

United States' Cultural Exchange Programs in Algeria : Has the US Won New Hearts and Minds?

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Abstract :

The United States has always been involved in bloody wars. Whatever the cost was, they were Americans those who died in battlefields. The war on terror is the most important nowadays. Contrary to ancient counterterrorism strategies primarily based on "kill or capture" attitude of any persona non grata, the US seems willing to adhere to a more effective peaceful strategy. Therefore, this paper discusses the use and efficiency of US Cultural Exchange Programs as a Soft Power tool in the anti-terrorism war and the US struggle to remove the black image people around the world have against it, with special focus on the Arab Muslim world. This article, through a descriptive analytical method, examines the historical evolution as well as the impact of the above-mentioned programs, with a distinctive emphasis on the Algerian youth case after the 9/11 attacks.

Key words: soft power, public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, US cultural programs, Algeria.

المُلخَص:

لظالما كانت الولايات المتحدة، ولا تزال، متورطة في حروب دموية. وأيا كانت التكلفة، فقد كان الذين ماتوا في ساحات القتال أمريكيين. إن الحرب على الإرهاب هي الأكثر أهمية في الوقت الراهن. وخلافا للاستراتيجيات القديمة لمكافحة الإرهاب التي تستند في المقام الأول إلى طريقة "القتل أو القبض" على أي شخص غير مرغوب فيه، يبدو أن الولايات المتحدة على استعداد للالتزام باستراتيجية سلمية وأكثر فعالية. لذلك فإن هذا البحث هو محاولة لمناقشة استخدام وكفاءة برامج التبادل الثقافي الأمريكية كأداة للقوة الناعمة في حرب مكافحة الإرهاب والسعي الأمريكي لإزالة الصورة السوداء التي تحملها الشعوب في جميع أنحاء العالم ضدها، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على العالم العربي الإسلامي. تبحث هذه الدراسة، من خلال مذهب وصفي تحليلي، التطور التاريخي، فضلا عن تأثير البرامج المذكورة أعلاه، مع التركيز أكثر على قضية الشباب الجزائري بعد هجمات 11 سبتمبر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: القوة الناعمة، الدبلوماسية العامة، الدبلوماسية الثقافية، البرامج الثقافية الأمريكية، الجزائر.

Résumé :

Les États-Unis ont toujours été impliqués dans des guerres sanglantes. Quel que soit le coût, ils étaient américains ceux qui sont morts sur les champs de bataille. La guerre contre le terrorisme est la plus importante de nos jours. Contrairement aux anciennes stratégies antiterroristes fondées principalement sur l'attitude «tuer ou capturer» toute personne indésirable, les États-Unis semblent disposés à adhérer à une stratégie pacifique plus efficace. Par conséquent, cet article examine l'utilisation et l'efficacité des programmes d'échanges culturels américains comme outil de Puissance Douce dans la guerre contre le terrorisme et de la lutte pour éliminer l'image noire que la majorité de la population mondiale a contre les États-Unis, et le monde Arabo-musulman en particulier. Cette étude, à travers une méthode analytique descriptive, considère l'évolution historique ainsi que l'impact des programmes mentionnés ci-dessus, avec une réflexion particulière sur le cas de la jeunesse algérienne après les attentats du 11 septembre.

Mots-clés: soft power (Puissance Douce), diplomatie publique, diplomatie culturelle, programmes culturels des États-Unis, Algérie.

Introduction :

Following the challenges of the new millennium, the United States has been struggling against the spread of opposing ideas that are perceived as roots of a national security threat. This menace, that is linked to a hatred towards all what is American, spread in an unprecedented way especially after the 9/11 events. Thus, using some power is inevitable to defend America and its interests. In fact, the word “power” that used to connote “force” has now taken a broader meaning that does not only include hitting, bombing, killing and torturing. Scholars speak about a new kind of power that is “soft”; it addresses minds and works on long-lasting objectives. It does not use traditional ways to coerce but rather encourages mutual understanding and acceptance through “cultural diplomacy”. This latter, by far, offers a long term strategy device in the face of opposing political and ideological threats.

