

ARTICLE

Forlorn Arabs and Flying Americans: National Identity in the Early Childhood Curriculum of Postrevolutionary Iran, 1979–2009

Shervin Malekzadeh

Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, Colgate University, Hamilton, NY, USA

Email: sm424@georgetown.edu

(Received 30 March 2022; revised 20 April 2022; accepted 21 April 2022)

Abstract

Drawing upon three decades of postrevolutionary textbooks, this article traces the development of the Arab Muslim as a recurring character in the early elementary curriculum of the Islamic Republic, set against the historical context of Iranian modernization and state formation in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Sympathy for the Arab by the postrevolutionary state included a rebuke and an affirmation: Look at what has happened to the Arabs who were not able to defend their homes and their homeland, and look at what has *not* happened to us. Set against the Palestinian Arab figure are the accomplishments of American scientists and inventors who feature prominently in the postrevolutionary curriculum as sources of emulation for young readers. Star turns from Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, and Orville and Wilbur Wright invite a reconsideration of the role of the foreign Other in the construction of Iranian national identity, notably the expectation that the dispossessed constitute natural allies in Iran's ceaseless struggle against "the West." Islamization of the primary school curriculum since 1979 has not come at the expense of Iranian national identity but as its expression, elucidating the ways postrevolutionary educational materials can serve as a repository for tracing the continuities and permutations in depicting the Arab or Western Other as well as different civilizational ethos of the Islamic and Persianate world across time.

Keywords: Arabs; identity; Iran; nationalism; Persians; postrevolutionary education; textbooks

Khāled stood motionless as the soldiers surrounded him. All of his friends had run away but he stood alone, a rock still held in his hand. Only six years old, he showed no sign of fear. This only angered the soldiers more. They leveled their rifles at him. "Who taught you to throw stones at us?" one shouted. "If you don't tell us, we will kill you! There are no cameras here! No one will know that you're dead!" Khāled relented. "My brother, my brother Mohammad."

The soldiers rushed to Khāled's home, certain that they were about to arrest a major leader of the rebellion. Khāled's parents opened the door. The soldiers demanded to see Mohammad. "We will not return your other son until you bring him!" they shouted angrily. "Bring him now!" A smile passed over the father's face. He went inside and returned with a small child. "Here is Mohammad," he said. "He is three years old." The soldiers were stunned, unable to speak.

In the confusion, Khāled broke free from his captors. He ran to his brother and held him close. The story took a gruesome turn: “This time you come with us and strike them with rocks too. Don’t be scared! Alright?” Mohammad nodded his head and said: “I too will come so that I can hit them with rocks.” At that moment, the Israeli officer slammed the butt of his rifle into Mohammad’s head and warm blood spilled onto Khāled’s hands (Fig. 1).¹

“The Palestinian Teacher” appeared halfway through the third-grade primer, in a corner of an Islamic Republic primary school curriculum, carefully gauged to solicit outrage from its young audience. With its stark depiction of malice highlighted by the soldiers’ almost cartoonish cruelty, the lesson traced for its readers a world of manifest evil in which the injustices suffered by the dispossessed, even by children such as the irrepressible Khāled and Mohammad, went unredeemed. A call to arms, Mohammad’s martyrdom prefigured the courage expected of Iran’s “children of the revolution” even as it darkly warned them of the fate that awaited those who would lose their land.

Their task was to bear witness to crimes unseen or ignored by much of the rest of the world. Iran after 1979 had proclaimed itself advocate and agent for the rescue and revival of the oppressed of the world, above all the community of believers, or *ummat al-Islām*. As such, the boundaries of Iran’s imagined community extended in the post-1979 era beyond the borders of the traditional “Guarded Domains of Iran” to include its Arab and Muslim neighbors, now conceived as both participants and beneficiaries of the Islamic Revolution.²

This new internationalist aspiration was in reality the latest iteration of an older nationalist project of Irāniyat, fostered by the late Qajar and Pahlavi states primarily in the early twentieth century and rooted in the distant traumas of the nineteenth century.³ In the new reverie on what it meant to be “truly” Iranian, the plight of the forlorn Arab served as symbol and reminder of the indispensability of preserving Iran’s sovereignty against foreign encroachment; the dismemberment of Lebanon and Palestine in the twentieth century was less an inspiration for global struggle than it was a contemporary reminder of the catastrophes of Golestan (1813) and Turkmenchai (1828), two early nineteenth-century Perso-Russian treaties that resulted in significant territorial losses for Qajar Iran in the Caucasus.⁴

Drawing upon three decades of postrevolutionary textbooks, this article traces the development of the Arab Muslim as a recurring character in the early elementary curriculum of the Islamic Republic, set against the historical context of Iranian modernization and state

¹ “The Palestinian Teacher,” in *Fārsi-ye sevom-e dabestān*, 1386/2007, 133–35. All primary evidence presented in this article is based on original research carried out during 2008–2009 and 2013 in the archives of the Iranian Ministry of Education’s Organization for Educational Research and Planning (OERP). The archives include the entire collection of Persian primers covering grades one through three published between 1979 and 2009, as well as selections from late Pahlavi-era primers, grades two through five.

² The phrase “Guarded Domains of Iran” (*Mamālek-e mahruseh*) was originally coined during the early sixteenth century to describe the territorial domains of the Safavid kings, who fostered an Iranian national unity centered around the Persian language and literary corpus, and the Twelver Shi’i religion. Under Agha Mohammad Shah Qajar and his successors, the term again was used to legitimize the Qajar dynasty and to foster a newly emerging sense of Iranian nationalism. Originally stretching from Dagestan in the north to the Indian Ocean in the south, defeat in war to Russian and English armies during the nineteenth century called into question the legitimacy of the Qajar monarchy and its claim to be the true defender of the Guarded Domains. Amanat, “Russian Intrusion,” 38.

³ Kashani-Sabet (“Fragile Frontiers”) observes that the concept of Irāniyat (“Iranianness,” or more simply “being Iranian”) existed long before the rise of modern nationalism in the nineteenth century, making the task of “imagining” the Iranian community less challenging than in other places. She writes, “The impulse to set apart things Iranian—land and language, culture and civilization—had old roots and simply found a new application and context in nationalism.”

⁴ The wars with Russia (1804–1813 and 1826–1828) remain prominent in the collective psyche of Iranians, many of whom can still recite the names of the territories lost to the tsarist regime more than two centuries ago; Amanat, “Russian Intrusion.” Monica Ringer details how political and social responses to the trauma of defeat laid the foundation for modern education in Iran in *Education, Religion, and the Discourse of Cultural Reform*.



FIGURE 1. “The Palestinian Teacher,” *Fārsi-ye sevom-e dābestān* (Third-grade Persian), Tehran: Ministry of Education, 1386/2007.

formation in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.⁵ Whereas the Pahlavi state had portrayed the Arab as an abject figure incapable of redemption other than by the grace and intervention of Iranian civilization and culture, he was rendered merely pitiful by the

⁵ A useful summary of modern state formation as “the dynamic, historically informed, often contingent process by which states emerge in relation to societies” can be found in OECD “Concepts and Dilemmas,” 13–14. See also Vu, “Studying the State.”

Islamic educational system.⁶ Sympathy for the Arab by the postrevolutionary state in its primary school materials included a rebuke and an affirmation: Look at what has happened to the Arabs who were not able to defend their homes and their homeland, and look at what has *not* happened to us.⁷

As he has throughout Iran's modern history, the imagined Arab remains an object in constant need of rescue, stripped of any meaningful agency or subjectivity. The Islamic Republic of Iran's innovation was to place him within a narrative of *national* failure. Iran's strident advocacy on behalf of the region's dispossessed reveals itself to be ultimately inseparable from the Arab's inability to protect himself, or from Iran's deep-seated desire to demonstrate its superiority over its neighbors, a compensation for its own weakness in the world.⁸

Set against Arab suffering and defeat in the Islamic Republic's elementary textbooks are the accomplishments of American scientists and inventors who feature prominently in the postrevolutionary curriculum as sources of emulation for young readers. Star turns from Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, and Orville and Wilbur Wright invite a reconsideration of the role of the foreign Other in the construction of Iranian national identity, notably the expectation that the dispossessed constitute natural allies in Iran's ceaseless struggle against "the West."⁹

More than just primers, the Persian textbooks presented in this article provide young students with their first exposure to the ideology of the revolution and the official values of the Islamic Republic. These textbooks matter to the field because they contain what Mandana E. Limbert refers to as official "wish images," idealized projections manufactured by elites of the perfect (and obedient) members of society against which daily life can be measured.¹⁰

Unique among media in Iran, textbooks come with a guaranteed readership, making them an important source for understanding the shaping of Iranian historical consciousness among an increasingly literate population.¹¹ Textbooks more broadly serve as markers of Iran's participation in a universal modernity, a participation that takes place within the framework of a distinctive Iranian culture. By reproducing the most advanced and modern knowledge in the standardized format of a national curriculum, textbooks act as an instrument of indigenization and mediation "between the parochialism of national identity and the universalism of modern knowledge."¹²

The organization of a coherent and consistent ideological message in textbooks after 1979 has been haphazard, at best.¹³ Immediately following the revolution, and acting on their own

⁶ Vejdani has shown that Pahlavi-era textbooks consistently emphasized the abjectness of Arab (as opposed to Muslim) culture and behavior, a distinction that the postrevolutionary school system continues to preserve; Vejdani, *Making History*, especially 74–91. Islam, particularly as practiced by Iranians, remained a positive historical force in the prerevolutionary curriculum during the final years of the monarchy, when state secularization was at its height. See *Fārsī-ye dovom-e dabestān*, 1355/1976; *Fārsī-ye sevom-e dabestān*, 1355/1976; *Fārsī-ye chāhārom-e dabestān*, 1355/1976; and *Fārsī-ye panjom-e dabestān*, 1355/1976.

