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5. YOUTH & REVOLUTION

A Call to Reform Higher Education in Yemen

Whoever teaches without emancipating stultifies. And whoever emancipates doesn't have to worry about what the emancipated person learns. He will know he can learn because the same intelligence is at work in all the productions of human mind.

(Rancière, 1987)

The youth bulge in a country like Yemen in which a quarter of its estimated 25 million population is between 10 and 19 years of age, 46% of them under 16, has raised many societal challenges and played a central role in the country's revolutionary transition since 2011 (Ahmed, 2013). The Yemeni government in the past few decades has invested in education to accommodate this rising youth rate. The country has witnessed a rapid growth in higher education since the 1990s, from two universities at the time of North-South unification in 1990 to 16 universities (eight public and eight private), each hosting various colleges and programs. The eight public universities in Yemen include 105 colleges divided into 45 applied sciences and 60 humanities and social sciences. The number of students enrolled in the Yemeni universities increased from about 35,000 students in 1990 to reach 266,096 students (including private universities) in 2010, more than 7 times the original number in ten years. The enrollment of females in university education increased from 16% in 1990 to 30% in 2010. The enrollment of students in private universities also increased from almost 0% of the total enrolled in university education in 1993 to about 23.5% in 2010. In 2005–2006, there were about 174,000 students in public universities and about 12,000 in private ones. In 2009–2010, the number of enrolled students in public universities reached 203,497 students with 62,599 students in private universities in the same year (National Information Center, 2015).

This unprecedented growth in the number of university enrollees has forged a space for students to play a viable role in challenging Yemeni status quo politics that produced unbearable conditions of corruption, unemployment, and disenfranchisement for 30 years. It was not until the revolutionary fervor of the Arab Spring that this role faced its first serious test. In February 2011, students emerged out of the country's post-secondary institutions as a contending voice invested in the country's transformation process. For the first time in Yemen's contemporary history, university students energized public squares in Taiz, Sana'a, Aden, Hodeidah, and

of the governorates of Sana'a, Aden, Taiz, Al-Hudaydah, Ibb, Dhamar, Dhamar, and Hadhramaut reveals a serious problem in the university learning outcomes (see Table 1 above). For the year 2009–2010, the number of university enrollees in those governorates reached 178,552 students while the graduating rate did not go beyond 22,578 (Al-Warafi, n.d.). Although it is important to recognize other factors (e.g., socioeconomic conditions, family obligations, religious teachings, government policies, etc.) in making sense of the gap, the GPA-based admission policy remains an inaccurate ground of prediction. It continues to deny high school students the opportunity to develop their own agency even before they start their university education. Equally important, enforcing the GPA-only criteria strips away every student's basic right to compete for the chance to pursue career in his or her area of interest.

TEACHING METHODOLOGY

Teaching methods, according to Glaser (1976) and Clarke (2001), constitute a way of organizing information and activities that promote the cognitive process and facilitate learning. Drawing from their fifty-year long experience in education research, Chickering and Gamson (1987) emphasized interactivity as the most appropriate approach to learning. The primary principles of this approach are predicated on building connections between students and faculty, developing reciprocity among students, encouraging active learning, providing prompt feedback, and respecting timeliness and diversity. Hake (1998), Bligh (2000), and Knight and Wood (2005) just to name a few, as cited in Eison (2010), examined the effects of traditional lecture styles and found that in all cases lecture was an unacceptable method of instruction for meaningful student learning and retention when compared to instruction in the same subjects using engaging techniques. Interactive lectures and strategies produced better attitudes, higher test scores, and overall better critical thinking skill ability. In particular, Knight and Wood (2005) found that students who worked collaboratively and had more active lectures made significant learning progress. These works echo an emerging momentum in the past few decades within all disciplines that calls to embrace interactivity as the most productive learning approach.

Yemeni University students, who manage to surpass the already restricting admission system, are set to a passive learning environment that continues to emphasize traditional lecturing as the dominant approach to learning. Educators are teaching the way they were taught decades ago. Nevertheless, the 21st century requires teaching general skills like problem solving, critical thinking, problem-based learning, and interpersonal and communication skills. It requires a focus on student-centered rather than teacher-centered approach. The Yemeni education system fails to cope with the current century changes and its rapid technology development.

Designing and planning learning activities are an essential part of education at the tertiary level (Angelo & Cross, 1993; Robley, Whittle, & Murdoch-Eaton, 2005). However, traditionally, learning activities have not been adequately connected to

values and thought processes, and morality and politics. The results of their study showed the university students' perception that using social media has a negative effect on the moral and political aspect, but not on their culture/thought domain.

Teaching methodology in Yemeni universities is in a serious need of intervention. Teacher-centered classes, lack of innovation in curricular design, and dismissal of technology in learning are factors that continue to restrict the cultivation of students' potential to initiate projects and come to terms with the vocabulary of their contemporary reality. The current system locks them in a perpetual mode of passive learning that denies them their very right to emancipation.

