

Hebrew in Arabic and Arabic in Hebrew texts

Is this the other within me?

How do Jewish and Muslim adolescents  
react to learning about interreligious  
similarities and influences?

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# What happens when I find you “inside me”?

- Human life is also considered sacred in Islam, as found in the Quran in which dignity is attributed to all humans, understood as an inherent right; thus, Muslims often identify human dignity as the base for human rights (Moore, 2019).
- Can we imagine a God so arbitrary as to choose one nation, one place, and one moment in human history in which the eternal divine will was to be manifest (Green, 2003 in Moore, 2019)
- “...For you have chosen us and sanctified us of all nations “ (Shabath Blessing, untranslated yesterday)

# What happens when I find you “inside me”?

- How does the study of interreligious similarity and influence affect learners attitudes towards the other religions and its believers?
- Context of an intractable conflict, increasingly conceived as religious
- Two studies
  - Jewish students
    - Birth of Islam+ Interreligious similarities +Jews under Muslim rule=>Islamophobia
  - Muslim students
    - Interreligious similarities=> prejudice towards Jews

# Study 1: Islamophobia & interfaith history teaching

## Problem

- Islamophobia as “legitimate prejudice” (Bleich, 2011; Creighton & Jamal, 2015)
- Stereotypes+Perceived threat (Ernst & Bornstein, 2012; Lee et al, 2013)
- Social distance (Lee et al, 2013)

## Factors

- Historical perceptions (Shadid& van Koningsveld, 2002)
- Current Realistic conflict + Political affiliation (Ernst & Bornstein, 2012)
- Media representation (Morgan & Poynting, 2016)

## Antidote?

- Historical Counter-stereotypic examples (Abu-Nimer & Hilal, 2016)
- Shared identity approach (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2014)
- Exposure to religious symbols ?? (Razpurker-Apfeld & Shamo-Nir, 2015)



# Method

## Participants

- 351 (160 completers) Israeli Jewish 7<sup>th</sup> -9<sup>th</sup> grade students.

## Conditions:

- Conflictual (Crusades/Minorities in Middle East)
  - Private school (Center-Left, High SES)
- Commonalities (Muslim culture and science, Jews of Islam)
  - Public schools (Center-Right, Lower SES)
- Control (Renaissance/industrial rev)

## Instruments

- Islamophobia questionnaire (Pre-Post) (Lee et al, 2013; Ernst & Bornstein, 2012), (“All Muslims are extremists” “Islam was as tolerant to other religions as Christianity and Judaism”  $\alpha$ 's = .78 - .84)



# Jewish Teachers' challenges

Negative stereotypes and prejudices on Islam and Islamic people.

Atmosphere of fear and hate to the 'Other' due to terror acts, which happened on a daily base in Jerusalem and in other cities in Israel.

