

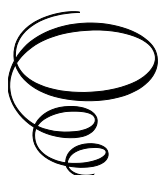
The Constantly Reshaping Social Identities in the Middle East

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Edited by

Gadi Hitman and Eyal Lewin

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Gadi Hitman and Eyal Lewin
Ariel University, July 2024

INTRODUCTION

EYAL LEWIN AND GADI HITMAN

This book is an outcome of the presentations delivered during the sessions of the inaugural international conference organized by the Middle East and Central Asia Research Center (MECARC) at Ariel University, Israel. Both the conference and this book share the theme “The Constantly Reshaping Social Identities in the Middle East – and Beyond.” The insightful academic discussions at the conference covered a wide array of subjects, ranging from identity issues to societal divisions, spanning from the Maghreb region to the Gulf states, encompassing leadership challenges, societal dynamics, conflict resolution, and national resilience. From the diverse range of topics discussed, we have curated a collection of works that collectively address gaps in scholarly literature, emphasizing the roles played by communities and leaders in shaping socio-political identities. While much of the existing literature on the Middle East and other regions predominantly focuses on politics, security, and societal aspects from a state-centric viewpoint, this book employs a range of methodologies to underscore the significance of identities and narratives across cultural, religious, and social dimensions. The individual chapters shed light on various actors and their contributions to shaping distinct identities, thereby highlighting their significant impact and influence on the local, national, regional, and global levels.

We have opted to commence this book with a succinct review of the current theoretical literature on collective identities research. Subsequently, we provide concise summaries of each chapter to offer readers a holistic view of the book’s contents and enable them to focus on subjects aligned with their academic and professional preferences.

Collective identities

By the end of the twentieth century, certain political scientists foresaw the conclusion of an era characterized by ideologies dividing nations and peoples, with the belief that the world was progressing beyond major conflicts. In his renowned work *The End of History and the Last Man*,

American political scientist Francis Fukuyama (1992) referenced the philosophies of Friedrich Hegel and Karl Marx, who viewed human history as a progressive movement from one socioeconomic era to another (Jackson & Xiadis, 2017). His central thesis posited that following the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ascendance of Western liberal democracies signaled humanity's progression toward the culmination of ideological development and the widespread adoption of Western liberal democracy as the ultimate form of governance (Fukuyama, 1992).

In an attempt to update his hypothesis on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his original 1989 essay that predated the book, Fukuyama considered events such as the Arab Spring, perceived shortcomings in achieving pro-democratic objectives, global revolutions, and instances of democracy regressing in countries like Thailand, Turkey, and Nicaragua. He slightly adjusted his perspective, attributing the primary challenges faced by democratically elected governments in certain nations to functional rather than ideological issues. Fukuyama contended that economic advancement, enhanced governance, and strengthened civic institutions would mutually reinforce each other, ultimately guiding all countries toward a non-ideological path leading to democracy (Fukuyama, 2014).

Samuel Huntington, one of Fukuyama's teachers in the field of political science, presented a contrasting viewpoint. In his scholarly response to Fukuyama, detailed in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996), Huntington proposed that while the era of ideology might have ended, the world had transitioned back to a state marked by cultural confrontations. He contended that cultural divisions would be the predominant sources of conflict in the future, emphasizing the significance of different civilizations as the primary framework for assessing conflict potential (Huntington, 1996).

This book does not challenge Huntington's or Fukuyama's theories; rather, it delves deeper into a crucial aspect central to Huntington's argument: the role of various group identities within the intense geopolitical dynamics that appear to be shaping our world.

The concept of collective identity has long been a central focus of sociological inquiry as scholars seek to understand how individuals come together to form groups based on shared values, beliefs, and experiences. Derived from the field of social movement studies, collective identity refers to the collection of identity interpretations that are constructed and collectively embraced by groups of activists (Gamson, 1992; Mattoni, 2016; Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Simon & Klandermans, 2001).

In modern times, globalization has played a key role in shaping contemporary collective identities, as it has facilitated the exchange of ideas,

values, and cultural practices across borders. As a result, individuals today are often exposed to a wide range of perspectives and worldviews, leading to the formation of hybrid or fluid identities that may draw on multiple cultural traditions. Globalization has led to a “deterritorialization” of identity as individuals are no longer tied to a single geographic location or cultural heritage; instead, they can draw on a diverse range of influences to shape their sense of self. The multifaceted and contradictory aspects of globalization have led to the emergence of new identities at varying levels of scale, including global identities, while also revitalizing the significance of ethnic and religious identities in influencing and restructuring global, regional, national, and local landscapes (Keohane & Nye, 2000; Robertson, 1992; Smith, 2016; Waters, 1995). These identities have played a key role, especially in the Middle East in which it became clear since 2011 that the identity and attachment to the nation-state has intensified (Hitman and Naor, 2024).

