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Policies, Politics, and Ideology

Arabo e didattica dell'arabo:
politiche, politica e ideologia

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Religion, Ideology, and Nation-building in Jordanian Textbooks and Curricula for the Teaching of Arabic Language

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ABSTRACT

This article looks at Jordan as a case study to investigate how the link between the national and Islamic identity is constructed through textbooks and curricula for the teaching of Arabic language. The first section of the article introduces the reader to the relevance of Arabic language in historical discourses on Islam, Islamism and Arabic nationalism. Then, the article looks at the specific case of Jordan, providing an historical overview on how nationalism, religion, and religious pluralism played a part in Jordanian educational and political strategies. The following section specifically focuses on the use of the Arabic language in the Islamic and national perspectives, providing a diachronic comparison between the 2013 Arabic Language Curriculum and the 2019 General Frame for Jordanian Curricula, integrated by references to textbook content materials. The article identifies pragmatic needs behind the highlighted teaching policies and contextualizes the analyses in the broader Jordanian historical and political frameworks, pointing at the relevance of the Arabic language for the construction of identities in the contemporary Middle East and at its enduring politicization. Comparison between the 2013 and the 2019 documents shows relevant changes between past and present formulations, namely in the reduced emphasis on the link between language and religion.

Keywords: Arabic language; education; Jordan; nationalism; religion.

1. INTRODUCTION

The years between 1916 and 1918 are known in the history textbooks of the Middle East as the years of *al-Tawra al-'Arabiyya*, the military

uprising of Arab forces in the region against the Ottoman Empire. The revolt, sparked by an agreement between al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī al-Hāshimī (the Hashemite Sharif of Mecca) and the British government, aimed at the creation of a single unified and independent Arab state recognized by the British and stretching from Aleppo to Aden. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire the territory was instead partitioned into British and French mandate territories. Nonetheless, the agreement laid the foundations for the establishment of the Hashemites leadership in several lands of the region. The colonial partition divided the territory into new nation-states that were shaped according to geo-political interests rather than naturally emerging from local demands. As a result, the new monarchies, and republics in the post-colonial periods, including the Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan (officially renamed in 1949 as Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan), had to develop “discursive practices” of identity construction to define or promote legitimacy and national identities (Rajjal 2014). These discursive practices had to provide convincing narratives to connect the people to the lands bounded by the lines on the map and used education as the main ideological battlefield. Indeed, “history and historians have been recruited, both wittingly and unwittingly, into national projects all over the world, to delineate and simultaneously legitimate, the existence of new nation-states” (Anderson 2002, 5). If that was true in the case of history and historians, it is important to note that these processes of identity construction encompassed all educational subjects. In this framework, the teaching of the Arabic language had definitely an important role. In fact, Arabic language was not only ancillary to Islam but also constituted the medium of a cultural-national revival in Arabic speaking countries since the 19th century (Chejne 1965, 447).

This article looks at Jordan as a case study to investigate how the link between the national and Islamic identity is constructed through textbooks and curricula for the teaching of Arabic. The first section of the article introduces the reader to the relevance of Arabic language in historical discourses on Islam, Islamism and Arabic nationalism. Then, the article looks at the specific case of Jordan, providing a historical overview on how nationalism, religion, and religious pluralism played a part in Jordanian educational and political strategies. The following section specifically focuses on the use of Arabic language in the Islamic and national perspectives, providing a diachronic comparison between the 2013 Arabic Language Curriculum and the 2019 General Frame for Jordanian Curricula, integrated by references to textbook content materials.

The article identifies pragmatic needs behind the highlighted teaching policies and contextualizes the analyses in the broader Jordanian historical and political frameworks, pointing at the relevance of Arabic language for the construction of identities in the contemporary Middle East and at its enduring politicization.

2. THE RELEVANCE OF ARABIC LANGUAGE IN HISTORICAL DISCOURSES ON ISLAM, ISLAMISM AND ARAB NATIONALISM

Arabic may be considered, first and foremost, the language of Islam. Indeed, all Muslims, no matter what their native language is, are expected to recite the *Qur'ān* in the original language and to pray in Arabic. It constitutes the common liturgical language of more than 1.9 billion people around the world (2021)¹. Multiple traces of the interplay and overlap between the Arabic language and Islam have been recorded through Arabic and Muslim history. In his account on the significance and place of Arabic for Arab-Muslim societies, Anwar G. Chejne (1965, 454) noted for example that the second Caliph 'Umar (634-644) instructed his governors to spread the knowledge of Arabic for "it rejuvenates the mind and increases virtue". According to the scholar, such a strong relation between language and religion was also constructed through the opinions of well-known grammarians, who equated the Arabic language to a religion itself (that was the case of the Basrawi grammarian Abū 'Amr b. al-'Alā', d. 771), or even asserted the greater value of Arabic grammar over Muslim jurisprudence (*fiqh*) (the Kufan grammarian Ibn al-Farrā', d. 822).

