

A Curriculum of Contradictions: State-Sponsored Children's Literature in Egypt (1954-2011)

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Received: September 2014
Accepted: March 2015
Published: September 2015

Abstract

Children's literature has always been a highly influential and politicised tool, particularly when used *en masse* by governments in public school. This paper maps the development of political ideology in the 4th grade Egyptian Arabic literature curricula between 1959 and 2011, altered under the regimes of three consecutive presidents: Gamal Abdel Nasser (1954-1970), Anwar El Sadat (1970-1981), and Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011). After collecting the curricula from the Ministry of Education archives, translating them, and identifying political themes, I have evaluated the extent to which the political ideology of each regime is present in the stories of their respective curricula. However, similar to theories on the difficulties of using children's literature as a tool for indoctrinating children to the state's ideologies (Hollindale, 1992), contradictions are revealed within the stories between the state's ideology and other possible interpretations. Moving chronologically between presidents, this study lays the groundwork for further study of Egypt's dynamic modern history through the lens of its educational system during the crucial period when the nation had just overthrown the monarchy and was looking to stake a claim for itself in the international arena. That children's literature was chosen to effect this change nationally proves not only the significance of the medium, but also the regime's depiction of children's roles as future citizens.

Keywords: government sponsored, political children's literature, curricula, Egypt, historical review

Introduction

After Egypt's revolutionary military coup in 1952, the British-controlled Egyptian monarchy was overthrown and replaced with a presidential system. For the first time in thousands of years, Egyptians governed Egypt. A priority of each proceeding regime was the development of a free education system available to the majority of Egyptians. Similar to the development of Western education after 1870, "education took over the task of indoctrinating the general mass of the population with appropriate values and attitudes" (Dixon, 1977, p. 89). The state-sponsored curriculum, particularly the Arabic literature curriculum, was used to promote the state's ideology. This study maps the development of political ideology in President's Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar El Sadat, and Hosni Mubarak's regimes by looking at the Arabic literature curriculum. Such an evaluation of the Egyptian state's ideological promotion through children's literature in the curriculum has never previously been attempted.

The primary Arabic literature curriculum consists of approximately forty children's stories to be read and taught in class. These stories are written by a group of people selected by the Egyptian Ministry of Education. The selected group is predominantly male and usually consists of five professors from different universities and a consultant in educational curricula. For example, the current curriculum was written by six men: three Professors in Curriculum Development from the Universities of Ein Shams, Helwan, and Mansoura, a Literature professor from Ein Shams University, and the Master of Education College of Areish under the University of Suez Canal. Lastly, there is one consultant on educational curricula. The past curricula are available at the Egyptian Ministry of Education Archive in Cairo where I accessed the material needed for this study.

The curricula I selected for my study depict the ideological stances of each regime, but also reveal contradictory ideas. My research focus then not only identifies the presence of state ideologies in the curricula, but also whether or not that ideology is flawed, contradictory, or unreflective of society. In any literary work, different readings are often expected as Abdel Tawab Youssef, popularly known as "the godfather of

children's literature in Egypt and the Arab World,"¹ explains in an interview I conducted with him:

[N]ow we have a theory that when an adult reads a story it is saved in his mind as a different story than what is written. Does this also apply to children's literature? ... Even more so than with adults. Tell the child a story, and ask him to repeat it, he'll tell you a completely different story. Something completely different (my translation; Youssef, 2014).

Children's literature has been used extensively as a political tool. According to Peter Hunt, children's literature helps form the reader's ideas and "plays an integral role in the shaping of children's concepts of culture and society" (1991, p. 51-52). Several critics have analysed the development of ideology in children's literature in state and non-state sponsored texts in the United States and some European countries, such as Michelle Abate (2010) and Julia Mickenberg (2006). Peter Hollindale further explains how ideology is a "climate of belief," which can be "simultaneously supported and subverted" (1992, p. 37). The concept of ideology in this study is problematic, as the state's declared ideology continues to change radically between presidents, which creates a society without one solid ideology that is not represented in state-sponsored literature. Hollindale's definition of a "climate of belief" therefore does not take into consideration how the climate can change between the rather large landscape separating the authoritarian state and the people. Indeed, both the ideology of the regime may be present in the literature, along with contradicting ideologies from other national groups. In order to analyse my primary material thoroughly, I will keep in mind Anna Adamik Jaszo's concept of the "threefold judgment," which she explains in her depiction of Germans in Hungarian literature, as a process in which one must take into consideration the events of the time, the writer's view of the events, and the prevailing opinion of these past events as one reads about them (2001, p. 33). The next three sections chronologically present each president's era to foreground the contextual events surrounding the curricula, the government's role in these events as they are the writers of the stories, and my (the reader's) current opinion about these events.

