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 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

2008

ANTI-BAHA'ISM AND ISLAMISM IN IRAN

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Introduction

Over the course of the past 50 years, the Iranian political discourse has continually misrepresented the Baha'i religion as a foreign entity. This xenophobic attitude is the culmination of a relentless campaign of purposeful forgetfulness aimed at representing a religion that emerged in the second half of the thirteenth/nineteenth century from the heart of Shi'i academic seminaries and Iran's religious culture. The exile of the Babi and Baha'i leaders to Baghdad following the attempted assassination of Nāsir al-Dīn Shah in 1268 (AH)/1852 paved the way for alienating and 'Otherizing' this Shi'i-Iranian movement.² In the historical narratives that proliferated in the 1320s/1940s, its leaders were successively declared to be agents of the governments of Russia, the Ottoman Empire, Great Britain, and Israel – their ultimate goal: to infringe the 'religious and national unity' of Iran. The spread of these narratives, which misrepresented the Iranian Baha'is as outsiders, was concomitant with the height of a campaign aimed at the effacement of 'the Alter' in Iran's national policies and political practices. The persecution of Baha'is and Jews, the campaign against 'materialists,' and measures such as the political acts of terror that marked the 1320s/1940s may all be considered signs of instituting a policy of effacing 'the Other' into Iran's political culture. The decade that is recognized more than any other as the period in which popular movements blossomed was also an era that witnessed the public acceptance of 'conspiracy theories.' The diffusion of these theories, which suspected 'foreign hands' of directing Iran's affairs, was in and of itself a catalyst toward 'Otherization' and the cleansing of other religions and thought systems from Iran's religious and political life.

In Iran, ghettoization and effacement of 'the Other' was concomitant with self-praise and self-acclaim. Although anti-Baha'ism had, for the most part, subsided during the reign of Riḍā Shah, it was violently rekindled in the 1320s/1940s. Its peak in this decade was concurrent with the founding

of an Islamist movement. This movement, which sought to construct an Islamic future for Iran, crystallized all the while being in direct conflict with the Baha'i religion. Throughout this confrontation, in which this same movement achieved the propagation and spread of Islam throughout Iran, Islamic organizations and publications maintained a conspicuous plan for the gradual genesis of a 'Shi'i public sphere.' This sphere became systematized by conjoining mosques, centres for religious mourning (*takāyā*), organizations, and homes that served as sites for religious ceremonies. It created a 'counter public' vis-à-vis the 'national public sphere,' which until then, had not only been receptive to public dialogue, the exchange of differing views and the birth of a new culture and identity in Iran, but also inclusive of the adherents of all religious traditions. In the course of propagandistic campaigns aimed at thwarting the spread of the Baha'i religion, this Shi'i sphere was transformed into a powerful force that in 1327/1948, under the leadership of Ayatullah Burūjirdī, succeeded in incorporating Islamic education into the curriculum of primary and secondary schools. The government and the royal court, which had both garnered religious legitimacy in the 1320s/1940s and the early years of the 1330s/1950s through their protection of the Shi'i public sphere, began to face a crisis of leadership in early 1334/1955. In that year, Ḥujjat al-Islam Muḥammad Taqī Falsafi waged a denigrating attack against the Baha'is on a radio program aired daily in Ramaḍān. Following these vilifications, Tehran's military authorities occupied and destroyed the Ḥaẓīrat al-Quds (the administrative and devotional centre of the Baha'is of Tehran). The coordinated aggression against individual Baha'is and Baha'i institutions in all parts of Iran, which transpired a mere ten years after the Jewish holocaust in fascist Europe, drew the concern of the world's Baha'is to these Iranian citizens. The protest of Baha'i Assemblies throughout the world to the United Nations and the reaction of the international community in defence of the rights of Baha'i citizens alerted the Iranian government to the fact that, after the genocide of the Jews in Europe, the effacement of 'the religious Other' was incompatible with the new political protocol and the prevailing civil code of conduct.³ With the government distancing itself from the anti-Baha'i policies of the clerical establishment, the joint state-clergy project became more and more inclined to internal opposition and dispute. The direct confrontation between the two in 1341–2/1962–3 was the culmination of a disunion that began after the occupation and subsequent destruction of the Ḥaẓīrat al-Quds.

In this paper, I will undertake a study of several of the interrelated dimensions of anti-Baha'ism and Islamism in the period between 1320–34/1941–55.

The Otherization of Baha'is

The mode of encounter with the Babis and Baha'is over the course of the past one hundred and fifty years may be divided into two general phases. In

the formative phase, which commenced in the 1260s [AH]/1840s, the clashes with Sayyid 'Alī-Muḥammad the Bab, his followers and the Baha'is, were disputes deeply ingrained in issues of Shi'i eschatology. These initial confrontations laid the groundwork for changing the understanding of such concepts as 'the Lord of the Age' and 'expecting the advent of the Hidden Imam' (*intiḏār*) in Shi'i jurisprudence. In the second phase, which took shape around the 1320s/1940s, these disputes gave way to a political discourse declaring a genuinely Iranian religion that had emerged from within the heart of the land's religious culture, to be entirely a machination of colonialists and imperialists. This period, which was contemporaneous with an upsurge in Baha'i propagation activities, witnessed the formation of numerous Islamic institutions throughout Iran for the explicit purpose of contending with the Baha'is. Once established, these organizations immediately set out to publish and circulate their positions and views. In this public mobilization effort, the Shi'i clergy both laid the foundation for numerous organizations and established the political discourse that paved the way for the attainment of political power at the threshold of the 'Islamic revolution.' The 'Otherization' of Baha'is in the political discourse played a decisive role in the crystallization of the concept of a 'Muslim nation of Iran.' In doing so, the discourse accused all other religions of being party to a colonialist plot to destroy the 'unity of the Muslim nation.' Furthermore, it misrepresented all Iranians who were not Muslim or who did not share in the ideals of a 'Muslim nation' as outsiders and, what is more, agents of foreign powers.

The polemics of Ḥājj Muḥammad-Karīm Kirmānī (1225–88 [AH]/1810–71), the spiritual leader and exemplary guide of the Shaykhīs, provides an example of the first confrontations with the Babis. Kirmānī believed that Sayyid 'Alī-Muḥammad the Bab 'was the perpetrator of . . . innovations that contradicted the exigencies of Islam, Shi'ism, and their essential nature.' After listing the 'innovations' of the Bab, at the conclusion of his *Risāla-yi tūr-i shahāb dar rāndan-i Bab* (Treatise of the Flaming Bullet to Expel the Bab; 1262 [AH]/1845–6), Kirmānī advanced the following motives for the Bab's adherents: 'Some followed him for the purpose of gaining some position of leadership, others because they were infatuated with changing the government and the prevailing social conditions, some as an act of enmity towards any form of government, others to spread injustice and oppression in the world, and so forth' (Kirmānī, M.K. 1387/1967: 210–11). In Kirmānī's aetiology of the Babi movement, 'each person' joined the Babis 'due to some vain imaginary idea' and thus, 'made famous the cause of this worthless and deceptive man' (Kirmānī, M.K. 1387/1967: 220).

