



מרכז עזרי לחקר איראן והמפרץ הפרסי
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**Islamic Republic of Iran Textbooks Perpetuate
Pahlavi Nationalism**

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Islamic Republic of Iran textbooks perpetuate Pahlavi nationalism

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The educational goals of many contemporary nations, has been to educate present and future generations in the ideology of the state. Higgins and Shoar-Ghaffari sustain such a point in that “all who have written about education in the Islamic Republic agree that a chief aim is the creation of an Islamic person, the development of commitment to one G-d”ⁱ

However Farhad Kazemi also points out that while the Islamic tradition figures high in educational policy planning after the 1979 Iranian Revolution “the predominance of one tradition over others at a particular time doesn't mean the final and complete demise of other forces that have existed for generations in Iranian society and that are part of the country's cultural legacy.”ⁱⁱ

He is referring to the decision of the Islamic republican regime not to make drastic changes inasmuch as school textbooks from the preceding Pahlavi regime; that belong to the humanities and the social sciences, the main area where unwarranted westernization could have its most “poisonous” impact on Iranian pupils.

Specifically there is a consensus from those that have performed a comparison of pre- and post-1979 revolution textbooks that the complex and heterogeneous cultural atmosphere in Iranian secondary school education does not serve as the battleground between two apparently mutually exclusive forms of identity – *Iranianism* and *Islamism*.ⁱⁱⁱ

What does this mean in practice for the goals of the post-revolutionary Iranian to educate present and future generations in the ideology of the state – “an Islamic person, the development of commitment to one G-d”?

Firstly the revolutionary movement apparently saw no need to change the pre-revolutionary narrative in school textbooks. The youth continued to be taught the Pahlavi dynasty's conception of the “immemorial Iranian nation” - that it has always “been there”; the same in antiquity as in the modern epoch - as it was first articulated by European scholars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century's.^{iv}

For example the textbooks description of the Islamic-republican era is not marked by divine interventions only, but it is also conceived, as in the Pahlavi era, in linear time, in which the constructed history of the nation acquires antiquity and ancestry. That's why Islamic consciousness in Iran does not in any way constitute the basis for an alternative myth to the national myth. Rather, it adds Islamic terminology to the very same myth.

Hunter provides succinct details in an analysis describing that the goals of the Pahlavis was to instill loyalty to the homeland and belief in the “grandeur” of the Iranian-Aryan heritage, while those of the Islamic regime was the radical Islamization in all walks of life. He shows that in appropriating the very basic “story line” of the Pahlavis in the textbooks, which presupposed a linear movement of the “Iranians” as a unified group from pre-Islamic to Islamic times, the Islamic Republic has also implicitly endorsed the mainstays of the “Iranian-Aryan hypothesis.”^v

For this reason in the textbooks both the Pahlavi and the Islamic Republican states have each sought to establish and/or reinforce an Iranian identity that can help bind the populace to the state and that can form a common core of national culture.

Secondly and most important it means that, although the creation of the *Islamic person* has truly been a prime objective of the Islamic Republic, an equally important result has been the creation of an *Iranian person*; an approximate of the very same person envisioned by the Pahlavi monarchy. In post-revolutionary Iran, too, the *conception* of the nation has become the field and the model in terms of which to think of commitments and loyalties.

The significance is that in clinging to the European\Pahlavi master-narrative of Iranian history, the school textbooks show that the 1979 Revolution was not a total breakpoint. It carried forward certain cultural patterns from the old regime; and thus became subject to the same evolution, the same dialectic of remembering and forgetting, the same successive deformations, and vulnerability to the very same manipulation and appropriation.

In continuing the narrative, Pahlavi nationalism as the product of modernity has been perpetuated under the Islamic republican regime. The Islamic movement, even though verbally rejecting all modern political models as alien imports from a hostile West, has in practice sustained and perpetuated various political ideas, organizations and aspirations implicitly premised upon the models and assumptions of Western nation state politics. Consequently, in Iran today textbooks show and teach that political Islam is within the confines of Iranian nationalism.

This may seem at first glance to be benign. However studies in other countries on school textbooks show that the content is instrumental in influencing the thinking and decisions of future leaders.

For example Segell shows that French school textbooks in the inter-war period of 1918-1939 described how France didn't need to win the First World War of 1914-1918 or even to fight the German enemy in order for French identity to survive. Using defeatist language they described how decisions and actions during the First World War had not in any manner led to the waning of French identity or France being a weaker state once the war had ended. He proves that this lead young French military and political leaders to decide to an early capitulation to Nazi Germany at the start of World War II instead of defending sovereignty.^{vi}

Hence I argue there may be an eventual weakening of the revolutionary movement and political Islam in Iran because of the decision of the revolutionary movement to permit school text books to teach *Iranianism* and *Islamism* within the same confines thereby perpetuating Pahlavi nationalism.

There is no doubt that the youth who will be tomorrow's leaders are influenced by the content and knowledge of their education!

Endnotes:

ⁱ Patricia J. Higgins and Pirouz Shoar-Ghaffari, "Women's Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran," in Mahnaz Afkhami and Erika Friedl (eds.), *In the Eye of the Storm: Women in Post-revolutionary Iran* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 1994), p. 20.

ⁱⁱ Farhad Kazemi, *Politics and Culture in Iran* (Ann Arbor: Center for Political Studies, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, 1988), p. 1.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mobin Shorish, "The Islamic Revolution and Education in Iran," *Comparative Education Review*, 32 (1988), pp. 58-75; Khosrow Sobhe, "Education in Revolution: Is Iran Duplicating the Chinese Cultural Revolution?," *Comparative Education*, 18 (1982), pp. 271-280; Jalal Matini, "The Impact of the Islamic Revolution on Education in Iran," in Adnan Badran (ed.), *At the Crossroads: Education in the Middle East* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), pp. 43-55. Mehrad Haghayeghi, "Politics and Ideology in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 29 (1993), pp. 36-52; Rasool Nafisi, "Education and the Culture of Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran," in Farsoun and Mashayekh (eds.), *Iran: Political Culture in the Islamic Republic*, pp. 160-77.

^{iv} For a modernist interpretation of Iranian nationalism see, Mostafa Vaziri, *Iran as Imagined Nation: The Construction of National Identity* (New York: Paragon House, 1989). For an opposing, “primordialist” or “perennial” approach to Iranian nationalism see, Gherardo Gnoli, *The Idea of Iran: An Essay on its Origin* (Rome: Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1989).

^v Shireen T. Hunter, *Iran After Khomeini* (New York: Praeger, 1992), p. 98

^{vi} Glen Segell, *Political culture and the promise of international peace: French primary school indoctrination, 1914-1918*, (London: Patroon Press, 1997)