This strong connection served as a unifying cultural factor in Muslim society when the Abbasid caliphate started to crumble, and even when Persian language broke through the monopoly of Arabic in the Muslim World. As noted by the non-Arab scholar and scientist al-Bīrūnī (d. 1048) who lived at the time of the Ghaznavid Empire (Sands 1961, in Chejne 1965, 456):

Our religion and our empire are Arabs and twins, one protected by the power of God, the other by the hand of Heaven. How often have tribes of subjects congregated together, in order to impart a non-Arabic character to

¹ See <https://countrymeters.info/en/World#religion> [26/10/2019], number of followers estimated by Countrymeters, January 2021.

the state. But they could not succeed in their aim, and as long as the call to worship continues to sound in their ears five times each day and the clear Arabic Koran is recited among the rows of worshippers ranged behind the Imam and its reforming message is preached to them in the mosques, they have got to submit, the bond of Islam is not broken, and its fortress is not breached.

After a period of decline between the 16th and the 18th centuries, Arabic became the language of Arab cultural and political renaissance in the 19th century. The preeminent role of Arabic language was highlighted by Fück (1955) who defined Arabic language as the symbol of the cultural unity of the Muslim world. Similarly, in the 1950s the Egyptian author Maḥmūd Taymūr described the strength of such a bond highlighting: “Arabic is the language of a revealed religion (*luḡbat dīn samawī*) and is here to stay as long as the *Qur’ān* and Islam exist” (Chejne 1965, 455).

Arabic language was a central element for Arabism first (understood as a sense of belonging and cultural awareness of Arab identity), and later on for Pan-Arabism (*qaumiyya ‘arabiyya*, the ideology advocating the unification of the Arabic speaking countries of North Africa, the Middle East and the Horn of Africa, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Arabian Sea). According to Sati al-Husri, probably the best representative of the theorists of Pan-Arabism, Arabic language and Arabic history constituted the pillars of a sense of belonging overcoming geographic borders and uniting minorities and people adhering to multiple beliefs. In this sense, the doctrine of Pan-Arabism was perceived as pragmatically secular as it accentuated Arabness instead of Islam as a unifying factor. It is not a coincidence that some of the most important figures in the Pan-Arabic movement, such as George Antonius and Michel Aflaq, were Christians. Yet, as already noted by several scholars (among whom Lapidus 1988, 665; Gabrieli 1996, 164; Hourani 2010, 297), Arabic nationalistic ideology was not in direct contrast with Islam, as Islam still constituted an essential component of Arabism providing subsidiary strength to the relationship between Arabs. As highlighted by Manduchi (2017, 27):

to be specific, if the linguistic element, Arabic, is what identifies the Arab nation, it is just as true that Arabic was born as a written language and spread only with the Qur’ān and is therefore closely linked to the birth and development of Islam. Islam was thus at the base of the birth of the concept of nation and legitimised the birth of the post-colonial states. With few exceptions, for example Turkey, Islam has never been questioned by the nationalistic ideology.

Previously, the triangulation between Arabism, Islamism and nationalism had been recognized by some of the theorists of Pan-Islamism. Pan-Islam was developed as a political concept by the Young Ottomans in the second half of the nineteenth century, in an attempt to unify the Islamic community under the authority of the Ottoman sultan. Nevertheless, after the revolution of the Young Turks and especially after the abolition of the Caliphate by Atatürk in 1924, theorists such as Rashīd Riḍā (influenced by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī, among others, and close himself to Pan-Islam) insisted upon the necessity of an Arab caliph to guide the Islamic community. In this vision Pan-Arabism was associated to Islamic reformism and Arabs were seen as superior from a religious point of view to other Muslims. In this framework, Islamism started to get closer to Arab nationalism. The same Rashīd Riḍā, for instance, became one of the supporters of the Saudi monarchy after the conquer of Mecca on the part of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Āl Su‘ūd in 1924. Such Islamism, which was closely related to pan-Arab nationalism and was connected substantially to the Muslim Brotherhood, “died with Arab nationalism in the phase of globalization which accompanied the rise of a radical and transnational political Islam” (Dakhili 2009, 27, quoted in Manduchi 2017, 30). Indeed, while until the 1990s most Islamic movements contributed to the strengthening of nation-states, “becoming nationalist or at least nationalized” (Roy 2003, 53), violent Islamic radicalism such as *al-Qā’ida* identified with movements disconnected from any territory and in direct competition with the Arab governments of the Middle East (Manduchi 2017, 32).