As a Soft Power tool, this policy aims at spreading American ideals, principles and beliefs, such as Liberty, Equality, Work and

leisure, Individualism, Democracy, Materialism, and Self-Government, especially in areas where they are negatively understood and highly rejected. In this sense, the contest of ideas is taking place in Arab and Islamic countries that are perceived to pose an ideological threat. Cultural Diplomacy became an indispensable soft power instrument to achieve certain American objectives.

After the 9/11 events, the American administration realized that being geographically far from the old continents does not make the country safe enough from any terrorist attack. Moreover, they understood that a wave of hatred and anger against the United States, and all what symbolizes it, was growing while the ancient methods to Americanize people were said to be unrewarding.

Soft Power vs. Hard Power :

The term ‘Power’ is defined by many scholars as the use of force. Robert A. Dahl, however, gives a more appropriate definition. In his article entitled: “Concept of Power”, he states that the term power is the ability to achieve one’s purposes or goals and the ability to get others do what they otherwise would not do (203). Throughout the United States history, the concept of power took many forms and necessitated the use of different tools not forcibly coercion. They are tools that states use to deal with other countries in international relations. Accordingly, Diane Coutu reaches a conclusion concerning the term, saying that power “is nothing more than the ability to affect others to get what you want and that requires a set of tools. Some of these are tools of coercion or payment, or hard power, and some are tools of attraction, or soft power” (“Smart Power”).

Hard Power, as the name implies, refers to something hard or strong, such as military or economic power. In contrast, Soft Power is more tolerant, moderate and subtle. The two terms Hard and Soft Powers were firstly coined by Joseph S. Nye, Jr. in 1991. In his book, *The Powers to Lead*, Nye defines soft power through a comparison between the two faces of power. On the one hand, with the first type, hard power, “you get other states to do what you want” (29). Thus, it is represented in the form of command and force. On the other hand, It is much better when you are able to “make others want what you want” (29), an argument that lies under the definition of the soft power. Nye adds that soft power is “the ability to get what you want

through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies" (*Soft Power* ...5). In other words, culture is said to be a strong influential element among the three main resources of soft power.

Soft power is the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment. A country's soft power rests on its resources of culture, values, and policies. A smart power strategy combines hard and soft power resources. Public diplomacy has a long history as a means of promoting a country's soft power and was essential in winning the Cold War. The current struggle against transnational terrorism is a struggle to win hearts and minds, and the current overreliance on hard power alone is not the path to success. Public diplomacy is an important tool in the arsenal of smart power, but smart public diplomacy requires an understanding of the roles of credibility, self-criticism, and civil society.

Cultural Diplomacy :

Simon Mark defines Cultural diplomacy as the diplomatic practice of a government to initiate the international deployment and exchange of ideas, principles, values, knowledge, belief, art, morals and habits created by a society in addition to a wide range of manifestations of culture, targeting a wider foreign audience in support of the host government's foreign policy objectives (8-11).

In the same vein, Cummings Milton claims that cultural diplomacy is "the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understandings"(1). In other words, Cultural diplomacy contributes in building international channels and interactions between different people of the world crossing geographical boundaries. Richard Arndt says in his book *The First Resort Of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy In The Twentieth Century* that cultural diplomacy helps create "a foundation of trust" between people of different countries building a neutral platform for people –to–people contact. On this basis, policy makers can easily work on to reach political, economic and military agreements (qtd. in Waller 166).

The cultural diplomacy takes many forms such as the US Cultural Exchange Programs. The latter are with ties to the Bureau of

Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) of the US Department of State. They help develop cultural understanding between US citizens and citizens of different countries around the world. The exchange is not meant to be between one individual and another individual from another country; rather, "exchange" refers to the mutual cultural understanding which is created when an individual goes to another country ("About ECA").

History of US Government Cultural Exchange Programs :

The first use of cultural diplomacy had a political dimension. The use of culture for political purposes has evolved since 1930s. France and Germany, for instance, made intensive efforts for the sake of cultural expansion through cultural relations programs before WW1. Shortly, other nations took the same path due to its effective results. Great Britain established the British Council for relations with other countries in 1934 and the United States created the Interdepartmental Committee in cooperation with other American republics in 1938 and set up the Division of Cultural Relations in the Department of State in order to meet the need for "national interpretation" (Hellyer 11).

