

Eckert. Dossiers 18 (2018)

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**Depiction of Europe in an Iranian History Textbook:  
Resentment and Discontent**

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Eckert. Dossiers

Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research

ISSN 2191-0790

Volume 18 (2018)

**Editors**

Charlotte Murphy and

Tim Hartung

Form for referencing:

Green, Yal. *Depiction of Europe in an Iranian History Textbook: Resentment and Discontent*. Eckert. Dossiers 18 (2018). urn:nbn:de:0220-2018-0024.

## **Introduction**

Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, a growing body of literature on education has looked into the content of Iranian school textbooks, particularly history, critiquing what is evaluated as a collection of biased, exclusionary and ‘anti-Western’ narratives of the past (Paivandi, 2008; 2015, Soltanzadeh; 2012, Malkezadeh, 2011; Mirfakhrayi, 2017). Raised as a social criticism directed at the ideologies as well as policies of the Islamic government, this literature faults the curriculum for its one-sided representation of the ‘other’ and the creation of an image of the West that perpetuates animosity as opposed to peace and dialogue. Expanding the existing literature, this study seeks to investigate an Iranian history textbook’s (at grade 11) depiction of Europe as a region and its role in the country’s contemporary history.

This study was carried out following the historical nuclear agreement between Iran and 5+1 countries in April 2015. The agreement marked a major political achievement for the moderate government of Hassan Rohani, who hopes to expand and maintain his political-economic ties with the European Union. While political relations with the EU seemed to have progressed abroad at the time, this study began as a project with the goal of examining whether similar improvements were reflected internally in the school curriculum. This was important as the political discourses in Iran and in the European Union strongly indicated tolerance and an open-door attitude. This study was initiated at the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research (GEI) in the department of Europe, to see whether/how such attitudes have been translated into the Iranian textbook’s depiction of the West in general and Europe in particular.

The current report shares the main findings of the study and proposes a new theoretical framework to understand the discourse/depiction of Europe in an Iranian textbook at grade 11 (the reasons for the selection of the grade will be explained later in the report). Upon close examination, this research finds that the textbook under study suffers from ambiguity, confusion and bias against Europe, partly as a result of its pedagogical style and approach to presenting history. It, moreover, adopts a rather ‘resentful’ position against Europe, depicted as a monolithic and essentialized entity which sought to dominate Iran throughout history. Unpacking and critiquing such a depiction, however, this study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the textbook’s discourse, emphasising that it is deeply entrenched in historically, politically and ideologically charged contexts that cannot simply be explained as ‘anti-western’. This research contextualizes the textbook’s depiction of Europe within a *contested history* between Iran and the

West, and views it *partly* as an extension of an Iranian post-colonial discourse that suffers from unresolved controversies and holds ‘resentment’. It also argues that its resentful discourse links to the ideologies and politics of an authoritarian state which imposes its singular narratives – similar to that in Rwanda, Nazi Germany, Apartheid South Africa plus others (See McCully, 2012 for instance).

In light of research limitations – pertaining mostly to time and budget – however, this report only looks at its post-colonial underpinning, emphasizing that further research is needed to develop a framework that captures the complexities inherent to the textbook’s discourse against the West. This is important since it helps to think about the ways it can be improved if such an opportunity were to arise in the future.<sup>1</sup>

The current report has two main sections that follow a summary of the methodology used and the guiding research questions. In the first section, it provides a historical overview of the concept of “resentment” as a conceptual tool to locate the analysis of the textbook. The second section which shares the findings of the research begins by looking at the text’s pedagogical style and its approach to presenting historical knowledge. This is important, as the way history is presented impacts the image of Europe that the textbook portrays. After reviewing its pedagogical style, the next three sub-sections look into the objectives of the textbook as it relates to Europe, its depiction as a region and finally the way it has played a role in Iran’s history. The final sub-section then provides a conclusion and provides suggestion for further research.

### **Methodology and Research Questions**

Concerned with the depiction of Europe in an Iranian history textbook at grade 11, this study was guided by four research questions;

- A. How does the textbook feature in terms of its pedagogical style in presenting historical knowledge? And how does its style impact the depiction of Europe?
- B. How does the textbook portray Europe as a region?
- C. How does the textbook portray Europe in relation to its role in Iran’s history?
- D. How does the perspective shape the overall image of Europe?

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<sup>1</sup> For instance under the tenure of Mohammad Khatami (1997–2005), thanks to the reformist agendas, major steps were taken to improve history textbooks, making them more inclusive, moderate and tolerant towards the West. As an example see Reiss, W. (2005). *Obstacles and Challenges of an International Dialogue on Curriculum Revision in the Middle East. Learning about the Other and Teaching for Tolerance in Muslim Majority Societies*. Istanbul: The Centre for Values Education and The Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief.

Informed by the initial proposal, the guiding research questions were sharpened and refined in the process of the study, to avoid bias and pre-set assumptions that would contaminate the analysis of the text. As such, the concept of hate speech, which was part of the original research idea, was removed from the list of guiding questions, so that one could engage with the textbook as meaningfully as possible, and provide a prejudice-free analysis.

Since in the original proposal the school grade was not specified, due attention was paid to scanning the newly written textbook in order to select a grade that would best help satisfy the research aims. The criteria for selection were the level of depth and breadth of the Europe-related topics that were covered in the textbooks. Following a review of 8 textbooks (from grade 3 to 12), a grade 11 history textbook was selected as it specifically talked about Europe, politics, culture and history, as they related to Iran's past and present.

Based on this selection, two history textbooks for grade 11 titled *Iran's Contemporary History*<sup>2</sup> were examined; one published in 2013-14 (developed under Ahmadinejad's tenure) as well as 2017-2018 (revised and published under Rohani's office). The content of *both textbooks* was investigated to identify changes that would suggest transformation in the government's view of Europe as reflected in the curriculum. As will be explained in the section entitled "Textbook Content", the only major difference between the two versions is the inclusion of a new lesson called *Islamic Awakening in the Islamic World* in the 2017-2018 publication. The content of this lesson is discussed in the relevant section of this report. In light of the minimal difference between the two versions, only the latest one was selected for analysis.

