak and vent their frustrations.

A lack of vision and the need for evaluation

In order for the dialogue to be effective it needs to follow up on previous forums and training initiatives by evaluating the results and planning ahead for further deliberations. In other words, KACND must appear more organised with regard to its choice of topics, rather than appearing to rely on a 'knee-jerk' reaction to current affairs in the Kingdom. Evaluation of the current dialogue training programmes as well as listening to feedback from the trainers will enable the institution to use improve its overall training methods and techniques. This study has highlighted a number of other problematic points including:

- KACND is also considered to be too centralised, i.e., too much emphasis on top-down decisions emanating from the institution's headquarters in Riyadh. There needs to be more bottom-up input into KACND's agenda.
- Participants for KACND meetings should be selected in terms of merit with less attention paid to already established connections. More responsibility needs to be given to individual participants in terms of setting a forum's agenda, writing the recommendations / final statements, evaluating the results and planning follow-up meetings.
- It would be beneficial for KACND to establish offices staffed by regional coordinators in every Saudi province and administrative region. This would assist the Riyadh headquarters in recruiting a wider pool of participants for meetings and forums in addition to making KACND more accessible to Saudi society.
- Effective communication between KACND and society needs to be bidirectional

This study has also uncovered a perceived lack of vision at KACND that highlights issues that the institution is failing to address:

- Lack of freedom of speech within the National Dialogue process
- Questions asked as to why nothing of consequence has emerged from either the national and preliminary meetings
- Continuing discrimination against minority sects
- Persistent Sunni Shia problems and regional tensions such as Najdi versus Hijazi
- Constituencies who most need to talk to the king, such as youth, business people and women, who are often blocked from doing so

Of paramount importance is the need for constructive evaluation of the dialogue process. The process has expanded greatly in recent years with the grassroots training schemes reaching an ever wider audience. However, for these schemes to be effective an impartial evaluation needs to be put into effect in order to assess their quality and impact. This study proposes a number of solutions that could benefit KACND and help counter the argument that the institution's selection of dialogue topics is based solely on unconsidered responses to on-going socio-political events.

Institutional interaction

This study has noted that KACND's critics refer to the 'pseudo-democratic' intentions of the National Dialogue process as an Al Sa'ud smokescreen utilised to placate certain segments of society. Scepticism often surrounds the deliberations and impact of the meetings, 'a venting mechanism that amounts to no significant change' (Bundagji 2008 p. 1), in particular with regard to the lack of interaction between KACND and other socio-political institutions. However, KACND is not supposed to be overtly political or to be linked to other socio-political institutions, this in fact misses the point of the dialogue process. Might it be that the establishment of KACND, under the patronage of the then Crown Prince Abdullah, deliberately sought to keep the National Dialogue process in isolation? Isolating KACND may have constituted a politically astute move on the part of Crown Prince Abdullah and his reform-minded advisors, that is, allowing a National Dialogue on hitherto sensitive and sometimes taboo issues to occur, away from the constraints placed on other socio-political and economic institutions, may have facilitated a greater degree of openness from the participants on all sides of the societal spectrum. This political decision also placed the National Dialogue beyond the influence of more conservative elements within the Al Sa'ud and their constituencies. For example, prominent members of the Shia community have been permitted to voice their opinions openly in a legitimised forum without overt interference from more hard-line elements such as Interior Minister Prince Nayef. Indeed, King Abdullah may have aimed to outflank these hard-line elements within the official establishment by locating the National Dialogues outside the parameters of official Saudi power. If this is in fact the case, then it could negate much of the criticism levelled at the National Dialogue by its detractors.

Whilst it is partly correct to state that KACND does not officially interact with all other political bodies, thus undermining its long-term legitimacy, the suggestion that all National Dialogue participants have been solely involved with a single National Dialogue meeting (see Ammoun 2006, p. 235) is plainly mistaken. In fact, this study shows that outside of the annual National Dialogue Meetings, many KACND participants are involved in other forums such as the Cultural Discourse, committees, training schemes and recruitment for the institution and informal connections between participants continue long after the close of a specific meeting. In addition, KACND's association with various ministries proves that interaction between the institution and

other socio-political organisations is increasing. The centre is also in contact with other institutions in the Saudi society and has signed many agreements to cooperate with Saudi universities and the Ministry of Education to spread the culture of dialogue.

Misinterpretation of the nature of the KACND's role and the dialogue process

This study highlights KACND's recognition that up until around 2008, its role was misinterpreted and therefore, criticised, but the institution believes that society is beginning to understand its true function and look beyond the recommendations issue. However, a closer look at the contentious issue of the recommendations reveals that some of the past recommendations have been implemented, albeit often indirectly. The expansion of higher education is an example, as during the National Meeting in Al-Jouf, the government designated a budget for higher education as a direct result of the National Dialogue recommendations. Jafar Al Shayeb, a prominent social commentator, argues that although the government has not directly adopted any of the National Dialogue recommendations, 'the sessions have set the stage for better social understanding and paved the way for direct contact between religious leaders of different sects' (2005, p. 2). He argues that 'KACND has provided a forum for dialogue, the momentum for dialogue and space for dialogue'¹¹ and although the government has not adopted any of the recommendations directly, the meetings have facilitated better social understanding and paved the way for unprecedented contact between constituencies. Nonetheless, KACND needs to listen to the concerns and aspirations of society in order for the dialogue process to be seen as a reliable channel for state-society communication. Simply following an established routine and not updating the format and / or range of participants, i.e., going through the motions, at the National Meetings could endanger the entire process and lead to further criticism that the process is ossifying into an ivory tower or that the Cultural Discourse becomes nothing more than an elite cultural club.¹²

One National Dialogue participant contends that the problem is not the substance of the National Dialogue process and forums, but Saudi society's inability to understand the strategic intent behind KACND (Bundagji 2008, pp. 1—2). The institution does not

¹¹ Interview by author with Subject 46, Shia lawyer and political activist (Qatif: 29.03.10); this tellingly corresponds with the view of KACND's true role being that of offering a platform for dialogue on the country's future, expressed for instance in *Saudi Gazette* (2011, p. 1).

¹² A view shared by an early article about KACND: 'we hope that the Center will live up to its mission to promote free dialogue rather than become a mere academic research foundation' (Arab News 2003, p. 1).

wield real ministerial power. Certainly, the National Dialogue process as a whole can also be interpreted as a strategic measure to ease societal frustration whilst simultaneously maintaining control over the content and pace of reform, but this process should not be wholly disregarded, particularly as it has increased the number of people involved in state-society discourse. Therefore, the dialogue process represents the first institutionalised form of expression of opinion in Saudi Arabia at a time of rapid societal change.¹³

CLOSING REMARKS AND DIRECTION OF FUTURE RESEARCH

The implication of the research and conclusions presented in this study is that KACND now needs to reflect on three areas. Firstly, how to deal with conflict of opinion issues? Secondly, how to ensure that the critical element of current mutual respect among people is safeguarded? Thirdly, how to foster recognition, both within the institution and society at large, that the recommendations need not necessarily lead to direct policy change. Thus, KACND needs to highlight the ‘indirect’ effect of the recommendations and the way they have influenced state-society dialogue.

Arguably, the overall socio-political environment in the Kingdom was already transforming prior to the advent of the Arab Spring, but the regional events of 2011 gave added impetus for the necessity of speeding up socio-political reform initiatives. In this context KACND has an important role to play in assisting society to identify common denominators as well as providing instruction in effective communication techniques. This in turn could facilitate gradual enhanced socio-political and institutional opening of the political system by promoting the emergence of a wider range of voices from all Saudi constituencies. KACND may have already achieved its initial goal, namely initiating debate on previously taboo issues; therefore, the institution now needs to concentrate on achieving results that resonate with society in order to consolidate its reputation. This can be achieved through the continuation and development of the Cultural Discourse, the expansion of the dialogue training initiatives and by ensuring that the ninth National Meeting in 2012 reflects the new mood and openness in the Saudi media. Furthermore, this study has proved that KACND has strong links to the Ministry of Education, in particular the reform-minded officials who

¹³ An opinion supported by a *majlis al-shura* member who was instrumental in passing the resolution to allow women to vote in the next municipal elections.

believe that improved educational standards constitute the soul of reform. The perceived failure of the education system and the way that this has failed Saudi society has been identified as a major obstacle to reform. Therefore, advancing and deepening the dialogue process at all societal levels, in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, can assist in furthering educational reform and development. Indeed, in the long-term it may be that KACND's greatest achievement will be the schools and university programmes in 20 years' time rather than the more well-known National Meetings for Intellectual Dialogue.

The current Saudi state-society dialogue process is still relatively young, so it is difficult to assess fully its impact on society. KACND and the dialogue process could be approaching a critical moment; in 2013 the institution will celebrate its 10th anniversary, but its future role is uncertain in post-Abdullah Saudi Arabia. Continued research on the subject is therefore imperative combined with further examination of evolving class stratification and societal transformation in Saudi Arabia. It is hoped that the present study has provided a basis for such further research.

APPENDICIES

APPENDIX I

INTERVIEWEES AND MEMBERS OF FOCUS GROUPS

Subject 1	Qatif Historian
Subject 2	Journalist, former TV presenter and owner of the well-known 'Bridges' meeting place / café in Jeddah
Subject 3	Salafi academic, participant Riyadh focus group
Subject 4	Consultant for the Ministry of Education, close family friend of senior Al Sa`ud members including Princess Adila, Riyadh
Subject 5	Husband of Subject 3, former business partner of Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Al Sa`ud, owner of Saudi 'Planet Hollywood' franchise, Riyadh
Subject 6	Female academic and KACND participant, Riyadh
Subject 7	Ministry of Education official / consultant, regular KACND participant and involved in dialogue training, Jeddah / Makkah
Subject 8	Eastern Province academic
Subject 9	Influential Shia cleric and Cultural Discourse participant, Qatif
Subject 10	Najrani political activists and participants in Najran focus group
Subject 11	Personal assistant to Faisal Al Mu`ammar, Riyadh
Subject 12	Female ARAMCO official, influential and active contributor to women's issues, member of Saudi government overseas delegations, participant in BBC 'Doha Debates', Al-Khobar
Subject 13	Director of Information and Public Relations, Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources, Ismaili activist
Subject 14	Retired Eastern Province lawyer, Dammam
Subject 15	Student Prince Mohammed bin Fahd University and KACND National Meeting participant, Dammam
Subject 16	Former judge, Jeddah
Subject 17	Secondary school teacher in Najran
Subject 18	Student Prince Mohammed bin Fahd University, Al-Khobar
Subject 19	Managing Partner Law Firm, ex-judge and owner of Arab Network for Research and Publishing, Riyadh

Subject 20	Journalist and host 'liberal' <i>diwaniya</i> , participant Riyadh focus group
Subject 21	Riyad Bank Manager, husband of Subject 22, Najran
Subject 22	Ismaili 8 th National Dialogue participant Najran
Subject 23	Head of KACND 'Youth Committee', Riyadh
Subject 24	Member of <i>majlis al-shura</i> , Jeddah
Subject 25	Writer, Jeddah
Subject 26	Assistant Secretary-General King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, Riyadh
Subject 27	Business student Prince Sultan University, Riyadh
Subject 28	Shia Writer, Qatif
Subject 29	Shia political activist, Qatif and Riyadh
Subject 30	Medical student King Faisal University, Dammam
Subject 31	Manager Coca Cola KSA and member SANG <i>diwaniya</i> , Riyadh
Subject 32	KACND senior dialogue trainer
Subject 33	Academic, Riyadh
Subject 34	Al Mu`ammar, Faisal: KACND Director-General, former Deputy Minister of Education
Subject 35	Assistant Dean SANG University, regular KACND participant and contributor
Subject 36	KACND International Dialogue Department
Subject 37	Shia cleric, KACND participant, host Dammam <i>diwaniya</i>
Subject 38	Journalist <i>Al-Jazeera</i> newspaper, participant Riyadh focus group
Subject 39	Ministry of Education, personal assistant to Norah Alfaiz, Riyadh
Subject 40	KACND public relations manager, Riyadh
Subject 41	ACPRA political activist, Assistant Professor of Economics Institute of Diplomatic Studies, Riyadh
Subject 42	King Saud University medical lecturer, KACND participant and contributor
Subject 43	Shia religious and political leader, KACND participant
Subject 44	Eastern Province Ministry of Education, Student Affairs Department, educator and headmistress, KACND contributor, Al-Khobar
Subject 45	Female activist, Al-Khobar
Subject 46	Shia lawyer and political activist, KACND participant
Subject 47	King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals, social researcher, Shia

	activist , Qatif and Dhahran, participant Qatif focus group
Subject 48	Engineer, Ismaili activist, participant Riyadh focus group
Subject 49	Female academic, KACND participant and contributor, Riyadh
Subject 50	KACND Deputy Secretary-General, Riyadh
Subject 51	Assistant Professor of Political Theory, King Saud University, Riyadh
Subject 52	Business student, Prince Sultan University, Riyadh
Subject 53	Female ‘Youth Committee’ participants: KACND female focus group, Riyadh
Subject 54	Director KACND Women’s Center and Assistant to KACND Secretary-General
Subject 55	National Commercial Bank official, human rights activist, Dammam
Subject 56	Shia political activist and host Qatif <i>diwaniya</i> , participant Qatif focus group
Subject 57	Participant Riyadh focus group I
Subject 58	Chairman Department of General Studies, King Fahd University of Minerals and Petroleum, Dhahran
Subject 59	Alfaiz, Norah: Deputy Minister for Girl’s Education, Riyadh
Subject 60	Academic and KACND participant, Al-Khobar
Subject 61	Saudi Readymix supervisor, Shia journalist, Qatif
Subject 62	Rights Activists Network, public relations, Dammam
Subject 63	Shia academic and Political Development Analyst, Qatif
Subject 64	KACND Director Research and Studies
Subject 65	KACND consultant
Subject 66	Participant Riyadh focus group
Subject 67	Dissident and human rights activist, participant Jeddah focus group
Subject 68	Supervisor of foreign languages institutes, KACND participant, Jeddah
Subject 69	Academic and member <i>majlis al-shura</i>
Subject 70	Journalist, former General Director of Jeddah Radio, KACND participant, Jeddah
Subject 71	Journalist and broadcaster, Riyadh and Jeddah
Subject 72	Gause, Gregory: academic, Riyadh
Subject 73	Shia journalist in Jeddah, Safwa
Subject 74	Editor <i>Gulf States Newsletter</i> , London
Subject 75	Headmaster elementary / high school Qasim, participant Riyadh focus