The term "cultural exchange" has changed over time. The very first programs in the 1940s and 1950s might be more precisely described as "cultural impression" as the main focus was on bringing foreign visitors to the US and impressing them with American values. Increasingly, "cultural experience" initiatives became the objective. On the one hand, participants were not only visitors of US but also participators in US life. On the other hand, US citizens were to travel abroad to model foreign practices to those in the United States. Accordingly, the Programs became a tool to provide a "cultural engagement" that affects the community through teaching or introducing the American culture they met as participants (Gibson 6).

The US Cultural Exchange Programs have never followed the same policy. Since their emergence in the 1930s, with the creation of the Interdepartmental Committee in 1938 and the establishment of the Division of Cultural Relations, there have always been changes that followed the political objectives of different periods. Three main eras could be distinguished:

The Cold War Era :

During the Cold War, a “war of ideas” took place replacing coercive actions and wars. Each of the two poles tried hard competing to dominate the largest sphere of the globe and extend political, cultural, and economic principles. The 1936 Convention was an important document that the US government signed in Buenos Aires with twenty American republics to support Inter-American Cultural relations and promote the exchange programs for students and artists; this helped the spread of American knowledge, morals, democracy, and ideas abroad.

In September 1945, J. William Fulbright, a freshman senator from Arkansas -to be later the longest serving chairman in the history of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee- introduced a bill to Congress to be signed a year later into law by President Truman. The paper that became known as “The Fulbright Program” was initiated to join effort between the US and host countries through executive agreements and bi-national commissions (Vogel 12). William Fulbright believed that educational exchange could affect the attitudes of the participants toward foreign nations (12). Thus, the relation between the government and cultural exchange programs was established and this paved the ground for more effective future programs.

Soon, the US looked to these exchanges as a political tool. In 1948, the Smith-Mundt Act officially integrated exchanges as a foreign policy mechanism. The International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) was created to expose foreign leaders to their counterparts in the US. During its few years of establishment, the State Department Cultural Exchanges were devoted to serve foreign relation programs as a good mechanism in the field (Krause and Stephen).

Later, the United States initiated the Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948, known as the Smith-Mundt Act, to work as the post-World War II charter for peacetime overseas information and education exchange activities. The objective of the Act is “to enable the Government of the United States to promote a better understanding of the United States in other countries and to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries” (qtd. in Nakamura and Matthew 4).

The year 1961 witnessed the emergence of the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act. Also known as the Fulbright-Hays Act, it authorizes US exchange programs as a public diplomacy tool that comprises purposes like increasing mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchanges, and promoting respect for and guarantees religious freedom abroad and by interchanges and visits between the United States and other nations of religious leaders, scholars, and religious and legal experts in the field of religious freedom (Nakamura and Matthew 6).

The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs was another body in charge of the administration of relationships with a variety of educational and cultural exchanges. The Bureau directed the academic exchanges including: the Fulbright Program, which provides grants for the exchange of students, scholars, and teachers between the United States and other countries (“Programs and Initiatives”), and the Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program that facilitates academic study and internships in the United States for mid-career professionals from developing nations (“About the Program”).

The bureau also administrated the professional and cultural exchanges such as the International Visitors Program, which brings current and promising leaders of other countries to the United States to travel around the country, meet their counterparts, and learn about and experience American society and culture. Ambassadors, such as musicians, artists, sports’ figures, and writers also are part of these cultural programs that aim at sharing American culture with foreign public (Nakamura and Matthew 11)

In 1961, John F. Kennedy's administration largely stressed on the important roles of the exchange programs including the exchange of people and persons such as of missionaries, military personnel, students, professors, diplomats, tourists, businessmen, and technical assistants. He recognized the soft power value and its ability to overcome more obstacles than the hard power (Snow 206). Accordingly, the Fulbright program was expanded to many Acts; the latter coincided with the height of the Cold War. As a result, exchange programs changed its ‘good intentions’ that followed the pre-WWII, but rather the Educational and Cultural Affairs was coined as the fourth dimension of foreign policy in 1964 (Lindsay 423).

