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Artists and the Arab Uprisings

Lowell H. Schwartz, Dalia Dassa Kaye, Jeffrey Martini

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Sponsored by the Smith Richardson Foundation

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Cover photo: In this March 13, 2012, photo, a boy watches a female Egyptian artist and activist at work on the "No Walls Street" in downtown Cairo, part of a graffiti campaign to paint on concrete block walls a reproduction of the streets behind them. The colorful graffiti splashed over buildings is a reminder of the fervor that was centered in Tahrir Square. (AP Photo/Nasser Nasser)

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Preface

The dramatic revolts that began to spread across the Arab region in 2011 magnified the shortcomings in Arab governance that regional analysts have identified for some time. Underlying many of the political and economic challenges facing Arab society is a cultural contest among government authorities, extremist movements, and reformist voices. In this dynamic, reformists are squeezed between the bounds of acceptable discourse set by rulers who continue to fear freedom of expression and conservative religious groups that fear the liberalization of social values. Arab artists and writers could play a critical role in this contest by helping to shape public debate in ways that promote tolerance and nonviolence. Certainly, greater freedom of expression across the region could also empower extremist voices that reject alternative viewpoints. But opening up space for greater artistic freedom can also allow voices that support pluralism and democratic reform to reach broader audiences than is currently the case, leveling the playing field in countries undergoing fundamental political transitions or those still under authoritarian rule.

The Arab Spring has presented an array of opportunities for progress toward more freedom and democratic reform across the region, but it has also created a daunting number of challenges. New governments struggle to maintain stability and legitimacy, and authoritarian leaders continue to find ways to maintain their hold on power. It is thus not surprising that the term *Arab uprisings* has now replaced *Arab Spring* as the dominant characterization of the dramatic developments across the Arab world since 2011. In this report, we similarly use the term

Arab uprisings to avoid the potentially overly optimistic connotation that *Arab Spring* implies. That said, while the direction of these political transitions remains unclear, they nonetheless have the potential to improve the stability and well-being of the region's people over the longer term. This report explores the ways in which the cultural arena can contribute to such positive change, as well as the challenges that continue to face regional artists.

The United States will not, and should not, play the key role in taking advantage of the cultural opportunities presented by the uprisings. Only regional voices have the legitimacy to use art to attempt to affect debates in ways that advance tolerance and freedom. But in order for the United States to play a constructive role, it needs to ensure that its policies in the cultural arena are properly aligned with and supportive of broader shifts in U.S. policy toward the Middle East. The United States also needs to recognize the limits of government involvement in supporting regional artists and instead work to bolster nongovernmental efforts in this arena. This report investigates the changes that have occurred in the cultural sphere in the Arab world since the uprisings and proposes new strategies to better support regional artists and cultural freedom in the region, drawing on regional and nongovernmental sources of support.

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Summary

After decades of authoritarianism, a wave of political change and unrest began to sweep across the Middle East and North Africa in early 2011. After some initial hesitation, the United States embraced these changes, recognizing that successful transitions from authoritarian rule to democratic societies will not be easy and will require change along multiple vectors. This report focuses on one vector whose power and importance is often underestimated and neglected: the cultural and artistic arena.

Any consideration of the cultural sphere following the Arab uprisings must take into account a major trend across the region: the rise of Islamist parties that have outperformed more secular factions in the early stages of political transitions. Islamist groups are not uniform; they encompass a continuum of actors ranging from nonviolent groups with deep roots in society, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, to hardline Salafists and even organizations that previously used violence against the state. The inclusion of Islamists in formal politics makes political systems more representative and adds legitimacy to governing institutions. On the other hand, it also presents challenges for artistic freedom insofar as some of these groups embrace policies that run counter to such values as religious freedom and gender equality.

The rise of Islamist parties thus plays an increasingly important role in contests among governing authorities, extremist movements, and reformist voices. In the cultural sphere, regional artists are often squeezed between the bounds of acceptable discourse set by rulers who fear freedom of expression and conservative religious groups that

oppose the liberalization of social values. Thus, governments and some Islamist groups have worked to limit artistic freedom out of concern that artists will challenge their roles as the gatekeepers of information and moral propriety. That said, regional artists who favor tolerance, democracy, and nonviolence come from both secular and religious backgrounds. Consequently, support for regional artists does not suggest support only for artists with secular orientations or opposition to more religiously inspired art. In some instances, art drawing on religious themes may resonate more strongly with people in conservative societies and prove more effective in advocating such principles as tolerance and nonviolence than secular material.

This report seeks to identify the challenges that regional artists have faced from both the state and society in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings and, most importantly, how policies need to shift to better support these artists in overcoming barriers to the production and dissemination of their work. We suggest new strategies for doing so in which regional actors and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) take the leading role. We recognize that greater freedom of expression across the region can also empower extremist voices that reject alternative viewpoints. But opening up space for greater artistic freedom can also allow voices that support pluralism and democratic reform to reach broader audiences than is currently the case, leveling the playing field in countries undergoing fundamental political transitions and those still under authoritarian rule.

U.S. Policies and the Cultural Arena in the Middle East

In light of the unprecedented uprisings in the Arab world, the United States has adjusted its policies in several ways that could have an impact on cultural policies toward the Middle East. The first shift has been to embrace the spirit of change by declaring that it is "the policy of the United States to promote reform across the region and to support

transitions to democracy."[1] In countries where political changes have occurred, such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya, U.S. policy has focused on achieving a stable and nonviolent transition to democratic civilian rule. Part of this effort has been to reach out to new (or newly empowered) political actors as they emerge from long-standing periods of authoritarian rule.

The second major shift in U.S. policy has been an emphasis on broadening engagement beyond government-to-government interactions. The U.S. Department of State and other U.S. government agencies are seeking to expand and strengthen people-to-people relationships. In parallel, the State Department has embraced public-private partnerships as part of its engagement strategy. U.S. policymakers view such partnerships as advantageous because they add resources and capacity, and they are able to establish a presence in places that U.S. diplomacy normally cannot access. They also provide an ability to work with organizations and individuals overseas who might be concerned about being connected to activities directly sponsored by the U.S. government. In addition, through the U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative, the U.S. government has increased its government-to-NGO support across the region.

U.S. cultural policies, if properly directed and coordinated, could play an important role in supporting these broader shifts in U.S. foreign policy. Ultimately, democratic transitions can take root only if the culture and ideology of these states accept them. Regional artists and the creative work they produce can play an important role in shaping societal views in ways that reinforce a democratic society. U.S. policy can support this process, but only indirectly by broadening engagement beyond government-to-government interaction. The U.S. government cannot and should not take a leading role in such efforts. However, supporting artists and cultural freedom through nongovernmental channels can be a vital component of the larger process of building the civil society necessary to support peaceful and democratic transition.

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[1] Barack Obama, President of the United States, "Remarks by the President on Middle East and North Africa," transcript of a speech at the U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C., May 19, 2011.

Artistic Freedom After the Arab Uprisings

An important step in determining the best ways to support artistic and cultural freedom is exploring the barriers that regional artists continue to face in the broad dissemination of their work. While the Arab uprisings have lifted some prior restrictions in the cultural sphere, they have also introduced a new set of challenges. A review of the new environment in Egypt after the January 25 revolution illustrates the countervailing dynamics that have erased red lines on a number of topics previously considered off limits while also introducing a new set of restrictions and constraints. Egyptian artists remain squeezed between government authorities and conservative religious forces that seek to limit the bounds of artistic freedom.

Since the January 25 revolution, little has changed in the legal framework used by Egyptian authorities to censor artistic works. Politics, religion, and sexuality are the three main content areas subject to official censorship. The standards for censorship are ambiguous enough to afford broad discretion to government censors. The current director-general of the censorship office, himself a holdover from the Mubarak era, said that his office has granted more leeway to the airing of political opposition since the revolution. However, he expected no change in the censorship standards applied to sexual or religious content.[2]

In parallel to government censorship and bureaucratic mechanisms of control, artistic freedom is also constrained by societal pressures. Artists must comport with conservative values or risk public backlash that can include organized campaigns by conservative religious activists. For example, every Egyptian writer is aware of the infamous 1994 attack on Naguib Mahfouz, who was stabbed in the neck by religious extremists who viewed his work as un-Islamic. Although that stabbing occurred almost two decades ago and Mahfouz has since passed away, Egypt's most celebrated author is still the target of vitriol from conservative Islamists. Attacks on artists whose work diverges

[2] Interview with the director-general of the Office of Censorship of Artistic Works, Cairo, Egypt, April 11, 2012.

from conservative interpretations of Islamic values also extend to other media, including cinema.

Societal pressure on Egyptian artists extends far beyond Islamists who are hostile to the arts; family pressure can also play a role in preventing aspiring artists from pursuing their interests, because "art" is still not viewed across the region as a profession with stature. Young Egyptians also lack financial incentives to pursue the arts. The crux of the problem is weak consumer demand for cultural production, a dynamic that is particularly pronounced in the publishing field. Financial difficulties in the creative industries are compounded by a lack of protection for intellectual property. Laws designed to protect intellectual property of artists are either absent or not enforced.

Egypt's new political authorities have sent mixed signals regarding their positions on artistic freedom. In the early months of the country's transition away from military rule, the Muslim Brotherhood made a concerted effort to dispel the Islamist bogeyman, reaching out to constituencies traditionally skeptical of the organization, including the artistic community. The group's most visible effort was a January 2012 meeting between the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, General Guide Muhammad Badi', and the head of Egypt's Filmmakers Syndicate. The Brotherhood attempted to use this outreach to dispel fears that it would use its newfound power to limit cultural freedom. However, the Brotherhood's gesture failed to win over many of the rank-and-file members of the Filmmakers Syndicate.

While the Brotherhood has sought to position itself as a moderate force on cultural issues, many Salafist groups are openly hostile to artistic freedom. In a series of interviews conducted by *Al-Shurouq* newspaper with leaders of the Salafist movement in Egypt, some of these religious conservatives went as far as to advocate complete segregation of male and female actors in dramatic productions or restricting artists to only representing factual events while prohibiting fictional scenarios.[3] These positions have fanned fears that Salafists will push the

[3] "Fann lil Mar'a wa Fann lil Rajul" ["Female Art and Male Art"], *Al-Shurouq* (Egypt), June 17, 2011.

Brotherhood—or the Brotherhood will use the Salafists as cover—to restrict cultural expression.

In the midst of this tug of war between state authorities and conservative religious forces is a vibrant—if underfunded—community of Egyptian artists. Cairo has long been a cultural capital of the Arab world and still boasts some of the region's most prominent writers, filmmakers, and playwrights. The artists interviewed for this project were energized by the January 25 revolution while also mindful of the challenges ahead. Many had used their talents to document the uprising—for example, shooting film of street protests or sketching scenes of police brutality. Others were openly critical of government institutions, such as the Ministry of Culture, and the professional syndicates that they viewed as tools of state control. Some, but not all, were fearful of Islamists moving to limit artistic freedom, although most differentiated between the Muslim Brotherhood—whom they saw as relative moderates—and the Salafist trend, which they considered a genuine threat.

Current U.S. Government and Nongovernmental Efforts to Support Artistic Freedom

The U.S. government has a variety of programs that support cultural and artistic freedom. These programs and policies fall into three general categories: cultural diplomacy through artistic exchanges, financial or technical assistance and training or educational opportunities for Middle Eastern artists, and U.S. pressure on Middle Eastern governments to protect artistic expression and curb censorship.

Despite consistent recognition of the importance of enhancing the outreach and impact of regional artists, U.S. government programs remain relatively limited and haphazard. While multiple U.S. government departments and agencies are engaged in these efforts, there is a lack of strategic guidance and coordination. In addition, U.S. embassies in the Middle East and the State Department have been notably quiet on the defense of artistic expression, especially compared with their more robust defenses of religious and political freedom. And, as

they do in other parts of the world, many U.S. government programs focus more on the promotion of American culture in the region than support for local artistic talent.

While U.S. government activity remains minimal, a wide array of nongovernmental activities and programs to engage and support Arab artists has emerged in recent years. These include mentorship programs and artistic exchanges, the establishment of new film schools in the region and Arab film festivals, NGOs that promote Arab artists and better understanding of Arab culture in the United States, Hollywood filmmakers and companies that partner with local talent, and private-sector models to help Middle Eastern artists make a living from their work. Collectively, these nonprofit and for-profit efforts serve important roles, including improving the skills of emerging young talent, helping to promote creative work emanating from the region, and investing financially in regional artists.

Despite these important contributions, the nongovernmental landscape remains uncoordinated, and critical gaps impede artistic production, particularly the continued scarcity of sound funding models. The lack of copyright laws and pervasive pirating across the region also make it difficult for regional artists to make a living from their work. Marketing and distribution of creative content is also a continued challenge, as is the lack of arts infrastructure and arts education in Arab societies.

Drawing on lessons and examples of programs that appear to be working, we offer a set of recommendations to better leverage existing efforts to improve support for regional artists, recognizing that U.S. government efforts in this area should not be central. Instead, bolstering nongovernmental support for regional artists will prove far more effective and should be the lynchpin of any future strategy.

Recommendations for U.S. Government Efforts

- Balance the current focus of public diplomacy and cultural programs that promote U.S. culture in the Middle East with some recognition that support for regional artists is also an important

objective, even if it will need to be channeled through partnerships with NGOs.
- Focus on helping the region's artists and institutions in making the creative industries a source of growth and employment. The region's artists already produce world-class cultural products; U.S. engagement should be about developing the business infrastructure necessary to make being an artist a financially viable career path.
- Make more-vocal efforts to include cultural freedom as a critical component of promoting reform and countering extremism across the region. Treat cultural expression as a universal human right, as freedom of the press, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion already are.
- Provide training programs for lawyers, policymakers, and politicians about the importance of allowing and protecting freedom of expression.
- Concentrate on capacity-building for regional artists, finding ways to help them open up space for cultural expression (e.g., through greater Internet access or cultural exchange programs, preferably run by regional NGOs).
- Have artists assist the U.S. government in the selection process for culturally related proposals.
- Prioritize support for nongovernmental efforts to promote cultural expression.

Recommendations for Nongovernmental Efforts

- Encourage market-based companies that help distribute and fund work by regional artists.
- Develop local boards to assist in identifying the challenges artists face in creating and distributing their work. Connect these local boards with partners in the West who have the expertise to help artists overcome these challenges.
- Facilitate exchanges between regional artists and organizers of established international arts festivals. The exchanges should be

designed to help artists gain the practical skills necessary to organize arts festivals that raise their profile and attract tourism revenue.
- Develop metrics for NGOs engaged in regional training (e.g., in media or film production) to determine the success of trainees in maintaining jobs in their fields; such metrics may increase incentives to put more focus on creating sustainable models to support regional talent, not just one-off training sessions.
- Help support the creation of more entertainment distribution companies dedicated to promoting and selling Middle Eastern artistic works globally to support art as a viable industry in this region.
- Leverage multinational companies (i.e., the oil industry) operating in the region to support the arts, with the incentive being a means to improve their image regionally and globally. For example, an oil company could start a program modeled on the Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative designed to support mentors and artists specifically from the Middle East.
- Encourage philanthropists or major companies looking to invest in philanthropy to establish an "Ashoka" model for the arts. The Ashoka program supports regional entrepreneurs by providing them with a stipend so they can focus on innovation. A similar program could be designed to fund regional artists so they can focus on creative output.
- Increase partnerships between public and private institutions working in the Middle East art arena to strengthen the efforts of each; the successful public-private partnership between the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Hollywood Bowl offers a potential model.

A New Model for Supporting the Arts

Although these recommendations suggest ways to better leverage ongoing government and nongovernmental programs to support the arts, new models may be necessary to fundamentally restructure support for

the arts in this region. Some of the most successful models recognize the importance of tapping into the large-scale resources and convening power that only governments can provide and marrying them with private institutions and individuals to form public-private partnerships.