In his *Risāla-yi sulṭāniyya* (Treatise of the Monarchy; 1275 [AH]/1859), written at the request of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah, Kirmānī elucidated the point that 'during the occultation, it is unlawful for men . . . to wage the sword and revolt (*bi-shamshūr khurūj kunand*).' He explained: 'In this way, we pronounced the Babis who instigated men to wage the sword and revolt and

who took an oath of allegiance from these people, to be demons. Moreover, we wrote books against the Bab and against the waging of the sword before the advent of the Imam, peace be upon him, and published these works in various parts of the world' (Kirmānī, M.K. 1277/1860: 219–20). In these polemics, the Babis' revolts (*khurūj*) and their conflicts with the state were the basis for alleging them to be 'misguided, misguiding, and infidels.' Ḥājj Muḥammad-Khān Kirmānī (1263–1324 [AH]/1847–1906), the son of Ḥājj Muḥammad-Karīm Khān, proceeded to refute the Bab and his followers based on the same Shi'i standards (Kirmānī, M. 1342/1923: 262).

In suit with countless other 'ulama, in his work, *Irghām al-shayṭān fī radd ahl-i bayān* (The Coercion of Satan: Refuting the Babis'; 1342 (AH)/1923), Shaykh Zayn al-'Ābidīn Nūrī-Shah Ḥusaynī Tihirānī likewise explicated the differences between the Shi'a and the Babis on the basis of Shi'i criteria. In this monograph, written to refute *Al-īmān fī iḏhār nuqat al-bayān* ('Faith in the Manifestation of the Point of the Bayān'), Tihirānī set out to cite and disprove, one by one, all of the issues presented in that treatise. In seeking to draw attention to the changes the movement experienced during the ministries of Mīrzā Ḥusayn-'Alī Baha'ullah (d. 1892) and 'Abdu'l-Baha 'Abbās (d. 1921), Tihirānī wrote:

That which can now be seen and heard from the Babi and Baha'i sects regarding the need for good manners and the observance of courtesy is all due to the fact that they have become aware of how erroneous the initial goals of their leaders had been. For this reason, they decided to change their methods. It reached the point where 'Abdu'l-Baha himself dreamed up the idea of inviting the divided nations of the world to universal peace; heedless of the fact that a world war was approaching and the very opposite of what he had desired would occur.

(Ḥusaynī 1342/1964: 392, 396)

In his *Risāla-yi uṣūl-i dīn va kashf al-khaṭā-yi muslimīn* ('Treatise on the Principles of Religion and Disclosing the Errors of the Muslims'), Mīrzā 'Alī-Akbar Mujtahid-i Ardabilī Ḥājjib al-A'imma regretted the fact that, 'We are observing how some of the cowardly and unprincipled abandon Islam and become Babis.' He then briefly cited and vehemently refuted the 'obscene' claims of the Babis and Baha'is. For the most part, these polemics were aimed at citing the Arabic mistakes in Babi texts and mentioning reports such as 'the immodesty and indecency of the Babi and Baha'i sects where men and women gather together in the same meeting, with the lights turned off, and commit adultery by having intercourse with each other's wives' (Ardabilī Ḥājjib al-A'ima 1334/1956: 313, 318). In these polemics, the active role of Qurrat al-'Ayn in the Babi movement was assumed to have been a sign of the immorality of the Babis.⁴

The works of Aḥmad Kasravī (d. 1324/1946) mark at once, the final stage of studying the common foundations of the two religions and the beginnings of a new form of religious criticism. In stark contrast to other trends that took shape in those years, of which *Yād-dāshthā-yi kinyāz dālgurukī* (the Memoirs of Count Dolgoruki) is the example *par excellence*,⁵ Kasravī believed that Baha'ism was founded on Babism, which was founded on Shaykhism, which was founded on Shi'ism and Mahdism, and 'all of these have nothing save imaginary foundations.' Kasravī argued that Mahdism was incompatible with the laws of God (or better said, the laws of nature).

He explained that Mahdists 'imagine that the Mahdī will arise with an overwhelming force, transcend the natural laws of the world and carry out deeds that are beyond the abilities of other (normal) men.' On the basis of this presumption, they believe that the Mahdī 'will rule the world in a different manner and weed out its maleficent roots' (Kasravī n.d.: 70, 72–3). Kasravī believed that 'most of the Baha'i leaders are the same old mullas and in their discourse, they employ the same old style and rhetoric of the mullas' (Kasravī 1322/1944: 29–31).

As a result of the confrontations with the Babis and Baha'is, the expectation of the advent of the Mahdī, an advent which was believed to have been imminent, was gradually postponed to a more distant future. The delay of the Mahdī's manifestation caused his believers to become concerned for the future. It, furthermore, paved the intellectual path for the project of *vilāyat-i faqīh* (the governance of the jurist). Thus, in place of waiting for a tomorrow that would never materialize, the Shi'a were invited to take part in constructing an Islamic future.

Anti-Baha'ism in the Islamic public sphere

The Shahrivar 1320/September 1941 resignation of Riḍā Shah paved the way for the emergence of political forces that had been suppressed under his rule. Consequently, the 1320s/1940s witnessed the rise of numerous Islamic councils and organizations throughout Iran to confront Baha'is, materialists, and supporters of Aḥmad Kasravī. Alongside political parties and local councils, numerous organizations engaged in Islamic propaganda and instruction.⁶ Apace with these groups, other forces operating throughout the country likewise spared no effort in their respective areas of activity.⁷ Together, these groups succeeded in transforming organizations, mosques, centres where the martyrdom of Imām Ḥusayn was mourned (*ḥusaynīya*), and neighbourhoods into an interconnected sphere for Islamic propagation and education. Yet, that which distinguished these educational gatherings from devotional meetings or recitations of the tragedies of Karbala was their long-term objective. The aims of these groups had crystallized for the explicit purpose of confronting 'Baha'i committees,' political parties, and civic groups. By means of Islamic instruction and publishing, these

organizations were keen to become an obstacle for the progress of not only Baha'is, but any system of thought that was unrelated to religion. In this manner, with a united coalition of mosques, homes, and Islamic associations, a preventive campaign for building an Islamic future commenced. In the midst of these developments, publications such as *A'īn-i Islam* (the Religion of Islam), *Parcham-i Islam* (the Banner of Islam), *Dunyā-yi Islam* (the World of Islam), *Nidā-yi Haqq* (the Call of Truth) played a significant role in Islamizing the public sphere.

