
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

THE ELLIOTT SCHOOL
OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

MIDDLE EAST STUDIES PROGRAM

IMES CAPSTONE PAPER SERIES

SAUDI ARABIA'S CREATIVE CHANGE OF (HE)ART?

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MAY 2020

MIDDLE EAST STUDIES PROGRAM AND
INSTITUTE FOR MIDDLE EAST STUDIES
THE ELLIOTT SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

This paper is dedicated to my bright little sister Sami Thompson

رَاجِعُونَ إِلَيْهِ وَإِنَّا لِلَّهِ إِنَّا

Art offers substitutive satisfactions for the oldest and still most deeply felt cultural renunciations, and for that reason it serves as nothing else than to reconcile a man to the sacrifices he has made on behalf of civilization. On the other hand, the creations of art heighten his feeling of identification, of which every cultural unit stands in so much need, by providing an occasion for sharing highly valued emotional experiences. And when those creations picture the achievements of his particular culture and bring to his mind in an impressive manner, they also minister to his narcissistic satisfaction. -Sigmund Freud, in the Future of an Illusion (1964)

شكرا جزيلا

Thank you to my Mom and Dad for your patient love and constant support during this project. I am grateful to the Institute for Middle East Studies for the research opportunity, especially to my advisor Dr. Nathan J. Brown for guiding me in my research.

A special thank you to the following individuals for helping me bring this project into fruition:
Professor Mona Atia, Dr. Shana Marshall, Sultan Alamer, Sultan Sood Al Qassemi, Kristin Smith Diwan, Dr. Sean Foley, Ana Jowzik, Sanam Aghdaey, Claire Duguid, Joey Spadafore, Colin Silva, Patrick Phippen, David New, Anna Lamb, Makena Miller, and Yunus Peer.

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Saudi Arabia's Creative Change of (He)art?

Exploring the motivations driving the Saudi Kingdom's first Ministry of Culture

INTRODUCTION

In March 2019 in an ostentatious ceremony at the King Abdulaziz Historical Center, members of the Saudi ruling family heralded the country's first state entity dedicated entirely to the national arts and culture: the Ministry of Culture. The launch of the Ministry of Culture (MoC will be used hereafter, interchangeably) occurred within the context of expansive ongoing social, economic, and cultural reforms taking place in, and transforming, the kingdom's public sphere. For the last two years Saudi citizens have been living in a new environment marked by the rapid evolution of a more open socio-cultural climate, and one that is radically disparate from the traditional, highly constrictive societal one in past decades. For the kingdom's creative members of society, such as artists, filmmakers, writers, and intellectuals, the launch of the MoC emblemizes the monarchy's official embrace and state patronage of the arts and culture sphere. With this new development, Saudi artists today are experiencing a sense of greater flexibility and a fresh platform conducive to creating art and growing their professional careers.

Domestically, the dominance of conservative Wahhabi ideology in public life has ensured that Saudi Arabian society has had minimal exposure to artistic and cultural activities until only recently. The platform of the MoC and its related policies is reversing this status quo, through encouraging the involvement of the local population in state-funded art and creative projects and other cultural undertakings. Moreover, the MoC is consolidating its authority within the existing Saudi cultural sector, where it is responsible for myriad projects including heritage sites restorations, interactive arts exhibitions, film and theatre scholarships, sculpting competitions, classical music academies, calligraphic and traditional crafts workshops, fashion shows and international book fairs—the list goes on and on. The entity has also assumed responsibility for rendering the birth of previously non-existent art and cultural sectors—building them from scratch—including publishing, fashion, the culinary arts, and public libraries. Bringing the kingdom's artistic activities under the tutelage of the Ministry of Culture is an undertaking offering real benefits for Saudi society. However, it is pursued in a top-down manner in a diverse

social context—an approach that may have consequences beyond cultural efflorescence--and the Ministry's prerogatives represents a fundamental shift in state-society relations.

The MoC symbolizes a change of heart in how culture and the arts can be beneficial to the Saudi regime at a subnational and state-level. Previously, the Saudi government's main cultural policies were external in focus and scope with activities curated for foreign audiences abroad, specifically for the sake of international cultural diplomacy. Within the kingdom, under the ethos of Wahhabi Islam, public spaces inside the kingdom followed the mores of Islamic aniconism, a concept which Swiss philosopher Titus Burckhardt describes as the prohibition of any icons that can constitute as a form of idolatry¹. For almost a century, this ban on depicting figurative images--except for portraits of the royal family-- has extensively concerned and influenced the national Saudi population, with contemporary artists struggling to circumvent the system in a multitude of ways, and public life void of exposure to contemporary art.

The Al Saud monarchy's official embrace of the arts and culture just last year is a curious and exceptional development that necessitates further exploration. To the best of my knowledge, this research project represents the first academic effort to probe the MoC and its efforts over the course of the ministry's inaugural year. Guiding the following research design is my pursuit to answer the following question: what is motivating the regime in Riyadh to reverse its traditional hands-off approach vis-à-vis local arts and culture production, through establishing the Ministry of Culture? In other words, why has Saudi Arabia finally created a Ministry of Culture in 2019, decades after every other state in the region? This research project seeks to answer the above question by illuminating the key objective driving the monarchy to have established the MoC in the first place.

The paper begins with an overview of the unique sociocultural and economic tensions currently facing the kingdom. The next section sets up the historical cultural, artistic, societal, and heritage underpinnings of the Ministry of Culture, and the unique context within which it was established

¹ Burckhardt, Titus. The Void in Islamic Art. *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Vol. 4, No. 2. (Spring, 1970)

during March of last year. In order to situate the research question, the literature review is broken into two parts: I first summarize existing literature in academia centering around the nexus of art, culture, social narratives, and national identity within the Arab Peninsula region, particularly as it relates to Saudi Arabia. Secondly, I introduce relevant debates and discussions centering around the three main objectives of the MoC: I. culture as a way of life, II. culture as a means to diversify the economy, and III. culture as a means to facilitate international exchange.

This research project takes a humanist approach in examining the motivations driving the Saudi regime's pivot to the arts and culture. Of the three rationales identified above and supported in the literature review, I argue that more than international or economic interests, the Ministry of Culture was created for an internal purpose: that is to help define the distinctive character of Saudi Arabia as a modern nation-state. The ramifications for a society long defined by its Islamic-ness, rather than its Saudi-ness are significant, as the former predates the latter's much younger status, which is limited to the modern time frame of Saudi Arabia, established in 1932.

Key findings determined through original research provide compelling support for the main contention I make throughout this paper, in which I argue that the MoC's ultimate ambition—as analogous to that of the Al Saud monarchy—is to *energize Saudi society itself, and to restore Saudi Arabia's self-confidence*. At the crux of Saudi Arabia's national cultural policy ergo lies a particular form of instrumentalism: the use of culture to create, and continually reiterate, national identity.² The paper concludes with a brief assessment of predicted winners and losers among the diverse strata of Saudi society, in light of the public presence of the MoC. Lastly the paper touches on the price of artistic freedom that is now being conferred to Saudi artists and other local creatives under the auspices of the MoC, and its ensuing consequences. The importance of understanding the potential implications of the regime's decision to patronize national arts and culture *inside* of Saudi Arabian borders is significant, as they have the ability to affect the Arabian Peninsula and wider Middle East region, the Arab and Islamic worlds, and globally.

Thus, given Saudi Arabia's acute influence in global energy markets and international organizations, hegemonic role in the Arab and Islamic worlds, and its aggressive stance in

² Bell, David and Oakley, Kate (2014). *Cultural Policy*. Routledge: London. pp. 112.

regional crises and ideological politics, exploring the cultural motivations of the Kingdom at a state-level is crucial to a better understanding of the enigmatic Saudi regime.

CONTEXT

Brief overview of Saudi Arabia

Contemporary Saudi Arabia encompasses 80% of the Arabian Peninsula, with Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Yemen, Oman, and Kuwait comprising the other fifth. With the inclusion of the small island nation of Bahrain, and the exception of Yemen, these countries (called the Arab Gulf states) are among the wealthiest in the world. Due to the peninsula's locality—at the crossroads of Africa and Asia—the strategic land bridge has served as a major trading hub and transportation node for various civilizations spanning the last 4000 years. Thus, despite Saudi Arabia's recent establishment in 1932—the country inherits a vast territory brimming with rich cultural heritage and ancient history.

Contrary to prevailing perceptions, the country is not an absolute monarchy in a western sense. More specifically, Saudi Arabia is a neo-patrimonial state: with a political system based on patronage. As a result, power flows from the top down through various groups: tribes, clans, and important business families. Of equal importance are institutions--as varied as the religious establishment, sporting clubs, to the media--as well as a wide range of private individuals.³ The Ministry of Culture represents one of the newer entities within this local political ecosystem, and one that can directly be linked to the incumbent monarch, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. More specifically, his son, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, has served as the de-facto ruler of the Kingdom since his meteoric rise to power in 2017.

Economically, the Saudi population has been intertwined in a decades-long implicit social bargain, funded by massive state revenues accrued through petroleum and natural gas exports. At the crux of Saudi state-citizenry relations is the regime as the undisputed reigning patron—providing cushioned benefits and welfare services in exchange for near absolute socio-political acquiescence. In recent years, declining oil prices have led to financial budget deficits, with the

³ Gause, Gregory III. (2011) *Saudi Arabia in the New Middle East*. Council on Foreign Relations Special Report No. 63. New York: Council on Foreign Relations, December 2011.

government adopting austerity measures in response. Under these strained financial circumstances, Saudi Arabians today are witnessing the end of the cradle-to-grave social welfare system and economic incentives long accustomed to by the elder generations.

Domestically, Saudi Arabia is not a homogenous society, and each of its 13 regions vary widely in regard to their tribal, sectarian, and territorial identifications. The more urban conurbations of Riyadh and Jeddah are home to populations more accepting of globalizing trends, in comparison to those of hometowns and villages on the desert fringes. The existence of diverse ideological differences among the Kingdom's citizens have led to over-generalization, categorizing, and stereotyping within Saudi society.⁴ The concept of Saudi national unity has been a momentous struggle for the local populace to reconcile with on many levels. As such, the legitimate approval of the Saudi royal family's hegemony of the state is far from clear-cut; and can be exacerbated by cross-constituency divergences in identities, manifested along generational, urban, wealth, and regional lines.

Additionally, Saudi Arabia is home to a massive youth population--with over 70 percent of the total 33.7 million citizens under the age of 30. This highly educated subpopulation (many of which attended universities overseas in Europe and the United States) represents the demographic suffering the most from the country's high unemployment rate, reaching 12.9 percent in the Fall of 2018. Among Saudi youths, the World Bank estimates unemployment at over 25 percent, and female unemployment at 32 percent.⁵ The endurance of a high unemployment rate has led to grievances including waithood and widespread resentment, due an uncertain future with financial security.

Contemporary Saudi Arabia

The MoC's establishment can be understood within the context of local, regional, and international trends affecting the kingdom today. When describing Saudi Arabia's process of

⁴ Thompson, Mark C. (2017) Saudi Arabia and the Path to Political Change: National Dialogue and Civil Society. Bloomsbury Press.