In answering the research questions, this study employed a qualitative approach which also included limited theoretical reference to Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly his concept of modality i.e.<sup>3</sup>. The content of the entire

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<sup>2</sup> تاریخ معاصر ایران کلیه رشته ها (به استثنای رشته های ادبیات و علوم انسانی-معارف اسلامی) سال سوم آموزش متوسطه

<sup>3</sup> In defining the concept of modality, Fairclough (2003, pp. 164-90) notes: "The question of modality, can be seen as the question of *what people commit themselves to* when they make statements, ask questions, made demands or offers. The point is that there are different ways of doing each of these which make different commitments (p. 164, emphasis added)". The question of commitment, he clarifies, is related to the level of "truth" as well as "necessity" that is implied in and through language and its pattern of use (p. 219). In other words, modality refers to the level of authority and certitude that is constructed in Knowledge Exchanges (Statement, Question) and Activity Exchanges (Demand, Offer). Following Halliday's functional linguistic analysis, Fairclough's CDA examines modality in so far as "it is important in the texturing of identities, both personal (personalities) and social in the sense that what you commit yourself to is a significant part of what you are – *so modality choices in texts can be seen as part of the process of texturing life-identity* (2003, p. 166, emphasis added)". In this light, modality is adopted as a crucial conceptual tool to examine the depth and breadth as well as the mode of authority and certi-

textbook was examined to withdraw implicit or explicit relevance to Europe and the West in general. This meant looking for actual references to Europe/European countries/the West as well as more invisible meanings associated to them in sub-texts, for instance the use of the Gregorian calendar (see section *Confused and Confusing Calendar Systems*).

At the first level of analysis, the extracted information was categorised and coded broadly into ideology, identity, history, culture, science, people/nation, politics/government, economy and military. Each of these categories were, at the second level of analysis, further unpacked based on their relevance to Iran's history, the role of Europe in the country as a whole and the meaning associated to them. More specifically, the socio-political and pedagogical significance of each code was deconstructed which resulted in identifying four inter-connected themes (and sub-themes) that refer to Europe's involvement in Iran's history (see section *Europe in Iran's History*). While for the purpose of coding textbook excerpts were meticulously investigated and selected based on explicit and implicit reference to Europe, the textbook excerpts presented in the report were selected randomly in order to avoid bias.

### **Section One:**

#### **Resentment against the West: Towards Understanding the Discourse of the Textbook**

Research on Iranian school textbooks is a relatively new but expanding field. Its emergence traces back to the early 1970s, following the Shah's White Revolution through which he sought to re-invent the Great (Persian) Civilization based on nationalism, modernization/westernization and economic growth (Pahlavi, 1994; Keddi, 2003). In line with his vision and objectives, relevant studies at the time looked at textbooks (curriculum and education in general) to improve educational outcomes with the wider goal of creating a viable and patriotic workforce for the growing economy (Hamdhaidari, 2008; Koyagi, 2009).

Absent from the mainstream research at the time was an ideological critique of education in general and curriculum as well as textbooks in particular. Such critique was

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tude that (in)form the construction of official history in the textbook, with the view to deconstructing its cultural and political function in education. To do that, the analysis begins by exploring the cases of "explicit modalization" (ibid, p. 168), i.e. where in the words of Fairclough, "markers of modality" (ibid, 170) are present within the text. This, for instance includes (but is not limited to) cases where "modal" and "to be" verbs are used.

expressed mainly in underground intellectual as well as oppositional political circles, which in many – but not all – cases shared strong religious sentiments and reflected the anti-imperialist ethos of the era (Dabashi, 1993). Against the government's secular and westernizing policies as well as centuries of colonial rule in Iran, many philosophers, political activists and writers, faulted the education system for promoting Western/European culture and values at the expense of truly Iranian-Islamic ones (Hanson, 1983).

Jalal Al-e-Ahmad – one of the leading essayists at the time – in his widely-read book *Gharbzadegi* (Westoxication) for instance criticized the monarchic education for the creation of a youth 'who have lost their religious anchors without gaining any sensibility of selfhood'. (Al-e-Ahmad, 1977, p. 46). For him, the fault mainly remained with the 'West and its domestic lackey, the Pahlavi regime' (Vahdat, 2000, p. 62). According to Al-e-Ahmad – and many other thinkers as well as leading political actors namely Ayatollah Khomeini – it was the Western 'other' who perpetuated the process in and through which the 'Iranian self' was emptied of its substance and subjectivity. They accused the colonial influence of some European countries, and the US in recent years, of having threatened the Iranian-Islamic culture, endangering the country's geographical and political sovereignty, and exploiting its natural resources and wealth throughout history (Dabashi, 1993, Chehabi 1990).

Beginning as an intellectual post-colonial critique, *Gharbzadegi* (Westoxication) raised fundamental questions about centuries of unequal power relation between a 'semi-civilized' (ibid) nation i.e. Iran and colonizing European countries. Particularly the British and Russian empires as well as the US. *Gharbzadegi* criticized the monarchic rule and its authoritarian project of modernization and westernization that sought to re-invent a people based on *Western* models and values, alienating the lived culture, beliefs and identities of many Iranians, especially the more conservative and religious groups<sup>4</sup>. Despite its achievements in expanding and improving the provision and quality of education, the Shah's westernization was criticized as uncritically pro-western/pro-American presenting the democratic capitalist West, led by the United States, as the model for Iran's development and growth (Vahdat, 2000, Dabashi, 1993).

The social critique of the Pahlavi's as well as the colonial influence of Europe/America in Iran, informed the basis of the education system that followed the

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<sup>4</sup> See for instance Abrahamian's 'A History of Modern Iran' (2008).

Islamic Revolution of 1979 (Paivandi, 2015). Particularly Al-e-Ahmad's *Gharbzadegi* – which literally meant “to be struck by the West”, translated as “occidentosis”, “westmania”, “Euromania” and “westoxication” – remained the fundamental sub-text in school curriculum. Against the ‘pro-west’ attitudes that permeated pre-Revolution education, textbooks under the Islamic Republic, many argue, hold an “anti-Western” disposition (Paivandi, 2008). Portraying the West as the historical ‘other’, school textbooks rely on narratives in which Europe emerges as an ‘enemy’ who sought to dominate Iran throughout history, as the findings of this study suggest. Promoting a sense of mistrust in a homogenized entity vaguely referred to as the West, the textbooks under the Islamic Republic tell a particular story of the past in which Europe – directly and indirectly – acted as an ‘aggressor’, breaching commitments and disrespecting cultural values. In other words, the textbook constructs the past as having been “struck by the West”; it is Westoxicated.

In the recent decades many scholars have looked into the concept of Westoxication and tried to explain the way Iranian historical consciousness conceptualized the West during and after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. For Shayegan (1992), Iran (and the Muslim Middle East in general) suffers from ‘cultural schizophrenia’ against the West which he expressly finds in what he calls ‘hysterical language of obsessional rejection’ (p. 4). He notes:

[for the Islamic Republic] the West [...was considered] as a conspiracy of occult forces using their material power to take possession of us, shake us to our very foundations, debauch our morals, corrupt our virtues and reduce us by degrees to a state of political and cultural slavery (ibid).

Looking into a broad historical-cultural field, Shayegan traces the problem to Islam and its merging with local cultures and histories. While for the purpose of this study, his historical-cultural approach does not seem to provide the required theoretical framework, particularly as it covers too broad a view, Shayegan's notion of ‘obsessional rejection’ links to the concept of ‘resentment’ (Ashouri, 2016) as an underlying reason for what is commonly referred to as an ‘anti-Western’ discourse in Iranian school textbooks.

