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Israel and Jews in Egyptian Textbooks—A Forward-Looking Perspective

Eldad Pardo and Ofir Winter[1] | February 4, 2024

The education of younger generations can serve as a useful tool for researchers seeking to understand the vision of a country's leadership in the medium and long term. Israel–Egypt relations are a clear case that requires a forward-looking perspective. Although limited in their scope and depth, the two countries have peaceful and stable relations and diverse collaborations; they also carry traumas from the past and deeply rooted conceptions of hostility and suspicion. The question examined in this article is how education in Egypt shapes the connection between the countries and nations: Is Egypt—a powerful neighbor that keeps on getting stronger—a shaky partner in peace that is only maintaining normal relations with Israel for the time being, out of transient pragmatic considerations, or is it a reliable friend that is willing to deepen peaceful relations and normalization with Israel in a controlled and moderate manner, also out of pragmatic concerns? And can we identify educational trends in Egypt that may lead to positive or negative change in the existing nature of relations? An overview of Egyptian textbooks does not provide decisive answers to these questions, but it sketches the educational ethos that will shape the attitudes of future Egyptian generations, leaving room for cautious optimism.

The surprise attack that Hamas carried out on October 7 using weapons some of which were reportedly smuggled from Egypt; the murder of three Israeli tourists by an Egyptian policeman in Alexandria the following day; and the murder of three Israeli soldiers by an Egyptian soldier on the Israel–Egypt border in June 2023 all have raised questions regarding the resilience of peaceful relations between the two countries. One of the claims heard in the Israeli public discourse was that these incidents should not be considered exceptional or coincidental mishaps during 45 years of stable peace; they should rather be seen as expression of ingrained hostility toward Israel that still prevails and is cultivated in the army and in extensive circles of the Egyptian public. The praise that journalists, clerics, and social media activists in Egypt gave to these acts of terrorism and the Egyptian regime's reluctance of openly condemning them could strengthen the impression that there is no broad popular support for peace with Israel in the land of the Nile, and that it is doubtful whether there is any interest in true peace.

Some in Israel claim that the chill in Israel–Egypt relations, which are conducted mainly between the leaderships and armies and not between the peoples, does not only affect their current relations but could also endanger the durability of the peace agreement in the face of crises and turmoil. Occasionally published field intelligence studies that track the buildup of the Egyptian army and the accelerated development of infrastructure in both Sinai and the area of the Suez Canal warn that these changes could enable the Egyptian army to bring large forces to the front line with Israel in a short time. Hence, the concern has been voiced that even if the current regime in Egypt does not want a military conflict with Israel, the Egyptian public's hostility toward Israel, alongside Egypt's force buildup, could spur a future regime, in different circumstances, to consider doing so.

In contrast, Egyptian spokespersons deny that the military buildup contradicts the commitment to peace. They claim that its purpose is to enable Egypt to protect its land and maritime borders and its economic resources, to maintain effective balances of deterrence vis-à-vis countries in the region, and to manage its diplomatic relations from a position of strength. For example, in the Swords of Iron war, Egypt explained its ability to prevent Israel from fulfilling its "plot" to uproot the population of Gaza and expel it into Sinai due to the strength of its army. In addition, the continuing economic constraints affecting Egypt, its investment in development initiatives, and its dependence on relations with Jerusalem and Washington do not appear to encourage Cairo to withdraw from the peace agreement. And finally, Egypt is working hard on strengthening its image as a global bastion of stability, tolerance, and religious moderation. Peace with Israel contributes to its positive branding in the international arena, and it integrates with Egypt's internal national ethos toward which it seeks to inculcate, in part, through its textbooks.

Indeed, the authors of this article, in the framework of the IMPACT-se Institute, conducted a comprehensive study on school curricula in Egypt and reached many findings, some of them encouraging. They found that a significant improvement with respect to Israel and Jews in textbooks for the 1st to 5th grades, which were rewritten as part of a reform implemented by the Egyptian Ministry of Education since 2018. (By 2030, the reform is expected to include the textbooks in all grades from 1st to 12th.) Although these are not the first positive changes made in Egyptian textbooks since the establishment of peace between Israel and Egypt in March 1979, the current wave of changes—whose beginnings were already evident in the previous decade—is exceptional considering that the peace agreement was signed more than four decades ago. Moreover, the ratio between conciliatory and hostile discourse toward Israel and Judaism in the textbooks—

particularly in the new ones—is more balanced than in other institutional platforms, such as the mass media.

The content that appears in the textbooks, upon which the younger generation in Egypt is currently being educated, includes support for peace in general and peace with Israel in particular, and mentions normalization as one aspect of the peace agreement, although without explicitly and concretely encouraging partnerships with Israel. It also refers to cultivating tolerance and coexistence among the members of the monotheistic religions, including Jews; constructing a national identity that focuses on Egypt's unique national interests more than pan-Arab or pan-Islamic circles of identity; and a vision of the future that is directed toward the internal building and development of Egypt in the economic and environmental spheres.

No less important and encouraging is what is absent from the curriculum. There is no preaching for struggle against external enemies and no incitement to hatred or vengeance against past adversaries. Egypt's struggles against Western colonialism and the past wars with Israel are taught as history that does not directly relate to the current relations between the sides. As long as the trend described continues, takes root, and expands, the easier it may be in the future to create an atmosphere that is more conducive to expanding relations of peace and normalization between the two countries.