One potential approach would be to adapt a model like the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to a Middle East context. While the NEA accepts government funding, it maintains its independence and draws on panels of respected artists to help select and award grants for creative work and programs. One way to adapt the NEA model to the Middle East would be to draw on *regional* funds, starting with foundations in the wealthier Gulf Arab states or Arab expatriates, and use this initial investment to attract funding from other regional foundations and private philanthropists across the region and internationally (particularly Arab expatriates in Europe and North America). The Qatar Foundation, for example, has already demonstrated an interest in investing in the arts and arts education. While Gulf funding may raise concerns about constraints on artistic freedom, foundations and individuals associated with these governments have also demonstrated an understanding, that to build their human capital, independent and critical-thinking skills, including artistic expression, are an essential part of their countries' education curriculum.

But to maintain independence in terms of what type of work is funded and to avoid government donors dictating the artistic agenda, this model would also require a board of well-respected regional artists to run the fund, similar to how the NEA operates. Regional artists and institutions could be eligible to apply to the fund as a regular source of support for artistic work. This type of public-private initiative is certainly not the only way forward, but such a model would enhance enduring support for the arts in this region during a period of transformative change.

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Abbreviations

MEPI	U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative
NEA	National Endowment for the Arts
NGO	nongovernmental organization
RSICA	Red Sea Institute of Cinematic Arts
SCAF	Supreme Council of the Armed Forces
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USIA	United States Information Agency

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

After decades of authoritarianism, a wave of political change and unrest began to sweep across the Middle East and Africa in early 2011. These dramatic revolts across the Arab region magnified the shortcomings in Arab governance that regional analysts had identified for some time.[1] The protests, or what many now refer to as the "Arab uprisings" stemmed from a variety of factors, including the suppression of political opposition, systemic human rights violations, government corruption, the concentration of wealth and power among those associated with autocratic rulers, high unemployment, poverty, and, finally, the refusal of Arab youth to accept the status quo.

The United States has, for the most part, embraced these changes, recognizing the uprisings as an indigenous process with the potential to open up a pathway for democratic development. While welcoming these momentous changes, U.S officials and regional observers realize that making a successful transition from authoritarian rule to a democratic society will not be easy and will require change along multiple vectors. Examples include economic reform, establishing durable democratic institutions, and managing deep societal divisions along ethnic and religious lines. This report focuses on one vector whose power and

[1] See, for example, the series of reports issued by the United Nations Development Programme's Regional Bureau for Arab States between 2002–2009, *The Arab Human Development Report: Creating Opportunities for the Coming Generation* (2002), *Building A Knowledge Society* (2003), *Towards Freedom in the Arab World* (2004), *Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World* (2005), and *Challenges to Human Security in the Arab Countries* (2009).

importance is often underestimated and neglected: the cultural and artistic arena.

Broadly speaking, culture is a medium through which ideologies and norms find expression and are challenged. Ideologies and norms are critical because they provide individuals with frameworks for understanding how society should function. It is these frameworks that form the basis for what is possible in the "higher" spheres of law and politics.[2] In today's Middle East, Arab artists and writers have the potential to play a critical role in shaping the ideological framework of these countries' elite and newly galvanized publics.[3] Artists can influence public debates and promote tolerance and reform in countries undergoing or on the brink of fundamental political transitions.

Underlying many of the political, social, and economic challenges facing the Arab world is a contest among government authorities, extremist movements, and reformist voices. In the cultural sphere, reformists are squeezed between the bounds of acceptable discourse set by rulers who fear freedom of expression and conservative religious groups that fear the liberalization of social values. Governments and some Islamist groups fear artistic works by alternative voices because they play such a vital role in shaping the ideologies and ideas that can take hold in societies.

It is important to note that regional artists favoring tolerance, democracy, and nonviolence can come from both secular and religious backgrounds. Consequently, support for regional artists does not suggest support only for artists with secular orientations or opposition to religiously inspired art. In some instances, art drawing on religious themes may resonate more strongly with people in conservative societies and prove more effective in advocating such principles as tolerance and nonviolence than secular material.

The way this struggle is evolving varies widely across the region. In some countries, such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya, the revolts have

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[2] Hicham Ben Abdallah El Alaoui, "The Split in Arab Culture," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 22, No. 1, January 2011.

[3] In this report, we use a broad definition of the term *artist*. We view an artist as a person who practices any of the various creative arts, such as a sculptor, painter, writer, or filmmaker.

opened up new opportunities for cultural engagement, although at the same time, deep domestic divisions over cultural policy have emerged. In addition, while the uprisings have brought many changes to the cultural sphere, the basic institutional structures of the previous regimes that limited and censored artistic works remain in place. In other countries where uprisings are still under way or where regimes have been able to maintain their hold on power, the cultural sphere is one part of a wider struggle to remove or reform repressive autocratic regimes.

Cultural issues can be difficult and rocky territory in the midst of political upheaval. Popular revolutions often unleash renewed nationalism that can lead to a backlash over foreign assistance seen as impinging on a state's sovereignty. It is therefore understandable that U.S. officials and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) often shy away from confronting these issues, preferring to focus on more traditional programming, such as economic reform and development. Such approaches unfortunately underestimate the contribution that artistic freedom can make to reform in other spheres and the centrality of freedom of expression for establishing democratic societies. Previous RAND research also suggests that exposure to the arts can affect not only individuals but also societies, connecting "people more deeply to the world and open[ing] them to new ways of seeing and experiencing the world."[4] One finding that is particularly relevant to the Middle East context is that arts experiences can promote greater "receptivity to new perspectives and tolerance for others."[5]

Indeed, many regional artists recognize the power of art in shaping societal change (see box). The critical challenge is finding the most effective ways to support artists and free artistic expression while avoiding as much as possible becoming embroiled in contentious domestic political issues in ways that ultimately backfire. This report sets out to begin addressing this challenge.

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[4] Kevin F. McCarthy, Elizabeth H. Ondaatje, Laura Zakaras, and Arthur Brooks, *Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate About the Benefits of the Arts*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-218-WF, 2004, p. xvi.

[5] McCarthy et al., 2004, p. 69.

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What Arab Artists Say About the Power of Art for Societal Change

"We have the greatest weapon. We have 35-millimeter with 24 bullets a second. . . . That's really the best gun, the best tool, the best weapon you can have to talk about peace, to talk about human beings, to talk about who you are."

— Moroccan-born filmmaker Daniele Suissa

"My conviction, my mission, is based on the belief that the only way to beat extremism is through arts and culture."

— Kuwaiti entrepreneur Naif Al-Mutawa

"Art is about poking different points of views. . . . It's not about giving answers, it's about raising questions and offering a different way to look at things."

— Egyptian artist Mariam El-Quessny

"I believe music can change society for the better. . . . Music is one of the best ways to spread awareness, especially as it doesn't just communicate with the brain, but also touches people's emotions."

— Egyptian singer Dina El Wedidi

"What's very interesting is that a lot of women are in the arts because it's seen as a safe arena, but ironically you can really instigate a lot of change through the arts."

— Kuwait-based art journalist Mohamad Kadry

SOURCES: Shirley Jahad, "USC-Affiliated School Graduates Filmmakers from Mideast and North Africa," 89.3 KPCC (Southern California Public Radio), May 23, 2011; Christopher M. Schroeder, "Naif Al-Mutawa Fights to Bring 'The 99' and Its Message to Wide U.S. Audience," *Washington Post*, October 11, 2011; Deena Adel, "Reviving Revolution: The Role of Art in an Uncertain Egypt," *Global Post*, November 5, 2011; "Gilberto Gil and Dina El Wedidi: A Year of Mentoring," Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative, 2012–2013; Mohamad Kadry, "Winning Hearts Through the Arts," *Khaleej Times* (Dubai), March 11, 2012.

The Cultural Dimension During the Cold War

Unfortunately today, the cultural dimension is a largely neglected piece of U.S. foreign policy.[6] This has not always been the case. During the Cold War, for example, the U.S. government understood that culture was an important component of national power that could assist the United States in achieving its foreign policy objectives. American diplomats of the early years of the Cold War recognized that art and culture would play a vital role in the ideological struggle against the Soviet Union.[7] Policymakers, such as George Kennan and Paul Nitze, instituted a wide variety of cultural programs, including magazine and book exchanges, radio broadcasts that promoted dissident writers and artists living behind the Iron Curtain, and cultural exchanges between artists in the West and East. These programs illustrated that creative works could illuminate alternative views and ways of life, eroding support for authoritarian systems in the Soviet orbit.[8]

Cold War diplomats understood implicitly that the informational and cultural spheres were an important component of a grand strategy. In the 1950s, one of President Eisenhower's major initiatives was a strategy of cultural infiltration against communist societies. President Eisenhower viewed U.S. cultural programs as a vital method for exploiting communist societies' ideological and cultural vulnerabilities.[9] The Eisenhower administration sought to use cultural contacts between the West and the Soviet Union to break down the isolation of communist peoples and to introduce modern concepts and reform ideas to key social groups. The hope was that more open discussions of liberal ideas would subtly undermine the intellectual foundations of communist societies.

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6 Richard T. Arndt, *The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century*, Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2005.

7 Lowell Schwartz, *Political Warfare Against the Kremlin: U.S. and British Propaganda Policy at the Beginning of the Cold War*, London: UK Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

8 Robert English, *Russia and the Idea of the West: Gorbachev, Intellectuals and the End of the Cold War*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

9 Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945–1961*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.

To break through the Iron Curtain, the United States and other Western countries used a variety of methods to communicate with Soviet and Eastern European audiences. Among the instruments used were short-wave radio broadcasts, cultural exchanges, trade fairs, and Western book and magazine distribution in the region. These Western messages targeted intellectuals, who were believed to constitute public opinion, to the extent that there was one in communist societies.

Among the more notable aspects of the U.S. Cold War cultural policy was its support for dissenting intellectuals and writers. In the 1960s, the U.S. government supported Radio Liberty and its publishing arm, Bedford Publishing Company, which began highlighting *samizdat*, or dissident work. On the radio and in print, Radio Liberty disseminated the work of the dissent movement and publicized it to a wide audience. Through its book and magazine program, it distributed work banned by communist authorities, such as Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*. Finally, the United States sought to link Western museums and artists with their counterparts behind the Iron Curtain. This provided repressed artists a means of support and exposure to cultural trends in the West.

In hindsight, U.S. policymakers' embrace of a policy of cultural infiltration was a pivotal turning point in the Cold War. The well-known policy of containment could only achieve a long-term stalemate in the Cold War: It could not achieve victory. Military and political containment was a mechanism to stop further Soviet advances; it could not, by itself, weaken Soviet power or cause Soviet leaders to rethink their approach to international relations. Ultimately, what containment bought the West was time to show Soviet leaders and the Soviet people that their economic, social, and political system was inferior to the West's and should be abandoned. The policy of cultural infiltration was the key component of national power in communicating this message to the people of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

Although it is dangerous to draw too many parallels between the Cold War and U.S. policy in the Arab world today, the importance of cultural policies in advancing national interests is a critical lesson. That said, the context of the Middle East today differs significantly from

that of Cold War Europe. There will likely be little receptivity to the imposition of U.S. culture and norms into Arab societies, and attempts to do so would only backfire and increase anti-American sentiment, which is already high.

But the Arab world is producing its own creative works that offer messages of tolerance and nonviolence that can be far more effective in the battle of ideas than works coming from the West.[10] Thus, while the idea that the cultural arena is critical to shaping the future development of these societies is certainly similar to the Cold War experience, the means of influencing regional debates cannot originate in the West. The question is how can U.S. policies adjust to help support regional voices in ways that will bolster rather than undermine them?

Recent Shifts in U.S. Middle East Policy

While some anchors in U.S. policy toward the Middle East remain, a number of fundamental policy adjustments have emerged since the Arab uprisings. These adjustments suggest that a policy of supporting artists and cultural expression fits extremely well with broader U.S. objectives in the region, even if such support will need to be channeled in ways that differ significantly from the Cold War experience.

U.S. policy toward the Middle East has been a consistent balancing act between pursuing U.S. national security interests and promoting democracy, development, and freedom in the region. Decisions about how to pursue these sometimes conflicting objectives have only grown more complicated in light of the Arab uprisings. The uprisings and political changes occurring in the Arab world have introduced new factors into the equation, such as the increasing role of public opin-

[10] RAND has engaged in work exploring cultural output in the Arab world that promotes tolerance. See, for example, Gail L. Zellman, Jeffrey Martini, and Michal Perlman, *Identifying Arabic-Language Materials for Children That Promote Tolerance and Critical Thinking*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, TR-856-OSD, 2011, and Lowell H. Schwartz, Todd C. Helmus, Dalia Dassa Kaye, and Nadia Oweidat, *Barriers to the Broad Dissemination of Creative Works in the Arab World*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-879-OSD, 2009.

ion, the rise of Islamist parties and factions, and the weakening of state security authorities. Thus, in many ways, while the broad policy choices the United States faces remain the same, the overall strategic environment has shifted.

In light of the unprecedented developments across the Arab world, the Obama administration has adjusted its policies in several ways that could have an impact on cultural policies toward the Middle East. The first shift has been to embrace the spirit of change in the region by declaring that it is "the policy of the United States to promote reform across the region and to support transitions to democracy."[11] In countries where political changes have occurred, such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya, U.S. policy has focused on achieving a stable and nonviolent transition to democratic civilian rule. Part of this effort has been to reach out to the new (or newly empowered) political actors that have emerged after long-standing periods of authoritarian rule.

Complicating this transition and U.S. policy in general has been the rise of Islamist parties that have often embraced policies that appear contrary to such U.S. values as religious freedom and gender equality. In both Egypt and Tunisia, Islamist parties, banned by the old regimes, have emerged as the largest parties in parliament and are leading the government. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party and the main Salafist group, an-Nour, combined to win nearly three quarters of the seats in the lower house of parliament.[12] And in Tunisia, an-Nahda outpolled its nearest competitor by a nearly two-to-one margin. These gains were achieved through elections that, although not perfect, likely accurately reflect public opinion in these countries.

President Obama addressed U.S. policy toward these Islamist parties in a May 19, 2011, speech that provides a broad framework for U.S. efforts in the region:

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[11] Barack Obama, President of the United States, "Remarks by the President on Middle East and North Africa," transcript of a speech at the U.S. Department of State, Washington, D.C., May 19, 2011.

[12] That body has since been dissolved over a dispute on the constitutionality of the electoral law.

> Let me be clear, America respects the right of all peaceful and law-abiding voices to be heard, even if we disagree with them. And sometimes we profoundly disagree with them.
>
> We look forward to working with all who embrace genuine and inclusive democracy. What we will oppose is an attempt by any group to restrict the rights of others, and to hold power through coercion and not consent. Because democracy depends not only on elections, but also strong and accountable institutions, and the respect for the rights of minorities.[13]

In light of this policy, U.S. officials have met with and are working with the leaders of such groups as Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood.[14] Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, previously a member of the Muslim Brotherhood's executive apparatus, met with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton during a visit to the United States in late September 2012. The Obama administration also worked together closely with President Morsi to broker a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas after an escalating conflict in November 2012. Despite such collaboration, significant policy differences between the two countries—including over cultural issues—have emerged. U.S. officials have made it clear to regional governments in transition that continued U.S. support is contingent upon their respect for some basic principles, particularly minority rights and gender equality, and their continued progress toward democratization.

Carnegie scholar Thomas Carothers notes the Obama administration has taken steps to support democratization but has also avoided getting out in front of the wave of political change taking place across the Middle East. He posits that this cautious response reflects several concerns. First, there is a degree of uncertainty about how the uprisings will affect key U.S. interests in the region, such as counterterrorism and the security of the state of Israel. Second, U.S. policymakers

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[13] Obama, 2011.

