

THIRD SPACE THOUGHTS TO POLICY – IIIT’s AEMS Podcast
Transcript for Episode 11: Geopolitics and Education: Is Globalization on Pause?
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Host: Amina Derbi Guest: Dr. Tavis Jules

Amina: Welcome everyone, you are listening to Third Space Thoughts to Policy, the official podcast for the Advancing Education in Muslim Societies program at IIIT, the International Institute of Islamic Thought. The purpose of our podcast (Third Space Thoughts to Policy) is to hear from experts and stakeholders in the field of education policy reform including policy advisors, governmental officials, academics, teachers, and parents.

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The observations and conclusions featured in this podcast represent the speakers’ own personal views and experiences, not the organization’s.

As mentioned last time, IIIT is currently accepting applications for its Advancing Education in Muslim Societies Master’s Degree program in partnership with American University. So the International Training and Education Program-Advancing Education in Muslim Societies, also known as ITEP-AEMS, is a unique opportunity to earn a Master’s Degree in International Education and Training, with a focus on Muslim societies from a reputable university like American University. This program can be completed in one year and it is thirty credits. For more information, or if you are interested in applying, please visit www.iiit.org and then you can scroll to the bottom, and you’ll find the announcement.

And we are very excited to introduce our next guest, Dr. Tavis Jules.

Dr. Tavis Jules is an Associate Professor of Cultural and Educational Policy at Loyola University Chicago, specifically focusing on Comparative and International Education and International Higher Education. Recently, he co-authored the book, *Educational Transitions in Post-Revolutionary Spaces: Islam, Security, and Social Movements in Tunisia*, with Teresa Barton, which explores the transformation of the education system in Tunisia following the Jasmine Revolution, the first of a wave of revolutions known as the Arab Spring. Dr. Tavis Jules also wrote the book *Neither World Polity nor Local or National Societies: Regionalization in the Global South – the Caribbean Community*.

He has taught a variety of graduate and undergraduate courses at Loyola. He received his MA in International Educational Development, specializing in Peace Education, at Teachers College, Columbia University. He then went on to receive both an Ed. M. and Ed.D. in International Educational Development—International Educational Policy Studies from Teachers College, Columbia University. Prior to arriving at Loyola, Dr. Jules held a variety of positions internationally. From 2009-2011 he worked as the Head of Knowledge and Communication for the Globally Responsible Leadership Initiative, where he was responsible for developing fundraising, communication, marketing, and education programs.

He also worked as a curriculum specialist for Freedom House in New York, where he wrote, coordinated, and edited an online curriculum manual and learning portal for educators teaching about democracy and freedom in Iran. His vast professional and academic experiences have led to research interests in regionalism and governance, transitory spaces, and policy challenges in small island developing states. He also has written a plethora of book chapters ranging on topics from post-revolutionary higher education reforms in Tunisia to post-socialist conversions in the global South.

Hello and welcome, Dr. Tavis Jules to our show today, how are you doing?

Dr. Jules: I'm doing fine, thank you for having me on.

Amina: So, I'll go ahead and dive into the questions we have for you. Your research interests include regionalism and governance. Can you tell us your views concerning these two areas and how they are connected, please?

Dr. Jules: Yes, by all means. The connection between regionalism and governance, particularly within education, is very important for us today. We keep hearing in the news over and over that the U.S. is in the middle of a trade war with China, and I think we think about that and we don't really understand as well as recognize the consequences of a global trade war for us as Americans and the rest of the world, particularly because we tend to delink the idea of trade from everything else. And so in looking and trying to understand the core relation between regionalism and governance, I start off from the point of view that the interstate system as we know it, that is facilitated by market forces and globalization, has paused. It has paused to the extent that, particularly under the Trump administration with their withdrawal of the U.S. from several major multi-lateral trade agreements, it means, as though, the global society as we know it is becoming less and less interconnected and there are many of us who now argue that globalization as we know it as the primary driver and economic force driven by technological innovation has paused. And by pause, what we mean is that the sense of global interconnectivity that we had, particularly after the dot-com bubble, just before the millennium, that sense of global interconnectivity is in reversal and in withdrawal now. And as that happens, in essence what we're seeing is the proliferation of more regional trade agreements (RTAs), and so with the arrival of more regional trade agreements, a good example would be the renegotiation of NAFTA, so with the arrival of more regional trading agreements which puts the burden on the region to be the primary driver of economic growth. It has carved an interesting area for me to focus on what is the intersection between regionalism, governance, and education.

