Education and decolonization: On not reading Ibn Khaldun in Palestine

Magid Shihade

Introduction

Writing in the 14\textsuperscript{th} century, Ibn Khaldun\footnote{Ibn Khaldun is a 14\textsuperscript{th}-15\textsuperscript{th} century scholar who lived in what then was Andalusia (Spain), before moving to North Africa. His work, \textit{Al-Muqaddimah}, is considered by many scholars as one of the early scholarly works of materialist historiography of human social organizations. This six-volume work includes discussions on law, governance, economy, sociology or social theory, political theory, literature, religion, education, art, climate, geography, slavery, labor, and race, as these relate to aspects that impact human social organizations.} argued that what people know at each epoch of history is always less than what was known before (2005, pp. 39, 371–378, 411–427). While giving examples on the destruction of knowledge by each new ruler or dynasty, he argued that the main two reasons for the destruction of existing knowledge are envy and power—that is, envy of previous powers and the will to make the new ruler’s/dynasty’s knowledge the dominant one. Yet, knowledge in Ibn Khaldun’s time was not as globalized as it is today. Neither was the case that there was a center of knowledge that imposed its academic disciplines, theories, methods globally. Prior to the rise and hegemony of the West, there were different centers of knowledge, and while these centers interacted and borrowed from one another, there was no uniformity nor conformity in disciplines or in methods. While we have more academic disciplines today, these disciplines started in Western academic institutions, and their content has been copied all over the world. This is in order to keep the center (West) dominant in the global system and the periphery (Third World) dependent (Wallerstein, 2004).

Centuries after \textit{Al-Muqaddimah} was written, scholars have come to consider the relationship between power and knowledge (Foucault, 1977), power and knowledge at it applies
to colonial and imperial hegemony (Said, 1978), and hegemony of knowledge as a precondition to colonization (Bennabi, 2003). In this article, I will bring the insights offered by Ibn Khaldun about the politics of knowledge and power into conversation with later scholarship on knowledge, colonization, and decolonization. I will also discuss his insights about pedagogy and bring it into conversation with today’s critical scholars of education. Further, I will discuss another insight offered by Ibn Khaldun—mimicry—in the hope to understand the state of education in Palestine, which serves as an example of globalized Western hegemony through knowledge production and dissemination and through mimicry of that knowledge all around the world, including Palestine. In addition, I will discuss some local, regional, and global anti-colonial/decolonial scholarship, and offer some ideas on why education is central to decolonization and how and what education should be. In summary, I argue that decolonizing knowledge is more crucial than, and a precondition for, political decolonization, as the real goal of decolonization is ending dependency on the West in the future, a West (center) that maintains its hegemony through knowledge production over the Third World (periphery). Of course, my focus is on formal education at academic institutions. This is because it is the area I know most about and because of the strong emphasis in Palestine on education, with a large number of youth completing at least undergrad degree and many others pursuing graduate education.³ I will focus on social sciences and humanities, not only because it is the area I am familiar with but because social sciences and humanities are often seen in Palestine—as in the rest of the Third World—as not being important, even though every student, even those who study “hard” sciences, takes courses in the social sciences and humanities as a requirement for degree completion at colleges. I also argue that social sciences and humanities are the fields that shape knowledge and knowledge production in any society.

But, before venturing into the relevance of education to decolonization, it is important to differentiate between different categories of formal and academic education. There are, in general, two categories of education: one is vocational and technical and teaches students technical skills that are in immediate need for the society. This category includes disciplines that teach skills that are related to necessary needs of each society, from farming and building skills to skills related to planning, engineering, management, technology, and medicine. In contemporary times, we differentiate between vocational education and subjects such as engineering. The second category comprises what are described nowadays as “hard” sciences, as compared to “soft” sciences such as politics, sociology, and philosophy. Even though the modern education/college/university system did not exist during his time, Ibn Khaldun, through his discussion of the different skills and sciences, nonetheless brings all these subjects (vocational and technical/hard sciences) together. He does so, it seems, by reading what each entails, because they are skills acquired through memorization and the application of that knowledge, without any need for critical and philosophical thought (2005, pp. 96, 320–331). Of course, as I will discuss

later in the article, “soft” sciences include subjects/fields in the humanities and social sciences that have become, increasingly, about the application of already memorized knowledge or “theories,” and that require little, if any, innovation. Those who stray from this pattern are either completely dismissed or seen as “radical,” casting them on the margins of scholarship and established knowledge. In other words, in the social sciences and humanities, ideas/views became categorized as “theories,” and these theories, questions, and methods of research, which are Western in origin, have been copied all around the world. For example, there is no difference between sociology in Palestine, and sociology in Europe or the United States. Scholars who wish to do otherwise are either dismissed or not taken seriously by others in the field (S. H. Alatas, 2000; Mignolo, 2009: Raju, 2009).

