



*Abstract of a presentation presented at the International Conference on
"School Textbooks in the Greater Middle East: National Identity and Images of Self and Other"
June 28-29, 2011 – Jerusalem, Israel*

**Iran: Identity and Images of Self and Other in
the Islamic Republic's Elementary School Textbooks**

Eldad J. Pardo

The representation of Iranian identity of Self and Other following the 1979 Khomeini Revolution has attracted the interest of students of Iran. A new curriculum introduced in the early 1980s was supposed to help changing the country from a nationalistic polity to a holy universalistic-Islamic one. Scholars have pointed early on, however, to the limits of the Islamization project. Pride over the long history of the Iranian nation, the Persian language, poetry and kingship could not simply be erased, and built-in tensions among various elements of Iran's new identity remained. Even leaving aside the tension between the Iranian-Persian and Islamic images of the revolutionary identity aside, the Khomeinist worldview kept a number of inherent tensions unresolved. Chiefly among these are the tension between Shiite and non-Shiite Muslim identity, Persian and non-Persian minority and ethnic identities in Iran as well as the great dilemma of gender equality versus patriarchy and segregation.

Then comes the taxonomy of foreign nations, ideologies, religions and minorities according to categories of good, evil and tolerated in-betweens. In this context, attention has been given to the tension between nationalism and imperialism in Iran and the West, which entails dilemmas of peace and war, love and hate, downtroddenness and oppression as well as the chasm between creative life and the encouragement of self-sacrifice and martyrdom. Of particular interest is the tension between the modern, read Western-secular, worldview, and the Islamic Republic's revolutionary nativist-religious one. A new tension, arising in recent years, is the one between direct access to the Divine as against a Shari'a/government mediated access.

Drawing on recent editions of elementary school textbooks, my paper outlines, updates and evaluates the debate over the Iranian curriculum along the above mentioned lines of tension. It then studies the interconnectedness of three dimensions of identity: The "Big Other," or the Divine and His/Her expected role in the development of Iranian students' individual and collective psyche; the "gendered other," and her relation to Iran's collective identity; and the "civilizational self/other," or modernity, oscillating between a quest for cutting-edge science and apprehension about competing humanistic-secular worldview and history. Finally, I include in my discussion on identity areas concerning global citizenship such as the environment, sustainable energy and economic responsibility.