	group
Subject 76	Ministry of Education, consultant Vice-Minister's Office, Riyadh
Subject 77	Shia Islamic researcher and Cultural Discourse participant
Subject 78	KACND participant, Al-Khobar
Subject 79	Occidental Studies Unit, King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, KACND 2 nd National Dialogue participant, Riyadh
Subject 80	Lecturer Imam University and participant KACND female focus group, Riyadh
Subject 81	Preuschaft, Menno: Visiting Researcher, King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, Riyadh
Subject 82	National Cement Company, Ismaili activist and KACND participant 3 rd National Meeting, Najran
Subject 83	KACND Engineer Training and Workshop Department, Riyadh
Subject 84	Shia activist, participant Riyadh focus group
Subject 85	Business lecturer Prince Sultan University, Riyadh
Subject 86	Mobily employee, Shia human rights activist, Qatif
Subject 87	Professor Arabic Department King Saud University Riyadh
Subject 88	Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu, participant Riyadh focus group
Subject 89	Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, former Counsellor Politics and Culture, Riyadh
Subject 90	Assistant to Faisal Al Mu' ammar, participant Riyadh focus group
Subject 91	KACND secretary to Secretary-General
Subject 92	High Commission for the Development of Riyadh, participant Riyadh focus group
Subject 93	King Abdullah Scholarship student, Riyadh
Subject 94	Kidner, James: Director Co-Exist Foundation, UK
Subject 95	Academic, Riyadh

NB: Not all members of the focus groups are named and listed. Instead the spokesperson and / or people are listed above.

APPENDIX II

EXAMPLE QUESTION SET

1. Is the National Dialogue important? Why / why not?
2. Can you tell me about the role and mission of KACND?
3. To what extent do you have either a positive or negative attitude towards the National Dialogue?
4. To what extent can KACND encourage diversity and act as a source of strength and progression in society?
5. How should KACND promote its agenda in the future in terms of greater visibility?
6. To what extent should KACND encourage greater interaction with other Saudi socio-political institutions such as the majlis al-shura? Do you foresee greater interaction between KACND and other socio-political institutions?
7. To what extent can the National Dialogue foster national unity and social unity? How can you describe the difference between these two issues?
8. In your opinion, should KACND revisit previous themes in future National Meetings? Why or why not?
9. To what extent should KACND extend the range and remit of the preliminary, or sub-national, meetings?
10. To what extent should KACND extend the range of dialogue participants?
11. In your opinion, what are the main differences between ideological meetings and the service meetings?
12. How has KACND helped the position of female students and working women in the Kingdom? Can KACND meet their aspirations?
13. Are there significant issues that need to be addressed by KACND?
14. What do you see as the main benefits in educational dialogue training? (For example, dialogue in the student / faculty sessions).
15. What would you, as a Saudi citizen, like to see KACND become involved with?
16. Within a) a national context b) an educational context, (how) do you see the dialogue as a tool which connects individuals and groups?
17. In the future, where do you personally see the National Dialogue heading?

18. Who would you like to see participating in the National Dialogue process?
19. KACND talks about ‘moving away from domination and accusation towards tolerance and acceptance. To what extent is the dialogue attempting to move society away from the dominant discourse / ideology?
20. Why should the National Meetings’ recommendations be implemented?
21. To what extent does a weak education system lead to weak discourse?
22. Is there anything you feel that I should examine in greater detail?
23. To what extent can KACND influence the following?
 - National Unity
 - National Identity
 - Cultural Discourse
 - Construction of National Project

APPENDIX III

The King's Speech (2003)

Speech by Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, then Crown Prince Abdullah, Deputy Premier and Commander of the National Guard, announcing the consent given by the Late King Fahd for the establishment of the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue.

Praise be to Almighty God who ordered us in the holy Qur'an to join forces with others in implementing worthy deeds. In the name of God, the most merciful and most gracious and in fear of God and peace be on the Prophet of Allah who guided us to be friendly toward every Muslim.

Dear brothers,

Recently we have witnessed a very important development which found expression in the convening of the national dialogue forum which brought together the elite of our society from different persuasions and schools of thought. They met under the umbrella of Islamic fraternity and exchanged views in the arena of national brotherhood.

Toward the end of their meeting they came up with some constructive recommendations which are expected to reinforce their adherence to their cherished faith and to further strengthen national unity. All citizens of this country owe these pioneers profuse thanks and appreciation.

These most esteemed brothers of ours realised the need for continuing the dialogue so that more people can take part in the exchange of views. They wanted to evolve the dialogue into a constructive way of life in the Kingdom. I am happy to announce that the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Fahd bin Abdulaziz, has given his consent to the establishment of the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue so that the new center will be in a position to realise the foregoing objectives. Preparations are being made to select the site of the new center, which will be located in Riyadh. To help the center begin operation as soon as possible, various facilities of the King Abdulaziz Public Library will be placed at its disposal.

I have no doubt that the establishment of the center and the continuation of the dialogue will turn out to be an historic achievement, which could go a long way toward creating a new channel for responsible self-expression. In the long run, this will be very effective in fighting extremism and fanaticism and can create a healthy and clean environment which promotes enlightened attitude and rejects terrorism and terrorist ideologies.

Dear brothers, in this beloved homeland of ours we were able to realise peace, security and prosperity, because we strictly adhered to the Islamic faith and because we equally adhered to the unity of our homeland and the equality of its children. To be assured of success any dialogue must be conducted in line with these two basic principles and be dedicated to further strengthening them. We will have no life without Islam and we will have no greatness without the unity of our motherland. We will not permit anyone, no matter who he is, to tamper with the principles of our faith and in same manner we will not let anyone undermine the unity of our homeland no matter whoever he may be.

The terms of reference of the national dialogue must be based on the practices and customs of early Muslims which are embraced by the people of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Early Muslims, May Allah be pleased with them, used to conduct the exchange of views with wisdom and with sound advice. Their activities are based on the guiding words of the Prophet, peace be upon him. The Prophet (pbuh) said “Anyone who believes in Allah and the Last Day should utter a nice word or remain silent. Early Muslims considered abusing a fellow Muslim an act of deviation and killing him outright apostasy. This is the right path that a dialogue should follow.

I am confident that the nation’s *‘ulama* and intellectuals are among those who follow this right path. They fully realise as I do that the Saudi government and people are not prepared to see the freedom to conduct dialogue to degenerate into the exchange of abuses or into waging attacks on the nation’s shining symbols or against its leading *ulama*. This homeland, which has the honour of serving the two holy Harams and to which the hearts of Muslims from all over the world are attached, is not prepared to accommodate any idea even with slightest variation with the basic tenets of Islam. In the same manner, this homeland will not accept any ideology that is based on misinterpreting Islamic teachings and which use misleading emblems to justify its evil scheme of sowing terror and declaring practicing Muslims as apostates. The Saudi people will not accept any substitute for a moderate belief which rejects fanaticism as it rejects moral degeneration and permissiveness.

Reference and Link

http://www.kacnd.org/eng/prince_word.asp

APPENDIX IV

FIRST NATIONAL MEETING

Participants

Mr. Hasan Musa Al Saffar	Dr. Abdulaziz Ali Al Ghamdi
Dr. Hamzah Husain Al F i'er	Dr. Abdulwahab Nasir Al Turari
Dr. Hamzah Zahair Hafiz	Dr. Omar Hasan Fallatah
Dr. Rabi' Hadi Madkhali	Dr. Ali Abbas Hakami
Mr. Salman Fahad Al Awdah	Dr. Awadh Muhammad Al Qarni
Dr. Sulaiman Hamad Al Awdah	Dr. Fa'iz Saleh Muhammad Jamal
Dr. Salih bin Saud Al Ali	Mr. Faleh Nafi' Al Harbi
Mr. Saleh Mani' Al Hashil	Mr. Fahad Ibrahim Abu Al Asari
Mr. Tahir Abdulmun'im Al Hajuji	Dr. Qais Muhammad Al Alshaikh
Dr. Aayidh Abdullah Al Qarni	Mubarak
Dr. Abdulhamid Ahmad Abu Sulaiman	Dr. Muhammad Ihsan Ali Abu Hulaiqah
Dr. Abdulrahman Zaid Al Zunai	Dr. Muhammad Saad Al Rashid
Dr. Abdulrahman Saleh Al Atram	Dr. Muhammad Abduh Yamani
Dr. Abdulrahim Ibrahim Al Hashim	Dr. Mahdi Rashid Al Munjfin
Dr. Abdulsalam Barjas Al Abdulkarim (deceased)	Dr. Nasir Abdulkarim Al Aql
Dr. Abdulaziz Sa' ad Al Hallaf (deceased)	

Recommendations

1. To consider the speech of the custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah Ibn Abdulaziz, an essential document for the meeting which guides the dialogue parties with its meanings, ideas, and important contents that include:
 - The awareness of the dangers and vicious attacks that surround the country, its creed, and its unity, and the alertness to how discord and enmity whether tribal, regional, or intellectual can damage the ties among the members of the same country.
 - The realization that diversity of visions and backgrounds is a fact of our life, and an innate nature among humans that should be utilised towards a strategy for

guidance, advice and dialogue, and that it should be directed towards the right purposes that serve the objectives of the Kingdom and its principles and religious values.

- Taking into consideration the contemporary reality and the technological advancement in communication and transfer of information without barriers. This calls for new ways to protect our religion, nation, and citizens.
 - Putting more care on the issue of the local and international Islamic discourse in a way that reinforces the Kingdom's adherence to its Islamic faith, its relations with the Islamic world, and its national unity in the framework of the middle ways and moderation.
 - Following, in all of the above, a course of an objective and constructive dialogue far from discord, aloofness, or distrust.
2. The advice to have piety in secret and in public, and the return to Allah with humility since all what has befallen the Muslim nation of catastrophes is caused by its distance from Allah, from the Qur'an and the prophetic traditions of His messenger in both sayings and actions. The participants recommend that they, young scholars, university professors, imams, and preachers should pay more attention to this matter using all possible audio-visual, and written media while improving the discourse of guidance in order to respond to the needs of individuals and communities.
 3. The need for practical development of the idea of this meeting and the broadening of the scope of the participants to cover all levels and deal with various topics by forming a center for national dialogue that regulates the meetings and conducts researches and studies in this field. The participants hope that His Royal Highness Prince Abdullah Ibn Abdulaziz adopts this center.
 4. Preserving the national unity of this country which is established on religious bases from which the government derives its laws and the society gets its identity, and deepening the notions of obedience to authorities in matters that do not contradict religion in order to establish the sense of community, prevent discord and conflict, and accomplishing material and psychological security.
 5. Reinforcing the status of religious scholars and their role in the preservation of national unity and the rooting of its religious concept and legal principles and emphasizing their role in countering the misconceptions, explaining the deviation in the incorrect understanding of the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition, especially in the area of national unity, communion, interaction

between Muslims and non-Muslims as well as others, the comprehensive understanding of religious texts, without taking them out of context, and illustrating the objectives of the laws extracted from these texts.

6. One of the most important bases of national unity is the treatment of daily concerns of the citizens, the balance in the distribution of development programs among the regions of the Kingdom, caring for the rural areas so as to provide the necessary services, and treating the insufficiency in the performance of government offices, especially those related to the public matter.
7. Continuing to develop the elements of the educational process in a way that catches up with the present time, and reinforces national unity, while instilling in the students piety, readiness to sacrifice, prioritizing public interest, and preserving the Islamic identity for the citizen and his awareness and preservation of it from any negative affect.
8. Paying attention for youth issues in the development plans and programs, giving more concern to them and providing comprehensive treatment for all of their troubles.
9. The media should participate in reinforcing national unity; avoid tampering with the principles upon which it is built, respect religious scholars, calling for the good and prevention of evil, and call for Islam with good preaching.
10. Continuing the reform process, with all its aspects and broadening the base of popular participation, reinforces national unity and strengthens the feelings of belonging.
11. Islam is a moderate religion in its creed and legal rulings and does not condone excessiveness and extremism, nor does it accept dissolution and degeneration. It differentiates between excessiveness and adherence to the prophetic way of life and commitment to it.
12. The rule of protective precautions which is legitimate in Islamic rulings must be used carefully and moderately. It cannot be overlooked, nor can it be overused in a way that leads to excessiveness and the forbidding of permissible matters.
13. Dialogue is a way of opinion expression and a style of life to accomplish coexistence through a comprehensive methodology that adheres to the foundations and religious principles.
14. Difference and intellectual diversity are universal and historical facts. Therefore, they cannot be overlooked or obliterated. What lessens their negative repercussions is the implementation of the teachings of the Qur'an in judging

- opinions, things, or persons while being careful, objective, and fair, coexisting with this difference and regulating it, differentiating between the basics of religion and personal opinions allowed by the rules of difference and diversity. The ruling in these matters belongs to the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition.
15. Working towards the treatment of issues, problems, injustices, practices and traditions that contradict the Islamic law to which woman is subjected to in the contemporary times while illustrating the proper Islamic treatment of woman and facilitating her existence in the country as real example of the Muslim woman, broadening the circle of women's participation in a way that serves the issues of Muslim women.
 16. Securing the freedom of expression concerning what the Muslim sees to be true according to the authentic religious regulations in a way that does not negate holding responsible those who tamper with the religious principles, the agreed upon interests, or the freedom of others.
 17. Religious ruling (*fatwa*) has an elevated and revered position in the Islamic society. Therefore, it needs to be appropriated to the contemporary times through communication with the different jurisprudence councils. It also needs to utilise the Islamic tradition of '*ijtihad*' making use of specialists in other fields, establish centers for studies and scholarly research to support the rulings, and create commissions for fatwa in the different regions of the Kingdom.
 18. It is important to be aware of the regional and international circumstances, and act according to this awareness to secure interests based on fairness in international relations. It is also essential to make use of the academic and intellectual capabilities in rooting international relations according to Islamic methodology and to present the Islamic solutions for international problems.
 19. Jihad comes at the peak of the Islamic hierarchy. The Islamic law has explained its issues, principles, and basics. There is a need to link these rulings to contemporary times. Declaring Jihad rests in the hands of the head of state. The issues and principles of Jihad must be explained lest it be misunderstood. A distinction must be made between proper Jihad and mischief on earth.
 20. The participants affirm that resisting the Zionist occupation in Palestine is a legitimate right and they, therefore, advocate the efforts of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in helping the Palestinian people remove the injustice, regain their stolen rights and counter transgression.

