

Third Inter-University Seminar on Educational Research



Coach House at Green College (UBC Campus)

Monday, October 2, 2017, 16:00-19:30; Refreshments at 15:30

Organised with the support of UBC's Department of Educational Studies and Green College

Launched on Saturday, June 2nd, 2012, the Inter-University Seminar on Educational Research (IUSER) brings together doctoral students and emerging scholars from different higher education institutions to celebrate and share their work in a collegial and supportive environment. IUSER offers a multi-disciplinary space. Participants draw on – and experiment with – innovative methodologies, approaches, and themes. Sharing their experiences, they build meaningful intellectual engagements with peers and colleagues, within and beyond their home.

This year's IUSER focuses on education in the Arab region. We often encounter reports about this region in the media, but what do we know? What does it mean to be educated in deeply divided societies? What does it mean to be a teacher or a policy maker in contexts of violent adversity and political instability? What insights does this region provide about educational policies and practices compared to other world regions and countries and to Canada?

States and societies across the “Arab region” have been in turmoil and upheaval for more than a decade.¹ The daunting consequences are visible in terms of state collapse, widespread killings, devastating human displacement, and massive material and infrastructural damage. Prevailing political arrangements – regulating state-citizen relations – have been shaken too; several regimes have lost the remnants of their legitimacy or simply disappeared. While democratic yearnings assert themselves forcefully, oppression, political violence, inequities, and racialized exclusions persist and often deepen, further polarising societies from within. Social and political movements and groups vie for power, legitimacy, and self-determination. While some observers have allegorically viewed these dynamics as reminiscent of a so-called “Arab Spring”, others have rather remained much more skeptical. The latter point to the complex intersections that operate between local state apparatuses and larger geopolitical dynamics rooted in the strategic competition over resources extraction in a globalised world economy in which neocolonial and imperial pursuits remain dominant. Within this wider context, it is worth noting that schooling and higher education have experienced a dramatic expansion in many parts of the Arab region. Of particular interest are the surge of private higher education institutions, and the introduction of governance reforms within public school and higher education systems.

Notwithstanding, despite this expansion, it is not clear how the ambivalent processes noted above have been experienced in the fields of early childhood education, schooling, and higher education. The bulk of available research engages questions pertaining primarily to the expansion of off-shore higher education and privatisation within schooling and higher education systems. Yet, there is more at stake. Whether one turns to teachers’ work, or to the growth in the proportional representation of women in higher education, or still, to the reforming of curricula and school textbooks, there are few insights as to how the wider instabilities and geopolitical conflicts across the region engage the challenges facing educators and policy makers. Questions regarding belonging and affiliation remain powerful conduits of identity politics and contestation, mediating colliding visions of education and society.

Over this backdrop, IUSER 2017 brings together studies that shed light on the lived and discursively constructed experiences of educators, policy makers, and groups involved in early childhood education, school textbook design, teachers’ work, and higher education accreditation in the Arab region. They critically examine the intersecting relations between political and social struggles and policy agendas that promote contested projects of state, identity, and citizenship.

¹ On the conceptual and political debates associated with various geographic terminologies used to ‘name’ the “Arab region”, refer to Mazawi & Sultana’s (2010) introductory chapter.

PRESENTATIONS

Balsam Alrasheed

- **Child-centred early childhood education in Saudi Arabia: Exploring notions of possibility and visibility**

Presentation: 16:20-16:40

Q&A: 16:40-16:50

In the field of Early Childhood Education (ECE), “child centred” educational approaches, such as Reggio Emilia, have faced a long-running challenge. On the one hand, these approaches transcend their original practice sites and countries of origin. As the approaches move from one educational context to another, modifications are both necessary and inevitable (Rinaldi, 2005). On the other hand, when translated to geographically and/or ideologically new practice sites, the philosophical elements which give these approaches an essential foundation may be lost (Nyland & Nyland, 2005). This is a particularly relevant point of examination with regard to Saudi Arabia, for several reasons. Critics have noted the country’s educational system often treats the student in the classroom as passive vessels of knowledge, with an over-reliance on rote learning which is particularly inflexible in terms of its curriculum (Rugh, 2002; Doumato, 2003; Elyas & Picard, 2010). A patriarchal social order, based on segregation between men and women raises a range of additional issues regarding access to ECE. Here, one wonders how would the translation of ECE approaches be affected by their implementation in Saudi Arabia? To examine this aspect of ECE, I held a series of conversations with six ECE women educators in

Saudi Arabia. The analysis of the interviews generated a set of narratives, some of which challenged the prevailing notion of Saudi Arabia's preschool classes as being homogeneous in their curricula and wholly teacher-centred in their pedagogy. Taken as a whole, the stories told by these women paint nuanced and complex visions of Saudi Arabian ECE and society, some of which were more consistent with contemporary child-centred educational approaches than some may realize.

