Towards Peace Education in the Middle East and North Africa: A Pan-Abrahamic View

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This paper is dedicated to the future of education in the Middle East and North Africa, with a focus on the place of Israel and the Israeli and Palestinian curricula. We assume that a major cause of hostility toward Israel is legitimacy deficit and radicalism across the region. Addressing ethnocultural diversity and acknowledging aspirations for regional unity widespread among radicals and moderates alike, will chart new horizons and alleviate animosity. Culminating with the Abraham Accords, the most serious plan to date for regional reconciliation, the Abrahamic discourse opens the gates to welcoming Israel into a family of Islamic-Arab nations. A 'Pan-Abrahamic' view in education, where Israel must seek to position itself as an inseparable element in the region, addresses the longing for legitimacy and regional unity. We suggest that the Abrahamic discourse is critical for deradicalizing the Palestinian and other curricula and for helping Israel to synchronize the voices of its four conflicting education systems. While Islam and the Arabic language will remain the cultural axis of this region, educational systems should support the revival of the cosmopolitanism and efflorescence which had been its hallmark in former times.

Keywords: Education, Deradicalization, MENA, Incitement. Abraham Accords, Abrahamism, National Identity, Islam, Periodization, Narratives, Cultural Policies, Islamism, Israel, Minorities, Race, Palestinians, the Day After

Introduction: Regional Core Education and the Abrahamic Discourse

The purpose of this article is to explore promising directions for a shared core education in the Middle East and North Africa. We argue that the future of education across the MENA region must revolve around a vision of peace and prosperity that emanates from our *common civilization and history*. Without a shared vision for our future that is clear, appealing, accepted, and taught in some detail across the region, peace seeking countries will lack the moral backbone to justify the struggle for a better region. Considerations of economy, security, and practical concerns are compelling only when grounded in a broader philosophical perspective.

The need for educational cooperation was recognized already in the Egypt–Israel

peace treaty of 1979 and the danger of hate and incitement in education has become apparent at least since the Oslo Agreements. Furthermore, since the early 1980s, Iran's aggressive penetration in the Arab world has exploited divisions within national identities, which have been shaped by their respective education systems. More urgency was added with the second Intifada, the 11/9 attacks, the post Arab Spring civil wars leading to the emergence and decline of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, and the Turkish-Kurdish conflagration of 2015. Recently, the October 7 attack and its aftermath brought to the forefront of public awareness the dire consequences of bad education, not only in Gaza, but also across the region and in Western academia. An uncompromising "tough-love" reform in Palestinian education is recognized by many as a *sine-qua-non* requirement for any "day after" plan aimed at preventing more horrors in the future.

The quintessential example for this sorry state of affairs is perhaps the Iraqi curriculum. Heavily influenced by the likes of Syrian-Ottoman turned Arab nationalist Sati al-Husri, Iraqi curricula since the 1920s have had a radical anti-Western and anti-Zionist bent. Serving as a tool to enforce the hegemonic ambitions of the Sunni-Arab minority, Iraqi radical education replicated itself from generation to generation, driving the country into a host of wars and violent episodes (Eppel, 1997; Baram, 2011, 2016). New research on recent editions of Iraq's textbooks reveals a pathetic picture (Bengio, 2024). Large chunks of Iraq's modern history are not even taught. Glaring omissions are the rule of Saddam Hussein and the story of Iraq's ancient Jewish community dating back at least to 586 BCE with the arrival of Jewish exiles from Jerusalem to Babylon. This curriculum, which is rife with antisemitic content, still maintains that Israel is a colonialist country and Jerusalem is an occupied city. As Iraqi young minds are directed to Jerusalem, a city having little to no significance for Shiism, the country is slowly but surely falling into Iranian hands, as it operates a web of armed agents ready to act as a so-called "deep state" within the government or send militiamen onto the streets. One can only imagine how Iraq could have looked today had there been a century of patriotic education committed to open society, respect for minorities, and peace.

Many of the issues we examine emerged while writing our recently published review of the portrayal of Jews and Israel in Muslim and Arab Textbooks in the MENA region, Indonesia and Azerbaijan (Negev & Pardo, 2024). Studying a wide array of curricula, we predictably realized that significant differences divide the textbooks of the region's main two camps, the moderate and the radical (or *fundamentalist-regressive*). There is also a third camp, consisting of the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Qatar and Turkey whose curricula contain a mixture of liberal elements and Islamist expansionism. The camps differ over strategies to bring the region together: from a totalitarian-rejectionist approach aimed at transforming the region and beyond into a militaristic superpower, on the one hand, to an alliance of tolerant countries focused on peace and prosperity, on the other. Support for the Palestinians, which among the radicals entails the elimination of Israel, forms a litmus test for these conflicting visions because, as shown in the above Iraqi example, it remains a symbol of Arab or Islamic unity.

Significantly, however, there are also regional commonalities that may serve as a foundation for a universal core education that could be attractive, even to those societies now living under the Iranian yoke. Perhaps most important of all is the dream of regional unity, given a common conception of MENA or Southwest Asia as a unique civilizational center strategically located between the West and the East. Having said that, the national identities charted by curricula throughout the region are not sufficiently inclusive of important minorities, including Israel but also Kurds, Armenians, Druze, Copts, Alevis, Amazigh, Assyrians and Greeks. Conversely, all

regional curricula emphasize national pride, loyalty to the leadership, citizenship, and local heritage and depictions of real or invented ancient traditions are commonplace. Islamism has failed to root out nationalism, especially in Iran and Turkey but also among the Arabs, recruiting it instead as another mantle for its endless expansionism. To various degrees, all the curricula omit embarrassing parts of the past, and self-criticism is rare and partial at best.

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For a future core curriculum in the region to succeed, it must therefore subscribe to these dreams of unity, glory and power and, at the same time, impart deep commitment to national sovereignty, peace, tolerance, a culture of open dialogue, curiosity, a high degree of personal freedoms and mutual respect. While providing future students with cutting edge schooling in the arts and sciences, core-education textbooks should address the challenges faced by every country and social group in the region. Combined, they will strive to develop a unique and workable alternative in handling humankind's moral and material challenges.

We believe the Abrahamic discourse is our best hope for any future educational regional vision. Indeed Ofir Winter's seminal book highlights that this very discourse has spanned at least five decades, and has enabled past Muslim Arab peace efforts that have ultimately culminated in the Abraham Accords and the regional reconciliation they bring (Winter, 2022). Nevertheless, the educational dimension of the Abrahamic discourse still awaits much deliberation and development.

Curriculum overhaul is critical for any serious effort to end the perennial state of violence and state failures in the region. Thus, a shared regional core education imbuing common values may not only help participating countries to peacefully cooperate among themselves, but also to overcome internal conflicts and social justice issues, and in so doing dramatically enhance the wellbeing of their citizens and their allies near and far. Finally, it can provide the much-needed clarity of mind to resist the danger of radical Islamism.

We therefore suggest a regional "pan-Abrahamic" prism, which will grant the Jewish state the indigenous-familial status it needs and deserves.

An agreed-upon and meticulously planned educational method based on the Abrahamic discourse could win the hearts and minds of the great majority of Muslims, Sunni and Shiite alike, for peace and coexistence. From the Israeli perspective, it may herald a strategic turning point by solving the nation's double majority-minority identity challenge (accommodating a Jewish majority that is a regional minority and a large Arab minority within the country). We therefore suggest a regional "pan-Abrahamic" prism, which will grant the Jewish state the indigenous-familial status it needs and deserves, while the country's commitment to an essentially Arab-Muslim project will allow all Israeli citizens to practice their patriotic attachment to the state, defend it against rejectionism and take it to new level of prosperity and cultural achievement. If successful regionally, pan-Abrahamism could project a positive moderating influence on Europe and the West at large, which have become in recent decades important abodes of Islam in their own right.