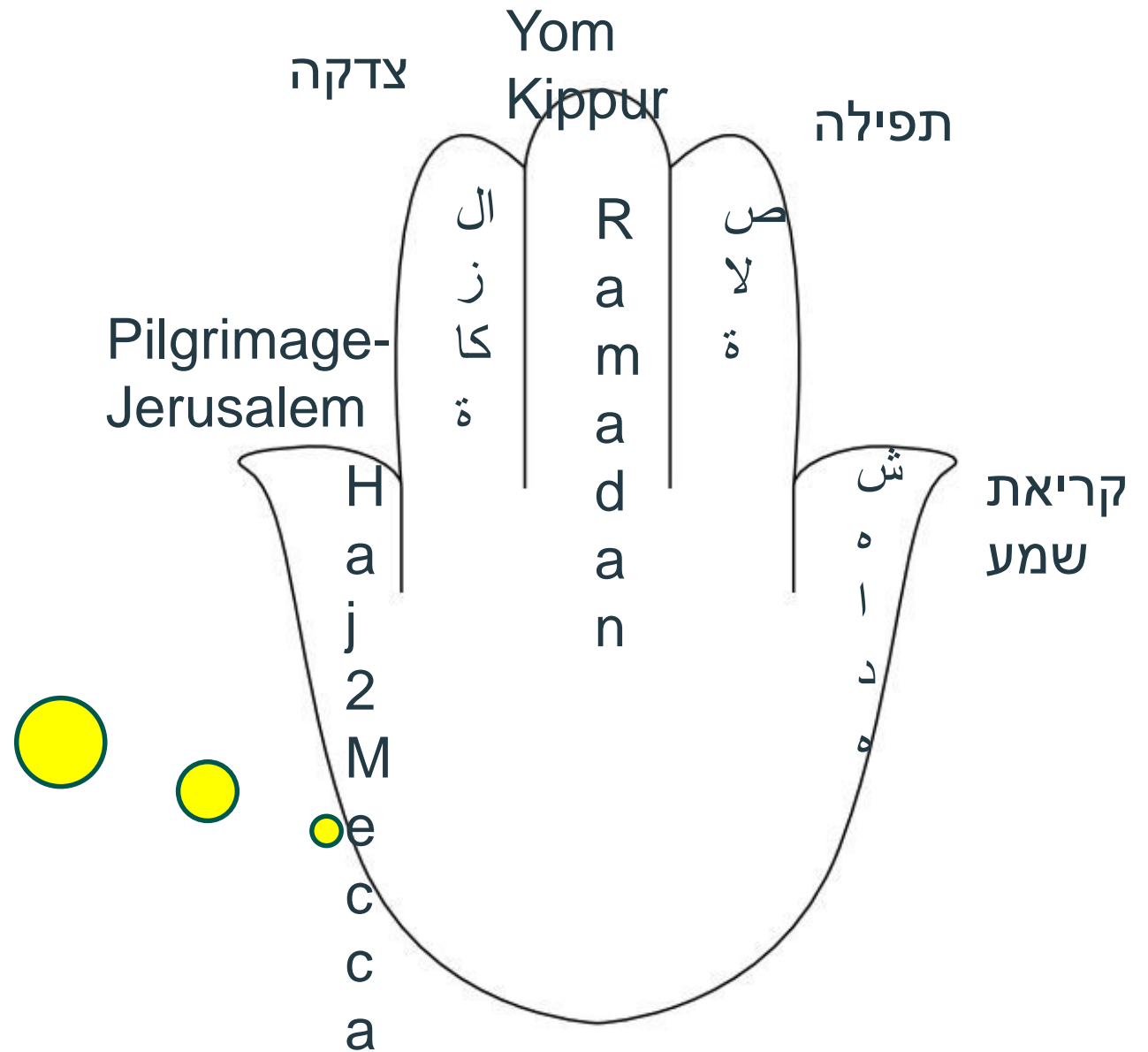
Parents' doubts or even objections to this historical study.

Indeed- supervisor's impression is that about half of the teachers omit the topic

# Emphasizing shared identity

'Five Pillars of Islam'  
and the Five Pillars of Judaism

Did they  
copy us?





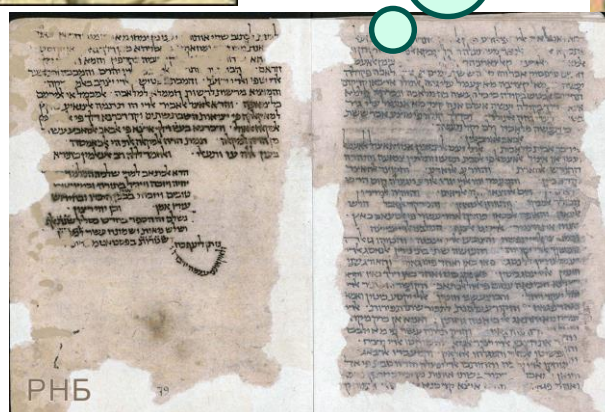
## Stressing the empathic strategy

Personal information about the founder of Islam- Muhammad (570-632 )



Muhammad as youth

“Were our grandfathers Arab-Jews?”