[14] For an overview of U.S engagement efforts with the Muslim Brotherhood, see Jeffrey Martini, Dalia Dassa Kaye, and Erin York, *The Muslim Brotherhood, Its Youth, and Implications for U.S. Engagement*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2012.

wish to avoid situations that force it to sever all ties with a leader who may end up staying in power, or with countries that help the United States maintain significant military assets. (The cautious U.S. approach to repression in Bahrain, for example, is often attributed to the presence of the U.S. Fifth Fleet in that country.) And, finally, the Obama administration is wary of putting itself at the center of potential political change in other countries because of concerns that doing so might discredit those pushing for democracy and force the United States to take on a level of responsibility over events that it is unlikely to be able to fulfill.[15]

Despite these concerns, U.S. policy has clearly shifted from the default position of supporting Arab autocrats in the name of stability toward a more nuanced position of generally supporting reform and democratic change where unrest is occurring. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made this point in a November 7, 2011, speech at the National Democracy Institute:

> We begin by rejecting the false choice between progress and stability. For years, dictators told their people they had to accept autocrats they knew to avoid the extremists they feared. And too often, we accepted that narrative ourselves. Now, America did push for reform, but often not hard enough or publicly enough. And today, we recognize that the real choice is between reform and unrest.[16]

The second major shift in U.S. policy has been the emphasis on broadening engagement beyond government-to-government interactions. In its first quadrennial diplomacy and development review, the U.S. Department of State highlighted the growing importance of nonstate actors in global affairs and the increasing role public opinion plays in international relations. The review noted that achieving U.S. policy

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[15] Thomas Carothers, *Democracy Policy Under Obama*, Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012.

[16] Hillary Clinton, U.S. Secretary of State, "Keynote Address at the National Democratic Institute's 2011 Democracy Awards Dinner," transcript of speech, National Democratic Institute, Washington, D.C., November 7, 2011.

objectives in the 21st century requires American diplomats to reach out to civil society and build relationships with "activists, organizations, congregations, and journalists working through peaceful means to make their countries better."[17] The result of this review has been increasing efforts by the State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to strengthen U.S. cooperation with partners beyond the state.

The State Department and broader U.S. government efforts to engage civil society have a number of components that are relevant to cultural diplomacy and artistic freedom in the Middle East. One component of the effort is to expand and strengthen people-to-people relationships. This involves U.S. citizens communicating and working with counterparts abroad. Interactions with women and youth are viewed as especially important. Public-private partnerships are another component of the State Department's engagement strategy. These partnerships are viewed as advantageous because they add resources and capacity, and they are able to establish a presence in places that U.S. diplomacy normally cannot access. They also provide an ability to work with organizations and individuals overseas who have reservations about being connected to activities directly sponsored by the U.S. government. This concern is particularly relevant in the Middle East context.

U.S. cultural policies, if properly directed and coordinated, could play an important role in supporting these shifts in U.S. foreign policy. Ultimately, the democratic transitions that have been embraced by the United States can take root only if the culture and ideology of the region's peoples are accepting of them. Regional artists and the creative works they produce can play an important role in shaping societal views in ways that are supportive of a democratic society over the longer term. U.S. policy can support this process by assisting these artists in overcoming the barriers they face in the creation and dissemination of their works, even if it must find ways to do so that do not involve direct U.S. government support.

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[17] U.S. Department of State, *Leading Through Civilian Power: The First Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review*, Washington, D.C., December 15, 2010.

Robust support to regional artists also fits with the emphasis on broadening engagement beyond government-to-government interaction. Supporting artists and cultural freedom can be a vital component of the larger process of building civil society in ways that support a peaceful and democratic state. Supporting regional artists should be viewed as a way to strengthen and expand U.S. cooperation with partners beyond the state. But the process of building connections should be approached primarily through NGOs. This report outlines an array of nongovernmental activities already under way to support regional artists. That said, the continued barriers facing regional artists suggest that new public-private partnership models may be necessary to fully empower this community in the future.

Organization of This Report

Understanding how to promote artistic freedom requires first identifying the obstacles that Arab artists currently face. RAND is one of the few research institutions that have analyzed this issue.[18] Building on previous work, this report seeks to understand how the Arab uprisings have or have not changed the barriers to the production and dissemination of creative works. Chapter Two explores the impact of the uprisings on the ability of Egyptian and other Middle Eastern artists to produce and distribute their work. It reflects fieldwork recently conducted in Egypt, which is the most populous Arab state to undergo a democratic transition. This chapter also reviews how Egypt's cultural policy has shifted since the revolution and the stated policies of the major Egyptian political parties that are likely to influence future decisionmaking.

Chapters Three and Four investigate ongoing government and nongovernmental efforts to support artists in the Middle East. Chapter Three explores current U.S. government attempts to support and promote Arab artists, U.S. government connections with the NGO

[18] Schwartz et al., 2009. Also see Cynthia P. Schneider and Kristina Nelson, *Mightier Than the Sword: Arts and Culture in the U.S.-Muslim World Relationship*, Washington, D.C.: Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, June 2008.

community, and gaps and shortfalls in these efforts. Chapter Four reviews and analyzes the activities of NGOs (some of which are supported by European governments) involved in fostering artistic talent and production in Middle East. It concludes with a discussion of the serious challenges regional artists face despite increasing nongovernmental support.

The analysis of the challenges facing regional artists in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, as well as the overview of governmental and nongovernmental efforts to support Arab artists, underscores continued gaps and areas for improvement. Building on this analysis, Chapter Five suggests policy recommendations for better leveraging current policies to more effectively support regional artists. That chapter also develops strategies for the broader and more effective support and distribution of creative works throughout the region, particularly through media, like film, that can reach large numbers of people. We also suggest a "roadmap" for the U.S. government and civil society counterparts to implement a strategy to support artistic freedom in the Middle East. Finally, we propose an entirely new model to support the arts in the region, a "regional endowment for Arab arts," which would allow the marshaling of regional government resources and private funding to support the arts through an independent regional institution.

CHAPTER TWO

Impact of the Arab Uprisings on Artistic Freedom: Egypt as a Case Study

While the Arab uprisings have lifted some prior restrictions in the cultural sphere, they have also introduced a new set of challenges. Post-Mubarak Egypt is an important case study for examining these dynamics, given the country's historic influence in media and the arts. Egypt's influence is derived from the fact that it is the most populous state in the region—comprising roughly one-quarter of the Arab world's total population—and it inevitably shapes cultural trends by dint of its demographic weight. A review of the new environment in Egypt after the January 25 revolution illustrates the countervailing dynamics that have erased red lines on a number of topics previously considered off limits while also introducing a new set of restrictions and constraints. Just as they were prior to the January 25 revolution, Egyptian artists are squeezed between government authorities and conservative religious forces that seek to limit the bounds of artistic freedom.

Legal Framework for Censorship

Since the January 25, 2011, revolution, little has changed in the legal framework used by Egyptian authorities to censor artistic works. One of the main laws regulating censorship in Egypt, Law 430 of 1955 (subsequently amended in 1992), remains operative. That statute authorizes the Ministry of Culture to oversee censorship of all visual and audiovisual materials "to protect the public system, morals, and

the higher interests of the state."[1] The task itself is performed by the Office of Censorship of Artistic Works, which, according to the current director-general, employs 150 staff and has branches in each governorate.[2] That office oversees the censorship of film, music, television, and theater, while a parallel structure has been established for censoring books and other written material. In instances in which content addresses national security issues (e.g., a movie portraying police brutality), the Ministry of the Interior is invited to weigh in.

Politics, religion, and sexuality are the three main content areas subject to official censorship. The standards for censorship are ambiguous enough to afford broad discretion to government censors. For example, films that depict excessive violence may be censored if they lack "dramatic justification," and it is entirely up to the judgment of the censor to determine whether or not those criteria are met.[3] A similarly opaque standard applies to religion insofar as censors are authorized to edit out material they deem "insulting" to Islam, Judaism, or Christianity. In practice, this means that overtly secular messages may be censored under the justification of protecting the artist from public backlash. In the realm of sexual content, depictions of homosexuality are the target of particularly aggressive censorship. The current director-general of the censorship office, himself a holdover from the Mubarak era, said that his office has granted more leeway to the airing of political opposition since the January 25 revolution. However, he expected no change in the censorship standards applied to sexual or religious content.[4]

The legal framework in Egypt provides wide-ranging authority to censors while limiting the rights of artists. For example, censors are

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1 The full English- and Arabic-language text of the 1955 law, including the 1992 amendments, is available through United Group (see the bibliography for links).

2 Interview with the director-general of the Office of Censorship of Artistic Works, Cairo, Egypt, April 11, 2012.

3 Interview with the director-general of the Office of Censorship of Artistic Works, Cairo, Egypt, April 11, 2012.

4 Interview with the director-general of the Office of Censorship of Artistic Works, Cairo, Egypt, April 11, 2012.

authorized to intervene at various stages in the development of a film or television program, first during the writing of the screenplay, later during filming, and again after final editing. The Egyptian government prefers to describe this process as a way of keeping lines of communication open between artists and censors, as well as saving filmmakers money by intervening early on, before resources are invested in a scene that may have to be deleted. Of course, subjecting artists to such an intrusive process reinforces self-censorship. Artists are further disempowered because they lack any legal recourse to appeal censors' decisions.

In addition to the 1955 censorship law, artists must navigate a maze of legal statutes that prohibit the insulting of state institutions, such as the armed forces and the presidency. For example, in 2011, the blogger Maikel Nabil was sentenced to three years in prison for criticizing military police handling of security after the ouster of Mubarak.[5] To understand the military's expansive interpretation of what constitutes an "insult" to the armed forces, it is instructive to consider the stern warning issued by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces' (SCAF) lead on legal issues, General Mamdouh Shahin, who noted, "If anyone talks about something related to the Armed Forces—issues pertaining to the Armed Forces—without written approval from the command of the Armed Forces, then he has committed a crime and will be called before the military court."[6] Since the SCAF relinquished its overt political role in June 2012, the military's tone has softened, although the message remains the same: Journalists should tread lightly in their coverage of national security issues.[7]

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[5] Nabil was initially sentenced to three years in prison, subsequently reduced to two years after a retrial. He was eventually freed after the SCAF commuted his sentence in early 2012. "Lil Marra al-Ṯhānīya . . . Mahkama 'Askrīya Tasjun Michael Nabil Sanatayn bi Tuhmat al-Isā'a" ["For the Second Time . . . A Military Tribunal Jails Michael Nabil for Two Years on Charges of Insulting"], *Al-Masry al-Yawm* (Egypt), December 14, 2011.

[6] Press conference of the Supreme Council held on July 12, 2011, and broadcast on Egyptian television. The segment can be viewed in Arabic on YouTube (see "Major General Mamdouh Shahin Clarification on Military Courts," in Arabic, YouTube, June 12, 2011).

[7] The new deputy minister of defense, General al-'Assar, has preferred to appeal to journalists' national spirit. He has noted that it is journalists' "patriotic awareness" that will keep

With the Muslim Brotherhood now the dominant political force in country, some have pinned their hopes on the Brotherhood using its newfound influence to roll back at least some of the legal restrictions that artists and journalists face. This expectation is founded on the basis that the Muslim Brotherhood suffered under these same restrictive legal conditions during the decades that it operated in opposition.[8] However, during the short period he has been president, Mohamed Morsi, who hails from the Brotherhood's senior leadership, has already availed himself of the same legal statutes as his predecessors to stifle dissent. Indeed, at the time of this writing, two Egyptian journalists are being prosecuted on charges of insulting the president.[9] Laws protecting the reputation of state institutions are most often exercised vis-à-vis journalists; however, these codes have a chilling effect on artistic production as well. For example, a playwright interviewed for the project singled out criticism of the military as a particularly sharp red line while noting that artists do find ways to get around this restriction by treating the subject matter indirectly or through metaphor.[10]

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them from undermining national security in their treatment of the armed forces. "Misr: Bad' Tadrībāt 'Askarīya Mushtaraka ma' Amirīka" ["Egypt: Start of Joint Military Exercises with America"], *Al-Hayat*, September 4, 2012.

[8] This is exactly the argument made by the Muslim Brotherhood. For example, the newly appointed minister of information has argued, "The truth is that some of those afraid [of the Brotherhood] have forgotten that the seat of this Ministry was filled by some Leftists and Nasserists and we were the Islamists that faced exclusion and marginalization. . . . I promise the great people that this [ministry] will be a pulpit for everyone." "Salah 'Abd al-Maqsud lil Al-Ahram: Atamna an Akūn Akhir Wazīr lil I'lām" ["Salah 'Abd al-Maqsud to Al-Ahram: I Hope That I Am the Last Minister of Information"], *Al-Ahram* (Egypt), August 26, 2012.

[9] President Morsi did intervene to allow the accused to leave police custody pending trial, but the charges themselves have not been dropped. "Ba'd Tarhīl Ra'īs Tahrīr al-Dustor lil Sijn: Mursi Yulghī al-Habs al-Ihtīyātī bi Jarā'im al-Nashr" ["After the Transfer of the Editor of *Al-Dustor* to Prison, Morsi Annuls Preventive Detention for Crimes of Publishing"], *Asharq Al-Awsat*, August 24, 2012.

[10] Interview with Egyptian playwright, Cairo, Egypt, April 11, 2012.

Crowding Out Independent Voices

In addition to formal censorship, the existence of a large state-run media apparatus also serves to crowd out independent voices. To provide some perspective on the size of the state's footprint, the Egyptian government still runs 23 television channels and dozens of newspapers and radio stations, and it staffs this apparatus with 44,000 public-sector employees.[11] To be clear, Egypt does boast independent privately run media, which has expanded modestly since the revolution. However, independent outlets are disadvantaged relative to the heavily subsidized state-run media.

The influence of the state is starker vis-à-vis journalists than vis-à-vis artists, but the latter are also subject to government control. Specifically, trade unions are used to embed artists in a bureaucracy through which the government can exercise a degree of control. Organizations such as the Writers' Union (Ittihād al-Kuttāb), the Filmmakers' Syndicate (Niqābat al-Sīnamā'iyīn), and the Theatrical Professions' Syndicate (Niqābat al-Mihan al-Tamthīlīya) follow a corporatist model, serving as intermediaries between the state and artistic communities. Linked to public universities—a degree from which is often required for membership—these associations establish a credentialing process that limits the entry of independent artists into the field.[12]

The Filmmakers' Syndicate has been particularly restrictive in this regard. Because making films in Egypt requires authorization from the syndicate, which has a sliding fee scale based on whether the applicant is a member, there are strong incentives for artists to join this organization. According to an independent filmmaker interviewed for this study, those, like himself, who are not members of the syndicate are required to pay fees of 70,000 Egyptian pounds (approximately $11,500) to obtain authorization for producing a film in Egypt.[13] This

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[11] "Mustaqbal al-I'lām al-Misrī ba'd al-Thawra" ["The Future of Egyptian Media After the Revolution"], *Al-Hayat*, June 8, 2011.

[12] Interview with a representative from a private film academy, Cairo, Egypt, February 2, 2012.

[13] Interview with a young filmmaker, Cairo, Egypt, January 24, 2012.

cost is not inconsequential, given that the total budget for a small independent production, according to the same interviewee, can be as low as $100,000.

Self-Censorship and Economic Incentives

In parallel to government censorship and bureaucratic mechanisms of control, artistic freedom is also constrained by societal pressures. Artists must comport with conservative values or risk public backlash that can include organized campaigns by religious activists. For example, every Egyptian writer is aware of the infamous 1994 attack on Naguib Mahfouz, who was stabbed in the neck by religious extremists who viewed his work as un-Islamic. And while that stabbing occurred almost two decades ago and Mahfouz has since passed away, Egypt's most celebrated author is still the target of vitriol from conservative Islamists. For example, the Salafist leader Abdel Mun'eim al-Shahat, who until recently was a prominent member of the an-Nour party that won a quarter of the seats in the 2011–2012 parliamentary elections,[14] continues to wage a campaign against Mahfouz as an author whose books encourage prostitution.[15]

Attacks on artists whose work diverges from conservative interpretations of Islamic values also extend to other media, including cinema. Youssef Chahine and Khaled Youssef, two prominent filmmakers whose movies often address such sensitive social issues as rape, have been the target of criticism from religious activists (see box, next page). And in a particularly chilling development, the Egyptian actor 'Adel Imam was recently sentenced to three months in absentia for insulting Islam through his unsympathetic portrayal of Islamists in

[14] Al-Shahat has since been expelled from an-Nour party over differences with its senior leadership.