The *Anjuman-i Tablighāt-i Islāmī*, founded in the early 1320s/1940s, was one of the most active anti-Baha'i organizations. Its 'founder,' 'Aṭā'ullāh Shahābpūr, had been one of the permanent writers of the fascist periodical, *Iran-i Bāstān* (Ancient Iran) in the 1310s/1930s. Reflecting on his previous experiences, Shahābpūr confessed: 'For many years I was blind and incapable of comprehending the truth . . . At about the same time that I had become deluded by all the useless pride and haughtiness, I was blessed to see the light of truth. In a matter of a few hours, all of the pride and frivolity dissipated . . . I realized that happiness is found in Islam alone.' After gazing on 'the beauteous vista of truth' in Farvardīn 1321/April 1942, Shahābpūr published a leaflet entitled, *A'īn-i gushāyish-i rāh-i naw dar 'ālam-i haqīqat* ('The Means of Embarking on a New Path in the Realm of Truth') (Shahābpūr 1323a/1944: 274). This booklet was the first work published by the *Anjuman-i Tablighāt-i Islāmī*. In its pages, 'explicating the significance of religiosity' and 'elucidating the truth of Islam to the world' were presented as being among the central objectives of the organization. The society sought to 'prove' the doctrine that 'each and every one of the religions existing today, with the exception of Islam, is either archaic, has been abrogated, is full of superstitions or is man-made. The true religion to which all must adhere is Islam' (Shahābpūr 1323b/1944). By 1322/1943, Jalāl Āl-i Aḥmad, Ni'mat Jahānbānūṭī (the editor-in-chief of the weekly periodical *Firdawsī*), 'Alī Akbar Shahābī, Muḥammad 'Alī 'Ilmī, Muḥammad Ḥasan 'Ilmī, 'Abd al-Raḥīm 'Ilmī and 'Alī Akbar 'Ilmī (the latter four being the managers of the 'Ilmī publishing house) were among the well-known 'friends' of the *Anjuman-i Tablighāt-i Islāmī* (Anjuman-i Tablighāt-i Islāmī 1322/1944: 13, 21). In order to achieve the goals of the society, Shahābpūr solicited the intimate cooperation of the 'ulama. He, moreover, encouraged them to author a few easy-to-understand books entitled *khud āmūz-i fiqh* ('Teach Yourself Islamic Jurisprudence'). Mujtahid Kamara'ī, Ḥabbat al-Islam Shahrīstānī, and Maḥmūd Ṭāliqānī were amongst the 'ulama to have their books published by the *Anjuman-i Tablighāt-i Islāmī*.⁸ To procure the 'ulama's collaboration, the society mobilized a force to ensure the enforcement of 'the second supplementary article of the Constitution and the acceptance of five of the most distinguished 'ulama as members of the (National) Consultative Assembly.' In this mobilization of 'Muslim brothers,' the *Anjuman-i Tablighāt-i Islāmī* desired 'the government and the Assembly to enforce this significant article,

on which depends the very salvation of all Iranians and Muslims' (Raḥīmīyān 1326/1947: 3). In order to accelerate the propagation of Islam, in 1326/1947, the society established *Dār al-'ulūm-i dīnī va 'arabī* (The Institute For Religious Sciences and the Study of Arabic) (Anonymous 1326a/1948: 3). Moreover, it published the weekly journal, *Nūr-i Dānīsh* (the Light of Knowledge; Mihr 1326/October 1947) and created 'a place where the pilgrims to Karbala could rest' (Shahābpūr 1326/1947: 1–2). In addition to educational leaflets, 128,000 copies of which were printed between Farvardīn 1321/April 1942 and Ābān 1323/November 1944,⁹ the society published *Sālnāma-yi Nūr-i Dānīsh* (the Annual Report of the Light of Knowledge). This report, first published in 1324/1945, contained mostly letters of introduction written by Baha'is who had converted to Islam in the preceding 12 months. These letters were often accompanied by a letter of repentance, the text of which was similar to the following letter, printed in 1345/1966:

I, Rahbar Zamānī, the son of the late Muḥammad Taqī; identification number 9; born 1318/1939; the son of a Baha'i; a resident of Himmat Ābād, near the city of Ābādīh. After recognizing the truth and contacting a number of enlightened Muslims regarding the falsehood and worthlessness of the lost and straying sect, I now proclaim my hatred and intense aversion for it. I recognize the Islamic religion and the sacred law of Shi'ism as being the sole path of truth and the only eternal religion. I announce my belief in the finality of messengership and prophethood through Muḥammad bin 'Abd Allāh and my recognition of his successors, 'Alī bin Abī Ṭālib and his eleven descendants. They alone are my guides and leaders, the true and righteous Imams and the trustees of the Messenger of Islam.

This letter is similar to a repentance letter written by someone else who had introduced himself as having being 'a resident of the village of Bād-Ābād' (Anonymous 1345/1967: 231).

Between the 1330s/1950s and the 1350s/1970s, the *Anjuman-i Tablīghāt-i Islāmī* was one of the most active anti-Baha'i organizations in Iran. In the two decades preceding the revolution, this society became known as *Anjuman-i ḍidd-i Baha'i* (the Anti-Baha'i Society) and *Anjuman-i Hujjatīya*. Moreover, its leaders grew to become some of the most influential figures in the Islamic republic.¹⁰

The *Jāmi'a-yi Ta'līmāt-i Islāmī* was yet another institution that sought to inhibit the growth of the Baha'i religion via the spread of Islamic training. This organization was founded in early 1322/1943 on the advice of the preacher, 'Abbās-'Alī Islāmī, and with 'the assistance of six scholars.' It soon reached the conclusion that the most effective means to achieve religious and social reforms was to promote religious education and not interfere in

the prevailing political debates. At the end of 1323/1945, this society established seven night schools for the study of the religious sciences. In Khurdād 1325/June 1946, the number of such schools in Tehran had reached 24 and the number of students had reached 2,337.¹¹ By the end of 1326/1948, the number of night schools increased to 45 and the number of day schools reached 16 (*Anjuman-i Tablīghāt-i Islāmī* 1326/1948: 3). According to 'Abbās-'Alī Islāmī, in its 25 years of activity, the *Jāmi'a-yi Ta'līmāt-i Islāmī* founded 'more than 170 cultural institutions offering moral and religious instruction' (*Islāmī* 1362/1984: 24). In addition to its schools in Tehran, the society's academies were established mainly in those cities and villages where Baha'is were known to have instituted teaching initiatives of their own.

'In order to serve our native land and sacrifice in the path of the unerring religion of Islam,' the *Jāmi'a-yi Ta'līmāt-i Islāmī* gave special attention to the dissemination of pertinent news and information. Ḥusayn 'Abdullāhī, for example, reported in a letter to 'the Shi'i exemplary guides and highest authorities on religion and law' that on a trip to the villages near Isfahan, a preacher from Tehran, Mr. Ghulām-Riḍā Fīrūzīān, witnessed the educational activities being carried out by Baha'is in Qahva-Rukh, Isfahan:

For many years, a Baha'i has been teaching the Muslim children to say 'In the name of God, the All-Glorious' instead of 'In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.' He has also been training them in the Baha'i teachings and not the teachings and laws of Islam. He has even been showing . . . these Muslim youth a different *qibla* to turn to for their prayers. What's more, several Muslim girls have been attending the school. In instructing them, he used only the books that contained the worthless Baha'i teachings. What is the cause of this horrible state of affairs?! Who is responsible?!

