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The Hope Crusades: Culturalism and Reform in the Arab World

This article is an in depth analysis of three public relations (PR) campaigns in the Arab region that promote the slogans of "Hope," "Life," and "Optimism." These PR campaigns are the most visible manifestations of a broader set of social and economic reform programs that have been launched throughout the Arab world during the post-9/11 era. The article argues that all these PR campaigns and the broader reform projects to which they are linked are shaped by a hegemonic culturalist way of thinking about the Arab world, not only in the West but among transnational Arab elites as well. Culturalism is an ideology that sees the world's population as being divided into discrete and homogeneous "cultures," which are determinative of individual thought and action, as well as broader social, economic, and political structures and processes. In these PR campaigns and in key policy reform documents such as the Arab Human Development Report and the Alexandria Charter, the problems of the Arab world are construed primarily as matters of culture. The Arab world and the West are constructed in terms of a stereotyped and Orientalist opposition, and solutions to contemporary problems in the region are presented as involving a key set of cultural reforms. Not coincidentally, these cultural reforms both facilitate and legitimate a simultaneous set of neoliberal economic, political, and legal reforms. [Middle East; public relations (PR) campaigns; national branding; neoliberalism; culturalism, and orientalism.]

Introduction

In the past few years, the Arab world has seen a proliferation of public relations (PR) campaigns that promote the slogans of "Hope," "Life," and "Optimism." In Jordan in 2005, Queen Rania launched a high profile "Culture of Hope" campaign that included youth projects, public events, and policy speeches. In Lebanon in 2006, billboards, television commercials, T-shirts, and handbags were mass produced across the country with the slogan "I Love Life." In Egypt in 2008, conferences, newspapers, and television programs promoted a new pan-Arab "Culture of Optimism" campaign. These PR campaigns are the most visible manifestations of a broader set of reform programs that have been launched throughout the Arab world after 9/11. Though important in their own right as a new genre of public relations campaigning not previously known in the Arab world, they also serve as a window to analyze critically some of the core ideological claims and assumptions that shape and guide the more substantial cultural, educational, and economic reforms now being imposed

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in the region under the banner of integrating the Arab world into the global economy. These reform programs as a whole are what this article refers to as the Hope Crusades.

This article uses a discussion of the Hope Crusades to highlight the dominance of culturalism in contemporary reform projects in the Arab world. It argues that these PR campaigns and reform projects are shaped by — and only make sense within — what has become a hegemonic way of thinking about the Arab world not only in the West but also among transnational Arab elites. In PR campaigns and policy reform documents such as the *Arab Human Development Report* (2002; hereafter AHDR) and the *Alexandria Charter* (Charter 2004), the problems of the Arab world are construed primarily as matters of culture, meaning that the Arab world and the West are constructed in terms of a stereotyped and Orientalist opposition and that solutions to problems are presented as involving cultural reforms. Conveniently, these cultural reforms facilitate and legitimate a simultaneous set of neoliberal economic, political and legal reforms and serve as marketing devices to solicit popular participation in the neoliberal restructuring of the Arab world. In the simplistic terms of these campaigns, reform is not about promoting a particular form of development (that is, neoliberalism), but moving the Arab world from death to life, pessimism to optimism, and despair to hope.

In analyzing these cases, I draw on the literature of public relations campaigns as development tools, the importance of NGOs in global governmentality, and the anthropological literature on globalization and culturalism. The analysis of the Culture of Hope campaign in Jordan is based on fieldwork data collected in 2006–2007, during which time I attended conferences and workshops conducted by NGOs; participated in classes offered to Jordanian youth; and conducted interviews with NGO and private and public sector leaders. The research for the I Love Life campaign was conducted in Beirut in 2007 and was based on participant observation in conferences and workshops. The Culture of Optimism data collection was based on my participation in and interviews with attendees at the conference in Cairo in November 13–16, 2007, where the campaign was launched, and is supported by analysis of media coverage of the campaign. All of this data was thus collected before the Arab Spring that began in December 2010, events that are described in the Conclusion. In that section, I discuss how these Hope Crusades and the neoliberal reform agenda to which they are linked are likely to be of continuing concern in the post-Arab Spring period.

The Hope Crusades I: The PR Campaigns of Life, Hope, and Optimism

“How do we foster a Culture of Optimism in the Arab World as a way for development?” This was the topic of a special show on Al Arabiya TV, aired from the annual meeting of the Arab Thought Foundation, held in Cairo in 2008 (fieldnotes, November 13–16, 2008).The program started with a montage from Jordan, showing people frowning (in ways that could be interpreted as reflective) while being asked the question, “Why are Jordanians pessimistic?” Another set of interviews from Egypt argued that Egyptians are not “anymore known for their jokes” implying that Egyptians lost their sense of humor. This was followed by interviews with “experts” who

were asked about the causes of the culture of pessimism in the Arab world. Without even challenging the question itself or the meaning of "culture of pessimism," the experts — a philosopher, a social scientist, a university president, and a religious figure — gave their opinions, which ranged from the idea that the Arab world is living in the past, to invoking the "religious mind," to decrying the spread of fundamentalism. In order to spread a "culture of optimism" in Arab societies, the experts focused on the importance of participation, dialogue, and trust, as well as involving Arab women because of their role in promoting a culture of optimism, as the experts believe for unknown reasons. The experts complained that the media focused too heavily on wars and negativity, not on the achievements and positive experiences of Arab societies. Only once was there even a mention of the growing problem of unemployment, and only in response to a young Egyptian who related his pessimism to his worries of not being able to find a job after he graduates (field notes, November 14, 2008).