And so, in essence what has happened is that we're now asking our national education systems, which we have been doing for a while, to not only prepare citizens for the 21st century market economy, but we're also telling them that we need to produce citizens for jobs that do not yet exist. And because these jobs do not yet exist, and then education is forced to prepare these students, we find ourselves almost at a crossroad where we're now expecting that our students will have both global and regional skills. And so, in looking at the core relation between regionalism and governance, my work, particularly within the Caribbean where I do a significant amount of work looking at the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), it then is anchored and looks at the way in which the regional is reshaping the national. So, in looking at the way in which the regional is reshaping the national level, it moves away from the significant research that we had in the late nineties and all the way through the beginning of the new millennium that paid a specific attention on how the global is shaping the national. And so, there's several of us again recognizing that

globalization has reached its limits in its current form and manifestation, and therefore, we've seen a retreat towards the regional level. Then we look at the spaces and the new places in which governance is emerging, and so as governance emerges from a regional perspective, we then tend to argue that the national is being reshaped and reconfigured, and therefore, we find ourselves heading towards perhaps that aspect of post-nationalism.

Amina: I see, and so when you talk about globalization being on pause, is this primarily referring to economic globalization? Because the term globalization, many people have different definitions for it and some will also include digital globalization as well and the interconnectedness of digital media.

Dr. Jules: Well, it's a bit more than economic globalization. So, again, many of us believe that we're at the dawning of what the World Economic Forum in 2016 referred to as the dawning of the fourth industrial revolution. We have recognized that with the coming of the fourth industrial revolution, which blends the physical with the cyber-physical, an example of that is the way in which we are always glued to our smart phones, and that's the physical being blended with the cyber-physical. We then recognize that in an era of the fourth industrial revolution, not only are new skills that are needed per se, and so therefore recently we've seen a significant emphasis on big data, on the internet of things, artificial intelligence, and so forth. So, these are all things connected with the fourth industrial revolution. But when we look at it as a whole, and we talk about the pausing of globalization, is because we say globalization which is driven by market economics as well as being driven by technological innovation, it has hit its cap.

So, we can say almost that globalization in its current manifestation has hit the glass ceiling. And this goes beyond the economics, because if we look at certain instances across the globe, it's not only that global trade is suffering, it's that there's other forms of the global being threatened. A good example of this is that we're seeing a movement away from cosmopolitanism and towards, whether we think of it across the U.S. or across instances of Europe, referred to as the far-right, the alt-right, etc. Even with those processes at the national level, and even the ways in which people are speaking up, if you think of, for example, the major attention it has gotten, in essence, every aspect of globalization has paused. So, we're almost teetering at the breaking point of it, and I would say because of that, we've then seen a much stronger [turn] to regionalism. So, recently we spent a significant amount of attention thinking on how bad Brexit would happen, we've been talking about Brexit without a back stopper, but at the end of the day, what I think we miss is that regional entities, particularly in the form of bilateral, and you think here of the TTIP that the U.S. has also withdrawn from, they're actually much stronger than many of the global hegemonies. I would argue that perhaps in the next decade or so, the region is what is going to become more, I would say thriving, the region is ultimately what is going to become the dominant way that we're thinking, and many of my colleagues' research, like Saskia Sassen for example, he talks about the rise of global villages. And more and more we're moving towards places and spaces where the global is ok, but it's not the most dependent thing, because we're also trying to recognize a sense of identity, a sense of uniqueness recalling for all various forms of a cultural adherence, and I think even when you look at those things that are bubbling underneath the surface that will ultimately explode at some point in time, we can perhaps argue that all facets of globalization have paused. Some faster than others.