At the same time, the overall picture is still ambivalent: Israel's name does not appear in maps in the textbooks (except for one), and in some of them—in the context of the ongoing conflict in Palestine—it is still presented as a foreign, aggressive, and occupying entity whose existence lacks historical, political, and moral legitimacy. An especially hostile tone toward Israel was found in the education system of the al-Azhar institution, attended by about 7.5 percent of school students. In addition, there is still a gap between the unequivocal praise for peace with Egypt that appears in Israeli textbooks and the dual messages with respect to Israel and Jews that appear in Egyptian textbooks.

Textbooks as Harbingers of the Future

Contradictory messages and a gap between what exists in curricula, in mass media, and in the declarations of public opinion leaders are not unusual. The basic premise of curriculum researchers is that school textbooks represent underlying trends that in themselves are less intense both in terms of radicalization and in moderation than what exists in the public discourse (except in cases of regime changes). For example, following the October 7 massacre and the subsequent war that broke out, the public discourse in Egypt has been more extreme than what is

presented in the Egyptian textbooks. An example fluctuating in the opposite direction is the appearance in recent years of extensive literature in Egypt criticizing the removal of the Jews and other minorities from Egypt during the period of Gamal Abdel Nasser. This move is now seen as having seriously diminished Egypt's honor and its prosperity, but as detailed below, its discussion has not yet percolated into the textbooks.

We can say that textbooks reflect the prevailing sentiments in the entire national public and certainly the expectations of figures in the political leadership, and changes, even slight ones, in curricula often elicit heated public debate. For example, minor changes in the approach to Israel made in Jordan's textbooks in 2015–2016 provoked an uproar, while changes to Egyptian textbooks were received with relative equanimity. Textbooks are a national project created by different figures in the government and from among the elite, centers of power, and others who are involved, including senior academics, teachers, and parents. As almost everyone sends their children to school, families encounter textbooks over the years, usually repeatedly, and they must reflect broad consensus. Large parts of the learning materials are dictated and not open for debate, and they are learned as absolute truth. This phenomenon is familiar in both authoritarian and in open and democratic states. States usually succeed in instilling a shared, uniform, and clear message in the curricula, even when there are many private schools (such as in the United Arab Emirates or Qatar) or parallel education systems (such as in Turkey and Egypt).

Is it accurate to say that textbooks have lost the influence they once had on the younger generation given the rise of social media and the more limited attention span characteristic of this generation? Paradoxically, it appears that the flood of information, the enormous diversity available, and its confusing fluidity have made the cumulative effect of the curriculum an indispensable ontological anchor. Schools inculcate a consistent message that is being systematically taught for many years, sometimes up to 15 consecutive years. Humans, as Viktor Frankl has taught us, seek meaning and anchoring.

Textbooks should therefore be seen as a unified, accredited, and authorized corpus, constituting many volumes, approaches, authors, and topics, both formative and foundational. Written over the course of many years, this corpus encompasses ancient and modern texts in a wide range of fields and carries social and political messages that remain consistent from year to year. The corpus of textbooks has great authority and repetitiveness, and it inculcates fundamental premises throughout the critical formative years of the students.[2] The corpus of textbooks is reminiscent of the holy scriptures, as it is authoritative and

"canonized"—at least until the next update—and encompasses the range of knowledge starting from the creation of the world, through poetry, history, and law to leaders and heroes, up to personal hygiene and respecting others. Even if textbooks are not holy scriptures themselves, they are the filter through which the younger generation receives the main religious lessons, as well as the key civil, national, and social messages.

Thus, textbooks may be seen as a "sacred and living" corpus that—along with the constitution, national holidays, primordial and civic identity, culture and political culture, anthem and flag—reflect the national ethos and guide the behavior of the nation. Unlike holy scriptures, textbooks are based—ostensibly at least—on principles of modern "rationalist" education, and they undergo changes as social values shift, although usually slowly. Hence, a systematic analysis of textbooks allows us to track trends and reforms. As a living genre, textbooks—unlike holy scriptures and the constitution—do not need dynamic interpretation and filtering; they themselves change according to pedagogical innovations, the public discourse, the dictates of the regime, as well as external reflections and pressures, a phenomenon that has been growing in recent years.

Sometimes changes in curricula precede political events, and sometimes they reflect them. This phenomenon is known and evident in studies of other cultural fields as being predictive, such as literature and poetry,[3] art,[4] and cinema.[5] For example, a study on feature films in Iran on the eve of the Islamic Revolution and a series of comparative studies on literature found that clear turning points occurred about seven years before a given historical milestone (such as a revolution or war). A passage written by the Israeli poet Haim Gouri following his 1977 meeting with the Egyptian intellectual Dr. Husayn Fawzi is familiar to military intelligence veterans:

The Yom Kippur War . . . was an existential war, and I participated in it as an education officer in an armored division in Sinai. I was then 50 years old. In December 1977 I visited Egypt for the first time in my life. I came with a delegation of Israeli journalists, who traveled to Cairo after [Egyptian President] Sadat's visit to Jerusalem. I met a well-known Egyptian intellectual there, Dr. Husayn Fawzi. We talked about the Israel–Egypt wars. He said that the Egyptian attack on Israel in May 1948 was a historic crime. Afterward he added a sentence that I won't forget: "In the Six-Day War you humiliated us, our wives were ashamed of us, our sons despised us. If the Israeli intelligence had read Egyptian poetry written after 1967—it would have known that October 1973 was inevitable. Every good intelligence officer needs to read poetry."[6]

Still, to what extent can strategic assessment rely on a song, textbook, or feature film? We propose adopting an intermediate approach of assuming that textbooks represent the desired or imagined future, the intention and the shared worldview, and, in fact, the epistemological system through which a society sees reality. The corpus of textbooks, due to its authoritativeness, its scope, and the long and formative years during which we are exposed to it as students, is extremely important in creating individual "ontological security," a sense of continuity and the secure and protected existence of each person in society. Studies have shown that each society or nation also needs collective ontological security, reflecting a sense of continuity, and existence.[7] As mentioned above, despite the range of competing sources of knowledge and the frenzy of the constantly changing world in which we live—and perhaps even because of it—the corpus of textbooks, which is authoritative and instilled during the formative years, has decisive influence over social and individual self-awareness. Thus, we must recognize textbooks as a basis for understanding the future in the medium and long term.