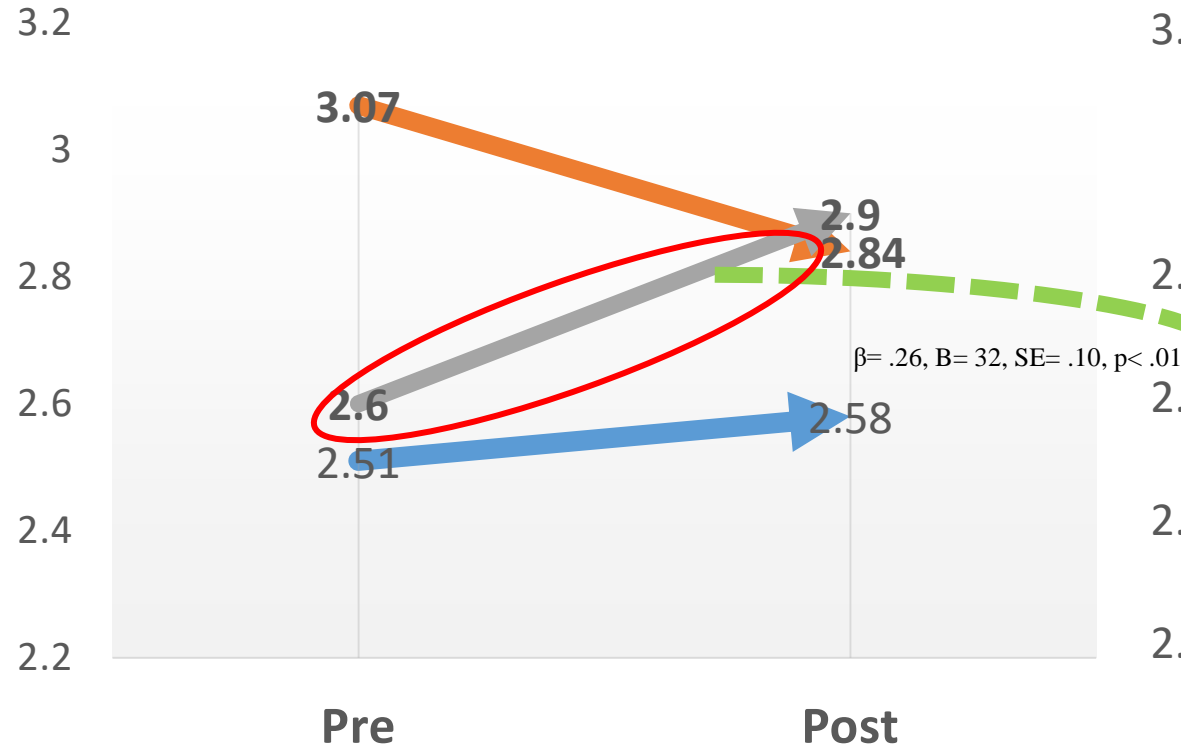
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Intercultural influences