Due to the importance and the benefits of these programs, the United States recognized that raising funds could lead to better ideological dominance. Thus, the US government spent about \$1 billion per year on international exchanges and training programs. The Fulbright program flourished, and measurements of its success caused many evaluations of cultural exchange to overlook the past failures of other exchange programs (Lambert 141). Scholarships for students to study in the US at both secondary and university education levels were granted in an attempt to counter USSR educational exchanges.

In post-war America, the term 'educational exchange' was used to denote 'cultural relations'. The two terms were inclusive as they reached the same objectives as regarded by analysts of the period (Bu 393). The exchange programs that aimed at spreading American knowledge, skills, and ideals were an indispensable tool in winning the war of ideas with the Soviet Union and led to the end of the Cold War. Scholar Rajan Menon notes: "Few Americans appreciate the degree to which knowledge about American culture, whether acquired by participating in our exchange programs, attending our cultural presentations, or simply listening to the Voice of America, contributed to the death of communism" (qtd.in Finn 15) Oleg Kalugin, a former KGB General and Head of KGB operations in the United States, stresses the idea adding that these exchange programs were a "Trojan Horse," because they helped for the "erosion of the Soviet system" (qtd. in Richmond 358).

With the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States found no use of continuing such programs. When international tension faded, the result was the reduction of budgets and staff by about 30 % and funding for exchange programs declined. The number of exchanges per year dropped from nearly 45,000 individuals to less than 30,000. While spending on traditional diplomacy amounted to \$25 billion in 2002 and intelligence spending was \$30 billion the same year, spending on exchange programs was at \$232 million, a decline from the \$349 million spent on exchange programs in 1993 (US Advisory Commission 10). These programs regained their importance as an effective tool to help secure America after September 11th, 2001.

1990s-Present: Special Focus on the Arab-Muslim World :

The attacks of September 11, 2001, required America to pursue a long term war on terrorism. Extending military power abroad was claimed to spread animosity toward the United States which has grown to unprecedented levels. Anti-Americanism spread and the United States image was abysmal in the Muslim world especially after the War on Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003).

In Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, only 15 % viewed the United States favorably in 2003, compared with 61 % in early 2002. In Saudi Arabia, according to a Gallup poll, only 7 % had a “very favorable” view of the US while 49 percent had a “very unfavorable” view. In Turkey, favorable opinion toward the US dropped from 52 % in 2000, to 15 % in the spring of 2003, according to the Pew Research Center (Stephens 29). The problem is not limited to the Arab and Muslim world. In Spain, an ally in the war on Iraq, 3 % had a very favorable view of the United States while 39 % had a very unfavorable view (29)

Americans themselves bore the belief that Arabs and Muslims had a negative image for the US, and thus “eight in 10 Americans perceive that people in Muslim countries view the United States unfavorably” (Saad).

Americans' Perception of How Muslim Countries View the United States

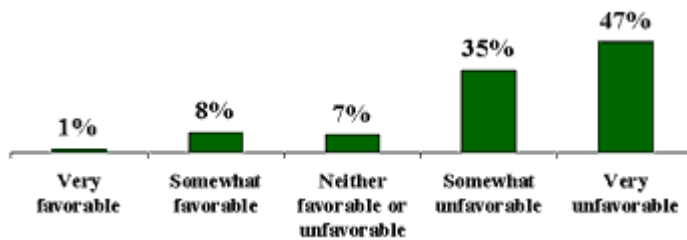


Fig.1. Saad, Lydia. “Americans Believe Muslim Antipathy Toward United States Based on Misinformation”. *Gallup.com*. March 2002. Web. Dec. 2017.

Despite these facts, the United States vision towards enhancing the exchange programs efforts was limited. It stepped back in raising

funds to these programs because of the 9/11 attacks consequences. The government was so cautious and its policies were more restrictive towards foreign students. The number of foreign students and scholars in the US dropped for the first time since 1971 which led Educational institutions to complain about these policies that were contrary to an open society (Snow 213). This would not help at increasing and building good relations between the United States and the Arab Muslim world and ameliorate a better American image.

Faced with a weakened mechanism to win 'hearts and minds' of the people of Muslim and Arab world and inspire moderate Islam to prevail over Islamic extremism, many politicians asked for investment in cultural diplomacy activities that were decreased since the end of the Cold War; the Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC) stated, "The US government should continue its trend of increasing funding for the exchange programs, perhaps the single most effective public diplomacy tool of the last fifty years" (Snow 213).

