

The immemorial Iranian nation? School textbooks and historical memory in post-revolutionary Iran

HAGGAY RAM

*Department of Middle East Studies, Ben Gurion University of The Negev,
P.O.B. 653, Beersheva 84105, Israel*

ABSTRACT. This paper is concerned with the fortunes of the pre-revolutionary, Pahlavi nationalist narrative in post-revolutionary Iran. The study analyses and compares pre- and post-revolutionary school textbooks with the aim of demonstrating that, for all its revolutionary and Islamic-universalist hyperbole, the Islamic Republic of Iran remained committed to the Pahlavi dynasty's conception of the 'immemorial Iranian nation' (or the 'Aryan hypothesis') as it was first articulated by European scholars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Post-revolutionary Iran clung to the European/Pahlavi master narrative of Iranian history, its very basic 'story line'. It was, therefore, subject to the same evolution, the same dialectic of remembering and forgetting, the same successive deformations, and the vulnerability to the very same manipulation and appropriation. This study, then, attempts to establish that the Islamic Republic's apparent shift from 'Iran Time' to 'Islam Time', though it reaches far beyond Iranian borders, nevertheless remains wedded to, and embedded in, the dominant European, secular traditions of the Pahlavi era. Islamic consciousness in Iran does not in any way constitute the basis for an alternative myth to the national myth. Rather, it adds Islamic terminology to the very same myth. Political Islam thus remains within the confines of Iranian nationalism. It is articulated in the framework of the symbols of Iranian nationalism, endowing them with a meaning that is *supposedly* religious.

Introduction

For history is the raw material for nationalistic or ethnic or fundamentalist ideologies, as poppies are the raw material for heroin addiction. (Hobsbawm 1997: 5)

This study, which is grounded in the modernist approach to nations and nationalism and in the contemporary fascination with collective memory, is primarily concerned with the fortunes of the pre-revolutionary, Pahlavi nationalist narrative in the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI). The study analyses and compares pre- and post-revolutionary school textbooks with

I wish to thank my colleagues and (above all else) friends Dr Iris Agmon and Dr Gabriel Piterberg for reading the manuscript and offering insightful comments and criticisms.

the aim of demonstrating that, for all its revolutionary and Islamic-universalist hyperbole, post-revolutionary Iran remained committed to the Pahlavi dynasty's conception of the 'immemorial Iranian nation' – in the sense that it has always 'been there', in antiquity as in the modern epoch – as was first articulated by European scholars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹ The IRI clung to the European/Pahlavi master narrative of Iranian history, its very basic 'story line'. It was, therefore, subject – to paraphrase the French scholar Pierre Nora (1989: 8) – to the same evolution, the same dialectic of remembering and forgetting, the same successive deformations and the vulnerability to the very same manipulation and appropriation.

This study, then, attempts to establish that the Islamic Republic's apparent shift from 'Iran Time' to 'Islam Time', though it reaches far beyond Iranian borders, nevertheless remains wedded to, and embedded in, the dominant Iranian worldview and traditions of the Pahlavi era (1925–79). Revolutions obviously occur within a specific set of pre-existing cultural patterns and many of these are carried over from the old regime. In Iran, as in other societies, 'revolutionary crises are *not* total breakpoints in history that suddenly make anything at all possible if only it is envisaged by willful revolutionaries' (Skocpol 1979: 171).

Recent scholarship has firmly established the modernity of the Islamic revolutionary phenomenon in Iran, thereby undermining the basis of the traditional view of it as a wholesale retreat from modernity.² By arguing that nationalism, which has been recognised as the product of modernity *par excellence*, thrived under the Islamic republican regime, this study further highlights the modernity of Islamic fundamentalist movements in Iran and elsewhere, rather than their supposed essential continuity with the past. Tracing the IRI's project of 'narrating the nation' thus reinforces the view that current Islamic movements, even though 'they explicitly reject all modern political models as alien imports from a hostile West, their various political ideas, organisations and aspirations are implicitly premised upon the models and assumptions of nation state politics' (Zubaida 1989: ix).

Education in modern Iran has been the focus of an increasing number of articles and monographs. This scholarship has contributed greatly to our understanding of the crucial role education has played in the socialisation process and attitude formation of Iranian youngsters, either before or after the Iranian revolution.³ Nevertheless, many of these works failed to provide an analytical comparative perspective of pre- and post-revolutionary education.⁴ As a result of this lacuna, they remained blind to the twists and turns, the suppressed possibilities, the contradictions still unresolved in the transition from a monarchical to an Islamic-republican order and its aftermath. Many of these studies thus end up affirming the essentialism so inherent in traditional Orientalism, that is, reiterating the conventional wisdom of Iran's monolithic 'return to Islam'. As Higgins and Shoar-Ghaffari point out (1994: 20), 'all who have written about education in the

Islamic Republic agree that its chief aim is the creation of an Islamic person or, in the case of recognized religious minorities, the development of commitment to one God'.⁵ However, a comparison of pre- and post-revolutionary textbooks as applied in this study is likely to reveal a more heterogeneous cultural atmosphere in the IRI. In this view, 'Iranianism' and 'Islamism' are not two mutually exclusive forms of identity; and for all the tension between them the two may coexist. Indeed, such a comparative framework will demonstrate that, though 'the creation of the Islamic person' truly has been a prime objective of the Islamic Republic, an equally important, and interrelated, objective has been the creation of an *Iranian person*; an approximation of the very same person envisioned by the Pahlavi monarchy. In post-revolutionary Iran, too, 'the *conception* of the nation becomes the field and the model in terms of which to think of [all] other commitments and loyalties' (Zubaida 1989: 147–8). Consequently, history in the Islamic-republican era is not marked by divine interventions only, but is also conceived, as in the Pahlavi era, in linear time, in which the constructed history of the nation acquires antiquity and ancestry.

Unless stated otherwise, all Pahlavi and post-revolutionary textbooks analysed in this research were used in primary, intermediate and secondary schools for the teaching of history, civic studies and the Persian language and literature. The significance of textbooks as major conveyors of official social and political values and viewpoints, revealing and reflecting the ideologies and aspirations of the issuing authorities, cannot be overstated. In (monarchical or republican) Iran, however, school textbooks have been of far greater significance because, 'in effect, the content of the textbooks *is* the curriculum and it constitutes the bulk of the knowledge consciously transmitted in the schools' (Higgins and Shoar-Ghaffari 1995: 39). What is more, in as much as the textbooks examined here belong to the humanities and the social sciences, the main area where unwarranted Westernisation had its most 'poisonous' impact on Iranian pupils, the Islamic-republican regime singled them out for the most drastic revisions (Sobhe 1982: 275). Thus, as Mehrad Haghayeghi observes (1993: 42), 'a close scrutiny of humanistic and social science textbooks at the elementary, guidance cycle (junior high school), and high school levels, demonstrates the comprehensive and systematic character of the revolution in education'. It follows, then, that pre- and post-revolutionary school textbooks in the humanities and the social sciences can serve as an excellent yardstick for measuring the quality of the cultural transformations sought by the clerical regime in Iran.

Lastly, most of the Pahlavi textbooks used in this study were published in the 1970s. This decade marked the height of Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's reign (1941–79) and the culmination of his 'White Revolution' reform programme, whose interrelated values and moral principles of Westernisation, secularisation and nationalism were inculcated ardently through the schooling system. Textbooks of the IRI analysed here were

published *after* 1981–2, when most of the textbook revisions had been completed (Mehran 1989: 36).

The study will proceed as follows. The first section will trace the Pahlavi nationalist narrative and examine its representations as they appeared in pre-revolutionary school textbooks. The second section (which draws on post-revolutionary textbooks) and the third section (which draws on textbooks from both periods) will evaluate the fortunes of this narrative in the Islamic-republican state in the light of the conclusions drawn in the first section.

From times immemorial to the Pahlavi era: the genealogy of the Iranian nation

The origins of the Pahlavi nationalist narrative can be traced back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially to the period of Constitutional Revolution (1905–11). Inspired mainly by European historical sources, notably the ‘Aryan hypothesis’ (see below), an increasing number of Iranian intellectuals had come to harbour the modern conception of Iranian national identity. Consequently, they

broke away from the Islamic system of historical narration in which the rise of Muhammad is constituted as the beginning of a new era and a new civilization, and the period prior to it as the age of darkness and ignorance . . . In turn . . . they came to view the pre-Islamic period as an ‘enlightened age,’ and the desperate conditions of their day as the result of the Islamic conquest. (Tavakoli-Targhi 1988: 66)

This heralded the concept of the ‘immemorial Iranian nation’ with profound historical roots, whose members have been moving through history as a unified group inhabiting – in Benedict Anderson’s famous words – the same homogenous, empty time and an identifiable space (1991).