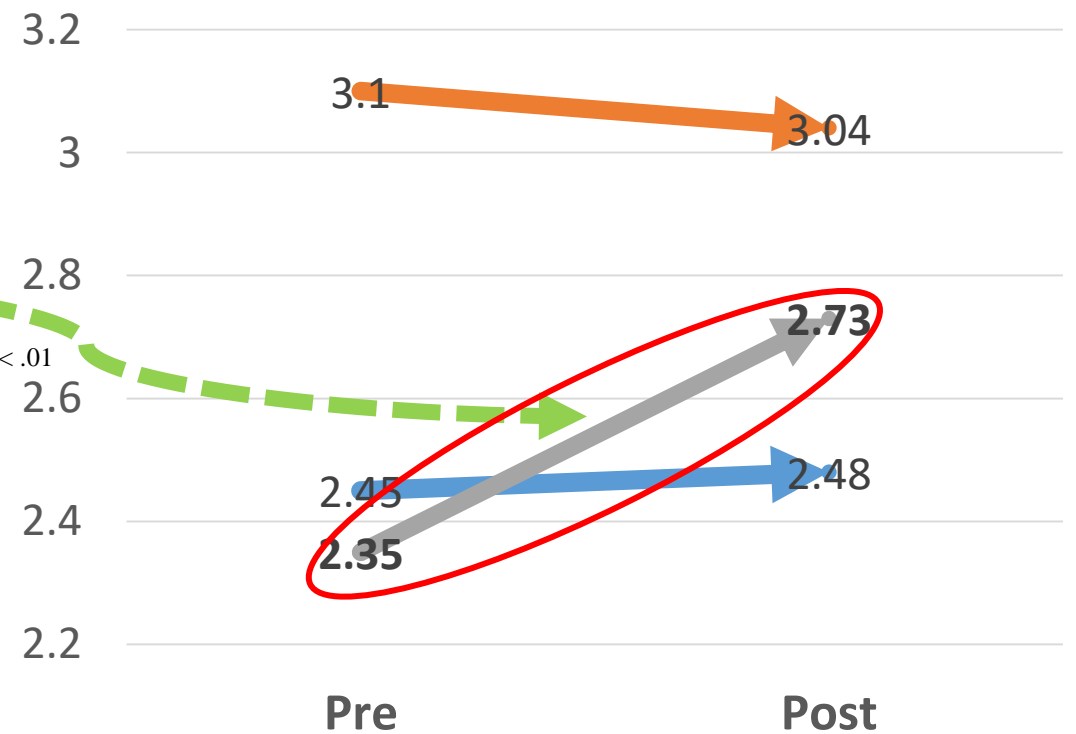
# Findings:

## Change in positive historical perceptions of Islam



$F(2,158)=5.74, p<.01, \eta^2 = .07$

## Change in willingness for encounter

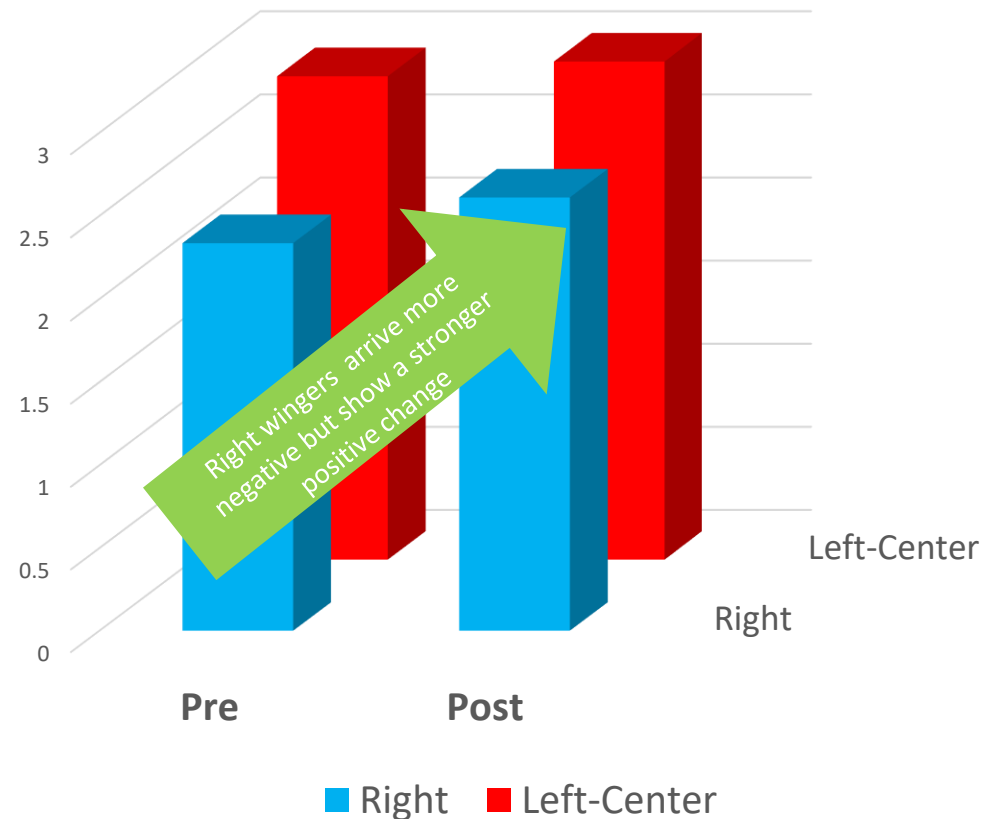


$F(2,158)=1.46, p = .07, \eta^2 = .03$

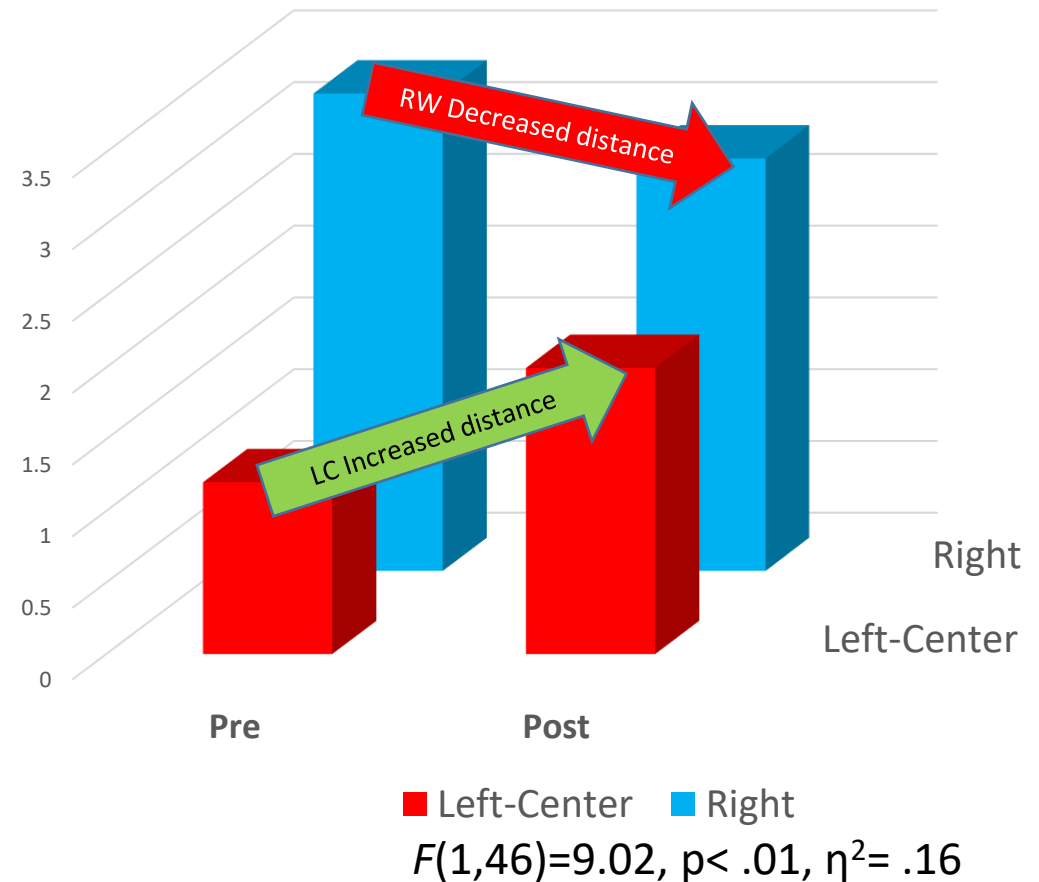
▶ Control ▶ Conflictual ▶ Commonalities

# Studying Islam interacts with political affiliation in a surprising way

Political affiliation and change in historical perception of Islam



Political affiliation and change in Social distance



# Discussion

- An effect of studying Islam on Islamophobia?
  - Entrenchment? A trajectory of SES and political affiliation
  - Hope? An independent change effect beyond demographics
  - We do make a difference
- History as (en)counter-information
  - Counter stereotypic images of Islam
  - Common-identity
  - Imagined contact
  - affirmation
- An effect of “Framing”?
  - Is the “Clash of civilizations” an outcome of teaching the Crusades?
  - Can the Commonalities approach work in a Western-Christian context?