We recommend analyzing curricula and taking them into account in strategic assessments. The proposed method is called Curriculum-Informed Strategic Analysis (CISA). Ideally, as we are trying to do here, the goal is for strategic evaluators and regional experts to join forces with curriculum researchers, to integrate the broad perspective with the "sacred and living" corpus of textbooks.

Reliance on curricula requires awareness of methodological pitfalls. Challenges include the question of how books are received,[8] as well as gaps between education policy and its actual implementation.[9] In addition, other educational activities in schools or social frameworks such as youth movements, school websites, and Facebook pages, sometimes convey more extreme messages than textbooks.[10]

The study of curricula as a tool for strategic assessment has a number of advantages. The fact that curricula are considered an authoritative and mandatory national cultural enterprise, with similar structures across most countries and societies, enables researchers to specialize and become experts. Curricula offer significant comparative capability, highlighting the potential for understanding and intuition. Curricula also reveal various patterns of thinking, unique approaches to social openness, and ways of coping with internal conflicts and undercurrents. Curricula can assist in estimating the chances for economic prosperity and internal growth, as well as a society's willingness to accommodate processes of change and engage in profound arguments without collapsing or

resorting to violence. A careful reading of textbooks can even reveal mistaken conceptions within the country being studied, as well as among those studying it.

Another advantage is that familiarity with the curriculum significantly enhances the capability of dialogue and open-mindedness within the research community. In other words, as discussed in this article, curricula enables us to "walk hand in hand" with Egypt's children from 1st grade together until the matriculation exams. If we assume that understanding the Egyptian military buildup plan helps us develop military capabilities that will enable us to cope with it, familiarity with curricula enables dialogue—heart-to-heart—and dreaming together with the child inside each Egyptian citizen.

In conclusion, a crucial lesson that we have learned in recent decades pertains to the concept of the "other." Studies on curricula often focus on describing the "other" or the ultimate adversary while raising discussions of peace, tolerance, incitement, demonization, and delegitimization.[11] While it is true that constructing the "other," whether negative or positive, is necessary for defining our identity, delineating our collective group, and identifying outsiders,[12] for the purpose of a strategic assessment, excessively focusing on the "other," particularly through a rhetoric of denouncing the them, can lead to methodological failure.[13] It is important to recognize that in addition to the "other," there is also the "self." Each student, representing the "self," is also educated to regulate their behavior according to the general will or the "national vision."

This leads to the conclusion that while studying a curriculum we must look at the "others" who are external to the national group through the perspective of the overall national vision presented by the textbooks. We should examine whether those "others" help fulfill a state's national vision or threaten it. Hence, for example, the presence of Israel—as is explicitly stated in Iranian textbooks—thwarts the vision of the Islamic Republic, of unifying the region into a single revolutionary Islamic state that controls the sea routes and natural resources. Another adversarial vision toward Israel is found in Palestinian textbooks.[14] In contrast, the current version of the Egyptian-pharaonic national vision is only marginally affected by the existence of Israel. As we will see below, according to Egyptian textbooks, the country can fulfill its vision and attain its collective ontological security with or without Israel.

Positive Trends: Education for Peace and Glimmers of Openness

The State of Israel has great interest in the way that the younger generation in Egypt is educated to perceive it, as Egypt is its largest, strongest, and most populated neighbor, and the first Arab country to sign a peace agreement with it.

As already noted, this article does not purport to confirm or deny possible future scenarios based on the content that the younger generation in Egypt is exposed to in textbooks. At the same time, it is possible and desirable to examine, based on the content currently discussed in Egyptian schools, how the heads of the education system—segments of the Egyptian public—are interested in shaping Egypt's national narrative and vision. The picture that emerges from the curricula leaves room for cautious optimism in several aspects:

A. Preaching peace as a general value:

Many textbooks preach "peace" as an Egyptian national ethos that originates from the pharaonic culture and as a religious Islamic value that is supported by Qur'anic verses and by the prophetic tradition. Students who memorize the books will repeatedly absorb the message that their country carries the banner of peace. For example, students in the 7th grade learn that Ramesses II made "the first peace agreement in history" with the Hittites after his victory in the Battle of Kadesh and from a position of military strength.[15] Even though the textbooks do not explicitly draw an analogy between past precedents and current agreements, as we will see below, the narrative of achieving peace from a position of strength recurs in the context of Egyptian–Israeli relations.

