The presentation of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Iranian primary schoolbooks

An interplay of religion and nationalism

MA Thesis in Modern Middle Eastern Studies

Faculty of Humanities

Leiden University

Author: Piter Pals

Student number: 1746650

Main supervisor: dr. Asghar Seyed-Gohrab

Second supervisor: dr. Saeedeh Shahnahpur

Table of contents

Introduction

When walking through the streets of Tehran, one cannot escape the gazes of the figures depicted on the walls of the city. Tehrani street art has massively increased since the Islamic Revolution and artists have intensified their work with the drawings of public persons of the newly established Islamic Republic of Iran. Whether it is Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-1989) who strictly looks down on you, Ali Khamenei (1939), the present leader of the Islamic Republic who smiles at you or Mostafa Chamran (1932-1981), a revolutionary commander who bravely leads the Iranian army in another battle-scene: their presence is undeniable and cannot be overlooked by anyone. Next to these prominent figures, random 'martyrs' or fallen soldiers decorate the buildings of Iran's capital, as a sign of their 'sacrifice for the defence of the country'. In this way, political framing by the Islamic Republic has entered the streets of the Iranian cities, in order to ensure that the Iranian people cherish the historical achievements of the current Iranian regime. Even though the Islamic Republic is a relatively young state, it has managed to strengthen its political base effectively, turning Iran into a stable nation with a solidified government. Centralisation and a strong state presence on every societal level have contributed to the stable foundation of the Islamic Republic.

During my stay in Iran in the spring of 2017 as part of a language course, I started thinking about the power of political framing in countries such as Iran. The street art is a striking example of the way in which politics can enter the public sphere and I was looking for different ways to show that the Iranian state is constantly seeking to legitimize its power in front of its people. As I was learning to master the Persian language, I was eager to do something with the written word as well, such as books which were read by a vast amount of Iranians and which were directly assigned by the state. In previous research, I had been doing some investigation of the power of education in societies that had just been politically transformed: I had looked at the case of Russia in the 1990s and Turkey after the victory of the AK-Party in 2002. Iran's case is exceptional, being completely turned upside down after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, with a new constitution and state structure based on theocracy and the power of the clergy. Therefore, I decided to analyse schoolbooks used in public schools in present-day Iran, to find out what the Ministry of Education, which is directly responsible for the publication of these schoolbooks, considers to be important to shape the world-view of young Iranians.

As a historian, I am mostly interested in the presentation of Iran's contemporary history in the schoolbooks. History education in general is thoroughly intertwined with identity politics and

national narratives and in Iran's case, it is worthwhile to look into the depiction of the political regimes before the Islamic Republic and the way in which these schoolbooks discuss the differences and similarities with the current Iranian state. Moreover, contested topics such as the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) and Iran's problematic relationship with the West certainly pass by when looking at the nation's contemporary history. Due to a language restriction, public schoolbooks from the elementary level have become the focus of this research. As history is no fixed subject in primary schools in Iran, I chose to analyse the course called 'Social Studies', which combines history with politics, geography and other societal matters and therefore suits this research best, as I explain later.[1] I have been lucky to find the most updated versions of these schoolbooks online, on a website owned by the Ministry of Education. In this way, I have investigated six schoolbooks for 'Social Studies', extending from fourth grade until ninth grade. Fragments of these schoolbooks will be cited in this research.

Before the extensive analysis of the mentioned textbooks, this research will start off with a theoretical framework of the most important concepts used in this investigation. Theories around nationalism, memory politics and the power of education in general and history education in particular will be discussed in the first chapter. The second chapter is an introductory chapter on the status of education in Iran, from a general point of view and with specific attention to the elementary level. The chapter will highlight the 'Islamization' of Iran's education after the Islamic Revolution, differentiating between the 1980s and the period from the 1990s until now. Finally, in the third chapter, the analysis of the schoolbooks will be extensively described, as the most important part of this research. Adding up, the three chapters are intended to show how the Islamic Republic has used the educational sphere as a tool to legitimize its power and authority, which is the main question of this research.

---

[1] See page 21-22 and 23 of this research.

Chapter I – Theories on nationalism, memory politics and history education

> The analysis of [school] textbooks is an excellent means to capture the social and political parameters of a given society, its social and cultural preoccupations, its anxieties and trepidations.[2]

Ever since the very existence of the nation-state, a phenomenon that is rooted in the Enlightenment, education has been regarded as a vital part of every society worldwide. Mass education has developed in an extensive way on a global level and in the modern era, schooling is provided by most governments in most nation-states. Education is widely regarded as one of the primary steps towards a world with more economic prosperity and sustainable development and stability, and is therefore supported by global organizations such as the United Nations[3] and the World Bank[4]. In general, the need for people to get educated stands out, as a way for human beings to develop themselves and to become skillful.

The educational curriculum for history classes in particular is often seen as a national identity marker. During my short occupation as a history teacher in training at a Dutch high school in Beverwijk, I noticed how the national past was regularly connected with modern-day issues in Dutch society, such as the treatment of minorities or the position of The Netherlands on the global stage. I recognized the power and intensity of history education, as a way to define the nation and its citizens from the past to the present. I discovered that national history can make or break a modern-day society in several ways and that history education is therefore considered to be vital in the process of nation-building, not only in The Netherlands, but also in other areas of the world and therefore in Iran as well.

Iran's educational framework cannot be discussed without mentioning the importance of shaping a national identity. Especially the current centralization of educational institutions in Iran is directly related to the interests of the Iranian state, to strengthen its legitimacy after the foundation of the Islamic Republic. It is therefore necessary to cover the theoretical framework of nationalism and national identities as such, also to find out how education can influence nation-building. A theoretical framework on the forging of a national identity and the importance of memory politics (and indirectly history education) on this identity will first of all

---

[2] Schissler, Hanna and Yasemin Nuhoglu Soysal (eds.), *The Nation, Europe and the World. Textbooks and curricula in transition*, (Oxford, 2005): 7. – The brackets in the citations throughout this research are my addition.
[3] See for example http://en.unesco.org/themes/education-21st-century, accessed on February 13, 2017.
[4] See for example http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education, accessed on February 13, 2017.

be given. Secondly, the study of schoolbooks in general will be discussed, in order to show the value of these books for a society as a whole.

The shaping of national identities through memory politics

Nationalism, currently a discourse that holds a prominent place in the Islamic Republic of Iran, has been a developing phenomenon since the beginning of the nineteenth century, not surprisingly a period that saw the emergence of the first modern nation-states in Europe and Northern America. There is a correlation between nationalism and the creation of nation-states: according to the scholar Ernest Gellner (1925-1995), 'nationalism engenders nation-states'[5]. He explains this interplay by pointing to the necessity of finding common ground and binding elements among the citizens of a nation-state – since political legitimacy of its rulers directly derives from the common ethnicity or culture of the majority of the nation:

> Nationalism is a theory of political legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones and, in particular, that ethic boundaries within a given state should not separate the power-holders from the rest.[6]

But how can we distinguish common denominators such as ethnicity or culture? On what basis do people bind together and feel connected to each other through their national background? The historian Benedict Anderson (1936-2015) has reflected on the spread of nationalism and introduced the concept of 'imagined communities': societies which rally around an 'imagined' idea of belonging together (even though they have never met their 'compatriots' in real life) in a limited and sovereign state with actual frontiers and a government which represents them on the basis of this same national idea.[7] What is important here is that nationalistic sentiments seem to be based on an idea, a set of beliefs on which all nationals agree. Anderson compared this feeling with the kinship of a religious community[8], which also bonds together out of solidarity. In a larger framework, the same interaction takes place within communities or nation-states where nationalism is strong and prominent. According to Gellner, the emergence of centralized nation-states has increased the force of nationalism in the modern era[9], as they emphasize the homogeneity of the nation to claim political legitimacy, to speak with Anderson again.

---

[5] Gellner, Ernest, *Nations and nationalism,* (Oxford, 1983): 55.
[6] Ibidem: 1.
[7] Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and the spread of nationalism,* (London, 1996): 6-7.
[8] Ibidem: 5.
[9] Gellner (1983): 88.

Still, the question remains how nation-states can create an effective national identity their citizens feel affiliated with. Common values and traditions form the most important elements of this identity, as direct and indirect markers of a certain nation and its inhabitants. Experts such as Anderson have stressed how vital a national narrative is to the creation of a national identity, as citizens of a certain state find out where they come from and which values they share with others through their national past: it is comparable with a child who is influenced by its upbringing and the norms it adopts from its environment.[10] Several scholars and political thinkers have attached the same authority to the state as to parents who raise their children: their approach defines the way their citizens perceive the world and their environment, by putting stress on certain values or norms derived from the national past. The historian Eric Hobsbawm (1917-2012) has called this approach the 'invention of tradition', meaning the interference of the state in which aspects to remember and which to forget from the national past. Through imposed repetition, certain traditions survive and are regarded to be of valuable importance, to show the continuity between past and present.[11] This analysis can be related to the thoughts of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), who used the term 'hegemony' to refer to the national discourse as proclaimed by the powerful institutes within a society: most of the time, these are intellectuals who are part of the political sphere and therefore achieve 'hegemony' over civil society.[12] Although Gramsci's observations are mostly influenced by strong Marxist thinking on social classes, his analysis of leading narratives within national cultures is relevant here, especially when a national narrative reaches a level of hegemony within a society. The cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1926-2006) has noted how cultural symbols such as language, the national cuisine and national holidays can be treated as 'rituals' which direct people as a 'road map towards certain sentiments, attitudes and behaviour'[13], comparable with Hobsbawm's invented traditions which shape a state or society. When used by national authorities, Geertz agrees with Gramsci that national culture can turn into a discourse of state ideology with a certain hegemony. In the words of Geertz, state ideology can be 'divisive, doctrinaire, totalistic and futuristic' at the same time, as the state presents the national cultural discourse as the unifying narrative to which everyone should adopt and which should be used as guidance for the nation's future.[14] Modern-day scholars such as Teun van Dijk (1943) seem to comply with Geertz's description of state discourses as divisive and totalistic narratives: for example Van Dijk notes that national identities as shaped by the state thrive on

---

[10] Anderson (1996): 204.
[11] Hobsbawm, Eric, 'Introduction: inventing traditions', in: Hobsbawm, Eric and Terence Ranger, *The invention of tradition*, (Cambridge, 2013): 1.
[12] Hoare, Quintin and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds.), *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, (London, 1971): 12.
[13] Geertz, Clifford, *The interpretation of cultures*, (New York, 1973): 216.
[14] Ibidem: 197-198.

polarization, making a distinction between 'us and them', the latter presented as a society with a distinct culture with different, often down-grading values.[15] He also emphasizes the power of lexicon and vocabulary used consequently by state institutions to put forward a national discourse: by expressing the same words to describe a national narrative, people will get familiar with the national idea and the common features of this idea.[16] Eventually, the national narrative will be so prominent that it will bolster nationalism and the formation of a clear-cut national identity, by utilizing national history and memory politics as elements of this identity.

Before entering into the educational framework and digging into history education as a factor of identity building, the broader phenomenon of historical and cultural memory politics will be dealt with. Memory politics sets the standards for a particular culture or society, deciding what the public sphere embraces (and thus remembers) from the past and what it puts aside. Public memory can unite a large amount of people, usually on the basis of their common history or culture and based on events such as historical commemorations, national holidays, nation-wide or international sports leagues or cultural elements such as literature or movies. The historian Pierre Nora (1931) has also called these subjects *'lieux de mémoire'*, as metaphorical 'places' where people find connections with their pasts and with the people living around them in the same nation-state who share the same values and history.[17] Nora makes a distinction between these memory politics and the ordinary study of history, which is much more contested. In contrast, memory politics are usually controlled by the state and thus possess a rather manipulative character, as indicator what can be remembered about the national past and what can be forgotten.[18] Furthermore, Nora notes that memory politics often stress the notion of progress in their discourse, stating that 'through the past, we venerated above all ourselves' as a nation.[19] It is important to explain who is defined as this 'we'. In this sense, memory politics are subservient to the larger quest to formulate an overarching national identity. Obviously, the state institutions take the lead in shaping this identity, to seek for common characteristics which define the nation-state and its inhabitants. Thus, the state usually dominates memory politics, by taking control over time and space and defining the historical landmarks of the national past which should be commemorated.[20]

---

[15] Van Dijk, Teun A., 'Ideology and discourse', in: Freeden, Michael and Marc Stears (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political ideologies*, (London, 2013): 180.

[16] Ibidem: 189.

[17] Nora, Pierre, 'Between memory and history: "les lieux de mémoire"', <u>Representations</u>, Vol. 26, No. 1, (1989): 12.

[18] Ibidem: 8.

[19] Ibidem: 16.

[20] Till, Karen E., 'Memory Studies', <u>History Workshop Journal</u>, Vol. 62, No. 1, (2006): 332.

This research deals with the sphere of education and I argue that education contributes to and is shaped by the forming of a national identity. By making use of public schools, the national narrative can be told to a vast part of the inhabitants in an effective way. Also Gramsci has noted that 'every relationship of hegemony is based on education'[21], meaning that the way people are taught often decides their attitude and relationship towards the state. When describing nations and nationalism, Gellner has acknowledged education to be a vital 'tool for the centralized state to implement its monopoly of knowledge to establish a modern, national society'.[22] Especially after the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Iran can be considered to be a centralized state that directly influences the outlook of its educational curriculum throughout the Islamic Republic. I therefore think it is important to delve deeper into Iran's education. This research has a focus on the contents of Iranian textbooks used in primary schools. Hence, the academic analysis of schoolbooks will also be discussed in this first chapter, to outline why textbooks can be interpreted as sources which tell something about a nation's development and identity.