¹ http://www.arabworldbooks.com/authors/essam_youssef.htm

My study presents a curriculum evolution riddled with ideological contradictions. The effect of the state's writing and manipulation of literature is debatable and will not be measured in this study. However, the child reader has been given different roles along the years, changing and conflicting responsibilities, hopes, and priorities. I hope that my study will lay the groundwork for future studies both of the Egyptian curriculum itself and of state-controlled children's literature in other countries.

1. Methodology

As no academic review of past curricula in Egypt exists, a large part of my research consisted of finding and mapping the curricula I decided to research. Helpfully, I am a fluent Arabic speaker familiar with the Egyptian national curriculum and Arabic children's literature. To narrow my scope, I chose to study the Grade Four curricula, for students aged ten, using purposive sampling based on two types of research. Initially, I did a preliminary investigation of when children in the Egyptian curriculum actually learn how to read by themselves, and found this to be around the age of ten for average students. This is admittedly late, yet there is already speculation that students leave Egyptian public schools unable to read according to current illiteracy rates (Abdelbakey, 2014). Furthermore, literary research demonstrates that the later elementary years are when children develop the ability to understand that disagreements may occur between preference-based and ideological beliefs (Banerjee et al., 2007, p. 1084; Heiphetz, 2012, p. 560). This ability to understand and judge ideological beliefs was critical to my research questions, and hence I found the fourth grade curriculum most appropriate for my study.

Curricula in Egypt are kept in the Ministry of Education Archives, which I was allowed to enter under special permission as a researcher. Once inside, I collected the eight appropriate curricula and proceeded to read through all of them, translating from Arabic to English, and taking detailed notes. Background research in ideologies in children's literature, political children's literature, and Egyptian political ideologies helped guide my research, as will be detailed in the literature review. As Sabeur Mdallel explained in her paper on translating children's literature in the Arab world (2003, p. 1), its literature is impregnated with morality, didactics, and a heavy ideological bias,

therefore needing not only a literal translation but also a cultural transfer. I attempted to do this in my translation of the work, as shown below. After identifying themes, I chose one heroic tale from each presidential era to examine for further analysis, selected because of its ubiquitous presence and distinctiveness throughout all the presidential eras, which leads to a more useful comparison.

Furthermore, I conducted interviews with several professionals to obtain a wider and clearer perspective of the changes during this era. This help was necessary as there was no available critical material on this topic. Children's literature professor at the American University in Cairo, Yasmine Motawy helped explain the overall development of non-state sponsored literature during this era, and also directed me toward prominent authors. Journalist and author Randa Shaath provided a more complete look at the birth and decline of publishing houses in Egypt and across the Arab world. Prominent children's author Abdel Tawab Youssef explained his work with the state and the development of Arabic children's literature. And finally, Hazem Kandil, Cambridge Professor of Sociology and Egyptian political analyst, helped explain the changes of Egyptian state ideologies since Nasser and discerned ideological references in the stories I selected. This data guided me through the changes and developments of each political era in relation to children's literature.

