

Conclusion

Iranian school textbooks and teacher's guides provide us with abundant material reflecting the attitude of the Iranian educational establishment to a variety of 'others' and to various aspects of peace and war. Some one thousand quotations covering themes within these two fields have been extracted from the textbooks (of which about half appear in the printed version of the report, while the full version is available on the CMIP website <http://www.edume.org>).

A careful study of this mass of data yields one main conclusion: Iran's is a war curriculum. Iran prepares its school students to fight the West – America in particular – as an indispensable complementary phase of the Islamic Revolution. In fact, Revolutionary Iran presents itself as the champion of all Third World nations, Muslim and non-Muslim, in a fateful global struggle against Western hegemony. It is a political conflict first and foremost, yet, it is Shiite Islam adapted to Ayatollah Khomeini's teachings which provides the ideology for this eschatological-like struggle between good and evil, culminated by the reappearance of the Shiite Hidden Imam, and the final goal is Islam's victory in this world. But success is not necessarily assured. It is Revolutionary Iran's duty towards God to perform the Jihad, and it is His decision whether to grant it world victory or collective martyrdom. Both are acceptable from the point of view of the textbooks. Mundane interests and ordinary logical considerations have no place in such a holy endeavor, which raises serious questions on the part of outsiders regarding the logical foundations of Iranian school education. This fundamental goal of Iranian education has not changed since the time of the late Ayatollah Khomeini, in spite of President Mohammad Khatami's seemingly moderate approach. It should be noted in this context that all the books examined for the purpose of the present research, and the vast majority of the teacher's guides, were published during President Khatami's term of office.

It should be also noted that this indoctrination effort is most apparent in the higher grades of the school system while lower grades are less exposed to it. But one should bear in mind that even younger school students never acquire their knowledge from school textbooks only. The teacher's role in class is equally influential, as well as extra-curricular activity. In Iran in particular, other factors of indoctrination are well developed. Children are trained in their Basij units, listen to Friday sermons in the local mosque, and are extensively exposed to the state-run media – including politicized children's programs on television. One such program showed a year ago a venomous anti-Semitic series called 'Zahra's Blue Eyes' in which Jews blind a Muslim child in order to transplant her eyes in a Jewish boy. In the case of anti-Western hostility, the attitude in the textbooks is intensively amplified by the other indoctrination factors, and we may assume that the latest exacerbation of relations with the West has permeated the class atmosphere in Iranian schools.

Two main efforts are discernible within the overall mission of world Jihad against the West. One, a massive effort is made to portray the West, with America at its head, as the incarnation of evil, and thus make it the object of the school students' hatred as a prerequisite for their spiritual mobilization for the global war with it. Two, much emphasis is put on the three issues of preparing for war, Jihad and martyrdom as Islamic ideals which should be followed at this time.

Consequently, in the Iranian school textbooks the West is depicted as an entity with a multitude of sins. It occupied whole continents, annihilated or oppressed their indigenous inhabitants, plundered their wealth, impoverished and maltreated them. Western nations exploited the colonized countries for their own economic benefits, promoted opium and slave trade, and tried to impose their own cultures and erase the local ones. The West today is responsible for most of the cases of environment abuse all over the world; it uses its worldwide economic, cultural and political hegemony for further consolidation of its power at the expense of the Third World countries; and it has encouraged evil forces such as the racist regime in South Africa, Israel and the Serbs to perpetrate atrocities against innocent people as a means of strengthening its own control over parts of the world. The United States is further accused of maltreating its Afro-American citizens, while falsely using the issue of human rights against other governments – Iran, for example.

A special issue is the West's apparent cultural offensive against the Muslim world. Westernization, which is often labeled 'Westoxication' [Gharbzadegi], is treated as an ominous danger targeting Islamic identity. Modern Western civilization is not rejected in principle, but its world hegemony is. In addition, its secular and materialistic character is sometimes depicted as inhuman, even un-Christian.

The list of crimes said to have been perpetrated by the West against Iran is equally long. Czarist Russia and Great Britain detached vast territories from Iran, imposed their political and economic influence over it and finally occupied various Iranian provinces (in World War I). The same scene recurred later with Britain and the Soviet Union as the main culprits (in World War II). In between, Britain imposed on Iran a local dictatorial regime (the Pahlavi dynasty), later supported by the United States. 'Westoxication' took its toll on Iran too. The Iranian school textbooks further mention other damages done to Iran by the West, namely, the creation of the Bahai religion – in order to sow disunity among the Muslims in their struggle against the invaders, the plunder of Iranian cultural treasures by Western merchants and adventurers, and the decline of the Persian language in the Indian sub-continent as a result of British Colonialism.

Special hostility is directed against the United States, due to its leadership role in the West nowadays and due, probably, to the fact that, when the anti-Shah movement crystallized under Ayatollah Khomeini, it was America who took over from Britain the position of the principal foreign power in Iran. Although the Soviet Union also featured in Khomeini's speeches and writings, it was somewhat peripheral in the overall picture. With the disappearance of the Soviet Union shortly after Khomeini's death, the focus on the United States has become more emphatic. The United States is said to have been the main foreign power to try and stop, or at least circumvent, the Islamic Revolution in Iran, as it feared the worldwide implications for its own position as the central world power. It is accused of having been behind Saddam's attack on Iran, having helped the Iraqis in avoiding total defeat when the fortunes of war turned against them, and having operated militarily against Iranian targets for that purpose, as was the case with the Iranian civil aircraft downed by an American naval unit.