⁵ Data from the World Bank, World Development Indicators. (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2019); https://epod.cid.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/2019-08/EPD_Report_Digital.pdf

osmosis into modernity, many experts convey terms such as reluctant, careful, stable, and gradual. For nearly a century, any state-led efforts to modernize—even for the most basic of technologies—have often clashed with the ultraconservative Wahhabi creed of what constitutes appropriate Islamic heritage. However, since the advent of widespread internet use in 1999, it has been harder for the local clerisy to convince the population to resist modernizing technologies. Today Saudi Arabia is enjoying an extraordinary level of internet penetration and social media saturation⁶. The kingdom represents the largest social media presence in the world, and Saudi Arabians constitute the largest group of active users on Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat in the region. The ability for Saudis to connect virtually is a pivotal development in state-society relations, as it has given rise to a brand-new person, capable of expressing his political views and away from state control.⁷ Access to the internet has allowed the majority Saudi youth population to connect to each other in new ways—both outside and inside the kingdom. Local Saudi artists, who have among the largest followings on the country’s social media, have used the online public sphere to build a new social movement⁸. As a result, these online connections have paved the way for a framework under which a genuine national dialogue, or majlis, has emerged between viewers and producers of art—far larger than possible in an art gallery or even the largest comedy show.⁹

SaudiVision2030 and Societal Transformations

SaudiVision2030 rests on diversifying the economy away from petroleum-based dependence, and creating more sustainable employment opportunities domestically through building a post-oil knowledge-based economy. Central to Riyadh’s long-term economic plan is developing the strategic position of the Kingdom as the center of the Arab and Islamic worlds¹⁰. Within this vision, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (also popularly known as MBS) is investing

⁶ Alaoui, Hicham. (2019). Youth, Technology, and Political Change in Saudi Arabia. Hoover Institution. Spring Series. Issue 519.

⁷ Madawi al-Rasheed. “A History of Saudi Arabia”. (2002) Cambridge Press.

⁸ Foley, Sean. (2019). ‘The Distant Early Warning System’: The Online Public Sphere and the Contemporary Artistic Movement in Saudi Arabia. Cambridge University Press.

⁹ Foley, S. (2019). Changing Saudi Arabia: Art, Culture, and Society in the Kingdom. Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.

¹⁰ Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Vision 2030 (رؤية السعودية). Accessible online at: <https://vision2030.gov.sa/en>

heavily in sectors such as entertainment and tourism—aimed at increasing spending by Saudis locally rather than abroad, mitigating capital outflows of residents—including developing the country into a world-class travel destination. In this context, Saudi youths represent the bulwark to entrenching not just the monarchy, but also the Kingdom’s wider financial, cultural, and geopolitical position in the world.¹¹

Like the Ministry of Culture, foreign tourism in Saudi Arabia represents a new enterprise for the country in many aspects. Previously in the Kingdom, as the home of the two holiest cities in Islam, Mecca and Medina, religious pilgrimage served as the primary means of foreign tourism for over a century. In fact, due to the dominance of puritanical religious dogma, the country has been notoriously anathematic of any non-Muslim foreign presence on its soil, thus representing one of the world’s most closed-off countries until late last year. The situation changed in September 2019, when the Saudi the government reversed its traditional stance and launched a foreign tourist visa program outside of the auspices of the Hajj visa. Today holidaymakers from 49 countries are now encouraged to visit Saudi Arabia; and a massive tourism campaign is permeating all corners of the globe, with promotional taglines including #visitsaudi and #welcometoarabia enticing foreigners with evocative desert landscapes and pristine beaches and islands along the Red Sea coastline. Thus, in less than a year, Saudi Arabia has gone from one of the world’s most inaccessible countries with a traditionally shuttered society, to one that actively sponsors all-expenses-paid trips for social media influencers and wide-reaching community leaders. The Ministry of Culture plays a key role in Saudi Arabia’s latest opening to the world, and the implications of reversing such long-standing policies will be discussed later on.

These new openings inside of the Kingdom serves as a means to revive Saudi society, after decades of rigid theocratic rule. Before current entertainment reforms were set in motion, strict controls on public activities rendered life unbearably boring for large swaths of the Saudi population. In order to circumvent this dearth of local entertainment options, Saudi nationals usually traveled abroad to access a better lifestyle and remained outside of the country for longer periods at a time. Resulting from this phenomena, billions of dollars’ worth of Saudi Riyals were

¹¹ Alaoui, Hicham. (2019) Youth, Technology, and Political Change in Saudi Arabia.

not reintegrated into the domestic economy as expected. In response to this, the current regime headed by MBS is reforming the entertainment sector, so that Saudis who spend billions each year on entertainment abroad will instead stay inside the Kingdom to have fun, creating much-needed jobs.¹² One example of this change is the reopening of public movie theatres in April 2018 after 35 years, with the premiere of Marvel's Black Panther¹³. Today the Kingdom plans to erect more than 2,500 movie theatres by 2030.

Learning from the failures of previous kings to meet national development goals, particularly Saudization,¹⁴ MBS is pushing for the massive expansion of the tourism, culture, and entertainment sector. Socially, SaudiVision2030 has already expanded public freedoms, especially for the female population. Over the past two years, women have gained basic rights including the freedom to drive, attend public events and travel without the permission of a male guardian, as well as are no longer required to wear the full-length head covering known as the abaya. However, since MBS has become the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, a dramatic departure from the normal operating logic of the Saudi monarchical system is occurring, superseded today by a drive towards *personalistic* autocracy.¹⁵ Today, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman holds the most power out of any ruler in the history of Saudi Arabia. This consolidation of power can be attributed to a series of arrests and purges of potential rivals within the royal family and members of the inner sanctum, whom MBS has accused of rampant corruption and even political treason. In March 2020-- in his most striking move yet on senior royals--MBS ordered the arrests of Ahmad bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and Mohammed bin Nayef, the last remaining full brother of King Salman and his uncle, accusing them of plotting against him. Thus, there exists an ongoing demand by MBS for absolute loyalty to him and a resulting rampant repression of all forms of critics, as seen in his role in the 2017 murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul.

¹² <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/17/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-entertainment-economy.html>

¹³ <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/04/05/599847092/black-panther-expected-to-formally-break-saudis-35-year-cinema-ban>

¹⁴ Since 1985, one of the goals of the Ministry of Labor has been replacing the overwhelming number of foreign workers in the country with unemployed Saudi nationals.

¹⁵ Alaoui, Hicham (2019). Youth, Technology, and Political Change.

Government Bodies dealing with Culture in KSA: Past and Current

However, the Saudi art and cultural scene is not a brand-new development, nor can it be considered as an idiosyncratic and personal project of the Crown Prince. The Ministry of Culture was established alongside various cultural bodies already active in Saudi Arabia. Within this cultural ecosystem, entities include the MiSK Foundation (founded in 2011 by MBS), the King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture (or, iTHRA), Diriyah Gate Authority, Telfaz11, and others. Previously, cultural policies fell under the auspices of the Ministry of Information and Culture, until the two entities split apart in June 2018. Working in tandem with the MoC on cultural heritage policies today is the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH), which is responsible for the development, promotion, and branding of Saudi Arabia as a global tourist destination. In recent years, there has been greater proliferation of cultural bodies leading to healthy competition between them in terms of cultural production. However, since the inception of the MoC, there has been less of this due to its monopolization of many facets of the cultural industries.

The Saudi Ministry of Culture

The Ministry of Culture was decreed in June 2018 and officially launched in March 2019, with HRH Prince Badr bin Abdullah bin Farhan al Saud—a close cousin and noted mega-ally of the Crown Prince—named as Saudi Arabia’s first Cultural Minister.¹⁶ The MoC’s official manifesto, entitled *Our Identity, Our Culture*, lays out Saudi cultural policy and the significant role the ministry intends to play. In this document, the MoC’s purpose is defined as to encourage a wide range of people to participate in the Kingdom’s cultural transformation, and deliver objectives that remove barriers, limit bureaucracy, and enable creativity to flourish. Ultimately, the ministry seeks to engender a flourishing of arts and culture that enriches lives, celebrates national identity, and builds understanding between peoples. It plans to do this by showcasing

¹⁶ Prince Badr bin Abdullah bin Farhan al Saud is the proxy buyer behind many of the world’s most expensive purchases of fine art (e.g. Salvator Mundi for \$450.3 million in 2018) and also purchases art on behalf on MBS

the Kingdom's rich culture, heritage, and traditions, where, through opening the country's borders, cultural exchange will also be strengthened.

Specifically, the Ministry of Culture's mandate is to ensure that laws and policies are in place to allow the cultural ecosystem to flourish, as well as set funding priorities. The MoC plans to avoid potential pitfalls by allocating managerial authority to smaller entities within the wider cultural ecosystem, giving them the freedom to manage their own activities. Several challenges the ministry is tackling includes unstructured funding and the need to develop formal education and talent in the sector. Guiding the ministry's work and its engagement with the wider cultural ecosystem are the following principles:

- I. Leading the sector
- II. Reforming the regulatory environment
- III. Preserving Saudi heritage and tradition
- IV. Developing and nurturing talent

In its inaugural year, the MoC has been integral to over 100 initiatives spanning sixteen newly established art and cultural subsectors: Heritage, Museums, Archaeological and Cultural Landscapes, Theatre and Performing Arts, Cultural Festival and Events, Books and Publications, Architecture and Design, Natural Heritage, Film, Fashion, Language and Translation, Culinary Arts, Literature, Libraries, Visual Arts, and Music. All MoC undertakings are intended to meet at least one of three objectives, which are: I. promoting culture as a way of life; II. enabling culture to contribute to economic growth, III. creating opportunities for global cultural exchange.

The Gulf Cultural Arms Race

Regionally, Saudi Arabia's quest to diversify its economy is also guided by the paralleled trajectory of neighboring Arab Gulf states, particularly Qatar and the UAE, who have undertaken similar concrete steps to develop their abundant resource capital into other areas of investment. Since the early 2000s, state patronage of the arts in these countries have recognized the institutional significance of the industry for the national project, cultural diplomacy, and international tourism. Yet, despite sharing a similar modern history of state and supra-state developments, the Saudi experience in formulating cultural policies differs in many notable ways from that of its neighbors.

Like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar have major ambitions to develop themselves into sophisticated art and culture hubs by attracting knowledge-based businesses and tourism. However, they are doing so primarily by erecting world-class art and cultural edifices built by world famous architects and artists, such as Jean Nouvel and Frank Gehry. Examples today include the Louvre and Guggenheim museum extensions located in Abu Dhabi, and the National Museum of Qatar (NMoQ), designed by one of the most famous female Arab architects, Zaha Hadid. In the last two years Riyadh under MBS has finally joined this trend, whose stated goal is to transform Saudi Arabia into a prominent Red Sea trade and tourism hub. A number of large-scale tourist projects are already under construction, including the futuristic metropolis of NEOM, the Qiddiyah leisure and entertainment city located in the Riyadh conurbation, and the 28,000 sq. km project to commercialize lagoons, archipelagos, canyons and volcanic geology on the kingdom's west coast.¹⁷ This trend in the Arab Gulf states lends to what influential Emirati art collector Sultan Sood al-Qassimi describes as the new centers of the Arab world—away from Cairo and Beirut and Baghdad.¹⁸

LITERATURE REVIEW

Internal Objectives: National Identity Formation and Narrative Construction

In the last decade, the Arab Gulf states have witnessed the rise of high-profile museums and developments of cultural heritage sites. Such new and current museums act as a support for an invented national story, and in practice continue to act as political instruments for the state (al-Ragam 2014, 665). However, there are noteworthy tensions between different community concepts of heritage and identity and the promotion of national identities through museums and heritage sites at a state level (Excel and Rico, 2016, p.4) In the region, one long- stated objective has been to promote national patriotism and increase national identity by establishing moral spirit and understanding of customs and traditions (Princely Decree, Kuwait, 1978, as quoted in ICOM 1981:14).

¹⁷ <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1571326/business-economy>

¹⁸ <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/10/abu-dhabi-dubai-doha-arab-centers.html>

The MoC established under King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, seeks to inculcate the public imagination with a fresh restructuring according to well-defined rhetoric images, and symbols. This strategy is “where particular ideas of the nation are created and embedded in the exhibitionary forms of a range of cultural practices and institutions, such as tourism, museums, expositions, and heritage displays” (Evans 1992:2) In the Saudi Arabian context, Dr. Madawi al-Rasheed argues that ‘historical memory is concerned with promoting the legitimacy of the ruling group at the expense of creating a national identity. (al-Rasheed, 2002, 195). She explains that “these narratives are not concerned with historical accuracy or facts, but with establishing obedience to the rulers (al-Rasheed, 2002). For members of Saudi society, their participation as poets, academics, and artists, is a testimony to the fact that the official text has been successfully internalized by some (but not all) Saudis to the extent that it can be reproduced without variation or betrayal (al-Rasheed, 2002). Thus, museums and cultural institutions in the region are popular among Gulf Arab regimes as they are understood internationally as both legitimizing and authoritative.