The television show followed a speech by Prince Khaled el Faisal, in which he explained the need to overcome the culture of pessimism, as it is a barrier to development:

> We have to revive the "Culture of Hope" and hard work that knows no barriers to reach the aims of our societies, instead of the culture of pessimism, because nations cannot be built except through hard work. The spread of the culture of pessimism among Arab people leads to despair and hopelessness that hinders them from achieving anything in life. If we don't try to overcome this culture of despair and spread a "Culture of Hope," public life will die, and people will stop achieving, and this is how a nation is destroyed. (arabthough.org 2009)

The Culture of Optimism campaign, though pan-Arab in scope, was designed and promoted in Egypt during a conference to launch the *Development of Culture in the Arab World Report (2009)* by the Arab Thought Foundation of Prince Faisal of Saudi Arabia. The campaign was widely covered by media: as a series of articles (500 in three months), which soon raised debates in different media venues: on television; in newspapers; and in magazines. Most of these media sources took it for granted that Arab culture is pessimistic, and simply offered different views on the reasons for this state of affairs.

Optimism was defined in one of the articles as "a psychological feeling that drives people to look positively, and expect positive change when passing through hard times" and the culture of optimism was defined as "having this positive attitude among a large cohort of people in the Arab world" (Al Abbassi 2010). Another commentator explained that if Arabs learned how to be optimistic, "they can achieve the impossible" (Almotamar.net 2010). while someone else suggested that it is the "education system in the Arab world that failed in spreading the culture of optimism; schools teach pessimism not optimism in the Arab world" (Almotamar.net 2010). The solution is then "to focus on positive developments in the Arab world such as growing investments and the rise in the number of Arab people discussing stock markets and development" (Alhandasa.net 2009).

Along with using the media, the campaign included workshops tailored to youth. In Yemen, for example, the Arab Thought Foundation, in cooperation with Yemen First, organized a two-day workshop for youth under the title "With Optimism We Can Make the Future" (Shabwatoday.net 2010).

The Culture of Optimism campaign is the latest of three PR campaigns that have appeared in the Arab world over the last few years. Though each campaign differs in scale, duration, political context, and programmatic agenda, all of them share the same rhetorical and conceptual frame; and two of them were designed by the same U.S.-based public relations company, Saatchi and Saatchi.[1]The first of these campaigns was the Culture of Hope, launched by Queen Rania of Jordan in her first speech after the terrorist attacks in Amman in 2005, and it was geared to tackle what the queen referred to as the "Hope Gap" in the Arab world. Queen Rania's Culture of Hope terminology was proposed initially by Saatchi and Saatchi, which had previously been involved in several campaigns in Jordan, including the "Jordan First" campaign, launched immediately before the 2003 war on Iraq, and paid for by USAID.

Even though the Culture of Hope terminology had been used previously by USAID, Save the Children USA, and U.S. officials in Jordan, immediately after Queen Rania's speech, these staff and officials started to refer to the concept as one coined by the queen. For example, Save the Children USA president and CEO Charles MacCormack claimed, in launching the Najah Program for youth in Jordan, that the program was "designed to help create the 'Culture of Hope' that Queen Rania is working so hard to realize" (Soukarieh 2009) Likewise, when Colin Powell launched the U.S. Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), he stated that, "We must work with peoples and governments to close the gulf between expectation and reality that Queen Rania of Jordan has so eloquently termed the 'hope gap'" (queenrani.jo 2002).

In her speech, Queen Rania pointed to the "gap of hope" between the Western and Arab worlds and the need to bridge this gap in order to reject the culture of despair she held to be responsible for terrorism in the Arab world. The Hope Gap, according to Queen Rania, is "the gulf between those who grow up nourished by the promise of peace with justice, equal opportunity, and tolerance for others, and those who do grow up without this advantage. Children growing up with this 'gulf' are likely to be more vulnerable to the despair and violence that perpetuates age-old conflicts and limits their sense of what is possible" (queenrania.jo 2002).

Like the Culture of Optimism campaign, the Culture of Hope campaign manifested itself in projects tailored to Jordanian youth, and were funded in part by USAID, Save the Children USA, and Jordanian and Arab business elites. Fadi Ghandour, the CEO of Aramex and director of the Arab Business Council, for example, started a program in Jabal al Nadhif — a poor neighborhood in Amman — immediately after the 2005 Amman bombings. Grieving from the death of a friend in the attacks, Ghandour decided to act because "otherwise terrorism will hit us all, and there is a need to spread a 'Culture of Hope' among those youth who are left for the fundamentalist groups" (personal interview, April 22, 2007).