Hostility towards the United States is apparent everywhere in the textbooks. It is backed by a set of provocative titles of which 'the Great Satan' is exclusively reserved

for the United States, while others, such as 'the Arrogant Ones', 'World Devourers' and 'the Diabolic Powers' are sometimes shared with other Western powers, or the former Soviet Union.

Israel, like Saddam's Iraq, is perceived as part of this anti-Muslim and anti-Iranian Western offensive. Israel is considered an evil force in itself which has occupied a Muslim land, expelled a portion of its legitimate inhabitants and oppressed those who remained under occupation. But its very existence is the result of Colonialist schemes against the Muslims. In order to nurture anti-Israeli feelings among Iranian school students, the textbooks not only emphasize atrocities attributed to Israel, or Israel's occupation of the Muslim holy places in Jerusalem, they portray Israel as a direct enemy of the Iranian people and the Islamic Revolution in Iran, a line already used by Ayatollah Khomeini himself in the framework of his struggle against the Shah regime already in the early 1960s. Israel was then accused of having trained the Shah's security apparatus – Savak – to torture political prisoners.

The Jews are referred to in the Iranian school textbooks in three different contexts. They are briefly mentioned as an ancient nation who used to live in Palestine in the past, and their holy places there are recognized. Then, they are depicted in a negative light as traitors, and as enemies of Islam, within the context of their political-religious rivalry in Arabia with Prophet Muhammad. In modern times they are referred to again very briefly as occupiers of Palestine. The Jews' national movement in modern times – Zionism – is described as a world-embracing organization with a great deal of influence on American foreign policy and Western media. In the spirit of Western anti-Semitic propaganda it is said to have aspired to establish Jewish domination over the world, beyond the establishment of the Jews' 'greater homeland' in Palestine. Zionism is accused of coveting all Arab lands and Jerusalem is said to have become the object of Zionism's greed and aggression (although it is recognized as a city holy to the Jews). Zionism is also connected to Western Capitalism and Colonialism.

The elimination of Israel, and, perhaps, of the Jewish population in Palestine altogether, is portrayed in one case as garbage removal. A picture story for grade 3 students presents the inhabitants of a clean and tidy town chasing away a repugnant creature who spreads garbage wherever he goes. The Jewish symbol of the Star of David is drawn on the creature's right arm and is also made part of the garbage which the town inhabitants clean up.

The message spread by the Iranian school books is that a formidable evil enemy such as the West, with its various offshoots, should be fought for the sake of mere survival. According to Khomeini's teachings, it is 'either us or them'. Fortunately, Islam is a source of strength capable of defeating the evil powers, on condition that the Muslims stick to their religion's tenets and unite. This is the main motive of Shiite Iran's ecumenical approach towards the Sunnites, as clearly seen in the textbooks (another important motive is the existence of large Sunnite minorities in the Iranian periphery). Most of the expressions advocating all-Muslim unity appear in the context of the global war against the West.

Having purified itself of 'Westoxication' through the Islamic Revolution under the leadership of Imam Khomeini, Iran has become fit to lead the Muslims, and the entire world, in this fateful worldwide struggle against the West. In fact, adds this message,

it has no choice, since the United States has already marked Revolutionary Iran as an obstacle in its way to world dominance and, therefore, has made it a primary target for its political conspiracies and military maneuvers. It seems that the Iranians, who stick to a deterministic world view, see the 'significant other' as a mirror image of themselves, with a similar deterministic view of the inevitable 'cosmic' clash, culminating in the total victory of Islam in this world and the reappearance of the Shiite Hidden Imam. Obviously, a sense of self importance is also involved here on the part of the Iranians.

The American danger threatening Iran is perceived to be imminent, which necessitates thorough preparation on a national scale. "A Muslim state should be all military" says Khomeini. Thus, the 'Mobilization of the Oppressed' (Basij-e Mostaz'afan), a force of several million volunteers of various ages and both sexes has been established. The school students' activity within the framework of this force, which has its bases in local mosques, is encouraged in the textbooks, with the support of the appropriate Koranic verses. Thus, the Islamic Revolution of Iran has shown the road that other Muslim societies should take in order to win the war against 'unbelief and arrogance'. Fighting Israel is part of this general war against the West, and is equally requisite for making the Islamic Revolution complete.

This general mood of preparation for war is enhanced with the help of the two traditional Islamic concepts of Jihad and martyrdom. In this context, Jihad assumes a social mission, namely liberating the oppressed from the oppressors, which, in this case, has a global significance, since oppression is the West's means of world dominance. Martyrdom is repeatedly discussed in the Iranian school textbooks, probably because of historical reasons, such as traditional Shiite martyrology, the violent character of the Islamic Revolution, and the Iraq-Iran war of the 1980s. But it is further presented to school children as an ideal massively interlaced with glorification, to be followed in general. The martyr's blood, symbolized by the red tulip, often appears in the books in text or illustration, and God's name, styled in Arabic characters as a red tulip, is an integral part of the Iranian flag today.

The Iranian education system thus loads its school children with the heavy burden of responsibility to confront the West in a world war, as part of their obligation towards the Revolution and to God, promising them either victory or eternal life in the hereafter. It is a heavy load to bear, and it is bound to bring forth its bitter fruit in the future, unless a comprehensive and immediate change is made in the Iranian curriculum. A change for the better, that is. An Iranian media report has lately revealed that the educational authorities have decided to introduce 'fundamental changes' into the school books. No details have been given so far, but one should fear that under President Ahmadinezhad any such change might worsen the situation. It is necessary that Iranian school textbooks be made compatible with the criteria suggested by UNESCO, which is incumbent upon any civilized school education (see some of these criteria in the Introduction). Committing the children to a violent future is destined to be disastrous to Iran first and foremost, beyond the grave implications for the affected world.