Technology, particularly the rise of social media platforms, has also had a profound impact on the construction of collective identities in modern times. Platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram allow individuals to connect with others who share their interests, values, thoughts, and identities, creating virtual communities that transcend traditional boundaries of time and space. Social media has enabled the formation of “networked individualism,” in which individuals maintain multiple, overlapping social networks that shape their sense of belonging and identity. The changes mentioned above have expanded the possibilities for individuals to connect while also presenting new challenges in terms of managing diverse and sometimes conflicting identities (Castells, 2010; Valenzuela, 2013). For example, individuals may struggle to reconcile their online personality with their offline identity, leading to feelings of dissonance or inauthenticity. Moreover, the anonymity and distance afforded by online interactions can sometimes lead to the formation of echo chambers or filter bubbles, in which individuals are only exposed to information and perspectives that align with their existing beliefs (Boyd, 2011; Crenshaw, 1991; Parks, 2011; Sunstein, 2001; Valenzuela, 2013).

Despite these challenges, the changing landscape of collective identities in modern times also presents opportunities for individuals to engage in new forms of self-expression and community-building. For example, social movements such as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo have mobilized individuals around the world to advocate for social change and challenge dominant power structures. These movements have demonstrated the power of collective action in shaping public discourse and influencing policy decisions, highlighting the potential of modern technologies to facilitate

grassroots organizing and political activism (Khazraee & Novak, 2018; Reyes-Mendez et al., 2020; Strickland, 2022).

The Middle East is a region of diverse cultures, languages, and religions where individuals and groups navigate complex social, political, and historical contexts to form and express their collective identities (Heydermann, 2000). Religion has long played a central role in shaping collective identities in the Middle East, where Islam, Christianity, and Judaism have coexisted for centuries. Religious identities in the region are often closely tied to cultural practices, social norms, and political ideologies, influencing how individuals define themselves and their relationships with others. For example, Sunni and Shia Muslims in countries such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Iran have distinct religious identities that have been politicized and mobilized in the context of sectarian conflicts (Abdulmajid, 2018; Hitman, 2022; Roy, 2014; Solarz, 2020).

Ethnicity is another important factor in the construction of collective identities in the Middle East, where diverse ethnic groups coexist within national borders and across regional boundaries. Ethnic identities in the region are often linked to language, history, and traditions, shaping individuals' sense of belonging and community. For example, the Kurdish people in Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran have long sought recognition and autonomy based on their distinct ethnic identity and shared historical experiences (Esman & Rabinovich, 1988; McDowall, 2004).

Nationalism has also played a significant role in shaping collective identities in the Middle East, as individuals and groups have sought to define themselves in relation to the nation-state and its political institutions. The disintegration of the Ottoman Empire in the early twentieth century was tumultuous, resulting in imperial dominance and the integration of the Middle East into the global capitalist system. Except for Iran, Turkey, and Iraq, the formation of nation-states in the region was shaped by imperial decisions. Following World War II, most of the Arab nations under colonial authority attained independence and endeavoured to establish cohesive nations. However, instead of evolving into fully unified national entities, many succumbed to authoritarianism and sectarian governance. As the twenty-first century unfolded, the region experienced renewed political upheaval, leading to the breakdown of functional states like Iraq, Libya, Yemen, and Syria (Baban, 2018). National identities in the region – and, in fact, around the globe – are often constructed around narratives of history, ethnicity, religion, territory, and sovereignty, influencing how individuals perceive themselves and others. For example, the Arab nationalist movements of the twentieth century sought to unite Arab peoples based on a shared sense of ethnic-linguistic identity and common political goals.

However, the stark reality that national unity in the Middle East remains incomplete and is further eroding along ethnic, religious, and sectarian fault lines (Baban, 2018; Khoury, 1997; Hitman & Naor, 2024).