One of important focus of US after 9/11 was the promotion of Democracy promotion in the Middle East. It became the core objective of the Bush administration's approach to foreign policy. Analysts cited democracy deficit in the Middle East as well as in some countries in the Arab and Muslim world as the most common reason for the attack on the Twin Towers, in addition to extremism, and anti-Americanism in the region (Hawthorne 21). In fact, Democracy promotion was an important initiative that included three main parts: 1) Military intervention, 2) Projects created from policy, such as MEPI and, 3) Public diplomacy (Dalacoura).

President George W. Bush wanted his foreign policy strategy to reform democracy; part of this democracy promotion was pursued through cultural exchanges to reach the larger public in the Middle East. Cultural exchange was just one of the main aspects of soft power Bush used. Various projects began and millions of dollars poured into the new US public diplomacy budget directed to the Middle East. The plan clearly sought to reach and affect a high number of people through study tours that "will bring Arabs to the United States to expose them to American democratic institutions and practices. Fellowships and English-language study programs will help Arabs build personal links with Americans and provide useful 'tools' for the modern (democratic) global community" (Hawthorne 23). In order to

achieve these project's objectives the State Department provided "up to \$10 million in 2003 for new projects in civil society and the rule of law across the Arab world" and tended to seek additional funding in the future (23).

The Fulbright and the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) are widely recognized as successful as they are included in the increased efforts focusing on the Middle East in order to improve foreign opinion of the US (Krause and Evera). Other programs were also created specifically to boost exchanges in the region: The Youth Exchange and Study (YES) program, and MEPI. MEPI started in 2002, and acted as oversight for small programs in the region. YES started in 2003, and accepted teens from Muslim countries for short learning experiences in the US (Krause and Evera).

Considering the gravity of today's threat and the cultural preference for face-to-face exchanges in the Arab and Muslim world, exchange programs are considered as the single most effective means to improve attitudes toward the United States. The programs also take into account the youthful demographics. High school students were added to the priority group, and more short-term exchanges of two to three weeks, rather than a semester to a year were launched as a way to get immediate benefits in a time of crisis.

Impact and Purpose of Cultural Exchange Programs :

The efficiency of these programs appears mostly in the pre-selection of the participants themselves, their ability to affect others and the potential they have to become future leaders in their communities. Present prominent political figures around the world participated in these programs. About 39 current heads of government, including President Karzai of Afghanistan, are former participants in the International Visitors Program (*Changing Minds*46). In fact, world leaders in government and the private sector have participated in the International Visitor Leadership Program with more than 200 current and former Heads of State, 1500 cabinet-level ministers, and many other. They are current or potential leaders in government, politics, media, education, and other fields who are selected by American Officials overseas (46).

On the one hand, public diplomacy seeks to influence opinions in ways that support US interests and policies for the short term. On the

other hand, cultural exchange programs promote dialogue, sharing ideas, and personal and institutional relationships, with the primary focus on values (*US Advisory Commission 3*).

Individuals brought to the United States or who experienced Americans abroad through cultural exchange programs develop a lasting impression of both American culture and the government of the United States (Nye 44–55). The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs reveals that, in 2013, it reached 9 million foreign participants from more than 110 countries involved in ECA cultural exchanges every year, among which 565 are either current or former heads of governments and states around the world. It claims that 31 over 1 million of Alumni are Heads of international organizations (“Facts and Figures”). Those participants who have been educated in the United States may develop a deep-rooted appreciation for American culture. Many of these individuals enter into positions that directly affect the foreign policy of the United States, such as Margaret Thatcher, Anwar Sadat and Hamid Karazai (Lozovsky). Others may at least make propaganda for the US government for free, and for a long time period in a wide space frame.