Within the context of the GCC states’ cooperation and rivalry, Ranjith Dayaratne explains this trend of identity and national heritage building as social constructs that have been combined to address specific aspects and concerns in different ways. In other words, “establishing difference” in order to emphasize citizen-ness, “Bahrain-ness”, “Saudi-ness” ect.” (Dayaratne, 2012). Thus, cultural institutions in the Gulf serve “to generate national cohesion and popularize state-led narratives – through the use of identarian labels such as “Arab”, “Saudi”, “Qatari”, “Islamic”, which are all applied to the field of contemporary art. (Cubelic, 2019, p. 37). The decision under MBS almost 3 years ago to enforce a complete diplomatic and economic blockade against Qatar should also be viewed within this context. Thus the blockade acts as a means to distinguish Saudi Arabia from its neighbors through consolidating a stronger notion of Saudi-ness.

The trend of cultural heritage activity in the Arabian Peninsula is one of highly political nature as it is intended to play a role in legitimizing monarchical rule. In her book *Tribal Modern: Branding New Nations in the Arab Gulf*, Miriam Cooke argues that national governments in the

Gulf States invented a new form of cultural brand — “the tribal modern”— which combines aspects of global contemporary culture with elements of imagined tribal traditions. (Cooke, 2014). This is crucial as “when local regional history is ignored, one cannot expect the development of loyalty to land or people” (Attar, 1998, 158). In Saudi Arabia, many of its citizens are aware of the manipulation of historical facts by the state. Accordingly, “their constant search for alternative sources of information about their past and different interpretations of their current affairs are testimony to the fact that state control over the imagination is neither complete nor successful” (Al Rasheed, 2002, 217). In essence, Bithaj Ajana describes the interests of Saudi Arabia in using the culture and the arts to facilitate international exchange as “the desire to create a bridge between Western and Arabic art and a platform for retelling the histories and stories of the region, some of which have remained undocumented so far. This is all whilst finding a balance between modernization and Islam, between an increasing urbanization and a need to preserve the cultural heritage of the region” (Ajana, 2011).

Economic Objectives: Culture as a Means to Diversify the Economy

The economic growth of Arabian Peninsula states over the past half-century has led to the current proliferation of museum recreation and heritage revivalism projects dotting the coastlines of the former Trucial States. In this “Gulf Art and Cultural Arms Race” monarchs, including of the former Trucial States. Notably absent from the large-scale cultural developments of its neighbors in the last decade has been Saudi Arabia. However, with the rise of MBS in 2017, Riyadh has had a change of he(art), with more than 800 million USD in spending earmarked for culture and media by 2020. Through these platforms, Saudi government is hoping to attract significant private sector investment into the development of its creative and entertainment industries.

The MoC can be viewed within the greater socioeconomic context of nationwide initiatives in Saudi Arabia towards creating a culture of learning and creativity leading to economic growth. According to Saudi Arabia’s tourism chief Ahmed al-Khateeb, billions of dollars are currently

being spent to improve infrastructure and develop heritage, cultural and entertainment sites.¹⁹ However, it is unlikely that the returns for this investment will be seen anytime soon. As explained above, heritage can play a crucial role in diversifying the post-oil economy among Arab Gulf cities. Thus, cultural tourism based on architectural and urban heritage assets can provide a new platform for development (Daher, 2006). The notion of creativity and its ripple effects on a society is associated with the modern term “creative class”—used to define creative clusters that result in “endogenous growth” in economies²⁰. When analyzing the social and economic impact of creative clusters, researchers and analysts point out to the phenomena of “positive shocks” to the local cultural sector, resulting in a ripple effect of economic growth in that community. An example of this is increased philanthropic activity, such as a major donation to an arts institution or the endowment of new cultural institutions in the community²¹. Cultural clusters could therefore trigger new ideas and help develop cultural industries, ultimately supporting economic growth. However, economic diversification is often cited as the framework within which cultural projects can be located, but given that Qatar owns just 14 percent of the world’s natural gas and Abu Dhabi 7 percent of the world’s oil, and with limited strategic planning even in terms of self-sustainability, let alone income generation for these cultural projects, such an agenda cannot be realistically be argued (Davidson, 2011). Thus, as Riyadh prepares for a post-oil future, the MoC will play a role in bolstering reforms and economic partnerships in a knowledge-based economy. In particular, the ministry will be integral to transforming the country into a world class financial and tourism hub. It will do so, at least symbolically, through high-level initiatives, including building new mega-museums and spectacular cultural centers.

International Objectives: Culture as a Facilitator for International Exchange

¹⁹<https://www.prnewswire.com/ae/news-releases/saudi-arabia-opens-to-tourists-from-around-the-world-873081023.html>

²⁰ Bagwell, S. (2008). Creative Clusters and City Growth. *Creative Industries Journal*, 1(1), 31-46.

²¹ Dickey, Jennifer W., et al. *Museums in a Global Context : National Identity, International Understanding*. The AAM Press, 2013.

As the first step to developing the country into a global cultural tourism hub the Kingdom opened Saudi borders to the world in October 2019. As a result, there are now more opportunities for cultural diplomacy, which is useful for many reasons, particularly due to the strong linkages connecting Saudi Arabia's to the global economy. In other words, part of the kingdom's economic success depends on positive cultural exchanges. Cultural diplomacy, the exchange of ideas and artifacts between nations in order to foster greater understanding, is the most preferred term to describe this ancient process (Nisbett, 2012). American political scientist Joseph Nye builds off of cultural diplomacy in his term "soft power" (Nye, 2004). As opposed to "hard" or brute force power, such as military might, soft power is described by Nye as the ability to persuade through culture (i.e. values and ideas). So-termed "soft" power lies in cultural exchange programs, supporting the arts, education, sports and social development initiatives.

Thus, while there are various reasons for motivating Saudi to pursue these cultural trends, and while each institution, whether museum, institute or gallery, has its own mission that falls under the larger grand vision by the state, an underlying key component of international cross-cultural communication has emerged²² The Ministry of Culture is the main medium through which the ruling Saudi monarchy is facilitating international exchange today, whether on a national level with state visits, or internationally, with providing numerous opportunities for the purpose of fostering interaction between Saudi nationals and foreigners. Yet, it is unclear which audience is most important for these cultural institutions. As Nancy Dermedesh points out, with "museums and art fairs throughout the world increasingly privatized, and out of necessity, adopt neoliberal agendas, it becomes clear in the GCC states that the promotion of artists in the Gulf is less intended for the betterment of arts education of local audiences, and more as a means to promulgate a more positive impression of these nations to the rest of the world" (Dermedesh, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on an extensive content analysis of Saudi cultural policies taking place at both the informal and formal levels. The types of texts used in my research for this project include

²² Mirgani, Suzi (2017). Introduction: Art and Cultural Production in the GCC. *Journal of Arabian Studies*:7. pg. 1-11.

journalistic articles, books, academic publications, blogs, research studies, and policy reports. Research findings themselves are based around a comprehensive study of the public discourse propagated by the Ministry of Culture over the course of its inaugural year. In order to conduct such an analysis, raw data was collected from numerous MoC online media platforms, including Instagram (@saudimoc), Twitter (@mocSaudi), and YouTube.

Most relevant to this research component are the media publications posted on the ministry's Arabic-language official website (accessed at www.moc.sa.gov). This website is where I pulled most of the cultural initiatives listed in the chart used for the analysis section of this project (*see Appendix 2 for full chart*). All of the information provided in the chart was translated into English from its original Arabic vernacular by the researcher (myself). My Arabic language proficiency was recently tested at the advanced level, which, along with 10 plus years of language experience, enabled an accurate translation of the content into English. That said, it is possible that errors in translation occurred, however it can be rest assured that the objective of the table—to determine MoC's key motivation—is not affected. The main reason the MoC's English language website was not incorporated into my research was due to the site's bare-bones nature--in comparison to the rich and detailed material provided in Arabic. For example, over the course of one year more than 100 MoC reports were published in Arabic in a consistent manner, whereas only nine articles were posted in English. This is symbolic as it clearly demonstrates that the MoC was established with the local population in mind, rather than for an international audience.

The table incorporates initiatives and projects launched by the Ministry of Culture between March 2019 and March 2020. Over one hundred art and cultural developments sponsored by the MoC were identified in this timeframe. However due to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, many key events scheduled for Spring 2020 have since been cancelled (including the Riyadh International Bookfair and the highly-anticipated very first International Red Sea Film Festival). All things considered, the main goal in creating this comprehensive table over the past six months was to observe the development of the ministry and assess the nature of its activities during its inaugural year. With this dataset, I was then able to determine the underlying key

motivation of the regime driving the decision to launch the first Saudi Ministry of Culture in 2019. A snapshot of the chart is displayed below:

MoC Project	Local/ Domestic	Economic	External/ Inter-	MoC Authority	MoC Objective (L,X,E)	Specific MoC Motivation	Special Notes
Tuwaik International Sculpture Symposium	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	Visual Arts	X	Create cultural platforms for Saudi artists to meet global counterparts; Support Saudi artists	Goal: to create an integrated enabling system for Saudi artists and individuals in creative industries;
Artistic Resident Program : Al Balad	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	Visual Arts	X	Spread awareness of Saudi Art; Encourage cultural exchange	Comprising of 4 Saudi and 3 international residents. Quality
Saudi Publishers Association	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	Literature, Publishing, and Translation Authority	L	Develop association's work to align with civil institutions and associations	activate the role of the association on the local level and the international level in coordination with the literature, publishing and translation sector.
"From the Inside" Art Exhibit	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	Visual Arts	E	Develop diriyah as cultural, recreational, and tourism center/ Promote national art	Part of MoC plan to Develop Diriyah (Industrial Zone) as a Global Art Destination/ Part of Quality of Life Program (Vision2030)/ Includes work from 25+ Artists (KSA and Gulf)
Fashion Future Event (Future of Fashion)	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	Fashion	X	Event in context of development goals; Sector needs infrastructure and cultural/organizational platform supporting sector	Sustainability-Main Theme of Event; Part of Riyadh Season
Charity Art Auction- "Art for the Country"	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	Visual Arts	L	transfer correct concept of auctions to promising Saudi Art Market; raise standard of local art to international level	Open exhibition saw a great turnout of citizens from various social classes. / Auctions as a fundamental investment pillar in industry / Sales managed by Christie's international art auctions. Proceeds go to establishing historical museum of Jeddah and support charity for children with special educational needs.
Craft Training Workshops by the Multipurpose Women C	TRUE	TRUE	FALSE	Heritage	L	Qualify and train female Saudi designers/creators	Hosted by French/Italian designer Maurizio Gallant
Establishment of Saudi Publishing House	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	Literature, Publishing, and Translation Authority	L	support and spread Saudi culture and literature/ enhance Arab and international presence, sign international partnerships with publishing houses	Independent financial center; Arm of Ministry for publication, marketing, distribution of Saudi books to Arab countries and book fairs/ Aimed at spreading Saudi culture and literature locally, regionally, and internationally
Information for All Programme (IFAP) Council Membersh	FALSE	FALSE	TRUE	All	X	strengthen international thinking process	UNESCO
Saudi Museum of Contemporary Art		TRUE	TRUE	Museums	E	Develop Diriyah as cultural, recreational, and tourism center/ Promote national art	MoU signed with DQDA; Artwork may be regional and international in origin
Minister of Culture Tours Historic Baghdad	FALSE	FALSE	TRUE	Heritage	X	Enhance cultural cooperation with other countries	Council
Dr. Stefano Carbone named CEO of Museums Authority	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	Museums	L		
Artificial Intelligence Artathon	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	Visual Arts	X	Provides opportunity for local artists to showcase their talents; Providing the cultural field with qualitative educational opportunities	World's first AI artathon. 2000 applicants from 50 countries. 10 winning pieces will be showcased at Global AI Summit in Riyadh from 30-31 March.
CULTURE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	ALL	L		1st program for cultural scholarship in the Kingdom.
Cultural Scholarship Program	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	ALL	X	Provide Saudi students with quality educational opportunities to study cultural and artistic disciplines at leading international universities	Emphasis on supporting youth/ 1st of its kind in KSA history
Riyadh International Book Fair	TRUE	TRUE	TRUE	Books and Publishing	X	Strengthen Riyadh as capital/leading city in book industry; Create environment conducive to reading and bookmaking	1st time managed by MoC since separating from MoI
Professional Acting Skills Course	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	Theatre and Performing Arts Authority			
Bienalaur International Exhibition (Bienalaur Riyadh)	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	Visual Arts	X	Provide high-end creative platforms for art connoisseurs; Create networking opportunities between Saudi innovators and their counterparts in the world to promote international cultural exchange	1st Middle Eastern city to host/ Enhances position as global artistic destination/ creates opportunities for local artists, and cultural interaction with visitors, citizens, and residents.
Bienalaur School of Fine Arts Academic Scholarship	TRUE	FALSE	TRUE	Visual Arts		International Cultural Exchange	

For a full chart, see Appendix 2.