Some of the messages of peace in the textbooks are directed inward toward Egyptian society, while some are intended for the region and the world. Most of these messages are general, although some relate specifically to various cultures and races. For example, in a lesson on "the dignity of the other," students in 4th grade learn that peace, tolerance, and refraining from violence are the right way to resolve conflicts and prevent violence.[16] In Arabic language classes, students in the 7th grade learn that Egypt aspires to spread peace and justice in its region to ensure stability, prosperity, and economic development, and to divert funds from arms races to purposes such as environmental cooperation.[17] Similarly, students in the 10th grade learn that peace is essential for nation-building and are encouraged to promote "a culture of peace."[18]

B. Education for peace with Israel:

Students learn about the peace agreement with Israel (*mu'ahadat al-salam*)[19] in several grades. The peace agreement is presented as a welcome historical development that was attained following Egypt's achievements in the 1973 war and that implicitly fits into the country's general vision of peace and its desire to improve its future. For example, students in 6th, 9th, and 12th grades learn in history classes about President Sadat's peace initiative and its aims, including "ending the state of war," "preventing the horror of war for future generations,"

and "improving the lives of Egyptians." Among the benefits mentioned that peace with Israel has provided Egypt include returning the Sinai Peninsula, redirecting energy toward economic development, strengthening stability, encouraging Arab and foreign capital investment, expanding tourism, and advancing national projects. A photograph in the 9th grade history textbooks visualizes the signing ceremony of the peace agreement at the White House in 1979 with the participation of Sadat, Menachem Begin, and Jimmy Carter. The textbooks even acknowledge that both the Egyptian and Israeli leaders were given equal credit for the Nobel Peace Prize that they received in recognition of their efforts for peace in the region.[20]

C. Islamic and Christian tolerance toward Jews and Judaism:

In Egyptian textbooks, the Jewish religion is generally discussed separately, without explicitly connecting it to the "Jewish state," creating ambiguity and room for interpretation regarding the concrete political significance of the content relating to relations with Israel. In most cases, the textbooks depict Jews and Judaism with tolerance and respect, as the negative and antisemitic content, which until recently had been widespread in the textbooks, has been removed from the revised curricula for 1st to 5th grades. For example, the charter that was made at the beginning of Islam between Muhammad and the tribes that lived in Medina (some of them Jewish) is presented as a model of coexistence between Muslims and members of other religions, relevant even in modern times. In classes on Islam, students in the 5th grade learn that the prophet Muhammad concluded the Constitution of Medina with the Jews of the city in order to establish a shared life of peace, compassion, justice, and cooperation. In addition, the textbooks discuss the common denominators between Islam and Judaism, including the Muslims' recognition of the Torah and of the prophetic mission of Moses, and the permission given to Muslims in Qur'anic verses to eat kosher Jewish food and to marry Jewish women.[21]

An even wider opening for mutual recognition between the Jewish and Egyptian nations is present in the religion textbooks created for the Coptic Christian minority, who comprise about 10 percent of the total population. These textbooks, which Coptic students study in separate classes, contain expressions that implicitly accept the historic connection of Jews to the Land of Israel. Alongside negative descriptions of the involvement of the Jews in the persecution and crucifixion of Jesus, the 7th grade textbook refers to the Roman province of Judea at the time of Christianity's beginnings as "the land of Judea" or "the land of Judaism" (*bilād al-yahūdīyya*).[22] Educational messages in this spirit could pave the way for a more open and positive approach toward Israel among the Coptic

minority in Egypt compared to the Muslim majority. In addition, the rise in Egyptian Coptic pilgrimages to Jerusalem increases the opportunity for peace with this segment of the population.

D. An "Egypt first" orientation:

The construction of Egypt's national identity is widely discussed in the textbooks, and it could also indirectly positively affect students' attitudes toward relations between Israel and Egypt. Essentially, Egypt does not define the Egyptian "self" vis-à-vis a negative external "other"—Western, Israeli, or Islamist—but rather extols political, military, economic, social, and environmental interests that are related to the country's internal development. While it educates the younger generation to see itself as part of the Arab and Islamic world and recalls the historic struggles that Egypt waged against external occupiers, at the center of its "overall national vision" is the particular national identity that draws inspiration from the pharaonic heritage and loyalty to the homeland. This worldview could make it easier for future generations of Egyptians to examine relations with Israel according to the unique national objectives of Egypt and not only—or mainly—through the prism of the Palestine problem or the Zionist–Arab and Jewish–Islamic conflicts.[23]

E. *Openings for expanding normalization:*

In accordance with the traditional "cold" peace between Israel and Egypt, the textbooks do not encourage concrete expressions of normalization between the two countries. Yet, the social studies book for the 9th grade does state that the wording of the Israeli–Egyptian peace agreement determines the establishment of "normal relations" or "friendly relations" between the countries in the political, economic, and cultural spheres (the expression establishing "friendly relations" also appears in the context of the peace treaty between pharaonic Egypt and the Hittite state).[24] However, in the same textbook, the Qualified Industrial Zone (QIZ) agreement that Israel, Egypt, and the United States signed in 2004 presents it as an Egyptian–American agreement, without mentioning the Israeli side in the agreement.[25]

At the same time, in both the agenda and the Egyptian-pharaonic national vision conveyed to the students in the textbooks, we can find an invitation—or at least a potential opening—to expand normalization with Israel in the future. For example, students in all age groups learn about the importance of economic and environmental issues to Egypt's future, such as preventing pollution of the sea and land, producing green energy, and conserving water, in which coordination and the exchange of knowledge with a technologically developed neighbor country such as Israel would be beneficial and even indispensable.[26]

Mixed Messages: Hostility, Denial and Non-Recognition

In addition to educational content that could directly or indirectly encourage strengthening the peace with Israel, the textbooks contain contradictory messages that could harm the peace agreement with Israel, increase the internal tensions burdening it, and perpetuate the ambivalent and even reluctant attitude toward peace with Israel among the Egyptian public. Below are the main ones:

A. Delegitimization of the historic right of Israel in its current borders:

The textbooks present Israel as an entity supported by Western colonialist forces and as having behaved aggressively toward Egypt, the Arabs, and the Palestinians since its establishment and particularly during the 1956 and 1967 wars. Denying the Jewish right to self-determination in the Land of Israel contributes to the notion that the State of Israel is historically and morally illegitimate. For example, in the geography textbooks, students in the 12th grade learn that the demand for a Jewish state in the Land of Israel is considered "racist" and seemingly accompanied by discriminatory practices toward the Arab minority with the purpose of forcing its members to emigrate.[27]

The non-recognition of Israel as a legitimate state entity is also reflected in maps that appear in geography, history, Arabic language, and other textbooks, in which Israel's name does not appear (except in an English textbook, which recently aroused a public uproar). The denial of Israel as a geographic reality—if only as an existing fact—is expressed by defining all of the land within the British mandate borders as "Palestine," "occupied Palestine," or "the occupied territories" at worst, and by not mentioning the name of the country—Israel or Palestine—at best. In the revised books for the 1st to 5th grades, the "improved" version is used in which the territory of the Land of Israel is left nameless. In contrast, in the 8th grade geography textbook, Israel is described as part of the "Arab homeland" and East Jerusalem and the Gulf of Eilat are named as part of Palestine.[28]

The textbooks clearly show that the question of Israel's legitimacy within its current borders is still subject to settling the Israeli–Palestinian conflict according to those in charge of education in Egypt. In Egyptian textbooks, peace with Israel is taught in direct relation to the Palestinian problem and Egypt's adherence to the view that it must be resolved. The books claim that Egyptian–Israeli peace laid the foundations for fulfilling Palestinian rights, and that it is based on Resolution 242 which demands—according to the traditional Arab interpretation—Israel's withdrawal from all of the territories conquered in the 1967 war.[29] According to

this educational approach, the continuing impasse in the Israeli–Palestinian peace process strengthens the image of the Israeli–Egypt peace agreement and its fruits as defective, and it casts a heavy shadow on Israel's legitimacy, as long as permanent borders have not been settled with its Palestinian neighbors.

B. Ignoring Egyptian Jewish heritage

Another weak point in the curricula is the failure to mention the contribution of Egyptian Jews to the multicultural heritage of the land of the Nile. On the contrary, when 10th grade students are exposed to the modern Jews of Alexandria—a large and magnificent community that numbered 40,000 members at its peak (about half of the total population of the Jewish community of Egypt on the eve of the establishment of the State of Israel)—they are depicted in a stereotypical antisemitic manner as people who engaged in trade, loans with interest, and banking. In the same spirit, when the textbooks describe the social classes in Egypt during the Ptolemaic dynasty (332 to 30 BCE), they state that the Macedonians and Greeks were the rulers, the Jews a lower class, and the "Egyptians" at the bottom of the social pyramid. This is also the case during the Roman period, in which the Romans ruled, and underneath them were two groups of Greeks, then the Jews and the "Egyptians" beneath them.[30] Narratives that almost entirely ignore the ancient and modern Jewish aspect of the Egyptian past and imply a rejection of foreign foundations constitute a barrier to building a present and a future of openness, pluralism, economic cooperation, and cross-fertilization between Israel and Egypt.

Furthermore, the textbooks reveal a gap between political moves and the educational discourse. In recent years, the government of Egypt has renovated synagogues, chiefly the Eliyahu Hanavi Synagogue in Alexandria and the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo. The study found that these actions have not yet been discussed in the textbooks. The government has also led initiatives to revive Egypt's cosmopolitan Mediterranean heritage, including hosting Greeks and Cypriots whose origins are in Alexandria and have reconnected with their Egyptian roots. This event has not yet been included in the textbooks. While Israel and Egypt are pursuing energy cooperation in the eastern Mediterranean, they have not yet advanced educational, cultural, religious, or historical interactions across their shared part of the sea. Limiting Egypt's openness to certain kinds of foreigners and not to others could undermine the synergy needed for Egypt, Israel, and the region.

C. The education system of the Al-Azhar institution

While the Christian religious studies textbooks expose students from the Coptic minority in Egypt to messages of recognizing the historic Jewish connection to the region, the textbooks used by the schools of the Al-Azhar institution, attended by about 1.8 million students and constituting about 7.5 percent of students in Egypt, present an opposite picture. Alongside fighting against the radical conceptions of the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi-Jihadist organizations in internal Egyptian contexts, these textbooks adopt a hostile discourse toward Israel that usually characterizes the radical Islamist ideologies that they oppose: They do not mention Israel by name but rather call it "the Zionist entity"; they describe Jerusalem as an Arab and Islamic city, which, along with its holy places, has no proven historical connection to Judaism; the textbooks call on all Muslims to struggle for the liberation of Jerusalem; and they reject normalization with Israel.[31] Moreover, these textbooks do not mention the Israeli–Egyptian peace agreement at all, despite the religious sanction given to it during Sadat's presidency by the sages of al-Azhar.[32]

Conclusion and Recommendations

For four and a half decades, Israel and Egypt have existed in a state of neither war nor full normalization. Although the connections between the sides are close in certain spheres, at the same time, there is a prevailing conception in Egypt that rejects rapprochement with Israel. Suspicion also exists in certain circles in Israel; it is sufficient to look at the public debate that broke out surrounding the question of Israel's approval for the sale of German submarines to Egypt.