Exchange Programs in Algeria :

As the most effective means for Americans and Algerians to learn about each other is People-to-people diplomacy. Through exchange program, people from both sides need to meet for better discovery, appreciation, acceptance and understanding of each other's culture. It is considered as the best way to know well about the “other”. Exchange programs funded by the US Department of State enable these connections to be made. The Cultural Affairs Office offers academic and citizen exchanges for qualified American scholars and Algerian scholars, professionals, university students, and youth (“Exchange Programs”)

During the past few years there was a considerable exchange of scholars from both parts. Under the Fulbright Visiting Scholar program, Algerian universities received American scholars to teach American literature, photojournalism, and biology on the one hand. On the other hand, Algerian professionals who participated in the Hubert Humphrey Fellows Program were able to stay for a year in a Masters-level program at American universities. Moreover,

knowledge-hungry American university students were in need of Algerian English teachers who have the opportunity to teach Arabic language courses. At the same time, they could improve their own teaching competences and acquire the English language in a better atmosphere. The International Visitor Leadership Program also sends Algerian professionals to the United States to confer with their counterparts and learn about the country firsthand (“Exchange Programs”).

The exchanges also engage youth programs and enable Algerian high school students to attend American high schools for an academic year and develop their English language skills. Indirectly, the students become involved in American teenage life resulting in life-changing experiences.

One of the youth exchange programs that flourished during the last decade is the Algeria Youth Leadership Program (AYLP). Each year, three chaperones accompany selects twenty-five secondary school pupils who are selected wisely to stay for around one month. The pupils are to spend about two weeks with Native American families for direct interaction. Visiting many places during the program like universities and museums, as well as touristic sites in their spare time with the host families are part of the program. Hence, the participant level of civic education, youth leadership skills, respect for diversity, and community engagement will develop in a good atmosphere (“Algeria Youth ...”)

The programs also extend its activities to workshops on leadership and service, community site visits related to the program themes, interactive training and discussion groups, small group work, presentations, and local cultural activities. Worth to mention is that participants stay with volunteer host families for around two weeks to highly engage in the American daily life and examine the local culture through visiting other cities, cinema, theatre, and other cultural/leisure spaces (“Algeria Youth ...”). Accordingly, this program ensures that participants are ready to develop their skills in order to be effective leaders in their schools and communities. In other words, the programs help to build a person who is able to lead others departing from an American ground and mentality.

For funding, the United States government pay for almost everything: ground transportation to and from Algiers, international transportation to and from the United States, orientations and

workshops, program fees and administration, site visits and seminars, lodging and most meals, some cultural activities, educational materials, and accident and sickness coverage. (“Algeria Youth ...”)

According to the Department of State requirements, participants should fulfill the following criteria:

- at least 15 years old and not more than 17 years by the start date of the exchange
- have good English skills, sufficient for understanding academic discussion and everyday social interactions
- have at least one year of high school remaining
- have demonstrated leadership in their schools and/or communities
- have interest in program themes

The differences in program impact on each participant emerge from both internal factors, such as personality, and external factors, such as one’s environment (“Algeria Youth Leadership Program”).

The eligibility criteria cited above are almost the same for all cultural exchange programs especially age and good English skill-with some priority to those who have not visited the USA before. All participants are supposed to be affected in some specific ways by programs. A primary expectation is that participants will become leaders through their exchanges. Participants are selected to be leaders but with the enhancement of pre-existing leadership ability. Therefore, the essential aim of these programs is to build leaders who have enough knowledge and skills to participate in their communities’ development.

The majority of the participants taking part in these programs change their opinion and views about the United States positively, and one of the main aims of these programs are to be achieved. Salim, a former State Department Exchange participant commented about how his own views of the US changed:

It was a good experience; I could travel to the USA and that was a dream for me. Before I went, I always thought differently of the USA as government and as people. But this trip changed my view to both. I can now say that I was totally wrong. Americans are the best; they hosted us with love and

respect. I was wrong, you know what I mean? Sometimes I feel shame about what I used to think about them.

Similarly, Khawla confirms that the American community is really different from what the majority think. When answering a question whether she had changed her point of view towards Americans after her participation in an exchange program, she replied:

Yes, they [Americans] could win my heart and change my perspectives towards them. They were so lovely and encouraging. I can approve they are not racist at all; they did not treat me as belonging to a different religion nor as coming from another continent. They were happy to know I was from Africa though my skin is not black.

The impact is not only limited in changing opinions but rather in changing behaviors in favor of those opinions. In other words, with their return, participants try to apply what they learned intentionally or unwillingly on their daily life in a different community.

