

Imam Khomeini and Mandela's Views of Education: Lessons from Iran's Cultural Revolution and Decolonial Thought in South Africa

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Abstract

Throughout the world, education policy makers perceive the role of education as critical in building the future. Conscientious education planners often consider aspects such as relevance linked to features like culture, progress and citizenship when they plan their education systems. For many, education is the only process that can transform the ills in society and help bring equality and equity. Furthermore, it is through effective education that countries can redress anomalies in language, patriotism, history, culture and nationalism. This article explores the role of education in two countries, the Republics of South Africa and Iran, and how education's role has impacted in supporting a changing society. It traces the philosophy and beliefs of two leaders, Sayyid Ruhollah Khomeini and Nelson Mandela. Khomeini perceived religion and the clergy as critical in education that would engender purity in students. Mandela as a young man learnt from his elders that the oppressed black people had nothing, hence in examining him the paper examines decolonization and the role of education in bringing about liberation and epistemic freedom. Among the commonalities between the two was that both leaders sought to rid education of the damaging effects of exclusive Western knowledge. But there are differences too. On the one hand, Mandela's philosophy was based on basic human rights and equality for all, yet on the other, critics have pointed out that Khomeini's dream of purity in education excluded women.

Keywords

Decolonization, Islamization, Relevant Education, Revolution, Western Knowledge

1. Introduction

The main purpose of this article is to examine how the former president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela (post 1990) and Imam Khomeini of Iran's philosophies perceived the role of education. Whilst both were not decolonial activists, their philosophies embraced principles that supported decolonization. The two of them acknowledged the destructive nature of much Western knowledge and modernization on education. Yet before examining the philosophies of the two leaders and their impact on education, the focus will be briefly on education policies in the two countries before the end of apartheid (in South Africa) as well as before 1979 (in Iran) during Mohammad Reza Shah's rule. Mandela and Khomeini were also aware of the critical nature of education as a process of pedagogy and teaching; this instruction encompasses skills, values, morals, beliefs and general personal growth. Whilst this article focuses on formal education, it should be acknowledged that education also happens in informal settings. Additionally, although informal education occurs outside the structured curriculum, it becomes part of learners' upbringing. [Alam and Muzahid \(2006\)](#) point out that informal education is a lifelong process and all learners acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from daily experiences. These authors state that Islamic teachings and values have been passed on to children for generations as informal Islamic education. [Alam and Muzahid \(2006: p. 87\)](#) opine:

Islam encourages its followers to achieve the highest degree of human virtue i.e. Ihsan that is also the root of Islamic spiritualism and morality. In Islamic moral teaching it is to be remembered that we will have to provide an account to the Almighty Allah on the Day of Judgment for all of our actions on earth (Q'uran 2:281). Informal Islamic education aims at producing spiritually and ethically developed human beings. This Islamic perspective can effectively be imparted to the people of the society in the informal setting of Islamic education through its different ways and the people will be able to play the vital role to build a society being enriched with moral and spiritual values.

All this leads to a healthy society when it comes to morality and spirituality. Similarly, in his book, *Long Walk to Freedom*, [Mandela \(1995\)](#) writes about the value of informal education in his Xhosa community. He relates how he learnt through the experience of watching adults and tried to mimic what they did. He learnt customs, rituals and taboos from observing his community. The games they played as children were pivotal in teaching them about life. [Mandela \(1995: p. 14\)](#) posits, "As I look back to those days I am inclined to believe that the type of life I led at my home, my experiences in the veld...introduced me at an early age to the ideas of collective effort." It is critical to examine how this informal learning is linked to formal education in institutions of learning. In all countries, governments constantly draw up the policies and role of education and what it should achieve in facilitating the learners' growth, preparing them for the future.