Close cooperation between USAID and local Arab elites again manifested itself in 2007 in the "I Love Life" campaign in Lebanon, a political campaign that was

launched immediately after the 2006 Israeli War on Lebanon. Lebanon was sharply divided after the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri between two camps: March 14th (the pro-American camp) and March 8th (the anti-American foreign policy camp led by Hezbollah) (Drennan 2007). The I Love Life campaign was designed by Saatchi and Saatchi and paid for by Lebanese private sector leaders who were allied with Hariri and March 14th. It featured billboards, stickers, T-shirts, posters, and television ads with the message I Love Life in three languages (Arabic, English, and French). It also organized music concerts, the most prominent of which was on New Year's Eve 2006, when some 15,000 people gathered in downtown Beirut. The campaign's mission as stated in its website was:

> [T]o challenge citizens across the country to take hold of their future.... We understand the Culture of Life, as opposed to the Culture of Death, as a deep, well-developed sense capable of discerning true values and interpreting authentic needs in our communities and society. We want to take a stand of empowerment and embrace the change towards a new life, towards a fresh perspective that would entail new social and economic norms. [Lebanon-ilovelife 2007]

As Elie Khoury, director of Saatchi and Saatchi put it: "We want to tell the world that, regardless of whatever they see on their TV screens, the Lebanese want to live and move ahead" (Blanford 2007). Though the I Love Life campaign was initially intended to continue for several years, a change in U.S. policies in Lebanon has led to the quiet "death" of the campaign, although the campaign's rhetoric is still alive (Drennan 2007).

The Ideological Frame of the Hope Crusades: Culturalism and Neoliberalism

The Culture of Optimism, Culture of Hope, and I Love Life campaigns are part of the spread of nation branding and political PR campaigns that have become a global phenomenon since the end of the Cold War (Sussman 2010). They are closely related to the color-coded revolutions in the former Soviet republics and elsewhere, many of which were sponsored and marketed by the same global alliance of U.S. state agencies, international aid organizations, and global PR companies. Indeed, the I Love Life campaign in Lebanon is a direct successor to the country's 2005 "Cedar Revolution." These campaigns constitute the global extension and export of domestic American political tactics and strategies, through which the democratic political process is micro-managed by professional marketing elites, and is then transformed into a comodified, consumerist spectacle (Dzenovska 2005; Sussman 2010; Sussman and Krader 2008).

The recent campaigns of Hope, Optimism, and Life are also some of the most explicit — and indeed, blatant — examples of a culturalist frame of analysis that has become hegemonic in shaping interpretations of the Arab world, not just among Western commentators but many Arab elites as well. According to this analysis, there is something fundamentally wrong with "Arab culture," a fatal flaw that is holding the region back. Arab culture, therefore, has to be "fixed" if the region is to move forward and join the global community of advanced and developed nations.

In culturalist ideology, two key assumptions are made, each of which is problematic. First, culture is homogenized and essentialized. Cultures are posited as having core essences that constitute autonomous and homogenous wholes that can be linked closely with clearly defined and differentiated areas of the world. The notion of cultures as "bounded" (Appadurai 1998; Gupta and Ferguson 2002), demarcated," (Gupta 1992), and "incarcerated" (Gupta and Ferguson 2002) in space rely on old notions of colonial representations of space as "dependent on images of break, rupture and disjuncture" (Appadurai 1998; Ferguson 2002; Gupta 1992; Gupta and Ferguson 2002). Gupta and Ferguson write of the working of imaginary geographic presuppositions that human diversity has to be represented in terms of discrete ethnic units that normally occupy equally discrete territories — an imagination based in the cultural presuppositions underlying nation states (Gupta and Ferguson 1997; see also Stolcke 1995). Second, culture is held to be foundational for understanding society, politics, and the economy. People are conceived of as the creations of their culture rather than culture being seen as the creation of people (Huntingdon 1993; Said 2001; Sen 2002). As Mahmoud Mamdani observes, culturalist discourse in the post-Cold War era "assumes that every culture has a tangible essence that defines it, and it then explains politics as a consequence of that essence" (Mamdani 2004)

The modern roots of culturalist ideology can be traced back to the era of European colonialism, when a theory of cultural difference between the colonizers and colonized and a cultural "lack" among the colonized was mobilized to legitimate colonial rule. According to Mamdani (2004), anticolonial political resistance was often reframed by colonialist ideologues as a matter of traditional cultural resistance against modernity. Culturalist ideology — or what Mamdani calls "culture talk" — served colonialism in two ways. First, it dehistoricized the construction of political identity and obliterated a view of politics and culture as contemporary conditions, relations, and conflicts that were set by the colonial encounter. Second, individuals were seen in authentic and original terms, as if their identities were constructed entirely by their unchanging culture into which they were born. Mamdani (2003) argues that if people are seen as a creation of their culture, petrified into lifeless custom, interventions by colonial powers can be framed as being urgently needed.

As Gupta and Ferguson point out, the presumption that social and cultural spaces are "autonomous have enabled the power of topography to successfully conceal the topography of power" (2002:35). Hence, the reliance of these campaigns on a notion of the world being divided into discontinuous cultural spaces not only helps the process of "otherness" but also helps make invisible the entanglements of the local and global. If hopelessness, death, and pessimism are informed by cultural logic, it is because of the notion of culture as confined and delineated to a specific locale, and not informed by socioeconomic policies and structural injustices practiced at a global level (Inda and Rosaldo 2002).