How should we read the findings of the study on the Egyptian curriculum in comparison, for example, with field intelligence conclusions that track Egyptian military buildup and warn of the threats that it poses to Israel? Should we turn our attention toward the military buildup; the practicing of war scenarios against Israel; the institutional constraints on independent expressions of peace, normalization, and on free movement between the countries; the continuing hostility in the media; and the limited cooperation between businesspeople and academia from the two countries despite the enormous, shared challenges? Or perhaps, on the contrary, this is a curriculum that is quietly undergoing a gradual positive reform, paving the way for possible change in the historic relationship between the countries and the nations, and it is forward-looking? Are the gradual changes in Egyptian curricula cracking the glass ceiling that has been preventing rapprochement between the nations?

A review of Egyptian textbooks does not provide decisive answers to these questions. However, the emerging trend in these textbooks of tolerance,

openness, a connection to ancient Egyptian roots and of a harmonious, aesthetic society that is aware of a person's role in protecting a balanced natural and political environment is encouraging (the concept of "Maat").[33] A review of the question of the "other," as the main adversary, in contrast with the national vision of Arab-Pharaonic-Islamic Egypt, reveals that the hostility to Israel lies in the harm that Israel ostensibly caused to Egypt. In other words, the Israeli "other" harmed Egypt's ability in the past to carry out what it needed to do to fulfill its national vision.[34] The curriculum reflects a sense that Israel as the "other" has withdrawn from its bad ways, and that there is a peace agreement between the countries that should be cultivated and maintained. However, Israel still remains "suspect," due to the threat that it is capable of posing to Egypt but mostly given the unresolved conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

The question of openness to the Israeli Jewish "other" therefore remains open. The curriculum embraces the Coptic Christians[35] and teaches about minorities in Egypt's history, but the learning is extremely limited, and the minorities (Greeks, Jews) are presented as foreigners who unjustly received excessive rights compared to the native Egyptians. It is difficult to believe that Egypt will succeed in attaining economic prosperity and growth without opening its doors to immigrants and foreigners; it is also hard to fathom that a "warm" peace with Israel and Jews is possible without Egypt holding itself accountable for the fate of those minorities, which it recklessly expelled in the 1950s.

In the 1920s and 1930s Egypt was considered—relative to that time—a liberal and anti-fascist state.[36] In the 1940s it became a prosperous society and the wealthiest in the Middle East. Scholars attributed Egypt's liberation from the yoke of British imperialism to its economic and social strength. [37]In the textbooks we did not find any clear indication that Egypt is actively seeking to appeal to individuals—intellectual, productive, and dynamic—from outside of Egypt as has occurred in the Gulf countries for example. The curriculum does not enable honest and true self-criticism of processes in the country's history, although we did find relatively harsh criticism of the rigid and oppressive nature of the Mubarak regime; however, an open discussion of historical and ideological issues is almost completely absent.

Initial signs of openness toward foreigners and a reconsideration of minorities that had been forced to leave Egypt can be found outside of the curriculum, such as in the realm of Egyptian literature.[38] Should these ideas percolate into the textbooks, they could augur an era of a "warm" peace, in the spirit of the Abraham Accords, in Israel–Egypt relations too; at this stage, however, there are no such findings. In terms of the Egyptian national vision, Israel is not needed for its

fulfillment, nor does it particularly interfere with it. While the books teach about peace with Israel and its importance, they do not reveal any empathy for the Zionist narrative, understanding of the Israeli mentality, or expressions of affection toward Israelis.

Since Egypt had wars in the past against foreign forces, including Israel, and given that the army proved itself as the "protector of the nation" in times of crisis and revolution, Egyptian students are expected to understand the centrality of the army and its defense. The army's significance in Egypt's history and its present could also partly explain the glorifying of achievements of past wars and the findings of the field intelligence studies, according to which the Egyptian army has not stopped preparing for Israel as a main threat scenario.

These combined insights reveal that there is room for cautious optimism and much work to be done in order to translate the positive trends in the textbooks into better relations between the countries and nations in the future. However, the cold peace between Israel and Egypt—and evident in several places in the textbooks—is burdened by the inherent dissonance between historical struggles and shared historical and religious convergences, between bloody wars and a pioneering but publicly controversial peace agreement, and between scars of the past and strategic cooperation in the present. Israel and Egypt share a border, adjacent maritime regions, and a similar geographic environment, but they are also parted by an enormous desert, which separates the two populations and also brings them together.

How is it possible to reduce the dissonance reflected in the Egyptian curricula?

First, it is necessary to construct and cultivate new educational narratives about the past, which will help create fresh perspectives on the present and future. Narratives along these lines stand on stable historical foundations: The nations in Egypt and in Israel are descendants of two ancient civilizations that have influenced one another for millennia. For long periods, sometimes centuries in a row, the lands of Israel and Egypt were united under the same sovereignty. Noteworthy points of encounter between the communities includes Egypt's pre-biblical and biblical heritage, the Jewish colony on the Elephantine Island next to Aswan, the Jewish community in Hellenistic Alexandria, the community of Fustat (ancient Cairo), the activity of Maimonides and his son in Ayyubid Egypt, and during Egypt's renewal in the 16th century and in modern times. The final encounter between the communities took place in cosmopolitan Egypt of the early 20th century, and it included fruitful relations between the residents of Egypt and the local Jewish community as well as with the Jewish community in the Land of

Israel, in parallel to the development of nationalist and Islamist foundations that were detrimental to these relations.