Hamdhaidari (2008) explains that under the Pahlavi Dynasty (1941-1979) there were strides towards Westernization and modernization. However, there were also challenges when it came to education; education produced uncritical technocrats. Hamdhaidari (2008: p. 22) claims that educational institutions also supported rote learning and the curriculum did not reflect the local content. The institutions of higher learning produced graduates who were not relevant for the needs of their country. The universities in Iran became centres for waging opposition as they pursued calls for universities as bastions of freedom (Hamdhaidari, 2008; Ferreri, 2014). The Pahlavi Dynasty was established in 1925. Reza Shah ruled until 1941 and then his son, Mohammad Reza Shah, ruled after the father and both were supporters of Westernized Iran. His reforms between 1960 and 1963 were known as the White Revolution. By the White Revolution the Shah sought to speed urbanization and modernization.

Whilst some perceived the Westernization program as effective in a rapidly changing society, it was changing the traditions and culture of the Iranians. In an authoritarian fashion the Shah ended Iran's Legislative Assembly in 1961. The power of the clergy was reduced, and the White Revolution was to lead to the 1979 Islamic Revolution which was instigated by the religious, social and economic sentiments of the people (Hamdhaidari, 2008). Furthermore, in modernizing Iran, the Shah changed the school's role. The Shah wanted Iranians to be educated and prosperous, but some Iranians perceived the reforms as undermining of Islamic law. The Shah's regime had three goals for education, and these were nationalism, secularization and using education to accomplish these goals. Khaki and Baht (2014: p. 134) point out that the education system became a major instrument for advancing westernization. Additionally, 'the schools were to promote patriotism (Mihan Parasti), loyalty to the nation, national unity and national independence'.

Mohammad Reza Shah invested time and money into building a strong education system, but he also encountered challenges that led to his downfall in 1979 (Marcy, 2010: p. 16). Mohammad Reza Shah sought to follow what his father Reza Shah wanted to achieve before him and that is to use Western technology to modernize Iranian citizens.

2. Brief Literature Review

Education is a political act; it is a social phenomenon that needs to fulfil the aspirations of the people. Therefore, educational practices are influenced by certain ideologies and should we want to bring qualitative change in educational practices we ought to recognize the close proximity of ideology and education (Laursen, 2006; Dawn, 2009). Ideology refers to philosophy which encompasses a set of beliefs and all over the world education has been influenced by ideology. However, various experts such as Paulo Freire (1970) and Gramsci (1970) have perceived the role of education as an instrument to close the gaps that exist in society as it empowers the populace. Progressive education should always ensure

that it does not increase the gap between the affluent and the poor. Dawn (2009) contends:

Recently there have been calls for qualitative improvement in education. The required improvement cannot come from cosmetic changes. The problem is far deeper. We need to challenge ideologies associated with notions of education, pedagogy, learning, assessment and the aim. Education has to move from transmission to transformation for which we have to revisit our definitions of knowledge.

Simmie and Edling (2016) point out that since the beginning of public schooling there has been an ideological battle for knowledge and values needed in moulding learners into moral people who become relevant to their society. Various ideologies have influenced education and schooling and over the years, in various parts of the world schooling has had to accommodate religion, be it Christianity, Islam, Judaism or Buddhism. Even within one religious group, there would be competition, for example between Protestantism and Catholicism. Lynch (2016) highlights five ideologies of educational philosophy that may benefit education, and these are nationalism, ethno-nationalization, liberalism, conservatism and Marxism.

Nationalism - has to do with the identity of a nation which helps people to understand its uniqueness. At schools learners' knowledge about symbols, beliefs, myths and collective memory will be underscored.

Ethno-nationalism - this is about loyalty to a certain ethnic or racial group. Yet, in a multicultural or multi-ethnic society, ethno-nationalism can create problems as seen in history such as the Rwandan genocide or the Gujarat vs Punjab tribes in India.

Liberalism - this ideology maintains that people should enjoy choices. Liberals are opposed to restrictions and believe that liberation of human rights will lead to progress. "The key elements of liberalism include the liberal concepts around property and the economy, rationality and the power of reason, secularism, individualism, progress, representative political institutions, and education for general citizenship" (Lynch, 2016).

Conservatism - this is the opposite of liberalism. Conservative education believes in the sustenance of the traditional curriculum. Conservatists are wary of individualism and change. To the conservatists, the role of education is academic and schools should not weaken themselves by assuming non-academic functions.