⁷ Malekzadeh, "Schooled to Obey." The dissertation traces continuities between the memory of Qajar territorial losses and the centrality of national self-preservation to the Pahlavi and IRI projects of modernization and schooling; see especially chapters 1 and 4.

⁸ For a full-throated discussion of the depths and durability of Iranian contempt toward Arabs, including by the current regime, see Zia-Ebrahimi, *Emergence of Iranian Nationalism*. The belief that Arabs were uncivilized and barbaric before the advent of Islam was axiomatic for Morteza Motahhari and Ali Shariati, whose writings were foundational to the curriculum of the IRI school system. By contrast, both authors exulted in the possibilities of Islamic practice under the Iranians. Motahhari, *Khadamāt-e moteqābel-e Irān va Eslām*; Shariati, *Bāzshenāsi-e hoviat-e Irāni-Islāmi*.

⁹ Golnar Mehran's widely cited 1989 article, "Socialization of Schoolchildren in the Islamic Republic of Iran," refers to the "New Islamic Person" as the ultimate goal of the postrevolutionary curriculum. According to Mehran, this individual "hates the prerevolutionary regime, rejects any form of dependence on the West, mistrusts the non-Muslim world and is highly critical of Western ways, and sympathizes with all oppressed peoples, especially Muslims" Mehran, "Socialization," 49.

¹⁰ Limbert, "Oman."

¹¹ Vejdani, "Place of Islam."

¹² Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran*, 98.

¹³ Systematic study of the internal politics of Iran's Islamic school system remains almost nonexistent, despite the presence of an expansive literature and understanding of factionalism under IRI rule. See "Structure No System: The

initiative, several groups within the nascent regime began to till the pedagogical soil in which a new school system could be sown. Their self-assigned task was to produce the goals and philosophy suitable for an Islamic education. With the Ministry of Education in disarray, these early efforts were confined to the Office of Investigations housed in the Organization for Educational Research and Planning, or OERP. OERP has deputy ministerial status in the Ministry of Education and is responsible for preparing, producing, and distributing textbooks. Although the head of the department is a political appointee, OERP has a reputation for being one of the more technocratic-minded and professional elements of the educational structure in Iran.

Work in the Office of Investigations stopped altogether with the absorption of groups into the newly resurrected Supreme Council of Education (SCE). The SCE was restored in early 1980 under the auspices of the governing Revolutionary Council after a nearly three-year hiatus.¹⁴ As an agency, the SCE fuses both legislative and executive functions. Its mandate is to devise the goals and curriculum appropriate for an Islamic society, as well as to implement educational policy. Importantly, as the ultimate legislative authority over matters of education, the SCE has the final word on the annual goals of the curriculum, although since 1984 any new major policy initiatives mounted by the SCE must first be approved by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, or SCCR.

Although this article focuses primarily on the Arab Other in the context of contemporary Iran, it points to future research on depictions of the Persianate in national settings other than Iran. If the Arab has an outsized presence in the curriculum of a purportedly post-nationalist, post-Persianate Islamic Republic, then what becomes of him when his story is told by other Persian speakers—the Tajik, the Afghan, the Uzbek—whose voices are notably absent in the Iranian curriculum? How do these countries reckon with their own Persianate pasts and how do they come to terms with the Iranian, whose contemporary descendants lay exclusive claim to the Persianate world? The question of who gets to be the inheritor of Persianate legacies ultimately rests on a fallacy.¹⁵ As Fani argues elsewhere, students of Iranian and Persianate studies would do well to step back and view nationalist projects transregionally—not to adjudicate which one is more historically authentic, but to critique the epistemic circle within which they all stand, whether it be in Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, or Uzbekistan.¹⁶

The Immemorial Iran

The embrace of Iranian chauvinism is hardly to be expected from a curriculum and revolution whose leaders routinely, and quite loudly, condemn nationalism as conspiracy, an instrument of imperial rule designed to sow division within the developing world. The purpose of Islamic schooling is neither patriotism nor the preservation of sovereign borders but preparation of the public for the defense of the *ummah*. The nation-state, at best, plays a subordinate role in what is understood to be an endless struggle against oppression and injustice.¹⁷ For

Foundations of the Politicization of the Postrevolutionary School System (1979–1989),” in Malekzadeh, *Ambiguous Outcomes*. For a Persian-language account of the institutional challenges and failures of the postrevolutionary Ministry of Education, see Mohammad Rezaei, *Tahlili az zendegi-ye Ruzmarreh-ye dānesh āmuzeshi*. Mohammad Ayatollahi Tabaar provides a compelling account of polarization in Iran in *Religious Statecraft: The Politics of Islam in Iran*, an important update to Mehdi Moslem’s seminal work, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*.

¹⁴ The Supreme Council of Education was originally established in 1966. The Council met from the 1968 through 1977, after which it ceased activities. In its original incarnation the responsibilities of the SCE were limited to producing the goals and standards of the Ministry of Education and did not include the executive and legislative powers granted to it in the postrevolutionary period.

¹⁵ There is an unusual urgency to the matter that poisons discussion in the public sphere. See the following discussion over who “owns” Nowruz for a recent example: @CCAForum, March 13, 2022, <https://twitter.com/CCAForum/status/1503026326990643204>.

¹⁶ Fani, “Two Nations Find a Poet.”

¹⁷ Observers of Iran typically characterize the postrevolutionary educational system as an unblinking apparatus of the state, “an educational model atypical at the international level” in which “purification and [ideological] commitment take precedence over knowledge and skills”; Paivandi, *Discrimination and Intolerance*, 9. Patricia J. Higgins

stalwarts like the following high school principal interviewed in Tehran in 2008 by the sociologist Mohammad Rezaei, the denial of nationalist projects constitutes a profession of loyalty as well as a commitment to professional duty:

We especially condemn nationalism. Imam Khomeini held nationalism to be a source of division. We must not propagandize nationalism in the school. This would be like teaching racism. . . . Are we teaching the Koran? Do we start the morning assembly with the name of God? Do we have prayer in the morning? . . . We must not do anything that would lead to the flag taking the place of the Koran. It's not important whether or not there is a flag but the Koran must be present, *velāyāt* (guardianship) must be present, the Imams and the holy sites must be present.¹⁸

In truth, the rejection or acceptance of nationalism has not been an issue in modern Iran, before or after 1979. Religious and secular camps have not been “at two opposite extremes along a spectrum, with secularists propagating nationalist ideals and religious leaders opposing those ideals.”¹⁹ Although some ideologues claim to reject nationalism, Aghaie notes that “their actual writings and speeches relied heavily upon nationalist concepts” shared by their rivals.²⁰ These include assumptions about Iran’s primordial and organic character as a 2,500-year-old nation with an uninterrupted history that “looms out of an immemorial past and glides into a limitless future.”²¹

Official denunciations of nationalism have had, in any case, almost no impact on textbook content. Indeed, gaps between official talk and textbooks, rhetoric, and pedagogical practice are hardly a new phenomenon in modern Iran, as Farzin Vajdani’s research on the early history curriculum shows. Despite conventional belief that Pahlavi nationalist historians considered the introduction of Islam to Iran to be the source of backwardness, history textbooks throughout the twentieth century “neither ignored Islamic history nor claimed that Islam was the cause of Iranian decline.”²² Closer to the present day, there is a growing if nascent literature dedicated to tracing the presence of Iranian nationalism in educational design after 1979. This research demonstrates that Islamization of the curriculum since 1979 has not come at the expense of Iranian national identity but as its expression.²³

and Pirouz Shoar-Ghaffari write that a rigid hierarchy of educational needs comprises the formal ends of the school system, beginning with “religious and spiritual ones first, followed by scientific and cultural, social, political, and finally economic goals”; Higgins and Shoar-Ghaffari, “Women’s Education,” 20.

¹⁸ Interviewed in Rezaei, *Tahlili az zendegi-ye Ruzmarreh-ye dānesh āmuzeshi*, 160.

¹⁹ Aghaie, “Islam and Nationalist Historiography,” 25. At the time of the principal’s remarks the curriculum contained numerous examples of nation-building exercises, including an extended lesson for third graders on the importance of the Islamic Republic’s flag, simply titled “Flag” (*Parcham*).

²⁰ Aghaie, “Islam and Nationalist Historiography,” 25. Earlier Aghaie writes, “Hence, nationalism is not, strictly speaking, an ideology or a single belief. Rather, it is essentially a discourse surrounding the idea of ‘nation.’ Within this discourse, the nation is defined and redefined in a contest between diverse political and social groups” (21). For a powerful account of this process in the experiences of Iran’s major ethnic minorities, see Elling, *Minorities in Iran*.

²¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 11–12. “No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind,” writes Anderson. The Islamic Republic, for all its lofty goals of establishing the greater *ummah*, is no different.

²² Vajdani, “Place of Islam,” 206. Vajdani notes that the bulk of Iranian history taught in school takes place *after* the arrival of Islam, a direct consequence of a nationalist logic that emphasizes the continuities of Iranian history, its “nationalist narratives of resilience” (210).

²³ The nationalism of the Islamic Republic as it is taught in the classroom remains woefully understudied. Little has changed since Amir Hossein Mirfakhraie observed in 2008 that “there has been no systematic research on how both Islamic ideology and non-Islamic discourses inform the construction of the ideal citizen in the school textbooks”; Mirfakhraie, “Curriculum Reform and Identity Politics,” 14. Notably, even scholars who center the nation–state emphasize its initial abandonment by the IRI. The revolution’s embrace and promotion of an Islamic-Iranian identity is typically described as a concession, made under duress. See Ansari, *Politics of Nationalism*, 1.

Textbooks as primary sources therefore present a powerful corrective to conventional thinking about education in postrevolutionary Iran. Far from being static, impermeable instruments of dogma and ideology, textbooks have been highly unstable, subject to the same forces of disruption that plague other social, cultural, and political realms in Iran.²⁴ Tracing curricular content over time as historical artifact reveals the massive gaps that exist between official rhetoric and formal practice, allowing researchers and analysts to better assess schooling's purpose and effects, as well as to elucidate how expressions of Iran's place in the world and engagements with its perceived Others may shift over time.