21. The participants in this meeting were deeply concerned and saddened by the vicious attacks on Muslim citizens and residents and others who have been granted state protection (by way of legally entering the country). They affirm that it is a war launched against Allah and His messenger because it is mischief on earth. Islam is innocent of these criminal acts.
22. The participants present their thanks and appreciation to His Royal Highness Prince Abdullah Ibn Abdulaziz for calling this meeting, and for his patronage of it. They would like the chairman of the meeting to wire a telegram of thanks and appreciation to the custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, the Crown Prince, and the Second Deputy Premier.

References and Links

KACND, 2004. *King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue: An Introductory Guide*. Riyadh: King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue.

http://www.kacnd.org/first_national_meeting.asp

http://www.kacnd.org/fir_partic_names.pdf

http://www.kacnd.org/fir_recom.pdf

APPENDIX V

SECOND NATIONAL MEETING

Participants

- | | |
|--|---|
| Dr. Ibrahim Muhammad Abu Abah | Dr. Abdulaziz Abdullah Al Humaidi |
| Dr. Abu Bakr Ahmad Bakadir | Dr. Abdulaziz Ma'tuq Al Bahrani |
| Mr. Ahmad Yahya Bahkali | Mr. Abdullah Bujad Al Utaibi |
| Dr. Amirah Dawood Kashghari | Dr. Abdullah Muhammad Al Ghatami |
| Mr. Amin Aqeel Attas | Mr. Abdulmuhsim Abdulaziz Al Akkas |
| Ms. Al Jawharah Muhammad Al Anqari | Mr. Abdulmuhsim Al Shaikh Ali Al Khunaizi |
| Dr. Hamzah Husain Al Fi'r | Dr. Abdulmuhsin Muhammad Hilal |
| Dr. Hasan Fahad Al Huwaimil | Mr. Abdulmaqsood Muhammad Khoujah |
| Shaikh Hasan Musa Al Saffar | Dr. Uthman Saleh Al Amer |
| Mr. Husain Mu'adi Al Hutailah | Dr. Omar Abdallah Kamil |
| Dr. Hamad Ibrahim Al Sulaiifih | Dr. Fatimah Omar Nasif |
| Dr. Hamad Abdulkarim Al Marzuqi | Mr. Fahad Ibrahim Abu Al Asari |
| Dr. Hamzah Qublan Al Muzaini | Dr. Fawziyah Bakr Al Bakr |
| Dr. Humoad Ali Abu Talib | Dr. Mazin Salah Mutabbaqani |
| Dr. Khalid Abdulrahman Al Ujaimi | Dr. Mazin Abdulrazaq Balilah |
| Mr. Khalil Ibrahim Al Fuzai' | Mr. Muhammad Said Taiyeb |
| Dr. Sami Muhsin Anqawi | Dr. Muhammad Abdullah Al Fuhaid |
| Dr. Saad Abdullah Al Funaisan | Dr. Muhammad Abduh Yamani |
| Dr. Said Musfir Al Qahtani | Dr. Muhammad Ali Al Maliki |
| Shaikh Salman Fahad Al Awdah | Dr. Muhammad Ali Al Harfi |
| Ms. Suhailah Zain Al Abidideen Hammad | Dr. Mansour Ibrahim Al Hazmi |
| Dr. Saleh Saud Al Ali | Mr. Mushari Al Thaidi |
| Dr. Saleh Sulaiman Al Wuhaibi | Dr. Mujib Said Al Zahrani |
| Dr. Aidh Abdullah Al Qarni | Dr. Munirah Sulaiman Al Oala |
| Dr. Abdulrahman Zaid Al Zunadi | Dr. Nurah Khalid Al Saad |
| Dr. Abdulrahman Saleh Al Shubaili | Dr. Nurah Abdallah Al Adwan |
| Dr. Abdulsalam Barjas Al Abdulkarim (deceased) | Mr. Hashim Muhammad Al Salman |

Dr. Hind Majid Ibn Khuthailah
Ms. Widad Ali Abu Al Saud.

Dr. Yusuf Muhammad Al Ghafis

14 sessions discussed the following papers:

- Dr. Abdurahman Mu'alla Al Luwaihiq
The Problem of Extremism: A Comprehensive Religious View
- Dr. Abdullah Ibrahim Al Turaiqi
The Relationship between the Ruler and the Ruled: Rights and Duties of Citizenship
- Dr. Abdurahman Mu'alla Al Luwaihiq
Manifestations of Contemporary Extremism
- Dr. Tariq Ali Al Habib
Religious Education in the Saudi Society
- Dr. Abdulaziz Humoud Al Shathri
Social Upbringing in the Saudi Environment
- Dr. Tariq Ali Al Habib
Characteristics of the Extremist Personality
- Dr. Ibrahim Abdulaziz Al Du'alij
The Role of Education in the Creation of a Balanced Personality
- Mr. Abdulaziz Muhammad Al Qasim
Religious Curricula: A Problematic Curriculum, Teacher, or Nature of a Community?
- Dr. Abdulaziz Saud Omar
Extracurricular Activities: Do They Lead to Extremism or Balance?
- Dr. Ihsan Ali Bu Hulaiqah
The Economic Factor and Its Effect on Extremism
- Dr. Mushari Abdurahman Al Nu'aim
Political Participation and Extremism
- Dr. Saleh Abdurahman Al Mani'
How to Understand and Interact with the Global Islamic Issues
- Dr. Ali Shuwail Al Qarni
The Saudi Media Discourse: An Analytical Study for the Diversity of the Social Vision
- Mr. Zain Al Abidin Al Ritabi
Is There a Clear Reform Methodology for the Treatment of the Phenomenon of Extremism?

- Dr. Ahmad Nafi' Al Muwarrai'i
Freedom of Speech and Expression in the Media and its Effect on the Thought of Excessiveness and Extremism

Recommendations

1. Calling upon legal scholarly institutions to agree on defining concepts and terms related to extremism, such as terrorism, the community of Muslims , the land of war, the land of *kafir* (rejection of faith) the land of Islam, the supported group, etc.
2. Calling for a deep and extensive study of the phenomenon of extremism in Saudi society: its causes, manifestations, effects and treatment so as to build, in light of it, a comprehensive strategy for treatment.
3. Expediting the process of political reform and expanding the people's participation through electing the members of the Shura Council and the Provinces' councils, and encouraging the establishment of professional unions, voluntary associations and civil society organizations.
4. Developing the means of communication between the ruler and ruled and the separation of the three powers; the regulatory, the judicial and the executive.
5. Affirming the control of the economic matter in a way that would preserve the public wealth, and prioritizing the spending on the basic needs of citizens according to balanced and comprehensive developmental programs as well as affirming the lowering of the public debt according to strict measures and achieving the principle of transparency and accountability in this regard.
6. Calling to the renewal of the religious discourse in a way that suits contemporary changes, along with understanding the outside world and dealing with it in an open, observant and interactive way.
7. Affirming the rejection of the individual fatwa (verdict) in public affairs, this would affect the interests and future of the Ummah such as matters of war and peace. This issue shall be directed to qualified fatwa authorities. The performance and mechanisms of these authorities need to be improved.
8. Stabilizing the concepts of dialogue in the Saudi society, and educating young generations in schools and universities to do so along with opening the doors for responsible freedom of expression which takes into consideration the public interest.

9. Developing the educational curricula in the various subjects at the hands of specialists in order to guarantee the spreading of the spirit of tolerance and the middle position and developing skills of knowledge so that a comprehensive development is achieved. There is also an emphasis on the necessity on the necessity to continue the review of these curricula periodically.
10. Supporting the students' non-class activities along with specifying their mechanism, establishing separate youth centers for males and females in the neighborhoods so as to organise focused programs, caring for the youth needs to develop the spirit of innovation along with qualifying their supervisors based on specific criteria .
11. Observing and watching for negative social phenomena and designing future plans to treat them with help from universities and other research institutions, specialised national commissions to care for the affairs of children, women and the family.
12. Supporting the role of women in all areas and calling for the establishment of specialised national commission to care for the affairs of children, women and the family.
13. Calling for opening the door for whoever wants to quit violence and mischief on earth and to repent. He shall not be isolated, not treated harshly, but be integrated into society.
14. Securing fair trial before the law for those accused of violence and terrorism. They shall have the right of choosing lawyers on their behalf and they shall meet them as they wish.
15. Laying down a comprehensive strategy which will help in bringing the youth back into the main stream and away from extremism, being given the opportunity for employment, training and qualifying, and opening more doors for program admissions into various educational institutions.
16. Affirming balance in the media treatment of the affairs of religion and country, along with setting a scientific methodology in this regard and staying away from division and dispersion along with considering the jurisprudent and intellectual diversity.
17. Giving importance to the media's international discourse, developing it to face contemporary challenges and calling for the establishment of a specialised unit at King Abdulaziz Centre for National Dialogue to care for civilization and intercultural dialogue and related studies.

18. The participants have recommended that theme for the third meeting be one of the following:

- The relationship between the ruler and the ruled
- The rights and duties of women
- People's political participation
- Education

References and Links

KACND, 2004. *King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue: An Introductory Guide*. Riyadh: King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue.

http://www.kacnd.org/second_national_meeting.asp

http://www.kacnd.org/sec_partic_names.pdf

http://www.kacnd.org/sec_recom.pdf

APPENDIX VI

THIRD NATIONAL MEETING

Participants

- | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Mr. Ibrahim Abdulrahman Al Bulaihi | Dr. Arif Mufadhi Al Barjas |
| Dr. Ibrahim Abdullah Al Dawish | Dr. Asim Hamdan Ali Hamdan |
| Dr. Ahmad Abdulaziz Al Hanbali | Dr. Abdulilah Said Al Din Sa'ati |
| Dr. Afrah Ali Al Humaithi | Dr. Abdulbari Awadh Al Thubaiti |
| Ms. Amjad Mahmoud Ridha | Dr. Abdulrahman Sulaiman Al Turari |
| Dr. Amal Salamah Al Shaman | Dr. Abdulaziz Saqr Al Ghamiti |
| Dr. Amirah Ahmad Al Ja'fari | Dr. Abdullah Salem Al Matani |
| Dr. Umaimah Ahmad Al Jalahmah | Dr. Abdullah Thaifallah Al Rahili |
| Ms. Umaimah Manwar Omar Al Badri | Mr. Abdullah Mahdi Al Sidran |
| Dr. Iman Sulaiman Maimash | Shaikh Abdullah Sulaiman Al Manee |
| Ms. Bahijah Baha' Izzi | Dr. Abdullah Muhammad Al Mutlaq |
| Ms. Juhaiyer Abdullah Al Musa'ad | Dr. Adnan Hasan Ba Harith |
| Dr. Hasan Muhammad Al Baraki | Dr. Ali Sa'ad Al-Musa |
| Dr. Husain Abdulrahman Al `Athil | Dr. Omar Salem Ba `Aqir |
| Mr. Husain Ali Husain Al Shuraimi | Dr. Awadh Atta Al Badi |
| Dr. Hanan Abdulrahim Al Ahmadi | Dr. Ghadah Abdulaziz Al Hawti |
| Dr. Khalid Sulaiman Al Dakheel | Ms. Fatimah Atiyah Al Mashhadi |
| Dr. Khadijah Abdullah Sabban | Ms. Fatimah Faisal Al Utaibi |
| Dr. Rashid Abdulaziz Al Mubarak | Dr. Fatimah Muhammad Al Qarni |
| Dr. Rashid Fahad Al Amr | Mr. Furaij Turki Al Aqla |
| Dr. Ruqayah Muhammad Al Muharib | Dr. Muhammad Hamid Al Ahmari |
| Dr. Salwa Abdulhamid Al Khatib | Dr. Muhammad Abdulrahman Al Arifi |
| Dr. Samirah Mahmoud Qattan | Dr. Muhammad Abdulrahman Al Omair |
| Dr. Siham Abdulrahman Suwaigh | Dr. Muhammad. Abdullah `Arafah |
| Dr. Sima Burhan Bakhit | Dr. Marzouq Sunaitan Ibn Tinbaq |
| Dr. Saleh Muhammad Al Mazyad | Ms. Muna Abdulmuhsim Al Shaie' |
| Dr. Salehah Dakhil Al Halees | Ms. Maha Ahmad Futaihi |
| Ms. Aishal Ibrahim Al Shanqiti | Dr. Maha Abdullah Al Munif |