Marxism - initiated by Karl Marx, Marxism maintains that the class system in society opposes the social, political and educational domains. The Marxist ideology seeks learners who are critical thinkers.

How did the above ideologies manifest themselves in Iran and South Africa? Although Islam has been present in Iran for more than 14 centuries, Islam as a general system was never implemented in the country and this included schools (Shorish, 1988). Yet, after the 1979 Islamic Revolution the role of Islam in edu-

cation was strengthened. Shorish (1988: p. 60) spells it out clearly:

The Iranians are very clear about the aims of education, and their expectations are very high that books will eventually lead to the creation of the Islamic person. This person is variously defined by scholars, but it is the following: God-fearing (*muttaqi*), learned (*'alim*), and brave (*shuja*). (These, incidentally, are also the criteria for election of a person to the leadership of the Muslim community, the *Ummah*).

The Islamic Revolution in 1979 sought to achieve these ideals as it moved towards the Cultural Revolution. Education reinforced Islamic pedagogy and the entire process of education was intent on eschewing from Western ways. The concept of *adab* was promoted—this refers to the process when people liberate themselves or break away from wrong and evil thoughts and actions through orderliness and discipline (Shorish, 1988). In fact, much literature points out that the Islamic Revolution in 1979 transformed various fields, especially the education system (Sajjadi, 2015). Furthermore, the education officials created an ideological educational system which included “promoting Revolutionary—Islamic behaviors in schools, modification of teacher training centres, making changes in the cadre and the educational content, ... applying to the ideology to the plans and revolutionising the educational environment (Sajjadi, 2015: p. 824). Godazgar (2001) gives examples of areas where the political ideology of the Islamic Republic was cultivated, and these include history, philosophy, Arabic literature, religious education, extra-curricular activities and Persian literature.

In both countries, Iran and South Africa, the transformation of education was necessitated by Western domination and education that instils an inferiority complex in the indigenous people. In a book review reminiscent of Frantz Fanon (1967) and Steve Biko (1987), Bangash (n.d.) writes on how Western education demeans the traditional Iranian education. Bangash (n.d.) expands on this (colonization) issue:

In fact, university education in most Muslim countries was imposed by the colonial powers for a specific purpose: to create brown replicas of the white man but instilling in them a deep sense of inferiority complex. The colonialists may have physically departed Muslim lands, but the system they imposed continues to produce cheap replicas of the West.

Western education has other peculiarities. It first undermines a student's self-confidence and then forces him/her to become an automaton to serve as a cog in the huge wheel of capitalism... In the Muslim world, Western education also detaches students from their traditional societal values of honesty, decency and integrity. Universities, therefore, serve as breeding grounds for promoting Western ideas in traditional Muslim societies.

It was for these reasons that the Islamic Revolution was intent on transforming the role of education with Khomeini elevating even the role of teachers as he likened them to prophets. Similarly, decolonial scholars in Africa and the dias-

pora have always highlighted the need to disengage from exclusive Western models. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) points out that there is a need to deprovincialize Africa and provincialize Europe. Europe should not be seen as a yardstick, for it is merely a province of the world. The calls for decolonization are calls for epistemic freedom and cognitive justice. They are also appeals to ensure that it is not only Europe or the West at the centre but all knowledges of the world should matter. Some decolonial struggles in Iran were identical to those in South Africa. One aspect is the English language. Fatemi, Ghajar and Bakhtiari (2018) write how haggling has risen among Teaching of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) scholars who argue that the English language needs to be structured to meet the demands of Islamic education. Fatemi et al. (2018) contend that Islamic values and epistemologies have suffered from marginalization caused by Western knowledge. The exclusive promotion of English has led to exclusion, stigmatization or suppression of other local languages (Fatemi et al., 2018; Zeiny, 2021). Zeiny (2021) argues that Western influences turned Iran into a dependent country especially due to the Qajar and Pahlavi eras. Additionally, Zeiny (2021) points out that there is necessity for a new epistemological frame to give legitimacy to marginalized epistemologies. Yet, what is common between modernizing Islamic education and trying to decolonize education in South Africa is the idea of realizing the role of ecologies of knowledge. Ecologies of knowledge refer to the various kinds of knowledge in existence from South, East, West and North. Musa, Syukri and Marzuki (2021) affirm that after the Islamic Revolution in 1979 the modernization of Islamic education continued to be encouraged; Iranian education was arranged in such a way that it continued utilizing the principles of Islamic teachings and there was a balance maintained between religious education, science and technology. Additionally, Islam had used the term “modernization” as can be seen in the concept, *tajdid* which also refers to some form of renewal. However, modernization according to Islam should not be excessive nor should it be coerced modernization (Musa et al., 2021).