# Study 2: Muslim students studying Islam-Judaism commonalities

Participants: 204 Muslim 7<sup>th</sup> graders from rural schools

Texts:

- Web excerpt about Judaism and Islam as “[sister religions](#)”
- Excerpts from the Omar pact and excerpts on relation to Non-Jewish minorities from the Jewish tradition and Israeli declaration of independence

Instrument:

- The Islamophobia scales converted to attitudes to Jews and Judaism translated to Arabic



# Muslim teachers' challenges

- Climate of religious threat
- Context of discrimination
- Highly conservative community
- Teaching about the sacred within the secular context



# Reactions in process

Teacher: In Your opinion- Are there similarities between the two religions?

Student: No

Teacher: but you already said it a minute ago...Prayer, testimony

Teacher: [Omar] moreover gave the Jews religious freedom...we believe in different religions and each has complete freedom to its rituals.

Student [interrupts]: the Jews interrupt muslims a lot, each time they close Jerusalem and murder Muslims.

# Reactions in process

Student written responses to: **“What did I learn from comparing Omar’s pact and Israeli declaration of independence”**

Omar’s pact is more righteous, because the Israelis wanted us to believe in Jewish prophets, but we have our own prophet, god have mercy on him.

The Israeli declaration of independence is more fair

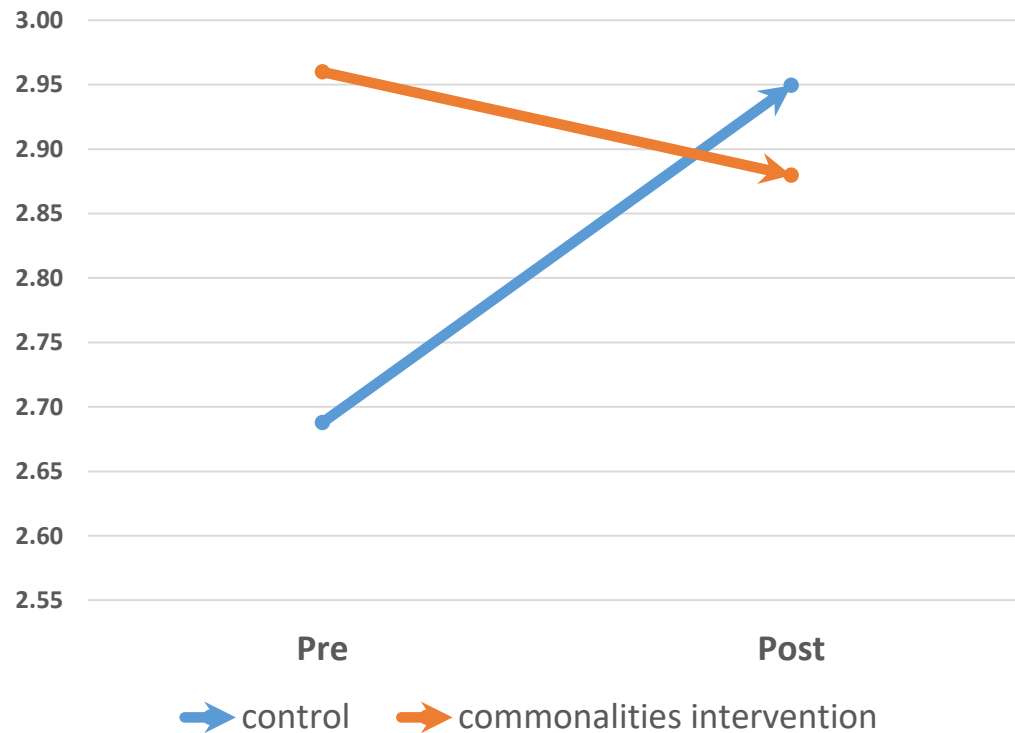
Omar’s pact wasn’t discriminatory because Jews threatened the security of Ilya (Jerusalem)