Taking a historical-psychological approach informed by Nietzsche's modern critique of the social world, Ashouri (2016) unpacks Westoxication in terms of ‘resentment’ against the ‘other’. As defined ‘resentment’ refers to *a sense of animosity directed at that which one identifies as the cause of one's frustration, that is, an assignment of*



*blame because of one's frustration* (ibid, p. 24-87). In other words, resentment points to *unresolved controversies* in one's past as it relates to the role of the 'other', projecting the root causes of all 'historical ills' to a constructed enemy. It takes root in the historical consciousness of a nation, which has not resolved experiences of frustration and humiliation, possessing a less powerful position against the external 'other' and, thus, harbors grudges and animosity.

Lacking a critical understanding, *resentment redirects all responsibility towards an external source*, thus freeing oneself from the burden of self-reflection, critique and corrective action. Ashouri (2016) regards 'resentment' as a salient approach in Iranian historiography since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which was expressed in different ways through various external sources. It began, he argues, by blaming 'the invading Arab Muslims' who put an end to the great Persian civilisation. However, owing to the anti-imperialist ethos of the 1950s in Iran – particularly following the US-UK-backed coup which toppled the secular-nationalist government of Mohammad Mossadeque in 1953<sup>5</sup>, it gradually transformed into a Anti-American/anti-Western/European sentiment which climaxed during and after the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

It can be argued that the historical resentment constitutes the official political discourse of the Islamic Republic, especially evident in more conservative political camps, namely Ayatollah Khomeini as well as President Ahmadinejad. Many go as far to argue that fighting with the West is an integral part of the State's theology of discontent (Dabashi, 1993) and links to the rule of a theocratic/authoritarian system of government (AmirArjomand, 2009). Together with the political-ideological root of the discourse – which itself deserves investigation that is beyond the limits and scope of this study – resentment shapes the pivotal sub-text of school textbooks, particularly that of the history textbook under study. As a consequence of unresolved historical controversy, it reflects a deep sense of frustration, envy and humiliation – the traits of a resentful discourse as Ashouri (2016) argues – caused by centuries of unequal power distribution between Iran and the Europe/the West. The pedagogical significance of such a discourse, as the findings of this study suggest, is a sense of mistrust and suspicion against an external enemy i.e. Europe, which emerges from the history textbook's narrative. In this light, 'resentment' creates and perpetuates the image of the 'other',

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<sup>5</sup> Historically, the coup remains an unresolved 'ill' with the US in particular since it was Mohammad Mossadeque who nationalized Iran's oil in 1952. In his book, *The Coup*, Abrahamian (2013) argues that it was in fact his nationalising project that threatened the US/UK's economic interests in Iran thus resulting in the coup which toppled his government.

who throughout history, sought to dominate Iran. Against such a narrative, the rule of the Islamic order is then portrayed as the fighter for the country's independence and freedom. The last part of this paper looks into these claims and unpacks the way in which the textbook depicts Europe throughout Iran's history of the past 200 years.

## Section Two

### Grade 11 History Textbook: General Information

Published in the school year 2017-2018, *Iran's Contemporary History* is the title of the grade 11 textbook under study. It is written in Farsi, Iran's official language, and was published by the Office of Textbook Development under the supervision of the Organization for Educational Media Planning and Research in the Ministry of Education.

The textbook is co-authored by *Dr Ali Akbar Velayati*, and three other writers<sup>6</sup>, none of whom are from the field of education or contemporary history. *Dr Velayati* – a pediatrician by training – was the longest serving Iranian Foreign Minister (1981-1997), a presidential candidate in 2012 and the current head of the Centre for Strategic Research, the research arm of the Expediency Discernment Council (*Majma-e-Tashkhis-e-Maslahat*).

As a universal and mandatory course, students learn about history as early as grade four in elementary school. This particular textbook is taught to students in grade 11 (one year before the completion of their general education) in all disciplines; except for those in Persian Literature and Social Sciences and Islamic Studies, who study history in more depth.

A look at history textbooks in earlier grades shows that the same content is, almost (exactly), repeated throughout the different levels of education with minor changes in some grades. For instance, in year 6<sup>7</sup>, the textbook provides more information about different pre and post-Islamic dynasties, and in year 8 it discusses the history of Islam, i.e. the life and battles of the Prophets and the Twelve Imams in Shi'ism. The Islamic Revolution of 1979, however, remains a permanent lesson at all grades, and the analysis expands as the students progress in their education.

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<sup>6</sup> The three other authors are Dr Jalil ErfanManesh, an art/cinematography researcher, Qolamrezar Mirzayi and Yaghoub Tavakolli, both Historians of the pre-Islamic era.

<sup>7</sup> First level of junior high school level

### **Principle Characteristics of the Textbook's Pedagogical Style**

Despite growing scholarly interest in Iranian history textbooks (Godaszgar, 2001, Keivani, 2006, Paivandi, 2008, Mirfakhrai 2017) very few studies so far have looked at their pedagogical style (Malekzadeh, 2011). It is important, both pedagogically and politically, to explore the overall traits of the textbook in terms of its style of representation as well as its approach to historical knowledge. In this light, the following four subsections look at the overall language structure and writing style of the text and the way it mystifies and confuses the course of events, that together make the textbook's pedagogical style a fragmented, under-explained and confusing account. The educational and political implications of such a formation, this study argues, is a portrayal of history as a set of facts and moreover the creation of an 'ideological fog' (Freire, 2005) that can impair student's critical engagement with and reflection on their country's past.

### **A Highly Modalized, Descriptive Language**

Applying Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly his concept of modality, this study finds that the text is written with a high level of certitude presenting historical knowledge in absolute terms. Throughout the book, historical information is presented in the form of *absolute statements*. Modal auxiliary verbs/adverbs/adjectives (can/could, should, maybe, possible, probable) are never used. Instead, the overwhelming majority of sentences are formed using what in Farsi are called 'attributive sentences' (*jomalat-e-esnadi*). They are mainly formed together with 'to be' verbs, and those that translate into 'become' in English.<sup>8</sup> For instance;

'The Pahlavi regime's goal was [only] to please the US; the Shah's master (p. 168)'.  
'The Mandate of the Islamic Jurist (*Velayat-e-Faqih*) is the most powerful force safeguarding Iran's territorial severity, protecting the values of the Islamic Revolution and national interest of the people of Iran preventing the return of dictatorship and infiltration of foreigners [into our culture]' (p. 223-224)

The political-military attacks of the colonizing European governments [was the reason] Islamic Awakening began in Iran (p. 20)

The same level of certainty exists even when the inner feelings, motivations and emotions of historical figures and/or those of a group of people – such as Iranians in general – are discussed. For example;

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<sup>8</sup> گشت، گردید

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Defeat against the Russians made the Iranians very angry, and after a few years, people answered to the call for Jihad with extreme passion for reclaiming the lost territories (p. 55).