While the category of technical knowledge is crucial for each society to survive, and while ethical concerns must be part of this category/these fields of study/learning, my article will focus on the second category of education, that of the social sciences and humanities. This is so for several reasons. One, my background is interdisciplinary in the social science and humanities, and so my knowledge and competence to engage in discussing the first category is limited. Two, the second category is often seen as less necessary, especially in the Third World. It is seen as something of a luxury, as complementary to the technical category, or as something that will not provide a stable income for those who pursue it. Hence, it is often neglected. Yet, I argue that social sciences and humanities are especially crucial for the concept of decolonization. Most ideas that we engage with to run our societies come from social sciences and humanities: democracy, state, self-determination, bureaucracy, development, sustainability, violence, and conflict, to name just a few.

In the following pages, I will engage with both form/method and content of education, as informed by my experience in working at a college in Palestine and at colleges in the United States as well as at a college in Pakistan, and by my knowledge about education in social science and humanities in general. I will discuss briefly how education is transmitted both in form/method and in content, and consider their limitations in helping in decolonization.

**Form/method/pedagogy**

In his discussion of the forms/methods of education as they were known at the time, Ibn Khaldun differentiates between two dominant types; one is concerned with memorization and restricted fields of study, while the other emphasizes independent and critical thinking and broadens the subjects of study. The first type is concerned with learning reading and writing with the purpose of memorizing the Quran and different legal exegeses, so that students learn how to copy and apply previously established rulings and explanations. The second type—which it also teaches reading and writing, as well as about the different schools of exegeses of the Quran—teaches poetry, history, philosophy, et cetera. It expands beyond the idea of immediate application of knowledge learned; rather than memorization, it highlights discussions and critical engagement with studied materials. Similar to Freire (1970), Ibn Khaldun (2005) argues that the second type
of education is healthier for the students and society at large, because it allows the building of critical and independent thought among individuals and also provides the student with much more expansive knowledge in fields that are necessary to build a more holistic education—fields that we call today social sciences and humanities. This second type, according to him, is favorable, for it helps in developing a more educated student body—and, consequently, a society that critically engages with the meaning of knowledge and the conditions for a sustainable society—by learning histories of, and lessons from, other social organizations, both from the past and from the present, and by learning how certain social organizations failed or survived. Furthermore, he argues that memorizing exegeses of the Quran is not useful because explanations, rulings, and readings of a text change with time and space. The text is thus unstable. It is not something that we should ignore, but it is something that we need to rethink before applying it meanings in a different time/space. This is because language is social, and the social is made up of individuals who are shaped by specific contexts, times, and spaces (pp. 96, 337–349, 371–387, 411–427). This approach to knowledge, at least in part, resonates with critical scholars of education, such as Paolo Freire. In The Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire (1970) highlights several points. On pedagogy, Freire stresses the harm to students if they are taught already packaged subjects, lectured to, and then asked in exams to answer questions based on the lectures given and material studied. This form of education does not help in developing critical thinking skills among the students because it is focused on memorization. It also positions students as objects of authority by the teaching faculty and, hence, furthers their dependence as well as their docility and conformity. Similar arguments were made by the Palestinian educator Munir Fasheh (1996) in his discussion of the state of education and pedagogy in Palestine. Another aspect of Freire’s and Fasheh’s pedagogical insights is that knowledge must be connected to experience. A similar argument was made by Mignolo (2009), who, in “Epistemic Disobedience,” ejects the dominant understanding that Western knowledge is universal and neutral/objective. In his view, knowledge was never neutral, and it was made universal through the hegemony of the West. Knowledge, in his view, which echoes the argument made by Ibn Khaldun, comes through experience, and the experience of scholars in the West does not necessarily reflect the experiences of peoples in the Third World. Furthermore, that knowledge was shaped by centuries of Western colonization and domination of the Third World, and was not free from racism and interest. It also devalued, marginalized, and dismissed the knowledge available in the Third World prior to Western colonization. Thus, in his view, an epistemic disobedience among scholars of the Third World/Global South must take place; a rethinking of knowledge production, methods of research, and inclusion of knowledge that has been marginalized by established fields in Western academic institution, is essential for a truly pluriversal world to exist.