Both are non discriminatory

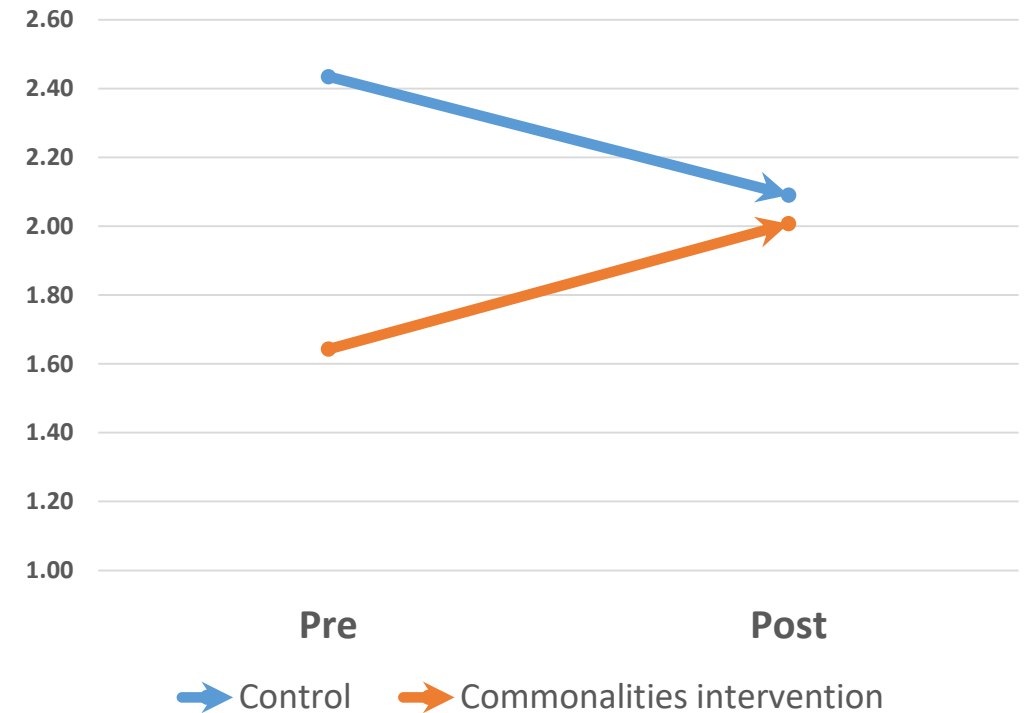
Omar’s pact is right. Omar was right to drive Jews out of Ilya. They recoiled from their promises

# Muslim classrooms intervention effects

Positive historical perception change among Muslim students following Commonalities intervention



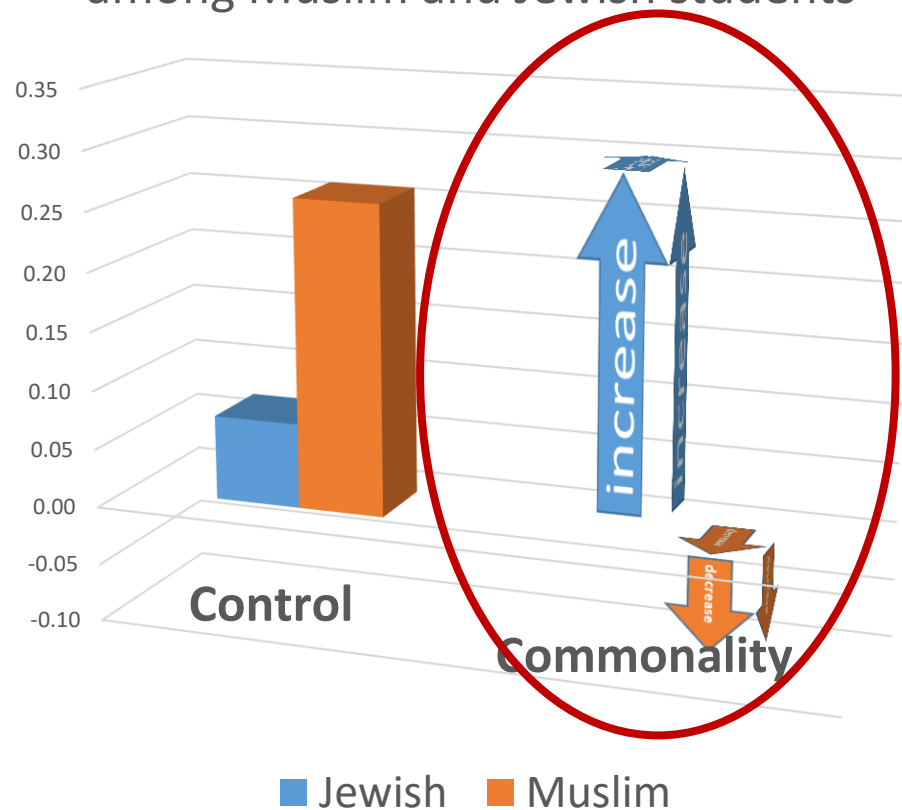
Stereotype change among Muslim students following Commonalities intervention