While portrayal of Jews and Israel is the central theme of this article, we approach it here as a case study that reflects the wider regional issue of majority-minority relations. The article includes two parts, one explains the logic of pan-Abrahamic education, and the other focuses on Israel as a case study with some attention also given to the urgent issue of Palestinian education.

Beyond this article, two more discussions are also needed to develop a regional core education. One is to handle all majority-minority relationships in the region at large

with a historical perspective that acknowledges cultural contributions from various historical layers (as will be discussed below). The other should be to synthesize a forward-looking perspective assuming that this region, with its way of thinking and doing business, can offer a unique contribution and role on global issues.

PART ONE – Why Pan-Abrahamism?

The Identity Challenge: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

The challenge of national identity and the longing for regional unity are not new and are not specific to education. In his 2006 seminal article, "Who Am I? The Identity Crisis in The Middle East," P. R. Kumaraswamy explains that while none of the countries of the Middle East are homogeneous, "these states have been unable to define, project, and maintain a national identity that is both inclusive and representative." (Kumaraswamy, 2006, p. 63)

> The problem is universal. Whether they are democracies (Israel and Turkey), evolving democracies (Iraq and Palestinian areas), republican regimes (Egypt, Syria ,and Algeria), quasi-liberal monarchies (Jordan and Bahrain), or Islamic regimes (Iran), the region suffers from the inability to recognize, integrate, and reflect its ethnocultural diversity. Without exception, all the Middle Eastern states have tried to impose an identity from above. Whether ideological, religious, dynastical, or power-centric, these attempts have invariably failed and have often resulted in schism and sectarian tensions.

The Middle Eastern state, often seen as a Western innovation, has faced repeated challenges by competing groups at home and cross-regional ideologies (Ben-Dor, 2006). Religious and ethno-cultural divides traverse many countries, and the tribal-clan structure remains a powerful factor in regional politics and social processes (Baram, 1997; Tapper, 1983; Rabi, 2016; Alon, 2021). As national curricula aim at securing the loyalty of most if not all citizens to homeland and regime, they must grapple with competing identities—both internal *and* regional—, and much is missing or misrepresented.

What are the solutions offered by education systems across the region to the national-identity problem described in Kumaraswamy's article? Clearly, each country's curriculum presents its own identity first, which entails reference to pre-Islamic cultures, and some allusion to minorities. Ancient local cultures such as Phoenician, Canaanite, Babylonian and Pharaonic are often Arabized or otherwise embraced as part of the national heritage, emphasizing primordial elements of race, lineage, or roots. Some discourse about democracy or other means of legitimacy is also included, alongside the commitment of the leadership to global and regional obligations that bolster national identities. Rallying against Israel—a substitute for actual unification and a symbol of its absence—also serves as a convenient means to consolidate identity in textbooks. Mainly in the textbooks of the radical camp, Israel is associated with Western colonialism—another common target in the crosshairs of the region's curricula. Textbooks also resort to longing for past empires and nurture direct and indirect aspirations for reuniting the region, drawing inspiration from various eras in its history.

While historiographical periodizations (and, in our case, their projection into the future) are perforce arbitrary, they are nevertheless useful for a broad brush understanding of historical processes and narratives. There are four main, apparently unifying visions in the curricula, constituting a periodization of four historical layers:

1. Ethnic or racial imperialism (Pan-Turkic, Pan-Iranian, Pan-Arab, Pan-Kurdish)[1] drawing

on the pre-Islamic/pre-Monotheistic era (assuming that Abraham is the first Muslim);[2]

2. Neo-Islamic-traditional visions (Neo-Ottoman, Wahhabi-Tawhidi in Saudi Arabia);
3. Modernist/Islamist visions (popular war or *resistance*, Iranian-Khomeinist, Muslim Brotherhood), which can be understood as a *fundamentalist-regressive* reaction to the failure of modernization in the region (Lewis, 2002) (in which we include the region's tumultuous experiences of granting equal citizenship to non-Muslims,[3] decline, colonialism, and cultural renaissance followed by the rise of the supremacist ultra-nationalist and Islamist movements including Jihadi Salafists such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS).
4. As will be elaborated in the next section, gradually budding is a fourth imagined future "unity," largely predicated on the Abrahamic peace discourse. This imagined regional future, which we call the "Abrahamic Age," is essentially Arab-Islamic in character, inspired by classic Islamic golden ages such as the Abbasid empire, and tends to adopt a maritime vision of global trade, peace and prosperity.[4]

The above four-layer periodization of the region's history can serve as a matrix for examining the curricula's attitudes toward "other" countries or minorities. The tension between the Arab world and Israel may be seen as one, indeed a conspicuous example, of the myriad tensions and conflicts in this area. According to some, Israel represents a stumbling block for Islamist unity. An Iranian textbook explains that the "continuation of Israel's existence and activity gives the Zionists the guarantee that if a powerful Islamic state is ever established in this region, Israel will confront it and be able to stop their influence."[5] Most curricula, however, appear to prefer a loose collaborative unity that is not the "powerful Islamic state," imagined by Khomeinist Iran.

Hate toward Israel and the Jews emanates from the first three historical layers. The Jews

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or "Israelites" are among those pre-Islamic and even pre-*ḥanīfi* (Abraham's monotheism, according to the Qur'an) tribes rejected by Islam, perpetually regarded as "others." The textbooks' presentation of other minorities and remnants from earlier ages varies from significant (Amazigh in Morocco; Kurds in Iraq; Circassians in Jordan; Copts in Egypt) to minimal (Kurds and Alevis in the Turkish curriculum; Azerbaijanis and Baluchis in Iran; Sabians and Yazidis in Iraq) to almost denial and distortion (Armenians and Greeks in the Turkish curriculum; pre-Islamic customs in Saudi Arabia; Kurds and Nusayris in Syria). Paradoxically, the Israelites are accepted as the spring of monotheism, but the curricula are hard pressed to see them as an indigenous culture still alive today, manifesting in modern Judaism, Zionism, and Israel. The idea of Israel stands in sharp conflict with claims of a Palestinian national continuity in history, which identifies "Arab" Canaanites as the original inhabitants of the land. For example, Palestinian students learn that "Jerusalem is an Arab city built by our Arab ancestors thousands of years ago,"[6] since "the Arab Canaanites were the first to settle in Palestine."[7] A similar problem is faced by the Jordanian curriculum regarding Israelite tribes east of the Jordan river: the Moabites are considered Arab immigrants[8] and the Mesha Stele is described without referring to its language [quasi-Biblical Hebrew] or the tribe of Gad.[9] It is not unlikely that under the right conditions, this enchantment with ancient ancestors could flip from brute competition into a shared passion. A Saudi textbook already takes a milder tone claiming that "Palestine has been Arab land since the Semitic migrations from the Arabian Peninsula"[10] and that "the Muslims allowed the Jews to live in Palestine as citizens under Islamic sovereignty."[11]

As regards the second age or layer of classic Islamic order, the Arab and Iranian textbooks often present the Jews of Arabia as a treacherous group collaborating with the enemies of the believers. It is true that there is a tiny but growing community of Muslims who believe that Zionism is perfectly commensurate with Islam, namely that the Land of Israel is the Jewish homeland (Palazzi, 2010; Dana, 2014; Hänel, 2023; Shofar, 2024). Indeed two new Hebrew books have been published, both claiming—based on numerous conversations with Muslim Arabs—that there is a clear distinction in the region's "local knowledge" between Jews, who are viewed as inherently evil and undeserving of independence, and Israelites, to whom the Quran promises an auspicious return to their homeland (Yemini, 2023; Bareli, 2024). A call to consider Israeli Jews as Israelites—and to follow in their footsteps as the quintessential people of the East—was already articulated by the Iranian proto-Islamist Jalal Al-e Ahmad in the early 1960s (Pardo, 2004; Al-e Ahmad, 2017).But these views are not yet to be found in the curricula, except for some echoes in Turkish educational materials. The preponderate popular portrayal of Islamic civilization in the textbooks is one of glory and tolerance, within which there is some recognition of cultural roles played by the "People of the Book."[12]

Much of the anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish polemic belongs with the Modern Age third layer. To invoke the words of antisemitism expert Ambassador Deborah Lipstadt, an "interconnectedness of hatred" allows hateful discourse on one subject to seamlessly feed into other related but independent topics. In other words, antisemitic content directed at Jews on the one hand, becomes entangled with content against Israel on the other, and vice versa (Miltz, 2022). The renaissance of the Jewish nation is generally associated in the region's textbooks with Western imperialism, criminalizing Israel as a colonial-settler entity, and describing it as an evil occupying regime which should be eradicated. Except for Morocco and to a degree also Turkey and Azerbaijan, local Jewish communities and their fate are largely ignored, even in a country such as Iraq in which the Jewish community is much older than Islam and Arabism.