Second, Israel should increase its effort to improve its image in Egypt. While Egyptian textbooks likely will continue to depict Israel as a past enemy, at least in the short term, Israel can take action to change its image and to strengthen its standing as a beneficial and constructive partner for fulfilling Egypt's national vision in the short, medium, and long term. Fruitful cooperation between the two countries is possible in the spheres of military and security, economy and technology, environment and water, energy and agriculture, religion and archaeology, and culture and tourism. The educational discourse that should resonate among those who completed the Egyptian curricula can draw inspiration from the past and offer new horizons of connection and cooperation in the future.

Where are we headed? The two countries are taking part in a broad regional process that can be called "the Abrahamic era." It began with the Israeli–Egyptian peace process and continued with a series of regional upheavals, including the eruption of Shite and Sunni radicalism, the strengthening of Turkey and Iran, the Arab Spring revolutions, the Abraham Accords, and the blossoming of visions of peace, prosperity, and national and regional cooperation. As the process is regional, it is facing attempts by regional agents of rejection to hinder and thwart it (such as Hamas's attack on October 7); but it should also be seen as a series of internal and bilateral developments, each of which requires special and independent thinking.

The coming years will be decisive in shaping the Egyptian–Israeli relationship given the transformations described. Overcoming the tensions that have developed between Cairo and Jerusalem as a result of the Swords of Iron war and fulfilling the positive potential inherent in peaceful relations requires a systematic effort to advance political, cultural, and educational dialogue that is as deep and broad as possible between the two countries, and no less important—between the two societies.

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[1] About the writers: Dr. Eldad Pardo is the research director at IMPACT-se, an expert on politics and culture in Iran and in the Middle East; Dr. Ofir Winter is a senior research fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies at Tel Aviv University. In the framework of IMPACT-se, the two published a study in March 2023 on Egypt's textbooks that Dr. Winter edited and to which Dr. Pardo contributed an introduction.

[2] Elie Podeh and Samira Alayan, eds., *Multiple Alterities: Views of Others in Textbooks of the Middle East* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 1–4.

[3] Jürgen Wertheimer, *Sorry Cassandra! Warum wir unbelehrbar sind* [Sorry Cassandra! Why we are unable to learn] (Tübingen: Konkursbuch, 2021). See Jürgen Wertheimer, "The Cassandra Project – Goals and Perspectives" for a methodological summary in English; Philip Oltermann, "'At First I Thought, This Is Crazy': The Real-Life Plan to Use Novels to Predict the Next War," *The Guardian*, June 26, 2012.

[4] See, for example, the paintings of Chaïm Soutine (1893–1943) on the eve of the Holocaust. Our thanks to Prof. Avigdor Posèq.

