

# Islamization And Indigenization of Faculties of Education in the Islamic Republic Of Iran

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## Introduction

A year after the 1979 revolution that overthrew the monarchy and led to the establishment of the Islamic Republic, the religio-political leaders of Iran called for a Cultural Revolution (*enghelab-e farhangi*) that aimed at transforming higher education in the country. Universities were closed during the 1980-83 period in order to “purify” (*paksazi*) them from “counter-revolutionary” professors and students and Islamize the curriculum, deemed to be Westoxicated (*gharbzadeh*)—“inflicted” by Western thoughts and theories—especially in the social sciences and humanities. One of the faculties that was affected by the Cultural Revolution was education, the curricular content of which was transformed to create the “ideal Muslim”-- one who is pious and politicized, a devout Shi’i and a loyal follower of the revolutionary ideals and rule of the religious jurispudent (*vali-ye faqih*). The early revolutionary discourse on Islamization (*eslami sazi*) has more recently been supplemented by attempts at “indigenization” (*boomi sazi*)--emphasizing de-Westernization, re-Islamization, compatibility with the local culture and values, and prioritizing the “real” needs of the society.

The present article aims at studying the Islamization and indigenization of faculties of education in Iran. It seeks to answer the following questions:

- a) what are the roots of transformation at Iranian universities?
- b) what are the general goals of Islamization and indigenization in higher education?
- c) how have the faculties of education been affected by the dual attempts? and

d) how does education curricular content reflect attempts at Islamization and indigenization?

Content analysis of official documents and the education curriculum along with interviews with higher education authorities have been used to obtain information about the Islamization and indigenization process at faculties of education. The following sections will shed light on the goals of the 1980-1983 Cultural Revolution and the Islamization of higher education in general and faculties of education in particular. In addition, they will portray the more recent attempts to indigenize the curricular content.

### **Cultural revolution**

It is not possible to understand what happened in Iranian higher education after the 1979 revolution unless one is familiar with the 1980-1983 Cultural Revolution that shook Iranian universities and continues to define the framework in which they function, especially in the humanities and social sciences. The tenets of the Cultural Revolution (Sobhe, 1982; Razavi, 2009) remain at the roots of transformation in the universities. Islamization continues to be a top priority of Iranian authorities in the High Council of Cultural Revolution (HCCR) and the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology (MSRT) previously called the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education (MCHE).

The religio-political leaders of Iran have at all times emphasized that the 1979 revolution was first and foremost a cultural one that aimed at bringing a “revolution in values” (*enqelab-e arzesgha*). Fundamental transformation in the realm of culture has led to the “command of ideology” (Sobhe, 1982) in all areas. There has been an overt and direct attempt to enforce the revolutionary ideology, the essence of which is politicized Shi’ism. Schools were among the first institutions in which ideology took

command, marked by the “purification” of textbooks from pro-monarchy material and Islamization of the content; expulsion of “counter-revolutionary” teachers; banning of coeducation; and compulsory veiling of female teachers and students (Mehran, 2003). The remaining “trenches” (*sangar*) to be conquered were the universities—long time bastions of political activism and meeting ground of liberal, Marxist, and Islamic ideas. A year after the revolution, universities were declared to be “at the service of colonialists” (*este’ margaran*) and “dependent on foreigners” (*ajaneb*). In 1980, Ayatollah Khomeini called for the necessity of a “fundamental revolution” at all institutions of higher education, aimed at “filtering” professors linked to the “East (*sharq*) and West (*gharb*)” (referring to the then existing socialist and capitalist camps), and transforming universities into a “healthy environment for the development of high Islamic sciences” (*’olum-e ’ali-ye eslami*) (IRI, 2018).

Universities were closed for three years during which faculty members at the religious seminaries (*howzeh*) and universities, identified to be Muslim, committed (*mote’ahed*), pious (*mo’men*), and loyal to the Islamic Republic, were invited to form the Headquarters of Cultural Revolution, later transformed into the High Council of Cultural Revolution. The aim was to bring about a cultural as well as an Islamic educational revolution (*enqelab-e eslami-amuzeshi*) with the following goals:

- a) “selection” (*gozinesh*) and training of “competent” professors;
- b) “selection” of students; and
- c) Islamization of the university environment and transformation of the educational programs (IRI, 2018).

The “selection” process refers to the screening of candidates on the basis of their religiosity and ideological commitment. Once again in 1984, Ayatollah Khomeini warned the university community about the “deep rooted influence of the West” and the

need to replace it by the “Islamic, national, and revolutionary culture.” The same concern is stated in different words by Ayatollah Khamenei who warns about the “cultural aggression” (*tahajom-e farhangi*) of the “enemies” (*doshmanan*) against Islamic values and national culture, and emphasizes the need for a “national crusade” (*jihad-e melli*) against “scientific backwardness” and “cultural servitude” (*taba'iyat-e farhangi*) (IRI, 2018).