[Mohammad Reza Shah] was confused [about what he had to do] in the Coup of 1953 and was petrified of its outcome (p. 121).

The level of certitude further increases with the frequent use of such adverbs as “in fact” and “definitely” or “the truth” without the provision of supporting evidence. For instance;

Reza Shah’s establishment of the national train line was in fact [his attempt] to facilitate the transference of the British army from the south to the north (p. 102)

Reza Shah did not do anything for his people and served [the nation] very little, or if one wants to tell the truth, he did not do anything that benefited the Iranian people (p. 104)

The acceptance of Western thought, and unquestioning self-immolation<sup>9</sup> and stupefaction<sup>10</sup> of the foreign culture, was one of the features of [the intellectuals] in the era of the Constitutional Revolution (p. 42).

In addition to the highly modalized discourse of the textbook, historical knowledge is presented in a descriptive-expository manner<sup>11</sup>. It overwhelms the student with information (such as dates and names as will be further explained in the next section) rather than an explanation, and it prioritizes breadth over depth in describing history. While it restricts the discussion to ‘one version’ of the event, it presents it in a highly assertive and descriptive style, as excerpts also demonstrate. The significance of the text’s writing style as Pingel (2000) also notes in his study of the *Representation of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Europe in History Textbooks*, is

Linguistic research shows that descriptive text often transmits the message that what they describe should be regarded as factual and as such “right” and can be granted without further inquiry. This boils down to translating “descriptive” as “assertive”. The role of language becomes obvious when a dry and factual description turns into an emotional narrative often decorated by quotations. Then we can draw the conclusion that sensitive issues such as “national questions” are at stake (p. 28)

Given Pingel’s insightful argument, this study argues that the Iranian history textbook constructs the past (and the role of Europe in it) as an unquestionable truth that links closely to ‘national questions’ as will become clearer in the following. The text-

<sup>9</sup> خودباختگی

<sup>10</sup> شیفتگی

<sup>11</sup> Here reference is made to Herlihy (1992) who suggests three categories in textbook writing: expository-descriptive, explanatory, investigative-argumentative, See Herlihy, J.G. “The Nature of the Textbook Controversy” in John G. Herlihy (ed.) *The Textbook Controversy: Issues, Aspects and Perspectives*.

book, through its highly modalized and descriptive language, claims ownership of a nation's diversely lived experiences, encompassing all areas of the past; from the real and concrete to inner feelings and/or thoughts of people.

### **Fragmentation**

The textbook covers *two centuries* of lived-history and more than 125 historical events<sup>12</sup>, over 25 lessons and 234 pages<sup>13</sup>. While the breadth of topics covered makes it difficult to provide coherent depth given the limited space available, the textbook's style of writing makes matters even more problematic. The majority of sentences are short(ened), lacking linking or descriptive phrases to connect one passage to the next. Paragraphs are also broken into few sentences, which altogether provide for a highly rushed script which disturbs the readers' comprehension of the passage. For example, lesson 10 titled 'The Collapse of Reza Shah's Reign', begins by explaining the outbreak of WWII. It reads:

#### **The Second World War**

WWII started with Hitler's spontaneous attack on Poland in 1939. Britain, Russia and later the US declared war on Germany. Since Russia secretly signed a non-aggression treaty with Germany, it was not involved in the war for the first two years [...]

In 1941, the German army suddenly attacked Russia and rapidly made advances on its soil. After that, Iran became important for the Allied Forces due to its sensitive geo-political location; since it provided the most suitable route for the transport of British and American military and economic support to Russia to stop the German war machine. On the other hand, the chances of the German's take-over of Iranian oil revenues frightened the British [empire].

In May 1320 h.sh<sup>14</sup>, Britain and Russia asked Iran to deport German nationals from the country [...]. Reza Shah was in a difficult situation. On the one hand he witnessed the Germans' repeated victories in the war, and Hitler had promised Reza Shah that in Spring of 1321 h.sh<sup>15</sup> his soldiers would arrive in Iran, on the other hand Iran was prone to being attacked by the Allied Forces.

The passage, which explains one of the most important world history events/processes with significant implications for Iran, stretches over three short paragraphs. Apart from the fact that the passage conflates different stories without adequately explaining their historical link (and processes), it obscures the story even further by

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<sup>12</sup> On average each lesson covers 5 historical events, if one just counts the headlines.

<sup>13</sup> Nine pages per lesson. Each page is comprised of almost 15 sentences, and 23 words per sentence amounting to approximately 79,220 words and 3,495 sentences, in the entire book.

<sup>14</sup> 1941

<sup>15</sup> 1942

jumping from one paragraph to another. While it allocates (only) two paragraphs to the formation of fighting forces in the war and Iran's geopolitical relevance, it reduces each one to a maximum of three to four sentences, written in a highly fragmented way and omitting the necessary explanatory connections between them. As such, it fundamentally reduces the text's clarity, limiting the students' comprehension of history as it unfolds.

In addition to the highly fragmented writing style, the textbook also overwhelms the students with names and dates. A word count shows that there are at least 650 names (including but not limited to those of politicians, clergy, international figures and political-economic treaties) plus 260 dates in the textbook<sup>16</sup>. By so doing, Iran's contested history is reduced to a list of information for students to memorize. This is a persistent trait in Iranian history textbooks that transforms historical narratives into an encyclopaedic list with limited context and explanation.

This, in the words of Giroux (2013, pp. 24-30), exemplifies the "culture of positivism" which underpins existing approaches to history education in many contexts around the world. The underlying rationale of such approaches is not to develop a viable notion of critical historical consciousness in the student. It is, rather, to limit the boundaries of historical knowledge to a set of objects and objective facts, as a means of control – of stripping students, as well as teachers, of their ability to engage critically with history and interpret, make or change their reality.

### **Under-Explained and Mystified Terminologies**

As the textbook conflates stories and jumps from one paragraph to another, it creates a highly fragmented image of history which is exacerbated by the frequent use of technical terminology, mostly of a political nature, that is left un or under-explained. While *Capitulation*<sup>17</sup> (the legal revocation of foreign nationals' criminal responsibility), for instance, is referred to in seven different pages and over ten times<sup>18</sup>, no explanation is provided on the actual meaning of the concept and more importantly its relevance to history. As the textbook fails to clarify this term, it only confuses students by focusing on the feelings that the *Capitulation Bill* triggered in Ayatollah Khomeini, rather than

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<sup>16</sup> The figures are calculated based on the number of names and dates present in a randomly selected lesson multiplied by the total number of lessons in the textbook. The number is, however not exhaustive, meaning that there are more names/dates in each lesson.