3. NATIONALISM, RELIGION, AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN JORDANIAN TEXTBOOKS

When looking at the interplay between Arab nationalism and Islam and at reference to religion in national discourses and state narratives, the case of Jordan appears as particularly interesting. Indeed, the members of the royal family in Jordan based their legitimacy on both the link of ancestry of the Hashemite family to the Prophet and on their leadership in the Arab Revolt (*al-tawra al-‘arabiyya*). As already mentioned, the Arab Revolt dates back to the first World War period. At that time, al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī al-Hāšimī, leader of the Banū Hāšim (the clan of the *Qurayš* tribe, to which the Islamic prophet Muhammad belonged) and

Emir of Mecca, supported the British efforts to defeat the forces of the Ottoman Empire, proclaiming the Arab revolt. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire the region was divided according to the Sykes-Picot agreement, which frustrated the Hāšimī pan-Arabic aspirations of being the king of a unified Arab nation. The region was indeed divided into smaller new-nation states, controlled by British and French authorities. Contextually, the leadership of two of these newly created states, Transjordan and Iraq, was given by the British to the Hashemites sons of al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī, Abd Allāh and Fayṣal.

In creating the Emirate of Transjordan in 1921 and the Hashemite State of Jordan in 1946, King Abd Allāh started constructing a national narrative for the new country, in part through the publication of school textbooks. In doing that, he had to consider the necessity of facing the main issue of conflict between the rulers and the ruled population. Indeed, the Hashemite family represented a foreign ruling dynasty originating from the Ḥijāz and attributed its power by a colonial authority. Moreover, the population living inside the borders defined by the British and French authorities was a mixture of different and divided ethnic, national, and religious groups (including Circassians, Chechens, Kurds, Armenians, and local settled nomadic tribes). Starting from the years immediately following the creation of the State of Jordan this situation was further complicated by the influx of thousands of Palestinian refugees who had to leave their homes in the context of the Israeli occupations in 1948 and 1967, and who were naturalized as Jordanian citizens (Anderson 2002).

In this framework the royal family shaped a national discourse based on a constitutional concept of legitimacy, relying on the image of Jordan as a modern state with a civil executive authority, an elected legislative authority and an independent judicial authority (Rajjal 2014). At the same time, it advocated both pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism discourses as forms of identification. While reference to pan-Islamism and pan-Arabism are and have always been important pillars in the narrative proposed by Jordanian textbooks, appeal to one or the other has been strengthened according to strategic political necessities over the years (Rajjal 2014). As noted by Anderson (2002, 9), in a study on nationalism in Jordanian history, literature and civic textbooks between 1950 and 1975:

as the leaders of the Arab Revolt in World War I, they [the Hashemite family] took on the mantle of Arab nationalist leadership, laying claim to the leadership of the whole Arab nationalism movement from that point

forward. Thus, Jordan was not just a separate state but one with Hashemite rule, standing at the epicenter of a potential reunion between the divided Arab states. The inhabitants of Jordan are thus linked to the history of the Arab world via their Hashemite leadership.

At that time, and according to the same strategy, Jordanians were presented as an integral part of the Arab collective and part of the universal Islamic *umma* (nation), while the political divisions of the Arab world into mini-states, separating one collective from another, were portrayed as artificial and temporary and as consequences of colonial powers' past intrusion in the region's affairs (Nasser 2019, 193-194). As highlighted by Nasser in a study on Jordanian textbooks used between 1948 and 1967, the textbooks also suggested that such a political division of the Arab world was associated with the project of implantation of Zionism into the heart of Palestine, which was an obstacle to Arab unity (*ibidem*)².

While pan-Arabism was a dominant discourse until the end of the 50s and the 60s, during the 70s it started to weaken. Indeed, the repression of Palestinians ordered by the Jordanian government during the events of Black September in 1970 and the signature of the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel in 1979, caused a substantial rupture in the pan-Arab front. As highlighted by Nasser (2004, 227):

in Jordan's case, during its formative era as a nation-state between the 1950s and mid-1970s, the state discourse sought its legitimacy by promoting multiple identifications such as pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism. At the same time, Jordan as a local identity was dialectically excluding the majority of Jordan's population by promoting these multiple identifications³. The appeal to the regional (pan-Arabism) and the universal (pan-Islamism) erases the particular of being a Palestinian.