Moreover, adding to the complexity, the construction of collective identities in the Middle East is also shaped by external interventions, including colonialism, globalization, and conflict, which have had a profound impact on the region's social and political dynamics. In the twentieth century, colonial powers such as Britain and France imposed artificial borders and systems of governance that continue to influence identity formation and political struggles in the region (Baban, 2018; Hitman, 2016; Hourani, 2005). Globalization has brought new opportunities for cultural exchange and economic development, yet it has also led to the spread of globalized identities that challenge traditional forms of belonging (Bayat, 2013). It is noteworthy that, in recent years, the entire region has been witnessing significant shifts in terms of identity due to other factors. Subsequent developments followed the events of the Arab Spring, like the emergence and consolidation of ISIS as a radical force within the geopolitical arena. Consequently, ongoing regional and global disruptions have been altering the landscape of the Middle East and impacting global politics (Manullang et al., 2023; Mohamedou, 2018).

The transformations in identity within each nation play a crucial role in current events. The conflicting identities that influence many nations, such as Turkey's move toward Islam in recent times, or Saudi Arabia's 2030 vision have the capacity to instigate a profound shift not only within individual countries but across the entire region (Baykan, 2018; Delibas, 2014).

Despite the various challenges, the complexities of collective identities in the Middle East also present opportunities for individuals and groups to engage in dialogue, reconciliation, and social change. Grassroots movements such as the Arab Spring, despite their overall failure, have mobilized diverse populations around shared grievances and aspirations, challenging authoritarian regimes and calling for greater political participation and social justice (Heydemann, 2013). These movements have demonstrated the power of collective action in shaping public discourse and influencing policy decisions, highlighting the resilience and creativity of Middle Eastern societies in the face of adversity. Their failure to establish a unified collective identity among all protest groups is evident in countries such as Syria, Libya, and Yemen. Even in Lebanon, which did not witness protest activities during the Arab Spring, longstanding political instability stemming from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds remains a significant issue.

On October 7, 2023, Hamas militants infiltrated into Israel and carried out massacres and war crimes, sparking widespread conflict in the region. Israel conducted a significant ground operation in Gaza, igniting a bout of warfare unprecedented in the Middle East for many years. Hezbollah, from its bases in Lebanon and Syria, also engaged in the conflict cautiously. At the time of writing, it remains uncertain whether this conflict will escalate into a full-scale war. Meanwhile, the Houthis in Yemen expressed solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza, leading to the closure of the Bab al-Mandab Strait. This action resulted in a global economic shift, forcing merchant fleets to undertake lengthy detours around Africa when traveling between Europe and the East. Iran, a key geopolitical player, is actively involved in regional conflicts and supports their escalation (Nevola et al., 2024). However, it is essential to recall that the region that is witnessing a devastating war in Gaza and Lebanon, resulting in the loss of many lives, is also where leaders from the Arab world convened in Israel to mark the Abraham Accords. These oscillations between peace and war, reconciliation and hostility, and rivalry and cooperation are influenced by the group identities of the various stakeholders in the region (Ben-Sabbat & Aaronson, 2022). In addition, the Palestinian society and political system is also divided on the background of different identities (secular vs religious).

The regional unrest undeniably represents a facet of a wider global crisis, prominently featuring the enduring clash between Russia and Ukraine that has now lasted several years. This confrontation goes beyond simple interests or cultural divides; instead, it delves into deep-rooted concepts of national identity that have abruptly taken centre stage in the ongoing conflict. The crisis is deeply rooted in the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). All Russian administrations, including the most pro-Western ones of the 1990s, were against this expansion. In 1989, former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev agreed to the reunification of Germany following assurances from US and Western leaders regarding Soviet security and a promise not to enlarge NATO. Nonetheless, NATO began expanding in the 1990s, moving military infrastructure close to Russian borders. Although Russia initially accepted NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe, by the late 2000s, Western politicians were eyeing Ukraine and Georgia as potential new NATO members. Russia consistently cautioned that these actions would cross red lines concerning further NATO enlargement. However, the West did not take these warnings seriously and instead argued for any state's right to choose its allies freely (Safranchuk, 2022). This issue was not solely about strategic interests; it was also a clash of narratives. It formed a juncture where Russia's identity as a perennial victim of Western aggression intersected with Western perceptions of a

defensive society during the Cold War era, along with the identities of various post-Soviet states that had experienced Russian dominance in their histories (Piculicka-Wilczewska & Sawka, 2016).

Collective identity makes the world go round; it plays a pivotal role in shaping the globe. Drawing from chaos theory, the butterfly effect underscores the idea of profound interconnectedness in our world, suggesting that a minor event can have far-reaching effects on a complex system (Lorenz, 1972). Identities across distant corners of the globe interact and impact one another, as exemplified during events like the Arab Spring and within the broader context of global dynamics.