While keeping in mind these insights about education and reflecting on the pedagogy that is prevalent, to differing degrees, in the Third World (using the educational system in Palestine as an example), one is struck by the emphasis on exams and memorization. In Palestine, not only in undergraduate education but also in graduate programs, the focus is on lecturing and
examination rather than on critical thought and analysis, which are only possible through oral and written assignments, discussion, analysis of views and insights, and engagement of their relevance to Palestinian society. Some programs even require exams as the step that ultimately decides whether students in graduate programs receive their degrees. Such a system does not help in creating critical minds within the Palestinian society. Rather, it enforces fear and hierarchy, and it could also further enforce docility. A faculty member who structures his or her courses around presentations and discussions of material in the syllabus is seen by administrators as not being a serious teacher. Teachers are even asked directly to change such methods and structure the classes around lectures, lecturing to students on the material they were supposed to read before class. Then, teachers are asked to use exams that test students on how much they memorized from the reading materials and lectures. Another problem in academic institutions in Palestine is the content of disciplines and courses offered.

Content

What academic institutions in Palestine offer to students is a copy of what is offered in Western academic institutions. Like the rest of the Third World, academic institutions in Palestine offer the same disciplines/fields of study that are offered in Western academic institution. Moreover, each academic field/discipline offers the same content that is offered in Western academic institutions—the same “theorists,” “theories,” questions asked, and methods of research. Take sociology as an example, or any other field for that matter: one studies the field exactly as it is formulated in Europe and the United States. One learns the same theorists and theories, is posed the same questions in that field, and engages in the same method of research as in Europe and the United States. Even though Ibn Khaldun is considered by many Western scholars as the “father of sociology,” sociology in Palestine does not include the study of his work. Of course, this description of Ibn Khaldun as “the father of sociology” does not translate into incorporating his thought into the field of sociology. If his work is studied, it is studied as a particular knowledge of and about a certain culture (Arab, Islamic); unlike the work of Western social theorists, his work is not conferred with a sense of universal applicability (Shihade, 2013).

Not many read Ibn Khaldun or any Arab scholar from the past, in the way I suggest here or elsewhere I use his work, including his method of research. Not only Orientalists from the West but also many Arab scholars treat Arab knowledge through Orientalist knowledge—something related, at least in part, to what Khalidi (2006) calls self-Orientalizing. That is, they read and view Arab scholars through the lens of Western academic scholarship on these Arab thinkers, and there is little work or scholarship that is independent of Orientalist scholarship. So, to include Ibn Khaldun in sociology curriculum requires the overcoming of “self-Orientalism” as a starting point.

Further academics in Palestine, like most Third World academics, value mainly Western thought or base their work only on Western epistemology. Even if they do not overvalue that scholarship over local scholarship, due to the centrality of Western theorists in these fields, they
remain the main reference and source of theorizing. To engage with Western theorists is to be relevant in these fields, because these are the hegemonic theorists. It is a form of mimicry, a concept that Ibn Khaldun deploys to describe how dominated groups follow the taste, ideas, and practices of the dominant group (pp. 102–103, 116–117, 249).

Moreover, many academics in the Arab world are educated either in the West or according to the Western system, using a curriculum that mainly values Western (at least assumed as such) knowledge; thus, we are often either ignorant of Arab scholarship, or I said earlier, we treat it through a Western lens. While it is true that there is a need to educate/re-educate ourselves and become more competent in Arab scholarship, this should not be hard since many of us are familiar with Arabic thought and can read it in its original language.