Today, some have linked the renewed attention to culturalist discourse about the Arab world to a new era of colonialism in the region (Gregory 2004, n.d.). But more generally, culturalist ideology has been harnessed to a local and global elite project of neoliberal social, political, and economic restructuring of the region. Culturalist

discourse obscures and distracts attention from the global and structural social, political, and economic inequalities and injustices that shape social problems and generate conflict across the contemporary Arab world (Dirlik 1985, 1997; Jameson 1991; Laroui 1976). It also depoliticizes and dehistoricizes analyses of and response to neoliberal reform projects by framing these projects in Universalist terms as the only possible social future that anyone who loves life, embraces hope, or promotes optimism could possibly desire.

Life, Hope, and Optimism on the Ground: Promoting Neoliberal Development

The Culture of Hope, Culture of Optimism, and I Love Life campaigns in Jordan, Egypt, and Lebanon, respectively, were not just public relations campaigns. They were each linked to a concrete set of education and training programs that focused, in particular, on youth and young adults. Though the scope, aims, duration, and social and political contexts of these campaigns differed in each country, all of these campaigns linked their abstract, generic talk about life, hope, and optimism to a common agenda of promoting neoliberal forms of development. The sweeping opposition between life and death is materialized as a conflict between those promoting the economic liberalization and those opposing them.

In Jordan, the Culture of Hope campaign came at a time of instability for the monarchy. In part, this instability was political, caused by popular dissatisfaction with the Jordanian state role in support of American foreign policy and especially with the war in Iraq, and by the lack of support for the new regime of King Abdullah, who unexpectedly ascended to the throne after the death of his father in 1999. In part, this instability was economic. Though economic liberalization began in Jordan in 1989, the process was accelerated by King Abdullah, who privatized all of the major government enterprises. In 2000, he signed a free trade agreement with the United States and European Union, and created the ASEZA (Aqaba Special Economic Zone Agency) that co-opted the land of the Aqaba people by erecting huge tourist resorts on the sites of their former homes (Saif 2005). These policies resulted in mass unemployment in a country that was considered a rentier state and exacerbated class divisions between the new elites (who benefitted from privatization) and the mass of the Jordanian population (who were losing their jobs in the public sector without being integrated into the private sector) (Saif 2005).

The Culture of Hope campaign provided a rousing, albeit anodyne, set of slogans that aimed to smooth over growing social divisions within the country by distracting public attention away from the Jordanian state policy that created the domestic suffering and unrest. More directly, the Culture of Hope, spoken of by Queen Rania and others, was made manifest through promoting a neoliberal culture of enterprise and free market idolatry. The specific programs that were linked to the Culture of Hope — namely the USAID-funded Injaz, the Save the Children's Najah, and the private sector-funded Arab Foundation for Sustainable Development (AFSD) — were all geared to train young Jordanians to be committed and disciplined neoliberal subjects by offering courses on financial literacy, free market economics, entrepreneurship, leadership, life skills, and work ethics.

Funded by USAID, Injaz operates under the patronage of Queen Rania and partners with the King Abdullah Fund for Human Development, which gives it access to youth from all over Jordan and provides it with resources and classroom facilities. Injaz also partners with the Jordanian Ministries of Education and Higher Education, which allow Injaz volunteers to provide classes, all of which promote neoliberal ideology throughout the country's schools and universities (Injaz.org 2010). Along with its close ties with the Jordanian state, Injaz is at the center of a dense network that ties together local NGOs, the Jordanian state, and international organizations that are all led by the United States. Injaz is an affiliate of Junior Achievement Worldwide (JA), an American nonprofit organization that has worked closely with the U.S. State Department in its mission to spread free market ideology around the world (in Latin America in the 1980s, in Eastern Europe in the 1980s, and now in the Middle East). This link is buried on the Injaz website and in its publications, which instead promote the group as a local NGO. Injaz adopts most of its curricula from JA and translates these materials into Arabic, tailoring and adapting them to meet the needs of the Jordanian market. The main private sector partners of Injaz are American corporations such as Microsoft, Burger King, Citigroup (and its Citibank), Safeway, McDonalds, and American Express (Injaz.org.jo 2010).

The sponsors of these programs focus on tackling the cultural deficits and pathologies they argue are responsible for creating social and economic problems in Jordan. A major "cultural impediment to economic development," claims the director of Save the Children USA in Jordan, for example, is "the lack of a work ethic among Arabs" (personal interview April 21, 2007). Likewise, Fadi Ghandour, the sponsor of AFSD, speaks out against the "old tradition in which the public sector was the main employer, and hence people did not feel the urge to work in order to excel and be more productive" (Personal Interview March 23, 2007). The curricula of Injaz, Najah, and the AFSD teach students that finding a job is contingent on the acquisition of skills and work ethic. Students are expected to be inspired by the stylized and clichéd success stories of Western corporate leaders and celebrities (e.g., Bill Gates, Oprah Winfrey, etc.), regardless of the vast differences of social, political, and economic contexts that shape their own opportunities. These programs are now part of the Jordanian public school curriculum and are advertised in Jordanian civic education and social science school textbooks.