The contributions

In the first chapter, Einat Shushan Refaeli and Eyal Lewin delve into the role of youth as an identity collective navigating through challenging circumstances both in general and specifically during the COVID-19 crisis. Scholars categorize societies across different nations based on their cultural proclivities, with one prevalent classification being the distinction between individualistic and collectivist societies. Thus, this chapter explores nations typically categorized as having collectivist social cultures (such as Japan, Thailand, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Taiwan) and compares their educational frameworks emphasizing resilience during emergencies with countries identified as having individualistic social cultures (like the United States, Canada, Spain, and Germany). Against this backdrop, and through a comparative lens, this study also delves into the Israeli case study. Three potential courses of action are proposed to enhance resilience, either individually or collectively, both within the broader education system and specifically among youths: establishing a resilience authority, formulating crisis management plans, and training resilience ambassadors within the community.

In the second chapter, Luis Fleischman delves into the aftermath of the Arab Spring, asserting that despite the turbulence experienced in the Arab world, the pivotal era introduced by the Arab Spring underscores an uncertain future for the region. The chapter scrutinizes the post-Arab Spring landscape, particularly examining the trajectories of Egypt and Tunisia. Both nations witnessed mass uprisings that toppled dictatorial regimes, leading to subsequent electoral processes followed by occurrences of coups d'état that propelled new authoritarian regimes into power. Fleischman's analysis focuses on three critical dimensions. Initially, it evaluates the legitimacy of these emerging dictatorships, assessing their durability and resilience and projecting the sustainability of their legitimacy claims.

Subsequently, it probes into civil society dynamics, exploring the emergence of protests and social movements amid the authoritarian regimes established after the uprisings. Lastly, the chapter examines the influence of the global environment on this transformation, scrutinizing how the pervasiveness of illiberal democracies and authoritarianism worldwide, coupled with the ascendancy of global powers such as China and Russia, has hampered the democratization process in the Arab world. In essence, it unravels the impact of burgeoning illiberal democracy and authoritarianism on the prospects of fostering democracies in Egypt and Tunisia.

In the third chapter, Daniela Traub analyses the economic evolution of three countries (Morocco, Azerbaijan, and the UAE) as they transition from predominantly oil or agriculture-based economies toward knowledge-based economies (KBEs). After the global economic crisis of 2009–2020, these countries embarked on a societal overhaul to nurture KBes, kickstarting economic progression and advancement. This transformation involved a spectrum of strategies encompassing legislative enactments, strategic planning, budget allocations, infrastructural enhancements, educational investments, economic liberalization, and substantial commitments to science, innovation, and technology. Embracing KBes prompts these nations to adopt a more open outlook toward international trade, business activities, and educational frameworks, fostering foreign engagement and collaboration. These initiatives not only shape the nations' cultural identities toward a more Western-oriented society but also prompt strategic realignments in the socio-economic sphere.

In the fourth chapter, Artyom Gofman and Eyal Lewin delve into narrative research, a burgeoning discipline that holds crucial importance in the realm of political science. Their chapter focuses on exploring the interpretations presented in Russian high school history textbooks and the pedagogical techniques employed. While historians adhere to professional standards by recognizing their biases, setting boundaries, and steering clear of personal biases in their studies, narrative constructors approach their work differently. They curate viewpoints on groups' past and future, reshaping history as a potent instrument for moulding collective identity, fostering social cohesion, and strengthening societal unity. Ultimately, their aim is to craft a national identity that resonates across various epochs, connecting individuals through a shared sense of belonging and continuity.

In the fifth chapter, Alexander Bligh explores the identity dilemma facing the Kyrgyz Republic: whether to assert its sovereignty as an independent nation with a unique national identity, fostering pride and loyalty in future generations toward their nation, or acknowledge its role as a subordinate member within a fragile coalition of groups aligned with a

distinct Russian meta-national identity. The chapter considers Kyrgyzstan's journey toward establishing a unique identity among the post-Soviet states that emerged in the early 1990s. It elucidates the challenging road to nationalism ahead, indicating that substantial national outcomes may not materialize in the immediate future. Unlike many other nations' identities, Kyrgyz identity does not mirror familiar paths, notably the European model from the nineteenth century. Additionally, no key figure in a position of authority, whether a ruler, president, prime minister, or influential leader, has decisively charted a course to forge a unified national source of unity. At this juncture, constructing national or local identities is premature, showcasing that Kyrgyzstan may just be at the nascent stage of transitioning from a traditional identity to a more contemporary one.