Modernity's Dilemma: Setting the Arab Apart

The 1979 Revolution did little to disrupt the belief that Iranians were a people assigned a unique destiny, if not by God, then by History. Nationalism remained "the determining ideology of modern Iran," the essential reference point "to which all competing ideologies have ultimately had to adhere, and within which most have been subsumed."²⁵ If there were a utopia to be found (or recovered) by the new Islamic order, it would be achieved by the formation of the Iranian nation, promoted through, not despite, religious precepts and values.²⁶ Salvation's path once again ran through Europe and North America, also the source of torments.²⁷ The trauma of military defeat and the subsequent loss of sovereignty over large swaths of territory in the early nineteenth century convinced Iranian reformers that the country could only be saved by adopting western technology and modes of government, a judgment largely shared by the leadership of the Islamic Republic.²⁸ Constituting a "dilemma of modernization," generations of nationalizing elites faced the difficult challenge of bringing development to Iran by importing foreign knowledge without sacrificing Iran's cultural identity.²⁹

Efforts by early Pahlavi reformers to localize modernity while remaining true to an "authentic" self corresponded with a concomitant desire to fix blame for Iran's degradation on the Arab invasion and conquest of Persia in the seventh century. Modern Iran would be defined by the concepts and knowledge imported from the West, but its national

²⁴ Malekzadeh, "Children without Childhood." For a comprehensive study of the internal dynamics of Iran's complex and dissonant political system, see Brumberg and Farhi, *Power and Change in Iran*.

²⁵ Ansari, *Politics of Nationalism*. He writes, "the notion that Iranians were somehow chosen had been reinforced not diminished by the Islamist narrative" (222).

²⁶ Islam was an expression of sovereign authenticity, of the "real" Iran, fulfilling a project already more than a century old at the time of the revolution. Sami Zubaida disagrees, arguing that the Khomeinist project is unthinkable outside of the modern, western paradigm of the nation-state, but he allows only a superficial role for religion, describing it as an epiphenomenon, "sprayed on" the architecture of the state as a salve to the masses. Zubaida, "Ideological Preconditions." For a more sympathetic reading of the compatibility of Islam with modernity, see Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse*.

²⁷ Inspired by similar reforms then underway in Egypt and Turkey, the Qajars under the direction of crown prince Abbas Mirza launched a series of military reforms known as the *Nezām-e jadid* (1803–1833).

²⁸ The current Leader has been quite consistent on this matter over the years. From 1985:

We are not against the process of getting raw materials from them. It should not be assumed that we reject the products of western culture and its scientific advance that are sometimes miraculous. Such dogmatism is not in line with Islamic views at all and we never follow this trend. We should design the building and it is not important where the raw, needed materials are procured. *However, these materials should fit the design.*

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, "Speech Made by His Excellency," emphasis added. See also Khamenei, "Tā che tasviram konand," in which he says, "*Shāgerdi bas ast!*" (Enough with being a student!).

²⁹ "Europe thus served as an important initial catalyst in considering the need to reform, a model of modernization, and at the same time, the specter of loss of territory and political autonomy that failure to reform would enable." From Ringer, "Negotiating Modernity," 41. Much of the intellectual labor that went into reconciling foreign knowledge with Iranian culture originally took place outside of Iran. For an account of the highly influential scene in Berlin, see Matin-Asgari, "Berlin Circle."

identity would be formed *against* the Arab, who represented negation, the absence of Iran itself.³⁰ The impulse to blame the Arab for Iran's decline quickly ran headlong into the imperative of historical continuity.³¹ The logic of modern nationalism dictated that there be an Iran that "has always been there," an unbroken presence from time immemorial. This was incompatible with the claim that the victory of the Muslim armies over the Sassanid empire represented a rupture in that historical timeline, marked by "silence" and loss.³²

Interwar educational planners found their way out of this intellectual thicket in part by reimagining Islam in civilizational terms, a phenomenon with origins outside of Iran but belonging to all of humanity. "Islam," Vejdani writes, "[has been] a positive historical force, one that highlighted the equality of believers, rather than the ethnic hierarchy that elevated Arabs over Iranians."³³ With the playing field leveled, the Iranian flourished, no longer deemed a victim of conquest but as the Islamic world's most vital and creative component.³⁴

The revolutionaries who took control of the Ministry of Education in the late winter of 1979 embraced their predecessors' approach. Islam was again separated from its origins as an "Arab" religion, done so in a way that would enable the ascendance of Iran while maintaining official commitments to pan-Islamism.³⁵ In postrevolutionary textbooks, patriotic stories appear alongside lessons in the content and practice of religious faith, as components—not rivals—of a shared national identity. Emerging from the pages is an authentic Iran, triumphant, that could rightfully claim its status as the first among equals.

First among Equals (But Iran Makes Everything Better)

The Iranian would first need to be made into the Arab's equal. This task falls to the third-grade lesson "What Is the Basis of Superiority?" (*Bartari be chist?*) Released with the initial wave of curricular revisions following the revolution, the lesson opens inside a mosque. There, the Prophet Mohammad and his companions are engaged in conversation. Suddenly, the Prophet's close friend and follower Salmān al-Fārsī arrives for worship. Mohammad smiles, pleased by this unexpected encounter. He beckons al-Fārsī, a Persian and one of the earliest non-Arab converts to Islam, to come sit next to him. The gesture is not well received by the others. One of Mohammad's companions loudly voices his objection. For him, al-Fārsī is beneath contempt: "Salmān is a Persian speaker and we are Arabs! He should not be included in our group nor should he sit alongside us. He should sit at a level below!"³⁶

The Prophet swiftly reprimands the individual, condemning his outburst with an impromptu sermon on the true nature of Islam: "Being a Persian (*fārs*) or an Arab," he exclaims, "is not a reason for thinking better or worse of a person. Neither our color nor ethnicity makes us wiser. Nothing save piety and faith makes us better."³⁷ Mohammad reminds those gathered there in the mosque that Islam is an experience without boundaries or limitations, available to all comers. "We Muslims know each other as equals and as

³⁰ Zia-Ebrahimi in *Emergence of Iranian Nationalism* coined the phrase "dislocative nationalism" to describe this phenomenon.

³¹ Vejdani, "Place of Islam."

³² Zarrinkub, *Do qarn-e sokut*; Ram, "Immemorial Iranian Nation."

³³ Vejdani, "Place of Islam," 211.

³⁴ In turn, Islam made Iran better, a point repeatedly emphasized by Motahhari and Shariati in their prerevolutionary writings. See Aghaie, "Islam and Nationalist Historiography."

³⁵ The overt ideological indoctrination at the heart of Iranian schooling, that is, the "Islamization" of school and society by the postrevolutionary government, generally follows patterns determined by the "rules of the game" associated with modern nationalism and state formation. Specifically, state leaders in Iran since the late nineteenth century have sought to inculcate through schooling an imagined, "authentic" national culture capable of binding state and society together. For an excellent discussion of the relationship between formal education and state efforts in Iran to create the nation, that "abstract social category or framework tying together state, society, and culture" see Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran*, 10.

³⁶ "What Is the Basis of Superiority?" in *Fārsi-ye sevom-e dabestān*, 1359/1980, 83.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

brothers. Accent and language do not separate us from one another. Where we live, our ethnicity, or our color must not separate us from one another.”³⁸

It would not have been lost on the students reading the story that Mohammad makes his oration on behalf of the only other named character in the story, and its only Iranian. As Persian speakers, as *Iranians*, these same pupils learn that they must never accept second-grade status within the *ummah*.³⁹ It is a pointed message, delivered with uncommon passion by the founder of the Islamic faith himself. The final paragraph steps outside of the story to address students directly through the narrative fourth wall:

As you can see from this important guidance, we Muslims know each other as equals, neither our accents nor our languages can separate us from one another. Where we live, our race and our color will not divide us. We do not count anything other than piety and faith (*taqvā va imān*) as sources of superiority.⁴⁰

From the story’s title to its pallid insistence that Persians be treated as equals, the story “What Is the Basis of Superiority?” reveals the insecurity of a revolution in its earliest days. Extraordinary even by the heightened passions of the postrevolutionary curriculum, it conveys an unmistakable message of defiance and dignity, staged behind an official line of Islamic solidarity and struggle. It is a line that invariably fails to hold, typically at the expense of Arab characters who soon tumble into ruin and loss.

Losing Their Religion

Loss, above all, of the land. Postrevolutionary textbooks from their first editions draw clear connections among worship, faith, and the possession of *mihan*, or homeland.⁴¹ These earthly bonds are affirmed by the story “Oh Iran, Oh My Homeland” (*Ey Irān, ey mihan-e man*), which

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ The politics of language choice and identity is a source of considerable anxiety for the founders of the Islamic Republic. Khomeini delivered the following comments not long after the ratification of the Iranian Constitution in April of 1979:

Sometimes the word minorities is used to refer to people such as the Kurds, Lurs, Turks, Persian, Baluchis, and such. These people should not be called minorities, because this term assumes that there is a difference between these brothers. In Islam, such a difference has no place at all. There is no difference between Muslims who speak different languages, for instance, the Arabs, or Persians. It is very probable that such problems have been created by those who do not wish the Muslim countries to be united. . . . They create the issues of nationalism, of pan-Iranism, pan-Turkism, and such isms, which are contrary to Islamic doctrines. Their plan is to destroy Islam and the Islamic philosophy.

Cited in Atabaki, “Contesting Marginality,” 224. Atabaki reminds us that Iran’s 1979 Constitution binds the nation through Islam as well as Persian, the latter designated as the lingua franca of the country.