Amina: Ok, ok. I'm sure that there are probably some who will look at that and say sure, there is a pause, but it necessarily a hard pause or a perceived pause, because globalization has been happening for such a long time that while many cultures and sub-cultures may be trying to hold on to those borders and boundaries, there's been a lot of cultural hybridization that might not be able to be

completely undone. So, I think that will be an ongoing development to watch and to monitor. So, our next question for you is how do you think geopolitics influence or impact education policy?

Dr. Jules: So, that's an interesting question, and it partly goes back to this notion of the pausing of globalization. So, the way in which geo-politics is starting to influence national education systems is changing and being shaped constantly. It's being shaped constantly in a way that is different from the past. And so, when you have large, geo-strategic ambitious goals such as Sustainable Development [Goals] and its predecessor before that was the Millennium Development [Goals], and then in education it was the Dakar Framework of 2000, and then it goes all the way back to the Jomtien Agreement in 1990. So, the conundrum is, is at the global level, we've now come to accept that investment in primary education is the best in terms of being able to get various forms of development off the ground. We've also recognized and accept that as we move towards greater servitization, or greater service economy, we need certain skills that the labor market is asking for. Historically, those skills have been shaped particularly by various forms or facets of globalization. And so, in that sense, the way in which the geopolitics continue to impact globalization, I would argue, is in a few ways.

One, international institutions, particularly now that the World Bank is looking to replace its Head, and historically the Chief of the World Bank comes from the U.S., this is an archaic agreement between the U.S. and Europe in the post-cold war period, and Europe appoints the head of the IMF. And so, one, we can see that international institutions are continuing to shape the global education agenda. They're doing that in ways where they continue to be those who sponsor, promote, and in many instances, fund various initiatives. And so as much as we would like to talk about this idea of a deeper emergence of a stronger national culture, at the end of the day, much of national educational policy and priorities are shaped by the international language that is espoused across these institutions.

Two, because so many countries continue to be and remain in the quagmire of the aid-dependent system, which is particularly a product of colonialism, it means that the way in which the global is impacting then the regional and national levels of education becomes problematic is because in many instances, countries are heavily dependent on money. And because your dependent on money, then your agenda-setting idea is going to be based on who's giving you that sum of money.

Third, and what I think is really important to you and the work that your foundation does, is that the global is reshaping the education, the national education systems, particularly geo-strategic endeavors in the ways in which we're not really talking about it. And one of the big things is the way in which we continue to promote and problematize the sense of otherness and the sense of fear, particularly fear of Islam and various forms of Islamophobia. It means in essence what has happened is that the way in which we not only train and educate citizens for 21st century jobs and the needs of the labor market, and then we start going to train them with a sense of inherent bias. As I said, one of the things that we're seeing as we become more of a security-driven culture and problematizes the other, there's no sense of space for learning and no way of opening up that sense of cosmopolitanism. And so, in essence, when you look at, I would say, the global education picture, it's dominated by strong goals in sustainable development, but it's also dominated by very much a sense of fear, a sense of fear of the unknown. And I think that fear of the unknown is also what in time will also...that sense of the fear of the unknown is ultimately what is driving educational agendas and priorities.

And the final big thing I would say has been perhaps the role of what we refer to often as league tables and standardization of benchmarks which is particularly driven by the sense of the inclusion of the private sector on the public-private partnerships. And basically what this model seeks to do, particularly in education from a geo-strategic perspective, is that education has moved away from being something that is made, and curated, and was often seen as the vanguard of the nation-state, and it's now...it now exists within this really weird space, where at the end of the day, it's not dictated per se by what are the needs of the nation, it is now dictated by data. And that data is collected and then its mined. So, that's why we talk about the linkages between the fourth industrial revolution and education. And a really good example of this is the way in which we often use data to not only criticize others, but we see this primarily in international assessments and tests, be these PISA, TIMMS, or PIRLS. In essence, we're mining data, and every educational system argues that the Finnish system is the best, but they also don't recognize the uniqueness of the Finnish system and they don't ask the question "do we all really want to be like Finland, or can we all really be like Finland?"

