

Evaluation of a bachelor thesis written by **Eliška Zajíčková** and titled “**The Impact of the Israeli and Emirati ‘Partnership of Convenience’ on UAE society: 2020-2022**”

The bachelor thesis deals with United Arab Emirates and its relations with the State of Israel in general, and with the so called Abraham Accords and its impact in particular. In the context of the Middle East developments it deals with a significant and relevant issue that is so far understudied in the academia. Another positive point to highlight is a good English language that makes the thesis readable for a potential audience. Also, the student worked on the thesis systematically.

The bachelor thesis aims to answer two interrelated research questions (page 8):

- What aspects of the UAE society are impacted and discussed in the UAE media after the signing of the Abraham accords in the context of the UAE-Israel relationship?
- How do the UAE news media portray the relationship between the United Arab Emirates and Israel following the Abraham Accords Declaration?

The bachelor thesis claims to be built on qualitative methodology in general, and on grounded theory in particular (page 7). However, it is predominantly rather descriptive content analysis of two English language Emirati and one Israeli newspaper. At the end of the thesis (pages 52 up to 54) it even perform a quantitative content analysis while comparing the three selected newspapers in terms of space dedicated to particular topic (categories) related to the Abraham accords. However, this combination of qualitative and quantitative methodology is not necessarily wrong, but I guess it should be reflected on.

Few critical points:

1. **Structure of the thesis.** I miss an introductory chapter that would shortly introduce the reader into the topic (including why is it important to research it), introduce the research questions and briefly also introduce the particular chapters of the thesis. I also miss theoretical chapter. Such a chapter is formally included in the thesis; however, it does not provide us with any theoretical framework (the only theoretical passages are those dedicated to sociology of media). Instead of the theoretical framework it deals with historical context (meaning the story of Abraham Accords).
2. **I miss more critical approach towards the topic. And expect something more than just reproducing and repeating Emirati official position on the subject matter.** Part of this problem is a neglect of existing academic literature dealing with the United Arab Emirates (or Gulf monarchies in general). For example, the thesis correctly states that there is no freedom of media in the UAE (including the existence of censorship and the sensitivities connected to foreign policy that cannot be criticised). However, the rest of the thesis based on media analysis and the way it constructs the image of Abraham Accords does not reflect or comment on it (especially on the concluding chapter).

There are also some other, rather minor problematic points resulting from relatively uncritical approach towards the United Arab Emirates and its policies. It seems like the thesis just copy and paste the official Emirati discourse. I will provide the evaluation with just few examples. The thesis claims (page 22) that the problematic and tense relations between Gulf countries and Iran had started only after the Iranian revolution (1979). However, Iran claimed Bahrain as one of its provinces long before the revolution. Also, the issue of the three Emirati islands claimed by Iran is much older than the revolution.

It is rather ironic to claim that (page 23) the “GCC was established after the Iran’s beginnings with the fundamentalist Islam”, since Saudi Arabia (as a leading member state of the GCC) is from its very beginning (1930s) the main world exporter of the so called fundamentalist Islam (its sunny version, sometimes labelled as Wahhabism).

Incorrect or at least uncritical claim that UAE tends towards noninterventionist foreign policy (part 23). The UAE military is part of the military intervention to Yemen (since 2015) that have led to the largest humanitarian catastrophe of our time, according to the UN reports.

3. **Methodology and analyses.** I see the biggest weakness of the thesis in this respect. First, it is not clear how the final body of articles/texts have been selected (how many articles have been used for the analyses), however the thesis tries to tackle with the issue. Second, if the codes have been uncovered and identified based on the articles published between July and December 2020, and then used and applied for coding the rest of the material covering the time span of 2021 and 2022, is not there a problem that a completely new topics and issues emerged in the way how media constructed the Abraham Accords, however it was missed since the filter (code system) elaborated in 2020? I consider this relevant since the topic is a new one and there could be a dynamic development in the way it is covered by the media. Third, I am not happy about the way the dates are presented. The quotations/excerpts from the selected newspaper articles form the dominant part of the thesis. However, it does not speak for themselves/it does not have meaning itself. It should be interpreted, commented and reflected on. In the context of the thesis it should be explained what are the meanings of the particular categories uncovered using the grounded theory (it is really not useful at all to quote a lengthy citations regarding details without any relevance for the topic of the thesis, for example how many Israeli tourists got stuck at the UAE airport or that few Israelis also tried to smuggle drugs to the UAE, page 34, or what was the content of the very first direct postal shipment from the UAE to Israel, page 44). Last but not least, I am not fully satisfied with the fact that there is no attempt at formulating a theory based on the grounded theory methodology (generally the conclusion is too brief, does not focus much on what has been found out as well as why). In fact, the thesis engages just with open coding, but does not strive to identify relations among the categories and build some more abstract categories and build conclusions based on this.
4. **References.** Primary and secondary sources should be distinguished. General lack of academic literature dealing with the UAE and Gulf-Iranian/Israeli relations.

Questions for the defence:

1. Is it possible to elaborate more deeply on how the final body of texts that has entered to the analyses had been selected?
2. Is it possible to elaborate more on the findings and results of the analyses? What does it say about the media coverage of the Abraham Accords? And why is the topic constructed in the way it is? Why are the findings relevant for understanding the international relations in the Middle East?

**I propose grad three, if the discussion during the defence is successful.**

Kokorinsko, 8<sup>th</sup> September 2022

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