<sup>17</sup> کاپیتولاسیون

<sup>18</sup> Pages 21, 26, 39, 159, 160, 161, and 166, Iran's Contemporary History, grade 11, 2014-2015.

the significance and relevance of the event itself. The excerpt below shows the relevant passage in the textbook.

### **Return of Capitulation**

With the increasing presence of American missionaries and army officials in Iran, the Government of *Hassan Ali Mansour*<sup>19</sup> sent a bill to the parliament [...] for [their] legal protection on 21 Mehr 1343<sup>20</sup> [...] In disagreement with Capitulation, the Imam said: “since I have heard the news [in recent days] I have not been able to sleep. I am sad, and my heart is aching [...] our national pride is tarnished. Iran’s pride is gone. The pride of its army is taken away ...” (p. 160-61)

On average, each lesson contains approximately three terms that are left un or under-explained regarding their meaning and/or relevance to the course of events. The table below provides a working list of such terms and their frequency within the text.

Word	Co unt
Communism	13
Parliamentary Fraction and Commission	12
Capitulation	10
Supplementary Constitutional Law	9
Local Council Election Bill	9
Appendant Bill/Treaty	8
Marxism/Marxist	7
Socialism	5
Protectorate	3
Negative Balance Policy	3
Nazism/Nazi Party	3
Racism	3
Bolshevik Revolution	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>87</b>

This study argues that such an approach obscures the students’ comprehension of the progression of history. It can in fact mystify, as opposed to explain, the significance and relevance of such critical processes as the emergence of Marxist ideology in Iran’s history, for instance. While Marxism is referred to seven times in the text, it is discussed with reference to the danger it posed to the society’s beliefs in Islam, by quoting Marx’s ‘religion is the opium of the masses’ (p. 87). By obscuring what actually defines Marx-

<sup>19</sup> Prime Minister to Mohammad Reza Shah in the mid-1960s, who was assassinated by a member of the *Fadayan-e Islam* (Devotees of Islam), an Islamist militia group.

<sup>20</sup> 13 Oct. 1643

ism, the text decontextualises it, and creates pedagogical confusion which negatively affects the students' engagement with the textbook.

### **Confused and Confusing Calendar Systems**

As the text obscures the course of history by failing to provide an adequate explanation of the main political-historical concepts, it further confuses the progression of events by mixing three different calendar systems; Gregorian, Iranian and Islamic. While in the majority of cases the Iranian official calendar *Hijri Shamsi*<sup>21</sup> is used, it is at times mixed and/or replaced by the Islamic lunar calendar; *Hijri Qamari is*<sup>22</sup>, reinforcing the link between Iran and Islam, most prominently through the Prophet and his family. A word count shows at least 13 such instances, the most significant of which relates to the biography of Ayatollah Khomeini;

Ruhollah Mousavi Khomeini was born on 20<sup>th</sup> of *Jamadi al-Thani*<sup>23</sup> 1320 h.q., on the birthday of Grand Lady of Islam, her Holiness Fatima (peace upon her) coinciding with *1<sup>st</sup> Mehr 1281h.Sh*, [...] (ibid, p. 155).

In addition to the Iranian and Islamic calendar systems, Gregorian dates are also incorporated but only in the context of political-economic treaties signed in favour of the West. In fact, in the majority of cases, they are used without connection to the Iranian dates, leaving the students with no insight into their temporal link with Iran's history. For instance, the textbook refers to the Anglo-Russian treaty of 1907 in three different lessons, but does not tell the student its equivalent date in the Iranian calendar system, leaving the task of discovery to the students.

This confusing marking of events disconnects Iran from the rest of the world, preventing students from linking their country's past to that of other nations and thus developing historical thinking skills, which the textbook authors claim to be one of their goals. While the lunar calendar reinforces the connection between events, the clergy and the history of Islam, Gregorian dates only indicate towards dark times, failure and losses for the country as caused by the monarchy in favour of the Western 'other'. The use of the lunar calendar further assumes an Arabian (read, authentic)-Islamic sentiment to

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<sup>21</sup> *Hijri –Shamsi* is a Zoroastrian-Islamic system based on the position of Earth on its revolution around the Sun. In Iran it is now 1395.

<sup>22</sup> This calendar system is also used in History of Islam, Religious Studies (Dars-e-Dini).

<sup>23</sup> The 6<sup>th</sup> month in the Islamic Calendar.



specific historical events/moments and (re)emphasises a divine place for the Islamic Jurist, similar to that of the Prophet and his holy family.

Yet, from a pedagogical perspective, the textbook fails to provide a coherent narrative of Iran's history, primarily as a result of the breadth of topics it covers. The limited space does not allow for a comprehensive explanation of the country's 200-year-history. The lack of coherence is exacerbated by the text's overall writing style. While the authors jump from one paragraph to the next, shorten and decontextualize the content, they create confusion as to the progression of history by confusing three different calendar systems and failing to explain pivotal concepts or processes and their relevance for Iran's history. This study argues that the *pedagogical confusion* which results from such a fragmented and mystified historiography significantly contributes to students' disinterest in learning about their past. It, in fact, creates an ambiguity that can hinder students' engagement with history.

### **Textbook Content: Topics and Main Themes**

The textbook focuses on Iran's *contemporary* history covering more than two centuries of events. A summary lesson devised as a read-only<sup>24</sup> opening to the textbook, also reviews Iran's history as early as Achaemenids (550-350 BC) to the Safavids and other monarchies until 1794. The table below provides an overview of its content. The list of contents demonstrates that the text constructs Iran's history mainly in political-military terms, a defining theme which it forms in the context of the clergy-led struggle against internal despotism and European/Western colonisation and exploitation (*Estesmar*).

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<sup>24</sup> Meaning students would not be tested on its content.

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Lessons	Lesson title	No of Pages
Read-only	A Review of Iran's History from the Beginning to Qajar time	16
1-6	<p>[Qajar Dynasty (1794-1925)]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From <i>Aqa Mohammad Khan</i> to <i>Mohammad Shah</i></li> <li>• <i>Nasser Al-Din Shah's</i> Era</li> <li>• The Pre-Context of Constitutional Revolution</li> <li>• The Beginning of the People's Movement against Despotism and the Victory of <i>the Constitutional Revolution</i></li> <li>• <i>Constitutionalism</i> during Mohammad Shah's Era</li> <li>• Second Era of <i>Constitutionalism</i></li> </ul>	45
7-16	<p>[The Pahlavi's (1925-1979)]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1900's Coup</li> <li>• Reza Khan: Establishing the Power</li> <li>• The Characteristics of Reza Shah's Reign</li> <li>• The Collapse of Reza Shah's Reign</li> <li>• The Allied Occupation of Iran and Its Consequences</li> <li>• The Nationalization of Oil Movement</li> <li>• The Pre-Context of the 1953 Coup</li> <li>• Aug-15-1953 Coup</li> <li>• A Quarter Century of American Rule in Iran</li> <li>• The Pre-Contexts and Objectives of the American Reforms in Iran.</li> </ul>	69
17-26	<p>[The Islamic Revolution/Republic (1960-date)]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Emergence of the Clergy-led Movement</li> <li>• Uprising on 15 of Khordad (6<sup>th</sup> June 1963)</li> <li>• [Socio-political] Transformations after the Exile of Imam Khomeini</li> <li>• Iran on the Way to the Islamic Revolution</li> <li>• The Victory of the Islamic Revolution</li> <li>• The Transitional Government of Mehdi Bazargan</li> <li>• The First Round of Presidency</li> <li>• The "Imposed War" by the Ba'ath Regime Ruling Iraq</li> <li>• Ideals and Achievements of the Islamic Revolution</li> <li>• Islamic Awakening in the Islamic World</li> </ul>	87