⁴⁰ “What Is the Basis of Superiority?” in *Fārsi-ye sevom-e dabestān*, 1359/1980, 83. Indeed, faith in Islam has long been the gateway for Iranian superiority. The nationalist historian Abbas Iqbal, one of the most prominent intellectuals of the constitutional era and a founder of what became Iran’s modern educational system, attributed the cultural and political accomplishments during the Abbasid period to the prominence of Iranians, proclaiming that “the majority of the learned figures among the clerics, philosophers, and poets who wrote in Arabic during this period of Islamic civilization were Iranians”; Iqbal, *Dowreh-ye tārikh-e ‘omumi*, 125. Iqbal’s centering of Iranian excellence would be echoed a few decades later by (the ostensibly anti-nationalist and “chief ideologue” of the Islamic Revolution) Morteza Motahhari, who argued that Iranians contributed more to Islam than any other Muslim nation, including the Arabs; Motahhari, *Khadamāt-e motaqābel-e Irān va Eslām*, 79–84.

⁴¹ Kashani-Sabet argues that the shift from an unbounded Persian identity based on language to an Iranian identity defined by territoriality and firm borders was the direct consequence of the calamitous military defeats of the early nineteenth century. As she puts it, “Fear of disappearance from the world map led to a desire to protect and promote the guarded domains”; Kashani-Sabet, “Fragile Frontiers,” 227.

first appeared in 1979. The third-grade lesson delivers a full-throated defense of Iranian territory and soil as the source of national identity, one that is unambiguously Islamic:

Oh Iran, oh my glorious home. Your tall mountains are the symbol of the glory and dignity of your children. Your wide fields are symbols of your freedom and liberty. The rush of your rivers is a reminder of the shouts of freemen yelling “*Allahu akbar!*” Oh Iran, oh my glorious home! Oh land of the pure and brave, oh land of free Muslims. Oh, land of Islam and faith. I pledge allegiance to you.⁴²

This is a corporeal love, tied to the permanence of geography, consecrated by the blood of martyrs:

Oh Iran, oh my homeland! Oh Iran, my glorious home. I love you, the laughter of your children. The shouts of your youth, the clamor of your people, I love them all. Oh, glorious home, its pure soil colored by the blood of martyrs. I respect you. Each morning and night I kiss the red tulips that grow in your cemeteries.⁴³

There is the land, only the land, to be defended in ceaseless devotion against all enemies, foreign or domestic:

Oh Iran, oh my glorious home! Oh, land of the pure and brave, oh land of free Muslims. Oh, land of Islam and faith. I pledge allegiance to you, I strive with love for your development. I love the true faith of your free people and stand ready to assist them. With anger and hate I destroy your enemies.⁴⁴

The pervasive concern that Iranians might fail to defend their homeland animates the narrator’s loud defiance. To lose one’s country is to lose everything. The burden of statelessness ultimately falls not to the Iranian, but to the Palestinian Arab, whose torments are described in vivid detail in a series of tragic stories across the elementary school curriculum. “An Adolescent from Palestine” appears immediately after “Oh Iran, Oh My Homeland” in the third-grade primer. A rather pitiful scene opens the story. A young Palestinian boy, distraught, stands alone in a refugee camp. The story’s narrator, an Iranian of a similar age, attempts to initiate conversation and discover what is troubling the young Arab:

I went closer and sat next to him, but he didn’t notice, his heart seemed to be somewhere else. I greeted him and he replied in kind, but then returned back to his thoughts. “Brother! I see that you are upset . . . your sadness has made me upset also.” “Brother! I wish for you to tell me your troubles so that I can perhaps help you to lighten your load” (Fig. 2).⁴⁵

The Palestinian replies with a series of rhetorical questions that reveal the reasons for his silence:

He lifted his view from the ground and calmly looked at me and said: “Have you ever heard of someone being run out of their own home, taken by force by another and when the owner complains, his complaints are answered by bullets. . . ? Have you ever been in a classroom that has its roof cave in because of a cluster bomb? Have you ever heard of a hospital destroyed with the infirm still inside? Have you ever heard of dolls that bring death to children?”⁴⁶

⁴² “Oh Iran, Oh My Homeland,” in *Fārsi-ye sevom-e dabestān*, 1359/1980, 91.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 91–92.

⁴⁵ “An Adolescent from Palestine,” in *Fārsi-ye sevom-e dabestān*, 1359/1980, 97.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 97–98.



FIGURE 2. "An Adolescent from Palestine," *Fārsi-ye sevom-e dabestān* (Third-grade Persian), Tehran: Ministry of Education, 1359/1980.

The details of the occupation are graphic and unsparing. There are no safe places or activities available to the narrator: the classroom, hospital, and even children's toys are potential sources of death and devastation. The Palestinian's only hope lies with those willing to come to the aid and rescue of his people. Bearing witness, the young Iranian proclaims his determination to participate in the struggle:

Brother! These are the sufferings that weigh on our hearts and on the hearts of all free people everywhere and I will help my triumphant and Muslim people save the house and homeland of my comrades.⁴⁷

The narrator addresses his audience directly in the final sentence, breaking the fourth wall between the lesson and the reader to issue a final challenge: "And you brother! How will you remember us while we are on this path?"⁴⁸

"An Adolescent from Palestine" (*Nowjavāni az felestin*) received a dramatic makeover in the late 1980s. No longer a passive victim, the story's authors transformed the boy into a warrior by replacing the image of a humble refugee languishing in a desert camp with one of an armed militant prepared for battle. Now instead of casting his eyes to the ground, the young man looks directly in the direction of his enemy with a rising sun in the background, presumably signifying a day that will bring him and his people closer to victory. Despite his young age, the young Palestinian has already seen and experienced more than his share of the violence. Written in a dispassionate third-person narrative, and with his Kalashnikov at his side, he details all the horrors that occurred after the Israelis drove his family out of its home:

⁴⁷ Ibid., 98.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 98.

He remembered incredibly bitter days. Days in which the Israeli executioners had forced them to leave their homes, forced out by bullets and fiery bombs. Anyone who dared to complain was answered with a hail of bullets. . . . Days in which the enemy's bombers had reduced the camps to dirt and blood, the tents shot full of holes. Refugee camps whose population was filled mostly with brave, innocent Muslims, who ended up as martyrs. . . . He remembered these bitter days along with hundreds of other bitter days and held his rifle even tighter.⁴⁹

Denied a proper childhood, the Palestinian's only joys in life have been "the sweet days of resistance and struggle," the memories of which drew "a beautiful smile across his face."⁵⁰ Inspiring audiences to bear witness is no longer enough. The last version of the lesson before its removal in the 1990s ends with the Palestinian leaving for the front, taking up arms and dispensing with asking for aid from his Iranian readers. Its message to the reader is clear: Muslims must take action to defend themselves.

Yet, it is weakness that has put the Palestinian in this position, his people's future put at risk by their loss of a homeland. The purpose remains *national* emancipation. After all, the goal is not to eliminate Israel so that the Palestinians can become part of the community of Muslims—they already are a part of the *ummah*. The aim is to push the Israelis out to restore the Palestinian homeland. A variation on the theme of dispossession is found in the second-grade primer, where Israel's occupation again provides the crucible for transformation. Presented in the first-person singular, "Letter from a Displaced Child" (*Nāmeḥ'i az yek kudak-e āvāreh*) is written from the perspective of a young Palestinian refugee, marooned in a refugee camp in southern Lebanon.

"Do you know who we are?" he asks the reader. "You and I are brothers. I am a Palestinian, we are Palestinian-Muslim children."⁵¹ Bound together in brotherhood by their religion and a shared enemy, "the enemy of all free peoples everywhere," the unnamed narrator goes on to draw out the critical difference between himself and his Iranian counterpart, noting:

The name of our country is Palestine and the name of your country is Iran. You live in your own country and in your own home. But we are displaced in the deserts. The enemy has destroyed our home and homeland.⁵²

The young orphan explains that since "your revolution became victorious," Israel has become frightened. Unable or too afraid to bring the fight to Iran, Israel has responded by tormenting the much weaker Palestinian people. That Iran is both the remedy and source of the orphan's troubles is left unacknowledged. Only through struggle can there be hope of ever being free again, but emancipation cannot be achieved alone. Once again, the text calls upon its readers, the children of Iran, to consider how they might participate and engage with such a struggle. In doing so, "Letter from a Displaced Child" appears to present a powerful alternative to nationalism, a call to stand in solidarity and purpose as Muslims against a terrifying enemy.

Iranians nonetheless receive a dispensation from the fight. In the postrevolutionary reimagining of what it means to be Islamic-Iranian, it is always the vanquished Arab, never the defeated Persian, who is portrayed in the pages of the textbooks. The Arab is not an ally. He is a warning: *The Palestinian has no home because he has no country*. Accordingly, the pretense that "Letter from a Displaced Child" is about the *ummah* disappears in the 1982 edition of the primer. A ward of the Iranian struggle, the Palestinian orphan attributes his people's uprising to "the victory of *your* Islamic Revolution with the leadership of Imam Khomeini," in effect inverting the message of universalism found in the

⁴⁹ "An Adolescent from Palestine," in *Fārsi-ye sevom-e dabestān*, 1366/1987, 137.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁵¹ "Letter from a Displaced Child," in *Fārsi-ye dovom-e dabestān*, 1358/1979, 48.

⁵² *Ibid.*

earlier lesson, “What Is the Basis of Superiority?”⁵³ The experience of shared suffering forms the nation, according to Motahhari, but in the textbooks it is almost always the Arab and his children who must struggle.⁵⁴ The Iranian only bears witness.

