

Call for Chapters

Reconciling Ancient and Indigenous Belief Systems: Textbooks and Curricula in Contention

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Background

A nation and its history have been traditionally and intimately interwoven. While the past is often imagined, it seeks to unite a nation around a collective past. Revisions to the past often seek to unite a nation, to find a common purpose, and to assure loyalty to the nation. What to leave in and what to leave out in a nation's past is often highly contentious and controversial. Dominant discourses and institutions represent and reconstruct nations' ancient pasts in ways that legitimate current and future visions of the nation.

Dominant interpretations of the Abrahamic tradition's key holy scriptures — including the *Torah*, *Tanakh/Old Testament*, *New Testament*, and the *Qur'an* — have generally portrayed ancient non-Abrahamic (so-called pagan) traditions negatively. Such interpretations and (mis)representations created unnecessary, or obsolete, divides and schisms between the Abrahamic tradition and these pagan religious traditions.¹ While such constructed divides and negative portrayals of non-Abrahamic religious belief systems might arguably have been necessary during ancient times when these Abrahamic religions sought to establish their unique identities, the pressing questions we need to ask today include: *What productive and inclusive knowledge systems, values, beliefs, and practices might we — as a human civilization — have lost over the millennia with the introduction of that divisive distinction from, and vilification of, these non-Abrahamic pagan traditions? Further, how do such negative depictions of these traditions influence modern-day citizens' understandings of their own histories? And how do these representations shape their approaches to other worldviews, perspectives, and religious traditions?*

Both the timeliness and urgency of this long overdue conversation stem from the reality that such divide has — consciously or unconsciously — not only shaped and tainted our relationship with some arguably extinct ancient belief systems (i.e., ancient Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, etc.), but also contemporary non-Abrahamic belief systems, including minority Indigenous Spiritualities in various geographical contexts across

¹ We use the label 'pagan' to refer to various forms of non-Abrahamic religious traditions: First, the label is intended to refer to ancient belief systems, that are widely considered extinct (e.g., ancient Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, etc.). Second, our use of the term aims to also capture belief systems that have survived until our present day. Those would include Indigenous Spiritualities that might have survived independently, alongside Christianity and Islam in various parts of the world, as well as Indigenous religious traditions that might have survived in a syncretic manner, fusing some of their beliefs and practices with the dominant Abrahamic religion(s). Finally, we are also keen on capturing some of the relatively recent efforts by groups aiming to consolidate and revive ancient 'pagan' belief systems and practices including Indigenous beliefs and practices in the Americas, Asia, Africa, and Oceania. Examples would include *Tengrism* in parts of Central Asia and Europe; *Shamanism* in South Korea and various other contexts; the rebirth of ancient *pagan Nordic religions* in some Nordic countries; the modern worship of ancient deities, such as *Gaia*; and, the revival of Wiccan beliefs and practices, among others.

the world. For instance, engaging critically with the misrepresentation of these belief systems might encourage some of the key Abrahamic religious and national educational institutions to revisit dominant interpretations that have generally positioned humans as viceroys or as holding dominion over the natural environment. This critical engagement and dialogue would also allow for a better understanding of, and learning from, pagan traditions, including their arguably closer connection to, and respect for, the natural environment. Such reconciliation could contribute to addressing some of humanity's most daunting global challenges, such as the climate crisis.

As numerous studies have demonstrated over the past decades, education is one of the most influential social sites in which collective national identities are constructed and contested. Various discourses and narratives compete to shape these identities. Thus, this edited volume will attempt to explore and theorize the generally understudied question of how — informed by various competing discourses and narratives — nations represent their ancient and existing non-Abrahamic pagan traditions in their national curricula and school textbooks. Further, it will attempt to explore how these textual representations shape citizens' identities, worldviews, and attitudes vis-à-vis various religious traditions and groups. Essentially, it attempts to contribute to elucidating four key questions across the various contexts in which they are relevant — the societies that predominantly adhere to some of the Abrahamic faiths.

- 1) How do national school textbooks and curricula in some nations portray the nation's ancient non-Abrahamic knowledge systems, religious beliefs, and practices?
- 2) How do these curricula represent the nation's existing non-Abrahamic knowledge systems, religious beliefs, and practices — including Indigenous Spiritualities — in contexts where these still exist?
- 3) How do these constructions and representations in curricula — and potentially other relevant social sites — shape students' and citizens' identities, worldviews, and attitudes?
- 4) How do nations that have embraced their non-Abrahamic pagan pasts represent and negotiate this past in their national textbooks and curricula?

Contributions Sought

We invite chapter submissions that attempt to address any or all of the aforementioned questions. We encourage contributions from scholars studying these questions in any context in which they are relevant. While the book is grounded in curriculum and educational studies, we welcome contributions from established and emerging scholars in various fields including, but not limited to, curriculum studies, comparative and international education, teacher education, religious studies, history of religion, and sociology of religion.

Submission Procedure

Interested scholars are invited to submit abstracts of 600-700 words in length, clearly outlining: the chapter's key arguments; potential contribution to the literature; theoretical and conceptual framework; methodology/methods; and data sources. Abstracts should also include a tentative title; the full name(s) of the author(s); institutional affiliation(s); full contact information; and an indication of whether the chapter would include any illustrations or images. Abstracts should follow the American Psychological Association (APA) format guidelines.² The deadline for submitting abstracts is **August 15, 2020**. All abstract submissions, and any inquiries, should be sent to: EditedVolume2022@gmail.com

Timeline

Authors of accepted and rejected abstracts will be notified of the reviewers' decision no later than October 15, 2020. Authors of accepted abstracts would be expected to submit their full chapters by March 1, 2021. Full chapters may not exceed 6,000 words, including references and annexes. All chapters will undergo a rigorous academic review process by the volume editors and other specialized scholars.

² APA guidelines are presented here:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/general_format.html