In the sixth chapter, Onana Camelia Stroescu analyses the historical underpinnings and key elements of the Aegean dispute in 1974 and 1975, preceding the 1976 Aegean crisis. The ongoing tension between the Greeks and the Turks traces its origins back to an enduring sense of distrust between the two peoples dating to the era of Ottoman Empire rule. Stroescu highlights that despite technological advancements, ongoing conflicts between states have remained constant over the centuries. This is particularly evident in the interactions between neighbouring countries, such as Greece and Turkey, whose historical animosity has intensified due to the definitions of their national, cultural, and religious identities. Throughout history, negotiations have often been the preferred method for resolving disputes between states. However, in the case of Greece and Turkey, negotiations have failed to yield the desired outcomes due to the rigid stances adopted by both governments. With only a brief exception in the early twentieth century, reaching a consensus between the two nations has historically been challenging. Despite attempts at bilateral negotiations, neither side has been willing to compromise, leading to persistent deadlock in their positions.

In the seventh chapter, Gizen Magemizoğlu presents a tribute of sorts to the destruction of the remaining Jewish community in Antioch following the devastating earthquake on February 6, 2023, which claimed thousands of lives in Turkey and Syria. Magemizoğlu delves into the interplay of memory, history, and identity concerning the displaced Jews of Antioch in the aftermath of one of Turkey's most impactful and recent earthquakes. This study also delves into the intricate aspects of minority affiliations and identities within the Jewish population of Antioch across different historical periods. The Jewish congregation in Antioch holds a significant place as one of Turkey's most historical Jewish communities. According to oral traditions among the Jewish people and accounts from the Roman-Jewish

historian Josephus, the initial Jewish settlement in Antioch dates back 2,320 years. Given Antioch's prominence as one of the key Greek cities, it is feasible to suggest that the Jews of Antioch might have been among the earliest inhabitants of this ancient city. The founding of a Jewish community in Antioch was intertwined with the Jews' freedom to practice their religion. Josephus mentions that the Jews received recognition and privileges from the Asian kings when they served as their allies.

In the final chapter, Eyal Lewin delves into the 2023 constitutional-judicial discourse in Israel, portraying it as a manifestation of clashes between the liberal and republican sectors within Israeli society. This distinct perspective diverges from other studies that interpret the protests following proposed reforms as a division between the public and certain unelected elites. Instead, Lewin introduces the concept of conflicting republican national values and liberal principles as key factors shedding light on the profound societal conflict. This study elucidates how the contentious dialogue that unfolded in 2023 following the government's proposal for judicial reforms constitutes yet another chapter in a protracted sequence of ethos conflicts within Israeli society. Nevertheless, the perplexing aspect lies in understanding why the 2023 iteration of this clash of ideologies surged to an unparalleled magnitude, necessitating additional scholarly inquiry.

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CHAPTER ONE

IDENTITY: YOUTH AND CRISIS – SOCIAL RESILIENCE FOLLOWING ERIK ERIKSON

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Introduction

For boys and girls, adolescence constitutes a complex and sensitive period in which they experience physiological and psychological developments. During these times, young people's image and self-esteem are shaped and established. In addition, significant changes are taking place around them regarding expectations of them from the family and all the social systems that surround them. Adolescence is therefore considered an intermediate period in which immaturity and mental instability make it difficult to form a personal identity. The many internal and external changes carry with them a host of challenges that adolescents must deal with (Arnett, 2000; Diaganados et al., 2016; Sandu et al., 2015; Wen et al., 2023).

Erik Erikson was a pioneering figure in the field of developmental psychology, known for his influential theories on human development and identity formation. According to Erikson, people experience crisis periods throughout their lives while shaping their identity. The developing 'I' of the person is built through the introspection of the person on themselves, and, slowly, they build their resilience as part of a cohesive identity and a sense of good ability in the varied areas of their life (Friedman, 2000; Gross, 1987). Crisis periods may be a turning point for better or worse in the development of a person's identity, which is acquired throughout their life; thus, during the coronavirus pandemic, teenagers and educational staff dropped out, withdrew from the education system, were emotionally damaged, and lost basic social skills that they had acquired throughout the development of their identity. On the other hand, other youths and educational

teams found a good and worthy opportunity in the crisis to strengthen qualities and actions that strengthen and promote resilience, such as contributing to the community, undertaking physical and creative activities, and more.