In this article, we pin our hopes for better education on the Abrahamic Age; i.e., the slow reconciliation process with Israel that seems to have become the strategic choice for several Arab countries since the mid-1970s.[13]

A Budding Abrahamic Age: Islamic and Inclusive

As the curricula plainly show, Middle Eastern countries are still tightly attached to overarching regional narratives. The Ottoman Empire is gone, but the thirst for a large and powerful global hub in this part of the world is widespread in the curricula, taking various shapes and forms. We believe therefore that a solid and convincing regional vision, embracing all, and ideally expressed in all the curricula, is not beyond reach. Under such a vision, members of minorities and majorities will have the reassuring feeling of belonging to an inclusive and benevolent worldview, one which fosters Emile Durkheim's concepts of "common consciousness" and "pre-contractual" solidarity (Dwairy, 2006; Naji, 2014; Grosbard, 2014; Ilai, 2022).[14] The importance of peace and tolerance standards notwithstanding, they are nonetheless abstract and context-dependent ideas which lack the adhesive qualities of commonality and solidarity.[15] In the pioneering spirit of the Abraham Accords, it is our belief that such an adhesive may be found in the familial connection to the figure of Abraham.

The core of this familial vision—common ancestry—is stated in the Abraham Accords, the most serious plan to date that lays the common ground for regional cooperation. While peace agreements with Israel are bilateral, they include a regional perspective that reflects the existence of a meaningful regional identity.

> Recognizing that the Arab and Jewish peoples are descendants of a common ancestor, Abraham, and inspired, in that spirit, to foster in the Middle East a reality in which Muslims, Jews, Christians and peoples of all faiths, denominations, beliefs and nationalities live, and are committed to a spirit of coexistence, mutual understanding and mutual respect. (Abraham Accords, 2020, p. 1)

The Accords accept the centrality of Abraham as the "common ancestor of the Arab and Jewish peoples." Abraham in Islamic heritage is the quintessential monotheist (*ḥanīf*), a prefiguration of Muhammad who is seen as bringing monotheism back to the purity of Abraham's ideal (Levenson, 2012, p. 105).[16]

In every single prayer, five times a day, Muslims ask Allah to send his blessings upon the prophet Abraham and his family (Habib, 2013). Students in the Arab world learn about the various roles of Adam, as "father of all humanity"; Abraham, as "father of the prophets"; and Moses, as "prophet sent by Allah to the Children of Israel" (Pardo, 2023, p. 6). The figure of Abraham has been decisive in explaining peace to Egyptian, Jordanian, and Emirati elites. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's 1977 historical speech in the Knesset coincided with Eid al-Adha, the Islamic Feast of Sacrifice in which Abraham is the central figure. Sadat not only referred to Abraham, "the great-grandfather of the Arabs and Jews," but also to his spiritual power and readiness to "sacrifice his very own son." Sadat called both sides of the conflict to repent, assume responsibility and adhere to justice and truth. His discourse was "Abrahamic" or regional, going beyond a separate peace to fully recognizing Israel: "we welcome you among us [the Arabs], with full security and safety" (Sadat, 1977). Israeli textbooks quoted King Hussein's speech during the signing of the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty saying: "Jordanians, Israelis, Arabs, Palestinians—all of them are children of Abraham."[17] A general agreement has developed in recent decades over the commonality of Abraham, even if traditionally this figure meant different things to different faiths; and a host of interfaith movements such as the Tariqa Ibrahimiyya, the Israeli Sufi Way, have emerged (Elkayam, n.d.; Abrahamic Reunion, n.d.).

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Hence, Jews and Arabs (Christians and Muslims alike) are connected ethnically, sharing one father, and religiously, as sharing one founding prophet. The Accords unabashedly invite "Muslims, Jews, Christians and peoples of all faiths, denominations, beliefs and nationalities" to live together in a spirit of coexistence, mutual understanding and mutual respect (which may be understood as equality) (Abaraham Accords, 2020, p. 1). The Accords are dramatically more liberal and open-ended than the openly-Islamic Ottoman system under which Theodore Herzl, David Ben Gurion and others envisaged the Jewish national home to exist (Friedman, 1977, pp. 101-100),[18] as well as that of non-liberal Muslim-majority Indonesia, where monotheism is enforced.[19] It is, however, similar to these examples in the sense that it offers an *Islamically-initiated* substitute for the original Arab-Islamic Caliphate. Arguably, it mainly aims at placing the Islamic world closer to the Western Judeo-Christian world by mitigating the medieval Islamic anti-Jewish invective, weaving in commonalties instead.[20]

This vision, which we call "Pan-Abrahamic," may allow for genuine diversity without threatening the sovereignty and patriotic feelings of people in the countries forming the regional framework. The way forward in terms of how Israel and Jews are depicted should

be charted based on the aspiration for the promotion of a new regional unity-agreement, alongside other cross-regional visions (such as the Islamic Nation, Arabism, pan-Turkism, pan-Kurdism, the Mediterranean or Levantine commonality and the solidarity of humankind at large) or nationally-specific visions for each country and leadership. A combination of a Pan-Abrahamic vision with countries' national, minority and tribal identities, and other cross-regional affiliations, will also address and embrace the cultural mosaic emanating from the three main historical layers described above (pre-Islamic, Islamic, Modern).

The pan-Abrahamic paradigm therefore suggests a quantum leap from Egypt and Jordan's cold-peace with Israel, in which normalization with an independent Jewish-Zionist state remains a cause for embarrassment. Even so, as demonstrated by Ofir Winter, the Abrahamic discourse has been pivotal in Egyptian, Jordanian and Emirati pro-peace campaigns to shift from rivalry to normalization with Israel. Winter laments that Israel is yet to *fully embrace* the discourse "as a fundamental component of its national ethos and policy priorities," actively fostering its domestic acceptance (Winter, 2023, p. 30). Our findings on Israeli curricula confirm this observation regardless of the pro-peace attitude of the textbooks, but also suggest that Abrahamic discourse does not permeate Arab curricula. The latter may be related to the ongoing Islamist anti-Abrahamic discourse, also noted by Winter, insisting on the supremacy of the Muslims and warning of a Zionist "plot to create a new religion called 'al-Ibrahimiyya (Abrahamism),' which would subsume all three monotheistic religions and harm Muslims" (Winter, 2023, pp. 29-28). Intellectual and theological answers for this "new religion" argument abound.[21] Still, properly measured Pan-Abrahamism in education remains our best hope, because taken together it is largely an *Arab-Islamic initiative* addressing the need for familial attachment and regional togetherness, and welcomed by non-Muslims. Nevertheless, the fundamentalist curricula are still a long way from embracing the pan-Abrahamic vision and will require great efforts and much convincing. For example, a Qatari Islamic-Studies textbook repeating the "Arab-Canaanites" refrain also places a six-century gap between the Jews and Abraham, while still recognizing ancient Jewish presence in the Land of Israel and associating between the Israelites and Abraham.[22]