Amina: Right, there is no such thing as a cookie-cutter approach. Like we couldn't take the Finland model and mass-export that. Those types of models and many scholars in international development have noted that whenever some type of external processes are emplaced or imposed upon local peoples, they lack a sense of continuity because its not based on the local customs and intricacies of that particular local population so they can't necessarily be sustainable. I'm also grateful that you pointed out that there is a rise of fear, and that that sense of fear is very harmful particularly in decreasing levels of empathy. And scholars in the realm of conflict analysis and resolution point out that in conflicts, that you know, stem from identity issues, one of the primary motivators for that is the dehumanization of the other, which typically does stem from fear.

Well our next question for you is that you've co-authored the book, *Educational Transitions in Post-Revolutionary Spaces*, with Teresa Barton, which explores the transformation of the education system in Tunisia following the Jasmine Revolution, the first of a wave of revolutions known as the Arab Spring, for our listeners listening in. Can you explain to those listeners who are currently tuning in, what the book covers?

Dr. Jules: Yes, so immediately after the fall of the Ben Ali regime, I went off to Tunisia to do research. I was very new to Tunisia, having spent, as you heard previously, a significant amount of time focusing on regionalism in the Caribbean. I got to Tunisia by fluke, really by fluke through another colleague who introduced me to Tunisia in the summer of 2012. And, from, since 2012 to now I spent half of the year in Tunisia doing research. And one of the things I was fascinated by...so I got to Tunisia because I was interested in understanding what sort of educational system would a country build during periods of transition. In political science, there's this entire literature on transitology that talks about how best countries transition from democratic rule to—sorry, how countries transition from dictatorial rule to democratic rule, and what that's like. And I got very fascinated by this literature, and this literature on transition and in my field in part, international education, there was a similar literature on transitologies by a well-known scholar, Robert Cowen, and one of the things he had argued is that societies need a minimum of ten years to be able to transition from dictatorial rule to democratic rule. And the theory had been a bit outdated, many people had not looked at it because there hadn't been that many transitions, and most of the transitions that had occurred were in Eastern Europe in the post 1989 period.

And so, when I got to Tunisia, I was really interested in understanding the role education played, if any, in starting the uprising. Tunisians don't refer to it as a revolution, they often—the translation from Arabic to English denotes and uprising—so they talk about the uprising. And in doing that, I recognized that in many places and spaces the West did not take time to understand the Tunisian uprising, I think they don't take time to understand many things across the Middle East and Islamic Maghreb, and so for me, I felt myself wanting to tell a story in terms of not only the role that education played, but also wanted to tell a story of a very educated and over educated populace who had basically benefited from the goodwill and gesture of dictatorial regimes and governments that had been propped up by the West, that's also something that we often neglect in the West, that the Ben Ali government was propped up by and supported by the U.S. and European Union in many instances, and how it is that that regime used education as both a stick and a carrot.

And so, in doing so, one of the things that we found that really got into the crux of the book is that one, Tunisia is in essence one of the largest homogenous societies that was partly shaped and formed and largely recontextualized in the post-Arab invasion, and because of that it doesn't necessarily suffer from many of the other things that other Arab societies suffer from in the sense of you know, there's not lots of tribalism and this sense of warfare as they've lived relatively homogenous, so because of that, over time in its post-independence period, it's two dictators, Habib Bourguiba as well as Ben Ali, were able to take that quality and they were also able to mold it in what we refer to [as] an authoritative bargaining agreement. And on the notion of an authoritative bargaining agreement, basically, what it argues is that over time, citizens are willing to give up aspects of their social, political, and economical rights to a "benevolent" dictator, and then expect that benevolent dictator to provide it with a certain level of social qualities, a certain level of social infrastructure, a sense of you know...they give up these rights and away and expect that a government takes care of them. It's not the same way we think of in a democratic way. And so in essence what Tunisia was able to do under its dictators was to, the dictators we argue, used education across the authoritative bargaining agreement, as a way both to hold and control the population, but also it was a way in terms of which it also allowed them to be able to advance and to not advance.