Erikson's work focused on the importance of identity development throughout one's lifespan, with a particular emphasis on the challenges and opportunities that arise during adolescence and young adulthood. Central to Erikson's theories is the concept of identity crisis, a period of intense exploration and self-discovery in which individuals grapple with questions of who they are, what they believe, and where they fit in the world (Erikson, 1994). Of relevance to youth identity formation are Erikson's stages of adolescence, in which individuals navigate the tension between identity versus role confusion, seeking to establish a coherent sense of self while also exploring different social roles and identities (Erikson, 1959). Erikson's theories of youth identity and resilience have important implications for understanding and supporting young people as they navigate the complexities of adolescence. By recognizing the importance of identity exploration, encouraging resilience-building strategies, and providing opportunities for growth and self-discovery, educators, parents, and mental health professionals can help young people develop a strong sense of self-identity and psychological well-being (Erikson, 1994, 1959). As we shall see throughout this chapter, Erikson's ideas can provide an important theoretical background to form a model for relying on youth as primary social agents of resilience in times of stress and crisis.

Various sociological studies deal with Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, which was put forward in the late 1970s (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to this theory, there is a connection between four subsystems that directly and indirectly affect each other: (1) the microsystem, which includes the interpersonal relationships of individuals in their primary and everyday environment; (2) the mesosystem, which combines two or more microsystems at the individual level; (3) the exosystem, which the individual is not directly involved in but which impacts them and those around them in the microsystem; and (4) the macrosystem, which includes large systems at the global state level that affect the systems of the individual in their life (Brechtwald & Prinstein, 2011; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It should be noted that Bronfenbrenner's model has continued to be used in recent years by social scientists, including Erik Erikson, in various fields (Eriksson et al., 2018; Hertler et al., 2018).

The youth's main social environment is in the microsystem. The school in the community provides adolescents with experiences and connections with their peers. Therefore, the school assists in shaping personal and group

identity and establishing and managing the personal and social resilience of young people and constitutes a very significant factor for individuals in society (Onkarappa, 2021; Salandana, 2013; Valiente et al., 2020).

Just as teenagers are agents of socialization, they can also become significant agents of resilience for their peer group and other groups in the microenvironment to which they belong (family, community, school). To the extent that their school, community, and family turn them into a driving force in terms of resilience, in the future, they will become caring, contributing adults with optimal resilience (Lee et al., 2012; Larkins, 2014).

The COVID-19 pandemic that broke out in December 2019 disrupted the routine to which we were accustomed. The pandemic affected society's public and personal agenda, leading it to rethink its course. The adolescent boy did not study in the conventional way, did not meet with friends and family, and was disconnected from his grandparents, who were often the most significant adult figures in his life. Thus, the young man missed a period that could have been full of friendships, first loves, and the variety of adventures that characterize adolescence. Instead, the youth experienced painful loneliness and disconnection from society (Branquinho et al., 2021; Lehman et al., 2021; Lundstrom, 2022; Waselewski et al., 2020).

Various countries around the world have dealt with many crises and natural disasters throughout history prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The education system in these countries operated differently from place to place and enabled creative solutions for dealing with the crises that struck the country in general and the education system in particular (Akram et al., 2012; Gavari-Starkie et al., 2021; Mutarak & Polhisiri, 2013).

Different scholars divide societies in different countries according to their cultural tendencies, and one of the most prominent classifications of this type is the division into individualistic societies versus collectivist societies (Kagitcibasi, 1997; Triandis, 1995). In individualistic societies, according to this classification, culture makes it possible to emphasize personal responsibility and freedom of choice. Collectivist societies, on the other hand, celebrate social uniformity in their culture and emphasize the significant place of the whole in individual life. According to this division, different societies maintain different types of community, different patterns of citizen behavior, and different shades of worldviews that influence people's responses – especially in times of emergency (Abdel-Fattah & Huber, 2003; Hammamura, 2012; LeFebvre & Franke, 2013).

Consequently, researchers often conduct comparative studies of cultural-social differences and realize the behavioral implications of this typology (Brewer & Chen, 2007; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In recent years, an index has even been developed that classifies societies as individualistic or

collectivist, according to which it quite clearly emerges that Western societies, especially Protestant societies, are more individualistic, while at the collectivist end of the spectrum are cultures found in the Far East (Hofstede, 2011; Hofstede et al., 2010).