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Iran's modern history begins in the textbook with the rule of Qajar dynasty (1789-1925) covered over six lessons. Nasser Al-Din Shah's half century reign is discussed in one lesson. Thematically, it focuses on colonial power struggles between the British and the Russian Empire, political-economic treaties signed with foreign powers and ill-behaved and traitorous royals. The Constitutional Revolution of 1907 – which established Iran's first national parliament – is reviewed over four lessons. Recurring themes of these lessons are the threads of secular ideas from Europe, and the clergy-led uprising against colonisation and despotism. The aftermath of the Constitutional Revolution, the establishment and reign of the Pahlavi under Reza as well as Mohammad Reza Shah (1925-1979), are covered over the next nine lessons. All the key socio-political and economic developments during this time are discussed in light of the continued 'sacred' battle between Ayatollah Khomeini and the clergy against the secular, anti-Islamic and 'west-loving' regime. The remaining nine lessons focus on the *dawn* of the religious uprising, the victory of the Revolution and its aftermath, and the establishment of an authentic Islamic state under the Mandate of the Islamic Jurist<sup>25</sup> (*Velayat-e-Faqih*).

A difference between the current version of the textbook and the ones in the previous years is the addition of a new lesson entitled 'Islamic Awakening in the Islamic World'. This longest lesson comprised of 34 pages contains an elaborate discussion on the emergence of struggles in the Ottoman Empire/Turkey, Egypt, India and Iran to revive 'authentic Islamic Identity' against the European domination of their culture and national identity. Following the historical review of the early 'Islamic awakening', the remainder of the lesson looks into the way the Islamic Revolution of 1979 'inspired' similar movements in other parts of the Muslim world namely Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Bahrain. The lesson concludes with a passage emphasizing the role of the Ruling Islamic Jurist, in creating this "new" wave of Islamic Awakening.

The textbook constructs Iran's history predominantly through a narrative of struggle against the internal and external 'other' – the former being the pro-western monarchy and the latter Europe/American governments – under the leadership of the Islamic clergy. Using such a narrative, it represents the past as a constant battlefield between good and evil which ended with Islamic Revolution. The good, it constructs, as the Shi'a clergy (*the religious establishment*) who historically upheld the banner of Islam and protected the rights of Iranians against internal despotism and external exploitation. The

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<sup>25</sup> Translation borrowed from AmirArjomand (2009)

bad, it then typifies as the monarchic rule together with the geographical as well as the ideological West (Europe and the US), who throughout history sought domination over the entirety of Iran; its political system, revenues and culture, thus endangering its sovereignty on all fronts. In this light, it constructs the establishment of the Islamic Republic, as *an organic outcome* of centuries of clergy-led struggles with internal and external ‘others’.

### **The Textbook’s Depiction of Europe**

In teaching about Iran’s contemporary history, the textbook places a particular significance onto the role that Europe and the West in general played over the last 200 years. In their *Note to Teachers*, the textbook authors outline 29 pedagogical objectives they aim for in history teaching, two of which directly mention Europe;

#### **Objective 2 of 29**

“[To learn about] the *intentions as well as competition* between colonizing European governments (British, France and Russia) in Iran”.

#### **Objective 6 of 29**

“[To learn about] the social, economic and cultural *consequences and impact* that the expanding communication and relation with the international community, particularly European countries, have had on Iran”.

While this study does not aim to evaluate the textbook in terms of its ability to meet these objectives, the underlying bias that (in)forms them is of significance. From the onset the textbook appears to hold a particular view point towards Europe, which it sets to promote rather prescriptively. Against a practice that would provide various interpretations of Europe’s role in Iranian history and the mutual relationships that followed, the textbook begins by looking into ‘the intentions’ of and ‘competitions’ between European governments and the ‘consequences and impact’ that followed as a result. While the language implies that these ‘intensions and consequences’ were rather negative, the prescriptive approach limits the space for a (relatively) free engagement with the past. This negative portrayal is moreover exacerbated by the fact that the textbook suffers from pedagogical ambiguity related to its writing and style as discussed earlier. In this light, this study suggests that the pre-set bias present in the textbook is likely to hinder analysis and reflection and promotes a one-sided portrayal of Europe as it relates to the history of the country.

### **Depiction of Europe as a Region**

Europe as a region appears frequently in the textbook, and is at times referred to in the broader term as ‘the West’ (*Gharb*). The analysis of the passages in which geographical Europe is mentioned, shows that the term is used in a rather homogenizing manner, even when the role of particular European countries is discussed. For instance in the first lesson, which looks at the establishment of Qajar dynasty, it reads:

The political-military invasion by colonizing European governments [was the reason] why the Islamic awakening began in Iran (p. 20).

In the passage that follows the statement above, the colonial power struggle between the British and French empires is presented. Similarly, on the economic treaties that the Qajar signed with the competing Russian and British empires, the text says;

As the result of the Industrial Revolution, the economy of the European countries blossomed [they therefore] were in need of consumer markets as well as cheap primary resources. The colonizers thus increased their pressure on other countries (p. 29).

Homogenizing Europe as one entity portrays the entire region as a monolithic whole throughout history, without differentiating between the various roles and changing relationships that Iran had with different European countries over time. While Nordic and Eastern Europe are almost never mentioned in the text, the whole continent is at times taken to denote and resemble (a) specific country/countries. Only a limited number of countries in Europe are actually mentioned in the text namely Britain, Germany, France and Belgium<sup>26</sup>. In the overwhelming majority of cases ‘Europe’ refers to Great Britain and in a number of instances is left vague and un/under-explained as the examples below show;

The colonizing countries of Europe since the 16<sup>th</sup> century started to occupy parts of Asia, Africa and America and until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries controlled many countries (p. 39).

The Ottoman Empire’s defeat against the European governments and loss of a part of their land where Muslims lived, made Turkish intellectuals rethink their position (p. 235).