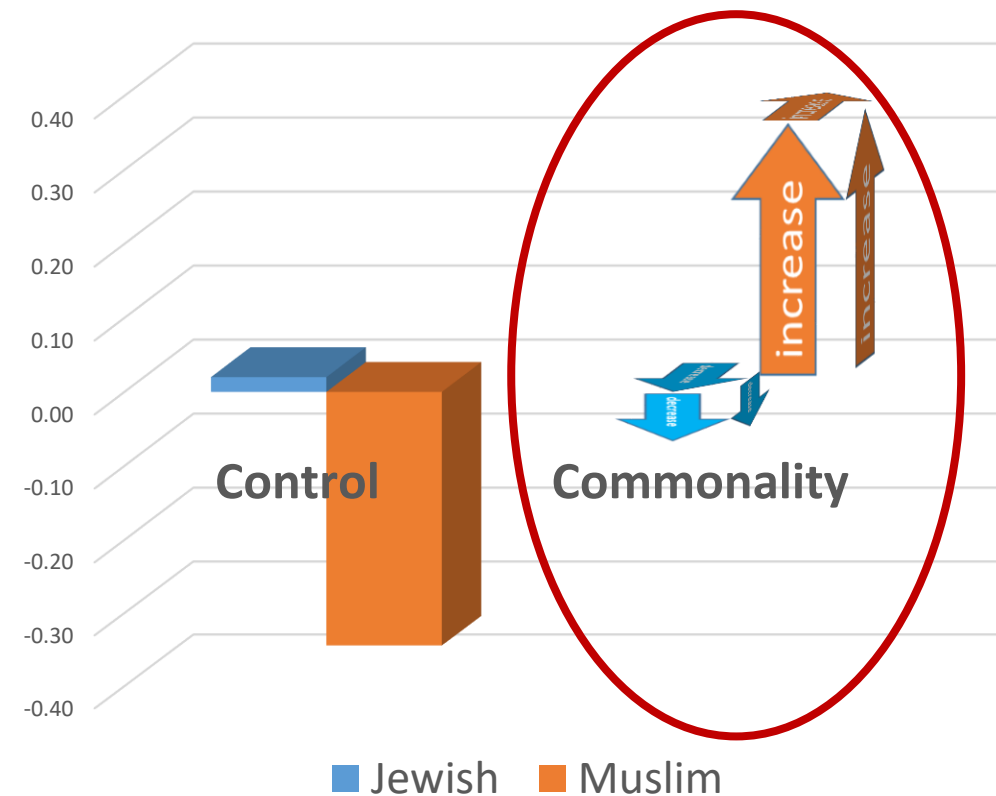
# Opposed effects on Muslim and Jewish learners

Positive historical perception change among Muslim and Jewish students



$F(1,285)=4.56, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02$

Stereotype change among Muslim and Jewish students



$F(1,285)=10.75, p < .001, \eta^2 = .04$

# Discussion

- Potential of interfaith teaching for prejudice reduction and possibly reconciliation
- Different potentials based on different histories? Would Christians be deadlocked in the “Clash of Cultures” heritage?
- Different potential for the minority and majority
- Why do Israeli Muslims and Jews react almost diametrically to learning of similarity?
- Promise of shared identity vs. perils of distinctiveness threat.
- Further research: content, duration, reflection

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