These multiple strategies contributed to the construction of Jordanianism in the following era.

With growing emphasis after 1994 (when Jordan itself signed a peace treaty with Israel), the barycenter of Jordanian national discourse moved more towards Islam. As highlighted by Nasr (2008, in Castegnaro 2018), this directly reflected into educational policies. As Nasr notes

² On reference to Zionism see also Fruchter-Ronen 2018.

³ Support for this argument can be found also in Abu-Odeh 1999 and Massad 2001. Due to his position, Abu Odeh became subject and object of a contentious debate over Jordanian national identity. To know more about the Abu Odeh case, see Nanes 2010.

comparing the proceeding of the 1987 Jordanian Conference on Education with the 1991 Jordanian National Charter and the 1994 Jordanian Education Law (Law no. 3, 1994), the 1994 Law increased emphasis on Islam by defining Jordan as part of the “Arabic-Islamic nation”. Previous documents only referred to Jordan inclusion into the “Arab nation” and redefined the known hierarchic order of citizens’ submission to “the Nation, the State and the King” which, after 1994, was modified into “God, the Nation, the King”. Since the 90s the discourse developed by the Hashemite family strengthened the principle of “religious legitimacy” (defined by Rajjal 2014 as one of the three pillars or concepts of legitimacy shaped by the Hashemites). In this framework, the Hashemite family strategically highlighted its ancestor link to the family of the Prophet and Jordan’s role as “protector of the Holy shrines” (including Muslim and Christian sites). Such a reference to Islam supported the nationalist discourse created by the royal family, which was therefore able to resist the negative impact caused by the frustration of Palestinian requests in Jordan and in the region.

At the same time, it is worth noting that this discourse strategy went at the same pace with political reforms limiting the growing political role of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Front inside the country, which were traditionally connected to Palestinian refugees’ political forces in Jordan. With this regard, the Jordanian system has been defined by Kaye *et al.* (2008) as guided by a policy of limited inclusion of Islamist forces. The Muslim Brotherhood was recognized as a political party in 1992, as part of a process to strengthen civil rights in the country. Yet, the disbandment of the Jordanian parliament and the reform of the vote system in the following years significantly weakened the Islamist parties favoring the pro-Hashemite conservative right representing Jordanian native tribes. While this strategy served the goal of reducing the dissatisfaction of the indigenous citizens and countering Palestinian political power in the country, it created a political void that paved the way for increasing religious extremism in the following years (Kaye *et al.* 2008). This became visible in 2005, at the time of the *al-Qā’ida* hotel bombings in Amman, and in the following years, when several Jordanian citizens joined the ranks of Isis (Barret 2017).

At the political level, the monarchy promoted what has been defined by Abu Rumman as “conservative secularism”, namely the building of the Hashemite legitimacy on religious foundations but not on religious ideology, and the exploiting and containing of religious Muslim cur-

rents according to the needs of the political moment⁴. This led to the parallel emergence of “various manifestations of Westernization and of Islamization inside Jordanian society” (Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh 2013, 35-37). At the same time, it fostered a policy of “religious neutrality”, not adopting any clear positions, either politically or culturally, with regard to any of the prevailing internal Sunni Islamic tendencies (*ibid.*, 37). This message of “religious neutrality” and tolerance came together in the Amman Message, delivered in 2004, which emphasized Islam’s core values of compassion and mutual respect between Muslim legal schools⁵.

As noted by Rajjal (2014), in the case of Jordan, such a process of strengthening and re-imagining of a complex and inclusive national Jordanian identity became a vital issue after 2001, with the launching of initiatives such as “Jordan First” and “We are all Jordan”, that gained critical significance against the backdrop of the increasing unrest in the Middle East.

Despite this tendency, in the last years relevant actors in the Jordanian educational sector such as Dūqān ‘Obīdāt (supervisor of Jordanian Curricula at the Congress on Education from 1991 to 1998) lamented a use of *Qur’ān* verses and *aḥādīṭ* in Jordanian textbooks (especially in the subject matter of history) leading to religious extremism, also pointing to the tendency to ignore non-Muslim communities in the country and female actors⁶. Similar critiques stimulated a process of textbook revision that started in 2016. As a result, the Jordanian Ministry of Education developed new didactic materials and curricula for the teaching of Islam, history, Arabic language and civics (De Francesco 2017; Castegnaro 2018).