[15] Al-Shahat's statement came during a December 2011 interview on an-Nahar television. The segment can be viewed on YouTube ("Abdel Mun'eim al-Shahat: Adab Naguib Mahfouzh Yu'adī ila al-Razīla" ["Abdel Mun'eim al-Shahat: Naguib Mahfouz's Literature Leads to Depravity"], YouTube, December 1, 2011).

Misr International Film Company, 3B Productions, France 2 Cinema, and Pyramide International

Youssef Chahine: Art as Politics

The work of Egyptian filmmaker Youssef Chahine demonstrates how the arts are intertwined with the expansion of personal freedom and the role the international community can play in supporting it.

Before he passed away in 2008, Chahine made dozens of movies that challenged authority. Always controversial and an equal-opportunity critic of the West and his own country, Chahine took on everything from poverty to autocracy and imperialism. His final film, *Heya Fawda*, or *This Is Chaos*, was a political thriller released in 2007 that revolved around the character of a corrupt policeman who preys on his neighbors. Chahine used this backdrop to expose the brutality of the state's internal security forces, and the film ends with a protest eerily reminiscent of the events in Tahrir Square that led to the toppling of Mubarak in 2011.

Chahine's unwillingness to self-censor left him at odds with Egypt's leadership, but he was able to continue making films—and increase the breadth of his distribution—with European support. His legacy, which has been taken up by Khaled Youssef, whom Chahine mentored, is a powerful reminder of how art contributes to the broader issue of personal freedom.

earlier films.[16] According to one interviewee who works at a private film institute, the result is a chilling effect on creativity in which filmmakers adhere to an unwritten code known as "clean cinema" (al-Sīnimā

[16] Nehad Selaiha, "Fighting Back," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, No. 1093, April 12–18, 2012.

al-Nazhīfa), or what the Brotherhood has taken to calling "purposeful art" (al-Fann al-Hādifa).[17]

And while the Muslim Brotherhood has tried to distance itself from an agenda aimed at limiting personal freedoms, Salafist leaders do not shy away from fanning public sentiment as a check on artistic freedom. In our interview with the then-head of an-Nour party, 'Imad 'Abd al-Ghafur, who is considered a relative "dove" within the Salafist movement, warned, "We will leave censorship to the people. We will let the people decide to punish what is base [radhīl]."[18] The threat of recrimination results in self-censorship by artists seeking to avoid public backlash. A young Egyptian filmmaker noted that his biggest fear is that Salafists are playing a long game designed to shape the education system and media coverage to promote conservative social values and a culture of deference to authority.[19]

Societal pressure on Egyptian artists extends far beyond Islamists who are hostile to the arts. One filmmaker interviewed for the project lamented that his family was actually the biggest obstacle to him pursuing his chosen profession.[20] He noted that there is a stigma associated with the arts, and his family feared it would be a gateway to drug use. And decades of authoritarian rule have conditioned Egyptians to resist boundary pushing. To exemplify this conservative mentality and deference to authority, one interviewee cited the case of a graffiti artist whom ordinary Cairenes turned over to the military police after he was found spraying revolutionary slogans on city walls. The interviewee noted that, sadly, the most entrenched censorship in Egypt is not from government minders but is self-imposed by the people themselves.[21]

In addition to the problem of self-censorship, young Egyptians lack financial incentives to pursue the arts. The crux of the problem

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[17] Interview with a representative from a private film academy, Cairo, Egypt, February 2, 2012.

[18] Interview with 'Imad 'Abd al-Ghafur, Cairo, Egypt, January 24, 2012.

[19] Interview with a young filmmaker, Cairo, Egypt, January 26, 2012.

[20] Interview with a young filmmaker, Cairo, Egypt, January 24, 2012.

[21] Interview with a young filmmaker, Cairo, Egypt, January 26, 2012.

is weak consumer demand for cultural production, a dynamic that is particularly pronounced in the publishing field. Despite the fact that Arabic is one of the largest linguistic communities in the world,[22] and Egypt is singled out in the oft-repeated colloquialism that "books are written in Egypt, printed in Lebanon, and read in Iraq," the market for Arabic language books is quite thin. The problem was well documented in the second *Arab Human Development Report,*[23] and we have seen nothing that would change those findings. Indeed, in an informal survey of four publishing houses of varying sizes and specialties, we found that even a bestselling book from top publishing outfit al-Shuruq had an estimated print run of just 100,000 copies and that the publishers' average print run for an Arabic book was under 10,000 copies (see box, next page).

Although there is greater revenue potential in broadcast media and film, the pot is small even in these more lucrative domains. Indeed, advertising revenue has long been scarce, but after the decline in economic growth and flight of investment after the January 25 revolution, it has become even scarcer. Companies spent $340 million on advertising in Egyptian media in the first quarter of 2010, but they spent only $166 million in the first quarter of 2011, a drop-off of more than 50 percent.[24] And where consumers have more disposable income, such as in the wealthier Arab Gulf states that rebroadcast Egyptian television and film, social values are more conservative, reinforcing the tendency toward sanitized content.

The financial problems of artists and the creative industries in general are compounded by a lack of protection for intellectual property. Laws designed to protect the intellectual property of artists are either absent or are not enforced. Copyright infringement is rampant, with publishers often discovering that the book they are working on is already available for sale without the permission of the author. Piracy

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[22] Ethnologue ranks Arabic as having the fourth largest community of native speakers (see Ethnologue, "Summary by Language Size," undated).

[23] United Nations Development Programme, 2003.

[24] "Mustaqbal al-I'lām al-Misrī ba'd al-Thawra" ["The Future of Egyptian Media After the Revolution"], 2011.

Bestselling Arabic Books

Publishing House (phonetic)	Publishing House (Arabic)	Types of Books with the Highest Sales	Average Print Run (number of copies)	Average Print Run for a Bestseller
Al-Shuruq	الشروق	1. Novels 2. Politics 3. Religious texts	10,000	100,000+
Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi	دار الكتاب العربي	1. Current events 2. Apocalyptic texts	2,000	5,000–10,000
Al-Ahram	الأهرام	1. Politics 2. Novels	15,000	50,000+
Maktabat al-Falah	مكتبة الفلاح	1. Islamic texts 2. Academic textbooks	1,000–2,000	10,000

NOTE: Figures are based on in-person interviews with representatives from each of the four publishing houses. The interviews were conducted at the International Book Exhibition in Cairo, Egypt, on January 28, 2012.

of visual media is the norm, with markets throughout Egypt stocked with illegal copied DVDs and CDs.[25]

Early Signals from Egypt's New Authorities

Egypt's new political authorities have sent mixed signals regarding their positions on artistic freedom. During the initial 16 months of the transition when the SCAF directed state affairs and held executive authority,[26] criticism of the military was not tolerated, although writers, playwrights, and filmmakers were granted broad leeway to criticize symbols of the former regime. Cairo bookstores are now teeming with

[25] For more information on the difficulties artists face in marketing and distributing their products, see Schwartz et al., 2009, pp. 7–16.

[26] February 2011 through June 2012.

monographs attacking the rule of Mubarak, symbols of the former ruling party, business leaders involved in privatization, and even the practices of internal security forces. For example, an Egyptian professor, ʻAbd al-Khaliq Farouq, recently published a book titled *Economies of Corruption in Egypt: How Egypt and the Egyptians Were Bankrupted*, complete with a provocative cover image showing former President Mubarak in a prison uniform running away with a bag of cash (see box, below). Needless to say, this publication would not have been tolerated prior to the January 25 revolution. Another recent book, *The Temptation of Absolute Power*, chronicles the abuses of Egyptian internal security forces. When we interviewed the author, Basma 'Abd al-'Aziz, she noted that in her initial attempt to publish the book in 2010, the prospective publisher's first question was whether she had a good lawyer.

Given the longer production cycles for film, the effect of the revolution on Egyptian cinema was subject to an initial lag, although there are emerging signs that the opening observed in publishing is making its way into this medium as well. For example, 'Amr 'Abd al-Jalil, director of the critically acclaimed movie *Sarkhat Namla*, or *An Ant's Scream*, which tackles political corruption, police brutality, and the economic grievances of Egypt's rank and file, noted that prior to the revolution, state censors placed 21 holds on the movie's script that

'Abd al-Khaliq Farouq: Egyptian Economics After the Revolution

The cover of *Economies of Corruption in Egypt: How Egypt and the Egyptians Were Bankrupted* by Egyptian professor 'Abd al-Khaliq Farouq shows former President Hosni Mubarak in a prison uniform with a bag of cash.

required changes before it could be released. 'Abd al-Jalil ultimately decided to press ahead with production and deal with the censors later, and when the movie came out after the revolution, state authorities granted its release without restriction.

However, this opening to criticize those who lost power in the uprising should not be confused with genuine freedom of expression. The lifting of restrictions in some areas has been balanced against the continued legacy of the prior system, the emergence of new set of red lines, and the impact of religious conservatism in defining the bounds of what is "acceptable." The opening is better understood as a mechanism by which Egypt's new authorities allow the public to blow off steam, all the while insulating themselves from dissent by deflecting criticism toward symbols of the Mubarak era.

In addition to the military, the other dominant actor in post-Mubarak Egypt is the Freedom and Justice Party that was established shortly after the uprising as the official political party of the Muslim Brotherhood. The party has already demonstrated its electoral clout by winning a near majority in the first parliamentary elections, outpolling the next closest finisher (also an Islamist party) by a two-to-one margin. And while the parliament has since been dissolved over a technicality in the electoral law, the Brotherhood's presidential candidate, Mohamed Morsi, won the presidential contest to become Egypt's first democratically elected president. In the brief time that he has held the office, President Morsi has been increasingly assertive in wresting back a measure of civilian control from the Egyptian military.[27]

In the early months of the transition, the Brotherhood made a concerted effort to dispel the Islamist bogeyman, reaching out to constituencies traditionally skeptical of the organization, including Egypt's artistic community. The group's most visible effort was a January 2012 meeting between the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, General Guide Muhammad Badi', and the head of Egypt's Filmmakers Syndicate. The Brotherhood attempted to use this outreach—along with an

[27] This can be observed in Morsi's retiring of the two highest-ranking members of the SCAF, Field Marshal Tantawi and Chief of Staff 'Anan, and cancelling of the SCAF-issued constitutional supplemental that granted the military wide-ranging national security authority.

earlier meeting in which in which it sent a delegation to the Theatrical Professions Syndicate—to dispel fears that it would use its newfound power to limit cultural freedom. However, the Brotherhood's gesture failed to win over many of the rank-and-file members of the Filmmakers Syndicate. Some members went as far as to call for a no-confidence vote on the syndicate leader, given what they perceived as his capitulation to the Brotherhood as the ascendant political force.[28] The Brotherhood has received a similarly skeptical hearing from the Writers' Union of Egypt, which, after being excluded from the Constitution Drafting Assembly, issued a warning "that this exclusion comes as a continuation of the policy of the Muslim Brotherhood that treats writers, thinkers, and cultural figures as enemies."[29]

To be fair to the Muslim Brotherhood, the organization's leadership has committed itself publicly to upholding artistic freedom, and Egypt's various artist unions are known to have staunchly secular memberships predisposed to viewing the Brotherhood with suspicion. The Muslim Brotherhood, did, for example, embrace a document put together by al-Azhar—the country's highest religious institution—affirming its commitment to basic freedoms, including artistic expression and creativity.[30] And while the president appointed a figure from within the Brotherhood to head the Ministry of Information, the new minister, Salah 'Abd al-Maqsoud, has tried to dispel fears that the Brotherhood will use the ministry to control the media. 'Abd al-Maqsoud has pledged that state media "will be a pulpit for everyone.

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[28] "Thawrat al-Ghadab 'ala Zīyārat Naqīb al-Mumathalīn lil Murshid al-'Āmm ["Revolution of Anger over the Visit of the Actor's Syndicate Leader to the General Guide"], *Al-Ahram* (Egypt), January 13, 2012.

[29] Writers' Union of Egypt, "Bayān Ittihād Kuttab Misr bi shā'n Istib'aād al-Ittihād min Ijtimā' Ra'īs al-Jumhūrīya ma' Mumathalī al-Ittihādāt wa al-Naqābāt al-Mihanīya" ["Statement from the Writers' Union of Egypt Regarding the Exclusion of the Union from the President of the Republic's Meeting with Representatives from the Unions and Professional Syndicates"], July 25, 2012.

[30] The entire document was published by *Al-Khamis* newspaper (see "Nass Wathīqat al-Azhar lil Hurīyāt al-Asāsīya al-Atī A'aduha Mufakirūn Muslimūn wa Masīhiīyūn" ["Text of the Al-Azhar Document on Basic Freedoms That Was Prepared by Muslim and Christian Thinkers"], *Al-Khamis* (Egypt), January 10, 2012.

Not excluding anyone or marginalizing anyone however much we may differ with him." And in a nod to artists, President Morsi appointed two individuals to his presidential team to advise him on cultural issues. Morsi's selection of the prominent Egyptian poet Farouq Goweida and the secular-leaning writer Sakina Fou'ad was apparently intended to allay concerns that the Brotherhood would push a conservative social agenda.[31] However, both resigned from their posts after Morsi issued a presidential decree in November 2012 that put his decisions above judicial review.

Whereas the Brotherhood has sought to position itself as a moderate force on cultural issues, many Salafist groups are openly hostile to artistic freedom. In a series of interviews conducted by *Al-Shurouq* newspaper with leaders of the Salafist movement in Egypt, some of these religious conservatives went as far as to advocate complete segregation of male and female actors in dramatic productions or restricting artists to only representing factual events while prohibiting fictional scenarios.[32] These positions have fanned fears that Salafists will push the Brotherhood—or the Brotherhood will use the Salafists as cover—to restrict cultural freedom.

The charges brought against Egyptian satirist Bassem Youssef illustrate how state authorities can use the public to limit freedom of expression. Youssef, who stars in a television program similar to Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show*, was charged with insulting the president and denigrating Islam after he parodied Mohamed Morsi for receiving an honorary degree from a Pakistani university. Under both international and domestic pressure, Morsi distanced himself from the charges, but Youssef still had to appear in court because private individuals were among those who filed briefs against him. The charges have since been

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[31] Sakina Fou'ad had previously lobbied President Morsi to stop the detention of journalists and stated that if offered the post of presidential adviser, she would "occupy herself with the most important portfolios, at the top of which is [the defense] of freedoms" ("Sakina Fou'ad: Sahtim bi Milaff al-Hurrīāt wa al-Muwātna Hāl Taklīfī bi Mansib Mustashār al-Ra'īs" ["Sakina Fou'ad: I Will Concern Myself with the Portfolio of Freedoms and Citizenship if I am Appointed a Presidential Adviser"], *Al-Mesryoon* (Egypt), August 25, 2012.

[32] "Fann lil Mar'a wa Fann lil Rajul" ["Female Art and Male Art"], *Al-Shurouq* (Egypt), June 17, 2011.

dropped, but the threat of legal prosecution will likely have a chilling effect on others who seek to challenge authority.

Groups intent on limiting cultural freedoms will find large segments of the Egyptian population that do want to uphold certain red lines. The degree of religiosity in Egypt—and how that religiosity is expressed—is constantly changing. But like their co-religionists elsewhere, Egyptians are nearly uniformly opposed to art that insults Islam or the Prophet Mohamed. The fallout from the video produced by an Egyptian immigrant in the United States that depicted the Prophet Mohamed as a philanderer is a visible example of Egyptians' outrage over what they viewed as a deliberate provocation and insult to the Islamic faith. Unfortunately, Salafists and other social conservatives can exploit these occurrences to press for wide-ranging censorship of cultural production. So, the challenge is to develop community standards that reflect a society's values and sense of moral propriety without granting broad discretion in censorship that can be used to limit legitimate political opposition or constrain freedom of expression.