Mr. Musa Abdulhadi bu Khamsin	Dr. Hind Muhammad Al Alshaikh
Ms. Nadiyah Ahmad Al Haza'	Dr. Hatfa Ridha Jamal Al Lail
Dr. Nasser Sa'ad Al Rashid	Dr. Haifa Uthman Al Fadda
Dr. Naif Hashim Al Du'ais	Dr. Wafa Abdullah Al Rashid
Dr. Nihad Muhammad Al Jaski	Dr. Wafa Abdulhadi Al Assaf
Dr. Nourah Saleh Al Shamlan	Dr. Wafo Nasser Al Mubarik
Ms. Nourah Abdulaziz Al Khuraiji	Mr. Yahya Muhammad Al Amir

18 Papers were discussed:

- Dr. Yusuf Abdulatif Al Jabr
Development of the Saudi Judicial System and its Role in Granting Women Justice and Rights
- Dr. Najla Hamad Al Mubarak
Legislation State of Affairs: Mechanisms Proposed to Grant Women their Religious and Civil Rights
- Dr. Ali Omar Badahdah
Conceptions Related to Women between Traditions and Religious Teachings
- Dr. Fawziyyah Abdullah Abu Khalid
From Traditions to the Horizon of Religious Stance
- Mr. Muhammad Abdullah Al Mushawah
Saudi Women Employment: Laws and Legislation
- Dr. Ilham Mansour Al Dakhil
Rules and Laws of Women Employment
- Dr. Walid Ahmad Futaihi
Women are the Counterparts of Men
- Dr. Wafiqah Abdulmuhsin Al Dakheel
Suitable Domains for Women Employment Fields and Regulations
- Dr. Muhammad Sahhat Al Khatib
Sufficiency of Educational Institutions and Variety of specialities in University Education for Saudi Females
- Ms. Fatimah Saud Al Harbi
Sufficiency of Educational Institutions and Variety of specialities in University Education
- Dr. Samir Sulaiman Al Umran
Women in Educational Curricula
- Ms. Fawz Abdullatif Kurdi
Women and Education

- Dr. Yusuf Abdullah Makki
Social State of Affairs for Saudi Women: Concerns Awaiting Resolutions
- Dr. Al Jazi Muhammad Al Shubaiki
Social Problems for Poor Women in Saudi Society
- Dr. Abdulrazaq Humoud Al Zahrani
Women's Social Participation: Rights and Duties towards Family and Society: Reality and Aspiration
- Dr. Omar Ibrahim Al Mudaifer
Domestic Violence
- Dr. Laila Jabir Al Ghalib
Domestic Violence

Themes

First Theme: Women's Rights and Religious Duties

This theme includes the issues related to the rights and religious duties of women, and the nature of legislation, with suggestions of mechanisms to allow women to accomplish their religious and civil rights and duties. It also includes traditional, customary, and religious concepts related to the issues of women between customs and traditions on the one hand and the teaching of Islam on the other.

Second Theme: Women and Work

This theme includes the issues related to the rules and legislations that regulate the work of women in order to analyse and evaluate them. It also discussed the suitable domains for women's work: fields and regulations.

Third Theme: Women and Education

The participants studied the reality of women's education in the Saudi society, the sufficiency of educational institutions, the diversification of specialties in college and vocational education. They also discussed the theme of women's image in educational curricula, her role in raising generations through her educational responsibility.

Fourth Theme: Women and Society

This theme discussed women's social participation, rights, and duties to the family and the society (reality and aspiration), women's social problems, development of social

services provided for them, and domestic violence and the damage it incurs upon Saudi women.

Recommendations

1. The emphasis on the importance and essentiality of woman's role in the family, and that her employment is a legitimate right governed by Islam.
2. The emphasis on the woman's right in motherhood, her right in marriage in accordance with the vision of Islam where the husband and the wife are comfort for each other where both share affection and compassion. She has the right in a home where she fulfils her natural basic functions that must be facilitated by society and protected from any obstacle.
3. The emphasis that the relation of the two sexes according to Islam is based on cooperation, complementation, and solidarity ('the believers, men and women, are protectors one of another'), not on conflict and rivalry.
4. Marital relations are based on piety, provision, obedience, and counselling. Provision does not mean dominance, nor does it negate the woman's responsibility for herself, and obedience in a way that is equitable.
5. The call to establish a national specialised commission caring for the issues of women and family. Its job is to coordinate efforts among private and governmental institutions.
6. The need for a national plan to spread awareness of women's rights and the creation of a national document that details legal rights and duties for women, and their role in the family and the society. The participants recommend that King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue carries out this plan by forming specialised committees in the fields of religious and social sciences to delineate the terms and concepts related to women issues, and establish cultural consciousness that separates between customs and religious rulings.
7. The need for revising the status of women in courts through the following:
 - a. Activating the plans related to the formation of family courts so that women can have circumstances suitable for their special status.
 - b. Expanding the formation of female departments in courts that can receive women and register their complaints.
8. The emphasis on including in educational curricula the legal rights and duties of women to help spread the correct conceptions about women's status in the

- community' and designing educational curricula for female students in a way that is suitable for the nature of women, preparing them for their mission in life.
9. Revising and evaluating specialties in university and vocational education, opening new departments suitable to the nature of women to meet the needs of the society, and the call to open female universities in the regions, while adopting new educational approaches such as distance learning and continuing education.
 10. Expanding the formation of female vocational institutes that are suitable to the nature of women to complement the development plans.
 11. Creating job opportunities for women to absorb the education and training graduates in a way that provides an honest living for the family and contribute to the accomplishment of the goals of the comprehensive development, while utilizing the technical and electronic communication to develop women employment through distance employment.
 12. Revising the laws and legislations that regulate women employment and expanding their scope in a way that is suitable for the nature of women, in accordance with the religious regulations. This includes revising the regulations of retirement, vacations, part-time employment, working hours, and working shifts.
 13. Commissioning the designated agencies to study means of public transportation that are suitable for women, and suggesting the appropriate mechanisms to grant women easy mobility when necessary.
 14. Expanding the participation of women in expressing their opinions, and participating in public issues, in accordance with the regulation of the Islamic religion and the social, economic, and cultural transformations.
 15. Promoting the establishment of institutions and voluntary societies that attend to family issues and solve their problems.
 16. The establishment of social and cultural centers for women in the cities and regions to spread awareness among women and to develop their skills, and developing the centers of social counselling to provide social, psychological, and specialised services to women and families.
 17. The need for government and humanitarian agencies to pay special attention to the issues of poverty among women, providing further support for these agencies, while creating job opportunities to provide an honest living for these women.

18. Developing the legislations which are derived from the Islamic law, to forbid violence against women in all of its forms, while taking the necessary steps to activate these laws, conducting researches and studies concerning the phenomenon of violence against women, and organizing conferences and seminars for this purpose.
19. Calling unto the media to present the issues of women and introduce their rights, duties, and role in the building of family and society in light of the teachings of Islam and its prominent principles.

References and Links

KACND, 2004. *King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue: An Introductory Guide*. Riyadh: King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue.

http://www.kacnd.org/third_national_meeting.asp

http://www.kacnd.org/thi_partic_names.pdf

http://www.kacnd.org/thi_recom.pdf

APPENDIX VII

FOURTH NATIONAL MEETING

Participants

Dr. Ibtisam bint Abdul Rahman Halawani	Abdullah bin Muhammad Fadaaq
Ahmad bin Hamad Al Buali	Dr. Abdulwahab bin Abdulrahman Noor Wali
Ahmad bin Muhammad Azzam	Wafa bint Hamad Al Zaid
Dr. Alaa bint Mahmoud Naseef	Dr. Azizah bint Abdulaziz Al Mani
Dr. Buthaynah bint Zakariya Al Marshad	Ali bin Othman Al Zaid
Dr. Thuraiya bint Salim Al Shihri	Faridah bin Muhammad Farsi
Ja'far bin Muhammad Al Shayib	Fahhad Mutad Al Hamad
Hasan bin Marzooq Al Nakhli	Qinan bin Abdullah Al Ghamdi
Dr. Hissah Bin Abdulaziz Al Qineyear	Latifah bin Abdullah Al Afaliq
Khalid bin Hasan Al Qahtani	Dr. Laila bint Ahmad Al Shatiri
Dr. Khalil bin Abdullah Al Khalil	Shaikh Muhammad bin Zaid Al Sulaiman
Dr. Dalal bin Muhammad Al Tamimi	Dr. Muhammad bin Salih Al Ali
Dunia bin Abdulwahhab Buqari	Muhammad bin Omar Al Amoodi
Ruqaiyah bint Sulaiman Al Alola	Dr. Mariam bint Eisa Al Eisa
Sarah bint Muhammad Al Khathlan	Dr. Nawal bin Abdulaziz Al Eid
Dr. Saad bin Abdullah Al Buraik	Dr. Noorah bint Abilul Aziz Al Mubarak
Sulaiman bin Awadh Al Zaidy	Dr. Noorah bint Abilullah Al Fayiz
Aliyah Bin Ali Makki Al Farid	Hazza' bin Shakir Al Abdali
Dr. Abdulaziz bin Muhammad Al Dakhil	Widad bint Abdullah Al Ammari
Dr. Abdullah bin Sulaiman Al Fahad	Yahya bin Ali bin Azzam

Sessions of the Meeting

Tuesday 7 December 2004

Session 1: Opening, the word of the chairmanship, and the workshops report

Session 2: Youth and Education Dialogue and Discussion

Session 3: Youth and Education: Conclusions and Recommendations

Wednesday 8 December 2004

Session 4: Youth and Work Dialogue and Discussion

Session 5: Youth and Work: Conclusions and Recommendations

Session 6: Youth and, Society and Culture Dialogue and Discussion

Session 7: Youth and, Society and. Culture: Conclusions and Recommendations

Thursday 9 December 2004

Session 8: Youth and National Identity Dialogue and Discussion

Session 9: Youth and National Identity: Conclusions and Recommendations

Session 10: The Final Communique, Conclusions and Recommendations

Themes and Recommendations

The Theme of Youth and Education

1. Setting up a strategy to evaluate education at all grades and to improve its structures considering the invariables and variables and the contemporary challenges facing society and the increasing growth of population.
2. Developing educational curricula in order to realise the right academic and intellectual building of the youth. This should come in conjunction with paying attention to the mechanisms that achieve the development of the applicational aspect, developing the abilities of critical thinking and innovation, the self-discipline for straight behaviour, the consolidation of the values of moderation, middle position, balance and respect for the other along with training the youth to be involved in dialogue and discussion.
3. The expansion in the use of modern learning media which include laboratories, computer systems that would achieve both learning and training, connects theory with application and develops the skills of information inference.
4. Speeding up the expansion of higher educational institutions in all regions of the Kingdom and setting up mechanisms to achieve admission at university levels in order to respond to the large increase in the number of high school graduates, to harmonise both needs and interests in a way that will not negatively affect the high academic standards of universities in the Kingdom as well as emphasising the scientific majors suitable for the work market.

5. Paying more attention to scientific research, developing the youth abilities in this respect and setting up a fund for developing scientific research.
6. Continuous development of teachers' abilities through specialised programmes and training seminars along with providing incentives for the distinguished and review of the criteria that control and evaluate the teacher's performance at all educational levels.
7. Developing self-abilities for students through encouraging non-curricular activity in the general and university education. There is also a need for dealing with the negative phenomena among the youth and to have them participate in building the future through student unions and councils.
8. Speeding up the execution of building government schools instead of the temporary and rented ones and to furnish them with what achieves a suitable educational environment.

The Theme of Youth and Work

1. Studying the problem of unemployment, knowing its size, the extent of its seriousness and setting up programs that treat it and establishing a supreme commission for human resources that plan for the general directions for man power starting with education, training and employment in the framework of economic visions. This commission shall also coordinate the efforts of all concerned agencies in this regard.
2. Calling for the development of mechanisms serving the project of Saudization letting the private sector to take part in its formation, working to intensify the training programs while benefiting from specialised training institutions and developing the skills to provide qualified capable youth.
3. Improving work regulations, fixing working hours to guarantee job security while at same time balancing the interests of business owners and the rights of workers.
4. Calling to spread work values such as initiation, responsibility, team work and self-discipline along with achieving justice, providing job opportunities and fighting corruption and favouritism.
5. Investing in the present financial resources to the extent that allows for having permanent resources for the future through productive projects and setting up a fund by the state and the private sector for future generations.

The Theme of Youth, Society and Culture

1. The positive communication with other cultures and benefiting from the outcomes of globalization along with strengthening self-immunity of the youth.
2. Giving youth the opportunity to share in the leadership of civil rights societies and facilitating their contribution in the issues of the public affair.
3. Encouraging continuous communication among the youth despite their varying tendencies, spreading the culture of dialogue and respecting the other opinion and calling upon youth concerned institutions to pay greater attention towards scientific, cultural, social and sports needs and providing special programs for the talented.
4. Facilitating the youth's attainment of knowledge through setting up institutions, cultural centers, literary clubs and libraries throughout all regions of the Kingdom while giving priorities to remote regions and providing for them necessary financial resources.
5. Paying attention to the disabled, orphans and those with special needs and reviewing related regulations and programs.
6. Encouraging youth to get involved in all types of voluntary work and setting up a national center which regulates voluntary activities, supervises its programs and recruits all youth groups to take part in its works.
7. The emphasis on having the voice of youth and their aspirations present in the mass media, to increase their presence in the mass media structure and the emphasis on the responsibility of mass media in building a youth culture that holds on to the fundamentals of the society.