In this presentation, I explore zones of both convergence and divergence of the stories shared by the six Saudi Arabian ECE educators. I will examine how they situate themselves in relation to Western-originated educational philosophies, such as Reggio and Montessori. Importantly, I wish to highlight areas of political tension manifest in ECE work and policy and consider their ramifications for the roles and behaviour of ECE classroom teachers. My conclusions indicate that, despite the subordination of ECE, Saudi Arabian student-centred pedagogies are more than a theoretical possibility. Not only do they currently exist, though in modest ways, but they often go unrecognised in the nation’s classrooms.

- **Teaching which Bahrainis and for what citizenship?
Colonial entanglements and the struggle over citizenship education textbooks**

Presentation: 16:50-17:10

Q&A: 17:10-17:20

Bahrain's 2011 uprising (*al-Ah'dath*) was predominantly read as an extension of the 'Arab Spring'. Nonetheless, it received the least media and scholarly attention, as if it were an afterthought, or a proxy in which other nation-states' politics play out. Some attributed the uprising to sectarian 'ancient hatreds' between various constituencies. Such a thesis, however, does not capture the prevailing terms and terrains of power and struggles unfolding in the country. Nor does it gesture towards the complex constellation of experiences and social realities in Bahrain. Questions of national identity and the nation-state in Bahrain are further complicated by regional geopolitical changes, contributing to the enforcement of exclusionary citizenship policies, such as 'political naturalisation' (*al-tajnees al-seyasi*) and 'citizenship deprivation' (Bahri, 2000).² These policies, and their ensuing struggles, prevail in distinct institutional and every-day spaces in Bahrain, touching on citizenship, belonging, and national identity.

Nowhere are these exclusionary citizenship policies more manifest than in Bahraini public schools. While political naturalisation and citizenship deprivation have become widespread since 2011, their implications for schooling and citizenship education remain strikingly understudied.

In this presentation, I examine the shifting political calculus in/forming discursive constructions of Bahraini citizenship in school textbooks produced and mandated by the Ministry of Education for public schools. I draw on (post)colonial studies of societies in conflict to ground my analysis (Mazawi, 2017; Sarvarzade and Min Wotipka, 2017; Shirazi, 2008). I unpack the carefully orchestrated discursive maneuvers emerging from these textbooks and the colonial entanglements between the Bahraini state and Global North philanthropic and international development agencies. I suggest that these entanglements produce a choreographed performance of what Derek Gregory refers to as a "colonial present" (cited in Mazawi, 2017), paraded under the cloak of modernity, morality, and peace education, while occluding persisting structures of oppression and their colonial underpinnings. I further suggest that the textbooks' discursive maneuvers produce "the visible and the sayable" (Rancière, 1999), effectively delineating boundaries of a body politic constituted of normalised assemblages. They also silence antagonisms operating between and within communities (Todd, 2009; Mazawi, 2017), and render invisible those who dwell beyond its epistemic limit (Guha cited in Cadena, 2015). The result is an ongoing "colonial present" that negates difference and diffuses disagreement in classrooms and schools.

² The official numbers of the politically naturalised are unknown; however, scholars estimate numbers to range between 50,000 to 200,000, representing between one-tenth and one-third of the total citizen population of Bahrain (Al-Shehabi, 2011). Likewise, since al-Ah'dath, at least 250 Bahraini citizens have been stripped of their citizenship due to allegations of disloyalty to the state (OHCHR, 2016).

- **Teacher policy reforms in Egypt and the control of teachers' work: Global, state, and local intersections**

Presentation: 17:20-17:40

Q&A: 17:40-17:50

Policy articulation is often associated with government activity. Yet, increasingly, policy is being influenced by what Arjun Appadurai calls “post-national spaces” that transcend national borders (Lingard & Rizvi, 2010, p. 14). In addition to the state, the new “policy creation community” includes local private agencies and public and private international organisations (Ball, 1993; Diem & Young, 2015; Marshall, 1997). Within this context, the Global South is more affected by global influences on its educational policies given international aid incentives. Moreover, policy ideas flow primarily from the Global North to the Global South due to uneven power relations (Williams, 2015).

Egypt is representative of Global South countries that are subject to considerable global influences on the articulation of their educational policies. Farag (2010) notes that ruling elites believe that Egypt “must follow the universal trajectory of educational reforms and that such a destination is best reached with the support of foreign agency funding and expertise” (p. 288). This said, Egypt has a very strong tradition of local (national) professional and political movements active in education. Here, I wonder how do these contradictory influences – of global and local

dynamics – intersect and impact relations between state and teacher groups in the field of education. How do these intersecting influences mediate struggles over teachers' work and their professionalization? To address these concerns, I examine the effects of global and local influences on teacher policy reforms introduced during the first decade of the 21st century.³ The controversies over these reforms continues to trigger resistance and power struggles. The state claims that the reforms uphold teacher professionalism. Teacher groups perceive in these reforms further marginalisation and a loss of control over their work. In between, the official teachers' syndicate, an arm of the state which lacks an elected leadership (Zaid, 2013), led many teachers to devise independent teacher associations in order to organise and voice their views.⁴

In my presentation, I examine how global and local influences shape the relationships between state and teacher groups over the question of professionalization. Doing so, I aim to untangle the power struggles over teachers' work in Egypt and their implications for teachers' lives and well-being.