Egypt's Artist Community

In the midst of this tug of war between state authorities and conservative religious forces is a vibrant—if underfunded—community of Egyptian artists. Cairo has long been a cultural capital of the Arab world and still boasts some of the region's most prominent writers, filmmakers, and playwrights. It is not a coincidence that the first Nobel Laureate from the Arab world was Egyptian or that the first Arab movie to vie for the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film was from an Egyptian director.[33] And while Egypt's influence in the arts has faded somewhat as other Arab states, such as the United Arab Emirates and Lebanon, have increased their own investments in film and television, fieldwork conducted for this study revealed a strong interest in the arts among Egyptian youth. This includes a number of up-and-coming artists who participated in the January 25 revolution and consciously seek to use

[33] The author was Naguib Mahfouz and the film's director was Youssef Chahine.

their art to advance personal freedoms and democratic governance. There is no official census of Egyptian artists, but a review of syndicate membership reveals sizable communities across the spectrum of the arts. For example, the Writers' Union boasts more than 850 members, and given that many authors pursue their craft without joining the organization, it is safe to assume that Egypt's literary community exceeds that figure.[34] Egypt is considered the hub of filmmaking in the Arab world, producing roughly 35 feature films per year,[35] suggesting that this community could also number in the thousands. Rounding out the artist community in Egypt are smaller constellations of musicians, playwrights, visual artists, and others.

The artists interviewed for this project were energized by the January 25 revolution but also mindful of the challenges ahead. Many had used their talents to document the uprising—for example, shooting film of street protests or sketching scenes of police brutality. Others were openly critical of government institutions, such as the Ministry of Culture, and the professional syndicates that they viewed as a tool of state control. Some, but not all, were fearful of Islamists moving to limit artistic freedom, although most differentiated between the Muslim Brotherhood—whom they saw as relative moderates—and the Salafist trend, which they considered a genuine threat.

There are a number of forums in Cairo that connect like-minded artists. These can be informal venues, such as cafes that attract intellectuals (*al-muthaqafīn*), or events like "Art is a Square," a regular street exhibit featuring artists whose work is often fused with revolutionary themes.[36] Since the 2011 uprising, gatherings are also increasingly used as an avenue for political participation. The most prominent example is the weekly salon organized by the acclaimed writer Alaa al-Aswany, in which intellectual and cultural figures meet every Thursday evening

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[34] For a full list of the members, see Writers' Union of Egypt, undated.

[35] Peter Rorvik, "Film and Film Development in Africa Overview and Discussion," paper presented at the Arterial Network Conference on Creative Economy, Nairobi, Kenya, December 2012.

[36] Ursula Lindsey, "Art in Egypt's Revolutionary Square," *Middle East Report Online*, January 2012.

to discuss a variety of topics. When we attended one of these salons in January 2012, the event began with a gallery visit showcasing the paintings of a young female artist before giving way to a panel discussion on political developments in Egypt.

Portability of Egypt to Other Arab Countries

Although there are a number of unique characteristics that limit the portability of these findings to other Arab countries, the trend lines in Egypt appear consistent with broader regional developments. Namely, the onset of the Arab uprisings has generated increased demand for personal freedom in the Arab world. Regimes—both new and old—have responded to this challenge with similar strategies, including opening some space for greater dissent, albeit within certain red lines. At the same time, regimes have stepped up efforts to co-opt cultural figures who serve as symbols of popular support for their rule. And, finally, regimes have held on to censorship and repression as a last line of defense.

Egypt, like many of its Arab neighbors, is in a period of political transition. And just as occurred in Tunisia, the Egyptian transition has empowered Islamists to move from opposition to part of a new governing coalition. However, the big winners of the Arab uprisings thus far are not violent extremist or ultraconservative Salafis, but moderate Islamists, such as the Freedom and Justice Party and an-Nahda, both of which won a strong plurality in their countries' first post-revolution parliamentary elections. These groups have stated their commitment to cultural freedom, although only time will tell whether they uphold these pledges. Other challenges facing Egyptian artists, such as the stigma of pursuing a career in the arts and a lack of funding and demand for artistic work, are also applicable to the broader region.

Egypt may be unique in some ways, however. Caution should be exercised in extrapolating from this case study because of the sheer size of Egypt's artistic community. At over 80 million people, Egypt's population is more than twice as large as the second most populous Arab

state (Algeria).[37] It is also the long-standing cultural capital of the Arab world, a hub of the region's film and television industry. And because the Egyptian dialect is nearly universally understood in the region, its artists face no linguistic barrier in reaching other Arab audiences. To give a concrete example of the vibrancy of the Egyptian artistic community relative to those of other Arab states, one interviewee cited a fellowship that was offered region-wide for young filmmakers to travel for three weeks and shoot a short film. Of the 500 applicants, 300 were from Egypt.[38]

Conclusion

In sum, the Arab uprisings have not eliminated cultural restrictions. Many of the previous challenges persist, including the three-way dynamic in which progressive voices are squeezed between state control and religious conservatism. Moreover, overt censorship and repression are only two of many barriers to artistic freedom. Indeed, changing deeply entrenched cultural norms is a more vexing challenge than simply canceling a censorship law or reshuffling the ministry of culture. Even so, a lack of economic incentives for talented young people to pursue the arts will continue to operate as a drag on the region's cultural production.

Yet, despite these conditions, the region boasts a sizable community of artists committed to their crafts. These individuals, and particularly the young among them, are an important voice for tolerance and the expansion of personal freedom. Although they do not receive the same attention as the economic, political, and security issues facing the region, empowering these artists has the potential to be just as transformative as more traditional areas of international assistance.

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[37] The most recent UN population data estimated Egypt's 2010–2011 midyear population as 80,410,017 and Algeria's population as 36,717,000. United Nations Development Programme, "Population, Latest Available Census and Estimates (2010–2011)," last updated March 18, 2013.

[38] Interview with young filmmaker, Cairo, Egypt, January 24, 2012.

CHAPTER THREE

U.S. Government Efforts to Support Artists in the Arab World

Both the Bush and Obama administrations have recognized the importance of enhancing the outreach and impact of Arab voices advocating for tolerance and nonviolence in the Middle East. In multiple policy documents, they have noted the role that cultural outreach can play in achieving the long-term U.S. goals of combating extremism and promoting democracy and reform in the region.[1] Despite such official statements, U.S. support for artists in the Middle East remains relatively limited and haphazard. While multiple U.S. government departments and agencies are engaged in programs that promote cultural and artistic freedom, there is a lack of strategic guidance and coordination in these efforts.

For analytical purposes, programs and policies to promote artistic freedom fall into three general categories: (1) cultural diplomacy through artistic exchanges, (2) financial or technical assistance and training or educational opportunities for Middle Eastern artists, and (3) U.S. pressure on Middle Eastern governments to protect artistic expression and curb censorship.

The United States engages in cultural outreach to the Middle East primarily through the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Other agencies, such as the USAID's Bureau for

[1] U.S. Department of State, 2010. On the Bush administration's cultural diplomacy policies, see U.S. Department of State, "Global Cultural Initiative," fact sheet, Washington, D.C., September 2006, and Laura Bush, "Remarks by the First Lady at President Bush's Global Cultural Initiative Launch," transcript of speech at the White House, Washington, D.C., September 25, 2006.

Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance, have some activities that fall into the category of cultural diplomacy. These programs focus on democracy promotion and civil society development. Finally, a few activities of the State Department's U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) might be categorized as promoting artistic expression. MEPI offers assistance, training, and support to groups and individuals seeking to bring change to the Middle East. It also supports youth and women activists who are promoting reform; occasionally, these activists are engaged in cultural activities.

While the U.S. Department of Defense continues to identify countering Islamic extremism in the Middle East as a critical goal, for the most part, it has retreated from supporting cultural activities. The Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Support to Public Diplomacy, established during the Bush administration, sought to support cultural activities that limited the appeal of radicalism and assisted reform-minded voices. This office was closed early in the Obama administration, and some of its functions were relocated to the Global Strategic Engagement Team, which reports directly to the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy.[2] In active war zones, such as Iraq and Afghanistan, the military commands have allocated some funding to promote local cultural activities. However, as the United States withdraws from these conflicts, these limited sets of activities have been significantly reduced or eliminated.[3]

Cultural Diplomacy

From 1953 to 1999, the United States Information Agency (USIA) was an independent agency in charge of the U.S. government's cul-

[2] Kristin M. Lord and Marc Lynch, *America's Extended Hand: Assessing the Obama Administration's Global Engagement Strategy*, Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2010, p. 43.

[3] An exploration of clandestine U.S. programs was not of this research effort, so we cannot draw any conclusions about the scope or nature of such programs.

tural diplomacy efforts and public diplomacy more broadly.[4] USIA was responsible for implementing the vast majority of U.S. informational and cultural programs, including a number of famous cultural exchanges with the communist bloc during the height of the Cold War. At the time, such important cultural figures as playwright Vaclav Havel were deeply engaged in politics. USIA believed that artists and cultural figures were a critical group for the United States to support and influence if it hoped to win the Cold War.

In 1999, USIA was dissolved into the State Department. The merger coincided with a steep drop in funding for public diplomacy. During the Cold War, public diplomacy spending averaged around $1.2 billion per year in constant dollars, excluding expenditures on broadcasting, such as Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.[5] In 2000, public diplomacy funding had dropped to approximately $400 million. Cultural diplomacy was zeroed out of the budget and the office that had previously conducted it was eliminated.[6] Without a clear ideological competitor, public diplomacy was relegated to a second-order priority.

After the attacks of September 11, 2001, public diplomacy spending recovered, with total spending reaching around $1 billion in 2006. Cultural diplomacy programs were restarted in 2003 under the new Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The office quickly realized that the Cold War model of cultural exchange needed to be updated for the 21st century. A much heavier emphasis was placed upon two-way exchanges, rather than simply disseminating American cultural products, and the Middle East replaced Eastern Europe as the central focus of activity. The programs also concentrated on reaching out to youth, who were viewed as more likely to be flexible in their political and

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[4] For a historical overview of USIA cultural activities, see Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945–1989*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

[5] Kristin M. Lord, *Voices of America: U.S. Public Diplomacy for the 21st Century*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute, November 2008, p. 37, drawing on figures from the Office of Management and Budget.

[6] Interview with a former State Department official, January 19, 2012.

cultural orientations.[7] One example was the placement of "American Corners" in local libraries and universities in the Middle East, offering books, magazines, DVDs, and other materials about the United States and access to research databases and the Internet.

The budget for the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs has gone up slightly over the past several years, reaching $635 million in 2010.[8] In comparison, the British Council, an independent agency of the British government tasked with educational and cultural relations, has a budget approximately twice that amount.[9] Over the past five years, funding for the cultural exchange portion of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs has remained steady around $11 million.[10] These figures indicate that the vast majority of the bureau's funding goes toward the educational portion of its portfolio. Cultural exchange funds are supplemented by the State Department's regional bureaus, which have their own funding mechanism for public diplomacy and cultural affairs activities. Individual embassies also raise funds locally—for example, by tapping into the American business community. The *American Idol*–style competition sponsored by the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, in which finalists sang at the Cairo Opera House, is one example of these efforts.

According to officials in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, the purpose of the bureau's programs is to foster mutual cross-cultural understanding and to demonstrate shared values and aspirations. It seeks to engage with traditionally underrepresented groups, including women, youth, and racial and ethnic minorities. It also uses cultural exchanges to showcase particular forms of American culture expression for the intelligentsia and opinion leaders.

State Department cultural affairs programs generally consist of offering grants to U.S. cultural institutions and matching them with

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7 Interview with a former State Department official, January 19, 2012.

8 U.S. Department of State, "Educational and Cultural Exchange Programs," in *Congressional Budget Justification, Fiscal Year 2010*, 2009. The State Department requested $633.2 million and received $635 million.

9 Lord, 2008, p. 36.

10 Interview with a senior State Department official, February 10, 2012.

similar institutions overseas. For example, it awarded a DanceMotion USA grant to Rennie Harris Puremovement, a hip-hop dance company based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In 2012, Rennie Harris toured the Middle East, stopping in Egypt, Israel, the Palestinian territories, and Jordan. State Department officials see hip-hop as a particular powerful messenger for foreign audiences, believing that hip-hop can serve the same role jazz did in the 1950s as an art form that expresses the creativity and multiethnic nature of America.[11]

Other State Department cultural programs seek to provide artists with training in their discipline and the ability to experience life in the United States. For many years, it has provided support for the University of Iowa's International Writing Program, which brings authors, screenwriters, and journalists to Iowa City to spend a semester exploring the creative writing process.

Finally, the State Department engages in efforts to pair U.S. and foreign institutions engaged in similar cultural activities. One example of this type of program is the international work of the American Association of Museums. In 2011, with State Department Assistance, the association connected the Children's Museum of Jordan in Amman with the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan. The two museums engaged middle school youth in a joint project calling attention to the worldwide dilemma of increasing waste production. The students acted as amateur archaeologists, photographing, filming, and describing their own families' garbage and researching how the approach to waste has changed over generations.

According to the State Department officials and regional experts we consulted, U.S. strategy and cultural diplomacy policy have not shifted since the onset of the Arab uprisings in early 2011. Senior officials say that, if anything, U.S. cultural programs have been slowed or curtailed because of a judgment that cultural diplomacy is not very effective in the midst of a revolution.[12] State Department officials do see cultural diplomacy as an important piece of the U.S. diplomatic

[11] Interview with a cultural affairs officer in the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, March 8, 2012.

[12] Interview with a senior State Department official, February 10, 2012.

toolkit for engaging the Middle East. However, they also indicated that there are serious challenges in terms of finding regional partners to work with and identifying artistic styles that resonate with Middle Eastern audiences.

Direct Support to Arab Artists

Unlike Britain and Germany, some of whose artistic outreach programs are discussed in Chapter Four, the United States does not have a specific office or associated nongovernmental institution devoted to directly assisting Arab artists in producing or distributing their work. However, USAID, the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, and the National Endowment for Democracy have some programs that promote cultural and artistic freedom. Efforts to promote cultural freedom are not the primary goal of these activities, however. Instead, they are offshoots of other U.S. government objectives, such as developing civil society in Middle Eastern states, promoting democracy, and promoting economic development in a culturally sensitive manner.

Many in academia and the policy world consider development of a civil society a key component in establishing stable democratic rule.[13] *Civil society* refers broadly to a set of institutions and values that offer both a buffer and critical linkages between the state and individuals and are manifested in the establishment and activities of NGOs. While civil society flows naturally from the institutional structures of liberal democratic states, it is both possible and desirable for this to occur in states transitioning to democracy.[14]

U.S. efforts at civil society development are extremely broad and include initiatives to promote economic opportunity, assist in the

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[13] Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1971; Dietrich Ruescemyer and John D. Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy*, Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

[14] Francis Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution*, New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2011.

establishment of an independent and responsible media, promote environmental protection, protect minority or gender rights, and provide access to health care and education. Focusing on civil society development is part of an indirect approach to political reform that lays the groundwork for developing the skills and institutions needed for a functioning democracy while minimizing the direct challenge to ruling regimes. In the view of USAID and MEPI, cultural and artistic freedom fits naturally under this civil society development framework.

In Egypt, a number of efforts to support local artists have flowed out of USAID's Democracy and Governance Program, particularly those designed to promote gender equity. These efforts fit into USAID objectives to promote civil society. For example, USAID funds local NGOs that, in turn, provide young filmmakers equipment for their work. In addition, USAID, again through local NGOs, funds films that specifically address women's issues. USAID support is often dictated by the films' subject matter. Local filmmakers are not pleased by this requirement, viewing it as an impediment to their artistic freedom.[15] Compared with other organizations, USAID is a relatively small player in promoting artistic work, however. The European Union, European governments, and the United Nations all have programs to support local artists that are larger than those of the United States.[16]

Another part of USAID's Democracy and Governance Program supports economic empowerment. This effort is linked to a growing understanding within USAID that economic empowerment and development will prevail only if they are embedded in the local cultural context. U.S. programs to promote economic development will find greater acceptance and will be more sustainable when the aid cor-

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[15] Interview with Egyptian filmmakers, Cairo, Egypt, January 25, 2012.