A deeper look into the importance of history education and history textbooks

Since having discussed the meaning of memory politics and education in general and its relation to the formation of a national identity by the state, we will now turn to the specific educational sphere through which most nation-states prove their legitimacy: history education. Especially since the 20th century, history education has been regarded as a crucial national identity-builder, as centralized mass education as a consequence of the rise of nation-states attempted to forge collective identities through the teaching of the national past.[23] According to the scholar Joseph Zajda (1944), history education has developed into a 'high-profile' topic of national significance, due to the combination of state ideology and nation-building through the focus on common features from the past.[24] The educationalist Peter Seixas (1947) has even argued that history education most of all 'enhances collective memory' in a society, with its stress on heritage which still has a function in the modern-day era rather than historical events as such.[25] In her edition on nation-states with a 'violent past', Elizabeth Cole (1961) discusses history education as a 'form of commemoration'[26], for these nation-states to reconcile with their own history and to show which

---

[21] Hoare and Smith (1971): 350.
[22] Gellner (1983): 89-90.
[23] Schissler and Soysal (2005): 1-2.
[24] Zajda, Joseph, 'Globalisation and the politics of education reforms: history education', in: Zajda, Joseph (ed.), *Nation-building and history education in a global culture*, (Dordrecht, 2015): 12.
[25] Whitehouse, John A., 'Historical thinking and narrative in a global culture', in: Zajda, Joseph (ed.), *Nation-building and history education in a global culture*, (Dordrecht, 2015): 16.
[26] Cole, Elizabeth A. (ed.), *Teaching the violent past: history education and reconciliation*, (Plymouth, 2007): 16.

events have really defined them as a nation. In the case of Iran, history education should be treated the same, in my opinion. The Islamic Republic has emerged out of the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and since then, the authorities of this republic have attempted to legitimize their power in every way, to maintain control over the country. History education, and especially the presentation of the recent, post-revolutionary history to schoolchildren, plays an important role in this legitimation and that is the reason why this focus is chosen in this research.

With regard to history textbooks used in schools, many scholars, who are discussed in this paragraph, have underlined the importance of looking at textbooks in order to find out more about a nation's past and present. In general, schoolbooks show what state and society wish to convey to the next generation: the books 'capture social and political parameters of the nation-state, its cultural preoccupations and its anxieties and trepidations'.[27] History textbooks are even more contested, as they present a clear-cut vision on the national past that includes certain events and people and excludes others which do not fit the national narrative. The historians Laura Hein (1952) and Mark Selden (1938), writing on the assessment of history education in countries with a turbulent past, note on history textbooks:

> the stories [in the textbooks] chosen or invented about the national past are invariably prescriptive – instructing people how to think and act as national subjects and how to view relations with outsiders.[28]

By calling the contents of the schoolbooks 'prescriptive', the authors dismiss the claimed 'neutrality' of history education: history is always written from a certain perspective, especially when actors such as the state are involved and the texts are used nation-wide. Also other scholars warn for the possible biased contents of history textbooks. The linguist David Olson (1935) called 'textbooks the authorized version of society's valid knowledge, (…) putting its ideas and beliefs above criticism' of the national past.[29] The educationalist Suzanne de Castell (1953) stressed the social function of schoolbooks: they describe what citizens need to know and present the reader with a sanctioned version of knowledge.[30] Furthermore, the educationalist Michael Apple (1942) argued that textbooks express a 'legitimate knowledge' which serves the national discourse or hegemony: the meaning of the contents is controlled by the schools and

---

[27] Schissler and Soysal (2005): 7.
[28] Hein, Laura and Mark Selden, 'The lessons of war, global power and social change', in: Hein, Laura and Mark Selden (eds.), *Censoring history: citizenship and memory in Japan, Germany and the United States*, (Armonk, 2000): 4.
[29] Luke, Carmen, Suzanne de Castell and Allan Luke, 'Beyond criticism: the authority of the school text', Curriculum Inquiry, Vol. 13, No. 2, (1983): 112.
[30] De Castell, Suzanne, 'Teaching the textbook: teacher/text authority and the problem of interpretation', Linguistics and Education, Vol. 2, (1990): 78.

the educational institutes as such.[31] The fact that textbooks are directly assigned by state institutions, experts on education and teachers strengthens the position of schoolbooks and gives them full authority over students, who, inexperienced and young as they are, tend to follow the line of the textbooks.[32] The omnipresence of the educational curriculum, most of the time backed by the government, guides pupils through their youth and the presented knowledge tends to appear to them as 'indisputable'.[33] Obviously, pupils are also taught to develop a critical mind towards everything they read and see, but one should not underestimate the perceived authority of a text in a schoolbook from a student's perspective. Especially in nation-states with a contested national history and with nationalistic tendencies, textbooks seem to be a productive way to clarify some disputed areas of history. In this research, it will be interesting to pay attention to the assessment of the role of the state in contemporary Iranian history, around contested events from the post-revolutionary era such as the Iran-Iraq War or Iran's relation with the rest of the world. Hein and Selden have remarked how, during an evaluation of the national past in history textbooks, 'one of the most sensitive issues is the conduct of one's own side during times of war'.[34] In this analysis of schoolbooks for Iran's elementary schools, we will closely assess the approach of Iranian state authorities, who are directly responsible for the researched schoolbooks. The analysis of this approach cannot be complete without taking into account the influence of Iranian nationalism and the forging of an Iranian national identity in the modern era. As Ali Ansari (1967) has pointed out, Iranian nationalism has played a decisive role in modern Iran, from the nineteenth century until now and the Iranian state has been very eager to monopolize the use of nationalism in the public sphere.[35] This research will describe how Iranian nationalism appears in the schoolbooks later on.[36] The next chapter will firstly dig into the Iranian school system created after the Iranian Revolution.

---

[31] Apple, Michael W., *Ideology and the curriculum*, (New York, 2004): 61.
[32] Luke, De Castell and Luke (1983): 120-121.
[33] Ibidem: 124.
[34] Hein and Selden (2000): 23.
[35] Ansari, Ali M., *The politics of nationalism in modern Iran*, (New York, 2012): 299-300.
[36] See page 31-38 of this research.

Chapter II – Education in post-revolutionary Iran

> We do not wish young people, who can be a treasure for this nation [Iran], to be wasted mentally. (…) We must begin with our children and our only concern should be the transformation of the Western person to the Islamic person. (…) We have to believe that we are somebody. (…) We can recreate the culture that made Avicenna. (…) The objective of our enemies is to divert our children from Islam. Be careful and educate the children 'Islamically'.[37]

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 profoundly changed every aspect of Iranian society, as the political framework of the country was turned upside down. The events have also been named as the 'Islamic Revolution', because its outcome eventually led to the establishment of an Islamic Republic, which exists until this very day. Although the revolutionary movement against the Pahlavi regime consisted of various factions with different political visions, the Islamists managed to emerge as the dominant faction, under leadership of their spiritual leader Ruhollah Khomeini. In the newly established Islamic Republic, Khomeini officially received the title of Supreme Leader, becoming the last and most powerful link in Iran's chain of command. The Supreme Leader and his advisers from the Supreme Council have held their influential positions and still control the president and the Iranian parliament in the current political structure in Iran.

The establishment of the Islamic Republic after the Iranian Revolution has not only altered the country's political outlook, its state institutions have been deeply influenced as well. Within these institutions, education has been considered one of the priorities of the Islamic Republic, to teach the Iranian children in a way 'suitable to Islam', to speak with Khomeini again. This chapter will analyze the extent of educational change in Iran after the Revolution, putting emphasis on the changes in its structure and curricula over the past decades. The so-called 'Islamization' of the educational framework in post-revolutionary Iran will be the central element in this analysis. As a start, state efforts right after the Revolution to reform the overall educational standards in Iran will be described. The first decade after the Revolution is specifically outlined, as a period when the most profound changes within Iranian education were implemented, also in terms of the curriculum. Afterwards, the focus will shift to the modern-day era, from the 1990s onwards. After dealing with some new state reforms, an exploration of Iran's elementary education, the focus of this entire research, will be done, with some actual figures that highlight the state of Iran's primary education nowadays.

---

[37] Ruhollah Khomeini during a speech in Tehran, 1982. Cited in: Chelkowski, Peter and Hamid Dabashi, *Staging a revolution: the art of persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, (New York, 1999): 247.

The aftermath of the Iranian Revolution: the influence on overall education in Iran

With the removal of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1919-1980) as Shah at the beginning of 1979, Iran was left behind with a political vacuum, soon to be filled by the dominant Islamist faction. In February, Khomeini returned from his exile abroad and was welcomed by a passionate crowd of people in Tehran. Khomeini had presented himself as the fiercest opponent of the shah in the years before and he was therefore regarded as the spiritual leader of the revolutionary movement, as a long-standing prominent figure in Iranian society with clerical authority. Under Khomeini, the revolutionary movement had turned into a popular revolt demanding social change. One of the most vocal slogans heard in the Iranian cities during the Revolution can be translated as the following: 'our revolution is a revolution in values'.[38] Under the Shah, the Iranian state had opened up to influences from abroad and especially American enterprises and institutions had set foot on Iranian soil, presenting a new world-view to many Iranians. Amongst others, Khomeini openly rejected the Western influence in Iran under the Shah, implying that Iranian traditions, norms and values were put aside or were even substituted by foreign elements. Therefore, he demanded a return of 'Iranian values' in the public sphere, insinuating that most of these values should be based on Islam and not on a secular ideology.[39] Within the Islamic establishment, private schools had already opened up in cultural centers, to oppose the dominant secular education present in public schools and offer their students religious courses as well.[40]

Moreover, the overt rejection of Western culture was not a new phenomenon in Iran: many persons during the Pahlavi era already voiced their concern over the maintenance of Iranian cultural heritage, with the rising influence of globalism. One of the most prominent critics of foreign influence in Iran was the writer Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923-1969). In the 1960s, he published a book called *'Gharbzadegi'*, translated as 'Westoxification' or 'Plagued by the West', in which he openly distanced himself from Western influence in areas such as economy, but also in education. The following passage is an example of Al-e Ahmad's opinion on educational standards dominated by the West:

> Whereas at one time a verse from the Qur'an or one of the traditions of the Prophet was enough
> to win an argument and put an opponent in his place, today quoting some foreigner on any subject

---

[38] Mehran, Golnar, 'Socialization of schoolchildren in the Islamic Republic of Iran', <u>Iranian Studies</u>, Vol. 22, No. 1, (1989): 35.

[39] Menashri, David, *Education and the making of modern Iran*, (New York, 1992): 308-309.

[40] Hunter, Shireen T., *Iran divided: the historical roots of Iranian debates on identity, culture and governance in the twenty-first century*, (London, 2014): 91.

silences all critics. Things have reached such a ridiculous state that one prediction from western fortune-tellers and astrologers is enough to immediately disrupt the entire world.[41]

After the Revolution, the new policy-makers in Tehran opined that Westoxification had infiltrated the Iranian society under the Shah and they thus argued that change should come from bottom up: younger generations could more easily be transformed than older generations who had lived under the Pahlavi regime for decades, to create a so-called 'New Islamic Person'.[42] This is the moment when education became very relevant.

From the establishment of the Islamic Republic onwards, the new authorities put emphasis on educational improvement. From 1980, prominent state officials such as Mohammad Beheshti (1928-1981) and Mohammad-Ali Raja'i (1933-1981) strived for the creation of the High Council of Education, a state program which should take care of a new educational curriculum in Iran's primary and secondary education. In 1983, the Council finalized its main goals, namely to implement the theology of Shia Islam within the curriculum and combine its notions with 'sacred' values such as the focus on family, but also on Islamic brotherhood.[43] These standards followed the so-called 'Cultural Revolution' from Iran's early 1980s, during which the Iranian government began to control the educational institutions from primary schools up to universities, in order to stress the inseparability of religion and politics in the Islamic Republic and to strengthen the Islamization of the society by creating 'committed' Muslims.[44] The implementation of these demands was strictly controlled by the High Council with the support of the so-called Local Education Authority, which oversaw the appointment of teachers and the teaching of the appropriate courses on the local level.[45] This construction shows how Iranian education remained strongly centralized and ideologically driven, in parallel with the former Pahlavi regime. However, secularization was replaced by Islamization, as this graphic of an ordinary elementary school class clearly depicts[46]:

---

[41] Al-e Ahmad, Jalal, *Plagued by the West*, (New York, 1982): 72.
[42] Chelkowski and Dabashi (1999): 247.
[43] Haghayeghi, Mehrdad, 'Politics and ideology in the Islamic Republic of Iran', <u>Middle Eastern Studies,</u> Vol. 29, No. 1, (1993): 41.
[44] Arjmand, Reza, 'Education and empowerment of the religious elite in Iran', in: Daun, Holger and Geoffrey Walford (eds.), *Educational strategies among Muslims in the context of globalization: some national case studies*, (Leiden, 2004): 71.
[45] Godazgar, Hossein, *The impact of religious factors on educational change in Iran: Islam in policy and Islam in practice*, (New York, 2008): 206.
[46] Graphic taken from: Chelkowski and Dabashi (1999): 129.
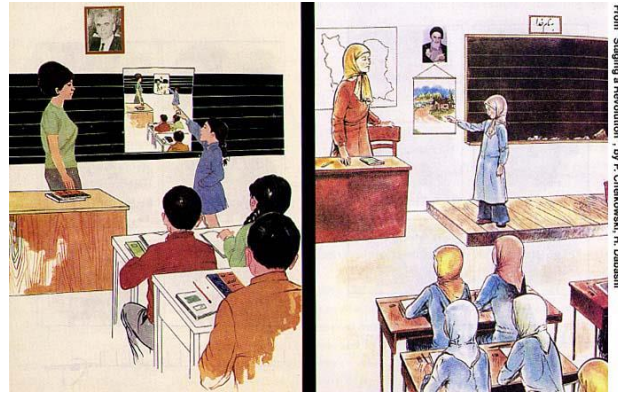
One can distinguish the differences between the classrooms: the picture on the right shows a class of solely girls and a female teacher who is wearing the veil, with an image of Khomeini and the slogan *'Be nam-e Khoda'* ('In the name of God') in the background. Religious discourse is omnipresent in the picture on the right.