In contrast, scholars who did not read the text in Arabic but in translation, and whose work/expertise is not on Arab/Islamic scholarship, have managed to read it critically and make it relevant to core questions of our modern times (e.g., Mamdani, 2013). Mamdani (2013) reflects on a seminar at the Makerere Institute for Social Research (MISR) in Kampala, where he shared the syllabus on medieval political philosophy with his graduate students. After reading the syllabus, students protested that the reading focused on Western scholars, not Africans. Mamdani asked them to suggest a medieval African text, and students proposed a translated and abridged version of *Al-Muqaddimah* by Ibn Khaldun. They argued that he is a 14th-15th North African scholar, and thus his work can be studied as an African text in political philosophy. Mamdani’s inclusion of the text suggested by students reflects a Freirean approach to education that takes students seriously, not as objects of knowledge but as those who have insights regarding what knowledge is relevant to them and to their self-esteem and well-being. Furthermore, reading the text suggested by the students led Mamdani to engage critically with the idea that Africans did not have written scholarship/knowledge as it is often portrayed in Western-centric education, and to find in it much more interesting thought on race and culture, as compared to Kant and other European scholars. For example, while European scholars continued for centuries to connect race, skin color, genetics, and while many justified the slavery of Africans because of their supposed racial inferiority, Ibn Khaldun argues that race is not a stable category—skin color is not linked to genes/race but to climate, geographic zones, and the type of work one does (under the sun or indoors)—and that slavery is unnatural to humans, because just pay for labor is central to sustaining human social organizations (Mamdani, 2013).

What is interesting in the example above is that a major text like that by Ibn Khaldun was suggested by students in Uganda as a text of African origin. Not many would see a direct connection between Ibn Khaldun and Africa as such. He is mainly seen as an Arab or Islamic scholar. Considering him African and deeming his text an African text reflects not only on these students’ openness but also on their freedom from Orientalist views—views that see such scholars only through the lens of Arabs or Islam, categories that are often seen as not part of Africa, or even foreign to Africa. Furthermore, in Palestine, among other places in the region, one does not find a graduate course in the social sciences that takes Ibn Khaldun seriously as a reference or as a source of epistemology. Nor does one hear of students in the social sciences
On not reading Ibn Khaldun in Palestine

85

demanding the inclusion of Arabic texts in the curriculum. Both faculty members and students seem to be content with German, French, Italian, British, and American social theories. Yet, I argue, it is crucial to engage with such work if we aim at delinking or decolonizing, as Mignolo (2009) has argued. This is because to continue to make Western texts and knowledge central in our academic institutions helps only to maintain Western hegemony and to reinforce a sense of inferiority among ourselves and our students. In one way or another, we are playing into the Western colonial mythology that there was/is no useful knowledge outside the West and that our local and regional knowledge is of a less value. Hence, in this article, as a way of writing differently about knowledge and education, I am very interested in the recovery of knowledge that we came to ignore. Although there are many other texts that we can utilize for this purpose, my knowledge of Ibn Khaldun’s work, which I have been studying for over fifteen years, restricts me to focus on his work, but does not in any way propose that it is the only work that is valuable.