⁴ The strategy of the monarchy has also been described as “monarchic pluralism” by Shryock who noted “Like the monarchs of Europe, Hussein juxtaposed images of tradition and modernity in artful ways. Yet because he ruled Jordan and did not merely preside over it, Hussein’s ability to fashion multiple Hashemite identities, or ‘royal personae’, was a crucial feature of his elaborate apparatus of power. To his subjects, he was a man of many guises: liberal democratizer, monarch, descendant of the Prophet, secularist, shaykh of all tribal shaykhs, and a refuge for the Palestinian people. Hussein’s manifestations were crafted in relation to constituencies (and political trends) he sought to influence or control” (Shryock 2000, 58).

⁵ See <https://ammanmessage.com/> [11/05/2021].

⁶ See <https://www.al-binaa.com/archives/article/55630> and <https://alghad.com/عبيدات-المناهج-المدرسية-بحاجة-لإصلاح> [11/05/2021]. On University curricula see Sowell 2017. To know more about gender bias in Jordanian textbooks before 2016 see Alayan and Al-Khalidi 2010.

Several changes characterize the new textbooks and curricula, which today offer a more nuanced portrayal of Jordanian society, paying more attention than in previous decades, to the representation of religious minorities (including Christians) and different approaches to religion and religious practices (Hadid 2016).

4. ISLAMIC AND NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES IN CONTEMPORARY EDUCATIONAL MATERIAL FOR THE TEACHING OF ARABIC LANGUAGE

This section of the article focuses on references to Arabic language, in the Islamic and national perspectives, in two didactic tools used in the Jordanian Kingdom: the Arabic Language Curriculum published by the Jordanian Ministry of Education in 2013, and the 2019 General Frame for Jordanian Curricula. The latter document was drafted and published in 2019 by the National Center for Curriculum Development, and it defines the general goals of education, in line with the Educational Law (nr. 3) 1994, the Jordan Vision 2025, and the National Strategy for Human Resources Development 2015-2016. Content analysis of these documents is here integrated with content analysis of the textbook for the learning of Arabic language used in the year 2019 in secondary schools (12th class). All selected documents were available online in pdf form and in Arabic language. More in details, they were accessed through the platform of the Jordanian Ministry of Education, in the section assigned to “Curricula and Textbook Management Department”⁷.

What follows provides a diachronic comparison between the 2013 and the 2019 perspectives, showing recurring patterns as well as elements of inconsistency.

The Arabic Language Curriculum of 2013 (*natāğāt al-luġa al-‘arabiyya*) describes Arabic language, in its introductory passage of the document as follows:

whereas the Arabic language is closely related to Islam as a religion, being the language of the Holy *Qur’ān*, students need to learn it in order to be able to read it [the *Qur’ān*], understand the teachings of their religion and perform ritual acts of worship. It is, furthermore, a universal language due to the presence of a large number of Muslims in various parts of the world

⁷ See <https://moe.gov.jo/ar/node/58> [29/10/2021].

[...]. Arabic language is the key to Arab and Islamic culture in the various sciences and arts [...] it bears the legacy of the Arab *umma* in terms of civilization, representing the strongest tie between Arabs and Muslims and being one of the most important elements of Arab unity. It exemplifies the identity of the Arab *umma*, being the vessel of its thought and culture. (2013, 6; personal translation from Arabic)

In the description, the religious, historical, and cultural dimensions of Arabic and Islamic identities are tightly connected by the linguistic element. Arabic language is therefore presented as the keystone of “Arab unity”. It is noteworthy that this representation brings together both pan-Arabic and pan-Islamic elements (seen as relevant, with reference to the “Arab *umma*”) that, as highlighted in the previous section, have been used in the past to forge Jordanian nationalism through education. In such a discourse, sectarian divisions, and the particularities of the different communities inside Jordan are minimized. This idea is furthermore strengthened by references to the challenges faced by the official Arabic language (*fushḥā*), such as the prevalence of dialect (*‘ammiyya*) and the interference of foreign languages in spoken communication and the media:

Arabic language faces many challenges such as the prevalence of dialect (*al-‘ammiyya*) and the interference of foreign languages in our spoken communications and the media. This calls for activating the use of eloquent Arabic and for paying attention to its teaching and learning. It also highlights the importance of developing the four basic communication skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing [...]. It is furthermore necessary to pay attention to Arabic literature and its various issues. Indeed, Arabic literature expresses the Arab-Islamic values and students can benefit from it in knowing their past, forming their vision for the future, deepening their understanding of themselves, communicating with others around them, knowing, understanding, and respecting other cultures, in addition to developing their linguistic taste. (2013, 6; personal translation from Arabic)