The primary purpose in organizing this chart was to correlate each MoC activity with the cultural objective(s) it best fits. Essentially, these objectives are I. culture as a way of life II. culture as a means to diversify the economy, and III. culture to facilitate international exchange opportunities. I determined the most fitting orientation of each activity based on related MoC media and press releases, which often outlines the main purposes and goals in undertaking each activity. In addition, I justified the classification I made subjectively through supporting literature and scholarship, which I attempted to illustrate in the above literature review.

In brief, for an initiative to be considered as economically motivated, projects must demonstrate a direct link to the Saudi economy in terms of revenue stream and/or employment opportunities contributing to Saudization objectives. Many economically-motivated projects are connected to the development boom being undertaken as Riyadh builds the country into an international financial and tourism hub. Cultural initiatives identified as externally-motivated must exhibit an element of international cultural exchange. As the literature review explains, such projects also display elements of soft power diplomacy, positive international image-making, and contribute

to greater Saudi influence in the Islamic and the Arab worlds. Lastly, an internally-motivated project was determined based on its capability to advance purposes of national identity inculcation and participation of the national citizenry. Moreover, for projects targeting aspiring or established artists and other creatives, I observed for indications of their participation in furthering the cultural contract: that is, facilitating artistic production for artistic obedience. Moreover, for museums and other cultural heritage related initiatives, I looked for whether they advanced the *organized and supervised system of cultural production* under the tutelage of the Ministry of Culture.

Due to my inability to travel to Saudi Arabia as a researcher, I attempted to gain an understanding of ongoing developments in the Kingdom by employing several unconventional research methods, including film (movies, and television), social media, and visits to related museums and art exhibits in London and Washington DC. Two movies that helped shed light on the diverse identities and the realities in the public sphere within the Saudi kingdom are the internationally-recognized feature length films *Barakah meets Barakah* and *Wajda*. These movies were produced prior to the establishment of the Ministry of Culture, and demonstrated the potential of the film industry at a time when making films inside the country was considered illegal. Moreover, as Saudi citizens are incredibly active on YouTube, I watched among the most popularly-viewed videos created by Saudi citizens reflecting national attitudes and perceptions on local society and culture. In addition to the methods above, I conducted informal interviews with several prominent experts in the field of culture and national identity in the Arabian Peninsula region. The interviews were carried out online and contributed to my more nuanced understanding of Saudi society and the current regime, which I have attempted to lay out in this paper. For their time, I will always be grateful.

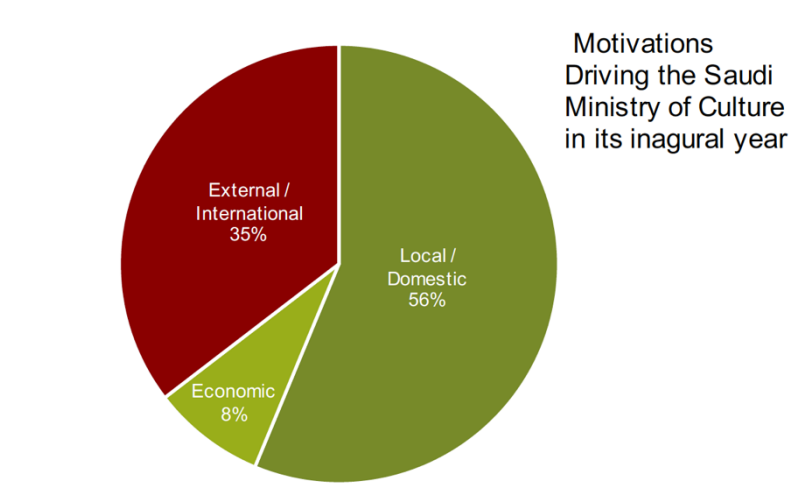
LIMITATIONS

The biggest research limitation for this project was my inability to travel to Saudi Arabia in order to conduct field work. Such a case would have allowed for a deeper understanding of the numerous cultural bodies existing inside the kingdom and how their operations clash with and contribute to the MoC and its sponsored activities. Lastly due to my Western background and education, there will always be an orientalist strand in my understanding of the intoxicating

region. Therefore this paper is largely written with an outsider understanding of the country and its cultural policies. That said, to quote the great Edward Said, I have tried to “ maintain a critical consciousness, as well as employing those instruments of historical, humanistic, and cultural research on which my education has made me the fortunate beneficiary”²³.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research done for this project focuses on critically analyzing the MoC’s numerous ongoing art and culture projects and initiatives occurring in the climate of Saudi Arabia’s transforming socio-cultural landscape. A central theme I put forth in this paper is: *the Saudi regime is restructuring its dominant narrative to one of a distinctive Saudi national identity, which rallies around a shared notion of Saudi culture*. The following chart presents a visual summary of this contention and the subsequent research findings.



The results seen here, which are quantified based on the chart found in appendix 2, illuminate the notion that domestic motivations are currently driving the kingdom's first cultural ministry. Thus the main focus of the Ministry of Culture is largely internal (as compared to its other stated economic and external objectives and interests). Economically-motivated MoC projects focus

²³ Said, Edward.(1979). Orientalism. New York: Pantheon Books. Pg. 26

mainly on strengthening the economy through their function as tourism and heritage sites. However, between 2019 and 2020 arguably less than 10% of state-led cultural projects contributed to the national economic goals. Economically, the Ministry of Culture expects the cultural sector to contribute up to 10% of state GDP by 2030 instead of the current 3%. Yet, generating 10% of the state GDP in the next decade may not be realistic, as evidenced by the experience of Qatar and the UAE, whose own cultural sectors have barely added to the national budget. Moreover, for any country building up an inchoate art and culture sector, it will likely take several years before any tangible returns are even possible.

According to the findings, state-led cultural undertakings with an international focus comprise over one-third of the total projects sponsored by the MoC over the past year. These projects largely resemble those found in other Arab Gulf states, particularly Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, and the UAE, which anthropologist Marc Augé best describes as a means to entering the global system of cultural branding²⁴. As of Spring 2020, the Kingdom is home to five officially-recognized UNESCO world heritage sites: Al-Ahsa Oasis (the largest in the world), Al-Hijr (Madain Salih) archaeological site (also known as al-Ula), At-Turaif District in ad-Diriyah, Historic Jeddah and the Gate to Mecca, and the Rock Art of the Hail Region. As the findings below will demonstrate, Saudi Arabia already has a history of implementing cultural policies with an international focus. The subsequent findings and analysis will build off of this contention, and demonstrate the paper's central theme: that the MoC represents a fresh restructuring of the dominant narrative in the Kingdom to one of a distinctive Saudi national identity—and away from an Islamic emphasis. With this data, I drew five original research findings.

Finding #1: The state is using Culture to connect with the diverse Saudi population

The MoC symbolizes a change of heart in how culture and the arts can be beneficial to the Saudi regime at a subnational and state-level. By launching numerous competitions centered around elements of national culture such as industrial heritage, poetry, and local folklore, as well as

²⁴ Augé, Marc. (2008) *Non-Places: An Introduction to Super modernity*. London, Verso.

organizing large scale events and festivals throughout the country, the MoC is interested in the active participation of all segments of Saudi society. For many of these national projects, the MoC requires that participants must be of Saudi nationality, and between certain ages. Notably, minorities, such as the Shi'a population, are specifically mentioned and encouraged to participate in MoC activities.

These cultural activities not only allow for a deeper connection between the regime and its citizens, but also encourage between the local population and the notion of belonging to the Saudi nation. An example of this is the 13/16 project, which is titled after the total number of administrative provinces in the country (13) and the number of new cultural subsectors of the Ministry of Culture. This project is unique due to the MoC's focus on documenting and celebrating all aspects of regional heritage. In the past, a more selective version of regional heritage was normally used in the national narrative. This narrative largely relied on the exclusion--rather than inclusion--of regional elements that did not completely support the legitimacy of the Saudi monarchy and its hegemony over the entire country.

Culture is also being used to connect the younger cohort with Saudi Arabia's recent past, namely the Kingdom's contemporary experience with a culture primarily defined by petroleum activities. The cultural impact of Saudi Arabia's foray in oil extraction is largely ignored by the population, and the Saudi people's relationship with its recent industrial history is wary. However, through MoC initiatives, including the Industrial Heritage Competition, the state is actively attempting to change this pervasive nonchalant popular attitude. In this competition, the state encourages citizens to seek out edifices and other structures built during the era of petroleum, in order to register them as future heritage sites and add them to the map. As such, the MoC activities are actively connecting the population with existing heritage, regardless of any un-Islamic origins.

Finding #2: The Formalization and Institutionalization of the Underground Art Sector

Locally, there exists no formal avenues to develop Saudi artists, and in previous decades these professions were specifically excluded and discouraged. As a result, the country still lacks many of the mechanisms needed for culture and the arts to play a robust role in Saudi society. Though

the MoC was established to correct this, it is forced to build many of the cultural sub sectors that fall under its supervision largely from scratch. In addition, the ministry is actively making efforts to introduce unprecedented opportunities in national arts and culture through the creation of new cultural bodies. Today, musicians, visual artists, writers, fashion designers, filmmakers, culinary artists, architects, and other creatives are now considered the jewel of the cultural sector by the MoC. New related cultural entities under the MoC include the country's first contemporary art museum, national music academies, institutes devoted to traditional arts and crafts, and the first Saudi publishing house.

However, the Saudi experience with museums, libraries, art galleries, and concerts—even its very own national heritage and culture—is both sparse and contentious. This is seen in local attitudinal responses towards cultural heritage sites, including al-Ula, which is the centerpiece of the national tourism strategy today²⁵.

There also remains a disinterest within the population with museums and art galleries²⁶. In fact, among the Khaleej states, the Saudi population is distinct in their preferences towards more intangible exhibitionary, ephemeral, and multisensory experiences as a form of entertainment, including cultural heritage displays and artifacts. This can be seen in the curatorial choices made in the cultural content displayed by iTHRA, versus that of the static permanent displays seen in Qatar and the Emirates. Whereas the former targets local audiences (families in this specific case) and engages them with Saudi history using interactive exhibitionary methods, the latter caters to foreign audiences and displays artefacts appealing to those with a more international identity.