According to this evolving nationalist narrative, Iranian history was divided into two main periods: pre-Islamic antiquity and the Islamic past. Antiquity begins with the Indo-European, ‘Aryan’ domination of Iran in about 800 BC, extends to the great ancient Persian empires, and ends with the Arab-Muslim conquest of Iran in the seventh century AD. Antiquity was seen as a period in which the Iranian nation flourished, enjoying an autonomous political, social and cultural life. The glories of the ancient, that is, *pre-Islamic* Achaemenid and Sassanid empires represented the nation’s golden age, embodying the Iranian national spirit, the Persian language and culture, the Iranian homeland, and the social, economic and political structures of an independent nation.

Antiquity ends with Persia’s historic defeat at the hands of the ‘barbarian’ and ‘savage Bedouins,’ the Muslim Arabs. The ensuing period, covering several centuries of Muslim rule, was represented by a ‘lack’, that is the Iranians’ loss of their collective experience as a unified nation.

Suppressed nationhood and an inability to assert the true spirit of the nation were seen as the underlying marks of the period. Extreme anti-Arab sentiment of the period even went as far as to dismiss not only Islam but also Iran's Islamic culture as unworthy of its pre-Islamic, Zoroastrian glory (Katouzian 1979: 542).⁶

The rising Pahlavi monarchy appropriated the nationalist narrative of the constitutionalist discourse, elevating it to rank of the official ideology of the state (Arjomand 1988: 68). In so far as modernisation and Westernisation were prime objectives of the Pahlavis, the nationalist narrative of the previous generation, with its emphasis on the 'Aryan hypothesis', which upheld the notion of a primordial link between European and Iranian civilisations, seemed to suit their ambitions. As Houchang E. Chehabi explains (1993: 223):

the obvious gap between the European model and the Muslim reality could be bridged by reclaiming the country's pre-Islamic heritage, which, as European scholars had discovered, shared a common ancestry with European culture. Europeanization was thus in the minds of [the Pahlavis] not an alienation but a return to the true self; mimicry of Europe and national particularism could go hand in hand.

However, the nationalist narrative of the Constitutionalists underwent one major revision under the Pahlavi dynasty, whose portrayals of the Islamic period were less negative than previously. This qualitative change emanated from the Pahlavis' endeavour, for purposes of political legitimisation, to project the idea of monarchy as an integral and sacred part of the Iranian way of life and, moreover, of the Pahlavi monarchy itself as the latest manifestation of an 'unbroken' monarchical tradition. In order to represent itself as an extension of the tradition of monarchical continuity in Iran, the Pahlavis had to impress the idea of the historical continuity of people and culture on the Iranian plateau. Accordingly, however calamitous the Arab conquest of Iran may have been, the ensuing Islamic period allegedly 'changed very little if any of the character and nature of the Iranian community, which sought to preserve its identity in the face of Arab and Turkish domination' (Vaziri 1989: 102).⁷

Let us now turn to examining representations of Iran's historical memory in textbooks that were used at the height of the last Pahlavi shah's reign. As will be seen, practically all the textbooks examined aimed at creating a sense of pride and historical identity by engaging in what Benedict Anderson defined as a 'process of reading nationalism *genealogically* – as the expression of an historical tradition of serial continuity' (Anderson 1991: 195). In the Iranian context, this meant the construction of a genealogy for the Iranian nation stretching linearly from pre-Islamic antiquity through the Islamic past to the present. The Pahlavis maintained the dynastic link – the self-proclaimed axis of Iranian nationhood – more or less throughout the entire narrative.

With a view to establishing the profound historical roots of the Iranian nation, its perennial sense of identity and nationhood, the textbooks of the late Pahlavi era set out to trace its primordial beginnings. It is with these assumed origins of the Iranian nation that the ‘Aryan hypothesis’ looms large in the textbooks at hand. Pupils were thus informed that the Iranians were descendants of ‘Aryan tribes’ who had migrated from the ‘western and southern plains of Siberia’ some 5,000 years ago. Comprising several factions, some had found their destiny in ‘central Europe,’ others in ‘Afghanistan and India’, and still others had ‘settled in the land that later won fame for its name “Iran”, that is, the land of the Aryan people (*sarzamīn-e qowm-e arya’i*)’ (*Ta’rikh Yek 2537* [1978]: 21–2). Indeed, the ‘very same Aryans . . . gave their name to this land, calling it Iran’ (*Ta’rikh-e Honar-e Iran 1359* [1980]: 7).⁸

In the several millennia that followed, so Iranian youngsters were required to read, the ‘Aryan’ Iranians achieved path-breaking progress, contributing the fruits of their ingenuity to human civilisation at large. Still, their most noteworthy achievement at this early stage of antiquity was ‘the establishment of the first Iranian monarchy’ (i.e. the Median confederacy) in the eighth century BC. This ‘monarchical order’, with its distinct ‘Iranian culture’, ‘worldview’ and ‘unique characteristics’, gave ‘this land a new countenance and introduced to the world new behavioral patterns . . . clothes and war tools’ (*Ta’rikh-e Lebas 1353* [1974]: 48).

The Median period thus serves as that particular point in the ‘story line’ where the tradition of monarchical continuity begins, where monarchy first emerges as a *sine qua non* of ‘being an Iranian’ (*Iranīyyat*). Yet, the union of monarchy and ‘Iranianism’ received its first major exposition in the account of the glories of the ‘second Iranian monarchy’, the Achaemenid Empire, especially during the reign of its founder Cyrus the Great (c. 550–530 BC). By virtue of this ‘illustrious’ monarch, rendered in the textbooks as a hero of ‘Iranian traits’ (*Ta’rikh Yek 2537* [1978]: 32), Iran took ‘gigantic steps in the way of culture and civilisation, attaining towering levels of progress’ and worldwide ‘fame and reputation’ (*Ta’rikh-e Lebas 1353* [1974]: 54). It is no wonder, then, that Cyrus’s coronation marks the ‘true’ beginnings of the Iranian nation, in commemoration of which in 1976 the nation ‘celebrated 2500 years of monarchical rule in Iran’ (*Ta’rikh-e Yek 2537* [1978]: 28–9).

Pahlavi textbooks in history laid much emphasis on the Achaemenid kingdom’s collapse before the armies of Alexander of Macedon (330 BC) and the establishment, soon after his death (323 BC), of ‘foreign’, Selucid rule over most of its territory. One may interpret these themes as a suspension of monarchical continuity in Iran and the loss of the Iranians’ collective experience as a unified nation. And yet, in the endeavour to portray the Iranians as a unified group moving steadily through history, the textbooks remained resistant to this interruption and (as we shall see) to other aspects that were deemed disruptive to the flow of the ideological message, all under the guise of narrative objectivity. Hence, the assertion

that Alexander's and the Selucids' attempts at subordinating Iran to Hellenic culture with a view to establishing a 'Greek state' on the Iranian plateau remained a 'futile illusion' (*khiyal-e batel*). 'The Iranians, who considered them foreigners and could not accept obedience to a foreign ruler, had risen up in opposition from every conceivable direction.' In such manner, not only did the Iranians 'not become Greeks' but, on the contrary, the Greeks 'submitted to the seductive force (*jazebah*) of Iran's culture and civilization', becoming themselves Iranians in both culture and worldview (*Ta'rikh-e Honar* 1359 [1980]: 26; *Ta'rikh Yek* 2537 [1978]: 44–5).

The durability of Iranian identity thus maintained, the monarchical link, too, was soon reinstated to reinforce the sense of nationhood. It was consequently explained that in the first century BC yet another monarchy of pure 'Iranian' origin (the Parthians) established its rule on the Iranian plateau, securing 'the independence and the culture of the land of Iran against the foreigners' (*Ta'rikh-e Lebas* 1353 [1974]: 64). Nearly half a millennium later, the Sassanids, as the 'true heirs of the Achaemenids', brought about another 'revival of the ancient Iranian customs, manners and traditions': theirs, for example, was the authentic 'national art' (*honar-e melli*) of Iran, for it had 'drawn extensively on the heritage of the past' (*Ta'rikh-e Yek* 2537 [1978]: 61–6).⁹

The long period of antiquity – in the course of which the 'Iranian spirit' remained by and large 'insurmountable' – came to an abrupt end with the swift collapse of the Sassanid armies before the powerful Arab invaders at Qadisiyya (637) and Nahavand (641). As a result, 'a new chapter unfolded in the history of our country' (*Ta'rikh-e Iran az-Payan-e Shah-in-Shahi-ye Sassaniyan ta-Payan-e Salsaleh-ye Zandiyān* 2537 [1978]: 3). Inaugurated by the 'humiliation' suffered by the 'Iranian' Sassanid Empire at the hands of a foreign 'inferior race', and epitomising the loss of the Iranians' national independence and the interruption of monarchical continuity, the textbooks under examination portrayed the transition to the Islamic period in ominous colours.