Ibn Khaldun was not writing at a time in which knowledge was central to colonization or to race. That is, there were no unified academic institutions or unified academic fields stemming from one center (Europe) and being copied all around the periphery (Third World). The knowledge that came to dominate the globe since the rise of Western modernity was racialized (the property and the privilege of the European/White race) and was used as a tool of Western hegemony over the rest of the world (Mignolo, 2009; Raju, 2009; Stam & Shohat, 2012, among others). The claims of Eurocentrism continue to maintain the fallacy that knowledge/philosophy originated in Greece (thus appropriating Greece and making it “European,” even though Greece was more connected to cultures in the Mediterranean, Asia, and Africa) and ends somewhere in the West (U.S.) (Bernal 1987; Mignolo, 2009; Raju, 2009, among others); Ibn Khaldun contradicts these claims, arguing that knowledge is accumulative and came about over long period of history where groups learned from another, and thus does not locate knowledge in a specific civilization or a group (pp. 337–343, 349, 371–387, 411–427). But Ibn Khaldun also argued that each group or civilization that comes to power destroys, at least in part, the existing knowledge that was advanced by the previous civilization or ruling dynasty. In his view, this is because the new group coming to power is envious of what the previous dynasty produced, so it normally aims to destroy that knowledge as a mean to make its own the most dominant (pp. 337–343, 349, 371–387, 411–427). In some sense, what Ibn Khaldun is saying is that dynasties, ruling elites, social organizations/civilizations are aware of the role of knowledge in establishing power. Yet, he does not say exactly why knowledge is crucial or central to power. Furthermore, he did not live in a period in which there was a monopoly over knowledge and knowledge production; knowledge was not as global as it has gradually become since the rise of Western modernity, under which previously existing knowledge outside of Europe has been not only destroyed, marginalized, or discounted but also, at least in part, appropriated. Western authority was claimed over it, and “Western” knowledge was made both hegemonic and global (Bernal, 1987; Mignolo, 2009; Raju, 2009; Stam & Shohat, 2012). Since the rise and hegemony of Western modernity, Western knowledge was made central; as the only valuable and credible knowledge,
it excluded all other alternatives. Hence, knowledge became racialized—the property and privilege of Europe and the White race—and it was made global with the change in technology and with the almost complete dominance of Western methods, structures of knowledge, and knowledge production (universities, academic degrees, publishing, etc.) due to an economic and military hegemony that was predicated on cultural hegemony (Bennabi, 2003; Mignolo, 2009; Raju, 2009). Taking content of any field of the social sciences as an example, one starts with theories and philosophies somewhere in Europe and ends with theories and philosophers in the United States. Knowledge of the non-Whites, of scholars and philosophers from all over the Third World, is either absent or not central in any academic field in the social sciences. What is central is White knowledge, which is, thus, a racialized knowledge.

Prior to the rise of the globally hegemonic Western modernity, different systems of knowledge coexisted without one dominating the other. They might have competed, but there was no monopoly over knowledge, nor monopoly over ideas, concepts, or technology produced. For example, a Chinese technology to produce paper easily travelled to different parts of the world without the monopoly over a technology that made modern scholarship and academia possible. Without paper-making technology, books and publications in the volumes we see today would not have been possible. Without books, we would not have had such a volume of writing so easily accessible and so easily transmitted. In short, knowledge, as it pertains the academy, would not have been possible without it. Yet, the Chinese made the technology of paper making accessible without patenting it and without the monopoly that goes with it, unlike of what we see today in the context of Western modernity and the hegemony over patenting and copyright, which perpetuates non-Western peoples’ dependence on the place where the new technology originated (mainly in the West). Prior to modernity, not only technology but also ideas, thought, and studies on every aspect of social human organization travelled with ease from one place to another, and were not held hostage by a particular group or language, as they are under the racialized modern global system of knowledge production.

Furthermore, when we study any field in the humanities and social science today, we study basically the same thing all over the world, and what we study is part of a Western capitalist global hegemony (Wallerstein, 2004). Sociology in Palestine is, more or less, the same as everywhere else, and the field is a copy of Western sociology. Sociology, like other fields, has a beginning and has an end. Both beginning and end are Western (Mignolo, 2009; Raju, 2009). There is no authority outside the West, and even non-Westerners who became global figures in knowledge base their study on Western knowledge. Raju argues that even in fields of the so-called hard sciences, such as mathematics, students are introduced to mythical origins of the field in Greece; Greece has been appropriated as part of and the origin of Western modernity, ignoring the links between Greece and the places outside of Europe that shaped Greek knowledge itself (Raju, 2009; see also a similar argument by Bernal, 1987). Any field in hard sciences, like those of the soft sciences, Raju argues, similarly ends somewhere in Europe or the U.S. In his study, Raju shows that mathematics, for example, was most likely developed somewhere else and then appropriated and misappropriated; it was made a difficult subject, rather than an accessible
subject with simple practical application, as it was once, before the rise of Western modernity. He further notes that hardly anyone challenges the field as whole. Raju also argues that most of the knowledge that Western academia is based on was itself based on knowledge produced in other places outside Europe, such as Africa and Asia. He argues that the denial of pre-existing knowledge in these places is due to Western bias, racism, and the will to colonize. In other words, to give credit to Asia and Africa for knowledge that was appropriated by Europeans runs contrary to the supremacist and racist background that was validated by Western scholars in order to claim Western superiority and justify colonizing peoples in the Third World.