Continuing his report, 'Abdullāhī argued that,

from our standpoint, all of the immorality and corruption in public life is due to the absence of religious educators in these different regions. If this negligence continues, it won't be long before this small number of simple-minded Muslims, residing in villages that have no access to religious sermons, forget who they are and become entirely different people!!

'Abdullāhī, 'a correspondent for religious newspapers [and] spokesperson of the Islamic publications' believed that the solution to these problems lay in pursuing the following steps:

As soon as possible, the respected and esteemed Shi'i authorities on religion and law, in particular Ayatullah Burūjirdī and individuals

such as Mr. Hujjat and Mr. Fayḍ Kathrullāh, need to choose a number of enlightened and serious students and charge them to organize sorely needed propagation projects and effective consolidation programmes in the villages surrounding the townships. Hopefully, by means of religious propaganda, they will put an end to the progress of these worthless and irreligious people.

'Abdullāhī went on to request,

Hājj Shaykh 'Abbās-'Alī Islāmī, the founder and director of the *Jāmi'a-yi Ta'līmāt-i Islāmī*, who is himself an enlightened and serious man, to place certain officials in charge of ensuring that in all of the townships, a sizeable number of branches are organized to offer the society's classes. In particular, more consideration must be given to those villages that are situated in difficult to reach regions. Perhaps, by the will of God and the effort of these enlightened Muslims, associating with these outlaws of religion will cease and some of the illiterate farmers will be protected and safeguarded from the clutches of these makers of sedition.

(‘Abdullāhī 1326/1948: 2)

Following the publication of this letter, in a report, Mahdī Ṣadiqī announced some very good news:

Praise be to God, as a result of a number of nightly speeches by Shaykh Ghulām-Riḍā Fīrūzīān, night school number six of the Isfahan branch of the *Jāmi'a-yi Ta'līmāt-i Islāmī* has been established. After a series of religious discussions with the above mentioned Baha'i teacher, he became doubtful of his beliefs. He closed his school and has left that village for now.

(Anonymous 1326c/1948: 2)

This string of propagandistic reports was published in the *Dunyā-yi Islam* newspaper. Ghulām-Riḍā Fīrūzīān, who was the main source for the reports concerning the propagation activities of the Baha'is, was also the founder of the school for religious education in Qahva-Rukh.

In addition to propagation projects and programmes, the society also contributed to the composition of curriculum. Simultaneous with Ayatullah Burūjirdī's efforts to augment the religious studies curriculum of primary and secondary schools, Ḥasan-'Alī Gulshan, who served as director of schools for the *Jāmi'a-yi Ta'līmāt-i Islāmī*, authored the monograph, *Akhlāq-i Gulshanī*. This text was to be taught at the society's night and day schools. Gulshan was hopeful that 'the ministry of culture might also prescribe the teaching of this book in all of the relevant primary and second schools

as part of the religious studies curriculum' (Anonymous 1326d/1948: 2). In the final months of Dr. Muṣaddiq administration, the rumour that Dr. Miḥdī Ādhar, the Minister of Culture, was intending to close the *Jāmi'a-yi Ta'līmāt-i Islāmī* and reinforce the Baha'i schools, played a salient role in stirring strong religious sentiments against his regime.¹²

The *Jam'iyyat-i Madhhab-i Ja'farī* was yet another anti-Baha'i organization active in the 1320s/1940s. Writing on behalf of the association, Sayyid Murtaḍā Khalkhālī and 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Mu'taḍidī published an open letter in the Bahman 1326/February 1948 edition of *Parcham-i Islam*. In this letter, they sought to report on the ever-increasing influence of the Baha'is:

Nowadays, in all of the ministries and all of the governmental offices, Baha'is occupy important and influential positions. They have infiltrated all of our religious, civil, and national affairs with their worthless religion. Little by little, the situation has escalated to the point where, in some places, individuals with like-minded principles have been advocating for their employment. This, despite the explicit text of federal laws that prohibit such hirings. By these means, they are now busy spreading their licentious and repugnant propaganda.

In this letter, the *Jam'iyyat-i Madhhab-i Ja'farī* solicited 'the sacred and blessed court' of the Shah 'to discharge the Baha'is from governmental offices and ministries and to repress their protestations' (Khalkhālī 1336/1958: 3). Two months after the publication of this open letter, 'a Muslim' mentioned 'the poisonous propaganda' of the Baha'is and requested the National Consultative Assembly to 'issue [a] manifesto. These sorts of people are capable of continuing their spurious deeds to disrupt the order and security.' He called on the Assembly to use this manifesto to 'Tell them to cease and desist their treacherous plots as early as possible; otherwise, the day will come when the Muslim nation of Iran will settle its accounts with the enemies of Islam and you will be punished mercilessly.' Possessing a favourable view of 'the clerics,' the writer then issued the following warning:

Honored clerics: every township must be diligent in ensuring that the poisonous propaganda of the Baha'is does not leave even the slightest effect on the people's morale, people who slip easily into ignorance. It is imperative to develop a system for propagation that is based on the exalted principles of religion, a system that will deepen the faith of the people in performing their moral duties, in carrying out community development, and in seeking further progress for themselves and their community. This system will awaken the people one by one, until such time as every Muslim is capable, by producing strong rational proofs and showing the power

of Islam, to deliver a fierce blow to the mouth of those who oppose Islam.

(Anonymous Muslim 1327/1949: 4)

The fundamental aim of many of the Islamic organizations and societies that were founded in this change-filled decade was delivering this same 'fierce blow to the mouth of those who opposed Islam.'

Yet another one of the Islamic organizations was *Jam'iyat-i Hay'at-i Muravvijin-i Madhhab-i Ja'fari* (the Association for Organizations of Promoters of the Ja'fari School). Formed in 1326/1947, it was a coalition of between 60 and 70 religious organizations based in Tehran.¹³ At a convention starting on 20 Adhar 1326/12 December 1947, Shaykh Mihdi Shari'atmadari 'asserted that according to the explicit text of the Constitution, one of the obligations of the nation and government of Iran is to contest and fight any and all any actions that may be construed as being anti-religious or anti-Shi'i (Anonymous 1326g/1948: 1). This association sponsored an abundant array of initiatives and programs. In a statement issued in Bahman 1326/February 1948, it stated: 'With the exception of Islam, and in particular, the true sect of Shi'ism, if you hear the name of any other religion or sect in the world, you can be confident that it is entirely devoid of faith and beliefs. On the contrary, at its root, you will find some political organization or some shadowy and sinister faction . . .' (Anonymous 1326h/1948: 3).