The new educational goals of the Islamic Republic of Iran were confirmed by an official law adopted in the Iranian parliament in 1987. This law stipulated that Iranian education had a 'sacred mission' to educate a 'new' Muslim as 'a virtuous believer, conscientious and engaged in the service of the Islamic society', based on Shia theology.[47] One year later, the High Council of Education extended its targets, listing goals which were important to pupils in the areas of spirituality, social behavior, economy, politics and natural sciences.[48] The Iranian state thus heavily intervened in the educational affairs. Let us have a look how this state intervention influenced parts of the curriculum in the 1980s.

The effects of the state intervention on the Iranian educational curriculum

The introduction of the Islamization programs in Iran's education demanded modifications in the curriculum itself, mostly through the revision of textbooks. A specific Bureau of Research, Curriculum and Textbook Development, set up in 1981 by the state, took care of the contents of the textbooks, mostly focusing on the area of Social Studies, as it was believed that Westoxification had mostly taken place within this subject.[49] In contrast, the outlooks of the textbooks dealing with natural sciences seemed to be left untouched, keeping most of the science

---

[47] Paivandi, Saeed, 'The future of Iran: educational reform – Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran and perspectives on democratic reforms', Global Transitions and Prosperity Studies – Legatum Institute, (2012): 4.
[48] Mohsenpour, Bahram, 'Philosophy of education in post-revolutionary Iran', Comparative Education Review, Vol. 32, No. 1, (1988): 85-86.
[49] Haghayeghi (1993): 42.

textbooks from the Pahlavi era.[50] The Bureau primarily aimed to remove references to the former Iranian monarchy in the textbooks and replace the topics related to 'tyranny and colonialism' with Islamic and revolutionary subjects.[51] Apparently, the authorities believed that the values of the Pahlavi regime had profoundly infiltrated the textbooks of Social Studies, the focus of this research as well.

Looking at the revision of textbooks on all educational levels in Iran's 1980s, the responsible state institutions put their emphasis on two basic principles: *'tazkieh'* ('purification') and *'ta'ahhod'* ('commitment'), which downgraded notions as *'takhassos'* ('professionalism').[52] These principles were religiously inspired, as purification was mostly directed at getting rid of non-Islamic elements in the curriculum, while commitment was invoked to inspire pupils to 'take care of their own religiosity and the religiosity of others'.[53] These basic principles directly found their way into religious courses, which entered the curriculum of primary and secondary education for the first time. For example, one can distinguish the principles in the foreword of this 1985 textbook for the course *'Farhang-e Islami va ta'limat-e dini'* ('Islamic culture and religious education'), intended for primary school students:

> The purpose of this book (…) is not to memorize and answer things correctly. The essential aims are to develop the spirit (…) and to complete the lives of children. (…) The aim is the internalization of correct religious beliefs. (…) The aim is to develop the children of today into men and women who are worthy, committed, constructive, good-willed, kind, highly chivalrous and God-loving.[54]

Next to the introduction of theological courses in the curricula, Iranian students in primary and secondary education were also obliged to learn classical Arabic to be able to read the Qur'an. Courses such as economy and geography were influenced by the new religious discourse as well: in economy lessons, usury was taught to be taboo, while in geography classes students were asked to learn all details about other Muslim countries in the region, to stress the Islamic solidarity between these nations.[55] Again, only the natural sciences remained untouched.

---

[50] Mobin Shorish, M., 'The Islamic Revolution and education in Iran', Comparative Education Review, Vol. 32, No. 1, (1988): 59.
[51] Arjmand (2004): 72.
[52] Shams, Fatemeh, 'Literature, art and ideology under the Islamic Republic: an extended history of the Center for Islamic Art and Thoughts', in: Talattof, Kamran (ed.), *Persian language, literature and culture. New leaves, fresh looks*, (London, 2015): 169.
[53] Godazgar (2008): 111-112.
[54] Preface of 'Farhang Islami va ta'limat dini' (1985). Cited in: Mobin Shorish (1988): 60-61.
[55] Mohsenpour (1988): 83-84.

Putting stress on Muslim solidarity all over the world, the Iranian educational institutions refrained from the use of clear-cut nationalism in the curriculum. Instead, distinctive Iranian features were outlined in a more indirect way, mostly through the long tradition of Shia Islam, the most dominant Islamic current within Iran. Shi'ism was officially linked to Iran in the curriculum, neglecting other religious perspectives.[56] At the same time, the history of pre-Islamic Iran was hardly mentioned in the newly designed textbooks after the Revolution, implying that only the Islamic history of the country is relevant.[57] This approach followed a general trend in post-revolutionary Iran, namely the insistence on Islamic 'role models' throughout history, with specific attention to the Prophet Mohammad (c. 570-632) and Khomeini. In this way, the new Iranian authorities distanced themselves from hard-core Iranian (pre-Islamic) nationalism and put more emphasis on Islamic solidarity across borders.[58]

Thus, in contrast to the Pahlavi era, during which Iranian nationalism played a prominent role and the history of the Persian Empire before the coming of Islam was cherished as sign of the 'greatness' of Iranian civilization[59], the post-revolutionary movement made more use of Iran's religious traditions, also to make sure that the religious foundations of the Islamic Republic were not shaken. For example, the legacy of the Revolution was protected by the invention of new holidays which marked important moments during the Iranian Revolution of 1979. These holidays were extensively described in primary school textbooks from the 1980s onwards.[60] Moreover, religious scholars or revolutionary figures from the past were adopted as role models in most textbooks, often replacing 'secular' historical figures from earlier times.[61] The focus on recent, contemporary history to make students familiar with the establishment and ideology of the Islamic Republic became a dominant element in Iran's schoolbooks. Moving Shia terms such as *'mostaz'afin'* (meaning the 'oppressed or downtrodden') and *'shahadat'* ('martyrdom') appeared in the mainstream vocabulary of textbooks in primary and secondary level, to explain their meaning and show the continuity between these classical terms and modern times, in which the Islamic doctrine had become dominant again.[62] For example, the textbooks praised the Iranians who had given their life for the Revolution or during the Iran-Iraq War as 'martyrs', and in the same textbooks, the Revolution was presented as the victory of the 'oppressed' over the Shah

---

[56] Mobin Shorish (1988): 72.
[57] Godazgar (2008): 117-118.
[58] Ansari (2012): 227-228.
[59] An example of this appreciation is the celebration of '2500 years Persian Empire' in 1971, under Mohammad Reza Shah. For more information, see: Axworthy, Michael, *Revolutionary Iran*, (London, 2014): 76-78.
[60] Chelkowski and Dabashi (1999): 130-131.
[61] Mehran (1989): 48-49.
[62] Haghayeghi (1993): 43.

and his regime which had 'taken advantage' of the Iranian people in the pre-revolutionary era.[63] This new discourse in the schoolbooks served as legitimation of the current regime and its religious foundations.

As we have seen, the aftermath of the Revolution has been decisive for the structure and outlooks of Iranian education in general. State intervention had led towards actual changes in the curriculum which would determine the educational course for the years to come. Shifting to the recent period after the 1980s, the state approach towards education slightly changed, due to changing circumstances in the country. The following paragraph will further discuss this development.

Iran's state approach towards education after 1989

After the tumultuous first decade of the Islamic Republic and the death of Supreme Leader Khomeini in 1989, the state authorities in Tehran have managed to consolidate their power. In terms of education, the process to implement a new ideology within the overall curriculum has continued, with most educational institutes already turned around in the 1980s. However, the educational authorities have also faced new challenges from the 1990s onwards. Most of all, the demographic factor has proven to be problematic. Since the 1960s, the Iranian population has gradually increased from around 20 million inhabitants in 1960 to almost 80 million Iranians in 2015.[64] The Islamic Republic has considered it its duty to educate all these children. In 1976, only 59 percent of Iran's youth between 6 and 19 years old attended schools, against 87 percent of the same group in 2010, causing a rise in school attendance since the Iranian Revolution.[65] The increasing number of pupils has created problems for the educational institutes, which have had to adopt to the new situation. In the 1990s, the number of teachers in primary and secondary schools declined and the available teachers were mostly selected by state commissions that regarded the teachers' ideological affiliation to the Islamic regime as more important than their scientific knowledge.[66] These developments paved the way for a partial privatization of the school system, as certain private schools opened to meet the demands of the rising population and to provide Iranian pupils with a higher level of education.[67] In recent years however, the

---

[63] Mehran (1989): 38-39.
[64] United Nations – Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Population Prospects: the 2017 revision*, (2017). Found on https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/, accessed on January 11, 2018.
[65] Paivandi (2012): 9-10.
[66] Arjmand (2004): 76.
[67] Arani, Abbas Madandar, Lida Kakia and Tandis Taghavi, 'Privatization of education in the Islamic Republic of Iran: one step forward, one step back', Cogent Education, Vol. 2, (2015): 2.

Iranian state has succeeded in tightening his grip on the educational system again, diminishing the private schools which lack funds and people to function properly.[68]

Looking at the modern-day structure of Iranian education, one can clearly distinguish a state-controlled mechanism. The Ministry of Education is directly responsible for educational elements such as national examinations, school buildings, appointment of school personnel and the training of teachers, but what mainly concerns us here is that the employees at this Ministry also design the curriculum offered at all public schools in Iran. The parliament and the local authorities working in the specific districts oversee the approach and policy of the Ministry of Education. However, the highest authority in educational affairs lies with the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, created in the early 1980s, which is in direct consultation with the Supreme Leader.[69] The clear-cut hierarchy shows how centralized Iranian education has turned out to be and who eventually decides its course. When Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (1956) was elected president of Iran in 2005, he proposed a new way of learning inspired by the so-called *'maktab-e Irani'*, which translates as 'the Iranian school of thought'. In short, this way of thinking also includes the achievements of pre-Islamic Iran, elaborating for example on the history of the Persian Empire and its legacy in contemporary Iran. Arguably, the Iranian school of thought consists of strong elements of Iranian nationalism. Under Ahmadinejad, nationalism has been a rising factor, but in the educational area, the Iranian school of thought was eventually rejected by the leading clergy within the Supreme Council, supported by the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. This faction argued that this specific school of thought consisted of anti-Islamic elements, making it unfit to become part of the Iranian curriculum.[70] It shows how the Supreme Council and the religious authorities in general still play a decisive role in Iran's education today.

Since the development and outlooks of mass education in general in post-revolutionary Iran have been discussed, it is time to redirect the focus towards elementary education in particular. The third chapter will elaborate on the textbooks for Social Studies, used in Iran's primary schools recently. Firstly, some background on the structure and curriculum for primary school students is necessary.

---

[68] Arani (2015): 7.
[69] Based on the report by the World Education News and Reviews from 2017. Found on http://wenr.wes.org/2017/02/education-in-iran, accessed on May 30, 2017.
[70] Hunter (2014): 224-225.

The set-up of modern-day Iranian elementary education

Just as most nation-states around the world, primary education in Iran has been considered crucial for the shaping of its citizens' mind. In a study by the Iranian educationalists Abbas Gholtash (1966) and Mohammad Hossein Yarmohammadian (1968) in 2011, elementary education is directly connected to the 'social character' of Iran's youth, as the question of Iranian citizenship is firstly addressed in primary schools.[71] The Iranian state therefore seems to treat elementary education with special attention, as its educational structure is obligatory and it shapes the pupils' mind-set as the first real encounter with the outside world. That is the reason why the curriculum for elementary education has been closely observed by the state authorities from the establishment of the Islamic Republic on. The curriculum decides which world-view and what kind of Iranian citizenship the teachers should teach to their students. Under the guidance of the educational authorities of the current Iranian regime, the specific curriculum aimed for primary school pupils mostly consist of religious values. Amongst others, the Ministry of Education has added the following goals to the current curriculum:

- loving the Shi'ite imams and prophets;
- reciting the Qur'an;
- observing prayers;
- becoming familiar with religious sites and the structure of Islamic governance;
- respecting the soldiers and martyrs of the Holy War.[72]

Obviously, the fact that these curriculum goals were designed by state institutions with a deep religious foundation, decided its form and shape, making a definite end to the secular educational goals during the Pahlavi era. Consequently, minorities such as the Sunnis or the non-Muslims within Iran had to comply with the new realities on the ground or became dependent on private schools in which the Shia traditions were less dominant. In public schools, Shia ideology has developed into the main marker of Iranian primary education today. However, this religious dominance does not rule out the teaching of universal values such as kindness, respect, discipline, patience, helpfulness, hard work and courage: these values, just as in other places around the world, can still find their way to the textbooks, alongside the specific Shia values

---

[71] Gholtash, Abbas and Mohammad Hossein Yarmohammadian, 'A critical analysis of the progressive citizenship education approach in Iran's elementary school curriculum', Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences, No. 15, (2011): 76.

[72] Mehran, Golnar, 'Iran: a Shi'ite curriculum to serve the Islamic state', in: Doumato, Eleanor Abdella and Gregory Starrett (eds.), *Teaching Islam: textbooks and religion in the Middle East*, (London, 2007): 54.

mentioned earlier.[73] This observation by the educational scholar Golnar Mehran (1948) connects with the analysis of schoolbooks for this research, which will extensively be discussed in the third chapter.