One step that Raju suggests is to reclaim knowledge that was cannibalized by Europeans, rather than take at face value the claims of Western authority over that knowledge. I am not suggesting that we disqualify all Western knowledge. In fact, there is nothing wrong with learning from and being in dialogue with knowledge produced in the West, but it makes no sense that one be accepted as a scholar only if one follows any field of study according to its established norms and its development in the West. Or, as S. F. Alatas (2001) argues, we must take from knowledge produced in the West what is relevant for us, not what is relevant for Western societies.

In Palestine, for instance, why is it that sociology does not make central the work of scholars like Ibn Khaldun, who even in the West is considered the “father of sociology”? Of course, in the West, as I noted earlier in this article, the argument that Ibn Khaldun is the “father of sociology,” is a form of marginalization rather than an acknowledgement that requires reassessing the field as we know it today. He is studied as an exotic text from the past, and the field of sociology does not consider his text as a central text of universal values, as it does with Western scholars of the past. But for scholars in the West to do so is understandable. What is not understandable that scholars in the Arab world do the same. It is only mimicry, using Ibn Khaldun’s and Fanon’s concept that can explain this state of affairs. Although Ibn Khaldun was speaking of how the dominated within the same social organization follow the dominant groups’ ideas, tastes, and so forth, Fanon (1963) spoke of dominated groups in the Global South prior to decolonization and of the state of elites after decolonization who mimic and follow ideas and tastes that are dominant in and by the Global North. As S. H. Alatas (2000) argues, it is a form of academic and intellectual imperialism. The same fields and their content are copied in the Global South, the same questions posed, and the same methods of answering these questions are followed. Alatas argues that this leads to further hegemony of the West, further dependency of the rest, and to conformity by following these same theories, questions, and methods. Scholars of the Global South, he further argues, are used only as suppliers of data, which is to be theorized by the scholars of the Global North (S. H. Alatas, 2000).

In Palestine, as elsewhere in the Global South, we follow Kantian and neo-Kantian scholarship, Hegelian and neo-Hegelian scholarship, Marxian and neo-Marxian scholarship, and so on, taking them at their face value, never questioning how Western scholarship, whether conservative, liberal, or leftist/critical, has been part and parcel of Western colonization of the rest of the world, as Mignolo (2009) argues. Even leftist/critical Western scholars more often
than not think that they know better and their critique is sufficient for the rest of the world to follow (Mignolo, 2015). We basically eat and digest Western knowledge naturally. Adel Samara (2011), reflecting on the sociology of knowledge in the social sciences, argues that colonization/normalization is in one’s blood because students and academics are caught in Western-centric knowledge production and are not exposed to local or to anti-colonial scholarship. It is not an exaggeration to say that anti-colonial or decolonial scholarship is marginal within the Palestinian academy. Works like that produced by Franz Fanon, Walter Mignolo, and so many others are seldom studied at Palestinian universities. The result is that, as we read articles and books by Palestinian students and scholars, we see a scholarship that is, at large, contained within Western-centric knowledge production. Thus, rather than creating space for reflection, analysis, and critical thought, colonization is further enforced, because we remain hostage to a system of knowledge that has been central to Western dominance and to the subordination of the non-Western world. In the context of Palestine, one cannot avoid the negligence of how Western hegemony that was created through the hegemony of knowledge production is directly linked to the colonization of Palestine, in which Israel presented itself as a Western front against the East, as a civilization against barbarism, and it was established and continue to sustain its settler-colonial project through the support of the West. An in such West, Israeli scholarship is valued, while Palestinian and Arab scholarship is either marginalized, used only as data for “theorizing, or is misappropriated and or plagiarized (Shihade, 2015a, 2015b).

Alternative models and approaches

Paolo Freire’s insights on pedagogy and on the role of education in creating healthy society, free individuals, and critical thought are useful (Freire, 1970). In Freire’s view, education must be aimed at developing critical thought; it should not focus on memorization or be an exam-based system. He further argues that the content of the material taught in learning institutions must reflect local needs and aspirations. This can be possible, at least in part, if students are allowed to contribute to the content of the material studied and to critically engage with it as individuals—individuals who are the product of a local context with a particular experience and particular needs as subjects of a Western settler-colonial regime. In other words, requiring students in Palestine to memorize already existing “theories,” frameworks, and/or paradigms stemming from the West only serves to further alienate them from the local context (Shihade, 2016). As Ibn Khaldun argues, knowledge and intellect are connected to the rest of one’s senses and thus, as Mignolo (2009) argues, one’s experience shapes the knowledge one produces. It is only then that a decolonial future, a new humanity for the colonized people, is possible (Fanon, 1963).