[16] The European Union has a budget of €400 million for cultural projects and initiatives. A portion of this funding goes to cross-border cooperation in the Middle East that supports local artists (see European Commission, "Culture Programme: A Serious Cultural Investment," web page, last updated January 10, 2013). The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is facing significant budget cuts but continues to support cultural activities in the Middle East. As noted earlier, the British Council's budget is twice the size of the State Department's expenditure on cultural efforts, and, as discussed in the next chapter, the council has a program to directly fund regional artists.

responds to the societal values of the country that the United States is attempting to assist. To foster awareness and norm creation, USAID supports forms of cultural expression that address the issues USAID is seeking to raise. An example of this is street theater that highlights women's rights and the dangers of human trafficking.[17]

There is also a growing understanding that the creative arts can be a source of economic development. USAID, in partnership with business associations and banks, provides microfinancing opportunities in the Middle East, with women entrepreneurs representing a significant portion of the beneficiaries. Sometimes these loans support economic activities related to cultural initiatives. For example, in 2008, USAID sponsored the Family Justice Project. Part of this effort included financial assistance for women in Giza, Egypt, to make handicrafts to support themselves. These types of programs support local cultural expression and enhance the economic status of women in these communities.[18]

Both government officials and NGOs expressed the view that support to the creative arts was most politically palatable if done under the heading of promoting economic development. This allows USAID and MEPI to support regional artists through programs designed to promote entrepreneurship in general and young entrepreneurship specifically.[19] These initiatives tend to be small-scale grants under $200,000.

U.S. Efforts to Highlight the Suppression of Artistic Freedom

One important way the United States attempts to protect artistic freedom is to document and highlight the human rights practices of various Middle East governments. The State Department views the freedom to engage in cultural events and activities as a part of the civil

[17] Interviews with USAID officials, September 27, 2012.

[18] U.S. Agency for International Development, *Audit of USAID/Egypt's Democracy and Governance Activities*, Audit Report No. 6-263-10-001-P, Cairo, Egypt, October 27, 2009.

[19] Interviews with USAID officials, September 27, 2012.

liberties that all global citizens should enjoy. The central U.S. government document on this topic for more than three decades has been the State Department's *Country Report on Human Rights Practices*, which catalogues and analyzes global civil rights.[20]

The State Department's annual report on each country's human rights practices covers freedom of speech and the press and includes sections on Internet freedom, academic freedom, and cultural events. Each section discusses the degree of censorship that occurs and various measures that foreign governments use to control output in these areas.

As noted in then–Secretary of State Clinton's preface to the 2011 report, the annual human rights reports serve several functions.[21] First, they are used as a guide by Congress to make decisions about foreign military and economic aid programs. For example, the law for approving aid to Egypt required the Secretary of State to certify that "Egypt is supporting the transition to civilian government including holding free and fair elections; implementing policies to protect *freedom of expression*, association, and religion, and due process of law."[22] If this standard is not met, economic and military aid could be cut or eliminated. Second, U.S. human rights reports have become a benchmark for human rights progress globally and regionally. Governments that would like to demonstrate to the international community and their own citizens that they respect human rights need to take these U.S. reports into account.

On a smaller scale, U.S. embassies engage in similar efforts, although they exhibit a high degree of caution in directly engaging in contentious domestic political issues. U.S. diplomats appear to believe that direct U.S. intervention in the cultural sphere will be viewed as foreign interference in domestic affairs. The U.S. Embassy in Cairo and the State Department have expressed in a limited way their concerns about recent moves by the Egyptian government to restrict media

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[20] See, e.g., U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, *2011 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, Washington, D.C., May 24, 2012.

[21] U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2012.

[22] Public Law 112-74, Consolidated Appropriations Act, Section 7011, Availability of Funds, December 23, 2011; emphasis added.

freedom, criticism, and artistic freedom in that country. However, in Tunisia, where cultural freedom has become a major domestic issue, the U.S. Embassy in Tunis has, for the most part, steered clear of the controversy. During the spring and summer of 2012, Salafist groups kept up a consistent stream of protests and demonstrations against cultural events that they regarded as undermining Islamic values. The postrevolutionary Tunisian government has denounced these demonstrations and extremist attacks on artists. It appears that the U.S. Embassy has deliberately avoided directly engaging on these issues. On the other hand, it has sped up its efforts to disperse funding to civil society organizations, including those devoted to fighting for artistic freedom. Some analysts and former officials have criticized this cautious approach, arguing for more forceful American pressure and attention to violations of freedom of expression.[23]

Conclusion

U.S. government efforts to promote artistic expression have not been significantly affected by the Arab uprisings. Programs continue to focus on promoting a positive view of U.S. cultural norms, with less emphasis on supporting regional arts. Funding for cultural exchanges and direct support for regional artists remain limited in comparison with other nations' efforts. U.S. officials appear reticent to deeply engage with cultural issues, seeing them as controversial and counterproductive to their efforts to achieve results on higher-priority issues.

On the positive side, the State Department appears to be effectively utilizing a public-private partnership model for its cultural exchange programs that matches U.S. artists with artistic communities in the region with similar interests and needs. These efforts could be enhanced if they placed a greater emphasis on building the capacity of the regional partners. Another positive development is the growing

[23] Elliott Abrams, "In Tunisia, Press Freedoms Are in the Crosshairs," *Washington Post*, March 11, 2012.

understanding within USAID that the creative arts can be an important component of economic development.

In conclusion, despite the official recognition of the important role culture plays in the broad challenges the Middle East faces, large gaps continue to plague U.S. government efforts in the cultural sphere. Support for regional artists is scattered throughout the U.S. government, with a lack of strategic focus and organization. Perhaps most troubling, while the United States includes cultural expression as a fundamental human right, U.S. diplomatic activity appears to indicate that artistic freedom is a lower priority than freedom of the press, freedom of speech, and Internet freedom. While U.S. government caution may be advisable in many instances, U.S. cultural programming could be more attuned to supporting regional artists through partnerships with global and regional NGOs, giving as much attention to supporting this work as it gives to promoting American artists and culture in the region.

CHAPTER FOUR

Nongovernmental Efforts to Engage and Support Artists in the Arab World

As artistic talent and production have spread across the Middle East, a wide array of nongovernmental activities and programs to engage and support Arab artists has emerged. Whether initiated by the private sector, individual artists and entrepreneurs, universities, think tanks, or other nonprofit organizations, nongovernmental efforts play a critical role in identifying and supporting Arab artists. Indeed, such efforts are essential to leverage when considering new public-private partnership models to foster the arts, particularly given regional sensitivities to direct U.S. government support.

While this report cannot identify every effort under way, we have outlined a number of general categories that capture the nature of nongovernmental engagement with regional artists. They include mentor programs and artist exchanges, the establishment of new film schools in the region and Arab film festivals, NGOs that promote Arab artists and better understanding of Arab culture in the United States, Hollywood filmmakers and companies that partner with local talent, and private-sector models to help Middle Eastern artists make a living from their work. Collectively, these nonprofit and for-profit efforts serve important roles, including improving the skills of emerging young talent, helping to promote creative work emanating from this region, and investing financially in regional artists.

Despite these important contributions, the nongovernmental landscape remains uncoordinated and critical gaps remain that impede artistic production, particularly the continued scarcity of sound funding models. The marketing and distribution of creative content from

the region is also an ongoing challenge, as is the lack of arts infrastructure and arts education in Arab societies. This chapter draws on this survey of nongovernmental efforts and the prior review of government initiatives to consider how such efforts might be better married with official resources or, in some cases, reconfigured without government support to more effectively help regional artists overcome the many challenges they face in creating and disseminating their work.

Programs to Cultivate Artistic Talent and Build Regional Skills

Mentor Programs and Artist Exchanges

A number of initiatives focus on direct support for regional artists by helping them produce their work. The Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative, a philanthropic program established in 2002, connects established international artists with rising talent across the globe, supporting a year of one-to-one mentorship and collaboration in film, dance, music, theater, literature, visual arts, and architecture. A number of young Arab artists have participated in this program as protégés of established international artists, including Egyptian singer Dina El Wedidi (paired with Brazilian musician Gilberto Gil) and Lebanese actor, writer, and theater director Maya Zbib (paired with American theater and opera director Peter Sellars).

Dina El Wedidi, whose songs focus on political challenges in Egypt and who sang before millions in Tahrir Square during the Egyptian revolution, believes her relationship with her mentor will help her build her career, teaching her "how to move from being a local underground artist, and how to join the international music scene."[1] Maya Zbib not only identified with her mentor's view of theater as a "force for change" that speaks to societal challenges but also benefited from his willingness to travel to Beirut to meet with other theater practitio-

[1] "Gilberto Gil and Dina El Wedidi: A Year of Mentoring," 2012–2013.

ners and students to share his insights.[2] During their collaboration, Sellars invited Zbib to visit the Congo with him, where he introduced her to Congolese artists addressing violence through their work, reflecting themes relevant to her own country's civil war. (Zbib runs a theater group that not only creates new works but also conducts drama therapy workshops in refugee camps in Southern Lebanon.) Through the mentor program, Zbib also traveled to Chicago to observe Sellar's own theater production (an interpretation of George Frederick Handel's *Hercules* in which Hercules is reinvented as a returning war veteran from Iraq and Afghanistan), where she learned new theater techniques and met American war veterans with Sellars during research for the production.

The British Council's Cultural Leadership International Programme is similarly focused on identifying and supporting emerging global cultural talent. The program helps develop cultural management skills by offering seminars and workshops and helps cultural leaders increase their international exposure through small grants to pursue a placement abroad or short courses in the United Kingdom. The program stretches across the globe but has included a number of Arab countries, such as Egypt, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, and Syria.[3] The British Council also supports the Royal Court Theatre, which runs an international residency program that allows emerging artists from around the world, including the Middle East, to develop their work by interacting with British playwrights, directors, and performers over four weeks.[4] While the workshops are held in English, the plays are expected to be written in the artist's native language. The British Council and the Royal Court Theatre also started an initiative in 2007 focused specifically on the Middle East, inviting writers from across the region to workshops in Damascus, Tunis, and Cairo with British artistic directors and playwrights. The project led the Royal Court to present a series of readings, *I Come From There: New Plays*

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2 "Peter Sellars and Maya Zbib: A Year of Mentoring," Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative, 2010–2011.

3 British Council, "Cultural Leadership," web page, undated.

4 Royal Court Theatre, "International Playwriting Residencies," web page, undated.

from the Arab World, and some of the plays from the project have been produced across the region.[5]

The German government–supported Goethe-Institut owns Villa Aurora, a residence in the Pacific Palisades neighborhood in Los Angeles that houses visual artists, composers, filmmakers, and writers from around the world and helps them to produce their work. Villa Aurora also awards an annual nine-month resident fellowship (the Feuchtwanger grant) to writers and journalists from countries that restrict freedom of expression. The 2012 Feuchtwanger fellow was Tunisian author Hassouna Mosbahi, whose writings advocate for a "modern, humanistic Arabic culture."[6] Similarly, the Prince Claus Fund, funded in part by the Dutch foreign ministry, provides financial support for artists and cultural institutions in places where cultural expression is restricted. The fund also helps organize cultural events that bring attention to global artists, such as an Arab film festival in Rotterdam featuring work by young regional filmmakers.[7]

Regional Film Schools, Training, and Film Festivals

Over the past decade, and particularly since the mid-2000s, the film industry has grown significantly in the Middle East. One reflection of this is the emergence of new film schools and the hosting of international film festivals in the region. As part of Jordanian King Abdullah's ambition to make his country a cultural leader in the region and develop the creative capital of its youth, the Royal Film Commission of Jordan and the University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts jointly established the Red Sea Institute of Cinematic Arts (RSICA) in Aqaba, Jordan.[8] Inaugurated in 2008, the film school offers advanced graduate-level training in film, television, and other

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5 For more details, see the Royal Court Theatre, "Near East and North Africa Since 2007," undated.

6 See Villa Aurora (2012) for the author's full bio.

7 See "Arab Camera Festival, Rotterdam," Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development, November 28–December 2, 2012.

8 Steven Spielberg apparently recommended the partnership with the University of Southern California, where he is a trustee. He had met King Abdullah while filming *Indiana Jones*

screen media to Arab students from Jordan and throughout the region. As one American film and television producer observed, these types of schools are important in developing regional talent and allowing creative individuals to learn practical skills to execute their films and to tell their stories in ways that will resonate with regional and international audiences.[9]

A regional filmmaker active in the establishment and development of RSICA, Claire Naber Matalqa, believes this type of effort helps empower local voices and creates "a haven for investment in local talent."[10] The school's dean, James Hindman, similarly argues that Americans and Europeans should not be the ones telling Middle East stories, which is why, in his view, the "Red Sea Institute is so important. It's to empower people to tell their own stories."[11] Samer Mouasher, the head of the Royal Jordanian Film Commission, notes that the region has a long history of storytelling, but that its storytelling culture has "slowly been dying with time. . . . RSICA is trying to nurture the little seeds of storytelling or the storytelling culture of the Middle East using the best technology, using the best talent from around the world to support these students."[12]

The Sundance Institute has also been involved with identifying and cultivating regional filmmakers through its Middle East Film Initiative, part of its Feature Film Program. Working with the Royal Film Commission in Jordan, this initiative helped start the RAWI (Storyteller) Middle East Screenwriters Lab in 2005 to help emerging filmmakers with their first or second feature.[13] The program is designed to bring established writers together with regional screenwriters to help them develop their work in annual workshops held in

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and the Last Crusade in Jordan's ancient city of Petra. See "Jordan Signs Cinema Pact with USC," *USC News*, September 20, 2006, and Jahad, 2011.

9 Interview with a Hollywood producer, Los Angeles, June 1, 2012.

10 "People in Film: Claire Naber Matalqa," *Doha Film Institute Blog*, April 17, 2011.

11 Jahad, 2011.

12 Jahad, 2011.

13 Sundance Institute, "RAWI Middle East Screenwriters Lab," web page, undated.

southern Jordan. Filmmakers from Lebanon, Iraq, Palestine, Iran, Syria, Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco have participated in the labs. Several films developed through the program have gone on to screen at the Sundance Film Festival and other international venues, including *Amreeka* (Palestinian-American director), *Pomegranates and Myrrh* (Palestinian), and *Son of Babylon* (Iraqi). The discontinued National Geographic's All Roads Film Project gave small grants to filmmakers to help them jump-start their careers; a $10,000 grant to Palestinian-American filmmaker Cherien Dabis to make a short film in the West Bank helped her secure financing to make her award-winning 2009 film *Amreeka* (which National Geographic films then distributed as its first fiction film).

In Qatar, H. E. Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad Al-Thani helped found the Doha Film Institute (DFI), an organization focused on film appreciation, education, and training that is designed to build "a dynamic film industry in Qatar that focuses on nurturing regional storytellers while being entirely global in scope."[14] DFI also runs a grant program to support filmmakers across the region; since 2011, more than 70 regional filmmakers have received funding from DFI. In 2009, DFI also partnered with Tribeca Enterprises to host the Doha Tribeca Film Festival, which showcases top Arab and international films. As Jordanian filmmaker Claire Naber Matalqa observed, "With new support grants, workshops, film schools, regional awards and film festivals (like the Doha Tribeca Film Festival) geared towards encouraging serious filmmaking and storytelling in the Middle East, we are all taking important steps in the right direction."[15] That said, some observers note that the film festivals taking place in Gulf countries, such as Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, feature more foreign films than regional ones, as they are viewed more as a platform to put their countries on the film industry's map than as a means to support regional talent.[16]

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[14] See Doha Film Institute, homepage, undated.

[15] "People in Film: Claire Naber Matalqa," 2011.

[16] We heard this critique in a number of discussions with observers of the Arab art scene.