Nonetheless, Islam has undoubtedly played a major and distinctive role in the development of Iran's elementary education since the Revolution of 1979. Direct religious courses entered the curriculum on the elementary level and their total share has increased over the years. The Iranian educationalist Saeed Paivandi (1956) has measured that 17 percent of school time in primary schools was spent on 'formal' religious courses in 2005, while 'real' attention paid to religion was actually 24 percent, as other courses such as history or the teaching of the Persian language also included certain Islamic features.[74] The sociologist Hossein Godazgar (1958) even notes how members of the Iranian clergy frequently enter primary schools to teach religious courses and lead daily prayers in front of the students.[75] In addition to this direct way of bringing religion to the classroom, elementary students are faced with the religious doctrine through the textbooks themselves. As we will also see in the third chapter, the Islamic Republic's interpretation of Islam in the schoolbooks is quite pervasive. The ideals of the Iranian Revolution, expressed through the many speeches by Khomeini, are prominently stated in several editions, in which Khomeini is presented as 'the pious and knowledgeable leader of Muslims', according to Mehran.[76] Without even discussing the contents of the schoolbooks, one can already find the picture of the former Supreme Leader at the beginning of every researched edition. The pictures show a kind and respected man surrounded by small children, depicting him as a father figure.

In short, it can be assumed that Iranian schoolbooks are strongly politicised in the past few decades. Mehran also confirmed this in her 2003 analysis of Iran's elementary education: she stated that even six year-old pupils grow up with discussions around complicated topics such as 'the liberation of the oppressed' or 'the fight against neo-colonialism'.[77] The vocabulary within the classrooms seems to correlate with the political developments in post-revolutionary Iran. Islam and its derived values have heavily influenced the modern-day curriculum and the schoolbooks thus present Islam as a 'way of life', calling the 'defence of the Iranian Homeland'

---

[73] Mehran, Golnar, 'Khatami, political reform and education in Iran', Comparative Education, Vol. 39, No. 3, (2003): 325.
[74] Paivandi (2012): 4.
[75] Godazgar (2008): 204.
[76] Mehran (2007): 55.
[77] Mehran (2003): 326.

as a duty every Muslim in Iran should align with.[78] Specific examples from direct fragments in the schoolbooks will be shown in the next chapter.

Numbers and facts about Iran's current elementary education

The Iranian Revolution not only brought political change to the country, it was also accompanied by an explosive rise in Iranian population figures. As the post-revolutionary state had promised to offer everyone at least basic education, Iran's educational system was obliged to increase and extend as well, with some results: tables show that the amount of Iranians educated in primary education in 2000 had doubled in comparison with 1970.[79] The success of mass education can also be seen when looking at the literacy rate in modern-day Iran: with respect to women, almost 95 percent could read in 2006, both in urban and rural areas, compared to about 55 percent in cities in 1966.[80] These statistics show a remarkable level of success for the Islamic Republic when it comes to the offering of basic education, although the same report also highlights that the Iranian state attempts to slow down the fertility rate, as educational institutes face problems fitting in all newly-born youth.[81] For now, the authorities seem to be able to cope with the population numbers, as the latest report by UNICEF, the United Nations-branch responsible for children rights, outlines how the attendance and survival rate of Iranian children in primary education is over 90 percent, with the attendance rate almost reaching 100 percent in 2014.[82] Thus, the outreach of Iranian elementary education is quite effective and therefore it can be concluded that the researched schoolbooks, spread by the Ministry of Education, are also widespread all over the country.

In recent years, Iran's public schooling has been reformed several times, including its primary education. Right now, after the latest revisions in 2012, the structure is the following: basic education consists of nine years of studying, starting with children from four years old. Basic education is divided into two tracks: primary school itself (called *'dabestan'* in Persian) and the so-called 'guidance cycle' (*'dowre-ye rahnama-i'*), preparing the pupils for their next step towards secondary education.[83] In this research, both tracks are considered as part of Iran's elementary

---

[78] Mehran (2007): 59-60.

[79] Lutz, Wolfgang, Jesus Crespo Cuaresma and Mohammad Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi, 'Demography, education and democracy: global trends and the case of Iran', <u>Population and Development Review</u>, Vol. 36, No. 2, (2010): 260.

[80] Ibidem: 271.

[81] Ibidem: 270.

[82] 'The state of the World's Children 2016 statistic tables – The Islamic Republic of Iran', <u>UNICEF</u>, (2016): 135. Found on https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF_SOWC_2016.pdf, accessed on May 30, 2017.

[83] Based on the report by the World Education News and Reviews from 2017. Found on http://wenr.wes.org/2017/02/education-in-iran, accessed on May 30, 2017.

education, as the schoolbooks from fourth grade until ninth grade (the last year before the start of secondary school) will be analysed.

As mentioned above, the discussed schoolbooks deal with the subject translated as 'Social Studies'. Next to this course, Iranian primary school students are dealing with subjects around Persian language (reading, writing and comprehending the Persian language), mathematics, science and Islamic Studies.[84] By putting the focus on Social Studies, this research hopes to show how the current Iranian regime tries to legitimize its own power and control over the state through the schoolbooks offered by the Ministry of Education. Chapter three will provide us with some clear-cut examples of these kinds of justification.

---

[84] Based on the report by the World Education News and Reviews from 2017. Found on http://wenr.wes.org/2017/02/education-in-iran, accessed on May 30, 2017..

Chapter III – An analysis of Iranian primary schoolbooks

> You [i.e., the student] should work with local people and authorities to maintain security. You should be responsible to act out of the blood of the martyrs who died for the Islamic Revolution and defended the homeland. You have a duty to work with your fellow countrymen to improve your country. You have a duty to defend the unity and independence of your homeland. In addition to your country, you are responsible for the Muslims of the world and all human beings.[85]

This chapter will dig into the actual contents of Iranian schoolbooks, designed for pupils at the elementary level between seven and thirteen years old. Iranian students at this age are confronted with several courses concerning Persian language, mathematics, science and Islamic Studies, but in light of this research, our emphasis is on the subject '*Motale'at-e Ejtemai'i*', which translates as 'Social Studies'. In this course, students will explore the Iranian society by looking at its history, its state structure, its geography and its demographics. These areas, and in particular the presentation of contemporary Iranian history, are of great interest to this research, as they directly relate to the state ideology and the core values of the Islamic Republic. The central authorities in Tehran have attempted to institutionalize their political visions on every societal level, with education being one of the prime markers of the Islamic Republic to control and 'guide' their inhabitants. The Islamization of the educational framework since the 1980s is the clearest example of the increased state control over public schooling, but the renewed curriculum for elementary education involves more elements than just religious values. This research argues that Iranian schoolbooks legitimize the very existence of the Islamic Republic, by not only focussing on its religious ideology, but also mixing the Islamic identity of the state with elements such as Iranian nationalism.

The primary schoolbooks which have been examined for this research, are being used in classes from fourth grade until ninth grade, the final year before students will start their secondary education. During their time on the elementary level, pupils deal with a fixed curriculum, directly implemented by the Iranian state through the Ministry of Education. The researched schoolbooks are no exception, as the authors are assigned by the state and the contents are approved by the ministry through an official stamp. The analysed textbooks have been published in 2016, making them the most updated version of this kind so far.

---

[85] Fallahian, Nahid, Nazia Malek Mahmoudi, Abbas Portavi Moghadam and Nasrallah Salehi (eds.), *Motala'at-e Ejtemai'i: madani, jeghrafia, tarikh – payeh-e haftom-e dowreh-e aval-e motevaseteh* (*Social Studies: sociology, geography, history – Seventh grade of elementary school*), (Ministry of Education, Tehran, 2016): 8.

Throughout this chapter, this series of Social Studies will be closely investigated by citing directly translated quotes from the books, such as the citation at the beginning of this chapter. This quote refers to the overall analysis of the concerned textbooks, because one can distinguish a strong sense of citizenship, patriotism and religious dedication in it. In this way, the educational authorities of Iran wish to invoke a certain sentiment of belonging to the Islamic Republic among the students. This attachment and devotion to the current Iranian nation can be regarded as the main theme of this inquiry. The schoolbooks definitely consist of an approach of statism, putting the state at the centre of Iranian society. Obviously, the very foundation of the Islamic Republic should therefore not be overlooked, paying a lot of attention to the run-up to and aftermath of the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and decisive events such as the Iran-Iraq War.

The description of the history of post-revolutionary Iran will thus be a prominent feature in this chapter. Alongside three overlapping themes, the overall analysis of the schoolbooks will be cut into pieces. Firstly, we will see how prominently Islam features in the textbooks, as main marker of the current Iranian regime. Secondly, the issue of Iranian nationalism plays a role in the description of post-revolutionary Iran, as unifying element which can bind people together and eventually legitimizes the concept of Iran as a state. Thirdly, Islam and Iranian nationalism will come together in the description of the state model of the Islamic Republic, as a democracy based on religious values which has stood up against imperialism, colonialism and the oppression of people in general. As one can note, the three themes are certainly intertwined, as Islam plays a role in modern-day Iranian nationalism and Iranian patriotism has unified Iranians in their encounter with foreign influence in the country. The inter-relation of the themes should be taken into account and should be read between the lines when analysing the mentioned fragments. All of the themes eventually add up and create a strong sense of the Islamic Republic of Iran as the truly representative state for all Iranians, a state which protects the domestic Iranian-Persian culture from outside influence and which holds the keys to a bright future in which the Iranian identity and Shia Islam are preserved. In short, the descriptions in the examined schoolbooks indicate a justification for the current state of affairs of the Islamic Republic and the importance of continuing this political path in the future.

The notion of Islam in Iranian primary schoolbooks

It would not come as a surprise that the Iranian state's interpretation of Islam has become more prominent in schoolbooks since the foundation of the Islamic Republic. In contrast to the secular state under the Pahlavi regime, Iran officially became a theocracy after the Islamic

Revolution, transforming the public sphere in an area dominated by the ideas of the ruling clergy. Education has followed the same pattern, as the previous chapter has outlined. In schoolbooks, Islam is depicted as the fundament of Iran and its people, adding up to and even 'improving' the Persian civilisation already present in pre-Islamic Iran:

> We [i.e., the Iranians] are Muslims. (…) The culture of our people and even the political system and the laws are based on Islam, its beliefs and values. (…) Of course, Zoroastrian, Christian and Jewish minorities also live in our country. (…) They have kept their religions and have always defended the land of Iran against the invasion of foreigners. (…) Islamic beliefs and values created a great transformation in Iranian culture. Of course, a collection of [pre-Islamic] Iranian customs and ceremonies continued to exist, such as the Nowruz celebration, which did not contradict the teachings of Islam.[86]

Some interesting elements stand out in this quote. Firstly, the schoolbook refers to a certain 'we', meaning the Iranian people. According to the text, the Iranians are Muslims, while the authors afterwards admit that other religious minorities live in the country as well. They are considered part of Iran, as these minorities have stood up against foreign influence in Iran. So, religiously the non-Islamic minorities are not incorporated in the Iranian framework, but in terms of nationality, they are considered to belong to Iran: an outright separation between Iranians ('us') and the outside world ('them'), a distinction we will perceive more often in the rest of this chapter. Lastly, it is interesting to note that the schoolbook-authors are eager to mention the compatibility of Islam with the Persian civilisation and its own cultural traits, presenting the combination of the two concepts as a perfect fusion. When discussing the notion of Iranian nationalism in the schoolbooks, more examples of this argument will follow.

When dealing with Islam in Iran, one cannot avoid to touch upon the specific theology of Shia Islam as most dominant Islamic current in Iran for centuries. In the Islamic Republic, Shi'ism is being used as a political tool, as the only 'true' religion of Islam which inspires its followers to be committed to justice and against oppression of any kind, as the following citation describes:

> The teachings of Islam and Shi'ism call people to fight oppression and seek justice. By studying the insurrection of Imam Hosayn and the events of Karbala, the Iranian Muslims have always been ready to stand against oppression and injustice.[87]

---

[86] Fallahian, Nahid and Abbas Portavi Moghadam (eds.), *Motala'at-e ejtemai'i: madani, jeghrafia, tarikh – payeh-e nohom-e dowreh-e aval-e motevaseteh* (*Social Studies: sociology, geography, history – Ninth grade of elementary school*), (Ministry of Education, Tehran, 2016): 124.
[87] Ibidem: 86.

In this way, pupils at the primary level learn more about Shia Islam and the historical events which have shaped the theology of the Shia doctrine. The history of the early Shia Imams, such as the story of the death of Imam Hosayn (625-680) in Karbala, is an important element of this theology, also as a way to distance Shi'ism from Sunnism, another Islamic current which, amongst others, has different views on the question of the succession of the Prophet Mohammad. In the modern-day Islamic Republic, the Iranian authorities consider Shia Islam as a defining identity-factor for Iran, as the one and only Shia state in the world. As can be noticed, the schoolbooks link Shi'ism also with politicised terms such as 'oppression' and 'injustice', claiming that Shia Islam, and therefore the Islamic Republic of Iran as well, oppose these notions. The connection between Shia Islam and the Islamic Republic and its ideology will be discussed more extensively later on.[88] Firstly, the authors of the textbooks for the early grades choose to give an historical overview of the Islamic origins in the Middle East and in Iran specifically. In the Social Studies-book for the fourth grade, the presence of God is already mentioned before the Islamic religion was even founded. In this fragment, the authors discuss the early settlements and civilizations in Mesopotamia:

> They [the human beings during this time] were able to overcome the problems, because God has given humans great blessings, compared to the rest of the animals. He has given wisdom to humans in order to find solutions to their problems.[89]

So, this schoolbook already refers to a 'divine power' in the early times, stressing the importance of religion from the beginning on. With the coming of Islam in the seventh century, this religious influence was for the first time acknowledged by the people, according to the schoolbook-authors. However, the acceptance of Islam as a new religion took some time, as the Arabs, who firstly encountered this religion through the teachings of Mohammad, had to abolish their old belief system:

> At that time [around the 7th century], most Arabs were idolaters and the Ka'bah, the house of God, was filled with various elements of worship. The Arabs did not enjoy much knowledge during this era of ignorance and few could read and write. In that period, women were often low-ranking and some men even felt less determined to have a daughter as a child.[90]

---

[88] See page 41-45 of this research.