In order to provide entertainment and cultural events which cater to the Saudi population preferences for less-static cultural experiences, the Kingdom now has eleven major festivals circuits occurring throughout various parts of the year, known as Saudi seasons²⁷.

²⁵<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-tourism-alula/saudi-antiquities-site-long-seen-as-haunted-tries-to-woo-visitors-idUSKCN1PT1CK>

²⁶ Al-Rawaf, R. (2016). *Building a museum culture in Saudi Arabia: Where are we now and what needs to be done?* (Order No. 10194532). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1867702836).

²⁷ For more information: <https://www.saudiseasons.sa/>

Moreover, the MoC is in charge of celebrating Saudi Arabia's various ethnic heritages. Through hosting national cultural events and festivals, including the popular Flowerman festival in Asir, located in the country's most southern province, the Ministry of Culture is using a platform that includes diverse populations rather than excludes.

In the past, the only festival hosted inside of Saudi Arabia was the Janadriyah festival, which was launched in 1985 and long hosted by the Saudi National Guard. This glitzy event inside of Riyadh has long served multiple purposes for the Saudi monarchy. The annual festival centers around promoting the legitimacy and hegemony of Al Saud royal family, and their claim to the throne against other tribal rivals and local counternarratives. Moreover, the festival was also used as a rare opportunity for the Saudi monarchy to entertain international cultural exchange inside of its highly-insulated borders. Through inviting foreign heads of states, particularly Western allies, to partake in the national celebrations, the Saudi monarchy was able to show off its rich heritage and traditions to its international counterparts during more conservative decades.

Finding #3: Red Flags in Cultural Heritage Preservation

As a result of the Kingdom's quest to modernize rapidly, there is an ongoing phenomena of high-level cultural destruction and disregard of historic sites inside Saudi borders. In fact, since 1985, Saudi Arabia is reported to have destroyed over 98% of its cultural heritage, according to a 2014 assessment by the Arab Islamic Heritage Research Foundation in London.²⁸

Such large-scale demolitions are associated with the expansion of the Masjid al-Harem in Mecca and other similar projects aimed at increasing the Kingdom's capacity to host the ever-increasing numbers of Muslims performing the Hajj. However, the ongoing destruction of cultural heritage can be viewed as both arbitrary as well as idiosyncratic decisions. Heritage sites with religious and tribal significance have long been victim to targeted destruction, as they serve to support a history that potentially weakens the hegemonic claims of the Al Saud dynasty, or the dominance of Wahhabism. These sites, located particularly in the Hejazi region and associated with early Islam and the Ottoman Era, include venerated mosques, burial sites, and historical landmarks

²⁸ Power, Carla. (2014, November 14). Saudi Arabia Bulldozes Over its Heritage. TIME Magazine. Retrieved from: <https://www.time.com/3584585/saudi-arabia-bulldozes-over-its-heritage>

associated with the Prophet Muhammed and founding personalities of early Islamic history. Cultural heritage and preserving national artifacts ergo is not a priority for the Saudi state, unless it supports the regime's legitimacy or cultural tourism goals. As a result, the past decades have seen the permanent erasure of a majority of artifacts and heritage sites due to the massive construction projects taking place country-wide.

Similarly, the Saudi state has shown negligence in protecting national heritage via the flight of national artifacts through the possession of former expats living in the country . For decades, ARAMCO employees and other foreigners freely took ancient artifacts and historic objects they came across while living in and developing the country's oil sector. Recently however, cultural artifacts and local heritage are now wholly regarded as a useful tool for the regime and in furthering national interests. Thus, since 2012, the Kingdom has begun to discreetly recall its "stolen heritage" through initiatives such as the "Antiquities Homecoming Project". This cultural policy which I have loosely termed the "regifting of national culture" has not been employed elsewhere in the world. This is most likely due to other nations' adoption of cultural policies other than that of Saudi Arabia's, which had turned a blind eye to acts of cultural heritage theft for decades.

Finding #4: External Cultural Priorities Remain a Significant Priority

Previously, the Saudi government's main cultural undertakings had been external in focus and scope with activities curated for audiences abroad, specifically for the sake of international cultural diplomacy. A well-known illustration of Saudi Arabia's traditional external focus in its cultural policies is the traveling exhibition entitled "Roads of Arabia Masterpieces of Antiquities in Saudi Arabia Across the Ages" . This exhibition was directed by the SCTA for almost a decade, until last year, when control was transferred to the brand-new Ministry of Culture. The exhibition, since its launch in 2010, has toured 16 European, US and Asian stations, in addition to two domestic locations at the King Abdulaziz Centre for World Culture in Dhahran and the National Museum in Riyadh²⁹. Currently, since November 2019, the exhibition—aimed to

²⁹ The first station of the "Roads of Arabia Masterpieces of Antiquities in Saudi Arabia Across the Ages" Exhibition was held at the Louvre Museum in Paris in July 2010, followed by la Caixa Foundation in Barcelona, Spain, then the Hermitage Museum in Petersburg, in Russia, and Pergamon Museum in Berlin, Germany. It was also held at Sackler Museum in Washington DC, followed by Carnegie Museum of Pittsburgh, the

showcase antiquities of Saudi Arabia and the civilizations of the Arabian Peninsula—is being showcased at the National Museum of Rome, which witnessed a record-breaking 6500+ visitors on its opening day³⁰. Thus, despite cultural policies under the MoC now assuming a greater domestic focus, activities intended for international purpose are still critical elements of the cultural strategy.

Finding #5: Shared Cultural Agenda between the current Minister of Culture and Crown Prince

In 2018, Prince Badr bin Abdullah bin Farhan al Saud, was appointed the first Saudi Minister of Culture, a position that was in fact created for him personally by MBS. Not only are the two men dynastic cousins, but they The relationship between the Crown Prince and the Minister of Culture is significant as both men share the same conception of culture, which is predominantly Western in outlook as well as motivated by gaining international credentials. However, the orientation of these powerful state leaders towards more globally curated production, comes at the expense of greater support for local Saudi cultural production, using local capital. The MoC is eager to seek out Saudi artists whose talents and artworks receive positive reception internationally. Thus, if Saudi artists are able to create this selective type of art desired by foreign audiences, their careers are likely to be supported by the MoC. This form of soft power is useful for the regime, as it helps to strengthen a specific national narrative at the expense of other concurrent cultural streams. However, MBS has long realized the power in using the arts and culture as a platform to negotiate, even cosmetically, societal reforms since 2011, with the establishment of the Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Philanthropic Foundation for the Encouragement of Creativity (MiSK). As one of the first nonprofit organizations in the country, MiSK represents another cultural entity being used to promote the Saudi artist envisioned by MBS, that is: an international citizen with national pride.

Vittoriano Museum in Rome, then the Fine Art Museum in Huston, Texas, followed by the Nelson Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri, and the Asian Arts Museum in San Francisco. The exhibition was also held at the National Museum in Beijing, the National Museum in Seoul, the National Museum in Riyadh, the National Museum in Tokyo and at the Louvre Abu Dhabi Museum in the UAE. URL: <https://mt.gov.sa/en/Antiquities-Museums/ArcheologicalMasterpieces> (Accessed May 2, 2020)

³⁰ <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/2017941/over-6000-people-visit-saudi-antiquities-exhibition-rome>

Implications of the New National Narrative

At the state-level, arts and culture was not regarded as a key tool or political instrument until very recently in Saudi Arabia. With revolutionary ripples from the Arab Spring still reverberating throughout the wider Middle East region--sustaining any degree of stability has become a top priority for the wealthy states of the Arabian Peninsula. In the past, the Saudi regime adopted a largely laissez-faire approach, permitting the religious establishment to dominate the public cultural sphere (or lack of). Thus, support for the arts was done at a very informal level--through elite patronage--by interested members of the ruling family or by prominent wealthy Saudi families. However, over the past year, the Saudi Ministry of Culture has brought under its umbrella huge elements of what used to fall under purview of independent cultural enterprises. Moreover, many cultural activities normally assigned to other ministries have now been transferred under MoC auspices, which is responsible today for organizing events such as the country's largest Janadriyah festival. Lastly, it is also evident that the ministry is already actively accumulating power from different areas of public and private interests and concentrating them under more personal control.

Not only does culture serve the purpose of restructuring a dominant Saudi national identity and narrative, but also in realizing the goals of SaudiVision2030. For the past two decades, there has been a growing need for Saudi nationalism as a counterbalance to curbing the dominance of the ultraconservative religious class. However, the fresh nationalist narrative being used today can trace its origins back to the reign of King Abdullah (2005-2015) who put his support in initiatives that slowly moved Saudi society in the nationalist direction, and away from the dominant Islamic identity. Even earlier, in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, the consequential challenges Riyadh faced led the ruling family to view their long-term partnership with the Wahhabi clergy with increasing scrutiny. Moreover, key segments of society recognized problems in the way power had been constructed in Saudi Arabia between the ruling family and its myriad family members and numerous dynastic branches, some which sought more social control through their partnership with the Wahhabi establishment.

These popular tensions with the pervasive nature of the Wahhabi establishment--and paradoxically globalization--were also felt deeply by the Saudi population, exacerbating cross-constituency frictions. Between 2009-2010, a series of state-society dialogues, known as the Cultural Discourse Meetings, were hosted by the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue (KACND). The existence of concurrent cultural identities alongside the predominant religious discourse was the crux of issues discussed, as well as the need for a national cultural discourse³¹. The meetings highlighted the reality that the current discourse is not based on social unity, and that the dominant discourse had produced extremist ideology: one that excludes other Saudi cultural streams. Moreover, all participants (Saudi nationals) agreed that there was an absence of transparency with regard to racial regional and ideological issues, and that coexistence between majorities and minorities must be promoted³². Participants also agreed that a common national identity could not be achieved without recognition of Saudi diversity, and with the need to surrender aspects of ideological differences in order to establish true citizenship. Lastly, the meetings emphasized that the Saudi youth lack identity, and it is the duty of society to foster pride in national identity and culture³³. All things considered, the Cultural Discourse Meetings revealed serious issues pervading Saudi society, and it was only a matter of time before the regime would be forced to confront them in order to move the country forward into the future. Unlike jobs and healthcare, ideologies and identities are epistemic issues that no amount of money can fix, and no regime type can ignore, even a totalitarian monarchy. Hardly a coincidence, the new cultural discourse promulgated by the Ministry of Culture builds upon these contentions made during the Cultural Discourse Meetings. This new distinctive Saudi identity is based on moving the country's dominant identity away from the one adopted in the wake of 1979. As evidenced by recent episodes, the regime under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is on a mission to curtail power and influence of the clerical establishment. However this is not the first time, and in the past the Al Saud monarchy has "used decrees to circumvent the authority of the ulama, when making major administrative, economic, and social changes".³⁴

³¹ Thompson, Mark C. (2017) *Saudi Arabia and the Path to Political Change: National Dialogue and Civil Society*. Bloomsbury Press.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori (1996), *Muslim Politics*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press

Thus, despite the Saudi royal family already moving towards nationalism before MBS, today hyper-nationalism is on the rise in Saudi Arabia. This nationalist ideology--which was previously banned in Saudi Arabia -- represents a narrative much more appealing to the Crown Prince than the conservative ideology that has dominated the Saudi public sphere for decades. From the election of Donald Trump to Brexit, the nationalist policies of the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi and the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the success of far-right parties in Italian, German and Austrian elections in 2017 and 2018, nationalism appears to be on rise globally³⁵. However, the appeal of this narrative has grown much more prominent under the current administration, as a distinctive sense of national identity and pride confers innate benefits on society such as Saudi Arabia's, domestically as well as internationally, and both financial and reputational. ³⁶

It can be argued therefore that Saudi regime is attempting to adapt to the reality of naïve cosmopolitanism by using the country's cultural heritage in constructing a unique local national identity in order to legitimize its current rule. Thus in light of a number of recent trending global developments, the popular appeal of a distinctive Saudi identity and nationalistic narrative has grown much more prominent under King Salman and his son Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Impacts on Saudi Society: Exacerbating the Generational Divide

The advent of widespread internet usage in Saudi Arabia marks the starting point for an opening up of Saudi society beneath the surface, a phenomenon that allowed citizens to mobilize information for the sake of transparency. In addition to this unprecedented opening of civil space--albeit online--it is without a doubt that Saudi Arabia is experiencing its most significant reforms in the socio-cultural sphere ever in its history. Naturally, today the country is witnessing multiple reconstructions of a narrative which are occurring simultaneously. In the wake of these massive transformations, urban elites and other cosmopolitans are clearly the winners in Saudi society, as well as the educated youth population. In addition to the traditional religious clerical class being pushed to the side, so too are the traditionally rural, conservative populations, as well

³⁵ Bremmer, Ian. (2017). The wave to come. *Time*, May 11. Available at <http://time.com/4775441/the-wave-to-come/>

³⁶ Mirgani, Suzi, (2017).

as the older generations of Saudi nationals. For the country's artists and creatives, this opening of the sector via the launch of the Ministry of Culture represents an unprecedented win in many aspects. Today, artists are able to create without going underground for fear of retaliation, and state patronage of the arts has provided tools and a platform otherwise inaccessible to local artists. However in other ways the *organized and supervised system of cultural production* under the tutelage of the Ministry of Culture threatens the very essence of what it means to create.