Islamic publication and propaganda

Publications such as *A'in-i Islam*, *Parcham-i Islam*, *Dunya-yi Islam*, and *Nida-yi Haqq* played a significant role in amalgamating religious organizations and societies and establishing an Islamic public sphere. This sphere had blossomed through consociating institutions and Islamic publications. By being morally critical of the new values of a rapidly changing Iranian society, this sphere laid the groundwork for an Islamic alternative to the national public sphere. In doing so, it strategically employed new cultural innovations and institutions prevailing in the national public sphere, e.g. radio, cinema, theatre, school, university, (political) parties and various newspapers and magazines. Islamic publications depicted Iran as a 'Shi'i state' and declared its citizens to be the 'the Muslim People of Iran.' In this manner, through excluding non-Muslim Iranians from the national public sphere, they triggered the appearance of a special and distinct sphere. *A'in-i Islam* was among the first Islamic newspapers to begin circulation in the 1320s/1940s.¹⁴ *Parcham-i Islam* began circulation in Farvardin 1325/April 1946 with 'Abd al-Karim Faqih Shirazi as its editor-in-chief. It was among the most influential weekly periodicals. Baha'is were rarely attacked in the first issues of *Parcham-i Islam*. For the most part, they were dealt with indirectly. References could be found in the writings of columnists such as Hujjat

al-Islam Najmabadi, Sayyid Mahmud Taliqani, Hasan Niku, 'Abd al-Husayn Ayati and Muhammad-'Ali Shikari.¹⁵ However, beginning on 9 Mihr 1326/2 October 1947, *Parcham-i Islam* began to directly attack the Baha'i religion and its adherents. The paper explained this change in policy in a memorandum as follows:

We at *Parcham-i Islam*, from our paper's inception to some time thereafter, had refused to engage in these kinds of discussions and had no desire to do so, since we live these days in a world in which a large segment of its people deny the existence of God and essentially have no faith in the fundamental principles of religion and the coming of the Day of Resurrection. Therefore, we saw no reason to discuss the Baha'is, the followers of a political and fabricated sect. However, recently it has been heard that in addition to not observing good manners, courtesy and respect, the Baha'is have also been committing mischief against and breaking the laws of our country. Therefore, from this week forward, by including facts about this sect in our paper, we will reveal the truth about this sect to our respected readers. We are hopeful that perhaps, God willing, it will also have an effect on those (Baha'is) who have strayed from the straight path and remain lost.

This change in policy was made precisely at a time when *Parcham-i Islam* had been forced to suspend its operations for a week as a result of financial difficulties. The headline on the front page of that week's issue of *Parcham-i Islam* read 'The Reasons for the One Week Suspension of Operations: Low Number of Subscribers [and] the Politics of Foreigners.' This headline suggests that a conflict against the Baha'is was the pretext to garnering the protection of the 'ulama and provoking the paper's Muslim readership. In this article, Faqih-Shirazi warned the 'ulama:

This is the last time we remind the spiritual leaders of Islam, the distinguished 'ulama, and the honored preachers who know themselves to be devotees of Islam and champions of its shari'a, that if we are forced to shut down this religious paper, all of our enemies will rejoice and the day will come when you will regret your present disregard, laxity, and negligence.

Further in the article, Faqih, who was in actuality a physician specializing in sexually transmitted diseases, described his ardent desire to serve as a journalist:

Due to my religious obligations . . . I will begin to walk down this perilous road. As I have been reminded time and again, I have

already learned this service from watching Christian doctors and the authorities at American hospitals do the same. The activities of the Baha'i doctors have forced me, despite all of the difficulties, to arise and undertake this sacred path of service.

(Faqihī-Shīrāzī 1326a/1948: 1)

Although Faqihī-Shīrāzī had given voice to his desire to engage in the propagation of Islam before, his previous words had been fairly different:

During my years of studying medicine, receiving training at hospitals, and finishing my hospital residency, I was fortunate enough to observe the ways in which Christian propagandists spread their religion. I closely studied their activities. Luckily, I learned the secrets of their resolve and perseverance. I realized that despite all of the challenges and obstacles they face in Iran, they have toiled and made a valiant effort to propagate the abrogated religion of Christianity. In those same days, I swore to myself that in addition to my lifelong spiritual responsibility to the medical profession, I would seize the first opportunity that presented itself to serve the true religion of Islam and would spare no effort, financial or otherwise, for this purpose . . .

In this account, written in Murdād 1326/August 1947, one finds no reference to 'the activities of Baha'i doctors' (Faqihī-Shīrāzī 1326b/1948: 1).

The occupation of the Ḥaẓīrat al-Quds

The campaign against Baha'is intensified in the late 1320s/1940s and early 1330s/1950s. The Tīr 1326/July 1947 murder of engineer Shahīdzāda in Bābulsar and the 14 Bahman 1327/3 February 1949 killing of Dr. Sulaymān Birjīs in Kashan were amongst the consequences of this new phase of attacks.¹⁶ Ayatullah Riḍā Gulsurkhī, presently one of the foremost leaders of the Shi'i seminary in Qum, participated himself in the killing of Dr. Birjīs. He recalled the circumstances of that event as follows: 'Dr. Birjīs was a Jew who had become a Baha'i. Perhaps more than a hundred Muslims had been killed at the hands of this man. This Dr. Birjīs would give the wrong medicine to those Muslims who were anti-Baha'i and kill them.' This report bears striking resemblance to another rumour apropos the selling of lethal drugs by Jewish-owned pharmacies to Muslim citizens. Originally, *Iran-i Bāstān* had spread this rumour in Tīr 1313/July 1934 to instigate anti-Jewish sentiments in Iran.¹⁷ However, in the 1320s/1940s, it was actualized as the primary motive of Dr. Birjīs's killers. In recounting the murder of Dr. Birjīs, who had been asked to visit an empty house under the pretext of seeing a sick patient, Ayatullah Gulsurkhī recalled that,

Eight people, including Mr. Rasūlzāda went and killed Dr. Birjīs. Then, they left the scene saying aloud, 'There is no god but God.' Of course, their primary instigator was the late Turbatī Vā'īz. After killing Dr. Birjīs, they went to the police and surrendered themselves. The officers took them to Tehran. I myself was included among the accused and my name was recorded as Ridā Gulsurkhī in the file.

(Anonymous 1370/1992: 183)

The murder of 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Hajīr¹⁸ at the hands of Sayyid Ḥusayn Imāmī¹⁹ on 13 Ābān 1328/9 November 1949 can be considered another indicator of the start of a harsher phase of opposition against the Baha'is. He was killed during mourning services for Imām Ḥusayn in the Sipahsālār mosque (Anonymous 1328/1950: 5, 15, 17). According to witnesses, the rumour of his being a Baha'i was the primary motive behind Hajīr's murder and the main reason why his killing constituted the most important element of the plans of the *Jam'iyat-i Fadā'iyān-i Islam*. It is believed that this rumour was spread by Abū al-Ḥasan Ḥā'irī-zāda.²⁰ In a report of the incident dated 25 Khurdād 1327/15 June 1948, a police detective wrote:

Following a talk that he delivered two nights ago before a crowd of people at the Masjid Shah, Ḥā'irī-zāda met yesterday with Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim Kāshānī and a few of the leaders of the *Jam'iyat-i Fadā'iyān-i Islam*. He said: 'You are *Fadā'iyān-i Islam* (the Devotees of Islam). Don't be content with the reins of the government falling into the hands of someone who is a promoter of the Baha'i religion (*dīn*). This is the first conflict that will be initiated by Muslims and you must remain obstinate and ensure that your interests are always met.'