The Abrahamic discourse is less familiar, but extremely relevant, to the Palestinian issue. Hillel Cohen explains that the discourse that has developed in Fatah and the left-wing Palestinian camps, was from the beginning an anti-colonial discourse. Despising Zionism, it presented the Jews as insidious foreigners in the land, making it difficult for these movements to justify a reconciliation process with Israel, even following the Oslo Accords. However, local Palestinians who initiated the Village Associations movement in 1977 aimed at a two-states-for-two-peoples vision via close cooperation, coexistence, and relationship on the basis of common ancestry between these two peoples sharing one country. According to Jamil El-ʿImleh, one of the heads of the Associations: "This land does not belong to Israel alone nor to the Palestinians. It is a land of both peoples. . . We are all sons of our father Abraham" (Cohen, 2014, p. 277; Carmon, 2016). This example demonstrates that the Abrahamic discourse of brotherhood is deeply rooted on a popular level and critical for a genuine Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation. And even now, as war is raging, the Abrahamic discourse remains a beacon of hope for peace lovers (Higuera & Basch-Harod, 2024). In a March 2024 interfaith meeting between local Jews and Muslims in the West Bank, the Muslim side reiterated that: "You know, Islam, Judaism, Christianity—we all believe in one religion. All follow the religion of the prophet Abraham, who 'was not a Jew nor yet a Christian; but he was true in Faith, and bowed his will to Allah's (which is Islam), and he joined not gods with Allah.'" (Qur'an, Sura Ali-Imran 3:67, trans. Yusuf Ali) (Ben Shalom, 2024).

PART TWO – Israel's Regional Integration as a Case Study for Abrahamic Education

We have dedicated a separate article to mapping the negative and positive elements in educational attitudes toward Israel in our region (Negev & Pardo, 2024). The main question one must ask when looking at the gaps that exist in teaching about Israel and the Jews is what *vision* these curricula try to impart and what could make anti-Israeli teaching out of place and embarrassing.

The salient anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish material in the region's curricula, we speculate, are a manifestation of the radicals' need to conceal the difficulties faced by these countries to articulate a workable national identity, alongside their professed sympathy with the Arab-Muslim Palestinians, typically presented as victims of Jewish "aggression." The obsession with the Palestinian cause is a central theme in the rhetoric of the radical curricula, and while rallying against the people of Israel—a regional minority group—may create the semblance of unity, it in fact subverts regimes from developing functioning open societies of their own. According to such curricula, a powerful Israel epitomizes the weakness of Arabs and Muslims, their disunity, and the unhappy return to the fore of a traditionally weak and subdued pre-Islamic force. While the Jews are acknowledged at times as providing the infrastructure for the rise of Islam, this undeserving indigenous people has become an invader settler-colonialist. Thus, in their obsession with blaming the Jews, Israel, and Western Colonialism for the plights of the Middle East, the radical countries take no responsibility for developing their own societies and thereby diminish their own agency.

As things stand now, even in moderate countries, anti-Israel and anti-Jewish teaching can be interpreted as a battle cry to invoke patriotic or religious sentiment among Muslims or the Arab nation. We believe that this emanates to a considerable degree from the challenge of legitimizing and consolidating the diverse, often competing identities into a functioning state identity, as described by Kumaraswamy. This is particularly true in countries like Iran, where the curriculum fails to recognize the cultural contributions of non-Persian and non-Shiite minorities, and even more so neglects the basic freedoms of the predominantly secular and non-revolutionary segments of society (Bayat, 2007, pp. 135-16; Monishpouri & Zamiri, 2023). A lack of tolerance characterizes other radical groups and Iran-proxy party-militias within failed states. The pro-Muslim Brotherhood regimes of Turkey and Qatar play a double-game. Both are important hubs of anti-Israeli incitement. Both actively subvert their neighbors' stability, ruthlessly undermining basic human rights at home. Their curricula, particularly that of Qatar, largely written by Muslim Brotherhood affiliates, but also the Turkish Imam Hatip curriculum, reflect a duality: While the curricula are essentially nationalistic, these two regimes simultaneously advance educational agendas that include anti-nationalist and ultra-nationalist messaging (Negev & Winter, 2023).

Pan-Abrahamic education will facilitate a straightforward representation of Israel and the Jewish people by addressing the challenge of inclusive national identity. It embraces the widespread yearning for unity in the region while also paving the way for genuine and secure diversity in each country, making it fully legitimate. This will indirectly strengthen each country's national identity, improve regime legitimacy and open the gates for gradual democratization. The curricula will draw on all four historical layers discussed above, allowing for free expression of the existing tribal, ethnoreligious, and cultural imprints they create. The proper educational attitude will save Israel's potential partners the hefty price of keeping their cooperations with Israel "under the radar" ((Schonmann, 2013; Jones & Guzanski, 2017; Podeh, 2022). In fact, as we have shown in part one of this article, the Abrahamic discourse has accompanied

Israel's peace treaties with Egypt, Jordan and the Emirates (Winter, 2022). In any event, unity that includes Israel has the advantage that it guarantees the independence of participating countries (while other unities such as those offered by Islamists, pan-Turks, pan-Iranians, and formerly pan-Arabs required the hegemony of one country over the rest).

As a relatively small country and as a non-Muslim one, Israel has neither the ambition nor ability to lead, yet it can tip the balance to help the "moderate camp" to block hegemonic dreams of the "radical camp." Such loose unity corresponds with the self-perception of many Israelis as members of a cosmopolitan people having no hegemonic ambitions in the region. Hence the great potential of the fourth "Abrahamic Age" and the promise it brings to welcome Israel to the region's family of nations. The discussion below presents the case study of Israel as it may ideally be presented within regional core education, how Israel itself could benefit by applying this curriculum at home as it tries to mend the cracks in its national identity, and what to do about supremacist Palestinian education. The ideas we present do not amount to a cohesive, well-developed skeleton for a future curriculum. Instead, these are a collection of ideas and possible trajectories to pursue, reject or use as stepping-stones to better proposals.

The mainstream Palestinian educational vision is still bent on a violent return, both explicitly and implicitly, to an imaginary "historical Palestine."

The Israeli case can serve as a good example for a country which could greatly benefit from the Abrahamic perspective. In the Arabic-Muslim landscape of the region, comprising roughly 20% Arab Israelis and a growing Palestinian population on its doorstep, Israel is the conspicuous element which seeks to preserve its uniqueness while still seeking to belong within the region. The upheaval that shook the country over the proposed judicial overhaul (January–October 2023) exposed gaps in the legitimacy of the political system and a deep divide over the country's national identity. The Israeli education system comprises four main curricula—National (secular-liberal), Religious-National (Pardo, 2022b), Ultra-Orthodox/Haredim (Pardo & Gamliel, 2017), and Arab-Palestinian as a national minority (Pardo, 2022c)—which teach different, largely conflicting, visions of Israel's national identity. Two of these curricula, the Ultra-Orthodox and the Arab-Palestinian, offer only a qualified recognition of the country's declared "Jewish-Democratic" character. The differences between the four curricula notwithstanding, all four embrace Israeli democracy and share a commitment to and enthusiasm for peace and mutual respect with neighboring countries and among all the citizens.

"Pan-Abrahamic" elements already exist in Israel's Law of Education, according to which all Israeli students should become "acquainted with the language, culture, history, heritage, and unique tradition of the Arab population and other communities within the State of Israel, and to recognize the equal rights of all Israeli citizens" (State Education Law, 1953). The curricula are imbued with much Middle Eastern culture, Arabic is taught, and the history of the region's Muslims, Christians and Jews expounded. Noteworthy is the Israeli Arab-Palestinian national minority curriculum, which in some respects, such as international language teaching (Arabic, Hebrew and English), is superior to that of the majority. The students in Israel and the region should thus be aware that, beyond the Abrahamic Accords, Israel is juridically committed in other ways to regional elements of identity.[23] A discourse on Abrahamic education should awaken Israelis to the existing regional-national dimension of the state's identity and bring together its seemingly opposing poles of rootedness and liberalism. One may speculate that a regionally-agreed pan-Abrahamic educational vision would not

only help Israel's integration in the region but facilitate an *agreement at home* over identity and vision.