[89] Fallahian, Nahid and Nazia Malek Mahmoudi (eds.), *Motala'at-e ejtemai'i – chaharom-e dabestan (Social Studies – Fourth grade of primary school)*, (Ministry of Education, Tehran, 2016): 32.

[90] Fallahian, Nahid, Nazia Malek Mahmoudi, Abbas Portavi Moghadam and Nasrallah Salehi (eds.), *Motala'at-e ejtemai'i: madani, jeghrafia, tarikh – payeh-e hashtom-e dowreh-e aval-e motevaseteh (Social Studies: sociology, geography, history – Eighth grade of elementary school)*, (Ministry of Education, Tehran, 2016): 49.

In the previous citation, it is noteworthy to read connotations such as 'ignorance' and the way the authors discuss the status of women when writing about the pre-Islamic era. To put it differently, the people 'needed' a religion:

> People [around the 7th century], instead of worshiping God alone, worshiped the sun and the moon or idols and went astray. The ethics and the law and regulations that people followed, were filled with ignorance and misguidance, superstition and oppression. Allah the Almighty sent prophets, to guide the people and save them from misguidance and oppression. (…) All these prophets were chosen by God to direct the people. They fought against the tyrannical rulers of their time and through the commands of Allah, they wanted to stop the oppression and act on the verses of Allah. They warned everyone that Allah would destroy the wicked and the oppressors and they also urged the people to do good deeds in order to avoid to obey the wrongdoers.[91]

Islam is presented as the religion which made an end to 'oppression and tyranny' during these times, dismissing everyone who did not accept Islam as wrong. This clear division between followers of Mohammad and the 'others' is also used in an eighth grade-textbook:

> The [early] Muslims were attacked by the idolaters and they had to defend themselves. Some battles were also fought to defeat the dangerous threats by enemies; for example, after some of the tribes of the Jews closed a covenant with the idolaters, (…) the Prophet had to fight with them. The Prophet has always adhered to the principles of morality and he recommended human values in the battles; he especially ordered his soldiers to be good for captives and he abstained from ruining the property of people during war. He also insisted that Muslims do not behave as polytheists. Since the purpose of the religion of Islam is to guide all people of the world, the Prophet approached the rulers of different countries, including Iran, (…) and invited them to Islam.[92]

The schoolbook especially presents Mohammad as superior to the 'wrongdoers':

> The Messenger of Allah [Mohammad], enriched with the qualities of goodness, was full of kindness, forgiveness, righteousness and happiness, and there was no way he was rich, jealous and greedy in his being. He aimed to promote moral values by educating and improving human beings. (…) Prophet Mohammad, based on the teachings of Islam, established a social system and a new government that governed a cooperation of the rulers and the people. He used the principle of counselling to participate in governmental affairs and, after consultation with the other companions, to decide on important political and military issues.[93]

---

[91] *Social Studies – Seventh grade,* (2016): 112-113.
[92] *Social Studies – Eighth grade,* (2016): 53.
[93] Ibidem: 54.

However, after Mohammad's death, Osman (579-656), the third caliph or leader of Islam, fell short of Mohammad's legacy of 'morality and righteousness':

> In the time [of the third caliph Osman], unlike the first two caliphs, the caliph's luxurious and aristocratic way of life was widespread, and the caliph's circles and brokers enjoyed the wealth acquired through the conquests.[94]

Here the question of the actual succession of Mohammad, a crucial element which divides Shia and Sunni Muslims until this very day, comes to the fore. Imam Ali (601-661), among Shias regarded as the only rightful successor to Mohammad, is described as follows:

> Imam Ali, though deserving the succession of the Prophet, kept silent [about the question of succession], in order to avoid the split of the Muslims. (…) [After Ali became caliph], he was insistent on the practice of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet and the implementation of 'justice'.[95]

In line with Mohammad, Ali is considered to be a just leader, not greedy for power, but actually keeping in mind the interests of his subordinates. The reader cannot miss the full-out praise for Imam Ali[96] and Imam Hosayn[97], two caliphs who are being worshipped by Shias as two of the twelve Holy Imams in their religion. The exceptional amount of attention that has been given to these successors of Mohammad, in contrast to the other caliphs, makes clear which religious perspective these schoolbook use.

As Islam was spread from the Arab peninsula during the seventh century, Iran 'welcomed' this religion when the country was dominated by the Sassanians:

> The message of the religion of Islam was brotherhood and equality. When the Muslim Arabs invaded Iran and the Sassanians were defeated, people in different regions of Iran gradually embraced Islam.[98]

The schoolbooks stress the progress Islam brought to Iran, through its focus on equality, no matter your background or income:

> The people of Iran, who were monotheists in ancient times, voluntarily accepted Islam after understanding the message of this religion. The message of equality and fraternity was very appealing to the Iranian people, who were unhappy with the privileged classes and the nobility [in

---

[94] *Social Studies – Eighth grade,* (2016): 56.
[95] Ibidem: 56.
[96] Ibidem: 57.
[97] Ibidem: 60-61.
[98] *Social Studies – Fourth grade*, (2016): 62.

their country]. In addition, the ethics and behaviour of the Prophet and the Shiite Imams played an important role in the participation of the Persians in the Islamic religion. During his rule, Imam Ali did not attach any superiority and privilege to the Arabs. (…) Thus, the Iranians found special interest in [following] the Prophet and his children.[99]

Not only in terms of politics and civil rights, but also with respect to culture, Islam was a truly positive addition to Iran, according to the authors:

Iranians were the flagship of science and knowledge and Islam breathed new life into the Iranian society and its culture and gave it a special dynamic. Iranians have had a long history of science, knowledge and art; after the acceptance of Islam, they used all their power and talent to advance and expand their culture. The Islamic civilization helped Muslim Iranians in the establishment and expansion of Islamic sciences. (…) Experimental sciences, art and literature were pioneering. (….) The most famous physicians, chemists, mathematicians and philosophers were often Iranian.[100]

This quote has a nationalistic tone as well, noting how Iranian culture was already developed in the pre-Islamic era and how Iranians managed to excel and outshine other peoples on the scientific level under early Islamic rule. Nevertheless, the historical reality shows that pre-Islamic Iran has definitely contributed to the shaping of a so-called 'Persian civilisation'.[101]

Throughout the centuries, a vast majority of Iran's inhabitants converted to Islam. In this way, Muslims shaped Iranian society: in particular the Shia clergy became powerful and influential in civil society and even in politics.[102] On the other hand, some political rulers of Iran sometimes distanced themselves from religion, marginalizing the power of the clergy. The Pahlavi dynasty, for instance, was established in 1925 and officially chose for a state with a secular character, secluding religion from public life, in opposition to modern-day Iran.[103] No surprise then that the Pahlavi era is negatively presented in current schoolbooks dealing with recent history. Specifically, the decreasing influence of Islam under Reza Shah (1878-1944), the first ruler of the Pahlavi era, is a matter of concern:

Reza Shah's government resulted in the weakening of Islamic values, the destruction of Iranian culture and the spread of non-Iranian culture. One of these developments was to force people to

---

[99] *Social Studies – Eighth grade,* (2016): 68.
[100] Ibidem: 72-73.
[101] For more information on Iran in the pre-Islamic era, see: Frye, Richard N., *The golden age of Persia*, (London, 1975).
[102] For more information on the growing influence of Shi'ism in Iran's public sphere, see: Axworthy (2014): 19-24.
[103] Ibidem: 38-39.

wear the same clothes. (…) Reza Shah's regime violently prohibited the wearing of the veil by Iranian women and girls.[104]

Again, the combination of Islam and Iranian identity is remarkable: 'the weakening of Islamic values' and the ban of veil in the public sphere are seen as the 'destruction of Iranian culture'. The policy of secularism continued under Mohammad Reza Shah, son of Reza Shah, and also his reign is critically assessed in the schoolbooks:

> The cancellation of the condition that every elected person in Iran should be a Muslim was among the changes in the law. No longer should an elected person bless the Qur'an (…) and swear an oath by holding the Book of Heaven. The Pahlavi government seemed to pretend that with these legal changes, it planned to engage people in social activities. But in fact the goal was to undermine the Islamic identity of the Iranian community.[105]

In other words, Islam was heavily rejected under the Pahlavi regime, according to the authors:

> The Pahlavi government did not pay attention to Islamic culture, the programs on radio and television and in the cinema were aimed at the destruction of Islamic values.[106]

Eventually, the so-called 'repression' of Islamic values backfired on the Pahlavi regime, causing a revolution which involved various political and religious groups, was partly inspired by Shia theology and in the end, was dominated by Iranian clergy.[107] The schoolbook-authors for sure wish to present the cycle of events around the Islamic Revolution in a sole religious way. They consider Islamic values to be part of the Iranian identity and its 'destruction by foreign cultures' through radio and television had to be 'resisted', explaining the roots of the Islamic Revolution:

> Decisive leadership of Imam Khomeini, the unity of the nation and the faith in Islam all contributed to the success of the Islamic Revolution.[108]

When dealing with the 'Islamic Revolution', the authors refer to the 'unity of the nation' as one of the factors, again implying how important Iranian nationalism has been during the revolutionary process. But this episode has served as an indicator of the notion of Islam in the schoolbooks of Social Studies. As can be noted, Iran and Shia Islam have been presented as intertwined and unitary: they complement each other and Islam is clearly seen as part of the

---

[104] *Social Studies - Ninth grade*, (2016): 94-95.
[105] Ibidem: 100.
[106] Ibidem: 103.
[107] For more information on the Iranian Revolution and the influence of the Iranian clergy, see: Axworthy (2014): 143-151.
[108] *Social Studies - Ninth grade*, (2016): 106.

Iranian identity. In sharp contrast with the presentation of the secular Pahlavi regime, the modern-day Islamic Republic is described as a just and honest state:

> The Islamic Republic is a state where Islamic laws are implemented and where the leaders choose the right people to govern the country.[109]

The word 'right' is crucial here. Obviously, this kind of vocabulary depends on interpretation, but the authors seem to point out that the Islamic Republic is 'rightly' governed through its system of theocracy: the implementation of Islamic laws lies at the basis of the current 'success' of Iran. The previous fragments on the notion of Islam in the schoolbooks have made clear how decisive, leading and directive the Islamic values have been perceived in the past and the present of Iran.

The presence of nationalism in Iranian primary schoolbooks

We have already seen examples of Iranian nationalism before, but full-fledged pride for the country has many shapes, some more clear-cut than others. In the modern era, nationalism is an omnipresent phenomenon in the world, as nation-states derive their legitimacy and power from certain nationalistic elements within their societies. The first chapter has given a theoretical overview of nationalism, this part of the research looks at the practice. The authorities of the Islamic Republic, and therefore also the authors of the schoolbooks, clearly make use of nationalistic sentiments in the public sphere, in order to unify the Iranian people and bind them together around a common idea. As has been argued before, this approach is most effective when people become familiar with a fixed national identity from a younger age, through education. The first paragraph already showed how Islam can serve as common denominator for the modern-day Islamic Republic and the mentioned quotations also consisted of some patriotic elements to stress the conformity.

At the same time, history can serve as an instrument to define the nation in front of outsiders, through encounters with foreigners in the past. Iranian nationalism is mostly shaped by the strong division between Iran and the outside world, the classical separation between oneself and the 'Other' with a different culture and background. That is the reason why the schoolbook-authors make use of the same patterns as well, as we will see. They specifically depict two

---

[109] Fallahian, Nahid and Nazia Malek Mahmoudi (eds.), *Motala'at-e ejtemai'i – painjom-e dabestan (Social Studies – Fifth grade of primary school),* (Ministry of Education, Tehran, 2016): 51.

contested topics throughout Iran's recent history: the matter of colonialism in Iran and the Iran-Iraq War between 1980 and 1988. These two subjects will be outlined here, again through direct quotes from the schoolbooks. The attention for the history of colonialism in Iran and the Iran-Iraq War certainly includes nationalistic features, but in a less straightforward way than the prominence of Iranian nationalism during the Pahlavi era. In the post-revolutionary era, the Iranian authorities made sure to mix Iranian nationalism with more general Islamic connotations[110], a clear contrast with the full-out appreciation for anything Persian under the Pahlavis. Still, we can distinguish some characteristics of Iranian nationalism in the researched schoolbooks.