2. Ideology and Children's Literature

The ideology of each president's regime is fully entwined with their respective political and economic policies. As stated by Michael Freedon, everyone is an ideologist since we have (or perhaps lack) an "understanding of the political environment of which we are part, and have views about the merits and fallings of that environment" (2003, p. 1). Yet as ideological beliefs do not represent an objective reality, the texts that contain them do not present only one reading (p. 49). Hence, a text meant to contain one ideology may read as an ideology contradictory to the original. Hollindale argues that "we should accept both the omnipresence of ideology and the realities of fragmentation, divergence, passivity, inertia, conservatism, invisibility, unreasoningness, in much of its expression and reception by the author and the child" (1992, p. 37). The reality that ideologies can be "simultaneously supported and subverted" is one of the main problems in the

relationship of politics and children's literature. Maria Nikolajeva explores additional complexities when she explains how ideology comes from the implied author of a text, and not necessarily the narrator of the story (2005, p. 173). Nadia El Kholy takes this a step further by claiming that, "children and their literature create ideology" (my translation, 2007, p. 59). As Roland Barthes claimed in his essay "The Death of the Author" (1967), the "authorless" text, while existing in a political and social environment, can very well adopt a new ideology created by its reader. Hence, the intention of the state in portraying a specific ideology may rather result in the unveiling of governments' ideologies' drawbacks, contradictions, or flaws. Similar to Nikolajeva's studies (1995, p. 1 & 2002, p. 187), on Soviet children's literature where she identifies that tales reflected the ruling ideology and propagated the values inherent in it alongside flaws and contradictions, the Egyptian curriculum proves to follow a similar model, particularly initially with Nasser's socialism.

As the analysed examples from the curricula are of hero tales, it should be noted that this type of literature can most often be found during times of critical social change. El Kholy's research on Egyptian heroes notes their simplification in Egyptian literature. She also finds the hero often impersonates the characteristics and ideology of the ruler of the time, "who has supremacy, the right to rule, and the will to sacrifice for his dominion" (my translation, 2007, p. 66). El Kholy mentions courage as one of the most important hero traits and that the rural hero does not have a personal goal, but rather defends the rights of all. In her study of heroism in Egyptian children's literature, she lists the most important hero characteristics as "Pan-Arabism, Social Values, Humanitarian and Civilization Values, and Academic and Adventurous Values. The types of heroes are: The Archetypal hero, the Religious Hero, the Historic Hero, the Romantic hero, the Rural hero, the Police and adventure hero, and the Imaginary Hero" (2007, p. 60-62). Pan-Arabism is particularly emphasized during Nasser's time from 1956 to 1965, while after the 1973 War, "nationalism, protection of sovereignty and freedom" became the aim, while during the 1990's it was solidarity with Palestine. For example, Yacoub El Sharouny wrote, "hundreds of stories from the 90s until now about the heroes of the 6 October War" (my translation, 2007, p. 67). El Kholy's findings of Pan-Arabism during

Nasser and nationalism during Sadat are present in their respective curricula, while Mubarak's ideology makes no mention of the Palestinian cause in the curriculum. This accurately represents how Mubarak's curriculum was whitewashed of every apparent ideology to discourage any political participation or disturbance.

3. Education During President Nasser: A Nation of Arab Socialists (1954 – 1970)

During and before Nasser, Egyptian nationalists were convinced that the British occupation had purposely stifled Egyptian education in order to prevent nationalist feelings from growing amongst students. Therefore, the government devoted a great deal of effort in expanding a free, national school system, and increasing the enrolment from 324,000 in 1913 to 1,900,000 in 1951 (Mansfield, 1965, p. 120). Private, foreign schools still existed, empowering the elite, and were often regarded by the revolutionary regime "as a breeding-ground for one of Egypt's worst social evils, its irresponsible aristocracy" (Mansfield, 1965, p. 121). Opening new schools at a rate of two every three days (Mansfield, 1965, p. 120), the number of primary school students grew from 15,000 in 1953 to 100,000 in 1965. However, in attempting to end class privilege and use education to spread "nationalization," the result was a stifling uniformity, which suppressed creative and bright individuals. Some Egyptian educationalists draw a parallel to the Soviet Union, which faced similar situations after its revolution, combating illiteracy and providing schooling for all children (Mansfield, 1965, p. 123). Yet, though he encouraged the middle class to become intellectual, Nasser was known to imprison many writers, resulting in a further sapping of creative energy (McDermott, 1988, p. 236). Yasmine Motawy explained how lack of originality was obvious under Nasser, particularly in state-supported publishing houses such as Al Maktaba Al Khadra (The Green Bookstore) (in conversation, 2014).