In Lebanon, the context of the I Love Life Campaign was slightly different to that of Jordan. At the time the campaign was launched, Lebanon was sharply divided socially and politically, and the campaign was directly allied with the March 14th movement. Although the I Love Life campaign was generic in its rhetoric and gave the impression of political neutrality, it was actually directed toward resistance to Israel, allying itself with the United States, France, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, and seeing itself as part of the U.S. and E.U. political agenda in the Middle East. The March 14th camp presented itself as fighting a Syrian and Iranian axis that was based on a culture of martyrdom or a culture of death, while the government represented Western values in Lebanon, such as "freedom," "sovereignty," and "independence." Prime Minister Fouad Siniora claimed that the March 14th forces embraced the:

> Culture of life, which can defend Lebanon and its Arabism, rather than the culture of death meant to destroy Lebanon . . . . Our agenda is to build and construct, while others have a program to obstruct. Our policy is to negotiate; theirs is to deter." [Saidaonline 2009]

The campaign sent the message that the pro-American side is civilized and adheres to a culture of love, while those resisting the Americans are lovers of death.

Interpreting the campaign as directed against the resistance to Israel, the opposition led a counter-campaign, in which they scribbled under the I Love Life slogans on billboards around Lebanon "with dignity," "without taxes," "in multi-colour," "undictated" among others. On one sign, someone wrote, "I [Heart] Capitalism." The campaign as a whole they dubbed the "Gucci Revolution." "All Lebanese love life—with unity, with joy, in different colors—and love the independence of Lebanon," Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah said. "For us, as a party of the opposition, it's not that the March 14 Forces love life and we don't—we were shocked by this slogan when it first came out. We want to show them that we too love life and are against death" (iheartcapitalism 2007). The instability and divisions in Lebanon affected the durability of the I Love Life campaign and its affiliated programs. It also meant they were more contested than the Culture of Hope programs in Jordan. Still, there were close parallels and direct links between the two campaigns. Satchi and Satchi designed both campaigns and both campaigns were also sponsored by USAID. Moreover, Fadi Ghandour, the director of AFSD in Jordan, visited Lebanon after the 2006 war to launch a carbon copy its Jordanian program in the south of Lebanon (the area controlled by Hezbollah) at a time when there was a clear policy of USAID, in his words, to "break the social net of Hezbollah"(personal interview, April 22, 2007). Ghandour declared at the launch of the AFSD in Lebanon that "the aim of AFSD is to spread hope amongst youth so as to prevent them from being prone to fundamentalist recruitments. We need to teach the youth of the south the love of life" (personal interview, April 22, 2007) As in Jordan, AFSD-Lebanon works to foster a culture of entrepreneurship and microenterprise among the young. It partners with Injaz-Lebanon and sets itself the responsibility of teaching entrepreneurship and volunteerism as a way to "create jobs for the hopeless youth who . . . love death and embrace a culture of death that leads them to join fundamentalist extremist groups such as Hezbollah" (personal interview April 22, 2007).

The culture of entrepreneurship and its alleged absence in the Arab world was also the topic of a three-day conference that was organized as part of the pan-Arab "Culture of Optimism" campaign held in Beirut on December 8–9, 2010, in which I participated. Unlike the Culture of Hope and I Love Life campaigns, which are country based, the Culture of Optimism campaign is pan-Arab and not shaped to the same degree by national considerations. In this campaign, culturalism is direct and explicit, such that Arab society and culture as a whole is talked about in terms of a closed and delineated identity, regardless of class, gender, national, or historical differences. Arab society is represented as having no connection with larger global processes. During the conference, participants tried to answer the question: "Why is the Arab world not conducive to entrepreneurial ventures, and how can we foster a culture of

entrepreneurship in the Arab world as a way to develop?" To find answers, there were lectures by experts from the United States and United Kingdom, as well as by Arab entrepreneurs. Among Arabs who shared their entrepreneurial experiences was Prince Faisal, who told his success stories about how he became a businessman to the young audience. The prince focused on the culture of volunteerism that is allegedly absent in Arab culture and its importance for development. "When I became a prince over Dammam, the region had no roads, no sewage system nor any schools or hospitals. If you go visit Dammam now it is very developed. It was only the efforts of one person; I invite you all to come and visit" (fieldnotes, December 9, 2010).

The conference ended with the distribution of awards to ten young people to start their own businesses, after they had presented their business plans to a business committee.

Hence, the three campaigns, hope, optimism, and love of life are achieved through embracing a culture of entrepreneurship and a culture of volunteerism. Here again hope seems to be premised on development, which itself is premised on a liberalized economy. The failure of neoliberal policies — privatization and structural adjustment, as well as the political alliance with the United States — is masked by the invocation of cultural arrangements. In blaming culture for political and economic problems, culturalism is invoked as paving the way for the neoliberal civilizing mission (Elyachar 2005).