CAMPUS POLITICIZATION

The political life for Yemeni higher education students, particularly in the period 1990–2011, constituted a micro version of the overall partisan tension that underwrote the primary sociopolitical tension in the society at large. The major political contenders in the Yemeni political scene played a vital role in politicizing university campuses in almost every respect, as witnessed and observed by the authors of this work. The ruling party of the General People's Congress and the opposition block spearheaded by the Yemeni Congregation for Reform were interlocked in a fierce competition to control the direction of political consciousness for the generations that were set to define the country's prospect. The competition was manifested in the partisan nature of student and faculty unions as well as the politically-informed hiring strategies of staff and faculty. The relationship between power and knowledge was strictly defined in terms of affiliations with partisan branches in the cities hosting the respective campuses, and civic engagements in a seemingly nuanced environment.

Foucault's (1971) critique of the west's institutional politicization of knowledge is instrumental in reading the interconnectedness of knowledge, power, and agency in the Yemeni higher education system. This forges both a limited and a limiting space for students to develop their own independent way of learning. Although students seem to be actively entrenched in domestic, regional, and international issues of their concerns, their voice is coopted in ways that restrict their ability to grow and embrace revolutionary stances that challenge their contemporary status quo politics. Demonstrations and sit-ins, especially those informed by their political parties, became immediate venues through which students exhibited the liminality of their disruption and intervention. In an attempt to encounter the Islamist-influence of student unions, which dominated campus life during the 1990s and catered to party-affiliates, the ruling party at the time installed its own politically involved unions in the early 2000s, and provided them with all resources that were previously denied to the opposition-led unions. The newly emerging unions, though initially appeared to present a viable model for organization that transcended the restrictions of the party's guidelines, were soon compromised to abide by their partisan affiliations. The student union disruptive experience was subsequently undercut to meet yet again partisan standards. The failure of the student union experience in

sectarian). Thus, the Yemeni higher education system has failed in harnessing the youth power by allowing campus politicization to set the terms for agency and engagement.

CONCLUSION

In the four years following the 2011 Yemeni revolution, the country moved from a peaceful transition into a bloody civil war backed by immediate regional military interventions. The process has emerged as a measuring timeline for an accelerated change among many university students from active actors in toppling a long-term dictator into passive agents in the political transition and eventually a viable force for militia street fighting. This transition necessitates a serious evaluation of the role of the higher education system in preparing the educated class to offer serious alternatives to status quo politics. A reading of this role in the pre-revolutionary era reveals major flaws in three policies, which, we conclude, have contributed to a rising generation of active yet docile citizenry incapable of intervening in the country's mainstream sociopolitical order.

The reliance on high school GPA scores as the only criterion for admission demonstrates its inefficiency in unlocking the students' potential for intellectual growth. These tests should be designed not to measure what students have learned in high schools but rather the necessary skills (e.g., problem solving, reasoning) needed to perform well in college. Admission committees should also consider other factors that include, but are not limited to, cumulative GPA score based on three years of high school, motivation and interest, orientation, study habits, high school class size, and socioeconomic status. This will necessarily impact the high school learning experience, bridge the achievement gap between urban and rural schools, eliminate cheating in the centralized tests, and better predict learning growth in college.

There is also a serious need to re-evaluate the current teaching methodology in Yemeni universities. Teacher-centered classes are not conducive to interactivity. They validate various scholarly concerns about productivity. Interactive learning bears the potential of enhancing the students' self-esteem. The ministry of higher education should devote resources to introduce its educators to contemporary teaching methods that encourage the students to develop their own classroom identity. Positive use of technology opens doors to new ways of learning for both faculty and students. A comprehensive reform in university teaching methodology solidifies the college learning transition process for students while safeguarding the development of their own agency.

De-politicization of the Yemeni campus life is a necessary ground to provide the students with the power to explore their own political consciousness without necessarily re-producing the society-imported partisan divisions. De-politicization should not necessarily require universities to have an apolitical environment. It could rather materialize in the elimination of politically-driven policies that constantly feed existing anxieties around exclusion and disenfranchisement. Securing a

learning environment in which faculty and students socialize in a system that denies corruption the chance to undermine equal consideration and representation enables universities to function as a space for confidence and prowess.

Revolutionary times carry the promise of yielding serious multifaceted change in a given society. Although the Yemeni revolution has slipped into violence, the prospect of reconciliation carries the potential to produce conditions for a new Yemen in which social and political forces value the price of peace. In a post-war Yemen, reconstruction plans have to devote resources to saving a generation on the verge of loss. In addition to the restoration of the ruined infrastructure, the urgency rises for a serious educational reform in the higher education system to grant the Yemeni youth the opportunity to learning and innovation. Introducing serious reforms regarding the afore-mentioned three policies represents a critical intervention for the well-being of the country's future. It produces learning conditions for students to emerge as a viable, contending, and stabilizing player in the country's sociopolitical order.

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APPENDIX A

Important Dates

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| 1962 | The Arab Republic of Yemen (North) founded in the aftermath of a revolution against imamate |
| 1967 | The People's Republic of Yemen (South) gained independence from the British empire |
| 1970 | Colleges of Education established in Sana'a and Aden (which later evolved into two main public universities, Sana'a University and Aden University) |
| 1990 | North and South were united into one country named Republic of Yemen |
| 1995 | Regulation no. 18 laid out the infrastructure of higher education in Yemen |
| 2004 | Republican Decree no. 137 designated the ministry of higher education as the authority to oversee university education in Yemen |
| 2011 | University students marched to streets demanding regime change |
| 2012–14 | Peaceful transition marked by a national dialogue among Yemeni power players |
| 2015 | Civil war broke out leading to a military intervention spearheaded by Saudi Arabia |