³ During that decade, Egypt experienced comprehensive reforms under the banner of furthering teacher professionalism. The reforms – many brought by and financed by international donors, such as USAID and the World Bank (Farag, 2010; Ginsburg & Megahed, 2011) – included the issuance of the National Education Standards (2003), the establishment of the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAAE, 2007), the promulgation of the Teachers' Cadre Law (2007), and the establishment of the Professional Academy for Teachers (PAT) (2008).

⁴ These include, among other, the Independent Teachers' Union, the Egyptian Teachers Federation, Teachers Without a Syndicate, Teachers Unions and Teachers Without Rights.

- **Reflecting on accreditation and standardization: An account from the College of Education at Qatar University**

Presentation: 17:50-18:10

Q&A: 18:10-18:20

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE accredits 670 colleges of education within the United States (NCATE, 2014). As of 2005, a dozen of countries in the Middle East have been attempting to make use of accreditation as a policy instrument to ensure high-quality teacher education (Johnson et al., 2005, p. 136).

Although there is limited evidence supporting the claim that accreditation yields improved teaching outcomes, universities worldwide, and particularly in the Global South, seek NCATE's accredited stamp for the sake of increasing the marketability of their programs (Johnson et. al., 2005). For instance, Qatar University's declared goal is to pursue accreditation for all the degree programs for which there are accrediting agencies (Qatar University, 2017). Its aim is to move higher in global rankings and compete with top universities, often those situated in the Global North (Stack, 2016).

In this presentation, we draw on our experiences as faculty members who taught and served on department committees dedicated to developing standardized syllabi for courses at the College of

Education at Qatar University between 2014-2015. The expectation was to construct courses that are aligned with the NCATE's standards and procedures to facilitate the College of Education accreditation by the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC).

First, we begin by examining, from a decolonial perspective, how NCATE's standards and procedures attempt to enforce a universal knowledge that fails to pay attention to the Indigenous bodies of knowledge and expertise in the local context of Qatar. Secondly, we co-construct an interwoven biographical account of our first-year teaching experiences at the College of Education. Through our accounts, we highlight that although standardization aims to improve overall quality, it decreases our flexibility and eventually student learning outcomes. Thirdly, we conclude that there are many limitations that underpin NCATE's accredited stamp and which require standardization. This is especially constraining pedagogically at a College of Education, where best practices in teaching are expected.

18:20-18:30 – Refreshments Break

Sonia Medel

- **Reflections: Struggles and futures of education in the Arab region.** 18:30-19:00

As discussant, Sonia Medel will engage questions, themes, and issues across papers. She will highlight the presentations' implications for research on education in the Arab region and beyond.

Open discussion 19:00- 19:30

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PRESENTERS

Hadeel AlKhateeb

Assistant Professor, College of Education, Qatar University. She received an MA in Translation Studies in the Arab-Israeli conflict from Salford University and a doctoral degree from University College, London, where she researched the impact of neoliberalism on Qatar's language policy and language planning.

Balsam Alrasheed

EdD student in Educational Leadership and Policy at the University of British Columbia, where she also received her MEd in Early Childhood Education. Balsam is currently on study leave from her teaching post at the College of Education, Princess Nora bint Abdul Rahman University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Esraa Al-Muftah

PhD student in Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia. She received her MA in Sociology and Education from Teachers College, Columbia University. Esraa is currently on study leave from her teaching post at the College of Education at Qatar University.

Mary Kostandy

PhD student in Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia. She has an MA in International and Comparative Education from the American University in Cairo. She has worked as a K-12 teacher and teacher educator in Egypt.

André Elias Mazawi

Professor, Department of Educational Studies, University of British Columbia. He works in the field of sociology of education and higher education. IUSER Convenor.

Sonia Medel

PhD student in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia. She researches critical development and intercultural education, with a special focus on Peru and the rest of Latin America; Latinx diaspora and youth in Western Canada; decolonial curricular and policy initiatives; and anti-oppressive methodologies. Medel also wears many activist hats, as instructor of an undergraduate courses she created on dance and music for social change, and as co-founder of a dance group. She serves as one of the coordinators of the Vancouver Latin American Film Festival, where engaging and grappling with diaspora dynamics is a weekly affair.

Sara J. Musaifer

Ph.D. student in the Program of Comparative and International Development Education (CIDE) and a fellow at the Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change (ICGC), University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. She earned her BA in Political Science from the University of Jordan, and her MA in Public Policy at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. In her current research project, she plans to explore the ways in which larger histories of coloniality and lingering imperialist projects continue to form and inform education policies in the Arab Gulf States.

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ACCESS GREEN COLLEGE

Map

PAST IUSER EVENTS

For information on the previous IUSER events:

- **First IUSER, June 2nd, 2012:**

Video Program

- **Second IUSER, June 1st, 2013:**

Video Program

FUTURE IUSER EVENTS

Interested in proposing thematic foci, or in participating in future IUSER events? Please, email André E. Mazawi.