The specific measures taken at the higher education level once the universities were opened include establishing Islamic associations (*anjoman-e eslami*), “mobilization” (*basij*) units, and the university “crusade” (*jihad-e daneshgahi*); forming “discipline” (*enzebati*) committees to monitor the political and religious “commitment” of the university community; enforcement of compulsory veiling (*hejab*) among female members; construction of mosques and prayer centers, and, more recently, tombs for the martyrs of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war at university campuses; “uniting” the seminaries and universities (*vahdat-e howzeh va daneshgah*) leading to the increased presence of Shi'i clerics at the teaching and administrative levels; establishing the Foundation Representing the Leadership (*nahad-e namayandegi-ye maqam-e moa'zam-e rahbari*) where a representative of the office of Ayatollah Khamenei plays a key role in university affairs; Islamization of the content; and screening of professors and students on the basis of their religious devotion and political loyalty.

The High Council of Cultural Revolution has been assigned twenty-three responsibilities, some of which are directly related to the universities. The High Council is, first and foremost, assigned the task of preparing the “cultural engineering” (*mohandesi-ye farhangi*) plan of the country. Once it is deemed appropriate and possible

to “engineer culture”, it follows that all scientific and cultural principles, goals, and policies are planned by a highly centralized organization in the capital Tehran. The High Council is also responsible for planning and policy making in order to “develop and transform” the research and educational system of the country; confront the “cultural aggression of the enemies” in an active and innovative way; determine the criteria for establishing universities and “selecting” scientific and cultural administrators, professors, and students; determine the necessary policies for the rule and expansion of the “pure Islamic culture of Prophet Mohammad” (*farhang-e islam-e nab-e Mohammadi*); determine the policies to create “cultural” products on the basis of Islamic values and national criteria; provide the macro plan for the cooperation of religious seminaries and universities; and determine the policies for the revision and transformation of the content in the humanities and social studies, based on Islamic values and cultural necessities of the country (IRI, 2018).

### **Islamization**

Educational authorities at the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology state that Islamization and indigenization remain the top priorities in higher education along with the more recent addition of internationalization (*beynalmelali sazi*) in order to raise the worldwide rankings of Iranian universities. They view such measures as key steps in maintaining the “Islamic-Iranian identity” of the nation and remaining “loyal” to the national and religious beliefs of the people. They also criticize the inability of higher education, especially in the humanities, to address the “immediate needs” of the society (interviews with authors, January 20 and February 5, 2018).

According to Dangor (2005), the “Islamization project” is a response to the secularization of Muslim societies and their educational institutions. As such, Islamization refers to the process of “including Islamic disciplines in the curriculum and providing an Islamic perspective on issues in the syllabi” (p. 519). The Islamization process in Iran includes, but is not limited to, the dual goals mentioned above. It is also an indivisible part of politicization--political Islam lies at the foundation of educational transformation in the country. The interplay of Islamization and politicization in education has been studied by Mohsenpour (1988), Shorish (1988), Habibi (1989), Rucker (1991), Haghayeghi (1993), Wiseman and Alromi (2003), Sakurai (2004, 2017), Paivandi (2006), Hamdhaidari, Agahi, and Papzan (2008), Fozzi (2009), Settie and Mabokela (2009), Arjmand (2017), and Golkar (2017). The rule of political-religious ideology in Iranian higher education is illustrated in the General (*'omumi*) courses that have to be taken by all undergraduate students throughout the country. They have to take six General courses titled Islamic Culture, Knowledge, and Beliefs (*farhang, ma'aref va aqayed-e eslami*), which is a combination of Islamic teachings and the political ideology of the ruling leaders, including Islamic Knowledge, Islamic Ethics, History of Islam, Islamic Texts (in Arabic), and Islamic Revolution and its Roots (MCHE, 1994a, p. 7).

What is the goal of Islamization in post-revolutionary Iran? The answer lies in the official documents that determine the direction undertaken by authorities in their planning and policy making. The 2003 *Twenty-Year Outlook of the Islamic Republic of Iran* envisions the country as having an “Islamic and revolutionary” identity, inhabited by “pious” individuals who are “committed” to the revolution and the Islamic government (IRI ,2003, p. 1). The cultural policies of the *Twenty-Year Outlook* emphasize deepening

religious insight based on the Qur'an and the teachings of Prophet Mohammad and his family; keeping alive the religio-political thoughts of Ayatollah Khomeini; strengthening national identity based on Islam, Islamic revolution, and the Islamic government; and confronting “cultural aggression” and “global oppression” (p. 3).