3.1 Curriculum Overview

Though Nasser held office between 1954 and 1970 and released two curricula, the second curriculum of 1965 revealed a plethora of new stories, themes, and is nearly double in size to its predecessor of 1959. The curriculum begins with a completely new national identity for students, defined as "whatever cultural characteristics a society (or nation) feels its members share that distinguish it from other groups" (Fox, 2001, p. 44).

Aside from the simple explanations in the curriculum of holidays and animals, two main themes permeate the curriculum: pan-Arabism and socialism.

Pan-Arabism is obvious in school stories, historic tales, and folktales. The very first story in the curriculum is called the *United Arab Republic*, explaining how Egypt and Syria have now merged into one nation. Several stories are similar such as, *Know Your Country*, *My Arab Nation*, *The Precious Palestine*, and *Ayman and Ghasan*. Other stories explain historic victories such as the 7th of May, *The Ship Cleopatra*, and more subtly through folktales such as *The Turtle and his Friends* and *The Rabbit and the Elephant* both show weaker animals (Arab states) uniting to defeat a common enemy (the West). Over one-third of the curriculum contains themes of pan-Arabism. The curriculum here clearly begins to define Egyptian identity by its relationship with other nations, particularly Arab nations, Western powers, and Israel. Nasser began to redefine Egyptian identity as a rejection of the European colonialist powers that once controlled and weakened it. He redefines and attempts to empower Egyptians by their Arabism and encourages friendships, trust, and relations with the neighbouring Arab world.

The second main theme is the glorification of socialism through stories which encourage children to trust the system. Stories began to show examples of children working with the state system for the betterment of society alongside their own success or glory. Such examples are *The Savings Book*, *Supplies of Winter*, *Tarek in the Health Club*, and *Little Heroes*, and finally, *The Great Man*, the story chosen for analysis.

3.2 'The Great Man'

This heroic tale portrays the benefits of socialism through a schoolboy who helps manage the school charity club which leads to helping a poor man find a job. The school charity club arranges a charity box where students donate some change, until a large sum has been collected. The club members hold a meeting to decide upon how to donate the money. After some suggestions, Ahmed, the protagonist, gives a detailed explanation of how the money should be given to one man who can make the best use of it:

What would be better would be to give all the money to one person. If we give it to a large number of poor people, each would get a small amount, but if we give it

to one person, then he will be able to use it in a useful manner. (1965, The National Curriculum [TNC], p. 156)

The janitor's son is chosen for his good manners and reputation as a hard worker, and he decides to sell school supplies to the school children. The story ends twenty-five years later at a school anniversary where the janitor, now a wealthy businessman, thanks Ahmed for his help and suggests funding a statue of Ahmed. Instead, Ahmed recommends the money be reinvested into other poor men so it can be put to worthwhile use.

Schools and education here can be directly representative of the state under Nasser, as he pursued the building of schools. Hence, the members of the charity club may be interpreted as members of government, specifically Nasser's regime. Even Ahmed represents the head of the state and creator of ideology by using the word "useful." This word "useful" portrays how ideology is unequivocally present. What is useful as we later find out is to invest in someone who "would be well-mannered, of good behaviour, hard working, and active" (1965, TNC, p. 157). These characteristics that the leader chooses demonstrates to children the characteristics they must adopt to be chosen for success in a socialist society.

However, a child reader who may not understand socialism or be politically fluent can easily read a different and possibly more straightforward interpretation of this story. An early form of favouring and corruption, friends may award money to people they are already acquainted with depending on their character. Rather than the equal distribution of wealth which socialism entails, here we see an ideology of entrepreneurship where each person is recommended to acquire and succeed at a trade.