The Theme of the Youth and National Identity

1. Authenticating 'Islamically' the issue of the national identify and the inclusion of what enhances the love of the country in the Islamic discourse while being aware of the strategic importance of the Arab and Muslim nations and the international relations.
2. Achieving a full belonging to the country and treating all types of discrimination among citizens.
3. Achieving a balanced and fair development in all regions in the distribution of development projects and providing opportunities for education, work and services.

4. Securing a decent life style for needy families while caring for their members and fulfilling their basic needs.
5. Improving educational curricula and activating them to achieve the enhancement of national belonging.
6. Redrawing nationality related mass media programs and improving their quality to make them more effective and free from monotony.
7. Celebrating national occasions the main of which is the national day to make the youth appreciate their value and significance. This shall be achieved through academic and cultural programs in the public and private educational institutions.
8. Sending cables of thanks and appreciations to the Late Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Fahd Ibn Abdul Aziz, (then) HRH Prince Abdullah Ibn Abdulaziz Crown Prince, Deputy Premier and Head of the National Guard, HRH Prince Sultan Ibn Abdulaziz (then) Second Deputy Premier, Minister of Defence and Aviation and General Inspector, HRH Prince Muhammad Ibn Fahd Ibn Abdulaziz Governor of the Eastern Province for their support of the Fourth National Meeting for Intellectual Dialogue and providing all needed facilitation to hold it.

References and Links

KACND, 2004. *King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue: An Introductory Guide*. Riyadh: King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue.

http://www.kacnd.org/fourth_national_meeting.asp

http://www.kacnd.org/fir_partic_names.pdf

http://www.kacnd.org/fourth_youths_partic_names.pdf

http://www.kacnd.org/fourth_recom.pdf

APPENDIX VIII

FIFTH NATIONAL MEETING

Participants

Asma bint Rashid Al Rushid	Thuraya bint Ibrahim Al Arrayed
Ameema bint Abdullah Al Khamis	Hassan bin Eissa Al Mala
Hasan bin Ahmad Al Qrabi	Hussain bin Ali Shabkshi
Hamad bin Abdullah bin Sulaiman Al Qadi	Heema bint Sulaimain bin Sindi
Dalal bint Aziz Dia Murad	Rabab bin Salah Jamal
Rahab Hasan Al Hasan Al Qrani	Saad bin Qadr Al Arabi Al Harithi
Zakia bint Ali Mana'a Abu Saq	Sulaiman bin Ali Al Hatlan
Samira bint Ali Al Adrisi	Samar bin Mohammed Al Saqaf
Aisha bint Qasim Shamaqi	Sahil bin Abdulaziz Al Hajj
Abdullah bin Ibrahim Al Kaeed	Shahab bin Mohammad Maki Jamjum
Anuk bint Sultan Al Shaheel	Salah bin Hussain Al Eid
Asim bin Nahd Al Shareef	Salah bin Ghanem Al Sidalan
Fatima bint Abdullah Al Ghashem	Abdulrahman bin Ahmad Al Jafri
Fatima Saeed Alahaq Mohammed	Abdulrazak bin Humood Al Zahrani
Fawzia bint Ghasan Al Ramadi	Abdulaziz bin Mitab Al Rasheed
Mohammed bin Zaid Al Amaee	Abdulwahid bin Khaled Al Hameed
Muna bint Abdullah Al Shafee	Aaud bin Mohammad Al Qarni
Muna bint Ali Saif Al Qhatani	Kamla Ali Mansour Al Maqbil
Yahya bin Salah Al Mansour	Majid bin Abdullah Al Qasbi
Ahmad bin Yahya Al Bahkli	Mohsin bin Hussain Al Awji
Abur Mahad Aishqi	Mohammad bin Abdullah Al Famdi
Badria bint Abdullah Al Bashir	Musfa bin Ali Al Qahtani
Bisamia Ahmad Mohammad Justania	Muna bint Abdullah Al Masheet
Tawfiq Ahmad Al Qasir	Muna bint Abdullah Al Damer
Naeema bint Bakr Buqri	Nuja bint Mohammed Saeed Al Sa'a
Noura bint Abdulrahman Al Yousef	Noura bint Sulaiman Abeed Al Baqawi
Noura bint Yahya Al Mahad	

Huda bint Delijan Al Delijan
 Hind bint Turki Al Sudairi
 Yousef bin Ahmad Al Asheemeen
 Bandar bin Mohammad Al Hajar
 Yama bin Mohammad Ali Iqwan
 Abdulrahman Aud Al Osman
 Faris bin Mohammad Al Asim
 Yasser bin Mohammad Al Osman
 Al Shaikh Hasan bin Mohammed Al Nemer
 Al Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Salah Al Hameed
 Al Shaikh Faleh bin Mohammad Al Sareer
 Al Shaikh Musa Alabdullah Al Abdulaziz
 Fatima Salah Hamad Al Yahya
 Fatima bint Abdullah Al Shammri
 Hussain bin Ali Al Beit
 Abdulaziz bin Abdullah Kamal
 Mureem bint Salah al Ghamdi
 Mala Al Mohandis Amr Abdullah Fadi
 Haifa bint Nasser Al Shar

Recommendations

The Fifth National Meeting issued a document entitled ‘Ourselves and the Other: A National Vision for interaction with World Culture’. The complete document can be viewed online in Arabic, English and French (See, reference below).

References and Links

http://www.kacnd.org/fifth_national_meeting.asp

http://www.kacnd.org/fifth_partic_names.pdf

APPENDIX IX

SIXTH NATIONAL MEETING

Participants

Dr. Ibrahim bin Abdulrahman Al Aqeel: businessman, supervisor of schools in Riyadh

Dr. Ahmed bin Mohammed Omar Zayla'i: KSU faculty member

Dr. Osama Fadil Al Bar, Dean of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Institute for Hajj Research, Makkah

Dr. Ismail bin Muhammad Al Bashri: University of Sharjah, UAE

Jameel Yusuf bin Farhan Al Aezzah: teacher, board member of the Literary Club, Al Jouf, and a member of the Board of Education in Al Jouf

Dr. Hamza bin Kablan Muzaini: faculty member retired, Medina

Dr. Khalid bin Hamad Al Anqari: Ph.D. in Systems Engineering and Industrial Engineering. Advisor to maintain the General Organization for Technical Education and Vocational Training, Riyadh

Khaled Faisal Al Sind: Arts student

Rashid bin Othman Al Zahrani: co-founder of Al-Majd TV

Dr. Zuhair bin Ahmed Al Siba'i: Chairman of Siba'i Institutes of Health and President of Association for the Promotion of Health.

Saad bin Othman Al Qasibi: President of the Computer Department at King Saud former Director General of the General Authority of Information Technology for the Food and Drug Administration

Dr. Saad bin Mohammed Ahmed Mariq: Al Watan newspaper columnist

Dr. Said bin Atiya Abu Ali: Vice-President Al Baha literary club

Dr. Samir Bin Alwan Al Bayat: Dean, Faculty of Engineering, KFUPM

Shamikh bin Ahmed Al Shamikh: college student teacher preparation speciality English

Dr. Saleh bin Hamoud Al Sadoun: Professor of Saudi, Teachers College Al Jouf

Saleh Bin Mohammed Al Shehhi: journalist and critic

Saleh Bin Mohammed Al Aheed: Arts student

Dr. Amer bin Abdullah Al Shahrani: KFU, Dean of the Faculty of Education at King Khalid University, Al Watan columnist

Shaikh Eid Saad Al Dossary: KSU Faculty of Education

Dr. Abdul Rahman Tayeb Al Ansari: former member Shura Council

Abdulrahman bin Sulaiman Al Habib: head of education and irrigation at the National Center for Agricultural Research

Abdulrahim bin Hassan bin Mohammed Al Harbi: retired Arabic teacher

Abdulaziz bin Ibrahim Al Hadlaq: Human Rights Advisor

Abdulaziz bin Otallah Al Atwi: lawyer

Abdullah bin Mohammed Al Nasser: writer and poet, cultural attaché in London

Abdullah bin Nasser Al Sabeeh: Professor of Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Imam Muhammad bin Saud

Abdullah bin Yahya al Moalami: Businessman Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce former Mayor of Jeddah

Abdullah bin Abdulmohsen Al Absi: High School student

Dr. Obaid Bin Saad Al Abdali: adviser in Economics and Computer Science, PSU faculty member

Dr. Ali bin Sadiq Al Hakami: Assistant Undersecretary at the Ministry of Education and former director of curriculum development

Dr. Ali bin Abdullah Al Hajji: KSU Faculty of Education

Dr. Eid bin Abdullah Al Shammari: KSA Professor of English language, Faculty of Languages and Translation, former member Shura Council

Dr. Fares bin Hamad Al Nasiri: businessman, Doctor of Business Administration

Faisal bin Dahish Al Dahish: KSU student, Faculty of Medicine

Dr. Mohammed bin Zayed Al Youssef: KAAU, Assistant Professor

Dr. Mohammed bin Shahab Al Khatib: Director of King Faisal Schools

Dr. Muhammad bin Salih Al Furzan: , head Qur'anic studies, Teachers College Riyadh

Dr. Mohammed bin Abdulaziz Al Sahlawi: KFUPM professor of economics and finance

Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Turki: KSU student, Department of Education

Dr. Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Qazem: KFU faculty, columnist Al Riyadh newspaper

Dr. Mohammed bin Faisal Abu Saq: Shura Council member

Dr. Muhammad bin Yahya Al Nujaimi: Head of Civil Studies, King Fahd Security College

Dr. Mohammad Jamil Khayyat: Professor Islamic Education, Umm Al-Qura University

Dr. Mohammed Salem bin Abdullah Al Sabban: Advisor to the Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources

Dr. Mahmoud bin Mohammed Safr: former Minister of Hajj

Mahdi Ibrahim Bukhari: TV host, interested in youth issues

Nual Othman Al Queetr	Mariam Rashed Al Rashed
Dr. Salee Al Turki	Tuhani Khamis Muneer Al Ghadeer
Thadia Bakr Aymen	Dr. Raqia Mohammed Abdulaziz Al
Dr. Fatima Saud Al Salah	Mahrab
Dr. Suheer Hasan Abdullah Al Qushi	Dr. Wafa Mahmood Abdullah Taibia
Dr. Shaeen Abdullatif Hamad Abu	Muna Abdulhameed Abu Sulaiman
Zanda	Sharifa Ibrahim Abdulmohsen Al
Dr. Fatima Salem Al Qarigi	Shamalan
Dr. Hasa Abdulrahman Mohammed Al	Abatsalem Halal Eissa Al Habeel
Sagheer	Fatima Salah Musa'ad Al Tislan
Dr. Hada Mohammed Al Ameen	Noura Hamad Abdulaziz Al Khamis
Dr. Laila Abdulkareem Al Juhaiman	Noura Abdulaziz Khalil Al Zuhair
Wafa Ibrahim Al Sabil	Alfat Mohammed Al Qabani
Dr. Nadia Yousef Abdulmuhsin Al	Aisha Abdullah Al Balqil
Delijen	Dr. Hada Mohammed Al Ghafis
Dr. Mareem Rashid Salah Al Jameeda	Bahia Mohammed Ibrahim Al Naqadi
Johar Khaled Al Rueeli	Dr. Nahd Abdullah Al Musa
Dr. Jameela Abdullah Hasan Saqr	Faiza Abdullah Mohammed Habtr
Dr. Reem Mohammed Abd Al Turki	Mareem Abdullah Al Lahamdi
Tanoor Ahmed Ali Hindi	Sameera Abdulkareem Al Qatari
Dr. Maha Abdulaziz Al Atla'	Ameena Ibrahim Al Sarahni
Dr. Johara Ibrahim Mohammad Bisheit	Aneesha Abdullah Saeed Al Ghamdi

Final Statement and Recommendations

The National Dialogue Project which received the auspices of our country's wise leadership is not any more meant for spreading the culture of dialogue. It has surpassed that to be a well-developed methodology KACND has employed in a systematic way. The purpose is to reach national visions that become essential in discussing the national issues from all aspects. It is out of KACND's belief that it is necessary to discuss the issues with the participation of concerned state officials. In order to achieve the goals of dialogue, KACND has moved to the advanced step of holding a meeting that brings officials with people from all strata of the society.

The Sixth National Meeting for Intellectual Dialogue was preceded by thirteen preparatory meetings in all regions of the country. In these meetings, the subject of education was discussed from all viewpoints on how to improve it. This issue is a national matter that has a great effect on our lives and our current and future needs. In this national meeting, a group of male and female scholars and intellectuals have met with both ministers of Education and Higher Education along with the governor of the General Organization for Technical Education and Vocational Training, some university rectors, high officials of these establishments and some high officials of related ministries. The participants value the status and care education has gained in the Kingdom since its founding at the hands of King Abdulaziz bin Abdurrahman Al Saud, may God's mercy be upon him. They mention with pride the great transitions in the march of education in both means and mechanisms. All participants also value the latest decisions made by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz, may God preserve his life, to establish a number of universities in various regions of the Kingdom along with a specialized university in the field of sciences and technology. This comes in connection with employing some of the state budget savings to be spent on education and educational buildings.

The participants affirm the main principles on which education stands as follows:

- Islam, which is a comprehensive system for our lives, is the foundation upon which the whole set of education is based, whether it is policy, curriculum or application.
- Education is considered the main pillar and joint factor for the economic, political and social development. It is one of the main pillars of the national unity and the support of the internal front and facing suitably all challenges.
- The accelerating developments in all fields require benefiting from the modern technologies and giving while preserving the unshakable principles and gains.