When discussing the influence of colonialism in Iran, the authors specifically target the foreign influence in Iran in the twentieth century. In this sense, they consider colonialism to be every interference of foreign forces in other countries, from military intervention to cultural influence. According to the authors, the foundation of the Islamic Republic made an end to every kind of foreign influence, marking the end of Iran's dependence on the rest of the world:

> Before the victory of the Islamic Revolution, colonialists had penetrated our country in various ways. The Islamic Revolution 'shortened' the hands of the foreigners in the country. The foreigners had had most influence and involvement in our country during the Qajar and Pahlavi governments.[111]

However before the erection of the Islamic Republic, the schoolbooks present Iran as nation restricted by foreign powers. The schoolbook of Social Studies for the sixth grade has included a specific chapter to the colonial influence in pre-revolutionary Iran, naming it 'Standing against Aliens'. This chapter starts as follows:

> A time-machine has taken you [the student] back to Iran from about one hundred years ago. You see the distressed and sad people. Talk to them. You hear from them about the journeys of the [Qajar] kings and princes to Europe, the aliens in their court and the aliens' involvement in the affairs of the [Iranian] country. You understand that the Russian army has occupied the north of Iran and the British have invaded the south. (…) Poverty and misery are everywhere. Ask yourself: why have the foreigners invaded the country? What do they want? Why do the [Iranian] people live in such a situation? Who allowed the colonialists to interfere in the country?[112]

---

[110] Ansari (2012): 201-202.
[111] Fallahian, Nahid and Masoud Javadian (eds.), *Motala'at-e ejtemai'i – sheshom-e dabestan (Social Studies – Sixth grade of primary school)*, (Ministry of Education, Tehran, 2016): 110.
[112] Ibidem: 107.

Next to this direct approach to make the pupils familiar with the situation in Iran during the Russian and British occupation, the schoolbook, amongst others, talks about the economic interference of the British in the Iranian oil sector, which 'was no longer owned by us'[113]. After the Second World War, oil nationalization seemed to bring back Iranian control over its oil reserves, but another major foreign force, the United States, interfered on the side of Mohammad Reza Shah, through a military coup in 1953. The coup itself will be a point of discussion later on[114], but the American influence afterwards is extensively described in the ninth grade-schoolbook:

> After the 1953 coup and the return of Mohammad Reza Shah to the monarchy, the American influence and domination over Iran increased. During this time, the Iranian people were upset by the failure of the oil nationalization and the foreign reign over their country. The Americans advised the Shah to make changes in various social and economic affairs in the country, to prevent the occurrence of the popular uprisings and preserve the Pahlavi government. (…) Mohammad Reza Shah considered it necessary to follow the advice of the United States to maintain his rule.[115]

The American interference and the close cooperation with Mohammad Reza Shah went much further than the Russian and British interventions, according to the schoolbooks. The authors speak of 'humiliating, degrading and offensive' measures by the Pahlavi regime, under American pressure:

> The United States forced the government of Iran to grant American military officers immunity (…): if Americans committed a crime in Iran, the Iranian courts did not have the right to prosecute them. In an important speech, Imam Khomeini considered the immunity of the Americans as an offense against the independence of the country.[116]

However, the schoolbooks also describe how resistance against the influence of the 'aliens' has always been present within the Iranian society. Not only Imam Khomeini spoke out against the foreign interference, ordinary Iranians expressed themselves as well:

> Although untrustworthy governments in Iran allowed aliens to intervene and influence [the Iranian affairs], our people have always been fighting colonialists. They showed great sacrifice, and 'to shorten the hands of the strangers', our fighters suffered a lot; they even passed away.[117]

---

[113] *Social Studies – Sixth grade,* (2016): 111.
[114] See page 39-40 of this research.
[115] *Social Studies - Ninth grade*, (2016): 100.
[116] Ibidem: 102.
[117] *Social Studies – Sixth grade*, (2016): 112.

These Iranians resisting the status quo are seen as 'martyrs' who sought to 'protect' Iran against the 'plundering aliens' from outside, who wanted to 'impose their economy and culture' upon Iran. The extensive attention for the colonial intervention in Iran before the foundation of the Islamic Republic is used as an eye-opener for Iranian pupils, to become aware of the difference between the modern-day Islamic Republic and earlier Iranian regimes, which used to be highly dependent on outside powers. With the coming of the Islamic Republic, Iranian independence is celebrated for the first time, according to the authors. We will now see how this current Iranian regime deals with foreign threats, specifically paying attention to the Iran-Iraq War.

Right after the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979, the 'independence' of Iran was violated by an Iraqi attack in the border region between the two countries. In the official discourse, so also in the schoolbooks, the Iranian authorities call the battle between the two countries an 'imposed war' or even a 'foreign conspiracy' by the enemies of the Islamic Republic to destroy the new state.[118] The war would last for eight years and would shape the Islamic Republic and its foreign policy, increasing the Iranian distrust towards the outside world. In addition, the Iranian regime demanded sacrifices from its people to defend the country, which was portrayed as a 'sacred duty'. The endurance of the inhabitants of Iran is frequently emphasized in the schoolbooks:

> In 1980, when you were not born yet, our dear country was attacked by the Ba'athist regime in Iraq and a war broke out. Your fathers, mothers and grandparents remember it well. Maybe you have read or seen articles about the war in books and movies. So far, questions about the meaning of words such as 'imposed war' and 'sacred defence' have come to the fore. (…) Why did this war happen and why did the enemy attack Iran? How did the people of our country fight the aggressors and protect the homeland?[119]

Polarization and patriotism are most effective during times of peril and the Iran-Iraq War can still be utilized to evoke nationalism among the Iranian people, by using terms such as 'dear country', 'sacred defence' and 'enemy'. Obviously, the war is still highly influential and contested in modern-day Iran and the schoolbooks therefore pay a lot of attention to the events, especially describing the tensed moments of the war in detail. One of these moments was the first entrance of Iraqi troops on Iranian soil, in the region around the city of Khorramshahr:

> In September 1980, while people were busy with their lives (…) and the school year was about to start in the city of Khorramshahr, all of a sudden terrible sounds horrified everyone. (…) A

---

[118] *Social Studies - Ninth grade*, (2016): 110.
[119] *Social Studies – Sixth grade*, (2016): 115.

number of Iraqi warplanes appeared in the sky and dropped bombs on the people. (…) Khorramshahr, one of the most beautiful cities in the southwest of Iran, is one of the most important ports of the area. (…) In the first week of the war, the Iraqi army occupied some of Iran's border towns and they faced stubborn resistance of the inhabitants in all cities. (…) The heroic resistance of the people in Khorramshahr against the sudden attack by the enemy lasted 34 days. While there were weapons, there was little ammunition for defence against the Iraqi army, which was equipped with bullet-guns and tanks.[120]

The impression the students get when reading these accounts, show on the one side a 'heroic resistance' by the Iranians against the Iraqi invaders, defending their 'beautiful' cities, even though they have access to less weaponry. On the other side, the Iraqis are portrayed as cowards, invading when the Iranians are busy with their lives and the start of the schoolyear. The Iranians are depicted as courageous fighters:

At that time [in 1980], Mohammad Jahanara was the commander of the Khorramshahr Revolutionary Guard. He and his other companions courageously fought with aggression alongside the inhabitants. Because of their sacrifices, they never will never be forgotten by the Iranian people. After all, the enemy, with more troops and many weapons, continued to advance and Khorramshahr fell to the army of Saddam. The enemy plundered the city and (…) many inhabitants became martyrs.[121]

Not only in Khorramshahr, but also in other cities, the resilience of the Iranians is stressed:

The city of Dezful suffered the most airstrikes. The inhabitants of this city showed so much resistance and bravery that this city was chosen as an example of Iran's resistance and persistence.[122]

In the meantime, the 'enemy', the Iraqi regime under Saddam Hussein (1937-2006), is 'being supported by the West through money and arms', according to the authors.[123] This description increases the feeling that the war was not only fought against Iraq, but also against the rest of the world, an assessment which is partly true.[124] The schoolbook describes how the Iranians 'withstood the pressure' and in the end, could celebrate the liberation of Khorramshahr:

On the fronts, the warriors of Islam (the army, the Revolutionary Guards and the Basij) fought hard, helped by prayers and calls to God. They were ready for any sacrifice. In these very

---

[120] *Social Studies – Sixth grade*, (2016): 116-118.
[121] Ibidem: 119.
[122] Ibidem: 119.
[123] Ibidem: 123.
[124] For more information on foreign involvement in the Iran-Iraq War, see: Takeyh, Ray, 'The Iran-Iraq War: a reassessment', *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 64, No. 3, (2010): 365-383.

conditions, the forces helped each other and were kind to each other. They were determined and hopeful. (…) At that time, the armies were supported by the people, who were mobilized as well. (…) Finally, the Islamic warriors, in collaboration with the brave pilots of the air force, were able to break into Khorramshahr. At the last stage, the army of Saddam had a lot of casualties and [their defence was] a great failure. Iranian warriors, crying enthusiastically, stepped into Khorramshahr in the afternoon, going to the main mosque. Thus, Khorramshahr was released from the enemy's grip in 1982. (…) At 4 pm, the [national] radio said: 'pay attention, dear listeners! Khorramshahr (…) has been liberated! Allahu Akbar, God is the Great!' People from all over Iran came to the streets after hearing this news and (…) they were filled with joy.[125]

The reader immediately notices the praise for the 'Islamic warriors', the religious connotation of the victory and the unity of the country during the celebration. These notions are repeated later on, summarizing the efforts of the Iranians during the whole war:

In the eight years of holy defence, the Iranian people did not allow even one harvest from the soil of the country to stay in the hands of the aggressors. In the face of the invasion of our country, the Iranian people of different ethnic groups, women and men, old and young, stood together and defended the homeland. Those people who could not participate in the battlefields helped the warriors through other ways. To regain the occupied territories of Iran, thousands of brave people of our country were martyred and families had to endure many problems, to maintain the independence of the Islamic homeland.[126]

Praising the full-out participation of all inhabitants of Iran, the authors present the war as the golden example of Iranian patriotism and unity and what these sentiments can achieve. What stands out, is the portrayal of the 'martyrs who have sacrificed their life for the sake of the country'. Pupils are directly asked to commemorate these soldiers:

Read about all the martyrs of the holy defence (…) and celebrate and rejoice their lives. (…) Investigate the life of one of the martyrs who fought in your city, village or neighbourhood during the imposed war.[127]

Consequently, the martyrs are never forgotten. The soldiers who survived, also receive a lot of respect and attention in the schoolbooks: the veterans are shown when being hugged by the current Iranian president, Hassan Rouhani (1948).[128] In this way, the legacy of the Iran-Iraq War, as a period when the defence of the country was badly needed and the continuity of the Islamic

---

[125] *Social Studies – Sixth grade*, (2016): 121-122.
[126] Ibidem: 123.
[127] Ibidem: 122.
[128] *Social Studies – Eighth grade,* (2016): 19.

Republic was at stake, lives on. Obviously, the case of martyrdom is another excellent example where nationalism and the Iranian regime's interpretation of Shia Islam meet.[129]

Moreover, the Iran-Iraq War outlines the Iranian perception that the country is 'never safe', as it has been attacked from outside, but also from within. Especially right after the establishment of the Islamic Republic, internal unrest swept through the country, for instance caused by assassination attacks by the leftist *'Mojahedin-e khalq'.*[130] In hindsight, the schoolbooks put the blame on infiltrators and separatists, who allegedly received aid by foreign agents:

> In the first years after the Islamic Revolution, the foreign enemies supported internal counter-revolutionary groups: they began to create insecurity in parts of the country, especially in the border regions. These groups wanted to put an end to the Iranian unity by launching a civil war. (…) One of the crimes committed by these anti-revolutionary groups was the massive assassination of revolutionary figures (…) and ordinary people. As a result of these terrorist actions, a large number of individuals in the Islamic Republic and some close friends of the Imam were martyred (…) shamelessly by these 'hypocrites'.[131]

By calling these opponents to the Islamic Republic 'hypocrite and cruel', the schoolbooks put them aside and choose the side of the Islamic Republic, which provides the Iranian people with stability. Therefore, the authors write with much appreciation about the state institutions that defend the country:

> After the victory of the Islamic Revolution under the command of Imam Khomeini, some revolutionary institutions arose, based on the needs of the country. Among other things, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard and the Basij Corps aimed at defending the ideals of the Islamic Revolution and the country's borders and rivers and supporting the literacy movement to reduce illiteracy in the country.[132]

It is interesting to note that the schoolbooks not only pay attention to the defensive side of these institutions, but also to their societal role, as organisations which help to tackle illiteracy in Iran. Nevertheless, the defence of Iran is their prime target and they do not stand alone: the Iranian authorities expect every inhabitant of the country to work for the national interest to protect the

---

[129] For more information on martyrdom in Iran and its specific role in the Iran-Iraq War, see: Korangy, Alireza, 'A literary and historical background of martyrdom in Iran', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 29, No. 3, (2009): 528-543.
[130] For more information on the internal unrest in Iran at the beginning of the 1980s, see: Axworthy (2014): 213-216.
[131] *Social Studies - Ninth grade*, (2016): 108-109.
[132] Ibidem: 108.