Art practitioners and members of Saudi Arabia's creative class are seeking out a new role in the country's transformation into a post-oil economy. By promoting art as a resource for the creative and knowledge industries as well as the leisure economy, and also as a tool to rebrand Saudi Arabia for international visitors and investors, they are employing their new role as national representatives of Saudi creativity to widen their agency³⁷. Moreover, artists are taking on the role of the concerned pious Saudi citizen acting in defense of Islam, national heritage, and a Saudi youth that has to be prepared for the challenges of the future; thus they are exploring a new role for artists and the creative class in Saudi Arabia. However, the establishment of the Ministry of Culture and its goals of bringing artists under its guardianship--despite its stated intentions to allow artists the freedom to manage their own activities-- should be seen in the context of MBS today, who has recently consolidated the most power of any Saudi monarch in the country's history.

Significance of Project & Future Research Recommendations

The significance of this research project is that it explores a government ministry that has not yet been extensively analyzed in scholarly work. The paper's focus on cultural policies on both informal and formal levels in Saudi Arabia is also useful for all types of researchers of the Saudi Arabia, as the topics covered, such as contemporary art in Saudi Arabia, Saudi artists, hyper-nationalism under MBS, and the role of culture in Saudi society, remain under-researched in academic circles and scholarly work. Thus the paper furthers our understanding of Saudi Arabia and the new role carved out for the arts and culture inside of the Kingdom at this time.

³⁷ Cubelic, Danijel. (2019) The Creative Kingdom. De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/zfr-2018-0028>.

However, although the MoC is a fascinating development, it remains one that is particularly inchoate at this time. Thus a few recommendations on where the work can be expanded on in the future: including further research on the role of the Saudi artist in the kingdom's tourism strategy. Research on the ramifications on the ground of the Ministry of Culture and its impacts on Saudi society will also be useful for expanding future research in the field. Specifically, measuring the gap between the ministry's stated intentions and the concrete results of its endeavors is crucial to any understanding of the impact of the MoC. Moreover, determining whether or not projects sponsored by the MoC realize the specific interests and goals guiding the ministry to initiate them in the first place. Therefore, more fieldwork on the impact of the MoC's initiatives and less theoretical work will significantly help the foundation within which future research and literature on this subject can be based off of.

CONCLUSION: The Power of Culture and the Arts

In the current multi-polar world, culture plays an increasingly important role, economically and socially. Governments like Saudi Arabia, continue struggling to adapt to the global status quo, and these states become battlegrounds for competing ideas and visions of the role and importance of culture. Thus, the relationship between culture and globalization is becoming ever more complex.

Unlike other areas, the arts and culture have the power to bring different peoples, oppositional forces, and divergent ideas together, rather than separate. Hyper-nationalism is on the rise, with the Saudi regime seeking its support from the national population rather than from its traditional source of legitimacy, the Wahhabi religious ideology. Today, the Crown Prince is using Saudi artists not only to create positive connections between the regime and the hearts and minds of its citizens, but also due to their influential role as “organic intellectuals”³⁸. Organic intellectuals

³⁸ Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci aptly describes organic intellectuals as individuals who emerge from the community and use critical thought to spread to direct the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong. Gramsci, Antonio (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. International Publishers. ISBN 0-7178-0397-X.

function with the capacity to express—through the language of culture—the feelings and experiences which the masses cannot. Thus the large segments of the national population whom Saudi artists organically represent are hopeful about Saudi Arabia's freer environment, but this does not mean MBS has their unconditional support. Moreover, certain classes are already being neglected, and these trends may eventually erupt adding to a new set of societal problems that must be addressed. However, once under the Ministry of Culture's tentacles, are Saudi artists organic if they must adhere to certain restrictions on their creativity?

This paper attempts to put forth the contention that the MoC represents the new narrative dominated by the regime: A distinctive sense of Saudi national identity rallying around elements of a unified Saudi culture. The move to directly control artists over the content of their work via the Ministry of Culture, MBS clearly understands the role of artists as organic intellectuals and their importance in representing a society especially one under totalitarian dictates. In such a regime, the power of artists also has the potential to pose as a serious threat to the legitimacy of the regnant monarch, and thus Saudi artists must also be viewed in the context of intertwining with the monarchy's legitimizing agenda.

Appendix 1: Full Chart of Ministry of Culture Initiatives (March 2019-March 2020)

MoC Project	Location	Date	Local / Domestic	Economic	External / International	MoC Authority	Specific MoC Motivation	Special Notes
Tuwaik International Sculpture Symposium	Riyadh, KSA	10 January-30 January 2020	X		X	Visual Arts	Create cultural platforms for Saudi artists to meet global counterparts; Support Saudi artists	Goal to create an integrated enabling system for 3 industries;
Artistic Resident Program : Al Balad	Jeddah, KSA	6-week-long cycles. Feb 29 deadline (canceled due to COVID-19)	X		X	Visual Arts	Spread awareness of Saudi Art; Encourage cultural exchange between artists and communities	Comprising of 4 Saudi and 3 international resident "Artistic Residence: the Balad" in cooperation with located in middle of UNESCO heritage site JHD
Saudi Publishers Association	Saudi Arabia (all)	5 December 2019	X		X	Literature, Publishing, and Translation Authority	Develop association's work to align with civil institutions and associations	activate the role of the association on the local level coordination with the literature, publishing and tra
"From the Inside" Art Exhibit	ad-Diriyah, KSA	8-26 December, 2019	X	X	X	Visual Arts	Develop diriyah as cultural, recreational, and tourism center/ Promote national art	Part of MoC plan to Develop Diriyah (Industrial Zo 25+ Artists (KSA and Gulf) / Part of Quality of Life Pro
Fashion Future Event (Future of Fashion)	the Cultural Palace (Riyadh, KSA)	4 November- 6 November, 2019	X	X	X	Fashion	Event in context of development goals; Sector needs infrastructure and cultural/organizational platform supporting sector	Sustainability-Main Theme of Event; Part of Riyadh
Charity Art Auction- "Art for the Country"	Nassif House, Jeddah, KSA	26, June, 2019	X	X	X	Visual Arts	transfer correct concept of auctions to promising Saudi Art Market; raise standard of local art to international level	Open exhibition saw a great turnout of citizens from as a fundamental investment pillar in industry / Sa
Craft Training Workshops by the Multipurpose Women Cooperative Society	Qassim region, KSA	25 April-5 May 2019	X	X		Heritage	Qualify and train female Saudi designers /creators	Hosted by French/Italian designer Maurizio Gallar
Establishment of Saudi Publishing House	MoC HQ (Riyadh, KSA)	25 April 2019	X	X	X	Literature, Publishing, and Translation Authority	support and spread Saudi culture and literature/ enhance Arab and international presence, sign international partnerships with publishing houses	Independent financial center; Arm of Ministry for international art auctions. Proceeds go to establish
Information for All Programme (IFAP) Council Membership	Saudi Arabia (all)	25, November, 2019			X	All	strengthen international thinking process	UNESCO
Saudi Museum of Contemporary Art	Diriyah, KSA	17 October 2019	X	X	X	Museums	Develop Diriyah as cultural, recreational, and tourism center/ Promote national art	MoU signed with DGGA ; Artwork may be regional
Minister of Culture Tours Historic Baghdad	Baghdad, Iraq	4 April 2019			X	Heritage	Enhance cultural cooperation with other countries	Came with delegation of the Saudi-Iraqi Coordin
Dr. Stefano Carbone named CEO of Museums Authority			X		X	Museums	set strategy for the sector, granting licenses in the field, encouraging financing and investment, adopting vocational training programs in addition to designing relevant educational	
Artificial Intelligence Artathon	Riyadh, KSA	23-26 January 2020	X		X	Visual Arts	Provides opportunity for local artists to showcase their talents;	World's first AI marathon. 2000 applicants from 5 showcased at Global AI Summit in Riyadh from 30
Cultural Scholarship Program	KSA (all)	2020 year	X		X	ALL	Provide Saudi students with quality educational opportunities to study cultural and artistic disciplines at leading international universities	Emphasis on supporting youth/ 1st of its kind in K
Riyadh International Book Fair	Riyadh, KSA	2 April-11-April, 2020	X	X	X	Books and Publishing	Strengthen Riyadh as capital/leading city in book industry; Create environment conducive to reading and bookmaking	1st time managed by MoC since separating from
Professional Acting Skills Course	USC School of Cinematic Arts	8-19 Dec 2019	X		X	Theatre and Performing Arts Authority	enhance expansion of information through digitization and preservation, and to support lifelong training and learning in the fields of communication and information, and on the production of	
Bienalsur International Exhibition (Bienalsur Riyadh)	the National Museum (Riyadh, KSA)	5 November-5 December, 2019	X		X	Visual Arts	Provide high-end creative platforms for art connoisseurs; Create networking opportunities between Saudi innovators and their counterparts in the world to promote international cultural	1st Middle Eastern city to host/ Enhance poton art opportunities for local artists, and cultural interacti
Parsons School of Design Academic Scholarship	NYC, USA		X		X	Fashion	International Cultural Exchange	
Art for the Country Auction	Jeddah, KSA	end of June 2019	X	X	X	Visual Arts	Enhance role of community service the arts can contribute	Proceeds (1mil SAR) for "Aid Center" for children support (1st historical museum in Jeddah)
Cultures from Russia Week	Riyadh, KSA (King Fahd Cultural Center)	14 October 2019	X		X	Festivals and Events	Emphasize depth of relations b/w KSA and Russia	Organized in partnership with Russian Direct Inve
Film Talent Development Program	Britain, California	Oct/Nov/Dec 2019 (1st phase)	X		X	Film and Video	Develop film infrastructure, create job opportunities, increasing cultural contribution	Quality of Life program (V2030)
Filmmaking w/ British Institute of Film Industry	Britain, UK	27 October-11 November 2019	X		X	Film and Video	Part of Phase I of Film Talent Development Program	Field visit to Pine Wood International Studio; Inter with British film makers
Filmmaking Under the Production Line	Britain, UK	27 October - 11 November, 2019	X		X	Film and Video	Part of Phase I of Film Talent Development Program	20 students; focuses on helping them choose the
Professional Representation Skills Program	Riyadh, KSA	8 December- 19 December, 2019	X	X	X	Film and Video	Part of Phase I of Film Talent Development Program	In collaboration with USC School of Cinematic Art
Participation in 6th Big Stuff Conference	Katowice, Poland	11 September-13 September 2019	X		X	Heritage	document industrial heritage and discovering the most important expressions of this heritage in all cities and governorates of the Kingdom, with the participation of citizens and residents	Conference titled: "Maintaining Large Industries in every 3 years; Workshop to discuss the challenge into a heritage destination
UNESCO Conference of Directors of World Maritime Heritage Sites	Glacier Bay, Alaska, USA	4 September-9 September, 2019	X		X	Heritage	Strengthen international presence in sector and contribute support and specialized technical assistance	1st Saudi participation in history, Participation from Agriculture, KAUST (special working group on iss
Flowerman Festival	Rijal Almaa village, KSA	12 August-31 August, 2019	X	X	X	Festivals and Events	Develop heritage and cultural sites; Rehabilitate to become internal and international tourist destination	Local to hire festival workers trained to host intern visitors b/w al-Souda park
Speech at Arab League by Deputy Minister of Cult.	Cairo, Egypt (HQ of Arab League General Secretariat)	8 July 2019	X		X	Libraries	Libraries as a source of cultural pleasure and haven for community (major national objectives)	first regional conference on the digital map of libr Arab countries. The conference comes as part of promoting joint Arab work in the field of culture an
Participation of 3 Saudi Artists in BIENALSUR	Buenos Aires, Argentina	27 June 2019	X		X	Visual Arts	increasing international presence of Saudi Artists / enhance international cultural dialogue	travels across 5 continents, scheduled to visit the Fatima al-Banawi, Ayman Zaidani, Faisal Samra
Red Palace / Exhibition	Riyadh, Jeddah, (Khuzam Palace)	8 June - 18 July 2019	X		X	Museums	documenting national history and reproduction in creative, new ways. Artist conveys personal feelings towards homeland and cultural and historical symbols	Support the national value of Red Palace in kingd story that reflects the value of the palace; Palace (location of US-Saudi agreement signed in 1933);
Translation Forum & Competition	Princess Noura Uni, Riyadh, KSA	March 19-21 (postponed covid-19)	X		X	Literature, Publishing, and Translation Authority	Enhance bonds of communication between the community of translators and related parties	3 educational and training workshops; 7 dialogue competition (translation of visual content) https://e