The Kingdom has been able to attain in a record breaking time high quantity and quality achievements in the different aspects of education which contributed to the enhancement of the total development in the Kingdom. However, there have been new changes in both the national and the international arenas which demand a wide review and a new vision to improve education.

Some of these new changes are as follows:

- The need for a healthy social adjustment to the new and great changes in the economic and population fields

- Great developments in the sector of information and communication technology and the need for its use in education
- The media and cultural openness and its influence on the educational process.

These challenges and changes require a scholarly action stemming from joint visions among the intellectuals on one hand and educators on the other. Such visions would contribute to the improvement of education and the optimization of its outputs. In discussing the reality of education and in light of the content analysis of the monitoring reports of the preparatory regional meetings in which more than a thousand representatives took part, the reality and challenges of education have been identified in the following areas:

- Policies, governing laws, objectives and plans
- Curricula, subjects and activities
- Quality, qualification and performance evaluation
- Admissions and level of accommodation
- Buildings, supplies and educational technologies
- Method of selecting educators and improving their performance
- Methods of teaching and evaluation styles
- Scientific research and higher education
- Financing and the relationship with the private sector

In this regard, the participants affirm the necessity to review the reality of education and the fostering of a joint national strategy to develop all elements of the general, higher and technical education. Such strategy will center around the economic, social and political developments as well as the national and international changes which include the review of the educational policy, the continuation to review curricula and subjects and their improvements, the raising of the level of professionalism for teachers and faculty members, providing buildings and technical supplies, activating the evaluation and quality control programs especially evaluating the performance of the educational institutions and their outputs by independent entities, raising the level of scientific research, giving some of the educational programs to the private sector to execute while benefiting from the world experiences in this regard. Based on the close views between the participants and educational officials on the issues of education and ways to improve it along with the participant's trust in the ability of our educational institutions to methodologically and professionally develop and reform education, the conveners have submitted the documents of this meeting and earlier preparatory meetings to the officials of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education and the General

Organization for Technical Education and Vocational Training. These documents include the following:

- Proceedings of all the meetings
- The participants' recommendations
- Written studies and comments
- Audio and video recordings of all dialogues, seminars and workshops.

The participants call for these ministries to study these documents and benefit from them since they contain the opinions of the elites of the Kingdom's intellectuals and those working in the educational fields and others who relate to such areas at all levels.

References and Links

http://www.kacnd.org/Sixth_meeting.asp

http://www.kacnd.org/sixth_partic_names.pdf

http://www.kacnd.org/sixth_fin_stat.pdf

APPENDIX X

SEVENTH NATIONAL MEETING

Preparatory Meetings

Areas of work and employment: a dialogue between the community and institutions work

First preparatory meeting: Dhahran

Day 1:

- Regulations and legislation relating to areas of work and employment
- Areas of women's work (in fact, and ways of development)
- Work culture and its impact on the localization of functions
- The private sector and its role in the provision of areas of work and employment
- Unemployment and its economic, social and security to the community

Day 2:

- Workers' committees and the administrative and financial rights of workers
- Regulate hours of work and its impact on the resettlement of functions (methods, mechanisms and constraints)
- Human resource development programs (Human Resources Development Fund, Centennial Fund, etc.) and their role in achieving alignment between training and labour market
- Unique experiences in the areas of employment (success factors / methods Circular).
- The results of the first preparatory meeting
- Scientific monitoring of the first preparatory meeting

Second preparatory meeting: Abha

Day 1:

- Regulations and legislation relating to areas of work and employment
- Areas of women's work (in fact, and ways of development).
- Work culture and its impact on the localization of functions.
- The private sector and its role in the provision of areas of work and employment
- Unemployment and its economic, social and security to the community

Day 2:

- Output of training, education and labour market requirements
- Job security between public and private sectors
- Expatriate workers and their impact on the localization work.
- Geographical distribution of the institutions work and its role in localization
- The results of the second preparatory meeting
- Scientific monitoring of the second preparatory meeting

Third preparatory meeting - Jeddah / Makkah:

Day 1:

- Regulations and legislation relating to areas of work and employment
- Areas of women's work (in fact, and ways of development)
- Work culture and its impact on the localization of functions
- The private sector and its role in the provision of areas of work and employment
- Unemployment and its economic, social and security to the community

Day 2:

- Work environment between the private and public sector.
- Private sector's role in rehabilitation and training
- Areas of employment in the health sector (demand and capacity)
- Programs and outputs of education and vocational training and the requirements of employers
- The results of the third preparatory meeting
- Scientific monitoring of the third preparatory meeting

Fourth preparatory meeting: Tabuk

Day 1: The work environment between the public and the private sector

This theme focuses on the following issues:

- Working hours
- Aspects of organizational, administrative and business culture.
- Material and moral incentives
- Competition and merit
- Women's work and the work environment in the private sector

Day 2: Unemployment and its impact in the community

This theme focuses on the following issues:

- The causes of widespread unemployment in the community.
- The impact of unemployment in economic terms.
- The impact of unemployment in social terms.
- The impact of unemployment in terms of security.

Day 3: Programmes and outputs of education and training and the requirements of employers. This theme focuses on the following issues:

- Competencies and skills required for the job market.
- How to bring about consistency between the outputs of education, training and labour market needs.
- The role of the private sector in training and rehabilitation
- Cooperation between the private sector and universities in the field of training and development of educational programs
- The role of the private sector in the establishment of specialised centers and colleges in the training and rehabilitation
- The results of the fourth preparatory meeting
- Scientific monitoring of the fourth preparatory meeting

Fifth Preparatory meeting: Riyadh

Day 1: The work environment between the public and the private sector

- Working hours
- Aspects of organizational, administrative and business culture
- Material and moral incentives
- Competition and merit

Day 2: The areas of women's work. This theme focuses on the following issues:

- Obstacles to women's participation in the private sector
- Regulations and legislation on women's work
- Women's work between the controls and the legitimate issues of customs and social traditions.

Day 3: Programmes, outputs of education, training, requirements of employers. This theme focuses on the following issues:

- Competencies and skills required for the job market
- How to bring about consistency between the outputs of education, training and labour market needs.
- The role of the private sector in training and rehabilitation
- Cooperation between the private sector and universities in the field of training and development of educational programs
- The role of the private sector in the establishment of specialised centers and colleges in the training and rehabilitation
- The results of the preparatory meeting, the fifth
- Scientific monitoring of the fifth preparatory meeting

QASIM NATIONAL MEETING

Participants

- Dr. Ibrahim bin Sulaiman Al Homil: Undersecretary General President of the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice
- Mr. Ibrahim bin Mohammed Effendi: businessman
- Mr. Ahmad bin Hassan Fitaihi: businessman
- Dr. Ahmad bin Mohammed Al Seef: director University of Hail
- Dr. Turki bin Abdulaziz Al Shanain: economic journalist
- Dr. Hamed bin Thafi Al Sharara: Dean of the Faculty of Engineering, University of Al-Jouf
- Shaikh Hussein Ali Radhi Al Abdullah: specialist in Islamic studies
- Dr. Zaid bin Abdulmohsen Al Hussein: Deputy Chairman, Human Rights Commission
- Dr. Saad bin Attieh Al Ghamdi: Executive Vice President, Abdulatif Jameel Group of Companies
- Professor Salman bin Mohammed Al Jishi: businessman
- Dr. Suhail bin Hassan Qazi: head Makkah Literary Club
- Professor Saleh Bin Ali Al Turki: Chairman Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Shaikh Saleh bin Awad Al Moamsi: Imam Quba mosque
- Professor Saleh Bin Eid Al Hassini: member of the Shura Council
- Professor Talat Zaki Hafez: journalist and economic advisor
- Engineer Abdulrahman Bin Ahmad Al Yami: member of the Shura Council
- Professor bin Rashid Abdulrahman Al Rashed: Chairman Chambers of Commerce and Industry Eastern Province
- Professor Abdulrahman bin Ali Jeraisy: President Riyadh Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Professor Abdullah bin Saleh Al Othaim: President Qassim Chamber of Commerce
- Dr. Abdullah bin Abdurrahman Al Othman: KSU Rector
- Professor Abdullah bin Farraj Al Sharif: newspaper columnist Al Madina
- Dr. Abdullah bin Yahya Bukhari: member Shura Council
- Dr. Abdul Mohsen Bin Nasser Al Obeikan: Shura Council member, advisor to the Ministry of Justice
- Dr. Ali bin Hamad Al Khashiban: Supreme Commission for Tourism
- Dr. Ali bin Isa Al Shabi: Dean Prince Sultan College for Tourism and Management

Dr. Issa bin Hassan Al Ansari: PMU director

Dr. Fahad bin Saleh Al Sultan: Secretary-General of the Riyadh Chamber of Commerce

Dr. Mahrous bin Ahmed Ghabban: Taibah University

Professor Mohammed bin Nasser Al Asmari: columnist Al-Watan newspaper

Professor Mukfor bin Abdullah Al Bishr: businessman

Dr. Muflih bin Rabiean Al Qahtani: Vice President of the National Assembly for Human Rights

Professor Nabil bin Abdullah Al Jama: Aramco director of development and training

Professor Najib bin Abdulrahman Al Zamil: columnist Al-Yaum newspaper

Mr. Yahya bin Hassan Al Zahrani: member of board of directors

Professor Yousef bin Abdullah Al Bayat: SABIC Vice President for Human Resources

Dr. Yousef bin Abdullah Al Shubaily: faculty member University of Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University

Dr. Asma Mohammed Ba Hormuz: professor of operations research, faculty of Economics and Management

Asma Mansour Al Ghanim: highest legal adviser, Mansour Firm

Asia Abdullah Al Sheikh: CEO, Global Management

Dr. Jawhara Ibrahim Al Sanat: Director of Continuing Education, Faculty of Dar Al-Hekma

Amal Saeed Al Ghamdi: Baha General Organization for Technical and Vocational Training

Amal Hamad Al Olayan: KSU Economics Department

Budor Abdulhamid Al Batini: Aster executive director

Joheer Abdullah Al Masad: MBA education, writer Al-Riyadh newspaper

Dr. Husa Saif Al Saif: assistant professor, Faculty of Education, University of Riyadh

Rania Suleiman Salama: CEO of International Cars

Reem Ahmed Firyaan: Director General of General Department, Business Women's Chamber of Commerce

Dr. Samira Ibrahim Islam: Professor of Pharmacology, King Fahd Medical Research

Dr. Suhour Fahmi Farhat: KAAU assistant professor, management and planning, Faculty of Education

Shaikha Mohammed Al Thaqafi: Aramco systems analyst, Human Resources

Salha Ali Ateef: Science Diploma

Dr. Aisha Abbas Natto: Chairman of the Board of Directors (optics)

Azza Taha Al Ghreesh: Architect private sector

Dr. Fatima Omar Nassif: President of the Women's Committee for Science
 Lamyia Abdulaziz Al Omair: director of databases, National Guard Hospital
 Muzna Hamad Al Bashri: Bachelor's degree
 Mona Rashid Al Ghamdi: director of the supervision of civil and foreign education
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 Hoda Rasheed Al Humaidhi: Center Jothan
 Huda Abdul Rahman Al Jeraisy: President of the Executive Board of the Women's branch, Riyadh Chamber of Commerce
 India Faleh Al Shammari: coordinated management of human resources, Baker Hughes, Bahrain
 Hila Ibrahim Al Tuwaijri: Department of Jurisprudence, Faculty of Law
 Wadud Said Al Senan: director computer centre, faculty member Institute of Management
 Dr. Wafiqah Abdul Mohsen Al Dakhil: supervisor, Office for Women's Human Rights Commission

Meeting Findings and Recommendations

Day 1: Session I: Dr. Khalid Al Sultan - The problem of unemployment

This theme focuses on the following issues:

- The actual size of unemployment (unemployment rate and methods of calculation)
- Outputs of education and training and the crisis of unemployment
- Recruitment and the crisis of unemployment
- Saudization programs (funds - policies) and the crisis of unemployment

Dr. Khalid Al Sultan proposed some questions, namely:

- What is the definition of unemployment internationally and in the Kingdom?
- What is the entity authorised to measure unemployment?

- What are the causes of unemployment? And their psychological, economic and social?
- Does the job seeker lack the skills or knowledge, or values?
- What is the liability of education, training and employment, and is there really a problem in the alignment between education and work?
- What is the relationship of unemployment to economic growth and whether the issues of job creation among the determinants of new projects?

Then began the interventions have been put forward many of the participants about their vision and argued that the problem of unemployment is unemployment optional.

- And that it must take advantage of international expertise to address this problem.
- You must change the structure of the Saudi economy from one based on a single source of knowledge to the economy (economy minds).
- We have the talent factories (universities) and (employee bodies), and must strive for harmonization between the two.
- There is a need for a major strategic project to tackle unemployment by the many parties and long-term plan be developed on a scientific basis.
- Care to develop mechanisms to achieve the recruitment process for the children of the community and his daughters.

Some participants also stressed the development of a career record of applicants for employment, information and rules through which the points of the employee and government agencies based their decisions on science. Establish more than one intervention to call for an integrated program to address unemployment at the state level in various institutions develop mechanisms for the process, and clear policies and programs of the time, and must follow the destination where there is experience, and a mechanism for monitoring and quality assurance, and Performance Monitor. Has also developed proposals for interventions to address unemployment focused on two areas:

- Care to education, training, and alignment between them and the work areas.
- High and care strategies for employment in the public and private sectors.