(Tafrihī 1371/1992 2: 147-8)

In this manner, the opposition to Hajīr had taken on 'a more religious tenor than before.' Those who sided with Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim Kāshānī considered fighting against Hajīr the same as 'protecting religion and the Qur'an (Tafrihī 1371/1992 2: 161).

Widespread propaganda against the Baha'is served to accomplish the dismissal of some followers during the administration of Prime Minister Razm-ārā (Tīr 1329/July 1950 - Isfand 1329/March 1951). Shams al-Dīn Jazā'irī, the Minister of Culture in Razm-ārā's cabinet, in explaining the decision to discharge these employees, recalled that in every meeting with Ayatullah Burūjirdī, the latter requested him to take this message to the Shah: At the command of Shoghi Effendi, the Baha'is will begin demonstrating. This 'is the why the Muslims are complaining.' Ayatullah Burūjirdī's complaint was based on the fact that, in those years, the Bahai's had gradually



Figure 10.1 Mulla Falsafī supervising workmen in the act of destroying the dome of the National Baha'i Center in Tehran, 1955.

ceased dissimulating their faith, and had begun identifying themselves as Baha'is on their employment applications. After conveying Burūjirdī's words at a cabinet meeting, Jazā'irī said: 'The non-official status of the Baha'i religion was communicated to all of the provincial governors in a circular, but I decided to discharge the Baha'is working in the ministry of culture.' In determining how to carry out this decision, he recalled: 'First, I requested to see all of them. I told them to write "Muslim" in your departmental files

and we will leave you alone because Islam judges by what is written, unless the contrary is proved.' However, his suggestion for religious dissimulation was not accepted by the Baha'is who for some time had been openly stating their religious identity:

But the Baha'i teachers did not accept. Instead, they wrote two formal letters against me, one signed by Furūtan, the secretary of the Baha'is' Assembly and the other by Fath-i A'zam, the chairman of the Assembly. They sent these letters to the office of the Prime Minister and its inspection department. In these letters, they declared my actions to be a violation of the right to religious freedom and a contravention of the charter of the United Nations.

In reaction to this protest, Dr. Jazā'irī noted: 'When this happened, I fired all of the Baha'i employees who were employed under contract. Moreover, I discharged all of the formal employees from the training staff and demoted them to administrative posts' (Anonymous 1334a/1956: I, 4).

In addition to these forms of discrimination, Islamic organizations and Islamist forces began fiercely persecuting the Baha'is. These groups believed the Baha'is' assertion of their religious identity was tantamount to an affront to Islam. Consequently, some reached the decision to destroy the Ḥaẓīrat al-Quds, the administrative centre of the Baha'is of Tehran. Although the rumour of destroying the Ḥaẓīrat al-Quds had been circulating since Urdībihisht 1327/May 1948, it finally materialized on 16 Urdībihisht 1334/7 May 1955 under the direction of Ḥujjat al-Islam Muḥammad Taqī Falsafī, the famed preacher of Tehran. Falsafī served as the intermediary between Ayatullah Burūjirdī and the royal court. In his *Khāṭirāt* (Memoirs), he has recounted the circumstances surrounding the Ḥaẓīrat al-Quds' destruction in a manner that would find acceptance in post-revolutionary Iran (Falsafī 1376/1998).

On the heels of the public mobilization effort headed by preachers and religious lecturers, in Ramaḍān 1334/April–May 1955, Muḥammad Taqī Falsafī (on Radio Tehran) and Mr. Shukūhīda (on Air Force Radio) reminded listeners in their talks that, 'the danger posed by the Baha'is is greater than that posed by members of the Tūda [Communist] party' (Anonymous 1334b/1956: I). In his memoirs, Falsafī recalls that his on-air lectures against the Baha'is took place after the mutual agreement between Ayatullah Burūjirdī and Muḥammad-Riḍa Shah had been reached. In an interview with a reporter from *Ittīḥād-i Millī* (National Unity) on 19 Urdībihisht 1334/10 May 1955, Falsafī stated the following regarding his meeting with Ayatullah Burūjirdī: 'Prior to the arrival of the blessed month of Ramaḍān, I had the privilege of visiting Qum. While there, I visited an extremely wearied Ayatullah Burūjirdī. He said, "Now that the oil issue has been resolved and the members of the Tūda party have been dealt with, we have to give some

thought to the Baha'is and do something about them.'" Based on Ayatullah Burūjirdī's recommendation, after this meeting, Falsafī met with Muḥammad-Riḍā Shah and told him: 'Ayatullah Burūjirdī believes that it is important to discuss the Baha'i problem, which is a cause of great concern to Muslims, in the talks that will be broadcast in Ramaḍān on the radio. Does His Royal Highness agree?' According to Falsafī, '(The Shah) fell silent for a moment and then said, "Go and say it"' (Falsafī 1376/1998: 190–1).

Thus, in Ramaḍān 1334/April–May 1955, Falsafī devoted his annual talks, delivered in Masjid-i Shah, to attacking the Baha'is. These lectures had been broadcast directly on the radio since Ramaḍān 1327/1948. However, in previous years, they had been dedicated to confronting the Tūda party. Falsafī's successive attacks against the Baha'is (and in particular, during the month of Ramaḍān) served to inflame anti-Baha'i sentiments. Immediately following the procession of religious mobs towards Yūsuf-Ābād Boulevard and their raid of the Ḥaẓīrat al-Quds with the approval of the Ramaḍān Security Council, Tehran's military governor occupied the Ḥaẓīrat al-Quds on 16 Urdībihist 1334/7 May 1955. This act marked the height of the cooperation between the government and the clergy during the period of Muḥammad-Riḍā Shah's rule. In a statement, General Taymūr Bakhtiyār, the military governor, explained the operation in the following terms:

Since the demonstrations and propaganda of the Baha'i sect have been inciting public commotion, as a means of maintaining public order, the security forces were ordered to occupy the propaganda centre of this sect which is called the Ḥaẓīrat al-Quds. We have done this to prevent, in every way possible, the destructive events that this sect may coordinate in the future.

(Falsafī 1376/1998: 193)

According to a newspaper report published in *Iḥṣā'āt*, after sunset that day, 'sweets were distributed to the people' in front of the Ḥaẓīrat al-Quds (*Iḥṣā'āt* 8671–17 Urdībihist 1334; cited in Falsafī 1376/1998: 194).