The Hope Crusades II: Social, Political, and Economic Reform

If the culturalist framework discussed so far shaped only the recent PR campaigns in Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon, it would not be of great significance or social impact in the contemporary Arab world. However, the same culturalist ideology shapes and guides a much broader set of social, political, and economic reform programs to which these campaigns are directly linked. The Hope Crusades are also constituted by and advanced through a series of policy reports in 2004 on the Arab World, namely the *Arab Human Development Report* (AHDR), published by the United Nations Development Programme; the *Greater Middle East Plan* (GMEP), published by the U.S. State Department immediately after the commencement of the 2003 war in Iraq; and the *Alexandria Charter*, published by the Arab Business Council in cooperation with NGOs operating in the Arab world. A set of concrete programs and reform projects have been set in motion by these reports. Like the PR campaigns, these policy reports and reform projects link culturalist analysis of the problems of the Arab world to a prescribed diet of neoliberal economic, social, and political restructuring.

The first AHDR was published in 2002 by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and subsequent versions were published in 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2009. Upon its initial publication, the AHDR was widely celebrated in the West and among liberal elites in the Arab world. The report received widespread newspaper coverage, and more than a million copies were downloaded from the Internet. According to *Time* magazine, it was the most important publication of the year (AHDR 2003:3).

Like the Hope Crusades, the AHDR embraces a culturalist frame of analysis for interpreting contemporary conditions in the Arab world. First, it proposes that the Arab world can be sensibly discussed as having a single coherent and core cultural identity or pattern, thus skirting the issues of enormous internal diversity and differences and extensive historical transformations. The report talks loosely of a set of core and unchanging "traditional" values and practices that are said to be at odds with the practices of modernity and the pressures and forces of a globalizing world, which ignores the extent to which "traditions" are themselves constantly re-imagined and reinvented, as a part of and response to the modern, globalized world (Lavergne 2004). Second, culture is claimed to be foundational for social, political, and economic development:

> Culture and values are the soul of development. They provide its impetus, facilitate the means needed to further it, and substantially define people's vision of its purposes and ends. Traditional Arab culture and values can be at odds with those of the globalizing world . . . . The values of democracy also have a part to play in this process of resolving differences between cultural traditionalism and global modernity. [AHDR 2002:27]

Third, the AHDR focuses on sets of institutional and cultural deficits that are said to separate the Arab world from every other country and that these deficits form the center of its social, economic, and political backwardness. These are deficits are supposedly in knowledge, freedom/democracy, and women's empowerment. As is typical of culturalist analyses, this framing leaves out the complex history of colonialism and neocolonialism, military occupation, regional conflict, and foreign interventions. Further, the sweeping invocation of gaps, lacks, and deficits between Arab and Western worlds both perpetuates ungrounded Orientalist stereotypes of the region and misrepresents the degree to which concerns of women's empowerment, freedom, and knowledge deficits remain as pressing in the West as they do in Arab countries (Abu-Lughod 2009).

When it comes to suggested reforms, the AHDR promotes a neoliberalization of the economy to secure good governance and growth:

> [T]he state's role [in the Arab region] in promoting, complementing and regulating markets for goods, services and factors of production has been both constrained and constraining . . . . Uncorrected market failures result in inefficient outcomes. Both growth and equity considerations make promoting dynamic private-sector development a critical priority of economic governance in Arab countries. [AHDR 2002:123]

Hence, if culturalist ideology lays the groundwork for the neoliberal reforms proposed by the AHDR, it also shapes and guides a set of educational and cultural reforms promoted under the banner of hope, optimism, and enterprise that are geared toward advancing a culture and society fully compatible with political and economic neoliberalism. Once impediments to development are expressed in terms of culture and attitude, such as resistance to change, hopelessness, despair, and the lack of a work

ethic, solutions that are based on identifying social injustice and economic inequality as the true significant determinants of the problems can be ignored or forgotten.

One consequence of the AHDR is that Western commentators have been given greater license to blame contemporary problems in Arab countries on Arabs themselves, while Western leaders have found a way to legitimize their reform programs for the region. Arabs, according to *The Economist* (2002), are "self doomed to failure." "Cultural values . . . are [the] chief obstacle to Arab progress," claims the Hoover Institute's William Ratliff, invoking the AHDR as the grounds for his argument:

> Culture matters. Some dismiss these criticisms as cultural condescension or even bigotry. But look again at the 2002 Arab Human Development Report . . . . "Culture and values" are the "soul" and "wellspring" of development and went on to warn that "traditional culture and values, including traditional Arab culture and values, can be at odds with those of the globalizing world." [Ratliff 2011]

Colin Powell, in his speech to launch the U.S. State Department's Middle East Partnership Initiative program, quoted from the report saying, "[T]hese are not my words. They have come from the Arab experts who have looked deeply into these issues" (Yacoubian 2005).