Indeed, most of the textbooks dealing with the Arab conquest of Iran lament the seventh-century defeat, which marks the transition from pre-Islamic glory to Islamic times. The battle of Qadisiyya was considered a dramatic watershed in Iranian history, resulting in the proud Iranian civilisation's submergence in the Arab-Islamic world and the surrendering of its long-standing sovereignty. In the course of the battle, so we read, the commander of the Iranian forces 'was slain and the Banner of Kaveh (*Derfash-e Kavehyani*),¹⁰ which was the national flag of Iran (*parcham-e melli-ye Iran*) and a memory of antiquity, passed over to the Arabs. Ctesiphon, the capital of the Sassanids, had fallen' (*ibid.*: 14–16). In this vein, the Arab invaders who had come to rule Iran were portrayed as incompatible with the Indo-European, Aryan-Iranian civilisation: they excelled in 'vanity', 'bigotry', 'superstition' and 'ignorance', they had 'no inclination toward science and knowledge' and they were 'innocent of the

[craft] of administration' (Khanlari 1340 [1961]: 6–7; Anvari *et al.* 2536 [1977]: 143–53).

The negative portrayal of the transition to the Islamic period notwithstanding, the apparent loss of Iranian nationhood seemed incompatible with the Pahlavis' project of constructing a genealogy of 2,500 years of continuous monarchy on Iranian soil. As mentioned, in order to create such a consciousness, the Pahlavis were required also to invoke the notion that there has always been a continuity of the people and culture on the Iranian plateau. The Sassanids' defeat at Qadisiyya and the resultant Arab conquest of Iran seemed to run against the image of a linear conception of nationhood in a manner even more acute than the interruption caused by Alexander's invasion of Iran some 1,000 years previously. In order to overcome this impediment, the Pahlavis resorted to the very same method they had applied in their accounts of Alexander's and the Selucids' domination of Iran in antiquity. That is, they nullified the suspension of nationhood by attributing to the people of the Iranian plateau a persisting sense of national identity under the 'yoke' of 'foreign' Arab rule.

Textbooks of the late Pahlavi era went about promoting this notion of continuity in three interrelated ways. First, they commented at length on the Iranian excellence in and contribution to Islamic Arab civilisation, ultimately asserting that the latter was essentially the product *solely* of 'Iranian' ingenuity. In this way, Islamic history was Iranised if not Aryanised altogether. Second, they portrayed the inhabitants of the Iranian plateau as ardent patriots who, for the love of the homeland, had risen up in revolt in order to overthrow Arab (that is, Umayyad and 'Abbasid) 'tyranny' and reassert their national independence. Finally, the textbooks referred to the various post-Islamic dynasties that ruled in different corners of Iran in different periods – from the ninth-century Tahirids, through the eleventh-century Seljuks, to the sixteenth-century Safavids – as 'expressions of national revivalism in [their] Iranian framework' (Vaziri 1989: 100–1). In this way, the dynastic link, so essential to the Pahlavi nationalist narrative, was also reinstated.

Let us examine each one of the three themes in detail, beginning with Iran's alleged contribution to Islamic Arab civilisation. The basic theme in the textbooks was that 'the Iranians were the sages (*khajehgan*) and the leaders of Islamic civilization' (Farshidvared and Givi 2536 [1977]: 179). Accordingly, the great Arab caliphates were considered, in effect, 'Iranian'. During their life span 'the Iranians exerted . . . influence on the court . . . and the reign of the Islamic lands was practically in their hands' (*Ta'rikh-e Iran az-Payan* 2537 [1978]: 26). Indeed, 'the great figures in the 'Abbasid court, from great viziers to teachers and physicians . . . were Iranian' (Farshidvared and Givi 2536 [1977]: 103–4). The 'Abbasid court was, therefore, 'an imitation (*taqlid*) of the Sassanid court' (Khanlari 1340 [1961]: 15). Moreover, when one speaks of Islamic art, 'it would be no exaggeration to state . . . that the greatest share and the most important role in [its]

establishment and progress ... is owed to the arts of Iran' (*Ta'rikh-e Honar* 1359 [1980]: 47). Lastly, according to the textbooks, the great medieval mathematicians, jurists, geographers, physicians, astronomers, astrologers, philosophers and historians – such as Ibn al-Muqaffa, Abu-Hanifa, al-Balkhi, al-Biruni, al-Razi, Ibn-Sinna and al-Ghazali, to name but a few – were all Iranian (*Ta'rikh-e Iran az-Payan* 2537 [1978]: 58–9).

By virtue of the Iranians' everlasting, indeed, distinct and superior sense of nationhood, the great Arab-Islamic caliphates converted to 'Iranianism,' just as Alexander and the Selucids had done several centuries earlier. This is not to say, however, that the Iranians contented themselves with the recruitment of new converts to their nationality. On the contrary, hand in hand with their successful enterprise at Iranising the Islamic civilisation, they took concrete steps to expel the foreign Arabs from the cherished homeland. Hence, we arrive at the second theme by means of which the Pahlavi nationalist narrative attempted to resolve the incongruity between the loss of the Iranians' collective experience as a unified nation and the need to forge a linear conception of Iranian nationhood.

Iranian pupils were informed that a concerted effort to expel the Arabs from the Iranian homeland dates back to the early days of the Arab conquest. Contrary to the teachings of the Prophet, the 'war-seeking' and 'deluded' Arabs had not refrained from 'all sorts of bloodshed, plunder and injustice'. The 'free and noble Iranians' thus worked to 'drive out [the Arabs] and retain their freedom and independence'. The golden opportunity had come about in the late Umayyad period. The heavy burden of Arab taxation and exploitation drove 'the oppression-stricken' Iranians to support 'Alid (that is, [proto-]Shi'ite, *mawali*) claims to the caliphate by means of revolutionary action. The 'Abbasid revolution, led by the 'valiant Iranian' Abu-Muslim of Khorasan, ultimately brought down the 'shameful Umayyad government' and Damascus, the seat of the Umayyad caliph, was 'captured by the Iranians'. However, realising that they had not fared better under the 'Abbasids, 'Iranian nationalists' and 'Iranian national movements' continued their operations for 'the renewal of Iran's political independence'.

The fervent fire of love for the homeland (*vatan*) burning in their hearts ... the valiant Iranians hoisted the banner of rebellion in the very same lands where the 'Abbasid caliphs shed the blood of the patriots and, in the final analysis, they prevailed over the malevolent enemy and obtained the independence of Iran by way of self-sacrifice ... (*ibid.*: 23–5, 32–5)

At long last the Iranians recovered their cherished homeland from the grip of the Arabs, rejuvenating their autonomous political, social and cultural life. Continued 'Abbasid rule over vast regions notwithstanding, 'the link of Iran's history to Arab history was annulled' (*ibid.*: 26).

Having established the continuity of people and culture on the Iranian plateau even after the transition to the Islamic period, it was now time to reinstate the dynastic link, the axis, as the Pahlavis would most likely put it,

of Iranian nationhood. The appearance, from the ninth century to the sixteenth century (that is, within the orbit of the 'Abbasid caliphate and long after its collapse) of various dynasties in different corners of the Iranian plateau, provided the Pahlavis with enough ground to proclaim the revival of monarchical continuity, leading to a further reinvigoration of the Iranian nation.

It would be impossible to discuss here the representation of so many dynasties covering such a long period of time. Given that, and the fact that practically all of these dynasties were described homogeneously (and linearly) as reviving the Iranian nation's glories and cultural heritage, a few examples should suffice.

According to Pahlavi textbooks, 'the first independent Iranian dynasty after Islam', that is, after two centuries of 'foreign' Arab rule, was that of the Tahirids (820–872) (Khanlari 1340 [1961]: 16). Yet the very last relics of Arab sovereignty are said to have been removed by the succeeding Iranian dynasty, the Saffarids (867–908). Ya'qub ibn-Layth, the dynasty's founder, was 'the first person after the fall of the Sassanids to have hoisted the flag of Iran's independence'; 'he liberated Iran from the yoke of the Arab caliphs with a view to reinstating the Iranian monarchy' (*ibid.*: 21). Ibn-Layth was also credited for bringing about a renaissance of the Persian language, which had sunk into oblivion and was supplanted by the Arabic language during the course of Arab domination. This development restored the 'splendor of Persian poetry, which reached perfection in the following epochs' (*ibid.*: 21; Farshidvared and Givi 2536 [1977]: 172–5). The following dynasties of the tenth and eleventh centuries – such as the Samanids, the Ghaznavids and the Buyids – were likewise admired for their 'manliness', their 'love of the homeland', and genuine regard for, and encouragement of, the Persian language (*Ta'rikh-e Iran az-Payan* 2537 [1978]: 36–51).