The 2010 *Comprehensive Scientific Plan of the Country*, ratified by the High Council of Cultural Revolution, is an ambitious call for the “revival of the great Islamic civilization” (*tamadon-e eslami*) and establishing a “new Islamic-Iranian civilization” (*tamadon-e eslami-irani*) (IRI, 2010, p. j). Based on the “school of Islam and the revolution” (*maktab-e islam va enqelab*), the *Scientific Plan* seeks to promote Persian as an international scientific language and revive the “pivotal and historical role” of Iran in the Islamic culture and civilization (p. 6). The main strategies identified by the *Scientific Plan* are knowledge production based on Islam; Islamization of educational and research institutions; transforming the system of education on the basis of Islamic philosophy; educating “virtuous” (*motaqi*) individuals imbued with Islamic values; promoting the interaction of Islamic seminaries with universities; strengthening the “religious look” (*negah-e dini*) at science and scientific learning by promoting the teachings of the Qur'an, Prophet Mohammad, and the Shi'i Imams; facilitating the intellectual interaction of religious scholars; examining “un-Islamic” (*gheir-e eslami*) approaches in educational texts, including humanism and secularism, and revising them based on Islamic teachings; introducing Muslim scholars and their works; explaining the relationship between “modern sciences” (*'olum-e jadid*) and the teachings of Islam; writing about the history of natural sciences and mathematics during the Islamic civilization; acquainting students with the Islamic culture and civilization; compiling textbooks to deepen Islamic

teachings; using the fundamentals of Islamic and Iranian architecture in designing educational buildings; reforming teaching methods based on the viewpoint of Islamic education; revising the content of education and research to bring about abundance by the values of the Islamic revolution; and religious training and “empowerment” (*tavanmandsazi*) of the students (IRI, 2010, pp. 21-39).

The Islamization of the humanities is stated as one of the priorities of the 2010 *Scientific Plan*. It seeks to transform and strengthen the “human sciences” (*'olum-e ensani*) and direct the “elite” (*nokhbegan*) towards studying in these fields. The development of the humanities, however, is at all times based on Islamic foundations and linked with scholars in religious research centers. The *Scientific Plan* aims at attracting exceptional talents, creating centers to train the elite, and support research in the humanities if, and only if, it they are compatible with the Islamic viewpoint and use “competent” faculty members who are “in command” of the fundamentals of Islam (IRI, 2010, pp. 51-52). The priorities are Islamization of economics, sociology, political science, law, psychology, education, and management (p. 16).

The religio-political ideology is also reflected in the *Sixth Economic, Social, and Cultural Development Plan of the Islamic Republic of Iran (2017-2021)*. The cultural section emphasizes the preservation and promotion of “Islamic, revolutionary and national values,” strengthening of “cultural-religious” foundations, and support for “forces committed to the Islamic revolution” (IRI, 2017, p. 27). Promotion of the “Islamic identity” (*hoviyat-e eslami*) is declared as the main objective of “cultural engineering” and education is assigned the task of “engineering” human resources. There is, once again, a call for transformation in the system of education, especially in the

humanities at the university level. Human sciences are to be Islamized through changes in the curriculum and textbooks, training of faculty members, and “selection” of students (IRI, 2017, p. 17).

### **Indigenization**

The literature on indigenization (Cupples & Glynn 2014; Jackson, 2005; Smith, 2005) is accompanied by studies about euro-centrism (Alvares, 2011); neo-colonialism (Murphy & Zhu, 2012); post-colonialism (Adams, Luitel, Afonso, & Taylor, 2008); academic dependency (Alatas, 2008); and the creation of the “captive mind” (Alatas, 1974). Research on indigenization points to the “questioning of the self” in marginalized societies and calls for de-colonization (Chan-Tiberghian, 2004; Chinn, 2007); de-Westernization (Gunaratne, 2010); and a search for “alternative” discourses (Alatas, 2006).

Indigenization in the Iranian context is, to a large extent, a combination of de-Westernization and Iranianization. It should be noted, however, that the authorities of the Islamic Republic view Iran as part of the Muslim world and the country is always referred to as “Islamic Iran” (*Iran-e eslami*). Indigenization is a recent addition to the official terminology in the country. “Indigenous needs, standards, capacities, production, science, and technology” are mentioned in the *Scientific Plan* without further explanation (IRI, 2010, pp. 3, 7, 25, 27). The term is clarified to some extent in the short explanations about the need for the “critical study of the West” (*gharb shenasi-ye enteqadi*) (p. 17) and “critical confrontation” with translated texts in the humanities (p. 51), referring to the dominant use of Persian translations of Western textbooks. There is a direct call for the replacement of “foreign” (*biganeh*) terminology and emphasis on the

use of Persian in all fields of study in an effort to transform the latter into a “scientific language” (*zaban-e 'elm*) (p. 52). Indigenization of the humanities and making them compatible with and responsive to the “real needs” of the country is a top priority of the 2010 *Scientific Plan*. The ultimate aim of indigenization is to train “local” experts and promote “self belief” (*khod bavari*) and “national empowerment” in order to safeguard the future needs of the country (p. 54).