The Palestinian case, whose education systematically rejects the existence of Israel, can serve as another, complementary, example for the value of Pan-Abrahamic education.

But the problem is larger. The October 7 attack and its aftermath revealed a shortage in moral and character edification, let alone peace education, in the Palestinian education system. While the general Israeli educational vision can be summarized as preserving and developing a national home with a hope that one day peace will be secured (excluding extreme right-wing outlooks), the mainstream Palestinian educational vision is still bent on a violent return, both explicitly and implicitly, to an imaginary "historical Palestine," which means that the focus is on removing Israel from the map and making the territory Muslim-Arab. In the Abrahamic approach, however, Israel would be recognized as an organic element of the region's cultural, historical, and familial makeup. Under this premise, Israelis and Arab-Palestinians would be considered equally indigenous and belong to the Land of Israel/Palestine *and* the region at large. Students should be aware of the fact that the ancestors of most Jews and Palestinians alike, immigrated (in the case of Jews, made 'Aliya' or ascended) to the Land of Israel/Palestine during the last two centuries, from other parts of the region and beyond (Khalidi, 2004; Grossman, 2011; Zureik, 2016; Shpak Lissak, 2021). According to one estimate, three quarters of Israel's Muslim citizens are either immigrants or the descendants of immigrants (Pipes, 2024). In short, adopting an Abrahamic approach could lessen the perception of a binary struggle of two peoples on one tiny land, and replace it with a rich and diverse, familial-regional, panoramic view of the Abrahamic idea.

Developing a proper education system in Gaza, and hopefully for the Palestinian Authority in general, will require the consideration of three sets of guidelines. The ***Abraham Accords values***, as described above, should form a first set of guidelines, with particular emphasis on the Land of Israel/Palestine as the birthplace of the conflicting peoples, with one's identity as ancient and the other's new in forming a separate national identity. The second set should outline the demands for ***peace and tolerance*** required by international standards. The IMPACT-se methodology (IMPACT-se, n.d.) summarizing these international standards has been applied for decades to analyze textbooks. The standards of this methodology mainly revolve about peace, tolerance, and respect for the Other in conflict situations, but also take a wider view as regards society's vision for the future and a host of other questions such as national identity, gender equality, and maintaining the prosperity of country and environment. A more focused and detailed approach to the presentation of the conflict itself, and the sides to the conflict, is Arnon Groiss' study questions for researching of societies in conflict (Groiss, n.d.). The third set of guidelines should be ***character and family education***. The first thing to consider are the Wasatiya standards (Dajani, 2019), developed by Mohammed Dajani Daoudi that focus on humanistic and empathy education with an Islamic emphasis, thereby imparting "necessary knowledge and skills required to solve conflict issues and advance peace, moderation and reconciliation as responsible citizens."[24] Two other character education programs to be considered with appropriate modifications are the originally-British, Naomi and David Geffen's Loving Classroom project (Loving Classroom,

Education about Jews and Israel in the region at large should similarly be part of the Abrahamic educational approach that embraces all the minorities and beliefs in the MENA region and considers Israel and the Jews as indigenous people sharing common ancestry and forming the central pillar of the monotheistic worldview.

2023), successfully applied in the UK, and William Haines' *My Journey in Life*, originally written in English, translated to Russian and successfully applied in Russia in the early post-Soviet years (Haines, 2002). In 2017, an Arabic version (*riḥlatī fī al-hayāh*) was prepared for Palestinian schools by Ghassan Abdullah from CARE. Finally, character education involves a solid base in philosophy and critical thinking leading to genuine search for meaning (Kizel, 2017; Cohen & Rocklin, 2023).

More Recommendations Related to the Portrayal of Jews and Israel in MENA Curricula:

- **Education about Jews and Israel in the region at large** should similarly be part of the Abrahamic educational approach that embraces all the minorities and beliefs in the MENA region and considers Israel and the Jews as indigenous people sharing common ancestry and forming the central pillar of the monotheistic worldview. Once incitement is uprooted, educators can remedy the curricula's disregard for Jewish history—starting in ancient times, through the history of Jews in Muslim countries, their prosperity and suffering, to the double blow they sustained during the Modern Age, namely the Holocaust and the demise of communities across the Middle East and North Africa. Similarly, students should learn with appropriate documentation the long, gradual and steady move from Arab-Israeli conflict to Arab-Israeli integration (Olson, Zaga & Benger, 2024). Other stories of ethnoreligious minorities must naturally be taught as well, a subject to be thoroughly researched and discussed elsewhere.
- **Many Islamic Education textbooks are overly focused on inter-tribal military tactics and stories of martyrdom.** Martyrdom (*shahāda or istishhād*) and *Jihad*, the violent application of this early Islamic concept (originally conceived with the intent to defend Islam from extinction) should not be promoted in the context of modern political conflicts.[25] Islamic military history may or may not be taught as part of general history of the region and the world. It may be useful to discuss whether military history is an appropriate topic for our K–12 students, given the current volatility in the region.
- **Religious studies should include the common sources of spirituality (prophets and beliefs) and interfaith relations**, such as the **Abrahamic Family House** in Abu Dhabi and the acceptance of the Quranic *Al-Fātiḥa* as a prayer text for Jews and Christians.[26] These should reference the place of Jews and Judaism in the Qur'an, and their contribution to the consolidation of the Islamic state during the early centuries and later (see for instance Meddeb, 2013; Franklin, 2014; Lecker, 2014; Bar-Asher, 2021). New research shows that biblical knowledge was widespread in Arabia, and dichotomies with Judaism, or even polytheists, were not that pronounced (Whittingham, 2021). Thus, commonalities between Islam and Judaism may be expanded and information on early Islamic conflicts between Muhammad and Jewish tribes be mentioned only briefly, if at all, and *in context*. Likewise, there is little doubt that Judaism as we know it was largely developed in close contact with Islamic civilization, not only in fields such as philosophy and mysticism, but also in grammar, religious law, as well as cultural spheres like music, liturgical poems, cuisine and the arts (Rejwan, 1998, pp. 80-48).
- **How to present Jews and Israel in an Abrahamic context?** Israel and Zionism are mostly perceived in the region, especially in school textbooks, as something between a demon or a malignant disease at worst, and a foreign entity with whose existence one has no choice but to reconcile, at best. In some cases, however, it is even regarded as a role model, and the cause of much angst, even in a peaceful context (Pardo, 2004; Shavit & Winter,

2016). In Fouad Ajami's words, Israel's post-Oslo "New Middle East" utopian peace project caused much dread, because it was seen as "a form of Israeli hegemony, *pax Hebraica*" and "a threat to all the sacred totems of Arab nationalism." So, one needs to draw the lessons and present common roots and possible contributions, but stay away from an image of, in the words of Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani, a "Middle Eastern supermarket with an Israeli chairman of the board" (Rejwan, 1998, pp. 194-193). Jews have often been famous for catering their religious, scientific, and financial knowledge to non-Jewish rulers (Gilbert, 2010).[27] Ideally, Israel should be presented as an advanced country with the capacity to help and support in a majority-Muslim region, with no interest in hegemony or proselytizing.[28] Most importantly, the Abrahamic context requires that students also learn the Israeli and Jewish story as a distinct nation, with its own unique history and civilization (Eisenstadt, 1992; Cahill, 1999; Firestone, 2001; Senor & Singer 2011; Myers, 2017; Jacobs, 2024).