Islamic Republic. The schoolbooks refer to this duty as an official 'citizenship assignment' and directly call the students to follow up on this task:

> Defend the country. Military and security forces sacrifice themselves to secure the country, to protect the borders and to maintain Iran's territorial integrity. But defence of the country against the enemies during both peace and war, it is the duty of all citizens. Membership in the Basij Corps and being ready to defend the country are important assignments.[133]

A direct call to defend the country against internal and external enemies perfectly sums up this paragraph. Iranian nationalism is a striking element in the schoolbooks for Social Studies on the elementary level. By outlining the historical continuity of the Iranian people, the problems and challenges they have faced in the past and the united efforts of the Iranians in the post-revolutionary era, the schoolbooks provide the students with a clear-cut explanation of the strength of the Islamic Republic nowadays. The Iranian authorities rely on the force of Iranian nationalism in order to keep the Iranians unified, showing them their commonalities instead of their differences. In the early stages of the Iranian Revolution, Khomeini had already insisted on the importance of having a 'grand narrative', which would combine Islam and Iranian nationalism.[134] Eventually, this mixed concept of religion and patriotism legitimizes the very existence of the current Iranian state and that is the reason why the Ministry of Education also regards the issue of Iranian nationalism to be very important. We will now turn to the third theme omnipresent in the elementary schoolbooks, which more clearly combines the notions of nationalism and religion in the formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The notion of the Islamic Republic in Iranian primary schoolbooks

Iranian nationalism and Islam come together in this third overarching theme, which is a legitimation why Iran has become an Islamic Republic, among all different state models existing in the world. The schoolbooks suggest that the Islamic Republic has progressed to be a complete and perfect state, both for its internal inhabitants and for the outside world:

> Iran is a powerful country in the southwest of Asia and has a special place in the region. The Iranian people, led by Imam Khomeini, fought and won during the Islamic Revolution, to eliminate oppression and establish independence, freedom and an Islamic Republic. The Islamic Revolution of Iran is a model for people in other countries in the world, to rise against the tyranny

---

[133] *Social Studies - Ninth grade*, (2016): 152.
[134] Ansari (2012): 205.

of the great powers and internal tyranny, and to present a transcendental image of Islam to the world. (…) Today, the Islamic Republic of Iran supports the oppressed people of all countries, especially in Palestine. (…) Although Iran is composed of different ethnic groups, these ethnicities have always been united and have defended the country.[135]

In other words, the Islamic Republic is a successful structure due to its democratic credentials and principles, as the authors note. It has grown out of a tyrannical state to become an inclusive state for all Iranians, despite their differences in background. It has fought oppression internally and therefore it has achieved true independence and freedom. Let us firstly analyse how the schoolbooks distinguish the Islamic Republic from its predecessor, the Pahlavi regime.

From its very inception, the Pahlavi regime is regarded as a highly oppressive state, in which full power belonged to the Shah:

> From the beginning of his regime, Reza Shah turned to tyranny and dictatorship. During his rule, the Council of Ministers and the Representatives of the National Assembly did not have much freedom and autonomy and they were subject to the orders of the Shah. (…) Reza Shah's government operated against independent parties and newspapers by using force and violence. Fear and repression dominated society.[136]

In short, democratic values were completely neglected during the early stages of the Shah's regime, according to the schoolbooks. After the Second World War under Mohammad Reza Shah, this political impasse could be broken, temporarily at least:

> In the first years of his reign, Mohammad Reza Shah did not have the power to govern through tyranny and dictatorship, as his father [had done]. Therefore, there was an opportunity for members of parliament and the Cabinet of Ministers to play an effective role in the administration of the country. During this period, political parties and the press began to re-engage. In these circumstances, the ground for the movement of oil nationalization was created. The acts of this movement are one of the most important events in contemporary Iranian history. (…) Ayatollah Kashani (1882-1962) and Dr. Mohammad Mosaddeq (1882-1967) led the nationalization of the oil industry. (…) Dr. Mosaddeq became prime minister to enforce the law and to make an end to foreign influence in Iran's oil resources and industry. The British government had done various things to prevent the law from nationalizing the oil industry, but because of the unity of the nation and the empathy of the leaders of the movement, this failed.[137]

---

[135] *Social Studies – Eighth grade,* (2016): 129.
[136] *Social Studies - Ninth grade*, (2016): 94.
[137] Ibidem: 96.

It is interesting to note how the authors speak about the nationalization movement under Mosaddeq as 'one of the most important events in Iranian history', stressing the 'unity of the nation' and its democratic character. The historical reality shows that Mossadeq indeed received broad support within Iran in the early 1950s and his power could only be countered through foreign intervention by the British and American government.[138] Therefore, the response by Mohammad Reza Shah and his foreign associates through a military coup in 1953 deservedly receives a lot of attention in the schoolbook as well:

> The governments of Great Britain and the United States were in favour of overthrowing the government of Dr. Mosaddeq and they designed a coup. (…) After the coup, Iran's oil reserves were back in the hands of the aliens and American influence and domination over our country gradually increased. (…) Mohammad Reza Shah became a tyrannical dictator who explicitly ignored the principles of the constitution. He also founded the country's intelligence and security organization (SAVAK) to crack down on the opposition. Again, the atmosphere of fear and repression dominated Iran.[139]

The collision between the Iranian people and the Pahlavi regime is a returning topic in the schoolbooks. The nationalization movement, but also the Constitutional Revolution of 1905 are regarded as crucial moments when the Iranian people showed their democratic ánd their religious spirit:

> Despite the wish to escape domestic tyranny and foreign domination, the Constitutional Revolution and the Movement for oil nationalization did not get the desired result. The Muslim people of Iran wanted to revive Islamic values establishing justice and freedom against the tyranny, [but] the oppression and corruption of the Iranian governments rose.[140]

In sum, politics under the Shah seemed to be unpopular and undemocratic in its core, as the authors clearly outline:

> The Pahlavi regime ignored the constitution and the nation's rights and principles.[141]

On the other hand, the authors argue that the oppressive nature of the Shah's regime provoked a reaction by the Iranian people, more unified than ever and led by a religious zeal:

> After the exile of Imam Khomeini, various sections of the [Iranian] population, especially clerics, academics, students and people from the bazaar, continued to fight. (…) They considered the

---

[138] For more information on Mossadeq, the nationalization movement and the 1953 coup, see: Axworthy (2014): 47-58.
[139] *Social Studies - Ninth grade*, (2016): 97.
[140] Ibidem: 99.
[141] Ibidem: 103.

struggle to be a religious duty. In addition to the followers of Imam Khomeini, other groups with different political opinions also participated in the political struggle against the Pahlavi regime.[142]

The joint opposition against the Shah and the leading role for religion ('resistance as a religious duty') paved the way for a full uprising against the Pahlavi regime, an uprising during which the 'will of the people' was finally prevalent:

> Under the leadership of Imam Khomeini, the Pahlavi government was overthrown. The Pahlavi regime was an oppressor and the [Iranian] people had not chosen it. After the victory of the Islamic Revolution, (…) more than 98 percent of the Iranian people voted 'yes' to the Islamic Republic.[143]

In contrast to the former Iranian states, the Islamic Republic is praised for its democratic credentials and the broad support among the Iranian population, also in terms of the return of 'Islamic values' in the public sphere. The referendum right after the Islamic Revolution is still used as legitimation to prove the democratic character of the current regime, which is presented as the prime supporter of the Iranian people, also in relation to the 'hostile' outside world:

> The Islamic Republic has continued its course, through (…) the effective participation of people in the country and despite the extensive conspiracy and the hostility of enemies.[144]

In this democracy, piety and righteousness are among the core values, deriving from the religious ideology of Shia Islam. As the Islamic Republic is, next to a democracy, regarded to be a theocracy as well, the leadership should be religious as well:

> The leader of the Islamic society [of Iran] should be a model of a complete Muslim. He must be almighty, righteous and brave, and he must follow the commandments of Islam and be well aware of the situation in society in order to lead it in the best way.[145]

Interestingly, both the religious character and the principle to link the politics of the country to the needs and demands of society are being touched upon here, as important elements of the leadership of the Islamic Republic. One can say that this approach can be seen as a superficial combination of Islam and democracy. Paradoxically, the ultimate leadership of the Islamic Republic is not chosen by the people, but is selected on the basis of his religious background. The Supreme Leader in Iran should be an 'ayatollah', a person with the highest religious authority, and has the final say in every political matter. The schoolbooks justify the power of the

---

[142] *Social Studies - Ninth grade*, (2016): 102-103.
[143] *Social Studies – Fifth grade*, (2016): 51.
[144] *Social Studies - Ninth grade*, (2016): 99.
[145] *Social Studies – Fifth grade*, (2016): 52.

Supreme Leaders Khomeini and Khamenei by pointing to their religious piety and discipline, through which they are just as 'modest as common Iranians':

> Imam Khomeini, the Great Leader of the Islamic Revolution, had a very simple life, comparable to the rest of the Iranian people. He was very careful about his prayers, he would worship God at midnight and again would wake up before the early morning prayers. Imam Khomeini was full of purity and (…) was very disciplined in his work. (…) He liked children very much (…) and he wanted them to study well and have good morals and behaviour. Now Ayatollah Khamenei is the leader of the Islamic Republic, after the death of Imam Khomeini. The Iranian people obey and follow him. Ayatollah Khamenei has said: 'students are the hope of the country. They should be studying well and exercise good deeds for the future of the Islamic Republic of Iran'.[146]

The combination of the democratic elements of the Islamic Republic, referring to the mass movement dominating the Islamic Revolution and the referendum which established the Republic, and the Islamic values of the current regime and its leaders has turned Iran into a stable, but also an ideological state. Especially when describing the modern-day global order, the schoolbooks pay attention to the special role Iran is playing on the world stage. The Islamic Republic is depicted as an opponent against global inequality and oppression, allegedly caused by the ongoing effects of colonialism:

> Powerful and hegemonic countries have, through colonialism, used the sources of other countries for their own benefit and have prevented [the other countries'] progress. (…) Preventing the political and economic independence [of the colonized countries], which continues to this day, is one of the causes of inequality.[147]

The schoolbooks state that Khomeini had touched upon the nationalistic, anti-colonial character of the Islamic Republic, as a country which was no longer dependent on other countries and showed support for oppressed people abroad:

> Imam Khomeini was an anti-colonial figure who always avoided the influence of foreigners in this country. And in terms of the independence of Iran, he said people should take the destiny of the country in their own hands. (…) The colonialists realized that their interests in Iran were destroyed. By forming the Islamic Republic, Iran became the helper of the oppressed people in the world and supported the struggle of the Palestinian people. The same [development] was not pleasant to the enemies.[148]

---

[146] *Social Studies – Fourth grade*, (2016): 97-98.
[147] *Social Studies - Ninth grade*, (2016): 55.
[148] *Social Studies – Sixth grade*, (2016): 117.

Comparing Iran with other countries in the Middle East, the authors emphasize the differences, lauding the Iranian state for its democratic model and political participation of the people without being influenced by the 'colonial West':

> Unfortunately, the political rule of some countries in the region follow 'the great powers'. Some countries are also ruled by hereditary royalty or emirates, people do not have much to say in terms of governmental affairs, they are not allowed to interfere and participate in political affairs.[149]

As the Islamic Revolution was all about the fight against the oppressive Pahlavi regime, inspired by Shia notions of justice, solidarity with the oppressed people around the world has remained part of the political discourse and therefore, these sentiments are also prominent in the schoolbooks:

> We [the Iranian people ed.] do not just help our compatriots during disasters, but we feel responsible for all the oppressed and injured people anywhere in the world. For example, every day we see the testimonies of Palestinian people, who are wounded and injured by the cowardly attacks of their occupation regime. In the news, we hear about people in an African country, who because of drought and starvation work in very difficult conditions and some of them die. As we hear these news, we say: 'I wish we were there, so we could help the damned and oppressed people'.[150]

The analysis of the six elementary schoolbooks demonstrates that the Palestinian case in particular receives a lot of attention, almost turning it in an obsession. The authors mention the Palestinians every now and then, when the schoolbooks discuss a matter of injustice. When showing maps of the Middle East, Israel and the Palestinian Territories are systematically called 'Occupied Palestine'[151]. For the Iranian decision-makers, Palestine is an outstanding case in which oppression through colonialism has taken place and is still taking place:

> With the support of the British government, the Zionists sent thousands of Jews to Palestine every year and they settled in settlements. They began military strikes and slaughtered and evicted Palestinians, with the help and support of the United States and British government. Eventually, the country formed the state of Israel. After the occupation of Palestine, a group of Palestinians were forced to migrate to neighbouring Arab states. Some have been living in camps in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, with less education, health and nutrition. For many years, the Palestinian people have not stopped the resistance to retrieve their land. The occupation regime of Jerusalem has continued to brutally attack Palestinian forces and to arrest and kill Palestinian youth. (…) The

---

[149] *Social Studies – Eighth grade,* (2016): 128.
[150] *Social Studies – Seventh grade,* (2016): 21.
[151] *Social Studies – Eighth grade,* (2016): 122.

protests of the unarmed Palestinian people in confronting the occupation regime has been brave and persistent.[152]

In the broader picture, Israel is accused of working together with the West to infiltrate in the Middle East:

> The occupation regime of Jerusalem, Israel, causes hostility with Muslims in the region, in addition to the repression of the Palestinian people. They are supported by the United States and Great Britain. (…) These countries and other powerful countries have established military bases in dependent countries [in the Middle East ed.], to maintain their interests in the region. These bases house various military weapons and forces.[153]

Apart from its colonial perspective, the Palestinian case is an important religious matter as well:

> Palestine is an important issue in the Islamic World. (…) Nowadays, the freedom of Jerusalem from the grip of the invaders and the victory of Palestine are the major concerns of Muslims in the world.[154]

As the one of the holiest cities of Islam, Jerusalem adds another, religiously inspired dimension to the cause of the Palestinians. Through special exercises, students are asked to show solidarity with the Palestinian people:

> Write down the name of a Palestinian teenager and express your sympathy and support, and include the hope for victory, in your letter.[155]

To conclude, the Palestinian case is another example in the schoolbooks in which the state ideals of the Iranian state (the fight against oppression) and Islam come together. In the schoolbooks, the Islamic Republic comes to the fore as a fierce supporter of the Palestinians, something the pupils from the elementary level should bear in mind.

In general, the overall analysis of the discussed schoolbooks has outlined some particular elements the Ministry of Education apparently wants to pay attention to, in order to shape the minds of the students on the elementary level. The ongoing centralisation in Iran's education has clearly influenced the curriculum for primary schools when it comes to the subject of Social Studies. We have seen how prominently the schoolbooks deal with topics around Iranian nationalism and Islam: the different fragments mentioned in this chapter speak for themselves.