The two pillars of cultural transformation in Iran have affected higher education in Iran. The following sections will provide a general overview of faculties of education, followed by an illustration of attempts to Islamize and indigenize the curricular content at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

### **General overview**

Higher education is highly centralized and “engineered” in the Islamic Republic. As a result, the curricular content of all programs offered at faculties of education in public and private universities are determined by the Education Committee (*komite-ye 'olum-e tarbiyati*) of the Humanities Group (*goruh-e 'olum-e ensani*) at the High Council of Educational Planning (*shora-ye 'ali-ye barnameh rizi amuzeshi*) or, more recently, the Council of Higher Education Planning (*shora-ye barnameh rizi amuzesh-e 'ali*) (hereafter referred to as the Council) at the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology (MSRT, 2001a, p. i). The Council determines the title of courses, number of units, duration of studies, prerequisites, electives, nature of courses (theoretical, practical, general, specialized), goals (*ahdaf*), intended results of each course, detailed curriculum (*barnameh-ye darsi*), course content (*sarfaslha*), teaching-learning methods, and sources in Persian, English and/or Arabic. For some courses, the Council even determines what

to teach in each weekly session (MSRT, 2014b). In reality, not every student at every faculty of education is taught exactly the same thing. Diversity among students and professors, individual preferences, and exigencies of time and place do not lead to such uniformity and standardization, yet this is what is deemed appropriate by the authorities at the Ministry.

It is apparent that for a long period of time universities have not had official independence in determining the content and structure of programs offered at faculties of education. They are obligated to implement the decisions made by the authorities in the Council and ratified by the Ministry. At certain points of time, however, education departments have volunteered or been invited to participate in “transforming and revising” the curriculum and/or designing new or updated content. This has been true in the master’s and doctoral programs since 2003.<sup>1</sup> Although education faculties are “allowed” to propose and design the curriculum of selected programs, they are “permitted” to teach the courses if, and only if, the content is approved by the Council at MSRT to ensure that it leads to the creation of a “committed expert” (*motekhasses-e mote’ahed*) (MSRT, 2016a, p. 3).

At present, Iranian universities offer one undergraduate, eleven master’s, and seven doctoral programs in education, some of which have been thoroughly transformed or revised (*baznegari*) during the past decade. Different faculties of education offer different programs at the undergraduate and/or graduate levels. A single program is offered at the undergraduate level titled Education (*’olum-e tarbiyati*) (MSRT, 2015b) with four branches to choose from: Educational Administration and Planning; Educational Technology; Education of Children with Special Needs; and Pre-Primary and

Primary Education. Students have to take 140 units, including a final research project, to obtain a bachelor's degree in education. The four year program consists of the following courses: basic (*payeh*) (20 units); major (*asli*) (70 units); specialized (*takhassosi*) (18 units); and electives (*ekhtiyari*) (10 units) (MSRT, 2015b, p. 17). The remaining units include general (*'omumi*) courses taken by all students. The most recent curriculum was ratified by the Council of Transformation and Promotion of the Humanities (*shora-ye tahavol va erteqa 'olum-e ensani*) at the High Council of the Cultural Revolution in 2015. It is designed to replace the ones ratified in the 1980s and 1990s. The curricular content is presented in 233 pages including a full description of the “appropriate” structure and content of each course along with detailed instructions on how to implement it.

Universities offer eleven programs at the master's level. The following are the titles along with the dates on which the content was ratified by the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education (MCHE) and later High Council of Educational Planning at MSRT: History and Philosophy of Education: Islamic Education (MCHE, 1989); Adult Education (MCHE, 1993); Educational Research (MCHE, 1994b); Education (MSRT, 2001a) with three branches (Comparative Education, Primary Education, and Pre-Primary Education); Education and Improvement of Human Resources (MSRT, 2003); Educational Technology (MSRT, 2014a); Curriculum Studies (MSRT, 2014b); Educational Evaluation (MSRT, 2014e); Higher Education Administration and Planning (MSRT, 2015a); Philosophy of Education: Teaching Philosophy to Children and Young Adults (MSRT, 2016a); and Educational Administration (MSRT, 2016b). Students have to take 32 units, including a thesis, to obtain a master's degree. The course work can be

finished in three semesters and students spend a semester or two to complete their research.

Iranian faculties of education offer seven programs at the doctoral level including Educational Administration (MCHE, 1995); Psychology and Education of Exceptional Children (MCHE, 1999); Higher Education (MSRT, 2001b) with five branches (Higher Education Administration, Economics and Financial Management, Development Planning, Curriculum Planning, and Information Technology); Assessment and Measurement (MSRT, 2005); Educational Technology (MSRT, 2008); Philosophy of Education (MSRT, 2014c); and Curriculum Development (MSRT, 2014d). Students need to take 36 units, including dissertation, to obtain their Ph.D. The doctoral program is divided into two sections: educational (*amuzeshi*) during which students take three semesters of course work, and research (*pazhuheshi*) when they work on their dissertation. Students are obliged to complete their studies in eleven semesters (MSRT, 2014d, p. 3).