The use of charity here can be reflected in the Egyptian culture and more specifically, the Muslim religion, where everyone is required to give 2.5% of their salaries annually to charity. This is common practice in Egypt, and the government's awareness of this portrays their hope in using this to create a welfare state. While Nasser's curriculum may attempt to use socialism as the tool to alleviate the ills of society, the use of themes such as charity and luck undermine this. These concepts allow people to grow up "accepting a manifestly unjust society, unacceptable morally in its

most basic assumptions” (Dixon, 1977, p. 31). If anything, these stories simply make people dependent on a system or a leader, which in reality is not fail-safe. Their obligations to society are minimized to simply putting a coin in a school charity box or donating an old shirt, knowing that this may help someone, somewhere, but not who or how that person reached such a poor situation in the first place.

Society here and not a socialist government are responsible for creating more opportunities and wealth. I argue that this story actually contains an embryonic form of capitalism that matures in the next President’s regime. Nasser’s ideology clearly addresses children and even more specifically males as adults; hence a regime where children are made dependent on the state for funding is contradictory. This recognition not only gives children a great deal of responsibility and respect, but also acknowledges the importance of their literature.

4. President Anwar El Sadat: Capitalism and Empowerment (1970 – 1981)

Under Sadat, economically, the education system was a burden on the state as it expanded, and open public education was not well-suited to Egypt’s manpower needs, resulting in a subsidization of education for the middle class by both the upper and lower classes (Abd Al-Fadil, 1982, p. 351). The graduates of the system were guaranteed public employment which severely bloated the state with an unnecessarily large number of employees and salaries to pay. Further decreasing the quality of education, the open door policy or the *Infatih* adopted resulted in a drain of Egyptian professors to other areas in the Arab world where they were paid higher salaries. This “brain drain” resulted in a shift of societal values, so that reading was no longer a priority (Yasmine Motawy in conversation, 2014). The *Infatih* also resulted in more translated books from the West, which led to a decrease in pan-Arabism (Randa Shaath in conversation, 2014). This eventually led to a general decline of Arabic literature and the Arabic language in Egypt (Galal Amin, 2000).

Meanwhile, the quality of primary education was increasingly neglected as most schools were forced to have shifts of three to four hour school days to keep up with the demand of students, a system still in place today (Hinnebusch, 1985, p. 268). To battle this lack of quality, parents were forced to create a whole new sub-industry to deal with

the low quality of teaching in schools. Private tutoring sprang up around Egypt for the upper and middle classes, not just individually, but for entire groups as well. Hence, a supposedly free system became an expense to the parents who wanted their children to be able to pass their examinations and climb the educational ladder (McDermott, 1988, p. 207).

4.1 Curriculum overview

Sadat's regime only released one curriculum before his assassination. In this curriculum, reference to Arab nationalism and the Egyptian victories are kept, such as *A letter and a letter* where an Egyptian travels to Libya because his father finds work there and tells his friends back home about his life there. Also, there are war tales such as the Egyptian victory of 6 October 1973 in taking back the Sinai from Israel. Otherwise, Sadat's regime redefines Egyptian national identity once more, referring to Egypt's unique village life, which differentiates it to the Arab bedouins and the merchants of the Levant. This is emphasized with traditional stories like *Mom*, *Kids Games*, *The Class Discussion*, *Our Village*, *The Friend of the Peasant*, *White Gold* (that being cotton), *Important Cotton*, and *Fieldtrip to El Kanater* where children's games and activities are described. The curriculum also has several references to the Quran and other Muslim texts, revealing Sadat's attempts to deal with radical Islam. Another story, *The Doctor Maymoun*, shows how Sadat's regime's ideology changed a great deal from Nasser's through an anthropomorphic fable where a clever monkey pulls out a lion's teeth, stripping him of power.

The new economic capitalist system is also explained in stories such as the selected *The Little Fisherman* where a boy depends on his and his family's savings to make a life for himself, rather than state funding. Such stories embedded in the curriculum portray a life students would expect to have upon leaving school. Cedric Cullingford also comments on books written about schools and how they concentrate on the messages "that they are supposed to convey, especially in the supposed art of preparing for the adult world" (1998, p. 36). These are the typical rags to riches stories of the middle class, yet without any help from the state. Similar to the popular Disney comics featuring Donald Duck and Scrooge McDuck, the wealth of such a character and

his personality cannot be understood without considering the economic system of the time that determined its distribution (Dixon, 1977, p. 14); in this case, it is capitalism.