3. South Africa and Mandela: Implications for Decolonization

Mandela has uttered so many critical thoughts about education and its role in society and one of them is, “Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor and the son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine...” (Soweto Urban, 2018). Mandela perceived the role of education as a process that leads to equity, equality and social justice, especially when education is based on effective values that can help people transform their world for the better. Furthermore, evident in the quotation above is the belief he had of education as a leveller in society. Speaking at the Education Africa Presidential Awards, Mandela (1997) postulated:

The power of education extends beyond the development of skills we need for economic success. It can contribute to nation-building and reconcilia-

tion. Our previous system emphasized the physical and other differences of South Africans with devastating effects. We are steadily but surely introducing education that enables our children to exploit their similarities and common goals, while appreciating the strength in their diversity. We need to educate our young people to become adults who cherish the values of respect for women and children proclaimed in the National Men's March today.

Mandela as president led a government that magnified the role of education to include a special role of nation building and reconciliation after years of apartheid policy. In fact, education had a huge role to play from ending white supremacy to curricula that sought to unite the nation. The post-apartheid curricula role is supposed to shape new identity. This education system after freedom in 1994 also sought to address apartheid's anomalies because education is pivotal in maintaining racial and cultural segregation in the old South Africa (Soudien & Baxen, 1997). The post-apartheid system demanded a curriculum that would build a new nation and it embraced a "process that is more sensitive to the multiplicity of differences that have animated South Africa's 300-year-long history of interrogation of those differences" (Soudien & Baxen, 1997: p. 457). Therefore, the post-apartheid system of education was not only an attempt to merely change the education system, but it served the purpose of transforming society. The transformation of education in South Africa resonated with Mandela's ideals of freedom and democracy. The later calls for a decolonised system of education are calls to ensure that education becomes relevant and reflects the African landscape rather than Europe (Msila, 2020). The decolonial project is also looking for a system that accommodates various knowledges than a system that exclusively centers Western knowledge.

In his book, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Nelson Mandela (1995) describes an event when he and his age mates came back from the mountains where they were made men as a come-of-age Xhosa cultural practice. This event is usually a time of festivities when everyone celebrates the coming of age of the initiates; the initiates are teenage boys who had graduated into manhood in the Xhosa society. Mandela (1995: p. 65) remembers the words of one chief who spoke to the new men. He was Chief Meligqili, the son of Dalindyebo, who pointed out:

There sit our sons, all looking young, healthy and handsome. We have circumcised them, but none will ever become a man because we are a conquered people and slaves in our own country. For the rest of their lives they will cough their lungs out deep down in the bowels of the earth because we have no land to give them where they could prosper and multiply as whites do. Among them are chiefs who will never rule because we have no power to govern; soldiers who will never feel the thrill of fighting for their own country because we have no weapons. But Qamata (God) never sleeps and will never let us down.