And then they were gone. By the late 1990s nearly all of the lessons on militant resistance that had defined so much of the early-childhood curriculum had been removed, replaced by an array of child-centered stories more concerned with replicating good habits and hygiene than with the destruction of Israel.⁵⁵ Along with them went the Arab, forlorn or otherwise.⁵⁶ The removal of the dispossessed Arab from the curriculum can be understood as evidence of a revolution increasingly confident of its ability to protect and preserve itself, even as it reflected the preferences of an Iranian population that had moved on without much fanfare from the dual-cultures debates of the past.⁵⁷ With the successful defense of Iranian territory during eight brutal years of war with Iraq, Iran’s leadership could reasonably claim to be the first regime in two hundred years to “not lose an inch of Iranian soil.”⁵⁸

Vigilance against enemies, real or imagined, had lost its urgency in a context where the immediate priority of most students was to find a job.⁵⁹ As merit and the credentialing provided by secondary and postsecondary education became increasingly tied to professional success in the postwar period, Iranian families turned to schooling to get their children into college, not the afterlife.⁶⁰ All roads led to the university and the possession of credentials, understood to be indispensable to success in the job and marriage markets. A school system once vaunted as an ideological apparatus in the service of the state had by the end of the twentieth century become a private resource for the social and economic advancement of ordinary families and their children.⁶¹

The variability of textbook portrayals of the Arab Other punctures the persistent myth that the Islamic Republic of Iran deploys curricular materials solely as extensions of an ideological state apparatus. The movement away from militant self-defense and toward a greater emphasis on meritocratic achievement anticipates the rise of the technocratic turn in Iranian politics after the death of Khomeini in 1989, a transition from an outer to inner jihad, so to speak, in which revolutionary morality combined with the pursuit of knowledge and expertise. Interestingly, changes in curricular tone and content have historically been out of sync with political developments outside of the classroom, suggesting that they were produced in response to the demands and expectations of parents, teachers, and students.⁶²

⁵³ Ibid., 16, emphasis added.

⁵⁴ Motahhari, *Khadamāt-e moteqābel-e Irān va Eslām*, 24.

⁵⁵ The first-grade primer was the earliest to change. The 1989 edition, for example, devotes its back cover to a message about hygiene. Bubbles rise from an oversized bar of soap, transforming into flowers as they move out of the frame. We see a child’s hands washing with soap under water coming out of a faucet. The accompanying message reads, “Children: If you want to become sick less often, use more soap when washing.”

⁵⁶ Arnon Groiss highlights “The Palestinian Teacher” in his overheated 2007 survey of Iranian textbooks, arguing that the postrevolutionary curriculum successfully bred intolerance toward minorities and women and instilled “in the souls of school students, especially in the higher grades, feelings of hatred” toward non-Muslims in anticipation of an eschatological struggle between “the forces of Good and Evil which is to culminate in the reappearance of the . . . Hidden Imam”; Groiss, “Iranian Textbooks.”

⁵⁷ Marashi’s *Nationalizing Iran* describes an unresolved “dual-cultures problem” (i.e., the pre-Islamic versus Islamic identities of Iran).

⁵⁸ “In times before the Islamic Republic, including the Ghajar [sic] and Pahlavi eras, some parts of Iranian soil were separated off. After the Islamic Revolution, Iranian youth didn’t allow even an inch of Iranian soil to be separated from Iran. #StrongIRAN.” @khamenei_ir, Twitter, February 10, 2020, 10:45 a.m., https://twitter.com/khamenei_ir/status/1226940353531478017?lang=en.

⁵⁹ Salehi-Isfahani, “Iran’s Third Development Plan.”

⁶⁰ With university admission rates historically at 10 percent or lower well into the 2000s, it is debatable which of the two was more difficult to obtain; Malekzadeh, “New Business.”

⁶¹ Rezaei, *Tahlili az zendegi-ye ruzmarreh-ye dānesh āmuzeshi*.

⁶² Although portrayals of forlorn Arabs fell from the pages of the curriculum, they did so just before the rise and consolidation of technocratic politics during Rafsanjani’s first term in office as president. Conversely, textbook content was its most strident not in the early years after the revolution, as might be expected, but toward the end of the

Learning to Fly: Western Sources of Emulation

Tales of scientific discovery and accomplishment provide the counterfactual to Arab lives of misery, as the possibilities denied to the Palestinian are made manifest by the achievements of American inventors and scientists. If the tragedy of the Palestinian boy Khāled and his family referenced at the outset of this article is to be avoided at all costs, then the adventures of American aviators, scientists, and inventors are lives to be pursued, available for the taking. Western achievement in science and technology belongs to all of humanity as proof of God's favor and presence. Science becomes not only a civilizational gift, but a righteous endeavor, the expression of virtue available to all regardless of national origin or religious belief.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the series of lessons dedicated to tracing the origins of human flight. The saga begins in the second-grade primer. "Feather and Wing" (*Par va bāl*) opens with the wonderment of Āzādeh, who expresses to her companion 'Ali her longing to join in flight the birds she sees every day in her yard. "Oh how I wish that God had given me wings and feathers so that I might fly in the sky!" she cries out.⁶³ 'Ali assures Āzādeh that she can, that there is nothing stopping her from doing so. The seemingly miraculous is within her reach. "How?" asks an incredulous Āzādeh. "God has given us feathers and wings," replies 'Ali. "Our ideas are our feathers and wings. Others, who like you desired to fly, used their ideas to invent the airplane."⁶⁴ All humans possess reason, granted (*āfarid*) by God. The capacity for flight is the birthright of all humans, a provision of God's grace. Flight has a heavenly source, but it is unrelenting human effort that brings it into being, capacities well within the reach of all individuals.

Subsequent stories make no effort to conceal the origins of the first manned flights, described in detail across a two-part lesson in the third-grade primer. One of the few holdovers from the Pahlavi-era curriculum, "The Story of Flight" (*Dāstān-e parvāz*), begins with ambition, born of the native curiosity of humans. "Since ancient times humans have desired to fly," the story reads. "They wanted to fly in the beautiful blue sky, to climb higher than the eagles and to soar through the clouds." Though many "have made great efforts and sacrifices in order to reach this ambition," it would be a German who would get there first:

One hundred years ago, in a corner of the country of Germany, a young man dreamed of flying. His name was "Otto." Otto paid very close attention to the broad wings of birds. Otto said to himself: "If I can build a large and powerful wing, I can fly just like the birds." He went to work, experimenting and building wings but couldn't fly with any of them. Otto didn't give up hope nor did he stop trying.⁶⁵

Otto persisted until he prevailed, finally achieving his dream of flight using a homemade glider. He went on to make multiple trips, until he tragically died in an accident. Years later Otto's story caught the imagination of two brothers and bike mechanics from Ohio:

Wilbur Wright was a bright and studious young man. One day, while playing, he fell and broke his bones and so was forced to stay home for several years. He read many books during this time of idleness. By chance he came across the story of Otto and his experiments. After reading these stories Wilbur Wright decided to follow in his path. With the help of his brother, Orville, he built wings with which he could safely land from a great height. Not long after this these two American brothers began to think about building a machine for flying (Fig. 3).⁶⁶

1980s, when lessons suddenly took on a harsher tone of Islamization. See "Reading *Baba Ab Dad* in Tehran: The Development of Religion, Politics, and Citizenship in Postrevolutionary Iranian Primers, 1979–2008," in Malekzadeh, *Ambiguous Outcomes*.

⁶³ "Feather and Wing," in *Fārsi-ye dovom-e dabestān*, 1358/1979, 101.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 101–2.

⁶⁵ "The Story of Flight: The Human Bird," in *Fārsi-ye sevom-e dabestān*, 1359/1980, 73–74.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 79–80.



FIGURE 3. “The Story of Flight Part Two: The First Airplane,” *Farsi-ye sevom-e dabestān* (Third-grade Persian), Tehran: Ministry of Education, 1359/1980.

Three years of experimentation and effort lead to the grassy bluffs of Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, and the first manned flight. The brothers invited their loved ones to bear witness to this incredible historical event:

The flying machine turned on. Inside the two brothers sat with happiness and excitement. Suddenly the plane took off from the ground and began to fly. The flight lasted 38 minutes. They returned to their happy friends, and after landing the plane safely, Wilbur stepped out with pride.⁶⁷

Wilbur and Orville went on to establish the first airplane factory, laying the foundation for commercial flight, and beyond. “Scientists, after great effort,” the lesson concludes, “built machines that could carry humans to the moon and land there. Scientists are once again seeking ways to send humans further into space and to other planets.”⁶⁸ As with the Prophet’s admonitions in “What Is the Basis of Superiority?” the Wright brothers’ place of birth is recognized in “The Story of Flight” but ultimately set aside as unimportant. The invention of the airplane is not bound by origin or geography, but was made common to humanity, a gift to be shared without prejudice or limitation.

A Revolution in Values

Education makes the achievement of such civilizational gifts possible by delivering knowledge “that was both practical (scientific) and ethical—the improvement of manners in

⁶⁷ Ibid., 80.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

order to attain a civilized state.”⁶⁹ The western scientist, valued for the utility of his contributions to humanity, is invariably cast as a model of righteous behavior. Already a motif in the 1980s, this became a more prominent and routinized feature by the late 1990s, when a revamp of the textbook design introduced a more expansive morality to the curriculum.⁷⁰

Thus, in the third-grade lesson “Hello, Mr. Bell” (*Salām, āqā-ye Bel*) a teacher explains to her students that the inventor of the telephone Alexander Graham Bell began his career as a teacher of deaf children. The telephone was created almost by accident, a by-product of Bell’s desire to devise an instrument to test his students’ hearing. As they did with their chronicle of aviation and flight, the authors take care to place the special genius of Bell within reach of its readers.⁷¹ The story of the telephone is one of improvement. From the original rudimentary device to mobile phones, each advance builds on the last, a linear path of progress that any person, or nation, can join.⁷²

Whereas “Hello, Mr. Bell” appears in the “Science and Scientist” section of the revised third-grade primer, righteous action earns a young Thomas Edison a spot under the “Individual and Social Morality” section. A companion to the lesson “The Sacrificers” (*Fadākārān*), “An Enlightened Thought” (*Fekr-e rowshan*) introduces us to an eight-year-old Thomas Edison, whose accomplishments are still far in the future, testing and measuring an array of instruments and devices in his mother’s basement.⁷³ Young Edison exhibits the persistence and diligence that would make him famous later in life, working well into the afternoon on his experiments. Only when night falls and the room is too dark to see does he abandon his work. On one of those nights Edison calls up to his mother but receives no reply. Worried, he looks through their darkened home, distraught. Eventually he locates her in a far bedroom, stretched out on a bed in immense pain (Fig. 4).