While most of the above-mentioned dynasties were described as 'full-blooded Iranian', it was difficult for the Pahlavis to authenticate the 'Iranian-ness' of subsequent dynasties such as the Seljuks and the Atabegs, or the Il-Khans and the Timurids. The much too obviously foreign origins of these households once again threatened to impair the Pahlavi monarchs' ordering of a sequential line of dynasties leading to their own, and the linear conception of the Iranian nation as a whole. To resolve this predicament they resorted to the familiar formula of *foreigner-becomes-Iranian*. Thus, for example, 'the Seljuks gradually learned about the culture and civilisation of Iran from the Iranians, and in that manner the Turks became Iranians' (Khanlari 1340 [1961]: 30–3). Other 'foreign' dynasties were considered equally passionate converts to 'Iranianism' (Anvari 1350 [1971]: 221–5).

Surprisingly, representations of the Safavids (1501–1722), the last Iranian dynasty in pre-modern times, lacked the flowery language and ornate expressions by means of which previous great dynasties had been appraised, even though the history of Iran as a united, independent Shi'a entity begins with them. This circumstance was probably the result of the Pahlavis'

project of secularisation and their concomitant endeavour to bypass Islam in the definition of the Iranian state. However, the anachronism and the reductionism inherent in the attribution of nationalist credentials to the Safavid monarchs remained intact. In fact, nothing else mattered. Thus, the advent of Isma‘il I to power in 1501 by means of the *Qizilbash* was described as a ‘movement [for] ... the liberation of Iran from anarchy’. Likewise, the estimation of Shah Isma‘il’s overall achievements boiled down to bringing about ‘the greatness of Iran and the durability of its independence.’ Lastly, the historic imposition of Twelver Shi‘ism as the Safavid state religion was rationalised in terms merely of ‘mobilising the national power (*niru-ey melli*) [of Iran] against ... the Ottoman state in particular’ (*Ta’rikh-e Iran az-Payan 2537* [1978]: 100–4).

The nationalist narrative of Pahlavi Iran approaches its end with that part in the ‘story line’ that deals with the history of Iran under the Qajars (1796–1925), allegedly the last of the royal dynasties, immediately preceding the Pahlavis, to have maintained the link of Iranian kingship. I will return to examine the Pahlavis’ representations of Qajar Iran later on, as a case study for evaluating the differences between the Pahlavi and Islamic republican historical memories and their causes.

To sum up the discussion to this point, then, the thread that runs throughout the Pahlavi textbooks examined is that, through a continuum of kingship, Iran has been a ‘nation’ since times immemorial, maintaining its sense of ‘nation-ness’ throughout the ages, be it in pre- or post-Islamic times.

All the blows that descended on Iran have never ... caused [Iran’s] separation from its own past. The Arab invasion brought down the Sassanid Empire; its palaces were ruined and its treasures had scattered in the wind, but the Iranian spirit (*ruh-e Iran*) remained insurmountable. In the course of many centuries Iran was under the yoke of non-Iranian rulers, but there was no cause for alarm. The Arab, the Turk, the Ghuzz, the Mongol and the Tatar [were] guests who dined at Iran’s dining table for a few brief mornings; they came and went without having been able to remove Iran along with them. At the time when the realm of Iran was divided into [many] parts, with each part being ruled by a native [Iranian] or a foreigner, its spirit remained vast and indestructible ... Iran has always been much too firm and much too rooted to yield to a particular race or a particular policy of this or that emir, khan or conqueror. The realm of Iran has been the realm of culture, of civilization and of language, and its borders have been [well] defined. (Anvari and Javadi 2537b [1978b]: 7)¹¹

The post-revolutionary state: from ‘Iran time’ to ‘Islam time’?

In 1993, Hamid Algar observed (1994: 259), a ‘gallery of famous men in Iran’, comprising bronze busts of some Muslim scholars of the tenth and eleventh centuries, was unveiled in a principal square in Tehran. This display, Algar contends, ‘is remarkable not only for its disregard of the

Islamic ban on statuary but also for the perpetuation of nationalist ideology it implies, fourteen years after the triumph of a revolution that deliberately exalted Islamic over national identity' (*ibid.*).¹² My inquiry into government-sponsored textbooks of the IRI corroborates Algar's assumption: not only have Persian historic, 'nationalist' figures remained decidedly resistant to revolutionary ideological colouring, but moreover, the nationalist narrative of the Pahlavis has been reanimated to invoke and preserve (and at times historically salvage) a distinct cultural identity.

In the reconstruction of the genealogy of the Iranian nation as it unfolds in the textbooks of the IRI, one might wrongly conclude that the Pahlavi conception of the immemorial Iranian nation has been thoroughly eliminated. It is true, *explicit* references to pre-Islamic Iran have decreased significantly in the textbooks under examination. History officially begins with the rise of the Prophet Muhammad, and pre-Islamic times are mentioned only in so far as they related to the conditions of 'ignorance', 'depravity', 'exploitation' and 'tyranny', which allegedly prevailed in Arabia on the eve of the advent of Islam (see e.g. *Ta'limat-e Ejtema'i* 1365 [1986]: 111–30; Iman 1360a [1981a]: 140–2). The omission of the pre-Islamic period might therefore be interpreted as a return to the Islamic system of historical narration, according to which the rise of Muhammad – and not the Indo-European domination of the Iranian plateau in pre-Islamic antiquity – constituted a new era and a new civilisation.¹³

The official effacement of pre-Islamic Persia in the IRI is by now common knowledge. One of the first actions taken by the revolutionary government was to eliminate glorification of the pre-Islamic empires; all pre-Islamic societies were living in ignorance and darkness (*jahelīyah*), and the Persian empires were no exception (Beeman 1983: 211; Hunter 1992: 94). But is this official rejection of pre-Islamic glories tantamount to a disavowal of the conception of the Iranian nation as a well-defined entity with profound historical roots? Instead of signalling an outright reversal from the dominant pre-revolutionary notion of the Iranians as a unified group moving through history since times immemorial, I believe it merely clothes an ardent sense of nationalism in Islamic terminology.¹⁴ As will be seen, when protected by the shield of 'Islam', pre-Islamic Iran, too, emerges as an era worthy of commemoration.

I argue, then, that even though history in the IRI begins with the rise of the Prophet, the Iranian nation, as it emerges in the textbooks, remains a distinct community of people whose destiny is at once inexorably linked to Islamic history and at the same time predates it, and even persists in separation from it. As an age-old phenomenon, as an objective, sacred reality, 'Iranianism' is presupposed either way. We may, therefore, find in the textbooks elaborate references to the existence and glories of Iranian nationhood both in antiquity and after the Arab conquest. For example, we read about pre-Islamic times that 'the people of *our country* ... have been involved in sports since times immemorial. At the very same time when the

Greeks inaugurated the Olympic games, the ancient Iranians taught their children horse-riding, archery and the game of polo' (*Farsi* 1368 [1989]: 173). We also have occasion to read that 'parallel to the advent of Islam, when the people of Iran got acquainted with the concepts of . . . justice and the methods of a just Islamic government, they submitted to the values of this religion without resisting the armies of Islam' (*Ta'rikh-e Mo'aser-e Iran* 1365 [1986]: 52). Thus, the Arab conquest may very well have been the 'liberation of many countries, including Iran, from the yoke of those who speak haughtily (*zurgu*) and oppressive monarchs' (*Ta'limat-e Ejtema'i* 1365 [1986]: 136). But the fact remains that Iran was already *there*, so to speak, there to be 'liberated' by the invading Muslim-Arab armies at that specific, distant point in time. In Islamic-Republican Iran, too, the Iranian nation stands out as an ancient phenomenon, even more ancient than Islam itself.

Moreover, if Iran existed as a nation long before the advent of Islam, some of its cultural attributes, even those predating the Islamic conquest, merit elaborate consideration in the textbooks under examination. Particular homage was paid to the Iranian national New Year, *Nowruz*. Yet, inasmuch as *Nowruz*'s pre-Islamic, Zoroastrian origins were conspicuously evident, the IRI vindicated its celebration by appropriating the day to its Islamic discourse. Consider the following words of an imaginary girl telling about her family's celebration of *Nowruz*:

We sat at the dining table wearing our best clothes, [and] my father blessed the New Year as we listened. When the sound of the cannon gave the glad tidings of the New Year my father took up the Qur'an in his hand . . . kissed it, and read a few verses. He then prayed for all Iranians and wished them total success and victory. (Iman 1360b [1981b]: 111)

Among other symbolic features of Iranian culture, the purely Iranian traditions of *Nowruz* were taken as an occasion of Islamisation, though their connection to pre-Islamic 'Iranian glory' was by no means eradicated. That in 1981–2, pupils were informed that, henceforth, *Nowruz* would be celebrated on the very same day as the 'Islamic Republic Day' – enabling a contemporaneous observance of both 'spring' and 'freedom' (Anvari 1360 [1981]: 129–31; Iman 1360a [1981a]: 136–8) – only blurs but does not obliterate the enduring imagined link between present-day Iran and its pre-Islamic past. At any rate, the incorporation of such purely Iranian traditions into the calendar of the IRI is one more indication that Iran's pre-Islamic culture has remained extremely strong and relevant to the Iranians' self-identity, even to the more radical 'Islamicists' who hold the reigns of government. The 'Aryan hypothesis' thus looms through the mists of Islamisation, if not in word than at least in deed.¹⁵

The correspondence between the pre- and post-revolutionary narratives becomes even more striking when we examine representations of the early Islamic period. As shown above, the Pahlavis attempted to overcome the supposed suspension of nationhood during the era of 'foreign' Arab rule by

attributing to the people of the Iranian plateau a persisting sense of ‘Iranianism’. The period leading to the ‘Abbasid revolution and its aftermath were viewed by the Pahlavi monarchy as expressions of national revivalism in their Iranian framework.