Mandela agrees that he was to later hear such words from the African National Congress (ANC) elders he met in Johannesburg, people such as Xuma, Dadoo and Selope. Mandela was aware of the barbarism of black education as the academic Tabata (1980) did. Tabata referred to education reserved for black people in apartheid South Africa as nothing more than *education for barbarism*. The education system taught learners about the supremacy of the white race. Tabata opines about the divisive and demeaning nature of South African education. It is interesting to note that although some may think that missionary education was better than apartheid education, there is much proof that, like the apartheid system, some English missionary schools regarded black people as inferior and could not be given a curriculum that was too academic; instead, they should be trained to be labourers (Christie, 1988; Msila, 2007). Mandela (1995: p. 163) refers to Bantu Education as an education system that divides, again a statement earlier postulated by Tabata (1980). Mandela (1995: p. 163) understood the role of education under apartheid to be destructive to the black person:

But a study of the provisions of the principal apartheid legislation shows that the real aim is not only to keep the races apart but to maintain the country's traditional policy of white supremacy. The Bantu Education Act 1953 was originally intended to create an educational system for Africans which would conform with the government policy and permanently restrict the African to an inferior position in all spheres.

The calls for change of the education system in South Africa after 1990 was meant to address these and many other anomalies in the education of all children in South Africa, hence the discussion here on how Mandela's ideas on education and many other debates fed the calls to decolonize education in South Africa. Yet before there were widespread debates about educational changes in basic education, the Education Ministry or the Department of Education (DoE)—now referred to as the Department of Basic Education (DBE) - tried to bring in a system that was to address the miseducation of children practiced under apartheid education. The first post-apartheid system of education in South Africa was outcomes-based education (OBE) which was based on a philosophy that envisioned an improved quality of education. This philosophy was to manifest itself in the Curriculum 2005 curriculum. Although OBE failed in South Africa because, among other concerns there, was much resistance and it allegedly confused teachers who could not handle the changes, the systems that followed have their roots in OBE philosophy and Curriculum 2005. The following were the systems of education that the DBE has tried over the years since 1997, after the demise of apartheid.

OBE & C2005 - this was introduced to improve the quality of education adapted to learner strengths and weaknesses;

National Curriculum Statement (NCS) - expresses knowledge, skills and values worth learning;

Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) - strengthens Curriculum

2005. It is committed to outcomes-based education and it sought to reinvent education that embraced democracy

Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) - this is the system meant to ease the administration burden on teachers and provide clarity on what needs to be taught.

The new system of education introduced after apartheid was an attempt to eradicate the dehumanizing apartheid education. The role of learners and their teachers was transformed. The envisaged pedagogy no longer regarded the learner as a blank slate or a tabula rasa. There was a belief that the learner brought much to the classroom which could be used for education purposes. Several authors have written about the promise of post-apartheid education in South Africa and what it needs to address (Christie, 1992; Msila, 2007). The post-apartheid education was an attempt to ensure that learners faced the realities of their communities. It was to ensure that education did not alienate the learners from their surroundings. Msila (2020: p. 14) writes:

Donaldo Macedo (1993) portrays the *Pedagogy of Big Lies*, in which he explains what schools do; that is to promote a pedagogy that propagates the inability to think critically. This is literacy for stupidification; stupidification results to education for domestication. Macedo (2000) (in Chomsky) writes about teaching tasks which lead to dumbness; where teachers treat learners as tabula rasas. The latter is an education alienated from the learners' realities. Colonial and apartheid education entrenched this kind of education, a pedagogy of lies where education was manipulated by colonial governments.

In transforming education in Iran, there was an attempt to bring the learners back to relevant education, focusing not on big lies but on truth, relevance and purity. The system also wanted to address the concerns that Iranians had about education under the Pahlavi; that it did not promote critical thinking. Below, the focus is on how Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini envisaged Iranian education after the Islamic Cultural Revolution.