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<sup>26</sup> These countries have also been mentioned once; Austria-Hungary, Italy, Denmark Switzerland (p. 41).

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The homogenizing discourse over Europe as a region is coupled with the fact that, at times, countries that are not part of the continent entirely are also counted as European. This is particularly true of Russia and Turkey;

Following the bombardment of the Parliament [by Russian troops] a group of advocates of the West who pretended to seek constitutionalism and patriotism, sought refuge in Europe and settled in cities such as Paris, London and Istanbul (p. 59).

The ‘inclusive’ approach towards Europe as a region, this study suggests, can confuse and negatively impact students’ perceptions of the entire continent and feed into an ‘othering’ discourse, that is directed towards the geographical location of Europe as whole. While the textbook, in the majority of the cases, focuses on the role that the British and Russian empires played in Iran, Europe as a region is negatively portrayed in the textbook. This argument becomes clearer when one further looks into the context in which the term appears in the textbook. As the analysis suggests, Europe refers to a location in which ‘treasonous politicians’ reside or take refuge.

To suppress the fighters of constitutionalism *Mohammad Ali Shah Qajar* invited *Mirza Asqar Khan Amin Al-Soltan* – who was a promised opposition to the Constitutional Revolution and resided in Europe – to go back to Iran. (p. 58)

*Taqi-Zadeh* who [was pro separation of religion and politics and] was involved in the assassination of *Seyed Abdollah Behbahani* [a leading clergyman of the Constitutional Revolution] – escaped the country to Europe. (p. 65).

The negative association of Europe (as a region) with political actors whose activities and ideologies are vilified in the textbook further complicates its depiction as an external ‘other’, promoting and perpetuating resentment towards the entire continent without space for reflection and analysis for students. The geographical Europe, in this light, becomes ideologically-laden, a location that as a whole stands against Iran’s interests as well as ideals, principles and values. In the majority of passages related to Europe, such ideological accounts seems to permeate the text as well as the sub-text, except for the rare occasions when Europe is depicted as a birth place of technology and modern science. Particularly in terms of scientific and technological advances the textbook refers to Europe rather favourably although such instances are comparatively far less frequent. The excerpts below provide two examples;

During the reign of Nasser Al-Din Shah Qajar, a group of Iranians gradually familiarized themselves with technological advancements made in Europe (p. 27).

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[One of the positive policies of Amir Kabir was] sending a number of students to Europe to learn about modern science and acquire skills (p. 28).

The homogenization of Europe, coupled with an ideologically-laden account of it – both implicitly and explicitly observable in the text – portrays a rather negative image of the entire continent. While such a narrative contains historical fallacies, in that not all European countries were involved in Iran’s history and impacted it similarly, it also shows it as a monolithic and essentialized entity that, *throughout history*, played the same role i.e. to dominate and colonize Iran. Whereas in the majority of cases Europe refers to the British Empire, the ambiguity that the text suffers from (and promotes), hinders the students’ ability to differentiate between the experience/history of colonization under competing Russia and Britain on the one hand, and the rest of the continent on the other hand. As such, the textbook extends the sense of ‘resentment’ to the entire region, and promotes bias against other European countries.

### **Europe in Iran’s History**

As argued so far, Europe and the West in general (particularly the British Empire, Russia and the US) feature prominently in the textbook as one of the major political players in the history of the country over the past two centuries. The text utilizes words such as foreign countries, outsiders<sup>27</sup>, colonizers, as well as Europe(an)/West(ern)/American frequently and interchangeably. It is estimated that each lesson contains at least 5-7 such references.

Europe (also broadly the West) constitutes an important part of the triangle of clergy, monarchy and colonizing states; the three leading political actors in Iran’s history that emerge in the textbook’s master narrative of struggle as explained earlier. Depicted as a rather monolithic and essentialized entity, the West is portrayed in terms of its ‘intentions’ to dominate Iran, use its resources and redefine its culture to its own benefit. Overall, four main and inter-related themes emerge from the analysis of the general story-line in each lesson, passages where Europe/West are mentioned/referred to as well as the sub-text in which they appear. The table below summarizes the themes and sub-themes.

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<sup>27</sup> بیگانه - اجنبی

<b>Interconnected Themes Related to the Role of Europe in Iran's History</b>
1. Aggression -Sub-themes: a) Direct Aggression: war, occupation, military invasion a) Indirect Aggression: cultural invasion, infiltration into the society
2. Domination -Sub-themes: Colonization, economic exploitation, political infiltration, interference in the country's affairs
3. Conspiracy -Sub-themes: betrayal, breach of commitments
4. Disrespect -Sub-theme: mistreatment of people

The textbook constructs the contemporary history of Iran with regards to the role of Europe/the West, as one of aggression, domination, conspiracy and disrespect towards cultural norms and values. **The theme of aggression** is best exemplified in recurring stories of *war* between Iran and Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Lesson One), the occupation of Iran during WWII by the Allied Forces (Lesson 11) and the Anglo-Russian treaty of 1907, numerous *political-military treaties, as well as economic concessions* signed with and in favour of the governments of Britain, France, Germany and the US (Lessons 1-18) as well as two stories of *coup d'état* (Lessons 7 and 14) devised in 1921 and 1953. Alongside the political and military aggression, the textbook refers to 'cultural invasion' – a term coined by Ayatollah Khamenei that refers to threats of the West to Iran's ideology, identity and values. In this respect, the textbook tells the students that;

Alexander's attack and the invasion of the Greek culture on Iran, was one of the first crises of identity in our country (p. 5).

The acceptance of Western thought, and unquestioning self-immolation<sup>28</sup> and mesmerisation<sup>29</sup> by the foreign culture, was one of the features of [the intellectuals] in the era of the Constitutional Revolution (p. 42).

[...] one of the cultural characteristics of the despotic rule of the Pahlavi, was the destruction of the authentic religious-national traditions of the Muslim people of Iran. This policy, in the name of modernity, promoted the decadent culture of the West and eliminated many of the representations of the national culture which are markers of the historical identity of Muslim Iranians (p. 226).

Mohammad Reza Shah's attraction to Western culture resulted in the weakening of [our] national identity (Iranian-Islamic) and cultural alienation in the society (p. 170).

<sup>28</sup> خودباختگی

<sup>29</sup> شیفتگی



Related to the theme of aggression is **domination** which emerges rather strongly in the textbook while it engages the students with the question “why [do you think] European countries infiltrated other countries? (p. 37)”. The textbook gives an answer by giving examples of pro-western monarchies who – under the influence and control of European/American countries – overlooked or actively gave up Iran’s national interests;

As the result of the Industrial Revolution the economy of the European countries blossomed [they therefore] were in need of consumer markets as well as cheap primary resources. The colonizers thus increased their pressure on other countries [...] during the reign of Nasser Al-Din Shah many economic concessions were granted to foreigners [...] without a doubt [those politicians] who were under the control of colonizing governments, played a key role in granting these concessions (p. 29-30).