Post-revolutionary textbooks attempt to resolve the incompatibility of foreign Arab rule on Iranian soil and the persistence of Iranian nationhood in a like manner. Yet, in addition to ascribing *national* credentials to the people on the Iranian plateau, the textbooks under examination also attribute to them ‘genuine’ (i.e. revolutionary) *Shi’ite-Islamic* credentials. Though this addition is tremendously important for an understanding of contemporary Iranian self-identity (see below), the fact remains that the post-revolutionary narrative, just like its Pahlavi predecessor, presupposes the existence of the Iranians as a unified group moving through history. Whether the Iranians were animated by the ‘Iranian way of life’ or by ‘true Islam’, whether they sought to reassert their national independence or their religion, are intriguing questions – but the fact remains that both motivations were indiscriminately invoked. Consequently, youngsters were required to read about their ‘Iranian ancestors’ who had risen up in revolt against the ‘wicked and tyrannical Umayyads’ with the aim of ‘regaining the reigns of government’. Led by the ‘Iranian-born’ Abu-Muslim of Khorasan, a large group of revolutionaries ‘of Iranian origin’ paved the way for the successful ‘Abbasid (‘Iranian’) revolution. Nevertheless,

the anti-Islamic conduct of the ‘Abbasid[s] ... on the one hand, and their ill-treatment of non-Arab Muslims – particularly the Shi’ites who were, for the most part, Iranian – on the other, incited several Iranian groups ... to revolt ... against the ‘Abbasids ... Some of these revolts were aimed at returning Iran to the Sassanid period and some at the establishment of an independent government ... Because the Muslim Iranians were fed up with the government of the ‘Abbasid caliphs ... they made every effort to salvage Iran from [their grip] and establish an independent government. (*Ta’limat-e Ejtema’i* 1365 [1986]: 150–3)

The Pahlavi and post-Pahlavi narratives draw even closer when one compares the respective representations of the autonomous dynasties that emerged in different corners of the Iranian plateau from the ninth to the sixteenth centuries. According to the Pahlavis, the rise of such dynasties was the first major manifestation (after the Arab conquest) of the extension of the tradition of monarchical continuity in Iran and a token of the Iranians’ enduring sense of ‘nation-ness’. The account of these dynasties in post-revolutionary textbooks is, on the whole, identical.¹⁶ The reader is thus provided with an opportunity to reflect on the exploits of an assortment of ‘many local states’ (the Tahirids, the Saffarids, the Samanids, etc.) that took a leading role in ‘expelling the oppressive and unjust ‘Abbasids from *our* country’ (*ibid.*: 153–5, my emphasis). When some of these dynasties, and those that later succeeded them, did not fit exactly the description of ‘full-blooded Iranian’, the IRI vigorously re-employed the technique of ‘turning

a foreigner into a native', which was so typical of the Pahlavis. For example, we read that, although the Timurids were a 'Turkish-speaking' people, 'the culture and civilization of Islam and Iran exerted much influence on them', and in any case they achieved progress mainly through the good offices of 'Iranian viziers' (*ibid.*: 156–9). In instances where foreign rulers were incompatible with Iranisation, the inhabitants of the Iranian plateau were imbued with powerful patriotic sentiments that ensured the continuity of nationhood. The Mongol conquest, for example, is described as follows: 'In this barbarous attack the valiant people of Iran did not disdain from any display of manliness and sacrifice. Men, women, the old and the young ... excelled in the defense of the country, not accepting the disgrace of foreign rule' (*ibid.*: 161). These words are ostensibly more fitting for the Pahlavis than the Islamic, universally inclined, post-revolutionary Iranian regime.

The pre- and post-revolutionary narratives converge on many crucial points, and the respective accounts of Safavid Iran are no exception. The IRI narrative, just like the Pahlavi, ascribed nationalist motivations to most of Shah Isma'il's actions, most notably his institution of Shi'ism as the state religion: 'he considered religion one of the ways of creating homogeneity and unity (*yekparchehi va-ettehad*) among the people in most of the country's regions' (*ibid.*: 166). Shi'ism, according to the textbooks under examination, was also a valuable means of making the 'Us–Them' distinctions, so central in nationalism. We therefore read that one of the Safavids' underlying objectives in instituting Shi'ism as the religion of the state had been to differentiate Iran from the majority Sunni Muslims, especially the Ottomans and the Uzbeks (*ibid.*: 166–8). Implicit in this account is the contention that Shi'ism helped Iran to avoid complete assimilation into the larger Islamic world.

Let us pause at this point and beg the obvious, long overdue question: where in all of this is the Islamic Revolution's alternative to the 'eternal yesterday', the 'sanctified mores' – to use Max Weber's terms – of the ancient Pahlavi regime? Indeed, if the Iranian upheaval is to be worthy of the name revolution, it is partly because it constituted a *counter-memory* to the hegemonic memory of the Pahlavi state. Where, then, are the revolution's competing views of the past, its essentially oppositional, hostile and subversive stand towards the memory of the Pahlavis? I shall presently attempt to address this issue by using Pahlavi and Islamic-republican representations of Qajar Iran as case studies.

Representations of an Irano-Islamic identity

As I have shown, both the Pahlavi and the Islamic republican states have each sought to reinforce a sense of 'Iranianism' by meticulously sketching a 'biography' of the Iranian nation from antiquity to the present. However,

this does not mean that the two historical narratives are identical throughout. Indeed, as I have noted and as Higgins and Shoar-Ghaffari have pointed out (1995: 342), ‘the most obvious difference between these state-sponsored definitions of Iranian identity is the emphasis given to Islam by the Islamic Republic’. Doubtless, no one can deny the mobilising role of the Islamic religion or the prominence of Islam as an ideology in the revolution and its aftermath. This prominence of Islam was, in part, a reaction against the Pahlavi dynasty’s endeavour to bypass Islam in the definition of the Iranian state (Dabashi 1993: 10). Equally significant, it was an attempt to reassert Iran’s cultural distinctiveness in the face of what was perceived as Western cultural and economic domination (Beeman 1983: 191–217).¹⁷

As we have seen, the post-revolutionary state has appropriated major parts of the Pahlavi historical memory with a view to elevating ‘Iranianism’ to the rank of a leading ideology. Thus, Iranian nationalism has prospered under ‘the reign of the ayatollahs’. It may, therefore, be said that the revolution’s qualitative alternative to the Pahlavis’ ‘eternal yesterday’ has been an ‘Irano-Islamic identity’ (Farsoun and Mashayekhi 1994: 9) stemming from the two equally important bases of Iranian nationhood and Shi’ite Islam. The revolution’s counter-memory (Iran’s official memory since the revolution) thus reflects a conscious attempt to reinstate the delicate balance between the nationalist and Islamic components of Iranian self-identity, after the latter had been severely disrupted by the Pahlavis’ campaign of resurrecting a *purely* pre-Islamic foundation for Iranian nationalism (Kazemi 1995: 558). In the words of Ahmad Ashraf (1993: 162), ‘this Islamic-Iranian conception of Iranian identity represents an attempt at bridging the sacred and the secular, tradition and modernity, and it has been adopted increasingly by the leadership and the lower echelons of the Islamic regime in Iran’.

The IRI’s endorsement of this twofold, ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ conception of Iranian identity, in contradistinction to the Pahlavi state’s endeavour to forge an identity based solely on the latter, is observable in their respective representations of Qajar Iran. To begin with textbooks of Pahlavi Iran, one crucial point comes to mind in their account of the Qajar period (1796–1925). In these textbooks, ‘Iranian’ monarchs, both before and after the Arab conquest, were generally applauded as champions of the Iranian national spirit. The Qajar shahs, however, were particularly condemned for their alleged obstruction of the Iranians’ aspiration for nationhood (Khanlari 1340 [1961]: 70–81).