- **Israel's reputation is replete with the export of its knowhow to the Third World and beyond**.[29] MENA curricula may well portray it as an inseparable part of and deeply rooted in this geographical region, a minority group within a large Arab and Islamic friendly environment, striving to improve and reform rather than to replace and destroy. At home, the majority of Arab Israelis are quite attached and incorporated into Israeli society and economy, making it even more part of the region (NAS, 2022). The same goes for Jewish refugees/Olim from the Arab and Muslim countries who, together with local Arabs form a large majority in Israel (roughly 70% of the population) (Rejwan, 1998, p. 191). This perception of Israel as part of a regional mosaic and a contributing player will endow it with "soft power," that is to say legitimacy through asserting its attractiveness to the region, and not coercion exercised over it (Nye, 1991; Nye, 2005, p. 12). Likewise, Israel's educational policy would better paint our national vision as playing a supportive role for the Islamic majority. A pan-Abrahamic education should depict a region that is open to minorities and immigrant groups. The Gulf countries and Morocco provide a good model for such an approach, but most curricula are lacking information on this issue. Proper immigration policies and corresponding education could pave the way to the revival of Jewish communities across the region and help Israel finetune its own identity accordingly.
- **Should future curricula teach about tragedies of the past and particularly the question of rejectionism?** Dialogue is easier when we ignore contentious issues. But as much as we would like to put the past behind us, is it really possible? Should not the young generation come to terms with what Joseph Braude describes as "the century of damage wreaked by pan-Arabist and Islamist forces" (Braude, 2019, p. 142)?[30] Should they not learn to beware of the fundamentalist rejectionist countries? Also, to what extent should History, Civics, and Literature textbooks delve into the damage caused by rejectionism? Lessons on the history and plight of ethno-religious minorities may posit a causal effect between the destruction of minority groups and the hefty price paid by majorities in allowing the rise of oppressive regimes unfit for modern economy, welfare, and freedom (a few cases of such minorities are Jewish, Greek, Assyrian, Armenian,[31] Maronite, Shi'ite, Amazigh-Berbers-Imazighen,[32] Kurdish, Zaza, Nusayri, Alevi, Druze, Yazidis, Saibans, Talesh, Turkmen, Baluchi, Bahá'í, Ahmadi, and "Levantine" European immigrants among others).
- In that vein, **the Holocaust and the fate of Jewish communities in the region** must be acknowledged in the textbooks, not just out of respect for the survivors, the memory of the dead, and historic accuracy, but also out

of empathy—acknowledging a great suffering of the "other" could be a first positive step towards rapprochement. Another part of the equation is the role of Palestinian extremists, first in radicalizing Palestinian society and then the Arab world and various Islamist movements. Most curricula about Israel suffer from a dichotomous outlook on the Palestinian cause, whereupon supporting the plight of the Palestinians renders any positive reference to Israel and Zionism to be inconceivable. A more dispassionate view is that the ancestors of both sides were often forced to face historical forces largely beyond their control. To be sure, Israeli textbooks teach about the Palestinian "Nakba" and the negative consequences of the 1948 War for Palestinian Arabs, noting that "both sides got hurt," and acknowledging that there were those who "were forced from their homes and towns during the battles."[33] Arab students, however, clearly do not receive the balanced picture that they should, thus creating serious gaps in the approach to learning history and how to draw relevant lessons from it. The question of the 1948 refugees—both Arab and Jewish—should be taught in a forward-looking view. Mistakes and tragedies should not be concealed, and resentment should be replaced by a mature, empathetic, and complex view of history, with the adoption of a future-looking, morally-sound, and reconciliatory spirit.

- **Lineage and Ancestry**: Ideally, a common regional vision will educate the youth on a common outlook regarding Israel and Jews with emphasis on shared religious values and cultural roots. The region's curricula already teach racially-based common lineage and ancestry (from family and tribal affiliations or *nisba*, to belonging to the Prophet's family, to being part of the Semitic, Aryan, or Turkic race). In the Iranian curriculum, for example, the non-Persian Kurds and Azeris are "Aryanized" in the textbooks, to keep them in the fold. In the Jordanian curriculum, Hashemite, Arab, and Semitic roots are inculcated and so is connection to the ancient "proto-Jordanians," (e.g., Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites and Nabateans). The Palestinian curriculum boasts about the Palestinians as descendants of the "Arab" Canaanites, their ancient presence in the region serving to justify their claims for the land. The assumed common Abrahamic-Semitic ancestry of Arabs and Jews could bring people together, but the pan-Abrahamic paradigm would better remain "color-blind," welcoming the "non-Semitic" Iranians, Turks, Kurds, Alevis (boasting Sumerian roots), Greeks, Armenians, Amazigh and so on. Likewise, the often-imaginary attribution made by local nationalists of descent from this or that ancient people must be contextualized as a social, historic, and political trend, and not presented as fact.
- **Less Familiar Facts about Zionism.** Students, including in Israel, are not familiar with much of the non-conflictual relations between the Jewish national movement and the Arab and Muslim majorities. Teaching such incidents of goodwill will naturally put past conflicts in perspective as avoidable and as reflecting only part of the story. As noted above, Herzl called for a tax-paying Jewish national home *within the Muslim-Ottoman Empire*, in order to save it from the collapse he anticipated (with full participation of and equal rights to local Arabs). He even ordered the manufacturing of the first industrial Arabic typing machine, which served as a prototype for generations to come.[34] Also of note is that in its first five decades, mainstream Zionism shunned military thinking (Shapira, 1992). Between 1881–1921 the majority of Jewish immigrant newcomers were refugees escaping pogroms with no nationalistic designs (Alroev, 2014; Rettig Gur, 2024). Those who did, dreamed about integration in the Levant (Milson, 1997; Harif, 2019; Evri, 2021). "Learning Arabic is a *part of Zionism*," explained German-Jewish historian Shlomo Dov Goitein in 1946, "a

part of the return to the Hebrew language and to the Semitic Orient, which today is completely Arabic-speaking. We desire that our children, when they go out into the world, will be able to feel *that they are children of the Orient and able to act within it*, just as we aspire that they do not lose the precious inheritance of European spirituality that we have brought with us" (Goitein, 1946, p. 8; Halperin, 2006). Other useful anecdotes of peace initiatives in the region include the Faisal–Weizmann Agreement, David Ben Gurion's 1930 "Shami" federation plan, the 1949 unity of Jordan and the West Bank, the various Jordan-Palestine-Israel proposals, and Sadat's historical visit to Jerusalem. Similarly, students will benefit from learning about missed opportunities for peace, secret relations between Israelis and Arabs over the years, and personal relations between Jews and Arabs (Podeh, 2015). Part of the story is also Palestinian cooperation with Israel and the contributions of Palestinians to building Israel (a sensitive subject matter still waiting for a good historian).[35]

Conclusion

To what extent can one argue that a peace culture has taken hold in Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, and the Abraham Accords countries? Particularly since the October 7 attack, pessimistic experts on Islam have become even more suspicious of the idea that genuine peace between Israel and the Arab countries will ever exist. According to this view, even if peace agreements are signed, they never transcend the status of *hudna* or temporary truce with a superior enemy, and *jihad* war lurks just around the corner. The ecstatic glee that came from Muslim crowds after the massacre[36] and the enthusiastic embrace of the horrors by the Al-Azhar Institute contributed to this gloomy view (Winter & Barak, 2023). Their conclusion is that, in order to provide Muslim moderates with the Shariah justification they need to defer their *jihad* obligations, Israel must be known to cause disproportionate and irreparable damage to any aggressor (Herrera, 2023; Sharon, 2024, Ben-Ari, 2024).

The problem, according to the pessimists, is not only that of the Islamic or Islamist worldview. Arabism, a modern ideology created by Arab Christians and Muslims, is imbued with Islamic military history, European antisemitism, and the total rejection of Israel as an alien colonial-settler entity. It seems that the majority of Arab liberal elites remain rejectionist, fiercely opposing normalization with Israel. Textbooks across the region (except for Turkey) continue to omit Israel's name on maps and refuse to teach about it. The long-term vision of destroying Israel in stages is predicated on various interchangeable models such as the early wars against the ancient Jewish tribes of Arabia; "resistance" (*muqāwama*) or anti-colonialist "popular war" by stages following the wars of Vietnam and Algeria; and, most of all, the Saladin's model of the Islamic world unified under one leader conquering the crusader-colonial state.