So, by controlling the population, which what we mean, is that ultimately, education became a social weapon that would allow people to be able to move from being poor to middle class, and to ascend ultimately, to a higher middle class, in a sense of being wealthy. And so that meant that by the time the uprising had occurred in 2011, you had this immensely huge educated population, but there were no jobs. And as part of this carrot and stick approach, Tunisia is really unique, and we talk about it in a sense of Tunisian exceptionalism, is the idea that the regime, the Ben Ali regime, would rather than allowing people to go find jobs, they would create universities and these universities would offer more programs, and then students would go to them. So you had this cycle where students in essence started becoming life-long learners, and then by 2011 you had a significant amount of overeducated Tunisians.

I remember one point in time, around 2016, the official figure was something like you had over 700 plus physio biologists, or a variation of that who had a PhD, who had PhDs and there were no jobs. And so, in having this over educated populace, we argue two things.

One, education was ultimately the straw that broke the camel's back because one of the things the regime didn't recognize is that as it sought to develop a technological infrastructure to be seen as Africa's or one of Africa's leading technological hubs in innovation, the regime didn't understand

technology the way that the youths understood it. Youths were then forced to learn technological skills in school to prepare them for this global market because we're talking about, you know, in the middle throws of globalization...but as youths were learning the technology to give them the skills for the global market, the regime didn't understand technology and technology became the regime's downfall.

And two, which is, which goes back to the fear we spoke about not so long ago, is ultimately what had happened, nobody saw this, but in the sense that with the uprising came a sense of disillusionment, particularly after the first or second year. With this sense of disillusionment, we all forgot about the high levels of unemployment and underemployment. And we argue that that vacuum, which was initially built on education, that ultimately would lead to what we now refer to as the Islamic State, and would lead to a successful Islamic State not only setting up a caliphate per se, but also having fighters. And the core relation we make there, is that one of the things we found with unemployment in Tunisia is that Tunisians don't really care who they work for once they have a job. And so, Islamic State was able to recruit Tunisians at an alarming rate and pay them in ways the Tunisian society couldn't do, and in looking back about it, that's really how we think of the core relation between education, Islam, and security, which is also the subtitle of the book.

Amina: Yes, well, it's interesting that you mention that because you said that in Tunisia there were a lot of folks who were overeducated, but I guess, another pressing question is educated how? Or in the sense of looking at the curriculum to see to what extent concepts of empathy, forgiveness, community mindedness, and moral reasoning were incorporated into any curriculums or any classroom settings because perhaps, had that been the case, while someone might have a degree in physio biology, or in STEM, for overall human development, it would be important to also be conscientious of those other areas which would have that individual have a greater sense of connection, and then not resort to extremism, even you know, as you pointed out for individuals who went and resorted to extremism, basically you said something along the lines of they went wherever to find a job, no matter who was paying them, out of the desperation. But, you know, when those concepts of moral reasoning, forgiveness, compassion, empathy are there, it's very difficult for individuals to dehumanize others and then enact acts of extremism.