The underlying reasons for this unusual negative attitude on the part of the Pahlavis toward the tradition of kingship are clear. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Iran was a backward country that was too weak and poor to resist the encroachments of foreign powers. However, the Qajar shahs were by and large averse to undertaking reforms aimed at modernising the state along the lines of ‘Western civilisation’. By repelling

reforms modelled after the ‘advanced’ West – thereby inhibiting a more intimate contact between Iran and European culture – the Qajars thus repudiated the most basic tenet of the ‘Aryan hypothesis’, namely the supposed common ancestry of the Iranians with Western civilisation. It was precisely because of this ‘blasphemy’ that the Pahlavi narrative disparaged the Qajars and, conversely, praised the role played by *secular*, Westernised intellectuals and reformers in the momentous events leading to the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–11. In this narrative, for example, there is hardly any mention of the (constructive or destructive) role of Islamic ideology and the *‘ulama* in the constitutional struggle or in the crucial decades that preceded it; not even, say, a brief mention of Ayatollah Shirazi’s famous decree against the tobacco concession (1891–2). If historical memory is any indication of present ideas about politics and society, then the Pahlavis’ effacement from history of ‘Islam’ and, conversely, their affectionate elaboration of secularism and secular identity in Qajar Iran, confirms the assertion that the Pahlavis sought to forge a purely secular, ethnic foundation to their rule.

In textbooks of the Islamic Republic, by contrast, secular intellectuals have been denied any substantial role in the constitutional movement’s leadership. Qajar Iran becomes the land of the *ruhaniyat* (the clergy), the genuine, ‘insightful and struggling leaders’ of ‘the people’ in their persistent struggle against domestic ‘tyranny’ and foreign ‘imperialist encroachments’, a struggle that reached a successful climax in the Constitutional Revolution (see e.g. *Ta’rikh-e Mo’aser-e Iran* 1365 [1986]: 3ff.). Furthermore, the constitutional struggle itself is described not as the fruit of Western enlightened thought (as the Pahlavis maintained) but, on the contrary, as an anti-western, anti-imperialist movement of liberation. Moreover, the primary objective of the revolution was not said to be the institution of ‘materialist’ and ‘vain’ ideals such as democracy or constitutionalism *à la* the West, but of the one single effective ‘weapon’ against Qajar oppression and foreign imperialist domination: ‘the glorious Qur’an and the injunctions of Islam’ (*Ta’limat-e Ejtema’i* 1365 [1986]: 18).

The elevation of the clergy and Shi’ite Islam to the rank of the leading forces in Qajar Iran corresponds with the post-revolutionary state’s endeavour to integrate the Islamic tradition more forcefully into the definition of Iranian self-identity. Yet the ‘bundle of silences’ (Trouillot 1995: 27) encompassing secular constitutionalism should not serve as an indication of a change of heart from pure ‘Iranianism’ to pure ‘Islamism’. Indeed, the powerful anti-imperialist thrust of the Islamic-republican account of Qajar Iran only attests to the enduring post-revolutionary concern to maintain the balance between the sacred and the secular in Iranian self-identity. Consider the following excerpt from a textbook in history on the state of affairs in late nineteenth-century Iran: ‘religious values and customs and the national culture [were] a very powerful barrier against the economic influence of the west, especially against the conversion

of the people into consumers of western commodities' (*Ta'rikh-e Mo'aser-e Iran* 1365 [1986]: 9).

It is important to note that post-revolutionary textbooks maintained this balance in their account of modern Iranian history after the Constitutional Revolution leading to and through the establishment of an Islamic republic. Note, for example, the following exposition of the partnership forged between Muhammad Mossadeq and Ayatollah Kashani during the oil nationalisation crisis in the early 1950s:

Following some ups and downs there finally came about the coalition and unity between the nationalist and religious forces, both of which were attached to Iran [and] opposed to the intervention of foreigners ... [T]he nationalist and religious forces were determined to bring down the first heavy blow in the world [arena] on the head of British imperialism and cut off its grip on the interests of the nation of Iran. (*ibid.*: 194)

Nationalism (*nasiyunalism*), according to a post-revolutionary twelfth-grade social science book (*Danesh Ejtema'i* 1365 [1986]), is a destructive imperialist invention. Designed mainly by Christian missionaries, European Orientalists, and Third World, 'westoxicated' (*gharbzadeh*) intellectuals, it was meant to 'root out the unity of the nations in Africa and Asia' and, more significantly, to lessen the unity of the Islamic community. All nationalisms in the Muslim world (pan-Arabism and pan-Turkism included) have not only led to divisions and spite among Muslims, but have also paved the way for the occupation of Palestine. Islam, so it was claimed, does not recognise nationalist ideology, in so far as it is taken to mean 'cultural, political, racial, economic, and geographic divisions' among peoples in general and Muslims in particular. The only aspect that forms 'the foundation and the pillars of Islamic society is belief ... in the one exalted God and the unity-seeking, human-constructing teachings of Islam' (*ibid.*: 126–40). Yet this severe (albeit very rare) denunciation of nationalism should be understood only within the context of an 'Islam-free' sense of national identity. When nationalism and Islam will be joined, loyalty to the homeland will be endorsed and recommended. Nationalism and religion cannot be separated, as the following excerpt, with which this study ends, vividly demonstrates:

O Iran, O my splendorous house! I love you. The laughter of your children, the clamour of your youth, the [battle] cries of your men, I love them all. O splendorous house. I hold dear your pure soil, which is coloured with the blood of the martyrs; each morning and each evening I kiss your red tulips, which grow on the tombs of the martyrs. O Iran, O my splendorous house! I consider your tall mountains a token of the bravery and pride of your children. I consider your vast plateaus a token of your independence and freedom. I consider your clamouring rivers a reminder of your freemen's cry of 'God is most great.' O Iran, O my splendorous house! O land of the pure and the brave! O land of the free Muslims. O land of Islam and faith! I guard you; I shall work hard for your development. I love your

liberated people with burning desire and great faith. I shall hasten to help them and I shall demolish your enemies with anger and hate. (Iman 1360b [1981b]: 91–2)¹⁸

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion has shown that the IRI has more or less remained committed to the Pahlavi monarchy's conception of the immemorial Iranian nation, in the sense that it has always 'been there', in antiquity as in the modern epoch. Appropriating the very basic 'story line' of the Pahlavis, which presupposed a linear movement of the 'Iranians' as a unified group from pre-Islamic to Islamic times, the IRI has also implicitly endorsed the mainstays of the 'Aryan hypothesis'. As this study shows, post-revolutionary school textbooks in the humanities and the social sciences have taken a leading role in inculcating this nationalist 'awareness of being imbedded in secular, serial time, with all its implications of continuity' (Anderson 1991: 205). This is a far cry from such sweeping generalisations that view post-revolutionary education as a means only of Islamisation.

Indeed, foreign and Iranian observers of Iranian education are usually keen on contrasting between the educational goals of Pahlavi Iran and those of the IRI. They claim that, while the educational goals of the Pahlavis had been to instill loyalty to the homeland and belief in the 'grandeur' of the Iranian-Aryan heritage, those of the current regime have been radical Islamisation in all walks of life (Nafisi 1994: 175). It appears, however, that this clear-cut division is not entirely accurate, and that given the need to develop different aspects of human resources, the Islamic Republic cannot live by 'the Islamic Person' alone.

The educational goals of the IRI are thus more complex and more problematic than some have suggested. The Islamic tradition, no doubt, figures high in its educational policy planning. But other traditions have also remained. 'The predominance of one tradition over the others at a particular time does not mean the final and complete demise of the other forces that have existed for generations in Iranian society and are part of the country's cultural legacy' (Kazemi 1988: 1). Indeed, as the foregoing discussion has shown, the Islamic Republic's evident endeavour to integrate the Islamic tradition more forcefully into Iran's political culture comes hand in hand with an equally forceful articulation and inculcation of the ancient regime's nationalist tradition.

What is more, the post-revolutionary Islamic tradition corresponds to and is synonymous with what Partha Chatterjee has defined as the 'spiritual' or 'inner domain' of Third World anti-colonial nationalism, 'bearing the "essential" marks of cultural identity' (Chatterjee 1993: 6). Viewed within this context, the 'Islam' of the post-revolutionary state is not in any way opposed to the nationalist tradition, but, on the contrary, it is an indispensable part of contemporary Iranian nationalism. That is to say, the

more the West, particularly the United States, was seen to be colonising Iran culturally (and economically), the more Iranian nationalism, to borrow from Chatterjee, 'insisted on displaying the marks of "essential" cultural difference so as to keep out the colonizer from that inner domain of national life and to proclaim sovereignty over it' (*ibid.*: 26). The guardians of the Islamic Revolution thus emerge as stern nationalists whose 'Islam' serves as 'the identifying emblem of the common people against "alien" social spheres in their own country which had excluded and subordinated them' (Zubaida 1989: 33).