Yet, there are some attempts in Palestine, as elsewhere in the Third World, that offer an alternative approach to education within the existing academic institutions, despite many challenges or difficulties in being accepted by program directors and administrators. Some academics in Palestine do introduce decolonial thought, as well as Arabic thought, but it is not always successful. For example, a program director at a Palestinian academic institution declined
to allow a faculty member to offer a course on settler colonialism in Palestine in a comparative perspective, arguing that the topic would be of narrow interest to Palestinian students. So, these attempts from within the formal academic institutions are either suppressed or limited in their scope due to the conformity of most faculty members and administrators (S. H. Alatas, 2000).

Outside the formal academy in Palestine, the space for an alternative approach to education, although limited, gives us some hope. One such example is an interesting educational project—Campus in Camps⁴—that offers an alternative approach. In Campus in Camps, students—who come from refugee camps in the West Bank—are not forced to join the study group. Those who do join do so voluntarily; they do so because they are interested in learning or in learning outside the suffocating system of universities, and/or because they cannot afford the cost of education, especially given that universities in Palestine continue to increase the tuition fees. These universities are seen by their administrators as a money-making institution and they rely, in part, on funding from Western sources that shape fields of study and dumb down on the university disciplines through the proliferation of mainstream Western texts.

Students in Campus in the Camps are given material to read and attend lectures about dominant concepts such as democracy, citizenship, sovereignty, and self-determination; over the course of the year, they are given the opportunity to discuss these concepts and to produce papers/booklets in which they write about what each concept means to them personally as Palestinian refugees, as Palestinians living under Israeli settler-colonial rule. Here, one notices of how personal and local experience is crucial to knowledge production. Concepts such as democracy and citizenship are written in these booklets by the students, who write what these concepts mean to them as Palestinians. Furthermore, some students also write about concepts that one does not learn about in formal academic institutions. In other words, these students write about these concepts from their own perspectives, rather than being examined on the definitions of these concepts according to their theorization by Western scholars, as we normally do at regular academic institutions. Furthermore, the students in Campus in Camps also participate in choosing the topics of study and in suggesting topics that they see as more immediate to their needs as youth in camps, as Palestinians living under Israeli settler-colonial rule. They are exposed to anti-colonial work such as that of Franz Fanon and are afforded an opportunity to reflect on such work according to the local context and time. One can call the approach used in Campus in the Camps a Freirean approach—an approach that formal academic institutions either reject or look down upon as not being a serious academic alternative. Such an approach will end the centrality and hegemony of the “teacher” and make the classroom experience more dialogical with the students, and will require faculty members to engage with current and local needs of the society. It will also require reeducation in texts that have been marginalized for too long.

A similar model was proposed by Munir Fasheh, an independent educationalist in the West Bank, who is among the faculty engaged in Campus in Camps. He has been suggesting an alternative model for education in Palestine—one that is not completely outside the university but is, rather, a separate program within the university itself. In his proposal to Birzeit University

⁴For more information on this initiative, see http://www.campusincamps.ps/
(Talk at Birzeit, on June 18, 2012), while he acknowledged the difficulties inherent in changing the whole educational system, he proposed to create a special program; this program would be similar to those of honors colleges in the United States, but would be completely independent from rules, regulations, requirements, approach, and content of the academic courses offered in the rest of the university’s programs/departments. He called the proposed program Beit Al-Hikmah (House of Wisdom), and suggested that only students with genuine interest be allowed to enroll in it. In the first year, students would be exposed to ideas and scholarship produced by Arab and other Third World scholars, both from the past and the present. During this time, students would engage with readings and discussions without any exams. By the end of the year, each student would be asked to choose one scholar or idea of interest to him or her, which would become the focus of her/his study for the remaining three years in undergraduate education. During these three years, the student would read further in her/his subject of interest, discuss readings with a faculty member who is competent in the specific subject, and write—first shorter pieces, then longer ones—on what she or he learned from the material and what it means to her/him today. The student would receive her/his degree after submitting a thesis on the subject chosen, presenting it to the students and faculty members in the program, engaging in a discussion with them on the topic, finalizing the thesis after receiving feedback, and submitting it to the program committee; this committee would be composed of scholars working in the field, who are interested in decolonization rather in degree granting.