Dr. Jules: Yeah, that's a very valid point that you raise. I'm happy you do. So one of the things that has happened, so historically, Al-Qaeda, the foot-soldiers that Al-Qaeda recruited were often those who had had less than or up to a primary level of education. Islamic State was able to change that in ways that it was able to recruit, through various propaganda channels as well as through the aid of social media, etc., a distinctive elite. So, one of the things to look at, is most of the Tunisians who went off to fight for Islamic State, and we look at the movement across a couple of ways. So, it's not addressed in this book, but we've addressed it elsewhere. So, there were a couple set of movements that happened with Tunisians going to Islamic State. You had the first set which was a very small, almost caravan of Tunisian women went off and then they got pregnant and then they came back to Tunisia. And then you had a few Tunisians who were disgruntled, but they didn't have a higher degree education, so no Bachelor's or Master's Degree or PhD, and so they went off. And it's that category that went off, akin to the historical Al-Qaeda foot-soldiers, that then got word back to those who had the PhDs and the Master's, and said, "you know, this is a really good paying gig, you should come." And so, one of the things that we have also found and that we are working on is you are correct. One, most of the people who went off to fight on the Islamic States, they came from the hard sciences. So, it was your engineers, and your...to some extent your doctors, your medical personnel, and your physicists, and your biologists. These were often the people went off and went.

So, they weren't your artists, and they weren't your lawyers, etc. who went. And so going back to this sense of the role that the curriculum has ultimately played in shaping them, it's interesting that you point that out, because in looking at it, we also recognize that yes, there's a sense of a universalistic curriculum that is there, but the curriculum in the sciences does not necessarily pay attention to some of what we refer to as softer skills.

Amina: Exactly, yeah.

Dr. Jules: And so, because of that, we see that. So even when looking at why the curriculum doesn't only respond and deal with the softer skills, the argument is that for a very long time, and we make this argument in the book, for a very long time, the citizens that Tunisia sought to educate, they were not for the Tunisian labor market. Tunisia educated citizens to be sent to the European labor market because that is what the West wanted at that point in time. France wanted a cheap influx of labor to be able to do the jobs that the French didn't want to do, and so for Tunisians, even though it went through these various phases of Arabization, where you know it sought to make the curriculum more Arab-centered, particularly the primary school, so all these waves of reforms of Arabizing the curriculum, making the curriculum point to Tunisia's three thousand years of glorious history where Islam is the center of all of that, the curriculum didn't really get taught properly, it didn't really transmit the sort of Islamic values that it should have, and the reason I would speculate is because Tunisia, and we refer to this as Tunisian exceptionalism. Across the Arab world and the Islamic Maghreb, Tunisia's sense of exceptionalism comes from the way in which it became a French protectorate, the way in which it left France's protective cover, and the way in which its dictators sought to shape it. But ultimately, the sense of Tunisian exceptionalism, which goes back to the curriculum, is linked again by this idea of a deep sense of secularism that exists within Tunisia.

And so yes, when you talk to Tunisians, they see and identify themselves first and foremost as Tunisians, and then they will say you know, we are Arab, and you never hear them talk about being African or North African. And that mindset has really been shaped by that sense of the post-colonial identity. And as I said, in looking at that, I would suggest here, that because of how that post-colonial identity has been shaped for them, a job is a job, and yes, there's lots of moral consequences you can think about. How can you go out and kill somebody in the ways that it has done? Many of the young Tunisians you ask them, they say, you know it was just a job. And for many of them, again, this stems from this sense of disillusionment, and I think that we see that across the Arab world, and the countries that the Arab Spring ultimately touched. Youths today are no better off than they were in 2011.

Amina: I see, I see. Well, I think that just further highlights how important it is to make sure that concepts such as empathy, forgiveness, and moral reasoning, and community mindedness are incorporated into societies, whether it's formally through education institutions or through informal institutions like after-school programs, or at local community centers it is something that is important and clearly lacking.

So, on Bloomsbury's description of your book, it states that "the book not only offers a thorough understanding of the role of youth in the revolution and how they were shaped by Tunisia's educational system. Crucially, it provides a comprehensive understating of theoretical and methodological insights needed to study educational transitions in other post-revolutionary contexts." Can you provide us with an overview please of how it does this?