Edison runs to fetch a doctor, who delivers grave news. His mother requires an operation immediately. Any delay will put her life at risk. With tears in his eyes, Edison beseeches the doctor to begin the procedure right away. “Then why are you waiting? Hurry up!”⁷⁴ The doctor replies that it is too dark. “The light in this home is not enough. I can’t operate with one or two candles. We need more light.”⁷⁵ Desperate to help his mother survive the night, and at his lowest point, Edison finds inspiration:

Thomas’s tears were falling. He didn’t know how he could help his mother. Sadness had gripped the entire house, little by little the pain gripped his mother until she was close to passing out. Thomas thought and suddenly shouted: “I got it! I found a way!”

He ran quickly to the basement. He grabbed every candle there was. He also looked in all of the rooms of the house and wherever he saw a candle, he grabbed it. Then he went to fetch the big mirror of their home. Slowly, slowly he brought the mirror next to his

⁶⁹ Ansari, “Taqizadeh and European Civilisation,” 48.

⁷⁰ Part of a renewed effort in the late 1990s to bring “fundamental change” to what had been an ad hoc textbook regime, the standardization of textbook design brought a more deliberate approach to classroom instruction. Lessons were now divided into one of eight sections, presented in the following order: “Institutions” (*Nahād-ha*), “Hygiene” (*Behdāsh*), “Individual and Social Morality” (*Akhilāq-e fardī va ejtemā’ī*), “Science and Scientists” (*Dānesh va dāneshmandān*), “Religion” (*Din*), “Nation and Homeland” (*Melli va mihani*), “Nature” (*Tabī‘at*), and “Art and Literature” (*Honar va adab*).

⁷¹ “Hello, Mr. Bell,” in *Fārsi-ye sevom-e dabestān*, 1386/2007, 88–89.

⁷² Kids, as always, are a bit more practical in their admiration of Bell’s invention. “Mr. Bell, if you hadn’t invented the telephone,” says one student, “we would have wasted a lot of our time”; *Ibid.*, 89–90.

⁷³ A story of national heroes who risked their lives in service to others, “The Sacrificers” includes the well-known story of Mohammad Hoseyn Fahmideh who, as a ten-year-old volunteer in the war with Iraq, sacrificed his life by throwing himself under an enemy tank; literally, Edison is an “enlightened thinker.” The title of the lesson, *Fekr-e rowshan*, plays on Edison’s fame as the inventor of the light bulb, *rowshan* being the Persian word for “illuminated” as well as the root of the word *rowshanfekr* or “intellectual,” literally “enlightened” or “illuminated thinker” in English.

⁷⁴ “An Enlightened Thought,” in *Fārsi-ye sevom-e dabestān*, 1386/2007, 66.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*



FIGURE 4. “An Enlightened Thought,” *Fārsi-ye sevom-e dabestān* (Third-grade Persian), Tehran: Ministry of Education, 1386/2007.

mother’s room. He asked the doctor to help him put the mirror on the table. Together they put all the candles on the table in front of the mirror and lit them. The room became drenched, bathed in light. The doctor smiled and said, “Excellent my son, you are very clever.”⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Ibid., 66–67.

Edison then enters into prayer: “While the doctor was busy with the operation, Edison sat in the corner and lifted his tiny hands towards the sky and asked almighty God to save his mother from pain and sickness.”⁷⁷ Edison’s wit and quick thinking anticipates the future inventor, but it is his grace and humility that carries the day, his mother’s rescue an affirmation of his faith and its reward. The curriculum once again privileges the ethical dimensions of creativity and discovery over technical ability and accomplishment. Knowledge can be lost or misused by nations, but the goodness of an eight-year-old boy who sacrifices his own safety for others, or of a teacher committed to serving deaf children, is forever.

“Let [the Westerners] go to Mars or anywhere they wish,” Khomeini famously proclaimed in Najaf in 1970, “they are still backward in the sphere of securing happiness to man, backward in spreading moral virtues, and backward in creating a psychological and spiritual progress similar to the material progress.”⁷⁸ The many stories of foreign achievement found in the curriculum undermine this conceit, the convention that although Westerners are adept at technology they continue to be hopelessly incapable of possessing the virtue needed to use their knowledge in a worthy fashion.⁷⁹ We see once more the revelatory power of textbooks as primary sources. Rather than mechanically reproducing an official line of unwavering hostility to the West, the curriculum shows the revolutionary state’s message to be much more nuanced than the heated rhetoric of its leaders might lead us to expect. Characters like Bell and the young Edison, by modeling righteous behavior, in fact serve as stand-ins for the ideal Islamic-Iranian citizen.⁸⁰

That the two inventors are neither Islamic nor Iranian makes no difference. In the same way that the textbooks dispensed with the Arab origins of Islam, the framing of Western science and technology as free-floating civilizational phenomena, unattached to ethnic or national origins, enables state planners to reconcile the urgent need for outside knowledge, which Iranian leaders have historically pursued with great ambivalence, with the imperative to preserve the country’s “authentic” culture.⁸¹ Nothing is lost by the inclusion of the outsider’s expertise, so long as it is rendered God-given, and where possible, Iranian in origin.⁸²

⁷⁷ Ibid., 67.

⁷⁸ Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, 262.

⁷⁹ According to Khamanei, Americans are not only lacking in virtue, in their jealousy they will do whatever it takes to prevent Iranians from putting an end to their monopoly on science:

Today, the Islamic Republic has raised the flag of justice and is determined to confront oppression and defend noble human values. Now if this system with such lofty ideals leads its nation to the peak of scientific progress, certainly the interests of the world’s expansionist and domineering powers will be threatened. . . . Considering this reality, we should make every effort to achieve scientific progress. But it should be noted that scientific progress will not be attained through imitation. It will be accomplished through initiative, innovation, originality, and the opening of new frontiers in science.

Khamanei, “Leader’s Address.”

⁸⁰ In a follow-up exercise to the lesson on Edison, students are asked, “If you were in Thomas Edison’s place, what would you have done?” “An Enlightened Thought,” in *Fārsi-ye sevom-e dabestān*, 1386/2007, 68.

⁸¹ Skepticism of the benefits of Western influence is hardly limited to the postrevolutionary period in modern Iran. Menashri relates the following lament from Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1930:

It would be much better to educate [our students] here in the country where they are going to live, and with whose progress they must inevitably be concerned. But we do not yet have the necessary machinery . . . I don’t want to turn the Persian into a bad copy of a European. That is not necessary, for he has [a] mighty tradition behind him.

Menashri, *Education and the Making of Modern Iran*, 106.

⁸² It is not by accident that the story of the Iranian philosopher and scientist, Abu Ali Sinna, one of the most important figures from the Islamic Golden Age, appears in both the prerevolutionary and postrevolutionary third-grade primers, with little change. The lesson credits his eleventh-century medical treatises as foundational to

Conclusion: Eternal Iran Valorized; the Persianate Subdued

The continuity of Irānīyat has always been premised on the fiction that it is the outsider who needs changing and reform. The seduction of the foreign invader continues to be one of Iran's most enduring tropes, used over the centuries by regimes and reformers alike to elide the memory of loss. Iranians take solace in their national permanence, in the enduring belief that no matter the calamity or the circumstances, their culture will eventually subdue and transform the invading foreigner.⁸³ The ancient Greeks, the conquering Mongols and Turkmen tribes, and the modern British, each in turn became better because they became Iranian.⁸⁴ All except the Arab, who finds no transformation in his encounter with Iran, a country now serving as his advocate and protector. The Arab remains abject, an object apart, a permanent warning against loss. For the Arab there is no salvation, no rescue.

But what of the Persianate? With an event like the 1979 Revolution often described and understood as a complete break with the past, what space is there for the Persianate in post-revolutionary Iran? If we assume that the modern period is not necessarily post-Persianate, as many of the contributors to this volume and others insist, what remains of the Persianate in Iran's postrevolutionary context?⁸⁵ After all, the Islamic Republic's official adherence to a set of universal values, shared in a common idiom by diverse populations spread across vast distances and decoupled from the logic of "one land, one nation, one language," arguably places contemporary Iran closer to the accounts of the Persianate in the twentieth century outlined in this volume than to the high modernism of the Pahlavi state or even the late-imperial model of rule so haphazardly adopted by the Qajar dynasty in its final years.⁸⁶

Despite revolutionary change, echoes of the Persianate frame remain, transposed to the present and made—like Islam and the wonders of science—Iranian. The Persianate, that sprawling, interconnected ecumene where a Persian speaker with the proper training and manners could live and travel from Sarajevo to western China, was never entirely removed from the postrevolutionary curriculum but reduced and reorganized to fit within the sovereign boundaries of a modern, Islamic Iran. No better example may be seen than in the treatment of the poet Ferdowsi in the early curriculum. Despite the fact that Ferdowsi's *Shāhnāme* was circulated and emulated across the Persianate world and in multiple languages, the poet is restricted to being an icon and savior of the Persian language in postrevolutionary textbooks for second graders in the Islamic Republic.