On the same path, another participant, Abdelkader, says:

It [the experience] changed me; not completely, for sure, but I feel that. I changed some of my daily life habits ... but people started criticizing me and claim that I am no more the same person and I am now behaving like an American. They say like: "you have been to the USA just for a short period, but though you seem very different, you have completely changed, you became an American!"

Participants, intentionally or not, compare their and the host country's cultures. This can be seen as quite normal till it is impressively noticed that the participants perceive the hosts' culture as being 'superior' to theirs. These attitudes and images appear in some of the applicants' new behavior like piercings, colored hair, low-waist trousers, American cap, etc. This clearly shows their admiration and embracement of the other's culture. The 'Americanization' of the participant may go deeper when s/he disregards and rejects his/her original community what leads to a strong disappointment.

In Zino's words:

And once you think it would be great if you can apply all what you have seen there in your own town/village or country because you feel you cannot deny that things that exist in the US at all levels are much better than what you have in your own country. Here... you feel looking for something different

to be done. The hardest problem is with people surrounding you, they cannot confess that things should change, and then they discourage you, because whenever you try to do something they start criticizing you and start blocking you. ...It discourages you a lot. This is the case almost always and in every little thing that I suggest or start. ...I cannot deny that they finally got me. I confess I do not like people talking about me.

Through what the participants revealed, it can be understood that they all agree that their view of the United States and its people has changed. Thus they turn back with a new positive attitude. They do not stop at this level, but rather try to apply what they experienced in host country to their original society. They complain to find neither the adequate atmosphere nor the same opportunity to change what they now see as “old or backward”.

Nevertheless, all former participants agree on the fact that they benefited a lot from their ‘unique’ experience to the US. They reveal that the trip itself was a dream that they could finally fulfill. They don’t deny they profited well from having a direct contact with native speakers of the language they love best, becoming more open-minded through meeting a different culture(s), visiting a lot of wonderful places, and encountering famous figures in various fields: intellectuals, artists, scholars, movie stars, etc. Yet, the most important benefit could be acquiring many skills they can now apply in their academic and/or personal life to better serve their community and be active citizens.

Conclusion :

America is facing the ideological threat of extremists by all means with ultimate aim to win the ‘war of ideas’. Its efforts to attract through cultural and ideological appeal seem to be successful via the educational and cultural programs targeted to a selected category of people in the Arab and Muslim world that is able to effect positively. This cultural diplomacy as a strategy of the soft power is looking for changing and building the minds and ideas that serve its benefits all over the world.

Although many participants do not have any political aim or agenda, the role they play in enacting these projects do have political

significance. Exchanges still meet their old definitions: political tools and mechanisms of foreign relations. Exchanges are political: the manner in which they are framed by the government, how their funding reflects government priorities, the clear, direct involvement of embassies, and their US associations make them obvious projects of the US government.

The importance of these programs lies when participants are able to show their culture, habits, and ideas to the other participants in the host country. Therefore, the programs aim is to teach people about the United States culture, but also focuses on showing the participant's culture to Americans. In other words, mutual exchange is designed to be reached.

The goals of these programs are extended beyond the US borders when the participants are supposed to, consciously or unconsciously, act as applicants and defenders of the American culture, values, and principles. More importantly, they become implicit representatives of America in their communities and change the negative stereotypes that their communities might have formed about America, then do the job on behalf of the Americans. It is a very fruitful investment when money is spent on participants' transportation and short stay, and the result is a lasting promotion for America for free, since the young participants who return with a positive view of the US would praise the American people, society, values, culture, and principles to all people they will meet in different circumstances: at school and university when they are students, at work once they get a job, and in associations and organizations they belong to. In this way, they will have the opportunity to spread the 'message' to a large population during a period of time presumed to be long.

The vast majority of participants come away from exchanges with a positive impression on the United States, and this can pave the way for another far goal of selecting, forming and producing leaders affecting their communities according to the American view. Participants are selected, trained, and tracked for leadership, which creates a self-reinforcing goal ensuring that programs produce leaders. In 2002, George W. Bush declared that there will be a war of ideas that America will for sure win. As far as the exchange programs are concerned, they are being fruitful so far.

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