In this article, we focus on countries that are depicted in various studies as having a collectivist social culture (Japan, Thailand, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Taiwan). For the sake of comparison, we also selected countries considered to have an individualistic social culture (the United States, Canada, Spain, Germany). Against this background, and in a comparative dimension, we also examine the Israeli case study.

Crisis responses

This section reveals how different countries have dealt with crises and other stressful events and how they have adopted creative solutions in the education system.

Japan

After a number of disasters and national crises (e.g., the Tokyo earthquake in 1923, the US bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in World War II, the Fukushima disaster in 2011), Japanese decision-makers adopted a number of solutions that must be followed in order to cope with future stressful and crisis events, thereby shaping the community and national resilience of its residents, especially students in the education system (Fujioka & Sakakibara, 2018).

Over the years, educators and students in Japan have cultivated an attitude of coping with challenging events, which they have called “risk education” (Kagawa & Selby, 2012). They have integrated the formal and informal education systems. According to this method, from a very young age, students should acquire skills that will help them to cope with the challenges they face during a disaster while learning theoretically and practically about the types of disasters. This learning is done through formal education (Shaw et al., 2021).

Japan’s education system has taken several actions to deal with crises and stressful events. First, a concerted national effort was made, according to which a culture that reduces risks must be fostered. Accordingly, students were educated on disaster preparedness from an early age by transmitting knowledge and skills to be called upon in the event of a disaster. This model is conveyed through theory and the practical training of teaching staff (Katada & Kanai, 2016). In addition, empowerment and reciprocity within

the community were strengthened through the practice of simulated crisis events that the school generates in the classroom. In this practice, students and educational staff work together to problem-solve events that may occur in the future. In this way, the exercises precede a remedy for a blow in the full sense of the expression (Katada & Kanai, 2016).

The issue of lessons learned has also been nurtured. According to the Japanese, disasters occur when people forget, so as long as we live, we must preserve the memory of the disaster and the memory of the loss of life and property. To remember and not to forget, the Japanese teach educational staff and students about events that took place and how to learn lessons from them for a possible future (Sakurai & Sato, 2016).

The Japanese saw the political arena as an important and necessary infrastructure for influencing decision-makers and policy-makers. Therefore, they promoted the enactment of a Basic Law that defined who the experts who would be assigned would be and who would have the mandate to develop resilience in the country. The law also explicitly addressed how educational leadership can be trained for resilience (Cabinet Secretariat – Government of Japan, 2018).

As part of the complex of activities described above, the Japanese took care of the development of life skills for children and adolescents. Unique schools in Japan that survived the Fukushima disaster prepared a curriculum called a “disaster-focused training program” after the disaster. This program included diverse life skills that the educational staff needed to provide to the students, including teamwork during a disaster, independent thinking, creativity, learning the history of tsunamis and other disasters, as well as general knowledge of local geology (Matsuura & Shaw, 2015; Trucker, 2013).

Another significant action was turning children and youth into significant ambassadors in the community. The Japanese see young people as a powerful factor in fostering social resilience, so they recruit them for community activities accordingly. Even during routine times, the youth instruct community members and family members – younger siblings and others in their immediate vicinity – in all matters related to disaster preparedness. Their role in such training is to establish mental resilience in their immediate environment, and thus they become agents of resilience in times of distress for the benefit of loved ones (Matsuura & Shaw, 2015; Trucker, 2013).

Thailand

After the tsunami disaster that struck the country in 2004, a community approach was established throughout Thailand and on Koh Phi Phi – which was directly affected – according to which children and adolescents who know their roles during a stressful event will survive the crisis better and their resilience will be more significant. A community mechanism was developed there that connects individuals based on shared identity and social solidarity. What distinguishes the community from other circles of identity (religion, nationality, ethnicity, class) lies in the community's geographic location and the nature of its social connections. These connections are intimate – they are personal, authentic, and spontaneous (Dahan, 2021). During the tsunami they experienced in 2004, children played significant roles in helping their families and communities. Later, they also took part in encouraging recovery from the event. Children assisted the elderly population, cared for younger children, helped clean and build houses, became interpreters for older community members vis-à-vis the media and the local education system, and, most importantly, created an authentic and meaningful relationship among all the victims of the disaster (Mutarak & Pothisiri, 2013).