### **Pillars of educational transformation at the faculties of education**

Authorities in the Islamic Republic have made every effort to pre-determine the courses taught at faculties of education. They have drawn and heavily guarded the boundaries within the “approved” framework. More than anything else, they have attempted to enforce uniformity and discourage individuality and autonomy. The ultimate goal has been what the 1980 Cultural Revolution originally aimed at—namely, Islamization and de-Westernization of education, more recently referred to as indigenization. An attempt will be made to illustrate how the two pillars of educational transformation are

implemented at the faculties of education through a critical analysis of the curricular content since the 1980s.

### **Islamization**

Islamization is an integral part of the 2015 Education undergraduate curriculum. It is presented as a key factor in the “reform, revision, and critique” of ideas that openly oppose religious principles and “Iranian people’s belief in Islam” (*eslam bavari*) (MSRT, 2015b, p. 11). Higher education authorities view Islamization as a means to reach “cultural self belief” (*khod bavari-ye farhangi*) and “pure life” (*hayat-e tayebeh*), as expressed in the teachings of Islam (pp. 13-14). Among the strategies introduced by the Ministry to Islamize the curriculum are identifying the “rich Islamic-Iranian cultural heritage” in education; developing the Islamic philosophy of education; drawing educational concepts from Islamic texts; introducing the original educational thoughts in Islam; identifying research methods that are “compatible” with Islamic education; and producing books and articles based on Islamic principles and religious teachings (pp. 11-14). The undergraduate curriculum in Education seeks to ‘empower’ students by deepening their religious beliefs and “developing their thinking abilities based on the Islamic culture;” promoting the understanding of Islamic moral values; deepening the students’ “knowledge of the self” (*khod shenasi*) based on religious texts; and enabling them to conduct research based on Islamic teachings (pp. 15-16).

How is the content of Education curriculum Islamized in practice? The first step is including courses with a religious content. Among the ten basic courses offered at the undergraduate level, four have an Islamic title and content, including Islamic Education, Educational Ideas of Muslim Thinkers, Educational Teachings of the Qur’an, and Family

in Islam. There is also a specialized course in the Educational Administration and Planning branch titled Fundamentals of Islamic Administration (MSRT, 2015b, pp. 19, 23). Islamization also takes place by including the following themes in the content of courses in Education: the teachings of Islam; religious seminaries (*howzeh*) as centers of Muslim education; goals and methods of training Shi'i clerics (*talabeh*) at seminaries; fundamentals of religious education; teachings of Prophet Mohammad and the Shi'i Imams; educational implications of Islam; Islamic life style; educational ideas of (Arab and Iranian) Muslim thinkers; methods of education in Islam; characteristics of Islamic education; moral education from an Islamic viewpoint; Qur'anic teachings; importance of education in Islam; relationships in Muslim families; Islamic models of child rearing; the concept of motivation in Islamic texts; psychological therapy based on Islamic culture; role and importance of management from the viewpoint of Muslim scientists; the Islamic-Iranian model of progress in management; psychological aggression from the viewpoint of Islam; Islamic view of child development; Islamic educational leadership; Islamic view of professional ethics among educators; using Qur'anic tales to promote thinking among children and young adults; religion and mental health; culture, religion, and media; fundamentals of human communication in Islam; human behavior from the point of view of Islam; Islamic approach to organizational behavior; social services in Islam; history of social work in Islam; importance of pre-primary and primary education based on Islam and the viewpoint of Muslim thinkers; Islamic viewpoint on personality; individual difference in Islam; Qur'an and psychology; learning from the point of view of Muslim philosophers; and psychological approaches in Islamic texts (MSRT, 2015b, pp.

32, 34, 36, 42, 44, 46, 48, 51, 53, 56, 57, 58, 59, 62, 63, 65, 66, 100, 116, 124, 150, 151, 155, 181, 204, 213, 214, 222, 228).

Yet another attempt to Islamize the Education curriculum has been the introduction of Islamic sources to the students' reading lists. Examples are the following books in Persian, some of which are published by Islamic centers established after the revolution including: *Great Muslim Educators* published in 2013; *The Ideas of Muslim Thinkers on Education (Four Volumes)* prepared in 2006 by the Office of Cooperation Between the Seminary and University (*dafter-e hamkari-ye howzeh va daneshgah*), founded shortly after the 1979 revolution to create a link between religious scholars at the seminaries and university professors; *Education in Islam* (2001) by Ayatollah Morteza Motahari, a leading ideologue of the Islamic Republic; *Developmental Psychology with a Glance at Islamic Sources (Two Volumes)* (2011); *Fundamentals of Education in the Qur'an* published by the Islamic Culture and Thought Research Center in 2008; *Family in Islam* (2014); *Comparative Study of Family in Islam and the West* (2013); *Responsible Child Rearing in Islam* (2012); *Research on Islamic Educational Issues* (2012); *Research on the Training of Shi'i Clerics* (1980); *Islamic Morality* (2008); *Organizational Ethics in the Words of Imam Ali* (2000); *Professional Ethics in Islam* (2002); *Mental Health in Islam* published by the Office of Islamic Propagation in 2003; *Islamic Administration* (2014); *Management in Islam* (2015); *Fundamentals and Principles of Islamic Administration: A New Approach to Management in the Third Millennium and (the) Globalization (Era)* (2004); *The Ideas of Great Muslim Educators on Child Development* (1987); and *The Psychological Viewpoint of Ayatollah Mesbah-e Yazdi* published by Imam Khomeini's Education and Research Center in 2006 (MSRT, 2015b).