The idea of such a strong connection between the religious and linguistic dimensions is reproduced in the following part of the document. Interestingly, the function of Arabic language as an instrument of religion appears as the very first point among the four pivotal learning outcomes envisioned in the Arabic Language Curriculum (even before the adequate use of the four communication skills mentioned in the introduction). As in the passage quoted above (and in line with the Message of Amman), attention is also paid to the international dimension as to the use of language as a form of mutual understanding between people.

As we read in the document, after completing the two elementary and high school cycles of the Curriculum, students should be able to:

1. employ the Arabic language to express feelings of faith in God Almighty, and attachment to Arab and Islamic values;
2. use the four communication skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) adequately, in order to face different life situations;
3. use the components of the Arabic language system: phonemes, morphemes, lexemes, syntax, and context, according to its eloquent form, in line with contemporary life;
4. enjoy the arts of literary creativity in Arabic language and types of literary creativity in other human languages leading to positive communication and common understanding between people. (2013, 7; personal translation from Arabic)

Comparing the 2013 Arabic Language Curriculum with the 2019 General Frame for Jordanian Curricula (including Arabic language and religious education) shows that emphasis on a direct connection between the religious and the linguistic elements is toned down. Nonetheless, Arabic language, Islam, and nationalism maintain their relevance as pillars of students' education and their envisioned identity:

The general goals of education [...] are exemplified in the formation of a citizen who believes in God Almighty, who is loyal to his *watan* [country, homeland] and his *umma*, who is endowed with virtues and complete in mental, spiritual, emotional and social personality, so that at the end of the educational stages he becomes a citizen able to: 1. use Arabic language to express himself and to easily communicate with others; 2. comprehend facts, concepts and connections related to the natural, geographical, demographic, social and cultural environment, locally and globally, using them effectively in public life; and 3. understand the elements of [his] heritage, drawing lessons to understand and develop the present; 4. be aware of Islam's doctrine and law, and consciously assimilate its values and instructions [...]. (2019, 8; personal translation from Arabic)

The relevance of the religious element is furthermore stressed in the following pages, which list the set of values which should be developed through education. In this framework, "belief in God" is listed first among eighteen items, followed by "sense of belonging to the homeland" and, third, "pluralism and diversity":

1. Belief in God, his Messengers, and his books is a basis for building the human personality and connecting all religions. This is essential in building the Curriculum, especially as Islam is a system of thought

- and behaviour that respects each person regardless of his religion and belief, raises the status of the mind and encourages knowledge, work, and morals. The focus on the value of belief in God stems from the principles of Islam and other divine messages and is consistent with the principles of the Amman Message [...].
2. Belonging to the homeland [...] includes the individual's love for his homeland, his close connection with his land and people, and the reciprocal relationship between the citizens and the state (*dawla*) [...]. This value is also reflected in the learner's belief that the people of Jordan are an integrated unit, and that there is no place for intolerance and discrimination, be it motivated by racial, regional, sectarian, tribal, or ethnic elements, by social status or by the belonging to any of the Muslim juridical schools. This leads to harmony [...] and patriotic and civic behaviours. [...] The value also reflects the learner's commitment to the central Arab issues his homeland is concerned with, starting with the liberation of Palestine.
 3. Pluralism and diversity: this value reflects recognition of the rich diversity of the Jordanian society, represented by a positive communication indicating acceptance, respect, and appreciation of the other, without abandoning private opinions and ideas but rather recognizing the right of the other to express himself and present his views in a climate of freedom, democracy, and respect. (2019, 25-26; personal translation from Arabic)

In the 2019 General Frame, the pivotal goals concerning the students' linguistic education are listed in detail. Noteworthy, concerns about the spread of dialect (*ammiyya*) and the interference of foreign languages are reiterated (2019, 51). Both Islamic education and Arabic language are mentioned as examples of cross-curricular subjects that form the personality of the learner (*ibid.*, 40). It is also remarkable that, contrary to the 2013 curricula, the 2019 document does not explicitly mention the use of Arabic language to express religious feelings or attachment to Islamic values. The 2019 General Frame presents Arabic language as first "the language of the Arabs", second as "the language of the *Qur'ān*", and third as "the official language of the state" (*ibid.*, 51). This formulation shows a different perspective from the 2013 Curriculum, where Arabic was presented first and foremost as the language of Islam and, only in a second place, as the language of the "Arab *umma*" and of the state.