4. Iran and Khomeini

Ayatollah Khomeini used religion as a basis of his education philosophy in Iran and his notions of education were different from those of the Shah before him hence he proposed the need for the "purification of education". Some have referred to Khomeini's educational ideology as radical Islamization (Khaki & Baht, 2014). Khomeini perceived education as a weapon to instil a cultural revolution, a tool that would also enhance ideological and religious reform which he felt was necessary (Khomeini, 1981; Bangash, n.d.; Pazargadi, n.d.). Education was also supposed to lead in restoring Islamic culture whilst it created a new moral order. Unlike the impoverishing the students' religious beliefs under the Shah, Khomeini called for going back to religion. In fact, in the Islamic Republic of Iran the envisaged nearness between God and people is very clear as the goals and

policies spell this out. [Mohsenpour \(1988: p. 85\)](#) highlights how Iranian education strengthens the beliefs of students:

The ideals of education in the Islamic Republic of Iran should strengthen the beliefs of students with respect to 1) oneness to God; 2) prophethood and revelation; 3) resurrection and its constructive role in the journey of human beings toward God; 4) justice of God; 5) Imamate and the leadership of the pure Imams; and 6) the dignity of humanity, its superior role, its freedom, and its responsibility before God.

Iranian school texts became pivotal in uplifting religion and patriotism. Religious socialization became supreme as anti-Islamic and colonial culture of the Pahlavi regime were eliminated ([Khaki & Baht, 2014](#)). Khomeini sought to eradicate western education and utilize culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In work translated by [Pazargadi \(n.d.\)](#) Khomeini underscores the above by emphasising the role of religious, cultural and social values in education so that it evolves into a true Islamic society.

Furthermore, in Iran the main role of education is to ensure that learners are prepared for a divine life that draws them closer to the Almighty God, a life where a pure society is envisioned. Purity refers to pure life and pure society undergirded by spirituality. Education is divided into two sections; K-12 and higher education. Over decades Iranian education shifted from pre-Islamic Iran to modern day education. From its inception, education in Persia was geared at ensuring that people would gain knowledge so as to understand God and succeed in their lives. However, whilst the focus was on religion there were classes in the arts, the military and politics amongst others. From these earliest times, education developed over centuries with emphasis on Islamic values and science. The advent of the 1979 Islamic Revolution brought many educational reforms where politicians sought to ensure more emphasis on Islamic values. It was after this revolution that the Iran society experienced the Islamization of reading materials. Islamic law and religious ceremonies at schools became more critical as the society started posing more questions as to what the role of education was supposed to be in Iran. Therefore, Islamization of education was introduced as opposed to Eastern or Western education.

[Khomeini \(1981\)](#) was concerned about academics giving the university a foreign-oriented education. He was also opposed to attempts to separate academics from theologians. The university according to the Imam was a convenient tool to control Iran and Western-oriented Iranian made it easy for the foreigners to make Iranian students turn to East and West for knowledge development. Imam [Khomeini \(1981\)](#) pointed out:

Some have turned the university into a bunker for fighting, and another group comprised those who were against Islam altogether and against Islamic education at the university... They are still engaged in their acts and make use of the group who is against the reformation of the university, and those who have given themselves up to the East or West bloc. Our youths

should be aware of such designs and know that it is through the university that a nation may be reformed or destroyed.

Furthermore, the Imam was concerned that, on the one hand, if the East wins it would end Islamic ways in all Islamic countries, whilst on the other hand, if the West wins it would destroy the culture as it would westernize it. Education, the Imam declared, should be for independence and that it should serve the nation rather than foreign powers. Furthermore, Khomeini added that it would be a disservice for the Iran nation and its government to pay for an education that is not relevant. According to the Khomeini, Moscow, London and Washington were not going to be their aegis but the Kaaba was. The Imam also highlighted the fact that without really understanding what Islam stands for with regard to education people criticise it for being opposed to knowledge. [Khomeini \(1981\)](#) is also quoted as saying:

Our difficulty lies in the fact that we are faced with people who without considering the problems and aspirations of the nation, declare as soon as it is said that such and such a centre must become Islamic, that it means that there should be no specialization. They intend to show to the world that Islam is opposed to knowledge and specialization, whereas the verses of the Holy Qur'an have emphasized the worth of knowledge and science to an extent unparalleled in other books.