It may, therefore, be said that Islamic consciousness in Iran does not in any way constitute the basis for an alternative myth to the national myth. Rather, it adds Islamic terminology to the very same myth. Consequently, political Islam remains within the confines of Iranian nationalism. It is articulated in the symbols of this nationalism endowing them with a meaning that is only apparently religious. The modernity that is a bulwark of secularism has been a major dimension of the experience of a self-proclaimed religious state.

One final, perhaps contradicting note: a wide array of scholars of nationalism has contended that the roots of nationalist thought and praxis may be found in the decline of tradition and religion – in the 'waning of beliefs in heaven and hell' as Anthony Smith has put it (Smith 1986: 176). In this manner, nationalism and religion become antagonistic, antithetical and mutually exclusive cultural forces. Yet, as my study has shown, nationalism, which is the product of modernity *par excellence*, becomes inexorably intertwined with the traditional and the religious – in short, with what we usually identify, wrongly I might add, as pre-modern values and practices. At any rate, the Iranian case confirms the assumption that modernity embraces a multidimensional array of historical phenomena that cannot be prematurely synthesised into a unified *Zeitgeist* (Felski 1995: 11–16).

Notes

1 For a modernist interpretation of Iranian national identity, see Vaziri (1989). For an opposing, 'primordialist' or 'perennial' approach to Iranian national identity, see Gnoli (1989).

2 On the modernity of political Islam in Iran and in other countries in the region, see e.g. Zubaida (1989, 1997); Abrahamian (1994); Riesebrodt (1993); Halliday (1996: 42–75). See also Ram (1996).

3 On education in the Pahlavi era see e.g. Arasteh (1969); Banani (1961); Eilers (1978). The most recent and most comprehensive study of education under the Pahlavi regime is Menashri (1992). On education in the IRI, see note 5 below.

4 A rare and notable exception is Higgins and Shoar-Ghaffari (1995). The study compares pre- and post-revolutionary elementary school textbooks with the view to evaluating several aspects of their portrayal of Iranian identity.

5 For further reading on education in the IRI and the role of education in the regime's socialisation process, see Mehran (1989, 1990, 1991); Shorish (1988); Sobhe (1982); Matini

(1989); Haghayeghi (1993); Menashri (1992, especially the Epilogue); Higgins and Shoar-Ghaffari (1994, 1995); Ferdows (1992); Nafisi (1994).

6 On the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century forerunners of the Iranian nationalist narrative, see Tavakoli-Targhi (1990); Kia (1995); Bayat-Philipp (1974); Bayat (1982).

7 Part and parcel of the project of hammering in the impression of a continuity of both nationhood and monarchy was the Pahlavis' construction of a symbolic framework by means of which to make meaningful the essential link between the pre- and post-Islamic periods. Some prominent examples of this included Reza Shah's announcement in 1935 that, since Iran was the 'cradle of the Aryans', the name 'Iran' would henceforth replace 'Persia'; and Muhammad Reza Shah's self-coronation and the elaborate 2,500-anniversary celebration of the Iranian monarchy in 1969 and 1972, respectively. A more blatant example was the shah's announcement in 1976 of a change in the official Iranian calendar: the year would henceforth begin not with the migration of the Prophet, but, instead, with the presumed date of the establishment of the Achaemenid dynasty. Muhammad Reza Shah's adoption of the honorific title *Aryamehr*, 'the Light of the Aryan Race,' was also intended to illuminate the continuity of Iranian nationhood with monarchy as its axis. For these and other symbolic formulations during the Pahlavi era see Ghods (1991: 34–5); Lewis (1975: 101); Chehabi (1993: 223–6); Tavakoli-Targhi (1988: 112); Wilber (1981: 127); Matthee (1993: 326); Cottam (1978: 328).

8 Published in 1980, *Ta'rikh-e Honar-e Iran*, which is referred to here, ostensibly belongs to the Islamic republican era. Yet this textbook was originally written and published in the Pahlavi era, and was included in the Pahlavi school curriculum. It is therefore representative of the Pahlavi historical memory and not that of the Islamic Republic. Indeed, though it was briefly used by the emerging Islamic Republic in 1980, it was soon abolished or simply removed from the shelves once the revision of textbooks had been completed and original, revolutionary textbooks supplanted pre-revolutionary ones.

9 For similar representations of Iranian history in Pahlavi textbooks see, *Ta'rikh-e Lebas* (1353 (1974): 69); Anvari and Javadi (2537a (1978a): 131–4); *Ketab-e Sevvom-e Dabestan* (1342 (1963): 111).

10 The 'Banner of Kaveh' refers to a legendary smith (Kaveh), who, having made a banner of his old apron, led the Iranians against the tyrant king Zahhak, defeated him, and seated Fereyduon on his throne. The story is narrated in the *Shahnameh* of Ferdowsi.

11 For similar themes, see Farshidvared and Givi (2536 (1977): 101–2).

12 Indeed, Ayatollah Khomeini's writings and declarations since the late 1960s were marked by pan-Islamic motifs calling for the realisation of Islamic unity – both political and moral – that would obliterate prior national, 'artificial' divisions among contemporary Muslim societies. In his programmatic book *velayat-e faqih* ('The Governance of the Jurist'), which is considered one of the major ideological pillars of the Islamic Revolution, Khomeini defined nationalism as an imperialist plot designed to sow discord among Muslims thereby advancing Western exploitation of 'the abode of Islam'. He claimed that in the wake of World War I 'imperialist powers' divided the 'Islamic homeland' (i.e. the Ottoman Empire) into 'peoples' and 'petty states' placing in each of them an 'agent of their own' to safeguard the powers' economic and political interests. He called upon all Muslims to unite in order to withstand successfully this imperialist onslaught; only through unity, he argued, will the Muslims be able 'to crush the human and tyrannical gods and idols that plunder the world'. See Khumayni (1979: 34–5).

13 Hence, Shorish (1988: 74), following an investigation of post-revolutionary textbooks, concluded, 'there is never mention of pre-Islamic Iran, which was admired very much in the prerevolutionary books. One cannot, of course, deny pre-Islamic Iran ... but for the present what matters to the Iranian revolutionaries ... is that their history is indistinguishable from the history of Islam.'

14 As Mostafa Vaziri has contended (1989: 198), the 'popularization of Iranian identity did not come to an end with the downfall of the Pahlavi regime, but it began to take a different direction with the surfacing of fundamentalist Islamic principles'.

15 On the Islamisation of secular Iranian holidays, including *Nowruz*, in the Islamic Republican state, see Higgins and Shoar-Ghaffari (1995: 349); Richard (1989: 33–5).

16 The tradition of monarchical continuity, however, is manifestly absent in the post-revolutionary narrative, owing, of course, to the Islamic revolution's rejection of monarchy as alien to Islam. On Khomeini's views on monarchy and legitimate political rule in Islam see, e.g. Akhavi (1980: 163–71); Enayat (1983); Rajaee (1983).

17 I will return to this point in the Conclusion.

18 For similar expressions, see *Farsi* (1368 (1989): 44–5).

References

- Abrahamian, Ervand. 1994. *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic of Iran*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Akhavi, Shahrough. 1980. *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran: Clergy–State Relations in the Pahlavi Era*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Algar, Hamid. 1994. 'Review of Mostafa Vaziri, *Iran as Imagined Nation*', *Contemporary Sociology* 23, 1: 259.
- Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections of the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edn. London and New York: Verso.
- Anvari, Hasan. 1350 (1971). *Farsi*. Fifth grade of primary school. Tehran: Vezeerat-e Amuzesh va-Parvaresh.
- Anvari, Hasan. 1360 (1981). *Farsi*. Fourth grade of primary school. Tehran: Vezeerat-e Amuzesh va-Parvaresh.
- Anvari, Hasan and Hasan Sadr Hajj Seyyed Javadi. 2537a (1978a). *Farsi*. First grade of guidance cycle. Tehran: Vezeerat-e Amuzesh va-Parvaresh.
- Anvari, Hasan and Hasan Sadr Hajj Seyyed Javadi. 2537b (1978b). *Farsi*. Second grade of the guidance cycle. Tehran: Vezeerat-e Amuzesh va-Parvaresh.
- Anvari, Hasan, Rasul Shayasteh and Hasan Ahmadi Kivi. 2536 (1977). *Farsi*. Fourth grade of high school. Tehran: Vezeerat-e Amuzesh va-Parvaresh.
- Arasteh, Reza. 1969. *Education and Social Awakening in Iran, 1850–1968*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Arjomand, Said Amir. 1988. *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ashraf, Ahmad. 1993. 'The crisis of national and ethnic identities in contemporary Iran', *Iranian Studies* 24, 1–2 (Winter–Spring).
- Banani, Amin. 1961. *The Modernization of Iran, 1921–1941*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bayat, Mangol. 1982. *Mysticism and Dissent: Socioreligious Thought in Qajar Iran*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Bayat-Philipp, Mangol. 1974. 'The concepts of religion and government in the thought of Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani, a nineteenth-century Persian revolutionary', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 5: 381–400.
- Beeman, William O. 1983. 'Images of the Great Satan: representations of the United States in the Iranian Revolution', in Nikki R. Keddie (ed.), *Religion and Politics in Iran: Shi'ism from Quietism to Revolution*. New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press.
- Chatterjee, Partha. 1993. *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Chehabi, Houchang E. 1993. 'Staging the emperor's new clothes: dress and nation-building under Reza Shah', *Iranian Studies* 26, 3–4: 209–29.
- Cottam, Richard W. 1979. *Nationalism in Iran*. (Updated through 1978). Pittsburgh, PA: Pittsburgh University Press.
- Dabashi, Hamid. 1993. *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*. New York and London: New York University Press.
- Danesh Ejtema'i*. 1365 (1986). Tehran: Vezeerat-e Amuzesh va-Parvaresh.
- Eilers, Wilhelm. 1978. 'Education and cultural development in Iran during the Pahlavi era', in George Lenczowski (ed.), *Iran Under the Pahlavis*. Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution.