4.2 'The Little Fisherman'

This story shows a schoolboy, Hamdan, pursue his dreams to become a fisherman in a capitalist system through his own efforts and savings. In the beginning, Hamdan asks his father when he will have a fisherman's boat, but is told to attend school instead.

Similar to *The Great Man*, Hamdan is complimented on specific traits when he takes his father's advice and attends school:

Hamdan listened to what his father said, so he would meet his friends and walk to school, where he would spend his mornings. He would listen to what the teacher would say, and ask questions, and understand, and do homework, and borrow stories, and read them. And he would join in clubs, and he would never present any homework late to the teacher.

And the teachers loved him, and the headmaster loved him. They called him the flying bird, because he was light in movement like a bird (1974, TNC, p. 127).

To put this in cultural context, the Arabic saying that someone is light means they are easy to deal with and not troublesome. A similar compliment would be *nisma* or breeze, which is light and pleasant. This is a way of demonstrating how students should behave, that they should be easy to deal with, and complete all work assigned to them by their teacher without delay. Therefore, though pursuing your dreams is important, school is presented in this story as a requirement nonetheless. What is actually learned at school to help Hamdan achieve his dream, however, is overlooked, and this may reflect Sadat's government's negligence of the degrading educational system at the time, leading to private tutoring and over crowding in classrooms. The story continues with Hamdan excelling at school and asking his father for a second time, he begins to save some money by fishing after school to help his father fund the boat. Years later, Hamdan buys the boat and eventually owns a successful fish mongering store.

Hamdan's story can be basically interpreted to be full of hope that hard work and schooling can lead someone to eventually achieve their dreams. The citizen relies

completely on himself to work and save money in a capitalist system. However, research in developmental psychology shows that those who cannot control their environment often retreat into a fantasy world (Landau, 1972, p. 292). In this case, simply idealizing scenarios may be destructive to helping children control and shape their environment. Therefore, though the events are depicted as ideal in Hamdan's story and he achieves everything seamlessly, this may portray the exact opposite. By contradicting the reality of the failing education system and family dynamics so strongly, this story practically achieves the status of fantasy and does not help children actually deal with the problems they may face to gain a profession. These problems are the incompetency of schools and funding needed to pay for private tutoring, and creating a career different than the family profession.

5. President Hosni Mubarak: The Whitewashing of Ideology (1981 - 2011)

Mubarak had inherited a regime with a shortage of money due to the previous wars. Yet, this did not stop him from issuing mass publications of cheap paperback books. Around 1986, these books often reflected the concerns of the time such as Nasser and Nasserism, Sadat's death, and a plethora of religious books (McDermott, 1988, p. 237). Aside from this literature, the government supported specific "favourite" authors in writing original Arabic fiction, which directly supported the ideologies of the state (Yasmine Motawy, in conversation, 2014).

The educational system was in more trouble than ever, with falling enrolment, gender inequality, and poor teacher-student ratios. Classes often had more than sixty or seventy students (Osman, 2010, p. 205). According to Egypt's Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), over sixty per cent of all investments in education are spent on private tutoring. Worse still, there was a major retreat in research and development; emphasis was placed on passing exams instead of independent learning.² In terms of the curriculum, this led to the replacement of fictional stories with non-fiction, generally discouraging the creativity encouraged in fiction.

² See the US State University Directory on the Egyptian Education System, Business Monitor International's 2009 report on Egypt's infrastructure, Karima Korayem's *The Research Environment in Egypt* (Research for Development in the Middle East and North Africa at the International Development

5.1 Curriculum Overview

Mubarak's regime spanned five curricula, and though his first one barely changed that of his predecessors, the second curriculum of 1992 was the most radically different from all the curricula before him. Nearly every story was removed with the only exceptions being: *Mother*, *Ants*, and *My Arab Nation*. The curriculum implemented a great deal of religion and some humour in the stories. Religion has often been referenced as acting as a psychological arm of the ruling classes used to "terrify" people into submission (Dixon, 1977, p. 128). Similar to the late eighteenth century when great publishing activity in the United States by the Christian church coincided with periods of great social unrest, Mubarak's era was inheriting the ever-increasing problem of the radicalism of the Muslim Brotherhood. Religious stories, then, first seen in Sadat's era, increased under Mubarak to address and attempt to take away from the political power of the Muslim Brotherhood. Mubarak's regime famously jailed and exiled Muslim Brotherhood leaders and followers, though in hindsight this did not stop their movement. However, this action represents Mubarak's ideology, which was to discourage political propaganda and participation.