Dr. Jules: Yeah, that's again an excellent question. I think one of the ways we often think about studying countries that are undergoing various forms of transitions—be them economic, political, or social—is that we tend to look for best practices abroad in another place that has done something similar, and try to introduce, as you said earlier, a cookie-cutter model, and bring it back in. We argue that this model doesn't work, and that's for the basic reason that during times of transition, we argue, and this is where we employ Vavrus and Bartlett's vertical case study, we argue that in essence, during times of transition, if you were to take education as an example, you need to look at the way in which the global, the regional or super-national, and the national, the subnational, and the sub-regional. How they work in tandem with each other, and ultimately, who are the actors and institutions across all those levels that are influencing the type of reform and reform trajectory that is basically happening. And so one of the things we were able to see, particularly in Tunisia, is that immediately after the 2011 uprising and until now, basically what has happened is that the education system has continued to do the exact same thing that it had done after the coup d'état in 1987 when you had the transition from Bourguiba to Ben Ali, and then the fall of Ben Ali onwards. So in essence, what has happened, and this is part of a global problem, we expect our educational systems to shape the mindsets of the citizens of tomorrow, but yet it's the last thing to be reformed and it's the least funded entity. Many countries—

Amina: Very good point.

Dr. Jules: (Continues) In the US have, many countries across the region have spent a significant amount of money in bringing and providing democratic promotion and all these other amazing things, but really, they haven't really looked at the true sense of the education and asked themselves, who are we preparing the Tunisians of tomorrow for? What is their purpose and who should they benefit? And so, in offering the initial description and reflecting on that description that you read earlier, I think for us those are some of the salient things that we're asking, you know, to reflect critically on it. Because we argue, again, the problem is not with the system per se, because many can look at it, and I know we shouldn't look at this positively, but many can say well you know, there were people, there were jobs, Islamic State were offering benefits, \$3,000 a month, free living, and a wife and a sex slave. You know, those were the benefits you got for having a degree.

That was not something you could get in Tunis. And so, in essence, Islamic State recognized there was a market there and it reacted on that. And so, in offering that sense, in offering to study or in suggesting the type of study we're putting forward here is looking at all facets of education, and trying to perhaps make it look holistically, and then asking ourselves what education should be for. And the last point I will end on, so in that case, any true reform that should be looked at now, preface seven years out onward of Tunisia. So, any true reform will then want to be able to focus and continue to talk about strengthening Tunisia's sense of secularism, Tunisia's sense of the way in which women are treated because Tunisia has the most advanced institutions that give Arab women significant amount of rights compared to any other Arab state across the region and looking in terms of how that is done. But at the same time, is also looking at the way in which Islam, if at all, should shape the educational system. And in doing so, then the question not only becomes what role should Islam have in shaping the system, but it also becomes in terms of what type of Islam is best able to shape the Tunisian system in light of its three plus thousand years of exceptionalism.

Amina: Well thank you for sharing those insights with us. So our last question for you today is what do you think are the best ways to address challenges in education policy today for developing

countries, particularly those with authoritarian regimes, transitional governments, or young democracies?

Dr. Jules: That's an excellent question because I think that is going to be relevant, particularly to your listeners across the Middle East, and Gulf, and Islamic Maghreb, in the sense, I think we need to step back and ask ourselves a couple of things. So first, let's step back and recognize, or let's say we step back and accept that various—that globalization has paused. Globalization has paused, trade or the current patterns of trade we have are no longer feasible, the economy, the global economy of seven plus billion of us trying to consume and over-consume, and over-over-consume is not feasible in its current state. Then I think for us, as educators, I think the serious question that we need to tackle is how best do we give everybody access to a decent quality of life that is worthy and dignified as a human being?

And I think the ways in which we do that can't necessarily be across a sense of a global scale. This is where we have to recognize the sense and importance of local cultural nuances, and that would also recognize first and foremost, that for us to educate in a way that allows us to understand the other, and not fear the other. I think one of the biggest challenges that education in transitioning spaces is dictatorial regimes, be it Saudi Arabia or Venezuela, is the idea that yes, education should be a central component of development, but I think one of the things we often assume is that education is a right, and we never really first recognize that education is a privilege. It's not a right, because it's not a right that is often afforded to many people. And so, I think in places and spaces that are ultimately transitioning, education either then could be very powerful, or it could be very detrimental. Powerful in the sense that it can free and liberate the minds of generations to come, detrimental in the sense that education can and continues in many places, to sow the seeds as well as to exacerbate many of the inequalities that exist within and across societies. And so, I think as countries struggle to figure out which form they take, whether it's democratic, or socialist, or communist, or any hybrid between there, whether it's mixed-economies or capitalist or any of those things, I think ultimately, the question to be placed is what is the role, scope, and function of the national education systems? And I think for each of them, it's different. The second question then becomes, is how do we use education to not only understand our historical past, but to shape the impending future?