Their school year culminates with a visit to the mausoleum of Ferdowsi, experienced through the primer lesson "Ferdowsi." The story is presented as a family's memory of visiting the poet's tomb and memorial, albeit as an afterthought to the more important pilgrimage to the shrine of Imam Reza.⁸⁷ "Last year I went with my father, mother, and sister on a pilgrimage to Imam Reza in Mashhad. My father said: "Near Mashhad there is the ancient city of Tus and the tomb of Ferdowsi, the great poet of Iran" (Fig. 5).⁸⁸

modern medicine, and so important that medical schools around the world continue to use them to this day; "Abu Ali Sinnā," in *Fārsī-ye sevom-e dabestān*, 1355/1976; "Abu Ali Sinnā, Dāneshmand-e Bozorg-e Irān," in *Fārsī-ye sevom-e dabestān*, 1365/1986.

⁸³ Schirazi, *Irānīyat, mellīyat, qowmīyat*.

⁸⁴ Ram, "Immemorial Iranian Nation."

⁸⁵ Kia and Marashi, "After the Persianate." The potency of the Persianate turn, and indeed of much recent historical writing on modern Iran, has been in their transgressions, against not only conventions of periodization but also the material, spatial, and political boundaries separating the "premodern" from the "modern" and Iran from the rest of the Persian-speaking world.

⁸⁶ For discussion of the late-imperial model, see Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran*. "High modernism" is discussed in Scott, *Seeing Like a State*. Soleimani and Mohammadpour discuss the imposition of Persian language policy under Pahlavi rule in "Can Non-Persians Speak?"

⁸⁷ The eighth Shī'ī Imam and the only one to be buried within the borders of Iran.

⁸⁸ Well into the nineteenth century, nearly a thousand years after the publication of the *Shāhnāme*, no account of Ferdowsi associated the poet or his work with Iran. He was, Fani writes, "merely a poet from Tus"; Fani, "Two Nations Find a Poet."



FIGURE 5. "Ferdowsi," *Fārsi-ye sevom-e dabestān* (Third-grade Persian), Tehran: Ministry of Education, 1386/2007.

Inspired by the convenience of proximity, the father suggests that the family make the trip. "It would be good to go and visit there as well," he advises the family.⁸⁹

With everything in its right place and in the right sequence, the family finishes their pilgrimage (*ziyārat*) at the golden-domed mausoleum, venturing out to Tus after several days. When they finally arrive at the site, they encounter large crowds already gathered around Ferdowsi's tomb, pilgrims of another sort.⁹⁰ The family joins the gathering. A tour guide leads them around the complex, offering up familiar tropes and measures of Ferdowsi's greatness and importance, including that "Ferdowsi labored for thirty years before finishing his book, the *Shāhnāmeḥ*."⁹¹

The story's narrator—"Ferdowsi" is one of the very few lessons where it is unclear whether a boy or girl is telling the story—asks the father, "What kind of book was the *Shāhnāmeḥ*?" The father replies, "The *Shāhnāmeḥ* is a great book in whose stories we can read and learn about the great heroes (*pahlavān*) of Iran." The father continues, replicating in a more intimate form the lessons that the fatherland (*mihan*) gives to its citizens: "All of the stories of the *Shāhnāmeḥ* are written in verse. Just as you heard [from the tour guide], Ferdowsi worked for thirty years to collect these stories and to put them into verse so that the Persian language, the same language that we speak today, might survive."⁹² Ferdowsi's importance is in the language and the people he preserved. Without Persian, there would be no Iran.⁹³

⁸⁹ "Ferdowsi," in *Fārsi-ye dovom-e dabestān*, 1386/2007, 158.

⁹⁰ As Grigor has shown, this practice of pilgrimage was an invention of early Pahlavi nationalism that shaped the building of Ferdowsi's mausoleum as a site of national memory and cultural heritage; Grigor, *Building Iran*.

⁹¹ "Ferdowsi," in *Fārsi-ye dovom-e dabestān*, 1386/2007, 159.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 160.

⁹³ Left unsaid is the conceit that Ferdowsi "saved" Persian, and by extension Iran, from the hegemony of the Arabic language. Ferdowsi's reputation as the "savior" of Iranian culture and identity extends to coverage in

The remainder of the lesson consists of poetry and a father's promise. Mashhad and the pilgrimage to Imam Reza's shrine already a fading memory, the two agree to continue learning together about the *Shāhnāme* and its many heroes and legends and tragedies. What began as a one-off visit has become a lifetime endeavor. "Today I know the stories [from the *Shāhnāme*] and I derive great pleasure hearing them repeated over and over again."⁹⁴ The curriculum had come full circle, the lessons of "What Is the Basis of Superiority?" undone. The same Persian language that had been dismissed by the Prophet as a threat to Islamic unity in his defense of Salmān al-Fārsī was now proof of belonging.⁹⁵ If the figure of al-Fārsī—a Persian speaker among early Arabic-speaking Muslims—was meant to convey Iran's unsettled belonging in the Islamic world of the post-1979 order, then Ferdowsi is an embodiment of the assuredness of Persian cultural and linguistic superiority thirty years later.

The Persianate does not seem to persist in the Islamic Republic period as a dominating framework, at least not in primary school textbooks, and certainly not in the ways that nationalism does. But understanding what civilizational ethos replaced it, under what conditions and when, remains an important endeavor to which educational materials may help provide some clarity, whether those understandings come from the Pahlavi era or from corners and spaces of the Islamic Republic left unexplored here. If the stories of Khāled, Edison, and al-Fārsī teach us anything, it is that educational materials are able to narrate a nation's insecurities and triumphs as they change over time. Tracking down that ethos, finding its narrative threads, and tying them together into a coherent story of pedagogy may reveal that the Persianate finds expression elsewhere and in unexpected ways.

Acknowledgments. This essay began as part of the Forum Transregionale Studien workshop Reading the "1979 Moment" in the Middle East, held in Berlin in June 2017. I am grateful to Amir Moosavi for inviting me to this very important gathering, and for pushing me to think about identity beyond Iran and my own "guarded" perspectives. Original research for this study was carried out at the archives of the Iranian Ministry of Education's Organization for Educational Research and Planning. All credit is due to the diligent and generous staff there for guiding me through countless textbooks with patience and good humor. Thank you to the anonymous reviewers for their encouraging and constructive comments. Finally, a very special thanks to Kevin Schwartz and Aria Fani for their persistence, and above all their determination to see this article included in this special volume on the Persianate. I am honored to be part of this impressive collection.

Bibliography

- Aghaie, Kamran Scot. "Islam and Nationalist Historiography: Competing Historical Narratives of Iran in the Pahlavi Period." *Studies on Contemporary Islam* 2, no. 2 (2000): 20–46.
- Amanat, Abbas. "Iranian Identity Boundaries: A Historical Overview." In *Iran Facing Others: Identity Boundaries in a Historical Perspective*, edited by Abbas Amanat and Farzin Vejdani, 1–33. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Amanat, Abbas. "Russian Intrusion into the Guarded Domain: Reflections of a Qajar Statesman on European Expansion." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113, no. 1 (1993): 35–56.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities, Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 2006.
- Ansari, Ali M. "Taqizadeh and European Civilisation." *Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies* 54, no. 1 (2016): 47–58.
- Ansari, Ali M. *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Atabaki, Touraj. "Contesting Marginality: Ethnicity and the Construction of New Histories in the Islamic Republic of Iran." In *Rethinking Iranian Nationalism and Modernity*, edited by Kamran Scot Aghaie and Afshin Marashi. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2014.

English-language and non-Iranian media. See, for example, Inskip, "Abolqasem Ferdowsi"; and Bekhrad, "The Book of Kings." For a critical analysis of the *Shāhnāme* as a purely Iranian (as opposed to a transnational) text, see Shams, Zarkar, and Baghoolizadeh, "Ferdowsi's Legacy."

⁹⁴ "Ferdowsi," in *Fārsī-ye dovom-e dabestān*, 1386/2007, 160.

⁹⁵ Ferdowsi embodied the spirit (*ruh*) of the Iranian people even as he transcended Iran. Ferdowsi may be "physically bound to connections with Iranianness (Irāniyat)," Mohammad 'Ali Foroughi observed in a speech delivered at the millennium celebrations of the great poet's birth, held at Tehran's *Dār al-Fanun* in 1934, but he is "spiritually a child of humanity or if I may say, a father of humanity"; Fani, "Two Nations Find a Poet." See also Sādiq, *Ketāb-e hezāre-ye Ferdowsi*.