German Delegation meeting with MoC	MoC HQ (Riyadh, KSA)	20 January 2020			X	Several sectors	Enhance means of cooperation w/ Germany in cultural field	prospects for cooperation and mechanisms for joint
Participation in 7th Meeting of ALF	Geneva, Switzerland	9 December 2019			X	Heritage		Fund comprises of international coalition of control personalities
Masterpieces of the Kingdom Exhibition	Rome, Italy	26 Nov 2019 (3 months)			X	Museums	International Cultural Exchange	Witnessed record-breaking 6500+ visitors in one
MoC Participates in AI Exhibition in Russia	Moscow, Russia (Hermitage Museum)	6 June- 7 July 2019	X	X	X	Visual Arts	Enhance cultural dialogue with the world	"Artificial Intelligence and Intercultural Dialogue"; International Economic Forum. Participating Saudi al-Saleh ; Context of high Saudi-Russo cultural co
MoC participation in UN Event "Culture and Sustainable Development)	New York, New York, UN HQ	21 May 2019			X	Heritage	Promoting cultural dialogue with the world	In conjunction with International Day for Cultural Discussion sessions, "cultural diversity as the core and Education: foundations of Sustainability, Cult
MoC Minister launches WEIBO account	China-KSA	19 May 2019			X	All	Strengthen international position of Kingdom	the first Arab Minister to join one of the most popu
MoC receives British delegation	MoC HQ (Al-Bujairi district, Riyadh, KSA)	18 April 2019			X	All	Cultural Cooperation between the two countries	purpose to exchange experiences in the cultural fi
"Cities Destroyed by Terrorism" Exhibition by Iraqi PM	Saudi National Museum, Riyadh	18 April 2019- 18 May 2019			X	Museums	Raising level of public awareness of the importance of preserving antiquities	Mdel Abdul Mahdi (Iraqi PM) opened exhibit in coo Parts in the presence of a group of officials, minist
MoU Signed with Iraqi Minister of Culture	Riyadh, KSA	17 April 2019			X	All	Enhance cooperation in culture and literary fields	participation in cultural festivals organized, superv authorities in both countries. CHILD CULTURE fie
Deputy Minister of Culture receives French Parliament Delegation	Al-Bujairi District, Riyadh, KSA	15 April 2019			X	ALL	Enhance cultural dialogue between peoples and Kingdom's international position on the cultural level	French delegation comprised of a group of intelle distinguished names in cultural, economic, and po
MoC receives Lebanese Minister of Culture	Riyadh, KSA	28 March 2019			X	internal entity initiative	Enhance cultural cooperation with other countries	Prospects for cultural cooperation were discussed
MoC receives Pakistani Minister of Information	Riyadh, KSA	28 March, 2019			X	internal entity initiative	Enhance cultural cooperation with other countries	Prospects for cultural cooperation discussed
Year of Arabic Script / Calligraphy 2020	KSA (all)	2020 year	X	X		Language	Highlight key elements of Arab culture	MoC will provide partial or full financial sponsora support to the qualified participations. Registration Government Entities, and Private sector and non-
Hayat al-Ashi Event	Manifouha nbrhd. (Riyadh, KSA)	1 March 2020	X	X		Heritage	Preserve and document heritage	
Writer's Retreat	Unaizah, KSA	Late Now/Early Dec (7 days)	X	X		Literature		Theme: Short Stories;10 Saudi/Arab writers
NoMow Cultural Development Fund	KSA All		X	X		All		
Al-Muflih village received from Asir region	Emirate of Asir, KSA	3 May 2019	X	X		Heritage	Development of cultural sites and cultural activities	one of the most prominent tourist attractions in the of the largest theatres in the Kingdom w/ 3500 see of the village as an important national cultural valu
MoU signed w/ Tourism Authority to: transfer of Heritage sector	MoC HQ (Riyadh, KSA)	24 April 2019	X	X		National Heritage	transfer comes in conjunction with General Authority for Tourism and National Heritage's comprehensive development of the tourism sector	heritage is a sector affiliated to ministries of Cultu
Celebration of Kuwait National Day	Riyadh, Jeddah, Sharquia (KSA)	25-26 February 2020			X	Festivals and Events		
Formation of the National Music Ensemble	Riyadh, KSA	March 8-31 2020 (auditions)	X		X	Music	Support and empower Saudi talents; Rooting Saudi musical heritage and bringing it to the world	Must know how to play main eastern musical instr musician: Dr. Abd Al-Rab Idris
Arabic Calligraphy Murals	al-Fouta, Riyadh		X				Activate the year of Arabic calligraphy; enhance its presence in society through various activities and qualitative initiatives that contribute to highlighting the Arabic calligraphy as well as support	Al-Fouta park: the second leg of calligraphy mural
Dr. Abdul Rahman al-Asem named CEO of the Library Authority			X			Library		
Jihad al-Khalidi CEO of Music Commission			X			Music	Seeks to regulate and develop the music sector; support the protection of international property rights; organizing training programs and adopting relevant professional programs	
Daw' Film Competition winners announced		20 February 2020	X			Film and Video		MoC providing electronic devices at 3 international can access short stories of 3 different durations: 1
MoC decorates public places with calligraphy murals	Khobar, Riyadh, Jeddah	Feb 21-29	X					
MoC meets with artists, intellectuals, and writers	Tarif neighborhood, Riyadh	18 February 2020	X					MoC views these individuals as the strategic partn
Sultan al-Bazei: named CEO of theatre and performing arts authority			X			Theatre and Performing Arts Authority		
Culinary Arts Authority headed by Mayada Badr		13 February 2020	X					
"Critics and Pioneers" Literary Evening	Riyadh, KSA	22 January 2020	X			Literature (books and Publishing/ Libraries)	Open a serious discussion on concept of criticism for growth and continued creativity	One of 4 literary evenings in January. Hosted by loal writers and critics.
Handicraft Workshop for Women	Shubra Palace in Taif, KSA	9 Jan-18 Jan 2020	X		X	Heritage	Develop and qualify Saudi female creatives in crafts and design industry	In collaboration with Multipurpose Women Cooper Italian Designer Maurizio Gallant; 34 participants develop craftsmanship in various regions- preced
National Museum Transferred to the MoC	Riyadh, KSA	7 January 2020	X				Enhancing the heritage of museum development?	Decision approved by cabinet, establishing board
Memorandum of Cooperation with Ministry of Education	MoC HQ (Riyadh, KSA)	1 January 2020	X			ALL	Promote educational programs and cultural activities in the education sector	
MoU with General Foundation for Technical and Vocational Training	MoC HQ(Riyadh, KSA)	1 January 2020	X				Create practical paths for cultural and arts in the area of technical and vocational training	
Industrial Heritage Documentation Competition	KSA (all)	14 July 2019, 6 October 2019	X			Heritage	Document Industrial Heritage	Aim of the Industrial Heritage Documentation Com important landmarks expressing heritage in all citi million ryials/ 800+ entries, Contributes to the esta database of all
National Cultural Award	KSA (all)	2020 (2nd quarter)	X			ALL		
The Popular Folklore Competition	KSA (all)	25 September-25 November, 2019 (2 month)	X			Heritage	Seeking to revive folklore and preserve it from extinction all members of society to participate; Aims to organize a comprehensive database of Saudi folklore within its project to	Part of national project to document intangible her folklore and its role in preserving the national men of KSA;
Joint Meeting with Minister of Education	Riyadh, KSA	7 November 2019	X			Institutional Initiative		
Daw' Film Competition	Worldwide (KSA citizens)	29 September- 29 December, 2019	X	X	X	Film and Video	support Saudi filmmakers including professionals and students specialized in the field, to present innovative Saudi cinematic content on local and international platforms.	The participant must be a Saudi national; Saudi s gain a preference during the evaluation process, a nonlocal stories. https://engage.moc.gov.sa/film
the Institute of Traditional Arts and Crafts	Royal Academy of Art, KSA	Fall 2020 (applications start)	X			Visual Arts	Preserve local identity through art education	Targeting 1000 students and trainees in long and
Janadriyah Festival (A national festival of culture and heritage"		1 November 2020	X	X	X	Festivals and Events		Council of Ministers decided to transfer the tasks r organization of the festival from the National Guar
National Register of Works of Art	KSA (all)	16 July 2019	X			Visual Arts (perhaps all)	Build bridges of understanding based on MoC 3 objectives	Pushing forward policies and plans that place art i Saudi society