Amina: I see. Well, there was a point that you made about how education can either go one way or the other, right? It can be used as a tool to open up the mind and open up the heart, but it can also be used in a way to sow seeds of discord and can also limit one's mind. I do think we can all agree though that an objective of education, at the very least, should be that a student who leaves that system, we couldn't guarantee that for every student of course, but to reach a level of human development where it would never be appealing as a benefit to hear, "ok, if you get paid \$3,000 and you get this, you know, wife and a sex slave," that anyone would ever view that as an offer they would want to take. Because you know, one, they would see the term sex slave, and think, "oh, how could I possibly do that to another human being," among other things. I think that, what's interesting here about what you said with regards to Tunisia, it's definitely important to focus on the softer subjects, because when they're neglected, unfortunately, it can lead to very concerning outcomes.

Dr. Jules: Yes, I agree with you a hundred percent. And I think yes, Tunisia is a current example of that and its link with fighters to Islamic State. I think again, if we look across history, history has countless lessons to teach about this. The one understanding I would put out there, is that this is

particularly interesting in a way in which we can think about the role of education in Muslim societies is that yes, it is important Muslim societies develop national education systems that are based primarily on socio and historical cultural understanding that is steeped in relevance across whichever religious principles they so choose to have or not have. More importantly, I would argue it's important for them to also have a deep sense and understanding of the other but at the same time also a deep sense and understanding of how the other views them. And I think it's when both sides get to that sense of an understanding of how each other views them, and how they view themselves, perhaps, just perhaps we might be able to envision a sort of education that is liberating and it frees everyone rather than continue to propel us to a past, a misguided past that we just cannot have if as a collective, if as humanity, we want to survive.

Amina: Right, and the “Mapping the Terrain” project that IIIT is currently undertaking, the AEMS has these “AEMS constructs” which are empathy, forgiveness, moral reasoning, and community mindedness, and those are all values that stem actually from the Quran and sunnah. There seems to be a perception that if you know, they learn more about Islam, then they—that could potentially be, could have negative outcomes, but that's not necessarily the case and we could argue that having the proper knowledge of what Islam actually teaches, because there appears to be a lack within the schooling, could be beneficial for providing more balance actually, and a more moderate interpretation since that's not being currently as widespread as it should be.

Dr. Jules: I agree. The final point I would add, is I think it's also it's not just about having a balanced understanding of what Islam is. I would argue it's more so about us recognizing that there's not one type of governance model out there, and that not the same governance model is appropriate for everybody. And so I think we have come away with this sense of post-truth thought where we all feel democracy is the best form of governance and it's recognizing that there are many aspects of democracy and there are many forms of democracy and the way in which we think about governance and ultimately its role in education, should be something that should be determined by the citizens at the national level and not something that should be determined by external invaders.

Amina: Absolutely, absolutely. Well, thank you very much for your time today, Dr. Tavis Jules. We greatly appreciate it and we look forward to staying up to date on all the great work that you do, and we thank you again.

Dr. Jules: Thank you so much for having me.

[transition]

Amina: Thank you all for listening. To stay up to date on everything happening with the Advancing Education in Muslim Societies program, please follow IIIT on Twitter (@iiitfriends) and on Instagram (@iiit_insta). You won't want to miss our next episode. More details are coming soon.

If you have any questions for us, or would like to join the conversation, please reach out to me. My email is amina@iiit.org. As always, we look forward to working together towards transformative education advancing holistic human development. Salaam!