- Atlas-e melli-ye Iran: Āmuzesh-e ʿomumi* (National atlas of Iran: Public education). Tehran: National Office of Mapping, 1377/1998.
- Bekhrad, Joobin. "The Book of Kings: The Book That Defines Iranians." BBC Culture, August 16, 2018. [bbc.com/culture/article/20180810-the-book-of-kings-the-book-that-defines-iranian](https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20180810-the-book-of-kings-the-book-that-defines-iranian).
- Brumberg, Daniel and Farideh Farhi, eds. *Power and Change in Iran: Politics of Contention*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016.
- Elling, R. C. *Minorities in Iran: Nationalism and Ethnicity after Khomeini*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Fani, Aria. "Two Nations Find a Poet: Fitting Ferdowsi into Iran and Afghanistan's Literary Canons." Ajam Media Collective, February 11, 2018. ajammedia.com/2018/02/11/ferdowsi-iran-afghanistan.
- Fani, Aria, and Kevin Schwartz, "Persianate Pasts; National Presents: Persian Literary and Cultural Production in the Twentieth Century." *Iranian Studies* 55, no. 3 (2022).
- Fārsi-ye aval-e dabestān* (First-grade Persian). Tehran: Ministry of Education, 1358/1979; 1360/1981; 1361/1982; 1362/1983; 1363/1984; 1365/1986; 1366/1987; 1367/1988; 1368/1989; 1370/1991; 1371/1992; 1372/1993; 1373/1994; 1374/1995; 1378/1999; 1381/2002; 1382/2003; 1383/2004; 1386/2007; 1387/2008.
- Fārsi-ye dovom-e dabestān* (Second-grade Persian). Tehran: Ministry of Education, 1355/1976; 1358/1979; 1359/1980; 1360/1981; 1361/1982; 1365/1986; 1366/1987; 1367/1988; 1368/1988; 1369/1990; 1371/1992; 1376/1997; 1380/2001; 1382/2003; 1386/2007; 1387/2008.
- Fārsi-ye sevom-e dabestān* (Third-grade Persian). Tehran: Ministry of Education, 1355/1976; 1359/1980; 1362/1983; 1365/1986; 1366/1987; 1367/1988; 1375/1996; 1376/1997; 1381/2002; 1386/2007; 1387/2008.
- Fārsi-ye chāhārom-e dabestān* (Fourth-grade Persian). Tehran: Ministry of Education, 1355/1976.
- Fārsi-ye panjom-e dabestān* (Fifth-grade Persian). Tehran: Ministry of Education, 1355/1976.
- Grigor, Talinn. *Building Iran: Modernism, Architecture, and National Heritage under the Pahlavi Monarchs*. New York: Periscope, 2009.
- Groiss, Arnon. "Iranian Textbooks: Preparing Iran's Children for Global Jihad." Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace, 2007.
- Higgins, Patricia J., and Pirouz Shoar-Ghaffari. "Women's Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran." In *In the Eye of the Storm: Women in Post-Revolutionary Iran*, edited by Mahnaz Afkhami and Erika Friedl. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1994.
- Inskeep, Steve. "Abolqasem Ferdowsi: The Poet Who Rescued Iran." Morning Edition, National Public Radio, February 9, 2009. [wnpr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=100397309](https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=100397309).
- Iqbal, Abbas. *Dowreh-ye tārikh-e ʿomumi*. Tehran: Matba'eh-e Sa'adat, 1343/1924.
- Kashani-Sabet, Firoozeh. "Culture of Iranian-ness: The Evolving Polemic of Iranian Nationalism." In *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics*, edited by Nikkie R. Keddie and Rudi Matthee. Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2002.
- Kashani-Sabet, Firoozeh. "Fragile Frontiers: The Diminishing Domains of Qajar Iran." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 2 (1997): 205–34.
- Khamanei, Ayatollah Ali. "Leader's Address to University Professors and Elite Academics." Office of the Supreme Leader, October 13, 2005. english.khamenei.ir/news/75/Leader-s-Address-to-University-Professors-and-Elite-Academics.
- Khamanei, Ayatollah Ali. "The Speech Made by His Excellency Ayatollah Khamanei on the Occasion of the First Anniversary of the Establishment of the SCCR (The First Seminar on Reviewing Dimensions of Expanding and Deepening the Cultural Revolution of Islam)." Secretariat of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, September 29, 2009.
- Khamanei, Ayatollah Ali. "Tā che tasviram konand" (Reflections on how we can . . . selected remarks by the Leader about education). Accessed March 27, 2022, farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=8118.
- Khomeini, Ayatollah Ruhollah. *Islam and Revolution: The Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*. Translated by Hamid Algar. London: Kegan Paul, 2002.
- Kia, Mana. *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin before Nationalism*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020.
- Kia, Mana, and Afshin Marashi. "Introduction: After the Persianate." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 32, no. 2 (2016): 379–83.
- Limbirt, Mandana E. "Oman: Cultivating Good Citizens and Religious Virtue." In *Teaching Islam: Textbooks and Religion in the Middle East*, edited by Eleanor Abdella Doumato and Gregory Starrett, 103–24. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2007.
- Malekzadeh, Shervin. "Schooled to Obey, Learning to Protest: The Ambiguous Outcomes of Postrevolutionary Schooling in the Islamic Republic of Iran." PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2011.
- Malekzadeh, Shervin. "Children without Childhood, Adults without Adulthood: Changing Conceptions of the Iranian Child in Postrevolutionary Iranian Textbooks (1979–2008)." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 32, no. 2 (2012): 339–60.
- Malekzadeh, Shervin. "The New Business of Education in Iran." *Washington Post*, August 19, 2015. [washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/08/19/the-new-business-of-education-in-iran](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/08/19/the-new-business-of-education-in-iran).

- Malekzadeh, Shervin. "What Trump Doesn't Get about Ideology in Iran: It's Nationalism, not Theocracy." *Washington Post*, June 25, 2018.
- Marashi, Afshin. *Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power, and the State, 1870-1940*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2008.
- Martin, Vanessa. *Creating an Islamic State: Khomeini and the Making of a New Iran*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2003.
- Matin-Asgari, Afshin. "The Berlin Circle: Iranian Nationalism Meets German Countermodernity." In *Rethinking Iranian Nationalism and Modernity*, edited by Kamran Scot Aghaie and Afshin Marashi. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2014.
- Matthee, Rudi. "Suspicion, Fear, and Admiration: Pre-Nineteenth-Century Iranian Views of the English and the Russians." In *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics*, edited by Nikkie R. Keddie and Rudi Matthee. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2002.
- Mehran, Golnar. "The Presentation of the 'Self' and the 'Other' in Postrevolutionary Iranian School Textbooks." In *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics*, edited by Nikkie R. Keddie and Rudi Matthee. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2002.
- Mehran, Golnar. "Socialization of Schoolchildren in the Islamic Republic of Iran." *Iranian Studies* 22, no. 1 (1989): 35-50.
- Mehran, Golnar. "The Socialization of Schoolchildren in the Islamic Republic of Iran: A Study of the Revolution in Values in Iranian Education." PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 1988.
- Menashri, David. *Education and the Making of Modern Iran*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992.
- Mirfakhraie, Amir Hossein. "Curriculum Reform and Identity Politics in Iranian School Textbooks: National and Global Representations of 'Race,' Ethnicity, Social Class and Gender." PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2008. open.library.ubc.ca/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0055443.
- Mirsepasi, Ali. *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Moslem, Mehdi. *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002.
- Motahhari, Morteza. *Khadamāt-e moteqābel-e Irān va Eslām* (The contributions of Islam and Iran to each other). 12th ed., vol. 1. Tehran: Enteshārāt-e sadrā, 1985.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. "Concepts and Dilemmas of State Building in Fragile Situations: From Fragility to Resilience." *OECD Journal on Development* 9, no. 3 (2008).
- Paivandi, Saeed. *Discrimination and Intolerance in Iran's Textbooks*. Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2008.
- Ram, Haggay. "The Immemorial Iranian Nation? School Textbooks and Historical Memory in Post-Revolutionary Iran." *Nations and Nationalism* 6, no.1 (2000): 67-90.
- Rezaei, Mohammad. *Tahlili az zendegi-ye ruzmarreh-ye dānesh āmuzeshi: Nāsāzihā-ye goftemān-e madreseh* (An analysis of the daily lives of schoolchildren: The failures of school discourse). Tehran: Society and Culture, 2008.
- Ringer, Monica. *Education, Religion, and the Discourse of Cultural Reform in Qajar Iran*. Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 2001.
- Ringer, Monica. "Negotiating Modernity: Ulama and the Discourse of Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Iran." In *Iran: Between Tradition and Modernity*, edited by Ramin Jahanbegloo, Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2004.
- Sādiq, Issā, ed., *Ketāb-e hezāre-ye Ferdowsi* (The millennium of Ferdowsi). Tehran: 1322/1943.
- Salehi-Isfahani, Djavad. "Iranian Youth in Times of Economic Crisis," *Iranian Studies* 44, no. 6 (2011): 789-806.
- Salehi-Isfahani, Djavad. "Iran's Third Development Plan: A Reappraisal." Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Department of Economics, Blacksburg, VA, 2006.
- Schirazi, Asghar. *Irāniyat, melliyat, qowmiyat*. Tehran: Jahān-e Ketāb, 1395/2016.
- Scott, James C. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999.
- Shams, Alex, Rustin Zarkar, and Beeta Baghoolizadeh. "Ferdowsi's Legacy: Examining Persian Nationalist Myths of the Shahnameh." Ajam Media Collective, January 17, 2013. ajammc.com/2013/01/17/ferdowsis-legacy-examining-persian-nationalist-myths-of-the-shahnameh.
- Shariati, Ali. *Bāzshenāsi-e hoviāt-e Irāni-Islāmi* (The rediscovery of Iranian-Islamic identity). Tehran: Elham, 1371/2002.
- Soleimani, Kamal, and Ahmad Mohammadpour, "Can Non-Persians Speak? The Sovereign's Narration of 'Iranian Identity.'" *Ethnicities* 19, no. 5 (2019): 925-47.
- Tabaar, Mohammad Ayatollahi. *Religious Statecraft: The Politics of Islam in Iran*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.
- Vejdani, Farzin. *Making History in Iran: Education, Nationalism, and Print Culture*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015.
- Vejdani, Farzin. "The Place of Islam in Interwar Iranian Nationalist Historiography." In *Rethinking Iranian Nationalism and Modernity*, edited by Kamran Scot Aghaie and Afshin Marashi. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2014.
- Vu, Tuong. "Studying the State through State Formation." *World Politics* 62, no. 1 (2010): 148-75.
- Zarrinkub, 'Abdolhossein. *Do qarn-e sokut* (Two centuries of silence). Tehran: Amirkabir, 1957.
- Zia-Ebrahimi, Reza. *The Emergence of Iranian Nationalism: Race and the Politics of Dislocation*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.
- Zubaida, Sami. "The Ideological Preconditions for Khomeini's Doctrine of Government." In *Islam, the People and the State: Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2009.

Shervin Malekzadeh is a Visiting Scholar in Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at Colgate University where he is completing a book manuscript on the contentious politics of postrevolutionary and Islamic schooling in Iran. An earlier career as a public-school teacher fostered his current research interests in the politics of education, national identity, and the power of culture in authoritarian and postrevolutionary countries.

Cite this article: Malekzadeh S (2022). Forlorn Arabs and Flying Americans: National Identity in the Early Childhood Curriculum of Postrevolutionary Iran, 1979–2009. *Iranian Studies* 55, 741–764. <https://doi.org/10.1017/irn.2022.30>