I see both models as possible spaces where students can be given the opportunity to think freely and critically, where they can become participants rather than mere recipients of knowledge, where they can think of education as something that does not directly lead to a job, but can enrich their society with more individuals who think independently and are competent in local knowledge as well as knowledge that is produced outside the West. This, in my view, will be a step to decolonial education—a path that can lead away from a sense of inferiority, toward a sense of pride and confidence of local as well as non-Western knowledge. As Bennabi (2003) argued decades ago, colonization is only possible when people think less of themselves, when they feel inferior vis-à-vis the colonizing power.

**Conclusion**

As I have argued elsewhere (Shihade, 2016), peoples and societies in the Third World can learn best from one another and from the perspectives of people in the Global South and their experiences of colonization and subjugation by Western countries. This does not mean we should exclude learning about Western countries and knowledge. But it makes more sense for an Egyptian, for example, to learn from and about India and Indians, who had a similar experience of British colonial rule. It will make more sense for Palestinians to learn about experiences of colonization of different Third World societies at the hands of Western countries. It will be more useful for Palestinians to learn from knowledge produced by scholars in the Global South. This is because, as argued by Ibn Khaldun centuries ago, experience through our corporal senses is a
On not reading Ibn Khaldun in Palestine

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It makes more sense for Palestinians to learn from those who were/are subjects of Western racism, hegemony, colonialism, and settler colonialism. It makes more sense for Palestinian students to learn about Ibn Khaldun and other scholars from the past rather than to be content with Hegel, Marx, Kant, Rousseau, and other idols of Western modernity, whose scholarship was and is part of Western hegemony. It makes more sense for Palestinian students to study scholarship produced by Palestinian scholars than by Western ones. And finally, it makes more sense for Palestinian students to learn about other Indigenous peoples’ histories and study Indigenous scholars’ work. Zionists and Israelis have been active in learning from and sharing knowledge about tools of domination that were/are in place in parts of the world where settler-colonial structures are in place. It will be as useful for Palestinians to learn from native and Indigenous peoples on the history of settler colonialism as they experienced or continue to experience it. This will help Palestinian students learn about what tools were used and what forms of resistance were or are being used to counter the structure of settler colonialism. To study settler colonialism—as it operated and/or continues to operate in different parts of the world and shaped or continues to shape these places and their peoples—can only help Palestinian society understand the rationale of the settler-colonial structure and the best means for resisting its final and ultimate goal: the elimination of the native (Sayegh, 1965; Wolfe, 2006).

Mignolo (2009) argues that for decolonization to happen, peoples of the Global South must delink from Western knowledge and uncover, revive, and develop their own system. This is so because knowledge was/is central to colonization. Bennabi (2003) argues that colonization starts with a sense of inferiority about one’s culture and knowledge. Said (1978) argues that knowledge of the Orient was a product of the imagination of Western scholars, which went hand-in-hand with colonial and imperial subjugation of peoples in the region. Even critical Western scholars are part of this domination, as Hamid Dabashi (2015) argues. To delink, thus, education in Palestine must be refocused to encourage critical thought (Fasheh, 1996; Freire, 1970; Ibn Khaldun, 2005); making central in the Palestinian educational system the work of past Arab and non-Arab scholarship of the Third World, and current knowledge produced by scholars from subjugated groups in the Global South, must become a priority (Fasheh, 1996; Shihade, 2016). It is only through this that we can hope to see a real decolonization take place in Palestine. Otherwise, even if granted a state, Palestine will become a copy of other Third World countries that remain subjugated despite official decolonization (S. H. Alatas, 2000; Fanon, 1963). Continued reliance on Western funding and knowledge will only keep us dependent, keep us more like consultants than like educators and knowledge producers (Mamdani, 2011).
References