Session II: Dr. Adnan bin Mohammed Al Wazzan - Women's work

This theme focuses on the following issues:

- Government decisions and areas of women's work (Resolution 120)
- Controls the legitimacy of women's work
- The vision of the community to the areas of women's work
- Career opportunities available to women in the public and private sectors

Dr. Khalid Al Hamoudi Director of Qassim University: this axis will discuss many important issues, namely:

- Control the legitimacy of women's work
- The areas of women's work
- Career opportunities available to women in the public and private sectors
- Government decisions and areas of women's work
- Activating the role of the senior scientists in the development of Sharia to the areas of women's work in line with the nature of the training
- Find care for the children of women workers, especially workers in the medical field
- The establishment of women's sections in the courts and some of the ministries and institutions in order to facilitate the realization of women's achievement in an appropriate environment.
- The restructuring of our economy so as to open career opportunities for women's work, according to proper planning of the re-review in which outputs and scientific disciplines.
- Adopting a strategic plan to see economic growth approach in the Kingdom in order to be a basis for planning of outputs and scientific disciplines.
- Linking the Saudization programs by measuring the effect and quality of performance.
- Develop a mechanism between government agencies and education, to achieve alignment between the institutions which serve the homeland and the citizen.
- To support small projects for youth and young women and that includes the formation of these projects to embrace and overcome the difficulties ahead.
- What is now the job of exploitation and humiliation of women, such as marketing and forcing it to training alongside the men.
- The importance of the implementation of the Council of Ministers with respect to distance working for women's work.
- Saudi women have the ability to prove themselves
- Encourage women to enter the fields of medical and work by reducing working hours to fit with the nature and role of women and the provision of nurseries for children in the workplace and provide transportation.
- Obstructionists try to block Saudization and the feminization of women's accessories shops because they prefer cheap labour inflows. They also confuse social customs and legislation.
- Islam does not prevent women from work and the work determines when a woman can work and when she should choose to stay at home with her family.
- Laws and legal systems differ from the ethics and values of society and it is not appropriate to confuse them.
- There is a difference between the Ministries of Labour and Civil Service on the need for a license to work with women in the Department of Labour requires that the license not required by the Ministry of Civil Service.

There are three models of women's work:

- The first model: a complete separation between women and men, and this may be expensive and limited in the quality of jobs it provides.
- The second model: overlap between the work environment for women and men within the legal regulations.
- The third model: it does not decide who controls and specific environment for both sexes, and when there is a shared environment between men and women do not need to talk about the important points which are creation and training of

women for leadership positions and support women's access to civil rights, family and personal status.

Protection of women in the work environment from any negative aspects such as sexual harassment or abuse of any kind, I suggest the following mechanisms to achieve the above-mentioned points:

- The civil institutions for women aimed at defending the rights of women in the work environment or home.
- Opening the way for women to defend their rights in the role of the judiciary and the practice of law and the establishment of faculties of law

Session III: Dr. Suleiman bin Abdullah Aba Al Khail, legislation, regulations and policies. The reality of work and the demands of the community

This theme focuses on the following issues:

- Dialogue participants with Saudi officials, chambers of commerce and the private sector.

Day 2:

Session IV: Dr: Khaled bin Abdul Rahman Al Hamoudi - The reality of work and the demands of the community: a dialogue with the participants and the Ministry of Labour

Theme IV: The reality of work and the demands of society. Dialogue with the participants and the Ministry of Labour

This theme focuses on the following issues:

- Dialogue with the participants and employers
- The reality of employment and the demands of the community:
- This theme focuses on the following issues:
- Dialogue with the participants and the Ministry of Civil Service

Theme VI: regulations, legislation and policies, look at future strategy: This theme focuses on the following issues:

- Policies and strategies required to provide areas of work and employment
- Regulations and legislation needed to address the problem of unemployment and the provision of areas of work and employment
- The vision of the community to the areas of women's work
- Ways to enhance cooperation and integration between public and private sector (policies - regulations - legislation)

Session V: Dr: Khaled Al Sultan - the reality of work and the demands of society: a dialogue with the participants and the Ministry of Civil Service

Theme V: the reality of work and the demands of society. Dialogue with the participants and the Ministry of Civil Service

The session began with a speech by the Minister of Labour Dr. Ghazi Al Gosaibi said the ministry's policy and plans in the recruitment and rationalization of recruitment that end of it, but pressure from the community has sprung up, pointing to the ministry's efforts in the recruitment of citizens, men and women, stressing the importance of developing a mechanism for harmonization between the public and private sectors, and between ministry is keen on rehabilitation programs for young unemployed people to the private sector, especially those with qualifications below university level.

The participants pointed to the need for coordination between educational institutions and those employed to illustrate the opportunities for future work to adopt the training programs and also put forward a number of participants their views on the role of chambers of commerce and the necessity of attention to training and rehabilitation and resettlement of jobs, as well as confirmed taking into account the growth of the community and develop a strategic plan take care of that growth, also put laws and severe penalties against the cover-up, and made sure some of the proposals on education programs, and determine the terms of the concept of the private sector, also emphasised the development of plans and objective dialogues with transparent heads of the private sector's reluctance to employ Saudis, and took relating to the work of women, and to consider the current regulations them, and the importance of opening the door to listen to their views, and then there were the interventions between procedural matters, and practical suggestions.

The Labour Minister should clarify the view of the ministry on *amatrah*, and comment on the inquiries indicating that employment exotic big subject needs to allocate the national gathering for him, and then explained that Sharia studied by the ministry in the preparation of the formulation have been drafting regulations on women, especially in paragraph private mix, stressing that the controls work for women has been prepared very carefully for the protection and maintenance of their rights, pointing out that the

bulk of employment and underdeveloped need to address the issue and prepare a national strategy for Saudization.

The meeting began with a speech by His Excellency the Minister of Civil Service which he displayed the powers of the Ministry of Civil Service regarding the functions and distribution in accordance with the classification established in the State in terms of types also pointed to the issue of allocation of functions to the industrial cities and new projects. He explained that there are problems relating to non-alignment between the outputs of education and career opportunities available.

To open the door to dialogue and debate where the participants presented their recommendations, opinions, and that was the most important:

- There is a significant lack of approved posts in the ministry, and therefore must be a mechanism for job creation
- The need for the ministry and the development and provide new jobs for women that are compatible with the stage of development
- Some participants called for consideration of the status of the work in the public sector from the point of productivity and incentives for staff, with the registry system of early retirement
- The need to develop a mechanism for the implementation of government decisions concerning workers in the public sector in government agencies
- That the Ministry of Civil Service examination to provide a safe means of transport for employees in the government sectors
- There are questions about the Saudi employee productivity; where the need to measure productivity in government jobs
- Considered in the study of working hours and times, and approach between the two sectors: public and private sectors in this area
- Proposal to establish an association to Saudi Arabia to develop human resources to help improve the performance of the quality of services provided by training organizations with a foundation and comprehensive standards by specialists to develop training programs, and the Assembly to the role of the adoption trained as practitioners to practice the professions, the adoption centers and training institutes and classification with workshops, programs and conferences to develop performance of the practitioners training

Session VI: Dr. Adnan bin Mohammed Al Wazzan - society and the private sector: the reality of work and the demands of the community

The meeting was opened by Dr. Adnan bin Mohammed Al Wazzan, Director of Umm Al-Qura University, and participants presented their proposals and posts most important of which:

- The importance of the establishment of the Zakat Fund to contribute to the support of young people
- The need for private sector contribution to the eradication of unemployment and the training of young men and women
- The need for private sector participation in building schools, training young men and women
- The need to put new jobs for young people in the private sector
- Out of many Chambers of Commerce for her role as president and held the same as it has nothing to do with such training
- The need for women's participation in the formulation of policies on the private sector
- The importance of identifying staffing requirements and appropriate programs to accommodate more young people in the private sector
- To provide all means of training for young people and open the various training areas
- There are dispersed in the private sector salaries between Saudis and non-Saudis, and then has to be monitored in the sector

Session VII: Dr. Sulaiman bin Abdullah Aba Al Khail - labor and employment development plans: a dialogue with the participants and the Ministry of Economy and Planning.

Theme VII: labour and employment development plans: a dialogue with the participants and the Ministry of Planning and National Economy.

Chair Dr. Suleiman bin Abdullah Aba Al Khail made the most important issues addressed in this axis, then began the interventions of the participants and raised the following key points:

- The private sector vary according to size and therefore difficult to apply the regulations that all institutions equally
- Establishment of a center for statistics on employment as well as coordination with the institutions and consolidation of systems
- The current regulations in public sector institutions do not encourage creative and hard, which requires regulations to be serious motivating the employee.
- The involvement of women in the work of systems is important because many of the regulations relating to women's issues must therefore take the view until the systems are totalitarian vision
- Regulations on the labour market old and not commensurate with the current stage in the Kingdom.
- There are systems, but the problem in its application and if it is applied shall not apply to everyone.
- Finding Systems commensurate with the nature and circumstances of women, such as the adoption of a part-time work
- The need for a system that places a minimum wage

The session began with a speech by His Excellency the Minister of Planning and National Economy, praised the center's role in establishing the concept of dialogue.

Then take the State's interest to human resources development plans and stressed that the development cannot be achieved only through a cadre of trained human is to teach the basis of the preparation, and the large size of state investment in human resources have been focused on state expansion in general and university education and technical support. The minister that the development of curricula should be to the requirements of the knowledge economy and the labour market as the problems we face are lack of proportionality between the outputs of education and the labour market has led to the existence of unemployment and also focused the attention of the Eighth Development Plan, employment and women's employment and Saudization and economic development. Then participants took count of issues, including:

- There is a need to take concrete actions to eliminate the problem of unemployment
- Foreign investment has a positive role in stimulating the labour market, which requires addressing the difficulties that we face
- Plans of the Ministry of Planning is not implemented by the agencies involved, which requires a solution to this problem and follow-up to these plans
- Women in the planning is still marginal, although there are a lot of decisions relating to women
- There is difficulty in obtaining data from the Ministry of Planning as indicators in the work or the adjournment of the templates can be used as there are differences and disparities in statistics between the Ministry of Planning and international institutions
- Statistics provided by the institutions to the Ministry of Planning is inaccurate and this requires that the ministry will adopt the means to confirm them
- To miss the follow-up plans and evaluation and to find alternative plans and a new strategy to deal with the lack of plans and failure
- Why not be there to publish periodic reports on the economic situation in the Kingdom and visions of the future
- Of the most important problems that we face is the lack of coordination between the Ministry of Planning and other ministries and institutions
- Of the problems is the weakness of social awareness processions of development plans in the Kingdom.

Closing Session: Dr. Khalid bin Abdulrahman Al Hamoudi - Results of the meeting

References and Links

http://www.kacnd.org/seventh_meeting_details.asp

http://www.kacnd.org/seventh_final.pdf

http://www.kacnd.org/siventh_meeting_schedule.asp

http://www.kacnd.org/seventh_meeting_qaseem.asp

http://www.kacnd.org/seventh_meeting_report.asp

APPENDIX XI

EIGHTH NATIONAL MEETING

Participants

Members of the Presidential Commission KACND

Shaikh Saleh bin Abdulrahman Husayyin: President Presidium KACND

Dr. Abdullah bin Omar Nassif: Vice President of the Presidium KACND

Dr. Rashid Al Sharif: Vice President of the Presidium of the KACND

Dr. Abdullah Bin Saleh Al Obaid: Presidential Commission KACND

Faisal bin Abdulrahman Al Mu`ammar: Deputy Minister of Education, Secretary General KACND

Ministry of Health

Dr. Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Rabiah: Minister of Health

Dr. Mohamed bin Hamza Khoshaim: Undersecretary for planning and development

Dr. Ziyad bin Ahmed Meemsh: Assistant Undersecretary of preventive medicine

Dr. Aqeel bin Jamaan Al Ghamdi: Assistant Undersecretary for therapeutic medicine

Dr. Ali Bin Qassim Al Qahtani: Assistant Deputy Minister for the preparation and workforce development

Professor Ghazi bin Abdulrarab Al Jilani: Assistant Undersecretary for planning and research

Dr. Mansour bin Nasser Al Hawasi: Deputy Minister for Executive Affairs

Dr. Khalid Bin Mohammed Marghalani :Director General media and health education.