[5] Eldad J. Pardo, *It's All in the Movies: Feature Films and the Islamic Revolution in Iran, 1953–1978* (PhD diss., UCLA, 1999); Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (1947; repr., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).
[6] Ron Kitrey and Effi Meltzer, eds., "Excerpt from an Interview of Gouri in September 2006," *Mabat-Malam* 80 (2018): 66 [in Hebrew].
[7] Jennifer Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma," *European Journal of International Relations* 12 no. 3 (2006): 342. For more on the issue of security, substantial and ontological, in international relations theory, see Tomer Rival, "Why Do States Cooperate in International Relations: Political Realism, Neoliberalism and Constructivism," *Imago*, November 4, 2012 [in Hebrew].
[8] Ways to address such questions include field studies, checking mandatory material for matriculation exams, guidebooks for teachers, media interviews, social networks, school websites, and public opinion surveys.
[9] Strategic cooperation can be camouflaged for decades. See Elie Podeh, *From Mistress to Common-Law Partner: Israel's Secret Relations with States and Minorities in the Middle East, 1948–2020* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2022) [in Hebrew].
[10] See state religious education in Israel. Education on tolerance, democracy, and peace in civics and history textbooks do not always reveal the messianic worldview of Israel as "the first flowering of our redemption." See Roy Weintraub, "The Teaching of History in State-Religious Education at the Beginning of Israel's Eighth Decade: One Story? Other Stories!," *Iyunim* 3 (2020): 187, 219 [in Hebrew]. For an expanded discussion, see Eldad J. Pardo, "Arabs and Palestinians in Israeli Textbooks 2022–23," (IMPACT-se, 2022), especially the introduction and p. 10. The question of the withdrawal from Gush Katif (according to testimonies) and anti-Mizrachi messages, were expressed mainly in activities within the school building. Alongside the curriculum, incitement is common in the Palestinian Authority (which is supervised by the Europeans), and under Hamas in the Gaza Strip and the Houthis in Yemen (who radicalize messages in similar materials). About Hamas's curriculum, see IMPACT-se Staff, "Al-Fateh – The Hamas Web Magazine for Children: Indoctrination to Jihad, Annihilation and Self-Destruction," (IMPACT-se, 2009); about the curriculum in Yemen, see Itam Shalev, "Review of Houthi Educational Materials in Yemen 2015–19," (IMPACT-se, 2021).
[11] Podeh and Alayan, *Multiple Alterities,* 4–9. On the danger of delegitimization, see Daniel Bar-Tal and Phillip L. Hammack, "Conflict, Delegitimization and Violence," in *The Oxford Handbook of Intergroup Conflict*, ed. L. R. Tropp (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 29–52.
[12] Katherine Verdery, "Whither 'Nation' and 'Nationalism," *Daedalus* 122, no. 3 (Summer, 1993): 43. Education is sometimes seen as a quasi-mystic aspiration to unify concepts, such as in the Israeli Ministry of Education's The Other Is Me program.
[13] See, for example, the discussion of the Haredi curriculum in Sami Adwan, Daniel Bar-Tal, and Bruce Wexler, "'Victims of Our Own Narratives?' Portrayal of the Other in Israeli and Palestinian School Books," (Study Report), February 4, 2013. For a different analysis, see Eldad J. Pardo and Tehila Gamliel, "Haredi Textbooks in Israel: Reinforcing the Barricades," (IMPACT-se, 2017).
[14] In the curriculum of the Palestinian Authority, one can identify a national vision that includes the "right of return," the establishment of "historic Palestine," and the encouragement of a gradual, full-scale war that will restore the land's honor, "justice," and "natural order." See Eldad J. Pardo, "The New Palestinian Curriculum: 2018–19 Update–Grades 1–12," (IMPACT-se, 2018). An attempt to bridge the Palestinian and Israeli national visions can be found, for example, in the educational methodology of Mohammed Dajani Daoudi, head of the Wasatia Institute in Jerusalem. See his "Wasatia Education: Exploring the Palestinian Curriculum" (Wasatia Academic Instiutte and IMPACT-se, 2019).
[15] *Social Studies: Natural Phenomena and Egyptian Civilization*, grade 7, vol. 1, 2022–2023, p. 58.
[16] *Values and Respect for the Other*, grade 4, vol. 2, 2022–2023, p. 137.
[17] *Arabic Language*, grade 7, vol. 2, 2022–2023, p. 21.
[18] *Arabic Language*, grade 10, vol. 1, 2019–2020, p. 27.
[19] This is the official name of the agreement, but the choice of *mu'āhada* (contract) instead of *ittifāq* or *ittifāqīya* (agreement) is not obvious. According to scholar of Islam and Arabic literature Dr. Khalid Abu Ras, the word *mu'āhada* has a meaning of taking responsibility and commitment, while *ittifāq* and *ittifāqīya* mean reaching understanding or agreement on an issue. Thus, *mu'āhada* carries a much broader and greater understanding of the agreement.
[20] *Social Studies: Egypt—Its Environment and Modern History*, grade 6, vol. 2, 2022–2023, p. 53; *Social Studies: World Geography and the Modern History of Egypt*, grade 9, vol. 2, 2022–2023, pp. 41, 68–70; *Egypt and Modern Arab History*, 1grade 12, 2022–2023, pp. 137–139.
[21] *Islamic Religious Education*, grade 5, vol. 1, 2022–2023, pp. 71–76.
[22] *Christian Religious Education*, grade 7, 2022–2023, p. 47. The name "*Yahūdīya*" appears in the Coptic translation to Arabic of the New Testament (in the King James Version, the land of Israel is called Jewry) and it corresponds to the province of Judea (Judaea). "Yahūda" in Arabic corresponds to the tribe and the kingdom of Judah.
[23] See, for example, *Arabic Language*, grade 2, vol. 2, 2022–2023, pp. 12, 43.
[24] *Social Studies: World Geography and the Modern History of Egypt*, grade 9, vol. 2, 2022–2023, pp. 68–69.
[25] *Social Studies: World Geography and the Modern History of Egypt*, grade 9, vol. 2, 2022–2023, pp. 30, 34, 38, 42, 47.
[26] See, for example, *Social Studies: My Homeland Egypt, Land and Civilization*, grade 5, vol. 1, 2022–2023, pp. 34, 36–37, 53, 55.

[27] *Political Geography*, grade 12, 2022–2023, p. 77.
[28] See, for example, *Social Studies: Our Arab Homeland—Geographical Phenomena and Islamic Civilization*, grade 8, vol. 1, 2022–2023, pp. 4, 6, 9.
[29] For example: *Egypt and Modern Arab History,* grade 12, 2022–2023, pp. 137-139.
[30] *Egyptian Civilization and the Ancient World*, grade 10, 2022–2023, pp. 101, 116–117.
[31] See, for example: *Arabic Language*, grade 8, vol. 1, 2021–2022, p. 96; *Arabic Language*, grade 9, vol. 1, 2021–2022, p. 15; *Arabic Language*, grade 9, vol. 2, 2021–2022, p. 21; *Reading and Writing*, grade 11, 2021–2022, pp. 81, 86.
[32] Yitzhak Reiter, *War, Peace & International Relations in Islam: Muslim Scholars on Peace Accords with Israel* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 2008), pp. 87–88 [in Hebrew]
[33] Jan Assmann, *Maât, l'Egypte pharaonique et l'idée de justice sociale* [Maat, Pharaonic Egypt and the idea of social justice] (Paris: Juilliard, 1989); Eldad Pardo, "The Taba Conflict: Ancient Egyptian Patterns During the Mubarak Era," (master's thesis, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1993).
[34] Or to carry out the command of the "great other," see the discussion in note 11.
[35] The following slogan even appears in one of the textbooks: "The word 'Copts' is applied to all Egyptians" (*al-Aqbāṭ kalima tuṭlaq 'ala al-Miṣrīyyīn jamī'an*). See *Egyptian Civilization and the Ancient World*, grade 10, 2022–2023, p. 118.
[36] Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship Versus Democracy in the 1930s* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009). One way or another, this worldview also projected positively on its relations with the Jewish community in pre-state Israel.
[37] Robert Vitalis, *When Capitalists Collide: Business Conflict and the End of Empire in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
[38] On literature as forward-looking, see the Cassandra Project, note 2.