Initiatives to Promote Arab Artists in the United States and Intercultural Understanding

A number of programs and individuals are focused on exposing artistic talent from the Arab world within the United States, both to bolster these artists' reputations globally and to enhance intercultural understanding and appreciation between the Western and Islamic worlds. Jennifer Bryson, who directs the Islam and Civil Society Project at the Witherspoon Institute, often writes and distributes articles and film reviews of artistic works focused on themes of pluralism and religious freedom. In her prior positions in government, Bryson has also worked to publicize promising Arabic novels and works of nonfiction with the hope of expanding their audiences overseas.[17]

At the Brookings Institution's Saban Center, Cynthia Schneider runs the Arts and Culture Initiative, part of the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World. This initiative is intended to raise awareness of how arts and culture can increase understanding between the United States and the Muslim world. For example, the program helps bring regional artists to the United States to give American audiences different views of Muslim society through the arts. Schneider's own writings have also reflected on how cultural engagement can affect political change, highlighting various cultural initiatives throughout the region, such as *American Idol*–style programs in countries like Egypt that have helped to empower women.[18]

Nonprofit media companies, such as Layalina Productions, have also emerged to produce Arabic and English-language programming to improve cultural understanding between the Arab world and the United States. Layalina's programming is broadcast on satellite and cable television networks throughout the Middle East and North Africa, with a key goal of using "television diplomacy" to address "negative stereotypes about the United States by providing Arabic-

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[17] Bryson's collected works are categorized by media type (literature, film, and theater) and can be found on her website (see bibliography).

[18] See Cynthia P. Schneider, "Empowering Egyptian Women Through Music," *Huffington Post*, March 26, 2012.

speaking television viewers with programming that is honest, positive, and entertaining," as well as to promote better understanding between the Arab world and the United States.[19]

Arab cultural centers, such as the Levantine Center in Los Angeles, also provide outlets to showcase and attract regional talent. The Levantine Center hosts regular events with Arab filmmakers, writers, comedians, and musicians to give these artists more exposure and to increase awareness of Arab culture among American audiences. (The center also started its own theater company that includes artists from the region.) Other Arab cultural centers in such cities as San Francisco, San Jose, Houston, and Boston, as well as the Arab American National Museum in Michigan, serve similar roles, with some centers also bringing American artistic productions to the region to promote cultural exchange. According to Jordan Elgrably of the Levantine Center, support for Arab artists visiting the United States or Europe (the largest Middle East arts institute in the world is the Arab World Institute in Paris) helps these artists gain legitimacy at home, which enables them to produce more work.[20]

In addition to cultural centers, there have been some one-time special events, such as the Arabesque festival at the Kennedy Center, which was funded by the Qatar Foundation and hosted a wide range of Arab artists in Washington, D.C., over several weeks of programming during the spring of 2009. The Hammer Museum in Los Angeles offers occasional programming focused on Middle Eastern art, including an Iraqi art exhibit that brought Iraqis to the United States for a speaker series related to the event.

Yet, despite these cultural centers and periodic arts festivals featuring Arab artists, there is no regular funding mechanism or defined program to help bring regional artists to the United States; the only artists who regularly tour in the United States are those who are already

[19] See Layalina Productions, "About Us," web page, undated.

[20] Interview with Jordan Elgrably of the Levantine Center, Los Angeles, August 22, 2012.

known, so it is difficult to identify and support emerging artists without a program to fund regional visitors.[21]

Regionally Themed Filmmaking for Global Audiences

A number of filmmaking groups have demonstrated an interest in the broader Middle East region, but their efforts are primarily tailored to global audiences and not people within the region itself. Film companies that focus on topics with social impact, including Participant Media, have produced several films touching on Middle East themes and raise awareness of cultural issues across the broader region largely for American and Western audiences. (Examples include *The Visitor*, *Syriana*, and *Kite Runner*.) While Participant Media is dedicated to highlighting social issues, the company is still a for-profit business and ultimately makes decisions about whether to produce films based on profit potential. Other film initiatives that have developed in the region, such as ImageNation (an Abu Dhabi–based group started in 2009 in partnership with Hollywood producers Walter Parkes and Laurie MacDonald),[22] have largely produced American movies and draw on American talent.[23] And popular Hollywood films with Middle East–related storylines, such as *Body of Lies* and *Green Zone*, are ultimately produced more because they have scripts that will attract funding and large audiences than because they have Middle East content. Thus, while a number of Hollywood films have focused on Middle Eastern issues, there is not yet a dedicated interest or support mechanism for producing work on this region (see box, next page).[24]

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[21] Jordan Elgrably of the Levantine Center pointed out this gap in an interview, Los Angeles, August 22, 2012.

[22] Gregg Kilday, "Walter Parkes and Laurie MacDonald Form New Joint Venture with Image Nation," *Hollywood Reporter*, April 25, 2012.

[23] Interview with a Hollywood producer, Los Angeles, June 1, 2012.

[24] These challenges were pointed out by Jordan Elgrably of the Levantine Center in an interview, Los Angeles, August 22, 2012.

Pen and Paper Films

The Challenge of Finding Distributors for Middle Eastern Films

Award-winning filmmaker Amin Matalqa finished shooting Disney's first Arab-language production in 2011, a soccer film called *The United*, just as the Arab uprisings were spreading throughout the region.

Matalqa, who was born in Jordan but moved to the United States when he was 13, filmed the movie in Jordan but used an Egyptian star to broaden the appeal of this pan-Arab soccer film in which athletes from different countries and with distinct backgrounds put aside their differences and work for a common cause.

The film never received theatrical distribution because Disney closed down its international division and Middle Eastern projects after the Egyptian revolution. However, Disney sold the film to more than 80 countries for television and home video distribution in 2013.

Similarly, despite its many awards (including a Sundance award in 2008 and Jordan's first entry to the Academy Awards for Best Foreign Language Film), Matalqa's Jordanian film *Captain Abu Raed* also failed to gain theatrical distribution in the region. Because of limited theater venues, the film has mostly screened at Arab film festivals, which do not produce revenue for regional filmmakers. Nonetheless, *Captain Abu Raed* was sold to Rotana, part of a pan-Arab entertainment group, for television broadcast starting in the summer 2013. Thus, although theatrical distribution remains a serious challenge for regional filmmakers, television and video markets are allowing for broader distribution of their work.

One exception is BoomGen Studios, co-founded by a regional expert and scholar of Islam, Reza Aslan. While it is also focused on producing commercially successful English-language entertainment, the company has made a conscious effort to relate its projects to the culture of the greater Middle East and its diaspora. Its productions seek to tell stories that can bring about social change, but they largely target American and Western audiences to increase cultural understanding; they are not intended specifically for regional audiences. Examples of BoomGen projects include such films as *Prince of Persia*, *All-American Muslim*, and *Miral*. While not aimed at reaching regional audiences, BoomGen and its partner company Aslan Media mine the region for artistic talent and highlight through interviews and reviews the work of artists in a variety of fields, including film, music, visual art, and fashion. The intention of these efforts is to introduce English-speaking audiences to interesting regional artists and increase cultural awareness. That said, Aslan worries that despite greater exposure to Western audiences, regional artists continue to lack sustainable funding for their work, which, in his view, continues to pose the greatest obstacle to artistic production throughout the region.[25]

Private-Sector Models Designed to Help Fund Regional Artists

Recognizing the funding challenge and the difficulty for regional talent to sustain a living from their work, particularly given the lack of copyright laws across the region, some private sector efforts have emerged to fill the gap. A for-profit company, Transterra, is one such example. Transterra's model is to draw on market forces globally to support people in the Middle East and other regions who produce media content, including documentary filmmakers and artists. Transterra has developed a network of journalists and filmmakers who contribute innovative material with their on-the-ground perspec-

[25] Telephone interview with Reza Aslan, August 31, 2012. Also see BoomGen Studios, homepage, undated.

tives and links them with international media outlets that pay for the regional content, including networks like CNN and Al Jazeera and cable channels like Discovery and A&E. According to a Transterra staff member, 50–70 percent of revenues from these transactions goes back to the regional contributors, allowing them to produce other creative work.[26] For example, one U.S.-based filmmaker who wanted to tell the story of the fall of Mubarak licensed and paid for footage from Transterra—footage that came from Egyptian filmmakers. These Egyptian filmmakers received 70 percent of the funds, which, in turn, allowed them to produce other work (and they received camera credit in the final U.S. production).

The idea for this market-based approach to supporting regional journalists and artists originated in 2006, when one of Transterra's founders was a graduate student at the American University in Cairo. (The company is based and registered in Beirut but has an office in Cairo.) At that time, technology opportunities, particularly with the advent of YouTube, were growing rapidly, suggesting new ways for people to access news and other unique perspectives from regions like the Middle East. Transterra and similar companies help global media outlets filter through this overwhelming amount of material, offering them more genuine perspectives from the region while using the revenue to help those who create the content. While Transterra offers some training in Cairo on camera use, editing, and other skills, it largely works with other NGOs that specialize in media training and focuses instead on helping to provide a market for these individuals once the training is over. As one of the founders of Transterra noted, a shortcoming of the nonprofit model is that it does not help artists find employment after they are trained so they can make a living off the skills they have acquired.[27]

Other private companies draw on similar market models. For example, Storyful filters and curates global social media for major networks while allowing a portion of its profits to go back to regional

[26] Telephone interview with Eli Andrews, June 12, 2012. Also see Transterra, "About Us," web page, undated.

[27] Telephone interview with Eli Andrews, June 12, 2012.

contributors.[28] While these companies seek to make a profit, they also reinforce the social action agenda of opening up space in support of democratization. Companies like Transterra also hope to continue leveraging online distribution sources to help filmmakers get around regular distributors that may not support their films (such as by posting films for free online but with advertisements to attract revenue).

Other distribution mechanisms for regional work are emerging, such as the establishment of Pacha Pictures, an international sales company partnered with Paris-based Films Distribution designed to serve as a regional vehicle for Arab television and film distribution around the world. At the time of this research, Pacha's website stated that it was the first company "fully dedicated to promote and sell the new emerging filmmakers from the Middle East."[29] Arab filmmakers and producers created the company out of concerns that new cutting-edge Arab cinema was not getting attention internationally outside of film festivals because there was no sales agency dedicated to promoting this work.[30] Without international recognition, many of these films do not gain attention back at home. Egyptian actor and producer Khaled Abol Naga started a new company, Team Cairo, for similar reasons, arguing, "There has never been a greater need for the Western world to understand our culture . . . and what better way to do that than through cinema?"[31]

Finally, the Aspen Institute's North Africa Partnership for Economic Opportunity Program has, with a fair degree of success, set up a network of U.S. and North African business leaders, entrepreneurs, civil society leaders, and artists who are focused on fostering job creation and entrepreneurship. Some local chapters, especially the Algerian one, have indicated that they see the creative arts as an engine for economic development and a way to establish a more positive image

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[28] Storyful, homepage, undated.

[29] The website was no longer accessible when we were preparing this report for publication. The company's Facebook page remained available, however.

[30] Jay Weissberg, "Pacha Pictures to Bow at Cannes," *Variety*, May 13, 2011.

[31] Weissberg, 2011.

of the country.[32] The Aspen Institute, working with its regional partners, has sponsored trips to the United States for its local chapters to allow participants to gather information about how to improve their creative arts industries. The delegation from Algeria visited New York, Detroit, and Washington, D.C., among other stops.

Ongoing Challenges to Regional Artists

Government censorship and societal pressures (particularly from more-extremist quarters) continue to pose barriers for regional artists. As Chapter Two explored, the Arab uprisings may have opened up space for free expression in some areas, but they also created new challenges for regional artists. For example, Naif al-Mutawa, the Kuwaiti creator of *The 99*, a comic series and later an animated film and television series with Muslim superheroes, has faced growing pressure from an Islamist parliament in Kuwait and has been accused of blasphemy.[33] Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Information banned the series because it believed it was subversive.[34] Despite such pressures and the difficulty of distributing *The 99* through state media networks, al-Mutawa has overcome such challenges and widely distributed the animated series throughout the region through alternative channels, airing it simultaneously on MBC and online via Yahoo.[35]

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[32] Interview with Vanessa Zuabi, associate director of Middle East programs, Aspen Institute, September 25, 2012. Also see Aspen Institute, "US–North Africa Partnership for Economic Opportunity," web page, undated.

[33] Some Islamists object to his focus on superheroes, rather than God, even if the superheroes in the series represent the 99 attributes of Allah and fight evil, reflecting themes of tolerance.

[34] For more on various setbacks the series has faced, see George Gene Gustines, "Along the Heated Trail of the Man Who Created Muslim Superheroes," *New York Times*, October 12, 2011. The piece also outlines some of the challenges al-Mutawa has faced in trying to bring the series to American audiences, where he has confronted forces suspicious of Islam. On his challenges within the United States, also see Schroeder, 2011.

[35] For more details see *The 99 Newsletter*, July 2012.

Indeed, the advent of YouTube and other websites has contributed significantly to helping artists overcome censorship barriers imposed by state-run media. As Arab films are moving more toward tackling sensitive social issues, these online mechanisms are particularly critical. One example of a popular YouTube series is a Lebanese production started in July 2012 that makes fun of censorship itself in a "mockumentary" set in a censorship office in Lebanon.[36] Needless to say, such satire could not have been aired on state-run media, but it can reach broad audiences across the region through YouTube. With movie theaters banned in Saudi Arabia, the Internet is the primary way to reach Saudi audiences. Saudi filmmaker Mohammed Makki produced an online miniseries that followed a group of men trying to make films in Saudi Arabia and also tackled the challenges for women in Saudi society; its first episode had more than 1 million hits on YouTube within the first three months of its release.[37]

Although artists are finding creative ways to overcome censorship, funding and adequate distribution sources may pose the greatest challenges for Arab artists today. In this respect, the challenges that regional artists face have remained, in essence, unchanged from the ones they faced before the Arab uprisings.[38] Regional artists consistently point to a lack of funding as the most serious impediment to their work. As Lebanese theater director Maya Zbib explained when asked about her biggest challenge, "Funding . . . in Lebanon, there is no support whatsoever from the government for theatre. It is regarded as a trivial profession."[39] Jordanian-American filmmaker Amin Matalqa has similarly pointed to the market and lack of distribution channels as the cen-

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[36] The series can be viewed on the website of an initiative supporting freedom of expression globally (see "Lebanon: YouTube-Series to Tackle the Thorny Issue of Censorship," *All That Is Banned Is Desired*, July 2, 2012).

[37] See "Saudi Arabia: Movie Theatres Are Still Banned, but the Film Business Is Moving On," *Arts Freedom Blog*, June 13, 2012. This article also discusses the work of Saudi Arabia's first female filmmaker, Haifaa Al-Mansour, who directed one of the country's first feature films with an all-Saudi cast, screened at the 2012 Cannes Film Festival.

[38] For more on the barriers before uprisings see Schwartz et al., 2009.

[39] "Peter Sellars and Maya Zbib: A Year of Mentoring," 2010–2011.

tral challenge facing regional artists because the region lacks enough theaters, distributors, and a movie-going culture to support filmmakers.[40] While awards and grants are important—and only five years ago, the problem may have been the lack of quality creative products—the key challenge today in Matalqa's view is access to broader markets and audiences throughout the region and globally.[41]

Just like artists in other parts of the world, finding distributors and producers to promote this work and allow creative content to reach wide audiences is a constant challenge, particularly for independent artists whose work may not be commercially popular initially. Egyptian musician Dina El Wedidi explained that, while the revolution allowed the existing underground music scene in Cairo to go public and improved her situation, "Now our problem here is production because producers want you to be very commercial."[42] As in other countries, Arab artists will need to find ways to produce important work with social impact messages that can still appeal to wide audiences. American filmmakers working in the region also find it difficult to attract Arab media distribution companies for small, independent films with social impact messages; one filmmaker who made a documentary in Jaffa about the power of ballroom dance to bring down barriers between Jewish and Arab children (a story that inspired the Hollywood film *Take the Lead*) did not succeed in attracting an Arab distributor for the work.[43]

Some film companies, such as BoomGen Studios, choose not to make their movies in Arabic because of concerns that there will be no distribution for the films once they are made. According to BoomGen co-founder Reza Aslan, outside of Cairo and Amman, there are not enough movie theaters to make Arabic films worthwhile, although he acknowledged that this challenge might be overcome with new media

[40] Telephone interview with Amin Matalqa, Monday August 27, 2012.