Bangladesh

Bangladesh is one of the countries most prone to natural disasters. Throughout its history, cyclones, extreme floods, droughts, and cold waves have always been its lot and had an exceptional impact on its large population, which is also one of the most densely populated in the world. Every disaster event directly affects tens of millions of people and children in Bangladesh (Sarker et al., 2013), and decision-makers have therefore led a policy according to which they must integrate the education system with the struggle against the forces of nature that strike them frequently. On the basis of this policy, they have advanced an action plan that anticipates future disasters in detail. Schools across Bangladesh have prepared a contingency plan that includes alternative learning locations, pre-organization of school transportation, assessments with teaching materials for the new location, and an emergency education plan. Each such plan in schools is headed by the emergency supervisor, whose job is to coordinate the incident should it occur. In addition, the education system has initiated continuing education courses for educational staff. These seminars promote learning about existing emergency plans and preparation – as part of routine life – for the next crisis. This system has trained teaching staff in the education system of

kindergartens, primary schools, and high schools. Each team was trained in the framework of relevant seminars, seminars, and workshops on a regular basis and under the supervision of the local Ministry of Education (Peek, 2008).

Bangladeshi decision-makers also promoted the allocation of designated budgets for resilience programs in the education system. Bangladesh, like Japan and Thailand, has allocated resources to programs that focus on an optimal assessment of the education system for crisis situations. They “colored” the budgets earmarked for this purpose in advance and built plans accordingly (Peek, 2008).

The Ministry of Education has also established the value of equality in education as a catalyst for increasing resilience. According to this worldview, equality in education for all, regardless of economic class and gender, will promote optimal resilience. Since many Bangladeshis are of very low socioeconomic status by virtue of being villagers who come from economically and socially difficult areas, policy-makers have prioritized promoting education for all equally (Akram et al., 2012).

Taiwan

In September 1999, an earthquake struck Taiwan. About 2,400 people were killed, and over 11,000 were wounded. In addition, about 870 schools were destroyed, making it difficult for the education system to return to full functioning as a result of this crisis. The main argument repeated by decision-makers related to the fact that children and adolescents should be exposed to proper disaster management at an early age, and therefore the school must establish a culture of risk reduction within the community. In this way, the school will strengthen community resilience by establishing and empowering it. According to the worldview that guides all disaster preparedness programs in Taiwan, schools must work in full cooperation with the community and build programs based on courses whose main content is crisis prevention. These courses are delivered to educational staff and students in academia so that they can serve as ambassadors to the local community (Jieh-Jiuh, 2020; Ministry of Education, 2019).

Indonesia

In December 2004, an incident occurred in the Indian Ocean that combined an earthquake and tsunami. This combination made the event one of the deadliest known to mankind in modern times. Over 300,000 people lost their lives in the disaster, including many children. Despite the fact that

tsunamis had struck the area for years, none of the state institutions were prepared for the disaster in terms of the education system. After the terrible disaster occurred, policy-makers decided to promote two main issues relating to the education system and its ability to promote optimal resilience within the education community. The first was the establishment of a dedicated institutional body called “Crisis Education.” This body transmits materials and knowledge regarding natural disasters and builds a system of safety culture and multi-age resilience. It also provides continuing education courses for teaching staff. “Disaster/Crisis Education” prepares a community-based model, that is, one that is designed according to its characteristics and ensures that the chosen model is assimilated among community members through a broad process of spreading information, training, exposure, and student training.

Another policy promoted in Indonesia was to encourage active elements in building resilience by giving grants to organizations that develop resilience. Thus, schools that developed models to strengthen community resilience and led initiatives aimed at developing disaster preparedness and strengthening resilience received financial grants from the state, which motivated schools throughout Indonesia (Consortium for Disaster Education, 2011; Rafliana, 2011).

Louisiana vs New Orleans

In 2008, New Orleans was struck by the deadliest hurricane to hit the United States since 1928: Storm Katrina, which claimed the lives of nearly 2,000 people. Most of those who perished were members of minorities and poor people, who were unable to escape the inferno on their own. In addition, most of the victims were children and adolescents who were left without a functioning education system, without a home, and, in some cases, even without a family. After the trauma of Hurricane Katrina, Tulane University in Louisiana established an entire educational research association, the Education Research Alliance (ERA), which took it upon itself to monitor the aftermath of the disaster and prepare, accordingly, for the future.

Following some of the studies raised by that consortium, the education system in the city of New Orleans decided to prepare for the coming crises through two processes that they adopted. One is the meticulous planning of an annual day for the community. Every year since the Katrina disaster, the city of New Orleans has marked the day with a large-scale event for the community. This day is organized and managed almost entirely by the city’s youth, and its main content focuses on gratitude to the community through providing assistance, contributions to the elderly population, and significant