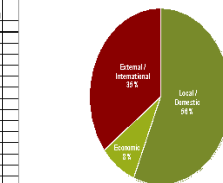
Memorandum of Understanding and Partnership w/ Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs	MoC HQ, Jeddah, KSA	8 July 2019	X			All	Integration and cooperation between the municipal and cultural sector. Preserves Saudi national identity by supporting the protection of sites, buildings, and monuments of heritage.	formation of specialized teams from both sides to objects in roads and public places. Strengthening procedures of municipal licensing for cultural activities archaeological and heritage
Workshop for Industrial Heritage w/ public and private sector	Al-Bujairi District, Riyadh, KSA	25 June 2019	X	X		Heritage	Establish a national database that includes a list of all sites, stakeholders, and entities supporting industrial heritage.	W/ participation of government agencies and relevant cooperation b/w ministry and public and private sector cultural significance and industrial heritage and su
Culture-related entities transferred to MoC	KSA (all)	20 May 2019	X			All	Extension of new structure for entire Saudi cultural sector (separating from Ministry of Info)	The Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts; Society; Photography Society; Saudi Cartoons and Society; Arab Calligraphy Society; Saudi Publishing
MoC Hosts Intellectuals at Iftar Table	Jeddah, KSA	19 May, 2019	X			ALL	Create an open continuous communicative window w/ employees of cultural sector	Emphasized female support and intellectual cooperation development of the country's culture. Importance of culture. "3rd in a series of meetings w/ intellectuals 2019
Saudi Society for Protection of Industrial Heritage Established	Al-Bujairi District, Riyadh, KSA	29, April 2019	X			Heritage	Document the most important local monuments	Industrial Cultural Heritage-- whether technological consists of buildings, machines, factories, mines,
Minister of Culture visits ITHRA	Dammam, Eastern Region, KSA	2 April 2019	X			Museums	Serve the cultural and artistic sector locally	ITHRA is an important cultural monument because programs that serve the cultural and artistic sector
Visit to the King Fahad National Library	Riyadh, KSA	27 March, 2019	X			Libraries	Developing libraries and turning them into beacons of culture and knowledge	"The library since its launch in 1990 plays a big role documenting Saudi culture"
After a while: Al-Kasbi and his Students (Saudi plastic arts exhibit)	Tuwaiq Palace, Riyadh, KSA	20 Feb-10 March 2020	X			Visual Arts		
International Short Story Day		13 February 2020			X	Books and Publishing		
Nomow Cultural Development Fund Draft open to public commentary		10 February 2020	X		X	ALL		
Dr. Mohammed Hassan Alwan named CEO of Literature, Publishing, and Translation		9 February 2020	X			Literature, Publishing, and Translation Authority		
Director of UNESCO (Azoulay, Audrey) visits al Tarif neighborhood		30 January 2020	X		X	Heritage		
"Sentimental Novel" literary evening discussion	Jeddah, KSA	29 January 2020	X			Literature (books and Publishing/ Libraries)		
"Doctors of Literature" Literary Evening	College of Medicine, King Saud University, Riyadh	29 January 2020	X			Literature		
National Theatre Initiative Inauguration	King Fahd Cultural Center, Riyadh	28 January 2020	X					
Jeddah Art 21.39 Initiative		Jan 28-April 18 2020	X			Visual Arts		Organized by Saudi Art Council w/ Support of MoC
Partnership with Andrea Bocelli Foundation	Paris, France	13 November 2019			X	Music	International Partnerships	Strategically aligned with UN 2030 Development Goals
Academies of Art-Music	Riyadh, KSA	Announced in August 2019	X		X	Music	Invest/Strengthen capacity building	Several workshops w/ Saudi and international officials Comprehensive study of the supply and demand in
MoC signs MoU with UNESCO	Paris, France	21 March, 2019	X		X	All	Develop partnership with UNESCO	cooperation revolved around the field of cultural heritage educational and training opportunities for KSA citizens
Isolation	Online	Mid-March-ongoing	X			The Literature, Publishing and Translation Authority	Discover literary talents that enrich the literary scene	Participants must be a Saudi citizen or a resident.
Theatrical Authorship Competition	Online	March 27-6 Jun2 2019	X		X	Theatre and Performing Arts Authority	Support winning texts to be produced and directed creatively and presented locally and internationally	https://engage.moc.gov.sa/theater
National Music Ensemble			X		X	Music Commission	Educate, train, and support female and male Saudi music talents	https://engage.moc.gov.sa/music
Riyadh International Book Fair Competition and Exhibition Awards	Riyadh, KSA	22 January- 1 April 2019	X		X	The Literature, Publishing and Translation Authority		Awards: Riyadh International Book Fair Award for Publisher
Industrial Heritage # Program	KSA (all)		X			Heritage	Enhance national identity through the industrial heritage; engage Saudi community through their discovery and documentation	Educating the community about the importance of winners will gain membership in the Saudi Society Heritage; Criteria: that the site has a cultural and historical

Appendix 2: Breakdown of Pie Chart of MoC Activities and Correlating Objectives

Note: Each row represents one initiative and the breakdown of its correlating objectives is mirrored from the comprehensive chart in Appendix 1.

Objectives/Issues				Initiative	Local/Domestic			Initiative	Economic			Initiative	External/International		
Local/Domestic	Economic	External/International	Initiative		Local/Domestic	Economic	External/International		Local/Domestic	Economic	External/International		Local/Domestic	Economic	External/International
1				1	0.5		0.5								
2				2	0.5		0.5								
3				3	0.5		0.5								
4				4	0.5	0.5	0.5								
5				5	0.5	0.5	0.5								
6				6	0.5	0.5	0.5								
7				7	0.5	0.5	0.5								
8				8	0.5	0.5	0.5								
9				9	0.5	0.5	0.5								
10				10	0.5	0.5	0.5								
11				11	0.5	0.5	0.5								
12				12	0.5	0.5	0.5								
13				13	0.5	0.5	0.5								
14				14	0.5	0.5	0.5								
15				15	0.5	0.5	0.5								
16				16	0.5	0.5	0.5								
17				17	0.5	0.5	0.5								
18				18	0.5	0.5	0.5								
19				19	0.5	0.5	0.5								
20				20	0.5	0.5	0.5								
21				21	0.5	0.5	0.5								
22				22	0.5	0.5	0.5								
23				23	0.5	0.5	0.5								
24				24	0.5	0.5	0.5								
25				25	0.5	0.5	0.5								
26				26	0.5	0.5	0.5								
27				27	0.5	0.5	0.5								
28				28	0.5	0.5	0.5								
29				29	0.5	0.5	0.5								
30				30	0.5	0.5	0.5								
31				31	0.5	0.5	0.5								
32				32	0.5	0.5	0.5								
33				33	0.5	0.5	0.5								
34				34	0.5	0.5	0.5								
35				35	0.5	0.5	0.5								
36				36	0.5	0.5	0.5								
37				37	0.5	0.5	0.5								
38				38	0.5	0.5	0.5								
39				39	0.5	0.5	0.5								
40				40	0.5	0.5	0.5								
41				41	0.5	0.5	0.5								
42				42	0.5	0.5	0.5								
43				43	0.5	0.5	0.5								
44				44	0.5	0.5	0.5								
45				45	0.5	0.5	0.5								
46				46	0.5	0.5	0.5								
47				47	0.5	0.5	0.5								
48				48	0.5	0.5	0.5								
49				49	0.5	0.5	0.5								
50				50	0.5	0.5	0.5								
51				51	0.5	0.5	0.5								
52				52	0.5	0.5	0.5								
53				53	0.5	0.5	0.5								
54				54	0.5	0.5	0.5								

A	B	C	D	E	H	I	J	K	L	M
60	1		68			1.0				
61	1		69			1.0				
62	1		70			1.0				
63	1	1	71			0.5		0.5		
64	1		72			1.0				
65	1		73			1.0				
66	1		74			1.0				
67	1		75			1.0				
68	1		76			1.0				
69	1		77			1.0				
70	1		78			1.0				
71	1	1	79			0.5	0.5	0.5		
72	1		80			1.0				
73	1	1	81			0.5	0.5	0.5		
74	1		82			1.0				
75	1		83			1.0				
76	1	1	84			0.5	0.5			
77	1		85			1.0				
78	1		86			1.0				
79	1		87			1.0				
80	1		88			1.0				
81	1		89			1.0				
82	1		90			1.0				
83	1	1	91			0.5		1.0		
84	1	1	92			0.5		0.5		
85	1		93			1.0				
86	1	1	94			0.5		0.5		
87	1		95			1.0				
88	1		96			1.0				
89	1		97			1.0				
90	1		98			1.0				
91	1	1	99			0.5		1.0		
92	1	1	100			0.5		0.5		
93	1	1	101			0.5		0.5		
94	1		102			1.0				
95	1	1	103			0.5		0.5		
96	1		104			1.0				
97	1	1	105			0.5		0.5		
98	1	1	106			0.5		0.5		
99	1	1	107			0.5		0.5		
100	1		108			1.0				
101			109			0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	
102			110			0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	
103			111			0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	
104			112			0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	
105			113			0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	
106			114			0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	
107			115			0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	
108			116			0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	
109			117			0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	
110			118			0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	
111			119			0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	
112			120			0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	
113			121			0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	
114			122			0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	
115			123			0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	
116			124			0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	
117			125			0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	
118			126			0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	
119			127			0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	
120			128			0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	



Limitations: Naturally, not every initiative is weighed the same and differ uniquely in its level of significance, investment, participation, scope, ect. Moreover, it is common for multiple objectives to intersect in a single cultural project and at varying levels of priority for the government. These multi-layered nuances are not accounted for in the above breakdown of the dataset and pie chart, in which each variable is weighed equally to its counterparts. In actuality, such an equal distribution is rare; however this limitation does not alter the research findings of this project, as the overall proportion between objectives differs significantly from one another in terms of state priority.

Appendix 3: Executive Summary of, *Our Culture, Our Identity* (MoC Manifesto published in March 2019)

Our Cultural Vision for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Our Culture, Our Identity
March 2019

Minister of Culture: HRH Prince Badr bin Abdullah bin Farhan al Saud

Objectives:

- I. Promoting culture as a way of life
- II. Enabling culture to contribute to economic growth
- III. Creating opportunities for global cultural exchange

Forward:

- I. Vision 2030 states that culture is indispensable to our quality of life
 - a. The Kingdom must increase both the quality and quantity
- II. Proud of rich cultural environment with extraordinary potential whose talent Transends Saudi borders to reach the world
- III. Saudi creatives= the Jewel of the cultural sphere
- IV. Ministry was established to oversee a cultural transformation that supports the growth and expansion of creativity
- V. Committed to delivering objectives and remove barriers, limit bureaucracy, and enable creativity to flourish.
- VI. We will showcase KSA's rich culture, heritage, and traditions to the world, and encourage cultural exchange by opening the Kingdom's doors to the world.
- VII. Embrace the very best of the Kingdom's ancient heritage and traditions and the latest in contemporary arts and culture
- VIII. We will encourage a wide range of people to participate in the cultural transformation and extends a warm invitation to all in the Kingdom to join in celebrating the nations proud and distinct heritage

Executive summary:

- I. Created by royal decree in 2018
- II. Established to be a new dedicated guardian for the Kingdom's cultural sector at home and abroad
- III. VISION: a flourishing of arts and culture across Saudi that enriches lives, celebrates national identity, and builds understanding between people.
- IV. MISSION: to support and enable a vibrant Saudi culture that is true to its past and looks to the future by cherishing heritage and unleashing new and inspiring forms of expression for all
- V. PRINCIPLES guiding the Ministry's work and its engagement with the wider cultural ecosystem:
 - a. Leading the sector
 - b. Reforming the regulatory environment,
 - c. Preserving Saudi heritage and tradition

d. Developing and nurturing talent

- VI. Intentions to establish new sector bodies to push sector specific agendas and the Ministry's approach to industry and international engagement

- I. Document was created by examining the existing cultural ecosystem in the Kingdom and engaging extensively with citizens, local and international partners, and subject matter experts
 - a. Including detailed research and the study of international best practice.
 - b. Conducted meetings with local practitioners and cultural agencies, local and international cultural experts, conducted polling's, analyzed social media and studied over 250 documents and publications
- II. UNESCO splits cultures into 7 domains, MoC's framework takes this into account and combines it with local Saudi understanding. **A Holistic Approach**

- III. MoC has identified 16 sectors:

- a. Museums
- b. Language
- c. Film and Video
- d. Music
- e. Poetry
- f. Visual Arts
- g. Heritage
- h. Libraries
- i. National Heritage
- j. Fashion Design
- k. Performing Arts
- l. Cultural Festivals and Events
- m. Books and Publishing
- n. Architecture and Interior Design
- o. Archaeology and Landscapes
- p. Food and Culinary Arts

Saudi Culture:

- I. The cultural sector is already well established
- II. 5 UNESCO World Heritage Sites:
 - a. Al-Ahsa Oasis
 - b. Old town Jeddah
 - c. Al Ula
 - d. Turaif District in Ad-Diriyah (where MoC is based)
 - i. Example of seamless infusion of past, present, and future
- III. Domestically, visual arts, music, and theater have flourished in recent years.

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