There are a lot of disjunctures in understanding this, but it is clear that specialization should be of service to the Muslims. It is for example not right to trivialize the Islamization of universities by inferring that there is no need for medical doctors or technology experts. One of the myths spread to youth in Iran is that Iran cannot be self-sufficient but needs the East and the West; these are part of the fallacious arguments that seeks Iran to either Easternize or Westernize. The role of education should be to oppose subservience because the latter becomes an education that is not productive to Iranians. The Imam bewails the fact that after many decades using public funds universities in Iran cannot be called self-sufficient; when a patient is seriously ill he has to be taken to England or the East for treatment. Yet the westernized teachers and professors continue to brainwash the youth because they impart corrupt training. Education needs to serve the nation and its needs. The fear of the Imam was not economic sanctions or military intervention from the East or West – but it was “... cultural dependence. We fear a colonized university that trains our youths to serve the West or Communism. We have no wish that our university be similar to the people who object to this policy.” The Islamization of education since the Revolution in 1979 ensured that there was a break from the West pertaining to culture and spiritual aspects. Furthermore, there was a desire to succeed in competition with the West. [Sajjadi \(2015\)](#) delineates four discourses that had a huge impact on the education system after the 1979 Revolution:

- 1) Islamic Revolution (1979-1987)

- 2) Construction Discourse (1987-1995)
- 3) Reformation Discourse (1981-2005)
- 4) Fundamentalism Discourse (2005-2012)

Below, these are briefly explicated:

Islamic Revolution - this included the creation of the Revolutionary-Islamic behaviours. These include “modification of teacher training centres, making changes in the cadre and the educational content, creating the Institute of Educational Affairs in order to promote revolutionary values ...” (Sajjadi, 2015: p. 322).

Construction Discourse - the performance of government and the political system had implications for the education system. These were supposed to increase political awareness of the citizens.

Reformation Discourse - the reformation period was about enhancing the political awareness, and, in addition, it had a huge impact on the educational system. Many political reforms led to direct and indirect influences on the educational system.

Fundamentalism - the period of fundamentalism discourse was necessitated by a need to respond to conditions that developed in the political, social and educational environment of the reform era. The fundamentalism period was about promoting the revolutionary and Islamic values.

The education system in Iran is perceived as playing a critical role in social transformation. Like in many other countries, education is seen as a tool to obliterate ills such as poverty and inequality and it also promotes social justice (Khaki & Baht, 2014). Looking at the history of education and leadership in Iran, one finds that despite differences Khomeini and Pahlavi have appreciated education. The leaders regarded education as a major contributor to effect changes in the ideology of society. Yet one sought to take the path of Westernization whilst the other fought for Islamization. Before and after the 1979 revolution, however, education had an important role to play in changing society. Much of the change in the Iranian society and education is credited to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. However, some have been critical on the reforms after the revolution especially Islamic Feminists who maintained that the system was not accommodating women progress in the Iranian society (Shavarini, 2005).

5. Khomeini, Women Education and the Iranian Society

Whilst Mandela’s philosophy is undergirded by the human rights agenda as he tried to build a free, non-racial democratic South Africa, many intellectuals questioned Khomeini’s human rights agenda pertaining to women in higher education (Hoodfar & Sadr, 2010; Winn, 2016). The introduction of the new education system after the Islamic Revolution brought with it several debates which questioned its legitimacy (Winn, 2016; Shams, 2016). A number of critics were against the system because amongst others, Ayatollah Khomeini refused to implement the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organiza-

tion's (UNESCO's) educational agenda (Farokhinia, Rasoli, & Salimi, 2022; Rezaee, Saadatmand, & Rahmani, 2022). Khomeini regarded UNESCO's agenda as Western conspiracy although some people referred to this as discriminatory against women (Shavarini, 2005). However, Khomeini maintained that UNESCO pronouncements on education were based on "corrupt and devastating Western style" which cannot be acceptable in the Islamic Republic of Iran (Iran Front Page, 2017). UNESCO is a United Nations body whose main mission is to constantly want to build peace through international cooperation.