This curriculum also places less emphasis on Arab nations, and rather on Egyptian tourism, morals, and technology. There are also humorous stories such as *The Arrogant Cat* and references to old Egyptian folklore such as the humorous, apparently ill-witted, but rather wise figure, Goha. Kandil compares Mubarak to Goha, saying that this is how Mubarak attempted to portray himself to the public, a seemingly simple-minded man who was actually rather wise (in conversation, 2014). Humour in stories has been considered an escapist strategy, which draws "attention not just to a refusal to face some of the difficulties or anguishes of life, but to their existence" (Cullingford, 1998, p. 151). In my opinion, Mubarak's regime used humour to help the public deal with or deny the hardships they were continuously facing in everyday life. After this curriculum, however, all folklore was discontinued and the curriculum became bland at best, with nearly no fiction whatsoever. Indeed, in the most recent 2010 curriculum, only one fifth

Research Centre, 2000), the UN Arab Human Development Report 2005, and a number of lectures by Dr. Ahmed Zewail, the winner of the 1999 Nobel Prize in Chemistry.

of the curriculum contains fiction and the rest discusses places in Egypt, the village, the environment, interesting facts, animal behaviour, and school practices. Overall, there was a large shift from fiction to non-fiction.

However, arguably the most obvious development is the female protagonist in the selected story, *A Trip to the Moon: Hana's Dream*. Hana dreams of becoming an astronaut and demonstrates great academic skill. This is the first mention of a female protagonist since the story in Nasser's 1965 curriculum *Wafaa Cooks*. Other writers were beginning to write stories with female protagonists such as Abdel Wahab El Meseiry who wrote *Cinderella and Mrs Zeinab Khatoum* (1999) and Abdel Tawab Youssef who wrote *The Story of Toshka* (2000; El Kholy, 2007, p. 72-73). These stories show girls with dreams and strong characters, rather than traditional characteristics of beauty, cooking, or demureness. By implementing heroines into the latest curriculum, this may have been another attempt by the Mubarak regime to appease the public while reality demonstrated something else entirely.

5.2 A Trip to the Moon: Hana's Hope

This story covers five chapters, filling about twenty of the seventy pages of the entire spring curriculum. Hana is introduced as an organized and hopeful student who enjoys learning about space through her computer, schoolbooks, and library. She falls asleep and awakens in a dream as an astronaut on the moon. Eventually, she returns to Earth through a space ship that takes her directly to her room. She awakens in bed, prepares for school, and tells her supportive family about her dream over dinner. The final chapter shows Hana sitting under a tree and reciting a poem about the beauty of the moon.

Though the space frontier may be filled with hope, I argue that it provided a distraction for children. Unlike in the West where space represents stars and dreams, in Egypt a dreamer has the connotation of someone who has their head in the clouds. In this case, space may just be a dream for Hana to distract herself with but never necessarily reach. At the same time, Hana's story begs the reader to explore technology as an answer to questions and a platform for growth. "Hana loves reading, sitting in front of the computer, and reading news on the internet about space and satellites." However, this

ability to learn is overshadowed by other parts of the story which reveal Hana's limited knowledge of the moon. Both the images and her inaccurate description of space signify the lack of dedication to or importance of the topic, especially considering that all other stories in these curricula are non-fiction and accurate.