The Greater Middle East Plan (GMEP), which is the U.S. government's (initially secret) policy platform for reshaping the Arab world in accordance with its own foreign policy goals, is likewise based closely on the claims of the AHDR and, indeed, begins by directly referencing this report:

> The three "deficits" identified by the Arab authors of the 2002 and 2003 (AHDR) have contributed to conditions that threaten the national interests of all G8 members. So long as the region's pool of politically and economically disenfranchised individuals grows, we will witness an increase in extremism, terrorism, international crime, and illegal migration. [Alhayat 2004]

Nor is it just Western elites who have opportunistically embraced the culturalist framework of the AHDR. The Arab Business Council's *Alexandria Charter* (AC) likewise defines the problems of the Arab world, first and foremost, in terms of attitudes and values. Development, thus, must be focused on changing these attitudes and values through youth and women's empowerment, training in SMEs- Small and Medium enterprises-, and so on. The AC focuses, in particular, on key "problems" in Arab values. First, it calls for "a review of the values that continue to negatively affect Arab life such as submissiveness and obedience and substituting them with values of independence, dialogue and positive interaction" (AC:12). It calls for giving the media a role in "rebuilding the values that support modernity and development such as tolerance, accepting the other and even the value of difference . . . precision, commitment to perfection and other positive values that help transform Arab Society into a new and functional society" (12). Moreover, the AC warns about the widespread "resistance to change"—invoked anywhere that local populations decline to do what current elites wish them to do. Old-fashioned employees who are used to working in

the public sector and wish to keep their public sector jobs are "resistant to change" (AC:3). Employers and workers who favor local, indigenous, and traditional ways of working and producing goods and services, as opposed to embracing the ways of the West, are likewise "resistant to change."

Despite a difference in style between the documents, what is proposed are reforms with virtually identical demands. (The style differences are borne out of the groups promoting the reforms: the GMEP was tailored to the G8 and, hence, is concerned with assistance; the *Alexandria Charter* was written by Arab business elites and civil society representatives, so it takes the style of demands.) The first of the reforms is political reform, and in both documents it calls for free and fair elections, named the free election initiative under the GMEP. The second reform is legal reform. The call to "promote legal and judicial reform" in the GMEP (Alhayat 2004) is transformed into a demand by the AC to review "the judicial and legislative branches" (AC:4). The third reform is for civil society. The GMEP calls to "allow[ing] civil society organizations, including human rights, media and NGOs to operate freely without harassment . . . . guarantee civil society freedom in funding and mobility" (Alhayat 2004) while the business elites demand allowing the establishment of civil society institutions by amending restricting laws on founding societies, syndicates and volunteer unions, regardless of the nature of their activities whether political, social, cultural or economic, to guarantee its freedom in funding and mobility (AC:6)

The fourth reform suggested in the GMEP under "Building a Knowledge Society" is almost the same in the AC but is articulated under the banner of "Social and Cultural Reform." Both include literacy eradication, education reform, the involvement of business and civil society in the reform project, translation of books from English to Arabic, and promotion of business education. Both call for the establishment of a corps for teachers' training and emphasize the need to focus on women's education. Besides being more elaborate, the AC promotes the:

> [E]radication of any form of religious extremism in school curriculum, mosques, and the media [and] encourag[es] the continuous revision of religious discourse to reveal the civilized, enlightened aspects of religion allowing interpretation of religious matters to benefit individual and society and facing all forms of rigidity, extremism and liberalism in comprehending religious texts. [AC:14]

This is compatible with the U.S. government's call for the promotion of moderate Islam. The proposed economic reforms followed what Traboulsi (n.d.) has called "any good neoliberal's wish list": entrepreneurship, microcredit, privatization, free trade, structural adjustment, limited state regulation, and a culture of individual responsibilization that puts individuals— not the government—at the heart of development.

The GMEP and AC aim to reshape the political realm so as to lock the region into a commitment to the neoliberal path of development through the extension of market values in social life. They each call for the establishment of different financial institutions, such as:

- a "for-profit microfinance institution, with a budget of 400–500 million dollars over the course of five years that will help 1.2 million entrepreneurs help themselves out of poverty" (Alhayat 2004);
- a "the Greater Middle East Finance Corporation to help incubate medium- and large-sized businesses, managed by a group of G8 private sector leaders committed to applying their expertise in business development to the GME region" (GMEP 2004);
- the "Greater Middle East Development Bank (GMED Bank) to help reforming countries finance basic development priorities" (Alhayat 2004);
- to create Free Trade zones[2] and media for countries to join the World Trade Organization and to enact the reforms that this would require (WTO.org 2008), though many Arab countries had already joined free zones: Bahrain in 1995; United Arab Emirates in 1998; and Jordan in 2000.

Moreover, both the GMEP and the AC call for additional political and legal reforms in order to redefine the political sphere through a series of precommitment mechanisms such as property rights, constitutions, and reduction of state involvement in the financial sector by "removing barriers to cross-border financial transactions; modernizing banking services; introducing, refining, and expanding market-oriented financial instruments; and building regulatory structures that encourage the liberalization of financial services" (Al Hayat 2004). In doing so, the GMEP and AC are trying to redefine the relation of the political and the economic. In addition, they are trying to define the terms through which political actions are possible in a neoliberal society, which are mainly through a co-opted civil society that the United States and the G8 will develop, finance, and empower, and by training parliamentarians and orchestrating elections. Across the region, new constitutions are being enacted and old ones amended, mainly to redefine the relation of the judicial branch to the executive branch, and to include intellectual property rights, corporate governance, and good governance. This process of liberalization—promoting a discourse of rights to promote the individual freedom and property—is referred to as democratization. As for justice, it is replaced by the rule of law: laws that are being amended and changed to supposedly provide solutions to economic problems.