There are vital differences between the Fundamental Transformational Document of Iran's Education (FTDIE) discussed above and the UNESCO 2030 agenda. Farokhinia et al. (2022) point out that the FTDIE document does not support equality of men and women and it also promotes gender stereotypes. Furthermore, Farokhinia et al. (2022) demonstrate that UNESCO 2030 agenda is inspired by humanist and family values whilst the FTDIE is influenced by the Shiite Islamic ideology. Various discussion papers have demonstrated that there are challenges in the FTDIE because it does not open beyond religious values (De la Camara, 2012; Shams, 2016). Rezaee et al. (2022) discuss how education needs to prepare global citizens who embrace qualities such as democracy, human rights, non-violence and various forms of social justice. All these are characteristics supported by UNESCO. Rezaee et al. (2022: p. 1800) debate about ways in which the curriculum such as social studies tends to be monotheistic and not be open in preparing learners to be global citizens.

The UNESCO's Education 2013 agenda pronounces that girls, boys and women should all be empowered equally by education (Plan International, n.d.). Furthermore, during the revolution, women had hoped for a better future as they played a huge and meaningful role. However, when Khomeini came into power, he created the first true and pure Islamic state where women, including professional women, were expected to go back to household duties appropriate to their gender (De la Camara, 2012; Winn, 2016). Women were discouraged from pursuing higher education and were supposed to follow good values and purge Western influence. Additionally, they were supposed to serve husbands and properly raise children (Shavarini, 2005; Shams, 2016). Education in schools reflected this role that women needed to embrace. In social studies books for example, women were portrayed as offering guidance on Islam and schoolwork. There are several contradictions though when it comes to the post revolution era and Khomeini's policies. Women are said to have been exposed to a number of opportunities that were non-existent during the Pahlavi era, and this includes their growing numbers at Iranian universities. This growth led to the establishment of Islamic Feminism, a movement that ensured that women enhanced their legal and social standing (Winn, 2016).

Shavarini (2005) maintains that as the number of women in higher education grew, the government feared this growth hence it initiated a debate on a necessity for quotas to be introduced thus regulating the number of women in higher

education. Some of the concerns were that the large number of women attending higher education would be a threat to patriarchy in the Iranian society (Shavarini, 2005). Therefore, whilst there were gains such the opening up of debates as women used the Koran to justify the need to improve their status, it appears that the shortcomings became an obstacle as well. New laws were found to be limiting to women's abilities to appear in public (Winn, 2016). In addition to this, veiling became enforceable and strict segregation was instituted in institutions of higher learning. Women were not allowed to register in 78 fields of study (Rezai-Rashti, 2015).

6. Conclusion

This article demonstrates that education changes as circumstances transform in countries. In fact, when education fails to change, the country will be stagnant when it comes to progress. In Iran, the 1979 Islamic Revolution brought with it a new era that heralded a recognition of Islam, the clergy and education that promoted virtue. The education as envisaged by Khomeini broke away from over emphasis on modernization and Westernization as embraced by the Pahlavi Dynasty before. The transformation of education in Iran was not without haggling though for as the discussion shows, women and men were not deemed equal. The question of human rights becomes critical in this regard. However, in his book, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Mandela draws from the wisdom of his elders as to what education should be and how it should impact on learners and the world. It is an education for empowerment, it is the process to liberate the country and ensure equality among all citizens. Mandela has also been unequivocal as to what education should mean for a country. Below are some of his quotes when it comes to education:

- “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”
- “The power of education extends beyond the development of skills we need for economic success. It can contribute to nation-building and reconciliation.”
- “Young people must take it upon themselves to ensure that they receive the highest education possible so that they can represent us well in future as future leaders.”

Mandela's thoughts and influences embraced the decolonial thought. The decolonial debates in South Africa have revealed why education needed attention to transform the country towards epistemic freedom and cognitive justice. Both leaders Khomeini and Mandela sought education systems that would lead to stable societies although there would be paradoxes in Khomeini's vision when it comes to equality. Yet, Khomeini wanted education that would lead to purity; and this is where learners are prepared to enhance the society and improve the economy through values and morality. In South Africa, the role of education includes the forging of equality to lead to a democratic society, different from the

one in the past which was built on colonialism and apartheid.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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