Dr. Mohammed Omar Bisulaiman: Director General Department of Planning

Dr. Sahar bin Mohammed Makki: Director General, Department of Health infection control facilities

Dr. Maha bint Ahmed Al Idrissi: radiation oncology advisor

Professor Munira bint Hamdan Al Osaimi: Director General, Department of Nursing

Professor Rashid bin Osman Al Rashid: Minister's Office, Ministry of Social Affairs

Ministry of Social Affairs

Professor Abdullah Ahmed Al Tawi: Director General Makkah security office

Dr. Hanan Abdulaziz Al Mahgoub: Comprehensive centre for females in Riyadh

Dr. Mohammed Abdullah Al Harbi: Director of public administration, social protection

Professor Nawal Al Alawi: female social security, Riyadh, Saudi Red Crescent Authority

Saudi Red Crescent Authority

Professor Abdulaziz bin Abdullah Abu Bakr: Director General of planning and budget

Dr. Khalid bin Salim Al Habashi: Director General of the Makkah region

Dr. Munira bint Abdullah Al Mazrah: Director General, women's sections

Ministry of Higher Education

Dr. Musa'ad bin Mohamed al Salman: KSU Assistant Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, supervisor of the university hospitals

Dr. Khalid bin Abdul Ghaffar bin Abdulrahman: Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and General Supervisor of Medical Services at the University of Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University, National Guard Health Affairs

The National Guard Health Affairs

Dr. Bandar bin Abdulmohsen Al Qnawi: Executive General Manager of the National Guard Health Affairs, Director of King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences

Professor Abdullah bin Ali Al Amari: Director General, National Guard Health Affairs

Dr. Mohammed bin Ali Al Jumu'ah: Executive Director King Abdullah International Medical Research, Directorate General of Medical Services of the Armed Forces

Directorate General of Medical Services of the Armed Forces

Major General Dr. Kitab bin Eid Al Otaibi: Director General of Medical Services of the Armed Forces

Dr. Jamil Atiya: program manager for the King Fahd Armed Forces Hospital Jeddah

Dr. Fatima Al Mutlaq: advisor, Director General of Medical Services for Medical Affairs

Directorate General of Medical Services Ministry of the Interior

Dr. Abdulrahman bin Abdullah bin Mu`ammar: Director General of Medical Services, Ministry of Interior

Dr. Suleiman bin Abdulaziz Al Suhaimi: Director General of Security Forces Hospital Programme

Dr. Ahmed bin Nasser Al Angari: Director of Administrative Development and Training Department

Participants Men

Abdullah bin Zamil Al Idrees: Chairman of the Committee on Health Affairs and the Environment in the Shura Council

Dr. Muflih bin Rabiean Al Qahtani: Chairman of the Human Rights Association

Saud bin Abdulrahman Al Shammari: member Management Committee and Human Resources Advisory Council

Dr. Mohamed bin Ahmed Al Kanhal: CEO food and drug company

Shaikh Mohammed bin Saleh Al Duhaim: former judge Ministry of Justice, founder and General Supervisor of the Centre for Cultural Renewal

Khalid Al Harbi: journalist Okaz newspaper

Dr. Abdullah Bin Saud Al Tuwairqi: writer Al Yaum newspaper, former member Shura Council

Dr. Amjad Bin Fawzi Al Hadi: editor of e-health care journal

Tarek bin Othman Al Gosaibi: Chairman Dallah Health Services

Dr. Adnan bin Ahmed Hussein Al Bahr: president Zam Zam health services and voluntary charity

Dr. Abdulaziz bin Mohammed Al Rashed: Secretary General of charitable health care

Dr. Samih bin Mohammed Al Lamai: Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, King Faisal University, Dammam, President of Saudi Society of Family and Community Medicine

Dr. Hadi Al Raki: King Faisal Specialist Hospital

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Dr. Badr Ala Mustafa: consultant family medicine preventive campaign chairman for patients with swine flu, social activist

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Dr. Mohammed bin Omar Nassif: member Shura Council

Miteb bin Saleh Al Mudif: student University of Najran

Jamil Al Dossary: managing editor Al Haiya newspaper
 Dr. Mohammed bin Nasser Al Qadi: businessman hospital owner, judge in Najran
 Dr. Jaber bin Salem Al Qahtani: professor of pharmacology
 Abdulaziz Mohammad Al Ajam: dental student
 Dr. Majed bin Abdullah Al Gosaibi: Director General Sultan bin Abdulaziz Charity
 Dr. Khalid bin Makimn Al Subai'i Al Anzi: consultant and director of children's
 specialist hospital in Riyadh
 Shaikh Mohammed bin Othman Al Zahrani: Judge Court of Riyadh
 Ziad bin Yassin Al Ghadir: businessman, member several health committees
 Mohammed Al Gosaibi Al Balawi: entrepreneur, private hospitals and clinics
 Dr. Salah bin Ahmed Al Saqa: KSU Professor of Psychology
 Dr. Hamad bin Mohammed Al Areenan: specialist Islamic history

Participants Women

Dr. Aham Abdulkarim: KFUPM, women's charitable association Qatif
 Dr. Asia Khalil Al Rawwaf: Armed Forces Hospital, Saudi Commission for Health
 Specialties
 Dr. Amal Jameel Fatlani: KSU
 Badriya Ahmed Al Othman: Eastern Region Welfare Organization
 Bahia Abdulhamid Abu Ali: Institute of Public Administration
 Dr. Tamador Youssef Al Ramah: KSU
 Dr. Husa Mohammed Al Shaikh: Al-Yamamah University for Girls, Down syndrome
 charity (DSCA)
 Huriya Abdullah Jedaie: retirees association
 Khlud Amr Saniw: human rights issues
 Rama Said Bahir: administrator Department of Education
 Raqia Suleiman Al Alawla
 Hia Abdulrahman Al Shammari
 Dalal Abdulaziz Al Fayez
 Dr. Fatima bint Abdulaziz Al Tuwaijri
 Asma bin Muhammad Al Aboodi
 Raqia Suleiman Al Hoiireny: Ministry of Education, writer Al-Jazeera newspaper
 Reem Ibrahim Al Khoja: King Abdullah University (KAU)
 Dr. Zahra Saad Al Mobei: Elaph Development Center

Dr. Samia Mohammed Al Amoudi: KAAU
 Samia Mohammed bint Amer: Society support charity for children with cancer
 Samia Ahmed Al Soma: Department of Education
 Dr. Sabah Hussein Abu Znadeh: Saudi Commission for Health Specialties
 Dr. Alia Mohammed Al Majil: KSU Faculty of Health Sciences
 Dr. Faten Abdulrahman Khorshid: KAAU
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 Dr. Nadia Abdulaziz Fantina: Saudi Aramco Hospital
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 Noura Saad Al Howita: Al-Riyadh newspaper editor
 Dr. Huda Abdulrahim Bokhari: KFU and KFUPM Faculty of Medicine
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Male Preparatory Committee

Dr. Fahd Bin Sultan Al Sultan: Vice Secretary-General KACND
 Dr. Abdulkareem bin Abdulrahman Al Zaid: Deputy General Supervisor of the King
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 Dr. Fahd Bin Ali Al Olayan: faculty member University of Imam Muhammad bin Saud
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 Dr. Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Shiha: Managing Director and General Manager of
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 Dr. Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Khazem: Al-Riyadh newspaper columnist
 Saad bin Abdullah Al Dossary: director of community relations at King Faisal
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 Dr. Abdulrahman bin Mala Al Loahaq: Member Scientific Center

Professor Hatem bin Salem Al Arnous: Director General of the Department of external dialogue and international relations KACND

Female Preparatory Committee

Dr. Hanan bint Abdulrahim Al Ahmadi: professor of health management

Dr. Buthaina bint Zakaria Murshid: Assistant Professor Faculty of Nursing, KSU Health Sciences

Ms. Wafa bint Hamad Tuwaijri Assistant Secretary-General KACND

Male Directors of KACND departments and staff

Dr. Mohammed bin Abdullah Shuweir: Director General of Department of Studies and Research and Publishing

Dr. Sultan Bin Ahmed Al Thaqafi: Director General of the Department of partnerships and cultural relations

Abdullah bin Umar Al Saqahan: General Manager, Training and Workshops

Said bin Nasser Abu Malha: General Manager, Public Relations and Media

Mohamed bin Hamoud Al Sabil: Director Office of the Secretary-General

Mohamed bin Jabir Al Jubeir: Director of Studies, Research and Publishing

Mohamed bin Fahd Al Jafan: Director of Information Technology

Salman bin Nasser Al Ajaji: Department of Management

Abdullah bin Abdulrahman Al Qahtani: Director of Public Relations

Media Committee

Salah Al Maghleiet: Undersecretary of the Ministry of Culture and Information Affairs

Dr. Solomon Al Eidi: Advisor to the Minister of Information

Awad Al Qahtani: media consultant

Mohamed Al Mahdi: Saudi cultural channel

Meeting Objectives

The Meeting aims to reach the following:

- Setting a suitable environment to conduct a dialogue between health services providers and other related sectors with various segments of society
- Identifying the reality, quality, geographical distribution, and development of health services

- Introducing plans, programs and projects to be presented by health sectors
- Agreeing upon recommendations to enhance the reality of health services presented to decision and policy makers

Topics of the Meeting

In the Final Meeting, the dialogue will tackle certain issues introduced by participants of the Preparatory Meetings conducted in Kharj, Khamis Mushait, Qurayat, Yanbu, and Qatif. These issues are as follows:

- The quality of services in the health sector
- The geographical distribution of health services (quality and quantity of health services distribution)
- Medical errors
- Patients' rights and work ethics in the health sector
- The role of the charitable health sector and institutions of civil society in elevating the quality of health services
- Health education and awareness
- Medical insurance and privatizing health services
- Coordination and integration among various health sectors
- Rehabilitation and training workers in the health sector
- What do citizens want from health sectors? (A dialogue between the society and officials in health sectors)

The Process of the Meeting

- The opening of the Meeting and a short presentation of the preparatory Meetings and their main findings
- Issues will be discussed according to their distribution on sessions
- The final session will focus on discussing the outcomes and the final statement

The Process of Dialogue in Each Session

- Introducing the theme through a brief presentation of the issues designated for each session.
- Open dialogue and discussion.
- The last 30 minutes are dedicated to officials in the health sector to reply and answer different inquiries and suggestions

Final Statement and Recommendations

In this meeting, eighty male and female participants representing different segments of society, and in the presence of healthcare providing governmental bodies, aimed to move forward the dialogue in the Saudi society. This meeting also aimed to tackle the reality of healthcare through discussing the health institutions capability to answer the patients' needs; quality of services in the health sector; geographical distribution of health services; medical errors, patients' rights; health sector work ethics; the role of

charitable health sector and institutions of civil society in elevating the quality of health services; and health education and awareness.

KACND has prepared for this meeting by holding five preparatory meetings in Al-Kharj, Khamis Mushait, Al-Qurayat, Yanbu, and Al-Qatif throughout the last year with the participation of 340 female and male participants representing all social groups and specialists in healthcare. They discussed all legal, social, and organizational aspects related to healthcare and services, developing the human resources in order to improve personnel, determining alternatives to fund health services, activating the role of civil society, and reaching an outcome submitted to officials to improve healthcare. KACND has conducted two studies. The first on health services with related statistical indicators, the other was a public poll on health services through 4000 questionnaires distributed all over the Kingdom. These studies found that the public are discontent with governmental healthcare as seventy-one per cent of them turn to private healthcare to spare the difficulty of admission to governmental hospitals. About seventy-eight per cent of the society sees that medical errors have become a common issue in the health sector. In addition, ninety per cent support the employment of Saudi women in the health sector while maintaining their rights. An approximate half of the society approve mandatory, although only seventeen per cent of the population have health insurance provided by their work sectors.

The Eighth National Meeting for Intellectual Dialogue tackled analysing health services, its quality, and geographical distribution, means to elevate and improve it, and solving all related problems. At the end of the meeting, the participants agreed upon the following:

First: The Importance of quality in the health sector as a national demand, and utilizing international quality standards in:

- Quality of health information through leaderships who are aware of these information, and providing related information in accurately, comprehensive statistics, and studies on its future in the light of the past
- Quality of the infrastructure in facilities, equipment and providing all supplies to hospitals and health centers; taking into consideration preventive and follow-up maintenance
- Training health cadres in coordination with concerned institution, determining standards to elevate personnel and work proficiency, and motivating workers
- Continuous training for health sector personnel in all levels and specialties

Second: The necessity of fair quantity and quality distribution of health services among all regions by means of:

- Establishing specialised hospitals in every region as to reduce financial and social burdens on hospitals, patients and their families
- Increasing the number of hospital beds to meet global standards
- Activating mobile hospital units to provide health services in rural areas and tackle emergencies

Third: Citizens' struggle with medical errors which demand certain regulations and systems to protect citizens' rights through the following:

- Determining terms and concepts associated to “medical errors”; educating people about them; and differentiating between possible complications, possible errors, negligence and deliberate crimes
- The necessity of firmly dealing with medical errors, working towards decreasing them, taking care of their documentation, classification, study and causes; in addition to setting appropriate rules and regulations to prevent their repetition
- Comprehensive reconsideration of the judiciary system regarding medical issues in a legislative, administrative and procedural level

Fourth: Rights and obligations of medical workers are the basis of institutions; therefore, they require a comprehensive reconsideration so as to set a foundation for these rights and obligations in medical practices. This includes patients, their families, physicians, medical workers and their families, the society, health facilities, fund providing bodies, medical educational system, and the media.

Fifth: Including the charitable medical organizations within the sector of health services providers by means of cooperative programs that work towards developing the health sector.

Sixth: Health education and awareness are important and should be highly considered by all sectors in order to enhance citizens' safety in drugs, food, sanitation, and the environment; as well as to activate the role of the family. In addition, health education and awareness work towards enhancing integration among governmental sectors, civil society, and related sectors such as media, public health, nursing, environmental health, social sciences, education, Islamic affairs, and municipal affairs in order to contribute in enhancing the culture of health. In an overall sense, citizens need health services to be accessible, fast in procedure, and with high quality, standards and comprehension.

After the participants have presented their views and opinions, representatives of governmental health sectors expressed their agreement with their opinions which aim at developing the quantity and quality of health services. Officials believe that this development could be achieved through the following:

- Supporting the Comprehensive Health Care Project launched by the Ministry of Health in conformity with the Health Strategy that focus on developing hospitals and health centers; as well as establishing a balance in distributing health services in all regions of the Kingdom
- Providing comprehensive health databases and unifying medical files for every individual in order to achieve higher productivity and quality
- Maintaining specialised health training programs in every field, supporting articles of training and scholarship programmes, increasing the level of graduates of technical specialties from governmental and private health colleges, and demanding all health sectors to increase the rate of Saudization
- Upgrading the National Health Services Council to a supreme council so as to follow up national health policies and objectives which would insure the contribution of all health sectors
- Conducting feasibility studies for privatization of certain health services, as well as granting the private sector a greater role, lands and easy loans to establish health projects especially in villages
- Finding alternative funding sources to establish operate and maintain health facilities; as well as activating the contributions of civil society institutions and trusts, in addition to encouraging the work of charitable health sectors as a way to support the Country's efforts in developing health services

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http://www.kacnd.org/pre_eight_meeting.asp

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http://www.kacnd.org/8th_ma_parti.pdf
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APPENDIX XII

NINTH NATIONAL MEETING (to be held in 2012)

References for Preparatory Meetings

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