There is less emphasis on Islamizing the curricular content at the master's level. Some specializations offer Islamic Education as a prerequisite, basic course, or elective (MCHE, 1993, pp. 7, 28; MSRT, 2014b, p. 6; MSRT, 2001a, p. 8; MSRT; 2016a, p. 8). A number of graduate courses include Islamic concepts such as legal rights of teachers and administrators in Islam (MSRT, 2016b, p. 28); philosophical and political thought in Islam; leadership and administration based on the Islamic viewpoint (p. 30); Islamic ethics (p. 35); Islamic view of children and childhood (MSRT, 2016a, p. 10); teaching philosophy to children from the viewpoint of Islamic philosophy (p. 15); philosophy for children in Muslim nations (p. 24); Islamic values; happiness in Islam; Islamic educational methods (MSRT, 2001a, p. 31) and the religious foundations of curriculum planning (MSRT, 2014b, p. 16). Similar to the undergraduate program, sources on Islamic education are included in the students' reading lists at the master's level, especially in Educational Administration. Examples are *Principles and Fundamentals of Administration from the Viewpoint of Islam* published in 2005; *Politics and Administration from the Viewpoint of Imam Ali* (2000); *Imam Khomeini's Leadership Strategy* (2005); *Islamic Thoughts in Administration* (2005); *Fundamentals of Islamic Humanities* (2004); and *Methodology in the Humanities from the Viewpoint of Muslim Thinkers* (2003) (MSRT, 2016b, pp. 18, 31-32).

The teachings of Islam have a special place in the master's program titled History and Philosophy of Education: Islamic Education. Ratified in 1989, it seeks to train educators who are familiar with the philosophical principles of Islamic education, able to teach and conduct research in that realm, and use Islamic philosophy to lay the foundation of educational goals in Iran. The addition of this program, a decade after the

1979 revolution, was deemed necessary to bring about an “Islamic university” (daneshgah-e eslami) (MCHE, 1989, pp. 3, 6). The program is comprised of thirteen courses, three of which are about Islamic and Shi’i teachings: Islamic Education, Educational Thoughts of Shi’i Imams, and the Teachings of Imam Ali (p. 7). The content of the course on Islamic Education includes the history of education in the Muslim world; principles and goals of education in the Qur’an, the words of Prophet Mohammad, and the Shi’i Imams; education in traditional schools (maktab) and seminaries (howzeh ‘elmiyeh) in Qom (Iran) and Najaf (Iraq); educational methods in Islam; education and ethics; as well as the governance of religious jurisprudence (velayat-e faqih) and education (p. 16). Religion is a central theme in the curricular content covering the role of education in Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Islam (p. 24). In addition, sources on Islamic education written by Iranian and Arab scholars are introduced to the students (pp. 32-33).

Islamization of the master’s program in Educational Technology has taken an interesting turn in recent years. In 2014, the Council of Higher Education Planning revised the 1995 curriculum, replaced a course on Advanced Islamic Education, and introduced Pathology of Virtual Spaces (with a Religious-Islamic Approach) (MSRT, 2014a, pp. 15-16). The goal, as stated by the Council, is to use “religious-ethical teachings based on Islamic values” in producing educational software and “protecting” the country from the import of products that “are not compatible with our culture, values, and ideology” (p. 7). The result is the design of three courses. One is titled Philosophy and Ethics in Technology and contains a large portion of religious teachings on how to prevent “moral damages” while using technology and avoid “counter value” (zed-e

*arzeshi*), “anti-Islamic” (*zed-e eslami*), and “unethical” (*zed-e akhlaqi*) issues in virtual spaces (p. 36). In the course on Web-Based Education, students are introduced to the necessity of web-based education in Islamic education and use of teaching models practiced at the religious seminaries (p. 60). Religion plays a significant role in the course on Pathology of Virtual Spaces in which students are made aware of the adverse impact of such spaces on the “religious-Islamic attitudes of individuals in society.” They are informed about the “danger” of using virtual spaces among the youth and their tendency towards “new mysticisms” (*erfanha-ye nozohoor*) and “satanism” (*sheytan parasti*) (p. 42). Among the sources introduced on the reading list are books in Persian, including *Critique of the Trend in Rising Mysticisms* (2009) and *An Introduction to Real and False Mysticisms* (2008), as well as articles in English titled “Satanism and the Decline of Morality” (1991), “Satanism in America” (1989), and “Media Construction of Satanism in Norway” (2005).