Time is of the essence, because urgent decisions must be taken to transform the violent and hateful education provided by the PA/Hamas/UNRWA in the West Bank and Gaza.

All the above notwithstanding, a new "Abrahamic discourse" has meanwhile emerged and is gradually pervading the Middle East and North Africa. Currently, most analysts tend to ascribe the Abraham Accords and the Israeli-Arab rapprochement mainly to widespread fears of the Ayatollahs' regime in Iran. However, the buds of the Abrahamic discourse preceded the 1978–79 Iranian revolution. We therefore argue that identity crises and local afflictions in the region indicate that there is room for an alternative regional vision, whose terminology, rhetoric, and underpinnings would not undermine other specific and regional visions. Drawing upon the spirit of the Abraham Accords, "Pan-Abrahamism" may offer such an

alternative to those radical and impractical elements of the Islamic and Arab-nationalist visions. If designed as an overarching framework that does not impinge on the legitimacy of local narratives, such as the Palestinian's right to self-determination, Israel and the Jews might very well be welcomed to the region as kindred spirits.

One of the first to grasp the direction of history and speak about Abraham in the context of peace with Israel was former Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, "the Hero of War and Peace," who raised Arab-Jewish religious and ancestral ties in his historical visit to Jerusalem in 1977 (Meital, 2003, p. 150). We have shown above that Palestinians used the Abrahamic discourse even earlier and some still use it today. Taking this discourse as a guide, we attempted to offer a preliminary "pan-Abrahamic view" for peace education in the Middle East and North Africa. We believe textbooks fashion the future since they are a "sacred and living corpus," serving as a pathway for society's objectives and values (Pardo & Winter, 2024). If indeed the curriculum shows us "where society wants to be heading in the future," fashioning robust peace education should contribute to a reality of peace as students grow up (Williamson, 2013, p. 115). As time goes by, the countries of the Middle East and North Africa will develop principles for their unique community, structure, economic ties, and freedom of movement. Meanwhile, curricula fostering a "pan-Abrahamic view" should teach students that the region is an open and inclusive one, and not merely a fighting arena in which national and regional visions and narratives clash. Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Arabism, and other regional, national, tribal, and global philosophies will still be taught as part of the appropriate mix suitable for each country, lending it more legitimacy at home and in the region. Interfaith activities and dialogue, growing over the years, can provide much more material for the Pan-Abrahamic education.

Time is of the essence, because urgent decisions must be taken to transform the violent and hateful education provided by PA/Hamas/UNRWA in the West Bank and Gaza. The Abraham Accords envision a region that fosters a reality in which peoples of all faiths, denominations, beliefs, and nationalities are committed to a spirit of coexistence, mutual understanding, and mutual respect. These principles, if cautiously developed into well-calibrated "Pan-Abrahamic" curricula and educational initiatives, will impart individual countries with powerful tools to overcome their representation and social justice deficits while helping each other keep their independence, security and prosperity. This new approach may extend to new pedagogical policies of inclusive teaching about minorities and immigration, hopefully paving the way to reviving and reforming Jewish communities in the Arab-Muslim world. It may also change the balance of immigration from the region to the West and allow for smooth integration of immigrants in both directions, making the two civilizations complementary. Most of all, such education will not only make Israel a welcome member in the region but will also address a host of other conflicts, large and small, as a new generation grows up within this new educational framework and begins to lead.

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Notes

1 Prevalent in Turkey, but also in Azerbaijan, and Iran. Among the Arab curricula we examined, the Syrian is the most pan-Arab, but this idea also has significant presence in those of Jordan and the PA as well.

2 The rise of monotheism, or the "Abrahamic religions," in late antiquity is largely seen in modern scholarship as one conflicting and concurring historical process deserving a unified academic field "studying the various Judaisms, Christianities, and Islams in juxtaposition to each other." (Halft, 2020, p. 329)

3 The Ottoman Empire, in its role as the Islamic caliphate, declared Christians and Jews equal citizens of the empire in its famous 1856 reform edict (*Islâhat Hatt-ı Humâyûnu*). Interestingly, 1856 is now considered in the radicalized Palestinian curriculum, as the new beginning of Zionism (bought forward from 1917, the beginning of the "Zionist Invasion," according to the Palestinian National Charter): "Since the Zionist Movement established its first settlement known as '*Montefioriyyah*' [Mishkenot Sha'ananim] in 1856, southwest of the Jerusalem city wall, the series of divisions in Palestine has not stopped." PA – *Social Studies,* Grade 9, Vol. 1, 2017, p. 10. See also, The Palestinian National Charter (1968), Article 6. See also (Quandt, Jabber & Mosely, 1973, p. 101).

4 Examples for this perspective can be found in the various "Vision 2030" visions available in the Emirati, Saudi and Jordanian curricula. Egypt emphasized dialogue, civilization and communication among them. According to Sarah Paine "continental" powers covet conquests while "maritime" powers compound wealth. (Paine, 2021).

5 Iran – *History 3, Iran and the Modern World*, Grade 12, 2021–2022 (1400), p. 113. See (Pardo, 2022a, p. 67).

6 PA – *National Education and Socialization*, Grade 3, Vol. 1, 2016–17, p. 28. See also: Jordan: *Arab and World History,* Grade 12 (Literary Branch), 2018–19, p. 65.

7 PA – *National Education*, Grade 4, Vol. 1, 2013, p. 14. Jordan – *History of Jordan,* Grade 11, 2017–19, p. 17. Qatar – *Islamic Education,* Grade 11, Vol. 1, 2020, p. 144.

8 Jordan – *History,* Grade 7, Vol. 1, 2017–19, p. 14.

9 Jordan – *History of Jordan,* Grade 11, 2017–19, p. 17.

10 KSA – *Social Studies*, Grades 10–12 (Joint Track), 2019, p. 62.

11 Ibid., p. 63.

12 The debate over the treatment of religious minorities under Islam is as wide and large as the richness of human history itself. For a recent skeptic view see (Pollack & Norwood, 2023).

13 Exact periodization is elusive. We tend to consider Anwar Sadat's visit to Jerusalem, and his speech at the Knesset focusing on Abraham and the need to repent, as the "turning point," while the "tipping point" may have occurred already sometime before or after the Yom Kippur War. The Khartoum Resolution of September 1967 aiming at "the withdrawal of the aggressive Israeli forces from the Arab lands which have been occupied since the aggression of 5 June," leaving the fate of pre-1967 Israel in the dark. (Arab League Summit, 1967). Khaizaran points to the 1979 Israeli Egyptian Peace Treaty as a "a crucial turning point" transforming the Arab-Israeli conflict into an Arab-Palestinian one (Khaizaran, 2023).

14 Solidarity "is *the* key problem within the sociological tradition." Coined by Emile Durkheim, these two terms, "common consciousness" and "pre-contractual" solidarity, maintain that unlike the Enlightenment's assumed "social contract" that binds people together, collectives share values and sanctity that go deeper than utilitarian agreement among atomized individuals. This particularly is true for the non-Western, community-based psychology.

15 According to intercultural psychologist Ofer Grosbard, "there is no model of peace in the Arab world other than the family model" (Grosbard, 2009, p. 15).

16 According to Meir Bar Asher, Abraham is considered "The first founder of Islam," an attitude that is reinforced five times a day in the prayer of Abraham, "O Allah, send prayers upon Muhammad and upon the family of Muhammad just as You have sent prayers

upon Ibrahim and upon the family of Ibrahim, verily You are the Praiseworthy, the Glorious." (Bet Avi Hai, 2023).

17 Israel – *History*, Grades 11–12, National World 2: Building a State in the Middle East, Moshe Bar-Hillel and Shula Inbar, Lilach Books (Permit: 4214), 2009, p. 213.