After occupying the Ḥaẓīrat al-Quds, in a telegraph to the Shah, Ayatullah Sayyid Muḥammad Bihbahānī offered heartfelt thanks for 'using the army of Islam . . . to close a society that corrupts religion and government.' Bihbahānī considered that day 'a religious holiday' (*Iḥṣā'āt* 8672–17 Urdībihist 1334, cited in Falsafī 1376/1998: 194). In his response, the Shah recalled: 'As you have repeatedly heard from us, we have always considered ourselves bound to enforcing the provisions of Islam and we will continue to desire this grace from God, the Most Exalted' (*Iḥṣā'āt* 8673–19 Urdībihist 1334, cited in Falsafī 1376/1998: 194). Ayatullah Burūjirdī likewise proclaimed his 'joy' to Bihbahānī at the closing of the Ḥaẓīrat al-Quds and prayed that 'God, exalted be He, has protected the sacred religion of Islam and the Iranian monarchy from the harm of enemies and the mischief of agitators. May He

forever protect His Royal Majesty for the sake of the Muslims' (Ibid.). In a letter to Falsafī, Ayatullah Burūjirdī likewise expressed his appreciation for Falsafī's 'valuable services' to 'not only the sacred religion of Islam, but all of the divine religions, as well as toward the Holy Qu'ran.' He stated that 'Baha'ism enjoys thorough influence in the system of government. Therefore, the most important issue is to purify this sect from all offices, ministries, and sensitive posts in the government' (*Iḥṣā'āt* 8672–18 Urdībihist 1334 and *Kayhān* 3574–19 Urdībihist 1334, cited in Falsafī 1376/1998: 194–5). In an interview with *Kayhān*, Ayatullah Burūjirdī demanded the demolition of the Ḥaẓīrat al-Quds, the dismissal of Baha'is from 'governmental departments and agencies,' and the approval of a proposition to expel every Baha'i from Iran (*Kayhān* 3575–20 Urdībihist 1334, cited in Falsafī 1376/1998: 195). This request, composed of four articles, was presented to the office of the President of the Assembly on 19 Urdībihist 1334/10 May 1955 by Sayyid Aḥmad Ṣafā'ī, a clerical representative from Qazvin.

In the introduction of this proposition, Baha'is were accused of being agitators and troublemakers who in 'wearing the guise of religion have revolted against the Muslim nation of Iran in every location of the country. Through various means, they throw people off the path of righteousness and chastity and away from the axis of godliness and piety. Furthermore, they spare no effort perpetrating any crime that will advance their sinister objectives.' Right at the height of the Baha'i persecutions, the authors of this proposition claimed that 'countless cases of murder, seditiousness, and other felonies committed in the past by members of this association have been filed with the judicial courts.'²¹

After the occupation of the Ḥaẓīrat al-Quds, 'security officials seized other Baha'i centres in numerous townships, including those of Rasht, Shiraz, Isfahan, Kirmanshah, Yazd, Kashan and Kirman.' On the heels of these occupations, individuals 'who had identified themselves as Baha'is on their employment applications were discharged from certain offices.' As the persecution of individuals who had been recognized as Baha'is intensified, some Baha'is were forced to write and publish letters of denial. The text of these letters was more or less the same:

Notwithstanding the fact that I am a Muslim and my being a Muslim is apparent and in no need of explanation, some of my coworkers accuse me of being a Baha'i. Just as I denied being so in 1330/1951 in the newspaper, *Dād*, once again I wish to inform the public that I, 'Abdullāh Bayāt, an employee of a chintz-making factory in Tehran, ID no. 3494 (issued in Malāyir), apart from being a Muslim, have been and will continue to remain loyal to the Shah and my native land, 2/3/34 (24 April 1955).

(Anonymous 1334d/1956: 3)

It is important to reexamine the words of Ḥujjat al-Islam Falsafī, who, as will be remembered, in acting on behalf of Ayatullah Burūjirdī, was responsible for employing the radio to provoke public sentiment against the Baha'is. According to Falsafī, in his radio talks of Ramaḍān 1334/April–May 1955:

I lectured on the prophets in the first two days and then went after those Baha'is. The government didn't pay much attention to the first three lectures. But slowly, reports from security officials throughout the country reached the state, and the government realized that this problem has deep roots. On the other hand, side by side with the messages of the clerics and the exemplary guide, His Imperial Majesty also issued certain orders. The command to occupy the Ḥaẓīrat al-Quds was issued at once. Anyways, I am deeply thankful of the service rendered by both the people and the army who came and occupied the Ḥaẓīrat al-Quds in time.

(Anonymous 1334a/1956: 1, 4)

In an attempt to further incite the masses to persecute the adherents of other faiths and ideologies, Falsafī spread the rumour that the Tūda party was developing close ties with the Baha'is:

One of the members of the Tūda party came to me himself and confessed, saying, 'Since our activities had been prohibited, we began to organize circumcision parties, weddings, and mourning ceremonies. But they became aware of our plans. So, when we heard the Baha'is were planning a coup d'état for the coming year, we decided to join them in order to pull off something significant. To this end, to show just how interested we were in Baha'ism, we even wed their women according to own their customs and laws.'

Conscious of the international reaction to his anti-Baha'i measures, Falsafī began glorifying 'his holiness Moses and his holiness Jesus' in his lectures. Aware of the international sensitivities against the persecution of religious minorities, generated as a result of the Jewish holocaust in Hitler's Germany, Falsafī found himself with no other choice but to declare: 'I am fully cognizant of the rights of minorities as expounded in the Constitution and in the holy books...' (Anonymous 1334b/1956: 4). On the heels of the Baha'i international Assemblies' complaints to the Shah, the Prime Minister, the National Consultative Assembly, the Human Rights and Social and Economic Commissions of the United Nations, and the governments of Europe and the United States,²² Falsafī exploited Cold War rhetoric and fear of the Tūda party's progress as a pretext for his attacks: 'We haven't been talking about religion. We have been discussing pseudo-religions.' In explaining this issue, he offered the following reminder: 'I told the Americans

that the Muslims have campaigned against the members of the Tūda Party and now the members of Tūda have joined the Baha'is. If you choose to protect the Baha'is, it will be as if you are strengthening the members of Tūda, who are the enemies of America' (Anonymous 1334b/1956: 4). In this manner, the conflict against Baha'is was not only a campaign for safeguarding the unity of Iran, but was also understood as being part of the campaign against the worldwide spread of communism.