Islamization, establishment of an “Islamic university,” teaching the “religious foundations” of curriculum development, adopting an “Islamic orientation” in policy making, training curriculum specialists with a strong “religious foundation,” and introducing the educational issues of Islamic countries are among the goals of the doctoral program in Curriculum Development (MSRT, 2014d, pp. 1, 2, 3, 32, 35). As a result, the course on the Philosophical Foundations of Islamic Education discusses the principles of education in Islam, the aims of Islamic education, and how the educational philosophy of Islam and the teachings of the Qur’an and Shi’i Imams have affected the curriculum (p. 8). A number of books are introduced to students including *Religion and Curriculum* (2008), *Why Religious Education?* published in 2010 by the Center for

Islamic Education Studies, and *Educational Schools of Thought in the Islamic Civilization* (2005). Other sources on the reading list have been prepared by Islamic centers, including the Education Institute of Imam Khomeini's Research Center; Iranian Society for Islamic Knowledge; the Islamic seminaries; the Foundation Representing the Leadership (of Ayatollah Khamenei) at the Universities; and the Research Center of the Office for the Cooperation of the Seminary and University (MSRT, 2014d, pp. 9-11).

The doctoral program in Philosophy of Education also aims at reviving the teachings of Islam, addressing the influence of Islamic philosophy on education, and studying the ideas of prominent Muslim philosophers in the field of education (MSRT 2014c, p. i). Prerequisite or elective courses offered are titled Islamic Philosophy, Philosophy of Islamic Education, Education from the Viewpoint of the Qur'an, and education in Imam Ali's *Nahj al-Balagheh* (pp. 3, 5, 24-26, 30-32). Curricular content is filled with discussions about the Islamic approach to education; philosophical foundations of education based on Islamic texts; and the Islamic philosophy of Iranian education (pp. 13-14, 35-36). References to Muslim educators include both Arabs and Iranians (p. 33) and the books on the reading list are in Persian and Arabic—published in Iran, Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt—as well as English (pp. 26, 32, 37).

### **Indigenization**

Although the term Islamization has appeared in official educational documents as well as curricular content since the 1980 Cultural Revolution, the term indigenization is quite recent. The 2015 undergraduate curriculum in Education defines indigenization (*boomi sazi*) as “paying attention to the antiquity and depth of the Iranian-Islamic culture” and the “richness” of the theoretical and practical foundations of education “in

our dear country Iran” (MSRT, 2015b, p. 9). It also aims at responding to the real and urgent needs of the society. The key words used in the discourse on indigenization are “adaptability” (*sazvuri*), “suitability” (*tanasob*), “context” (*matn*), “compatibility” (*senkhiyat*), “knowledge of the self” (*khod shenasi*), and “belief in one’s culture” (*khod bavari-ye farhangi*) (pp. 9, 11, 15). A sense of pride, nostalgia, and regret is clearly felt when the Ministry notes that long before teaching philosophy to children became popular in the world, the “East” (*mashreq zamin*) valued thinking and logic and prepared stories to develop philosophical and creative thinking among young adults based on the “rich Islamic culture” (MSRT, 2016a, p. 3). This indicates a return-to-the-roots movement and a response to the dominance of Western theoretical frameworks in education. Forty years after the revolution, despite continuous calls for de-Westernization, Iranian universities are still criticized for being “imitations” (*taqlid*) of Western institutions of the past (MSRT, 2014b, p. 3).

The Western viewpoint has been criticized by Iranian authorities for neglecting the “spiritual dimension of humanity” and focusing only on the “biological, psychological, and social aspects” (MSRT, 2015b, p. 9). What is the alternative offered by the Islamic Republic? The answer is familiarizing university students with the teachings of Islam and the “indigenous (*boomi*) culture” in the field of education (p. 15). Understanding “indigenous problems” in education (p. 16); designing “indigenous educational models” (p. 89); offering school guidance and counseling with regards to the “Islamic and indigenous culture” (p. 92); using “indigenous stories” in teaching thinking to children and youth (p. 100); and career counseling based on “cultural and indigenous foundations” (p. 112) are attempts at indigenization at the undergraduate level.

Indigenization in the curricular content of the master's and doctoral level includes the addition of such concepts as the need for "indigenous research" (MSRT, 2016a, p. 4); learning about successful educational models in the world and making them compatible with "indigenous-cultural conditions" (MSRT, 2014b, p. 57); "indigenizing the curriculum" and taking into consideration the "indigenous" needs of the "Iranian-Islamic society" (MSRT, 2014a, pp. 1, 4, 8); the necessity of "indigenous education" (MSRT, 2014c, p.1); and having an "indigenous orientation" in national policy making (MSRT, 2014d, p. 3).