18 The Zionist project was intended to be part of the Islamic Caliphate, aimed at bolstering it, with the Sultan granting the Jews "national protection." Herzl was presented the Grand Cordon of the order of Mejidiyye, the highest Turkish decoration. The Sultan even sent a telegram of good wishes to the fifth Zionist Congress.

19 This Abraham Accords text is reminiscent of Indonesia's five principles, the Pantja Sila, which stand at the core of that country's constitution. The Indonesian Muslim majority relinquished their aspiration to have their country openly Islamic. Instead, all Indonesian citizens are required to commit to the "Belief in the one and only God." No agnosticism or animism is allowed. No sex before marriage. One's obligatory religion must be selected from a list of six world faiths, none of them indigenous. Hence, monotheism is enforced.

20 It remains to be seen to what extent elements of humanism, relativism, liberalism, secularism and *doubt* will be embraced (Yadlin, 2006). On the difference between "revelation-based" and "doubt-based" societies see (Shavit, 2017).

21 According to one scholar, the three Abrahamic religions, "raise similar questions about God and the human being... but answer them differently." (Halft, 2020, p. 328). Hence, they cannot be considered one faith. Another angle can be to ask at which point new interpretations and practices make Islam, or any faith for that matter, a "new religion." Is Khomeinism, for example, a new religion? Is Indonesia's Pantja Sila a new religion? Were the Ottomans? Is the commitment to international order and laws non-Muslim? What is the religious meaning of interfaith practices, coexistence, dialogue, and cross-pollination? Does interfaith amount to the abolition of the religions participating in its activities, naturally assuming equality before God and sharing prayers, rituals and insights, or are there multiple ways to reach the Divine? And if so, can more than one religion claim "superiority in truth" (at least in certain ways) and still accept each other as fully adequate and respectable. Finally, and fundamentally, Pan-Abrahamism is not a religion but a spiritual and political discourse and superstructure, which is based on commitment to peace, common ancestry and values like many other international initiatives, bodies, and organizations.

22 Qatar – *Islamic Education*, Grade 11, Vol. 1, 2020, p. 144.

23 The **Declaration of Independence** states that the "Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance, and gave to the world the eternal Book of Books." In fact, Jews not only lived in the Land of Israel, but across the region since times immemorial, and so did the Arabs. The Declaration refers specifically to the region: "we extend our hand to all neighboring states and their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighborliness, and appeal to them to establish bonds of cooperation and mutual help [..] The State of Israel is prepared to do its share in a common effort for the advancement of the entire Middle East."

The 2000 amendments to **the Law of Education** and the Ministry of Education's guidelines require that all Israeli students learn to "be loyal citizens of the State of Israel, who respect their parents and family, their heritage, cultural identity and language." They should also learn to "recognize the language, culture, history, heritage and unique tradition of the Arab population, and other population groups in the State of Israel, and to recognize the equal rights of all Israeli citizens."

The **Guidelines of the Ministry of Education** demand that the curriculum impart "the history of the Arabs and Islam, and enhance their feeling of belonging to the Arab heritage and civilization," the "struggle for independence in Arab lands," "the question of Palestine," and "Arab nationalism in Palestine." In Arabic literature the guidelines specify that "students know that the heritage of the Arab minority in the State of Israel is part of the heritage of the Arab-Palestinian people."

In the Israeli context, the recognition of Arab collective rights can be found in the status of the Arabic language in Israel's **Law of the Supreme Institute for the Arabic Language** (2007) and Israeli Public Broadcasting Law, 7,5 (2014) and **Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People**, 4,bc (2021) and **Israeli Arabic language Academy Law** (2007). Both refer to the Arabic language as an official language in general and not local Israeli dialects of Arabic, though there are a host of them. The **Sharia Courts** and the **Islamic Studies curriculum** function according to the same Sunni Islam as is practiced in the Arab world.

24 Please pay special attention to WAI educational standards on page 6 -- no. 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11 and 15 (mainly 3 and 15). Article 15 is critical but needs reformulation in the Gazan situation, since what is right is not clear enough for a population raised on hate, revenge, and the celebration of death *("15. Moral Courage: To believe in doing 'what is right' irrespective of any opposition"*). This is reminiscent of Philip Zimbardo's Heroic Imagination Project, which 'designs innovative strategies by combining psychological research, intervention education and social activism to create everyday heroes equipped to solve local and global problems' (Heroic Imagination Project, n.d.).

25 We are thankful to Professor Mohammed S. Dajani Daoudi for this insight.

26 Both Egyptian president Sadat and the UAE planned interfaith prayer centers (at Mount Sinai

and Abu Dhabi) to include a mosque, a church and a synagogue (Winter, 2023, pp. 14, 20). The **Abrahamic Family House** in UAE was officially opened in February 2023, housing the St. Francis of Assisi Church, the Moses Ben Maimon Synagogue and the Imam al-Tayeb Mosque. Abrahamic Family House, https://www.abrahamicfamilyhouse.ae/. (Gambrell, 2021). Two projects initiated by Avi Elqayam prepare the ground for joint prayers. One is the exposition of less-familiar interpretations of *Al-Fātiḥa* so it can be used by Christians and Jews; the other is a trilingual prayer book (Elqayam, 2015; Elqayam, Arbib, Manasra, 2015).

27 The first Islamic *waqf*, as reported by al-Tabari, was donated by a Jewish rabbi in Medina named Mukhayriq, who fought alongside Muhammad and died in the Battle of Uhud (625) (Al-Tabari, 1987, p. 136). Samuel HaNagid (d. 1056) was a preeminent advisor and military general of the Muslim state (*taifa*) of Granada (Wasserstein, 1993). One may also consider as examples of figures sought-after for their knowledge, the Jewish converts into Islam, Ka'b al-Ahbar (d. 652/6) (Schmitz, 2012). In that vein also consider the famous Rashid al-Din Tabib al-Hamadani (d. 1318) the powerful vizier of the Mongol Ikhan Mahmud Ghazan (Brack, 2023, p. 12ff). On the influence of Islamic legal thought on Maimonides, see (Stroumsa, 2009, pp. 65-66).

28 Practical reasons are sometimes presented in curricula to justify good relations. The Azerbaijani curriculum points out armaments procured from Turkey and Israel. Indonesia teaches that the US is a powerful country to reckon with.

29 See for instance on the history of Tahal "Water Planning for Israel," established in 1952 (Jewish Virtual Library, n.d.); on Israeli technology in Africa, see (Ya'ari, 2023).

30 The book can serve as a good background for planners of future curricula.

31 Bulut, 2014; Aprim, 2024; Morris & Ze'evi, 2019; For efforts in balancing claims, see Gunter, 2011; Suny, Göçek & Naimark, 2011.

32 Cheref, 2024; Minority Rights Group, 2023.

33 Israel – Homeland, Society and Civics, Grade 4, *In Our Town and Around It*, Ziva Luria Maimoni, State and State-Religious, Kinneret-Zmora (Permit: 2420), 2011, pp. 240–41.

34 Herzl was a great friend of both Islam and the Ottomans and even ordered an Arabic typewriter to be created as a present to the sultan (Messenger, 2015; Artsy, 2016). At the time, Herzl was considering a "night shelter," as a stopgap for Jewish refugees in East Africa, before the establishment of a permanent homeland (Lewin, 2014, p. 82).

35 While some research exist on the economic role of Arab-Israelis with emphasis on equality or lack thereof in distribution of resources, there is still not an overall assessment of the contribution of Arabs to the emergence and the success of Israel – before and after independence – across the board, from agriculture to building, from media, diplomacy, politics, and the arts to architecture and medicine, law and industry, from cuisine to science, from nature preservation to security and defense. Also, a question to ask would be why no such comprehensive research exists.

36 "The Arab and Muslim world has never come to terms with the existence of Israel, and whenever there is a war – like on October 7th – the prevailing feeling among the masses of the people, as opposed to their dictatorial rulers, is support for the perpetrators of genocide." (Carmon, 2023).