To conclude the analysis presented here, it is worth noting that the changes highlighted so far still did not appear in the content of textbooks for Arabic language education in use in academic year 2019-2020 (and, to the best my knowledge, still in use). An example is provided

by the Arabic language textbook used by the 12th class. Reference to the 12th class seems here particularly relevant as this is the last year of school for many Jordanian students and includes preparation for the *tauwǧīh* (general secondary education certificate) examination. Moreover, at the time of attending the 12th class, students reach the majority age and the age of vote, set at 18 years in Jordan. This makes the teachings in the 12th class particularly important, especially when it comes to topics that could reflect on the student's attitudes and behaviors as active citizens of the State. In the introduction to the materials, the textbook, issued in 2017, and republished in a second edition in academic year 2018-2019, still mentions religion in the first place in terms of importance. Nonetheless, anticipating the recommendations of the 2019 General Frame and differently from the 2013 Curriculum (which emphasised the importance of the Arabic *umma* over the country), reference to Jordan (*waṭān*) precedes that to the Arabic nation, understood in the pan-Arabic sense as *qawm*:

Units are shaped with the aim of enabling the students to organize ideas and express them in a sound language [...]. The two books contain a rich content of various valuable texts [...] aiming at building the religious, patriotic (*waṭānī*), pan-Arabic (*qawmī*), social and educational skills in the hearts of our students. (2019, Introduction; personal translation from Arabic)

While the 2019 General Frame seems to set a distance from the use of Arabic in the religious perspective, the 2018-2019 Arabic textbook for the 12th class (last class before *tauwǧīh*) is still very well endowed with religious references in the form of *Qur'an* verses and *aḥādīth*. Remarkably, the reading passage in the first lesson focuses on verses 33-51 of *sūrat al-ʿImrān*, describing the figure of the Holy Mary. This unit provides a clear example showing how the textbook introduces information on Christianity and Judaism presenting them as religious traditions that paved the way to Islam and are therefore close to it, without distancing from the Muslim perspective which keep characterizing all lessons. As such, the textbook provides the students with references to a plural society and to other religions in the frame of an inclusive and almost univocal *Muslim* perspective⁸. Such an intertwining between

⁸ This echoes the reasoning of De Francesco (2017, 261) who, analyzing the 2016-2017 edition of textbooks for religious education, also noted that despite providing a balanced presentation of a plural society the textbooks consecrate little space “for ‘inter-Islamic diversity’ (Sunni, Shi’ite etc.) which is virtually absent”.

religion and language education also demonstrates the practical reality of religion being a cross-subject in Jordan. The textbook's content is also emblematic on the use of Arabic language in relation to the 'old' pattern: language-religion-nationalism. An example is provided in lesson 10 (titled "Jerusalem in the heart of the Hashemites"), which introduces the student to the poem *Risāla min bāb al-'amūd* by Haider Mahmoud. The poem is contextualized by the textbook in the frame of the Hashemites efforts towards the protection of the Holy sites and is described as having been recited by the poet in 1980 on the day of *isrā'* and *mi'rāj* to celebrate the role of the Jordanian armed forces, described in the textbook as the "Arab army that sacrificed itself on Jerusalem's walls" (2019, 144). Through the tasks in the lesson, the textbook asks the students to

explain how the poet alludes at the status of Jerusalem in King Ḥusayn b. Ṭalāl's opinion and at the status of Ḥusayn among his people; refer to the role of the Arab army in Jerusalem and highlight the religious (*dīnī*), pan-Arabic (*qawmī*) and patriotic (*waṭanī*) sentiments in the poet's conscience. (2019, Exercises, 144; personal translation from Arabic)

The importance of such religious, pan-Arabic, and patriotic sentiments and of the role of the Arab army is emphasised by several other exercises as follows:

التحدّث:

- 1- تحدّث إلى زملائك عن المعالم الدّينية التي تعرفها في مدينة القدس.
- 2- حاوّر زملاءك في التّضحيات والبطولات التي قدّمها الجيش العربيّ على أرض القدس.

Exercises no. 1 and 2, p. 142; personal translation. Translated as follows:

Speaking:

1. Talk to your colleagues about the religious landmarks you know in Jerusalem;
2. Talk to your colleagues about the sacrifices and heroic deeds of the Arab army on the soil of Jerusalem.