---

[152] *Social Studies – Eighth grade,* (2016): 132.
[153] Ibidem: 128.
[154] Ibidem: 131-132.
[155] Ibidem: 134.

Considering Islam, much emphasis is put on the specific theology of Shia Islam as proponent of justice and righteousness. A historical overview of Islam in the world and Iran is followed by the relevance of the religion in modern-day society, as inspiration for a theocracy in which the Islamic values are leading. In a broader framework, the Islamic Republic is justified by its Islamic credentials to fight for equality and against oppression of any sort, making historical comparisons with the (Shia) prophets in the past. In the modern era, Shi'ism is seen as part of the Iranian identity as such, connecting the religion with Iranian nationalism. Therefore, the schoolbooks present the resistance against the Pahlavi regime and the Islamic Revolution as a unified project by all Iranians, as Islam and 'Iranianess' have come together. In the current Islamic Republic, Iran enjoys its full independence from any other country, making it the 'ultimate Iranian state'. Events such as the former colonial experience in Iran and the Iran-Iraq War are used in the schoolbooks to prove that Iran should be on its own and that the country is unified and strong in the current circumstances. This kind of patriotism is blended with religious connotations such as 'martyrdom' and 'sacrifice'. Again, we see a full-out mix of nationalism and religion to convince the elementary students that today's Islamic Republic is the perfect state-model, as it is truly democratic and based on a religious legacy which has belonged to Iran for centuries. According to the schoolbooks, the Islamic Republic is not only beneficial to the Iranians within its borders, but also for all the people abroad who feel oppressed and humiliated by the 'colonialists and occupiers'. The attention for the Palestinian case in this sense is striking, as an issue in which Iran's quest to stand up against oppression comes together with Islam and the 'recapture of Jerusalem'. The conflict is used as another tool to show how the Islamic Republic of Iran is working for the good of the Iranians and the Muslims in general, just as the other elements mentioned in this chapter in the end serve as pure legitimation of the very existence of the current Iranian state and its political ideology.

Conclusion

In this complicated world of today, the Islamic Republic of Iran is usually at the forefront of media attention, being infamous for its strong stance against the 'West' and its theocratic constitution. The Iranian society is generally seen as conservative, strict and zealous on religious matters. The political leadership is regarded as autocratic and ruthless in terms of human rights and freedom, only caring about the citizens who follow them in their Islamic vision. In these general, holistic descriptions of modern-day Iran, mass media usually put emphasis on the opinions of the political order of the country. The diverse and multi-layered outlooks of the Iranian community are most of the time neglected and ignored, turning the general global image of Iran into a rather one-sided view. Besides, even when discussing the political opinions of Iran's leadership, their remarks should be put into the historical context of the country, but an analysis behind the politics of the Islamic Republic is often lacking. This research has wished to counter this development, by offering its readers a rare insight into the daily life of Iranians. By analysing the schoolbooks Iranian children between seven and thirteen years old encounter every day, this investigation has attempted to grasp a part of the reality Iranians nowadays live in.

Obviously, the Iranian state plays a very significant role in the drafting of the schoolbooks. Again, we cannot escape the political reality of the country, but this research digs more into the question why the Iranian state expresses the political viewpoints it spreads and why these political views are regarded to be so important to the Islamic Republic, as a deeper inside look. The investigation has clearly shown how schoolbooks have become so politicised since the Islamic Revolution, as the second chapter has outlined how the state influence in the educational framework of Iran has shaped the curriculum in almost every subject. Certainly, subjects such as 'Social Studies', the prime focus in this research, can be easily influenced by the state, as they deal with societal topics such as history, politics and demography. The first chapter has stressed how history education in particular is often an identity-marker within a nation-state, as its curriculum usually tells the younger generation where the inhabitants of their country and their culture come from and what unifies them.

Closely connected to these questions is the issue of nationalism, which is all about the common characteristics of a nation. The first chapter has provided us with a theoretical framework of all these concepts, moving from the force of nationalism to education and memory politics as the possible broadcasters of nationalism in the public sphere. These theories have been described with a reason, as they fit into the analysis of this research. I have argued that the primary

schoolbooks of 'Social Studies' in Iran are directly controlled by the Ministry of Education, in order to legitimize the rule of the Islamic Republic. Iranian nationalism plays a prominent role within this justification.

As the third chapter has clarified, Iranian nationalism has fully re-entered the classroom. Right after the Islamic Revolution, the state regarded this nationalism to be related to the 'great' Persian Empire, existing in the pre-Islamic era. Therefore, nationalism had to make way for values based on the Shia theology. However, the current schoolbooks have shown some examples of full-out Iranian nationalism again, even though in a different form than it used to be. The third chapter is divided into three parts, to explain the specific frame the Ministry of Education and the schoolbook-authors have made use of. The three themes together exemplify how the Islamic Republic portrays itself as the legitimate ruler of the country. First of all, Islam is obviously an important denominator. Through a description of the Islamic history, pupils are told how Shia Islam has become influential in Iran throughout the decades and why this specific theology is 'correct'. By politicising Shi'ism and linking religious values to the Iranian Revolution and the demands of the Iranian people, Islam is presented as a unique part of the common Iranian identity, making it suitable to connect it with Iranian nationalism as well. The issue of 'being Iranian' is addressed as well through the second theme: old-fashioned patriotism, when foreign threats to Iran in the recent past are discussed. The fight against colonialism and the Iran-Iraq War are mentioned to convince the students how the outside world wants to affect Iran and consequently, why Iranians should defend their country. Clear-cut fragments of the schoolbooks show a remarkable division between Iran ('us') and the foreign powers ('them'). This division, the role of patriotism and the importance of Islam for Iran are combined in the third theme, when the Islamic Republic openly presents itself as the state model Iranians can rely on. By pointing to its democratic character and its global fight against oppression of all peoples, the Iranian state does not shy away from justifying its existence as a solid state and political model. The three themes altogether prove this point: without Islam, a solid framework for the Iranians to feel unified and a political ideology, the modern-day Islamic Republic would cease to exist. This research has hopefully contributed to a better in-depth look into contemporary Iran and the dynamics of the Iranian state, which has extensively built an institutional structure to rely on in order to assure its future. When discussing Iran, we should take into account how the Iranian people are largely influenced by this state approach from their youth on, in the public sphere at least. Once more, this research has therefore demonstrated how vital and crucial educational curricula can be, especially when used directly by state actors.

Bibliography

Primary sources

Al-e Ahmad, Jalal, *Plagued by the West*, (New York, 1982).

Fallahian, Nahid and Nazia Malek Mahmoudi (eds.), مطالعات اجتماعئ – چهارم دبستان (*Social Studies – Fourth grade of primary school*), (Ministry of Education, Tehran, 2016).

Fallahian, Nahid and Nazia Malek Mahmoudi (eds.), مطالعات اجتماعئ – پنجم دبستان (*Social Studies – Fifth grade of primary school*), (Ministry of Education, Tehran, 2016).

Fallahian, Nahid and Masoud Javadian (eds.), مطالعات اجتماعئ – ششم دبستان (*Social Studies – Sixth grade of primary school*), (Ministry of Education, Tehran, 2016).

Fallahian, Nahid, Nazia Malek Mahmoudi, Abbas Portavi Moghadam and Nasrallah Salehi (eds.), مطالعات اجتماعئ: مدنی, جغرافیا, تاریخ – پایه هفتم دوره اول متوسطه (*Social Studies: sociology, geography, history – Seventh grade of elementary school*), (Ministry of Education, Tehran, 2016).

Fallahian, Nahid and Abbas Portavi Moghadam (eds.), تاریخ – مطالعات پایه هشتم دوره اول متوسطه اجتماعئ: مدنی, جغرافیا, (*Social Studies: sociology, geography, history – Eighth grade of elementary school*), (Ministry of Education, Tehran, 2016).

Fallahian, Nahid and Abbas Portavi Moghadam (eds.), تاریخ -مطالعات پایه نهم دوره اول متوسطه اجتماعئ: مدنی, جغرافیا, (*Social Studies: sociology, geography, history – Ninth grade of elementary school*), (Ministry of Education, Tehran, 2016).

Secondary sources

Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and the spread of nationalism,* (London, 1996).

Ansari, Ali M., *The politics of nationalism in modern Iran*, (New York, 2012).

Apple, M., *Ideology and the curriculum*, (New York, 2004).

Arani, Abbas Madandar, Lida Kakia and Tandis Taghavi, 'Privatization of education in the Islamic Republic of Iran: one step forward, one step back', *Cogent Education*, Vol. 2, (2015): 1-8.

Arjmand, Reza, 'Education and empowerment of the religious elite in Iran', in: Daun, Holger and Geoffrey Walford (eds.), *Educational strategies among Muslims in the context of globalization: some national case studies*, (Leiden, 2004).

Axworthy, Michael, *Revolutionary Iran*, (London, 2014).

Chelkowski, Peter and Hamid Dabashi, *Staging a revolution: the art of persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, (New York, 1999).

Cole, Elizabeth A. (ed.), *Teaching the violent past: history education and reconciliation*, (Plymouth, 2007).

De Castell, Suzanne, 'Teaching the textbook: teacher/text authority and the problem of interpretation', *Linguistics and Education*, Vol. 2, (1990): 75-90.

Frye, Richard N., *The golden age of Persia*, (London, 1975).

Geertz, Clifford, *The interpretation of cultures*, (New York, 1973).

Gellner, Ernest, *Nations and nationalism,* (Oxford, 1983).

Gholtash, Abbas and Mohammad Hossein Yarmohammadian, 'A critical analysis of the progressive citizenship education approach in Iran's elementary school curriculum', *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, No. 15, (2011): 76-79.

Godazgar, Hossein, *The impact of religious factors on educational change in Iran: Islam in policy and Islam in practice*, (New York, 2008).

Haghayeghi, Mehrdad, 'Politics and ideology in the Islamic Republic of Iran', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1, (1993): 36-52.

Hein, Laura and Mark Selden, 'The lessons of war, global power and social change', in: Hein, Laura and Mark Selden (eds.), *Censoring history: citizenship and memory in Japan, Germany and the United States*, (Armonk, 2000): 3-51.

Hoare, Quintin and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds.), *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, (London, 1971).

Hobsbawm, Eric, 'Introduction: inventing traditions', in: Hobsbawm, Eric and Terence Ranger, *The invention of tradition*, (Cambridge, 2013): 1-15.

Hunter, Shireen T., *Iran divided: the historical roots of Iranian debates on identity, culture and governance in the twenty-first century,* (London, 2014).

Korangy, Alireza, 'A literary and historical background of martyrdom in Iran', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 29, No. 3, (2009): 528-543.

Luke, Carmen, Suzanne de Castell and Allan Luke, 'Beyond criticism: the authority of the school text', *Curriculum Inquiry*, Vol. 13, No. 2, (1983): 111-127.

Lutz, Wolfgang, Jesus Crespo Cuaresma and Mohammad Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi, 'Demography, education and democracy: global trends and the case of Iran', *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 36, No. 2, (2010): 253-281.

Mehran, Golnar, 'Iran: a Shi'ite curriculum to serve the Islamic state', in: Doumato, Eleanor Abdella and Gregory Starrett (eds.), *Teaching Islam: textbooks and religion in the Middle East*, (London, 2007).

Mehran, Golnar, 'Khatami, political reform and education in Iran', *Comparative Education*, Vol. 39, No. 3, (2003): 311-329.

Mehran, Golnar, 'Socialization of schoolchildren in the Islamic Republic of Iran', *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1, (1989): 35-50.

Menashri, David, *Education and the making of modern Iran*, (New York, 1992).

Mobin Shorish, M., 'The Islamic Revolution and education in Iran', *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 32, No. 1, (1988): 58-75.

Mohsenpour, Bahram, 'Philosophy of education in post-revolutionary Iran', *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 32, No. 1, (1988): 76-86.

Nora, Pierre, 'Between memory and history: "les lieux de mémoire"', *Representations*, Vol. 26, No. 1, (1989): 7-24.

Paivandi, Saeed, 'The future of Iran: educational reform – Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran and perspectives on democratic reforms', *Global Transitions and Prosperity Studies – Legatum Institute*, (2012).

Schissler, Hanna and Yasemin Nuhoglu Soysal (eds.), *The Nation, Europe and the World. Textbooks and curricula in transition*, (Oxford, 2005).

Shams, Fatemeh, 'Literature, art and ideology under the Islamic Republic: an extended history of the Center for Islamic Art and Thoughts', in: Talattof, Kamran (ed.), *Persian language, literature and culture. New leaves, fresh looks*, (London, 2015): 163-190.

Takeyh, Ray, 'The Iran-Iraq War: a reassessment', *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 64, No. 3, (2010): 365-383.

Till, Karen E., 'Memory Studies', *History Workshop Journal*, Vol. 62, No. 1, (2006): 325-341.

Van Dijk, Teun A., 'Ideology and discourse', in: Freeden, Michael and Marc Stears (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political ideologies*, (London, 2013).

Zajda, Joseph (ed.), *Nation-building and history education in a global culture*, (Dordrecht, 2015).

Author unknown, 'Education in Iran', *World Education News and Reviews*, February 7, 2017. Found on http://wenr.wes.org/2017/02/education-in-iran, accessed on May 30, 2017.

Author unknown, 'The state of the World's Children 2016 statistic tables – The Islamic Republic of Iran', *UNICEF*, (2016).

Author unknown - United Nations – Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Population Prospects: the 2017 revision*, (2017). Found on https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/, accessed on January 11, 2018.

Websites

www.esa.un.org, accessed on January 11, 2018.

www.unesco.org, accessed on February 13, 2017.

www.wenr.wes.org, accessed on May 30, 2017.

www.worldbank.org, accessed on February 13, 2017.