Indigenization is in fact a combined effort to re-Islamize and Iranianize the curricular content of education. Although as far as Iranianization is concerned, the attempt to deal directly with national issues includes offering merely two courses titled History of Education in Iran Before and After Islam and Pre-Primary, Primary, and Secondary Education in Iran at the undergraduate level (MSRT, 2015b, pp. 19, 29-31, 38-41). The curricular content at the master's level comprises of three courses on the History of Education in Iran and the World; Seminar on the Comparative Study of Educational Problems in Iran and Other Countries in the World; and Critical Study of Educational Planning and Curriculum Development in Iran (MSRT, 2001a, pp. 6, 7, 11-12, 25, 27). Two courses titled Administration and Strategies of Research Centers in Iran and the World (MSRT, 2001b, p. 5) and Philosophical Foundations of Education in Iran (MSRT, 2014c, p. 4, 13-15) are the ones that directly address education in Iran at the doctoral level. The Ministry has included national educational experiences in weekly sessions and introduced sources on education in Iran.

It is apparent that in the duality of Islamization and Iranianization, the former is deemed more important by education authorities who always present Iran as part of the “Islamic world”; introduce Iranians as first and foremost Muslims despite the fact that Iran is, and has always been, inhabited by non-Muslims as well; and refer to the culture as an Islamic-Iranian one. One can, therefore, conclude that indigenization is just a more recent version of Islamization and a continuation of the “revolutionary” attempt to reduce the influence of Western thought. In reality, Western schools of thought and the ideas of prominent Western thinkers continue to exist in the scientific discourse at the faculties of education. Idealism, realism, pragmatism, existentialism, Marxism, (neo) liberalism, (post) structuralism, and (post) modernism are among the theories introduced along with the teachings of Islam in education (MCHE, 1989; MSRT, 2014c). It is true that every effort is made to introduce the achievements of the Islamic world and familiarize the students with the thoughts of Muslim scholars throughout time, yet it does not mean that they are not exposed to what the West has introduced to the world. In a statement on the goal of a master’s level course titled Fundamental Theories in Comparative Education, it is stated that since “comparative education is a global science with emphasis on the identity of different civilizations,” this course aims at helping students understand the ideas of theorists in both the “developed and developing” countries of the “north and south” (MSRT, 2001a, p. 22).

### **Concluding remarks**

The transformation of Iranian higher education has been one of the goals of an ongoing cultural revolution that aims at Islamizing the universities and “purifying” them from “Western elements.” Islamization has never been restricted to religious teachings and has

always been accompanied by politicization and an attempt to instill the ruling religio-political ideology. The ultimate aim of cultural transformation at institutions of higher education has been the creation of a “committed expert” who is pious and loyal to the ideals of the revolution and the ruling leaders. Islamization has recently been accompanied by indigenization. The term refers to a three-dimensional effort at de-Westernization, return to the Islamic-Iranian roots, and responsiveness to the needs of the country. The command of the religio-political ideology in the highly centralized system of higher education in Iran is portrayed in the pre-determined curricular content, designed by the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology and implemented by public and private universities throughout the country. The Islamization and indigenization of the humanities and social sciences in Iran, including the faculties of education, is a priority of authorities who warn against the dangers of “cultural aggression” by the “enemy” and insist on the need for the transformation of educational content based on the philosophy of Islam and the “Islamic-Iranian” model. The result is re-Islamization and calls for the indigenization of the content and sources.

Yet almost forty years after the onset of the 1980 Cultural Revolution that sought to Islamize and de-Westernize the universities, the authorities of the Islamic Republic are still concerned about the existence of “un-Islamic approaches”—such as humanism and secularism—in higher education. An analysis of curricular content offered at the faculties of education points to the paradoxical co-existence of two realities. On the one hand, every attempt is made to include Islamic courses and sources, and address the “indigenous” context in the syllabi. On the other hand, a significant part of many courses consists of Western theories and thoughts. The above paradox remains to be a challenge

for the authorities who have sought to bring about an Islamic revival and enforce the ruling religio-political ideology at Iranian universities since the 1979 revolution.

#### Notes

- 1 At the master's level, curricular content has been revised, updated, and designed in such programs as Education and Improvement of Human Resources designed by Shahid Beheshti University in 2003; Educational Technology prepared by Isfahan University in 2014; Curriculum Studies proposed by Kharazmi University in 2014; Philosophy of Education: Teaching Philosophy to Children and Young Adults designed by Shiraz University and Kharazmi University in 2016; and Educational Administration prepared by Ferdowsi University in 2016. Doctoral programs have been transformed or designed by education departments at Allameh Tabatabai University including Assessment and Measurement in 2005 and Educational Technology in 2008 as well as Tehran University including Philosophy of Education and Curriculum Development in 2014.

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