Even the portrayal of the first female heroine or protagonist in Egyptian curricula is overshadowed. Margery Hourihan explains how "heroism is gendered" (1997, p. 68), and though the heroine here is a girl, she still demonstrates masculine qualities. She demonstrates academic knowledge, emotional self-control, initiative, and active participation in school clubs. Even Hana's poetry is a traditionally male discipline in Egypt, where most if not all famous writers are men. The portrayal of a female heroine with male characteristics, in accordance with traditional canons, reveals how society was not yet ready to have a fully feminine hero or protagonist. Later in the story, her family verbally supports Hana's dream. Arguably, this a huge step for society to accept a girl being so ambitious. In fact, this is the first time a female protagonist in a story in the Arabic Egyptian curriculum has a dream beyond cooking. She is the first role model for an ambitious and smart girl, and now with the approval of her family, one would expect great things to come from Hana. Yet, this story concludes with Hana simply writing a poem.

The ultimate contrast in this story is the hope it provides for immense social changes, particularly with a female protagonist, in relation to the lack of accurate or quality information and actual results in the end. This is similar to how the Mubarak regime also used humour and religion to distract readers from the problems around them, on Earth. By thinking of unrealistic, albeit ambitious dreams, particularly as there is currently no functioning space program in Egypt, readers are encouraged to spend and possibly waste their time. Yet, while Mubarak's regime attempted to whitewash Egyptians of ideology and stories, this only cleared the stage for other ideologies.

Conclusion

Egypt's changing regimes attempted to utilize the state-sponsored Arabic elementary curriculum as a platform for introducing children to their ideologies. Yet, a closer look at the curricula indicates that while the state's professed ideologies are

present, so are numerous contradictions and flaws. Even as Nasser's regime introduced tales of Arab socialism, seeds of capitalism and problems with partnership are present in the stories. Sadat reclaimed Egyptian identity and promoted capitalism, though in a manner which undermined his regime's authority. Finally, Mubarak used humour, religion, and dreams to encourage apathy instead of political participation, but instead gave the opportunity for other stories to capture the hopes of the people.

The decrease of storytelling in the most recent curricula may very well have diminished the value of Arabic literature in society. The stories' lack of creativity and critical thinking have handicapped young citizens with long-lasting effects, making them incapable of formulating sound political or social decisions when they are older. However, as Hunt explained, it is impossible to know the exact effect that reading children's literature can have, as is evident in the revolutionary downfall of Mubarak's regime that was meant to suppress political activity.

This leads to the question of whether it is at all possible to quell stories, as this seems to be where Mubarak went wrong. In attempting to create a bland, non-fictional curriculum devoid of political participation, Mubarak did not decrease radical ideology and actions, but rather gave it a platform elsewhere. Blogs, Facebook, newspapers, and even oral stories handed down by the existing generations of the present-day society started to create the state – one that is infinitely diverse. International schools may have shared German, French, English, and American literature – along with the growth and expansion of Diwan, Egypt's first bookstore chain founded in 2002. Other curricula such as those by the Muslim Brotherhood undoubtedly promoted stories relevant to their ideologies.

While Nasser and Sadat's ideological regimes promoted change, it is not necessarily true that Mubarak's more passive agenda promoted stability. Mubarak's attempt to quell stories in the curriculum did not and, I believe, could not quell the people's inherent need to represent their society, problems, and find themselves in stories. Even the story of the Tunisian man, Mohamed Bouazizi, who set himself on fire, struck the hearts of Egyptians. In the current age of technology and internationalism, a regime cannot solely rely on an educational curriculum but also the media to promote

stories and create a sense of national identity. Hence, stories written in The National Curriculum to promote a currently acceptable ideology need to be aware that ideology is not just grounded in stories on paper – they are grounded in stories on paper in societies. And if what is printed practically mocks society with its starched uniformed children and economic success when the reality is largely the opposite, an ideology different and even contradictory to that intended by the regime may become adopted by the society. To the very degree that the ruling party and society began to hold such different views that they feel that this curriculum, representative of state-authority, no longer serves them, and that the only next logical step is, well, revolution. The role of literature and freedom therefore should be carefully considered by upcoming regimes to effect change; such studies can better prepare the government on how to positively involve and inform future citizens of their role in rebuilding Egypt.

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