- Enayat, Hamid. 1983. 'Iran: Khumayni's concept of the "Guardianship of the Jurisconsult"', in J. Piscatori (ed.), *Islam in the Political Process*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Farshidvared, Khosrow and Hasan Ahmadi Givi. 2536 (1977). *Farsi*. Third grade of high school. Tehran: Vezerat-e Amuzesh va-Parvaresh.
- Farsi*. 1368 (1989). Fifth grade of primary school. Tehran: Vezerat-e Amuzesh va-Parvaresh.
- Farsoun, Samih K. and Mehrdad Mashayekhi. 1994. 'Introduction: Iran's political culture', in Samih K. Farsoun and Mehrdad Mashayekhi (eds.), *Iran: Political Culture in the Islamic Republic*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Felski, Rita. 1995. *The Gender of Modernity*. Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press.
- Ferdows, Adele. 1994. 'Gender roles in Iranian school textbooks', in Samih. K. Farsoun and Mehrdad Mashayekh (eds.), *Iran: Political Culture in the Islamic Republic*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Ghods, M. Reza. 1991. 'Iranian nationalism and Reza Shah', *Middle Eastern Studies* 27, 1: 35–45.
- Gnoli, Gherardo. 1989. *The Idea of Iran: An Essay on its Origin*. Rome: Instituto Italiano per il Medino ed Estremo Oriente.
- Haghighyehi, Mehrad. 1993. 'Politics and ideology in the Islamic Republic of Iran', *Middle Eastern Studies* 29: 36–52.
- Halliday, Fred. 1996. *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation: Religion and Politics in the Middle East*. London and New York: I. B. Tauris.
- Higgins, Patricia J. and Pirouz Shoar-Ghaffari. 1994. 'Women's education in the Islamic Republic of Iran', in Mahnaz Afkhami and Erika Friedl (eds.), *In the Eye of the Storm: Women in Post-revolutionary Iran*. London and New York: I. B. Tauris.
- Higgins, Patricia J. and Pirouz Shoar-Ghaffari. 1995. 'Changing perceptions of Iranian identity in elementary textbooks', in Elizabeth Warnock Fernea (ed.), *Children in the Muslim Middle East*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. 1997. *On History*. New York: The New Press.
- Hunter, Shireen. 1992. *Iran After Khomeini*. New York: Praeger.
- Iman, Lyla. 1360a (1981a). *Farsi*. Third grade of primary school. Tehran: Vezerat-e Amuzesh va-Parvaresh.
- Iman, Lyla. 1360b (1981b). *Farsi*. Second grade of primary school. Tehran: Vezerat-e Amuzesh va-Parvaresh.
- Katouzian, Hamayoun. 1979. 'Nationalist trends in Iran, 1921–1926', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 10: 533–51.
- Kazemi, Farhad. 1988. *Politics and Culture in Iran*. Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Political Studies, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan.
- Kazemi, Farhad. 1995. 'Models of Iranian politics, the road to the Islamic Revolution, and the challenge to civil society', *World Politics* 47, 4: 555–74.
- Ketab-e Sevom-e Dabestan*. 1342 (1963). Tehran: Vezerat-e Farhang, Sazman-e Ketab.
- Khanlari, Parviz Natel. (1340) 1961. *Ta'rikh-e Iran: Dowreh-ye Islami*. Sixth grade of primary school. Tehran: Vezerat-e Farhang.
- Khumayni, Ruhallah Musavi. 1979. *Al-Hukumah al-Islamiyyah*. Beirut: Dar al-Tali'ah.
- Kia, Mehrdad. 1995. 'Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzade and the call for modernization of the Islamic world', *Middle Eastern Studies* 31, 3: 423–48.
- Lewis, Bernard. 1975. *History Remembered, Recovered, Invented*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Matini, Jalal. 1989. 'The impact of the Islamic Revolution on education in Iran', in Adnan Badran (ed.), *At the Crossroads: Education in the Middle East*. New York: Paragon House.
- Matthee, Rudi. 1993. 'Transforming dangerous nomads into useful artisans, technicians, agriculturists: education in the Reza Shah Period', *Iranian Studies* 26, 3–4: 313–36.
- Mehran, Golnar. 1989. 'Socialization of schoolchildren in the Islamic Republic of Iran', *Iranian Studies* 22, 1: 35–50.
- Mehran, Golnar. 1990. 'Ideology and education in the Islamic Republic of Iran', *Compare* 20, 1: 53–65.

- Mehran, Golnar. 1991. 'The creation of the new Muslim woman: female education in the Islamic Republic of Iran', *Convergence* 24, 4: 42–51.
- Menashri, David. 1992. *Education and the Making of Modern Iran*. Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press.
- Nafisi, Rasool. 1994. 'Education and the culture of politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran', in Samih. K. Farsoun and Mehrdad Mashayekh (eds.), *Iran: Political Culture in the Islamic Republic*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Nora, Pierre. 1989. 'Between memory and history: les lieux de mémoire', *Representations* 26 (Spring): 7–25.
- Rajaei, Farhang. 1983. *Islamic Values and World View: Khomeyni on Man, the State, and International Politics*. New York: University Press of America.
- Ram, Haggay. 1996. 'Mythology of rage: representations of the "self" and the "other" in revolutionary Iran', *History and Memory* 8, 1: 67–87.
- Richard, Yann. 1989. 'The relevance of "Nationalism" in contemporary Iran', *Middle East Review* 21, 4: 27–36.
- Riesebrodt, Martin. 1993. *Pious Passion: The Emergence of Modern Fundamentalism in the United States and Iran*. Translated from the German by Don Reneau. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Shorish, Mobin. 1988. 'The Islamic Revolution and education in Iran', *Comparative Education Review* 32, 1: 58–75.
- Skocpol, Theda. 1979. *States and Social Revolutions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, Anthony. 1986. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. London: Blackwell.
- Sobhe, Khosrow. 1982. 'Education in revolution: is Iran duplicating the Chinese Cultural Revolution?', *Comparative Education* 18, 3: 271–80.
- Ta'limat-e Ejtima'i*. 1365 (1986). Fifth grade of primary school. Tehran: Vezerat-e Amuzesh va-Parvaresh.
- Ta'rikh-e Honar Iran*. 1359 (1980). First grade of high school. Tehran: Vezerat-e Amuzesh va-Parvaresh.
- Ta'rikh-e Iran az-Payan-e Shah-in-Shahi-ye Sassaniyan ta-Payan-e Salsaleh-ye Zandiyan*. 2537 (1978). Second grade of general education. Tehran: Vezerat-e Amuzesh va-Parvaresh.
- Ta'rikh-e Lebas*. 1353 (1974). Tehran: Vezerat-e Amuzesh va-Parvaresh.
- Ta'rikh-e Mo'aser-e Iran*. 1365 (1986). Third grade of high school. Tehran: Vezerat-e Amuzesh va-Parvaresh.
- Ta'rikh Yek*. 2537 (1978). Second grade of general education. Tehran: Vezerat-e Amuzesh va-Parvaresh.
- Tavakoli-Targhi, Mohamad. 1988. 'The formation of two revolutionary discourses in modern Iran: the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1909 and the Islamic Revolution of 1978–1979', Ph.D. Dissertation, the University of Chicago.
- Tavakoli-Targhi, Mohamad. 1990. 'Refashioning Iran: language and culture during the Constitutional Revolution', *Iranian Studies* 23, 1–4: 77–101.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 1995. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Vaziri, Mostafa. 1989. *Iran as Imagined Nation: The Construction of National Identity*. New York: Paragon House.
- Wilber, Donald. 1981. *Iran Past and Present*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Zubaida, Sami. 1989. *Islam, the People, and the State*. London: Routledge.
- Zubaida, Sami. 1997. 'Is Iran an Islamic state?', in Joel Beinin and Joe Stork (eds.), *Political Islam: Essays from Middle East Report*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.