4- برزت العواطف الدّينية والقوميّة الوطنيّة واضحة في وجدان الشّاعر، مثل هذه العواطف من النصّ.

Exercise no. 4, p. 147. Translated as follows:

4. Religious, pan-Arabic, and patriotic sentiments emerged and were clear in the poet's conscience. Find examples of these sentiments in the text.

These examples show how Arabic language textbooks have been and are being used to support the national ideology crafted by the Hashemite leaders and to glorify the monarchy and the Jordanian army. Interestingly, while these examples from an Arabic language textbook show the role of the army introduced as a relevant element into the pattern 'language-religion-nationalism' and supporting the legitimization of the Hashemite monarchy in both pan-Islamic (the Hashemites as protectors of the Holy sites) and pan-Arabic terms (the Hashemites as leaders of the Arab army), the analysed passages in the Arabic Curriculum and the General Frame do not highlight direct reference to the army itself. In this case, textbook analysis provides therefore further elements for understanding.

5. CONCLUSION

Reference to Arabic language has been highly relevant in historical discourses on Islam, Islamism and Arabic nationalism in the Middle East. The case study of Jordan has illustrated how the Arabic language is still positioned at the core of institutional strategies for the building of contemporary national identities. Curricula and textbooks for the teaching of Arabic language are indeed used in Jordan to frame the national identity of students, together with sentiments of loyalty to the monarchy inspired and legitimized, among other elements, by connection to Islam. In didactic tools for the teaching of Arabic, the discourse on the importance of Arabic language is often linked to references to religion and the construction of the students' religious identity. Indeed, in the outlined discourses, religious (Muslim) identity often overlaps national identity, and the Hashemite monarchy is still legitimized to rule by its legacy to the Prophet's family and its role in the protection of Jerusalem's Holy Sites. Against this backdrop, reference to pluralism (including religious pluralism) as a positive value to be safeguarded through education, emphasised after 2016 and clearly enhanced by the 2019 General Frame, is brought up within the framework of an inclusive, Muslim, perspective. The diachronic analysis of the 2013 Arabic Language Curriculum and the 2019 General Frame for Jordanian Curricula (including Arabic language and religious education), contextualized in a broader historical framework, unveils differences and similarities between past and present attitudes concerning the politization of didactic tools for

the teaching of the Arabic language. While the 2013 Curriculum presents Arabic first and foremost as the language of Islam and as “the key to Arab and Islamic culture”, the 2019 General Frame tones down the emphasis on the connection between language and religion. Indeed, the General Frame remarkably presents Arabic language as “the language of the Arabs”, and only in a second place as the language of the *Qur’ān*. Furthermore, it does not describe Arabic language as a tool specifically suited to express or promote Islamic values. Nonetheless, the connection between language and religion still emerges strongly through the analysis of the Arabic language textbook for the 12th class used in year 2019, where the learning materials are aiming at building the “religious, patriotic (*waṭānī*), pan-Arabic (*qawmī*), social and educational skills in the hearts of our students”. As such, and despite the highlighted differences, the documents represent a coherent follow up with institutional strategies of nation-building identified by previous studies. Nasser (2019) in particular, has pointed at an “exclusive nature of nationalism”, demonstrating how the process of nation-building in Jordan entails processes of differentiation and exclusion on the one side, and appeal to “the universal” (pan-Arabic/pan-Islamic) on the other⁹. The findings show that Arabic language continues to play an important role in the construction of a modern Jordanian self-image and that this image is still centred on Arab and Islamic identity. Processes of nation-building show up in the analysed didactic tools not only in relation to religion, pan-Arabic and patriotic values promoted, but also through the appeal to the promotion of a standardized *‘Arabiyya Fuṣṣā* against local colloquial. Indeed, they agree in presenting the status of Arabic language as endangered by the interference not only of foreign languages but also of dialect (*‘ammiyya*), featuring the particularities of the hybrid identities of people under Jordan sovereignty. This finding echoes the reasoning of scholars who recently focused their research on the cross-subject of religious education, highlighting that textbooks still consecrate little space for inter-community differences such as inter-Islamic diversity (De Francesco 2017).

⁹ Indeed, according to Nasser, Jordanian textbooks advanced a discourse of identification with pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism, making the internal particularism of one collective or another in Jordan irrelevant (as Jordan is acting to “achieve” Arab unity). In this framework, forms of particularism or factionalism are seen as an obstacle toward the desired unity, leading to the suppression of particular identities, such as those of the Palestinians (Nasser 2004).

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