[41] Telephone interview with Amin Matalqa, Monday August 27, 2012.

[42] "Gilberto Gil and Dina El Wedidi: A Year of Mentoring," 2012–2013.

[43] Telephone interview with an American filmmaker and producer, June 5, 2012.

outlets, including MBC, and widespread online streaming that allows access to a wide range of films without the need for theaters.[44]

Finally, the lack of arts infrastructure is a major impediment to ensuring the sustainability of funding over time. When the Kuwaiti-based art journalist Sheikha Lulu Al-Sabah was asked what needs to change in the emerging art scene in Dubai, she responded,

> The number one thing we need is an art school. It's impossible to sustain yourself with museums and no art schools. We need academies, artist residences, patronage, etc. . . . If we celebrated creative minds more, there would be less of a stigma to pursue the arts [in the Arab world].[45]

The combination of the lack of arts infrastructure and arts education across the region and the limited distribution and support networks for artists to sustain their work poses serious obstacles for advancing the burgeoning creative talent coming from this region in a sustainable way. The Arab uprisings have unfortunately not altered these challenges and, in many ways, may have added new barriers for regional artists. But they have also created new opportunities to bolster the region's artistic communities. The question is how to capitalize on such opportunities, which our final chapter addresses.

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[44] Telephone interview with Reza Aslan, August 31, 2012.

[45] Kadry, 2012.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion: New Strategies for Supporting Regional Artists

The cultural sphere remains a contested arena in the Middle East even after the onset of the Arab uprisings. In some ways, the ousting of authoritarian governments has led to new possibilities for artistic freedom and unprecedented critiques of corruption and government abuse. Artistic production across the region is flourishing, with creative works that address sensitive societal issues increasing in ways that are attracting international recognition. Arab films, in particular, are gaining global prominence and winning prestigious awards at international film festivals. New film festivals and even film schools have emerged in the region over the past decade, improving the technical skills of regional filmmakers and their ability to tell stories in compelling ways. Regional artists are also finding ways to overcome censorship, particularly with the proliferation of online distribution sites, such as YouTube, that allow artists to reach large regional audiences without relying on state media or traditional Arab media distributors.

On the other hand, the ongoing political transitions in critical countries, such as Egypt, have also led to new societal pressures to limit artistic expression in certain areas as Islamist forces (particularly Salafists and other socially conservative actors) gain political ground. Salafist forces see cultural issues as a useful way to distinguish themselves from other political forces and to position their parties as defenders of Islam. Salafist pressure puts newly elected governments led by more moderate Islamic parties in a difficult spot with regard to cultural matters. Shaky coalition governments struggle in their efforts to maintain support from both their devoted followers, who often see modern

cultural expression as a threat to their beliefs, and secular forces that fear a rollback of their newly won cultural freedoms.

Within this political atmosphere, artists find themselves squeezed between lingering government censorship and rising conservative forces. And, like artists anywhere, but perhaps more acutely because of regional market limitations, artists in the Middle East face the dilemma of whether to become more commercial to increase their reach and viability. Artistic self-censorship remains common, limiting the creative potential and impact of cultural output. Artists struggle to find a space to create and disseminate their work—work that can have a profound impact on the way people across the region think and frame critical socioeconomic and political issues in the coming decades.

Accordingly, despite the profound social and economic changes that have swept across the region, it is still difficult for regional artists to make a living from their work. In many ways, things have gotten more difficult as the uprisings have triggered a region-wide economic downturn. Regional artists lack support, and no sustainable financial model has emerged in any art field, be it publishing, film, visual arts, or music. Programming or support from regional governments is minimal or nonexistent. The region lacks an art and art education infrastructure, making the demand and continued support for artistic production difficult to sustain. Other than attracting Western tourists and putting their countries on the map of the international art scene, it is not yet clear how the investment in major art museums and cultural initiatives by Arab Gulf states, such as Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, will benefit artists from the region or help create an indigenous constituency in support of the arts.

In many ways, this state of affairs is anomalous. In other developing countries, such as India and Nigeria, the creative arts are a major source of growth and employment. Nollywood, the nickname for Nigeria's booming film industry, has become one of the country's biggest employers, but Nollywood films are commercial, and have mass-market appeal.[1] Some in the Middle East are beginning to understand

[1] Vladimir Duthiers and Teo Kermeliotis, "Veteran Director Reveals Secrets of Nollywood's Success," CNN, August 23, 2012.

the potential economic value of the arts. They can see how creative industries could provide employment for a growing population, as they do in India and Nigeria, and how creative output can promote a positive and attractive vision of their countries' potential, spurring tourism and investment.

On the U.S. government side, our research indicates that investment and efforts in the cultural arena have not shifted significantly since the onset of the Arab uprisings. Despite greater recognition of the importance of supporting democratization processes, including freedom of expression, U.S. government resources for cultural programs remains limited. In terms of policy, the U.S. government has exhibited a high degree of caution in directly engaging on contentious cultural issues. Unlike other areas, such as religious and Internet freedom, U.S. embassies in the region and the State Department have remained notably quiet in the defense of artistic expression.

There are many good reasons for the U.S. government to retain a low profile. Newly elected governments are seeking to establish their independence and capacity to govern with populations that are resentful of U.S. power and intervention in the region. Governments and populations are particularly sensitive to direct U.S. government support for organizations and individuals, especially those who produce politically provocative work. This strongly suggests that direct U.S. government funding is not the way to support regional artists. Nongovernmental efforts, on the other hand, hold promise as a way to bolster and sustain regional talent. However, at the moment, such efforts are decentralized and more focused on increasing awareness of Arab culture in the West than on supporting artists in the region itself. These nongovernmental efforts are also largely disconnected from government resources, limiting their potential to channel large-scale support for cultural endeavors in a strategic fashion.

This suggests that entirely new models may be necessary to build sustainable programs to support the arts in the Middle East over the long term. These efforts should be based around three core principles.

First, many of the challenges that the creative arts face should be tackled as problems associated with economic development. As is the case with many small businesses and entrepreneurs, artists need access

to funds to get started, channels to distribute their products, effective ways to advertise and market their work, strong intellectual property protection, and other clear laws and regulations under which to operate. Aid and development organizations, such as the United Nations, USAID, and NGOs that focus on development, have models for assisting individuals and organizations that could overcome some of the barriers that artists in the Middle East confront. This approach also has the advantage of framing support to regional artists as an economic and development issue, which is likely to be less controversial than if it were viewed as outsiders interfering in domestic cultural matters.

Second, artistic freedom should be seen as an important and basic human right, just like freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, academic freedom, and Internet freedom. Artistic freedom, at its core, is about tolerance and a willingness to allow a wide range of views to be expressed in society. Successfully building a democratic society requires respecting other viewpoints, even when those views are uncomfortable for large numbers of people. In the Middle East, this principle is closely connected to religious freedom and respecting ethnic diversity. Ensuring this right may require active government involvement to protect and defend organizations and individuals who produce cultural products that may offend portions of the population.

Third, an important part of protecting artistic freedom will be the establishment of "community standards" for cultural products that are appropriate for democratic and free societies in the Middle East. Adopting these standards will allow artists to create their work within a stable legal and regulatory environment while eliminating the censorship that inhibits their creative freedom. While some may object to the idea of any limitation on cultural expression, it is important to remember that even the freest societies have often decided that standards were necessary for cultural works, and these standards need to be sensitive to regional culture and norms.

For example, in the United States in the 1930s, the movie studios established a voluntary standard that spelled out what was acceptable and what was unacceptable content for motion pictures produced for a public audience. Similar voluntary standards were also established in the publishing industry. As the movies and books produced during

this period indicate, political, religious, and social commentary was protected while nudity, extreme violence, and profanity were regulated.

Drawing on these principles and on the lessons and examples of programs in both the government and nongovernmental arenas, the following sections present a set of recommendations for better leveraging existing efforts to support regional artists. However, as noted earlier, existing models have significant limitations, making it advisable to establish new models to build sustainable programs capable of supporting art in the Middle East over the long term. At the end of this chapter, we consider such a model, which suggests partnering government resources *from the region* with those of private institutions and philanthropists, much as the NEA operates in the United States. A restructuring of institutions to support the arts and artists may be necessary to fundamentally alter the cultural landscape in this region in ways that can support efforts to establish democratic and pluralistic societies over time.

Recommendations for U.S. Government Efforts

- Balance the current focus of public diplomacy and cultural programs that promote U.S. culture in the Middle East with some recognition that support for regional artists is also an important objective, even if it will need to be channeled through partnerships with NGOs.
- Focus on helping the region's artists and institutions in making the creative industries a source of growth and employment. The region's artists already produce world-class cultural products, U.S. engagement should be about developing the business infrastructure necessary to make being an artist a financially viable career path.
- Make more-vocal efforts to include cultural freedom as a critical component of promoting reform and countering extremism across the region. Treat cultural expression as a universal human right, as freedom of the press, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion already are.

- Provide training programs for lawyers, policy makers, and politicians about the importance of allowing and protecting freedom of expression.
- Concentrate on capacity-building for regional artists, finding ways to help them open up space for cultural expression (e.g., through greater Internet access or cultural exchange programs, preferably run by NGOs).
- Have artists assist the U.S. government in the selection process for culturally related proposals.
- Prioritize support for nongovernmental efforts to promote cultural expression. U.S. embassies in the region can assist NGO efforts by
  - identifying regional partners
  - supporting NGOs' visits to the region
  - making entrepreneur development funds available to NGOs so they can sponsor regional artists
  - hosting conferences with NGOs and other organizations working to promote the arts in the Middle East to highlight their efforts and identify overlap and gaps.

Recommendations for Nongovernmental Efforts

American, European, and regional policymakers and nongovernmental institutions need to put more focus on how to support the arts through market-based principles and frameworks and increased philanthropy from individuals and corporations with ties to the region. Steps in this direction include the following:

- Encourage market-based companies that help distribute and fund work by regional artists.
- Develop local boards to assist in identifying the challenges artists face in creating and distributing their work. Connect these local boards with partners in the West who have the expertise to help artists overcome these challenges.

- Facilitate exchanges between regional artists and organizers of established international arts festivals. The exchanges should be designed to help artists gain the practical skills necessary to organize arts festivals that raise their profile and attract tourism revenue.
- Develop metrics for NGOs engaged in regional training (e.g., in media or film production) to determine the success of trainees in maintaining jobs in their fields; such metrics may increase incentives to put more focus on creating sustainable models to support regional talent, not just one-off training sessions.
- Help support the creation of more entertainment distribution companies dedicated to promoting and selling Middle Eastern artistic works globally to support art as a viable industry in this region.
- Leverage multinational companies (i.e., the oil industry) operating in the region to support the arts, with the incentive being a means to improve their image regionally and globally. For example, an oil company could start a program modeled on the Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative designed to support mentors and artists specifically from the Middle East.
- Encourage philanthropists or major companies looking to invest in philanthropy to establish an "Ashoka" model for the arts. The Ashoka program supports regional entrepreneurs by providing them with a stipend so they can focus on innovation. A similar program could be designed to fund regional artists so they can focus on creative output.
- Increase partnerships between public and private institutions working in the Middle East art arena to strengthen the efforts of each; the successful public-private partnership between the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Hollywood Bowl offers a potential model.

A New Model to Support the Arts in the Middle East: A "Regional Endowment for Arab Arts"?

Although these recommendations suggest ways to better leverage ongoing government and nongovernmental programs to support the arts in the Middle East, new models may be necessary to fundamentally restructure support for the arts in this region. Some of the most successful models recognize the importance of tapping into the large-scale resources and convening power that only governments can provide and marrying them with private institutions and individuals to form public-private partnerships.

One model along these lines is the British Council, established by the British government to support the arts by creating a separate, nongovernmental institution that, in turn, funds and convenes artists in support of British interests around the globe. While the U.S. government might consider a British Council model, it is not clear that there would be sufficient political will to establish such an institution in today's fiscal environment. And given the sensitivity in the Middle East to direct support from U.S. government sources, even a private institution with a close U.S. government affiliation is unlikely to be an effective channel for supporting regional art and artists.

That said, a different American model—the NEA—could be adapted to the Middle East context in interesting ways.[2] While the NEA accepts government funding, it maintains its independence and draws on panels of respected artists to help select and award grants for creative work and programs. Could the Middle East create its own regional version of the NEA?

One way to adapt this approach to the Middle East would be to draw on *regional* funds, starting with foundations in the wealthier Gulf Arab states or Arab expatriates, and use this initial investment to attract funding from other regional foundations and private philanthropists across the region and internationally (particularly Arab expatriates in Europe and North America). The Qatar Foundation, for example, has already demonstrated an interest in investing in the arts

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2 We would like to thank Reza Aslan for initially raising this concept.

and arts education. Gulf governments have also launched initiatives to support artists, including regional film schools, setting a precedent for this type of funding model. While Gulf funding may raise concerns about constraints on artistic freedom, foundations and individuals associated with these governments have also demonstrated an understanding that, to build their human capital, independent and critical-thinking skills, including artistic expression, are an essential part of their countries' education curriculum.

Moreover, the Gulf states may be attracted to such an investment to demonstrate that their commitment to the arts is not only about raising the profile of their own countries but also about building human capital and indigenous art across the region. To maintain independence in terms of what type of work is funded and to avoid government donors dictating the artistic agenda, a board of well-respected regional artists could be established to run the fund, similar to how the NEA operates. Regional artists and institutions would be eligible to apply to the fund as a regular source of support for artistic work.

Although a wealthy Arab Gulf government with a demonstrated commitment to building art capacity in the region would likely be necessary to jump-start such a fund, this model could be based on the premise that it would attract matching funding and support from regional nongovernmental sources and serve the broader region. Such a "regional endowment for Arab arts" could galvanize and support a new generation of Arab artists and create programming that could be integrated into national education systems to increase appreciation for the arts. While such an organization would not receive any U.S. government funding (only regional funding), the U.S. government could work with regional governments and nongovernmental groups to support such an initiative.

This type of public-private initiative may not be the only way forward, but such a model would surely enhance enduring support for the arts in the region during this period of transformative change. Ultimately, opening up space for cultural expression to allow people in the region to speak out freely as they debate their own future may be the most effective way to counter forces of extremism and intolerance. As artist and producer Peter Sellars argues, cultural work

can create a "protected zone," where people—particularly the region's youth—can discuss uncomfortable truths and express themselves in ways that are nonviolent.[3] Finding ways to support such protected zones is a long-term yet critical element to supporting democratic transitions, which is why support for the arts is not a luxury in this region but a necessity.

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[3] Interview with Peter Sellars, Los Angeles, August 28, 2012.

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After decades of authoritarianism, a wave of political change and unrest began to sweep across the Middle East and North Africa in early 2011. Successful democratic transitions will not be easy and will require change in multiple spheres. This report focuses on one sphere whose power and importance is often underestimated: the artistic arena. Regional artists have the potential to positively contribute to democratic transition by shaping public debate in ways that support tolerance and nonviolence. But Arab artists are often squeezed between the bounds of acceptable discourse, set by rulers who fear freedom of expression and conservative societal groups that seek to control acceptable behavior. Although the Arab uprisings lifted some previous barriers to artistic expression, new limitations and challenges have emerged. Moreover, artists continue to lack sound funding models to support their work and face limited markets and distribution mechanisms. This research explores the challenges posed by both the state and society in the region, as well as the policy shifts that may be necessary to better support regional artists. It also suggests new strategies in which regional actors and nongovernmental organizations take leading roles in supporting these artists and their work.

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