The similarities between the GMEP and the AC are not coincidental, as an unclassified document released by Wikileaks shows: the Arab Business Council (ABC) was coordinating its activities with the G8 and the U.S. State Department. The leaked document states that there was a meeting on November 10, 2005, with Elizabeth Cheney, Das Scott Carpenter (from the Near East Affairs Bureau of the State Department), U.S. Ambassador to Bahrain Monroe, and Abdul Ghaffar (acting as representative of the ABC). During this meeting it was suggested that:

> the parties could adopt a similar approach for business as that for civil society . . . . [It was] reported that the Arab Business Council had been active on economic reform, and the Economic Research Forum had been supportive of the Alexandria meetings on reform . . . . The ABC is undertaking initiatives to address some of these, including the creation of country-specific National Competitiveness Councils and a G8-BMENA-

> broader Middle East and North Africa Region- Investment Task Force." [Wikileaks 2008]

Conclusion: On Hope as Resistance

There have been other cultures of hope in the Arab world. Mahmood Darwish, the Palestinian poet, represents one such alternative, an alternative that has been elided and ignored by the PR campaigns and their Western and Arab elite sponsors, but nevertheless still has mass social currency throughout the region. The contrast between the two different cultures of hope, each underwritten by different politics and social bases, is important to note. Under siege, when steadfastness is key for resistance, hope is essential, Darwish (2000) says. The hope he describes is of the resistance, not pacification, that can "sow and cultivate" while opposing occupation and injustice and while working toward liberation of their lands. Darwish calls it an "incurable hope" that he likens to a "disease" that afflicts those committed to a cause: "To resist: that means to ensure . . . that your ancient disease is still alive and well in you; a disease called hope" (Darwish 2007). Darwish articulates the love of life that could exist if there were a different tomorrow for Palestinians—one free of occupation, injustice, and humiliation. He suggests that this future has to be made by hope: hope that can create resistance and steadfastness; hope that accompanies struggle for justice; and hope that stems from struggle for change.

In a poem he wrote when Beirut was under siege in 1982, Darwish states, "We love life whenever we can afford it" (Darwish 1995[1982]). The Lebanese intellectual Fawwaz Traboulsi interprets Darwish's poem as a call for continuous rebelliousness to pursue "an incurable hope" of liberation when life will become possible (Traboulsi n.d.). This is quite a different vision of hope and love of life than the "harmony ideology" that the PR campaigns in Jordan, Egypt, and Lebanon promote (Nader 1990). In the poem Darwish wrote when Jenin was besieged and shelled, he labels the freedom fighters as lovers of life:

We will love life because we are till the last moment the children of life.

> A freedom fighter from the besieged Jenin refugee camp phoned a friend outside of Jenin and said: "Tell me a joke before I die." His friend asked, "How can you laugh when you are at the brink of death?" The fighter replied "Because "I Love Life" and I would like to bid farewell with laughter." [Darwish n.d.].

Beginning in December 2010, a different rhetoric of hope, life, optimism, and awakening spread across the Arab world with the rise of a new set of events that has been widely dubbed the "Arab Spring." These events—which led to the overthrow of dictatorships in Tunisia and Egypt, as well as popular challenges to similar regimes in Yemen, Syria, Bahrain, and Libya—almost immediately challenged and revealed the limitations of the culturalist representations of the Arab world by Western and Arab elites that had been prevalent during the preceding decades (Amin 2011). Suddenly, the "Arab region" was a model of popular democratic and nonviolent reform for the

rest of the world, rather than being a global backwater supposedly held back by its alleged cultural deficiencies. Furthermore, the Arab Spring highlighted the central importance not of culture but of political economy for the region: the uprisings were, at their heart, a collective response to the objective conditions of political and economic exclusion and marginalization that the Hope Crusades had tried to represent and legitimate in culturalist terms.

Despite the apparent hope cultivated by the events of the Arab Spring, it is, however, still too early to know what their long-term significance will be. Though the popular uprisings across the region have clearly and explicitly been linked to one another, the ways in which they are now unfolding differs considerably according to local and national contexts. Western and Arab elites have moved quickly to try to shape these events according to their own interests, launching what Amin (2011) and others have called a counter-revolutionary project. From the beginning, it has been clear that the Arab Spring, in each national setting, has been internally fragmented and politically fragile, as it has been driven more by a powerful sense of what Arab populations do not want: continued political and economic marginalization and exclusion at the hands of dictatorial Arab political regimes, business elites, and their Western sponsors. The Arab Srping, however, has lacked a clear and coherent social and political vision for exactly what should replace the prevailing political and economic systems of the past decades. In such a context, it remains all too possible that the kinds of neoliberal political subjectivities, such as have been developed by the social, cultural, and educational programs discussed here under the rubric of the Hope Crusades, may once again reassert themselves to become the central drivers of the Arab world's immediate future.

Notes

1. Saatchi and Saatchi at the time of the campaigns was headquartered in the United States. Later, in 2008, Saatchi and Saatchi separated from the parent company and inaugurated Saatchi and Saatchi Middle East.
2. There were already several free zones in Arab countries that were created after the establishment of the Arab Free Trade Area in 1988; and others have been established since then, such as the Jebel Ali Free Zone in Dubai in 1990 and the Aqaba Special Zone Authority insert where in 2001.

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