As an extension of aggression and the intention to dominate, **conspiracy as well as a breach of commitments** frequently emerge in the textbook’s narrative of Europe/the West.

In light of the fact that all colonizers pursue their own interests [against] friendship with Iran, Napoleon signed a treaty with Russia called *Tilsit* and broke his commitments to Iran. The Iranian monarchy which was disappointed with France and lost hope in receiving support from them, approached the British Empire [...] however, similar to France, they also refused to adhere to their commitments and withdrew their missionaries from Iran (p. 22–23).

One of the conspiracies by the US and other colonizing countries against the Islamic Revolution was their effort to stop Iran gaining access to the knowledge of a peaceful nuclear programme in the years after the Islamic Revolution. That is the reason why Germany and Japan refused [to help Iran] construct Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant as agreed in contracts. These countries want to monopolize the valuable nuclear knowledge and prevent other countries from accessing it. This is why despite Iran’s membership in NPT and UNAEC’s supervision of Iran’s nuclear activities, the US and its allies try to close down Iran’s peaceful nuclear programme. This is while America owns many thousand nuclear bombs and in the late stages of WWII used these in Hiroshima and Nagasaki killing many innocent people (p. 209).

In comparison with the themes of domination, aggression and conspiracy, **disrespect and mistreatment** as directed towards cultural values and people, are less frequent in the text. It however appears in contexts where the textbook refers to the behaviour of European politicians and military. For instance, in respect to the Constitutional Revolution of 1907, the textbook reads;

One of the events that escalated the movement for constitutionalism was related to a Belgian official [who wore the attire characteristic of clergy to a new year’s party in Tehran, and offended conservative groups]. [The Constitutional Revolution] be-

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gan as a reaction against disrespecting the sacred values of the Muslim people of Iran (p. 45).

The textbook reduces a complex socio-political movement which established Iran's first parliament and transformed the government into a constitutional monarchy, into the mere act of a Belgian official at the time. It thus not only radically simplifies one of the most significant events in Iran's history but, moreover, limits the space to understanding the socio-political context in which it developed by pronouncing it an offensive act by a European official. By doing so, the passage redefines the importance of the movement in terms of disrespect shown by an external 'other', thus strengthening resentment against the West.

These four themes of aggression, domination, conspiracy as well as disrespect, this study argues, create and promote a deep sense of resentment against Europe/the West as a historical other. In the words of Shayegan, as noted earlier, such depictions suffer from a "hysterical language of obsessional rejection" (1992 p. 4). As he succinctly noted, it portrays

the West [in terms of] as a conspiracy of occult forces using their material power take possession of us, shake us to our very foundations, debauch our morals, corrupt our virtues and reduce us by degrees to a state of political and cultural slavery (ibid).

Such 'hysterical language' this study argues, fulfils a political purpose; it portrays the religious establishment as a fighter with external domination, aggression and conspiracy. Its underlying roots, however, should be partly traced back to the historical resentment that was born partly out of a contested past with unresolved controversies, that now have implications in politics at national and international levels. For the purpose of this research such a 'resentful' discourse is understood as problematic as it hinders critical engagement with the past and perpetuates animosity against the Western 'other', with limited space for reflection and amendments.

### **Discussion by way of Conclusion**

A growing body of scholarly literature in education has so far pointed to bias against the West in Iranian school textbooks. Paivandi's widely cited research *Discrimination and Intolerance in Iran's Textbooks* (2008) is one such example which concludes by arguing;

From the political standpoint and the perspective of Middle Eastern and Iranian history, the discourse of the textbooks can be considered "anti-Western." The "foreigners" referred to in

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the textbooks are none other than the Western countries and the U.S., which are continuously conspiring against the interests, national resources, wealth, and cultural values of the Muslim countries and which are considered potential and actual enemies. History, social studies, and religious studies textbooks have the highest number of criticisms of the West (p. 53).

Having analyzed how this grade 11 history textbook depicts Europe/the West, this study follows Paivandi's (2008) observation. It argues that the textbook portrays Europe as a monolithic, essentialized entity that has, throughout history, threatened the entirety of Iran; its geographical, political and economic sovereignty as well as its culture, identity and Iranian-Islamic values. Reflected in its master narrative, text and the sub-texts (its use of the Gregorian calendar, for instance), it criticizes the West for its (direct/indirect) aggressive as well as domination-seeking policies. Conspiracy and disrespect then remain salient features of Europe's colonizing attempts, as portrayed by the textbook.

From a pedagogical point of view, the textbook creates an external enemy against which religious figures emerge as the nation's ultimate saviors and freedom fighters. Drawing on a contested history between Iran and a number of European countries – particularly the British empire, Russia and the US – the textbook discourse reflects and promotes a deep sense of 'resentment' (Ashouri, 2016) and distrust towards the 'other'. Owing to the highly-modalized, descriptive language of the textbook which also suffers from increasing fragmentation, mystification and overall pedagogical confusion, this sense of resentment and mistrust is left with limited space for debate, critical analysis and reflection. In this sense, they are most likely to influence the students' perception of Europe rather negatively.

As such, the findings of this study agree with Paivandi's (2008) observation in that it also finds bias in the textbook's depiction of Europe and the West in general. It, however, critiques his argument that the textbook is simply "anti-Western". This study argues that the textbook should not *only* be regarded as the manifestation of the existing political view in the country but also as a continuation of a post-colonial discourse that holds unresolved 'resentment' (Ashouri, 2016) towards the 'European Other' from a contested past. In this regard, its discourse cannot be decontextualized from the history that gave rise to a 'resentful' language/attitude in the first place. While acknowledging that there is in fact bias within the text, de-contextualizing its content from history simplifies the matter and, more importantly, limits the possibilities of dialogue – at least within aca-

demic circles – about the way a contested history can be taught in order to promote reflection and critical thinking.

Taking the first step in this direction, this study suggests further research into frameworks that incorporate both theoretical and historical literature related to the contested history between Iran and the West/Europe. It emphasises the need for more studies to look into improving the textbook’s narrative with the aim of amending its biases, while acknowledging that any change will require political will and space if it is to be implemented. For that to happen, academic interest should be directed towards ‘improving the text’, as opposed to binary and simplified critiques which limit instead of inviting a new dialogue for change. There are already examples of positive transformations in Iran if/when permitted by the political space. In essence, this study encourages more research which should begin with a contextualized understanding of the textbook’s narrative, originating partly from a *contested history* and far predating the Islamic Revolution of 1979. By doing so, research can finally go beyond the binary notions of ‘for’ and ‘against’ in the textbook with the goal of understanding its discourse in terms of ‘resentment’ – rather than hatred and opposition – that can and should be resolved.

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