In late Ramaḍān 1334/May 1955, 'the distinguished *'ulama*, prayer leaders and likewise all of the preachers and promoters of religion' organized meetings for the purpose of 'settling once and for all the Baha'i matter' (Anonymous 1334e/1956: 1, 4). One of these sessions took place at the home of Ayatullah Khānsārī and was attended by Mr. Najafī Shahrīstānī, acting on behalf of Ayatullah Burūjirdī. At this meeting, the participants wrote a letter to 'His Imperial Majesty,' calling for 'the immediate implementation of the request of these three men.' It was decided that the three part request, which had also been included in the proposition brought forth to the National Consultative Assembly by Sayyid Aḥmad Ṣafā'ī, would be presented in person to the Shah by Shaykh Muḥammad 'Alī Lavāsānī, Mr. Najafī Shahrīstānī, and Ḥājj Bāqir Āqā Qummī. In an open letter, written in Khurdād 1334/May–June 1955 to General Fākhīr Ḥikmat (the president of the National Consultative Assembly), *Nidā-yi Ḥaqq*, which played a vital coordination role within the various Islamic associations, warned that the plan of the Baha'is 'is to destroy the government and monarchy and tear down the foundations of the sacred religion Islam.' Further in the same letter, which spoke of the *'ulama* as the protectors of the monarchy, *Nidā-yi Ḥaqq* wrote: 'At present, the Iranian people demand that the best interests of the nation be kept in mind and the proper course for the Baha'is become clear, just as the proper course of the members of the Tūda party was determined. Since they are not harming us now, it is an opportune time to deal with them. Otherwise, they will harm us in the future' (Anonymous 1334f: 2).

In determining the proper course 'for members of the Tūda party,' the government had sentenced numerous leaders of the Tūda party to death and life imprisonment. The state's dealings with the Tūda party became a model for its confrontation against the Baha'is. In Ābān 1334/October 1955, in an effort to attract the attention of religious forces, the military governor orchestrated the birthday celebration of the Prophet Muḥammad at the Ḥaẓīrat al-Quds. Consequently, *Nidā-yi Ḥaqq* expressed its appreciation to General Bakhtiyār and requested that 'the National Consultative Assembly hold an even greater and more elaborate festivity to celebrate the birthday of his holiness the Hidden Imām – the Qā'im, the Lord of the Command and the Lord of the Age – on 15 Sha'bān [28 March 1956].'*Nidā-yi Ḥaqq* was hopeful that 'in that celebration,' Tehran's military governor 'coupled with an unparalleled display of Muslim strength would strike a dagger to the heart of the few minor and straying sects' (Anonymous 1334g/1956: 1, 4).

As much as anti-Bahā'i forces had grown hopeful from observing Tehran's military governor's role in suppressing and dissolving the Tūda party, these developments were equally distressing to the Bahā'is.

The sudden disengagement of the government and royal court from meeting the *'ulama's* request to 'settle once and for all the Bahā'i matter' annulled the historic union between state and clergy. The suppressive stance of the state in fighting the Babis and Bahā'is coupled with their defence of Islam and Shi'ism had begun to crystallize during the reign of the Qajar monarchs, Muḥammad Shah and Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah. By promoting the campaign against Babis and Bahā'is, the government was able to enjoy the protection and support of the *'ulama*. The triumph of the Usūlīs over the Akhbārīs had, moreover, transformed the Shi'i mujtahids into an autonomous source of religious authority. In the process of attacking the Babis and Bahā'is, the *'ulama* became united and of one mind. During the rule of Ridā Shah, the government and clergy had openly confronted one another. However, in the 1320s/1940s and early 1330s/1950s, the campaign against the Tūda party, which had been declared the enemy of Islam, caused the two sides to again become united. With the occupation of the Ḥaẓīrat al-Quds in Urdābihisht 1334/April 1955, the amity between the state and religious establishment reached its peak. However, the government's change of course at the height of the Ḥaẓīrat al-Quds crisis deeply offended the Shi'i *'ulama*, and in particular, Ayatullah Burūjirdī, who had been anxiously concerned with the growth in the number of Bahā'is in his 'Shi'i country.' Thus, the clergy, who had been defenders of the monarchy until 1334/1955, gradually began to oppose the state. The event of 15 Khurdād 1342/5 June 1963 marked the continuation of a process that had commenced with the occupation of the Ḥaẓīrat al-Quds. Therefore, the occupation of the Bahā'i National Centre can be regarded as both the peak of the cooperation between the royal court and the clergy and the beginning of the end of their collaboration.²³

Conclusion

The 'Otherization' of the Babis and Bahā'is, a process which had commenced with the publication of *Yād-dāshthā-yi Kīnyāz Dālgūrukī*, reached a new peak with the founding of Israel in 1327/1948. The Bahā'i religion, which had established its international centre in Palestine in 1310 (AH)/1890 prior to the appearance of the Zionist movement, was now declared to be its agent. In this fashion, anti-Zionist political sentiments that supported defending the Palestinian refugees were confounded with anti-Judaism and anti-Bahā'ism. Moreover, political analysts were alleging that the state of Israel was nothing more than a tool of the American regime. And with the government of Iran developing closer ties with Israel, anti-government and anti-American sentiments exacerbated the prevailing anti-Bahā'ism, giving

the religion an entirely political connotation. The Iranian identity of the Bahā'is and their ties to the culture and land of their religion's birth had no place in this chain of scapegoating Bahā'ism as 'the Alter.' The Bahā'is were accused of being the instruments of Zionism, the agents of Imperialism, and the antagonists of Islam and Iran.

In this process of effacing and rewriting history to represent Bahā'is as the instruments of Zionism, it was forgotten that Mīrzā Ḥabībullah Āl-i Riḍā (Huvaydā), one of the Bahā'i employees of the foreign ministry, had been the first Iranian to express concern (more even than any Arab politician) over the Zionists' attempts to 'increase their numbers in Palestine.' In a letter dated 17 Ṣafar 1341 (AH)/9 October 1922 to the foreign ministry, Āl-i Riḍā reported that 'multitudes' of Jewish Iranians 'have migrated from Iran to Palestine . . . and if something is not done immediately to address this problem, every Jewish Iranian, like single drops of water, will eventually be absorbed into the sea of Zionism' (Vilāyatī 1376/1997: 98 [document 17]). It is particularly noteworthy that the Iranian *'ulama* failed to appreciate the implications of the increasing numbers of Jews in Palestine until the midst of the crises of the 1320s/1940s leading up to the founding of Israel.

With anti-Bahā'ism reaching its peak in the 1320s/1940s, the racist theories that had been exploited against the Jews were now also imputed to the Bahā'is. For example, writing in *Parcham-i Islam* in Shahrīvar 1325/September 1946, 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Āyatī noted:

For some time, I had wondered why the Babis liked the Jews more than any other group and tried so hard to proselytize them. I had likewise wondered why people became so united after joining these religions, until I learned that they have much in common in terms of their methods and ways. In one respect, they have both made religion into a plaything, fabricating some absurd teachings and foolish words. In another, they are both so fanatical in their belief of these fabrications, despite the fact that they themselves know that they are artificial and empty explanations that they have invented, that I can go so far as to say that no other group in the world today can be characterized by as much ignorant fanaticism and foolish zeal as Bahā'ism. In whatever country they reside, Babis and Jews commit involuntary treachery.

(Āyatī 1325b/1947: 2)

Just as the accusation of betrayal against the Jews resulted in the movement to wipe them out of Europe, similar accusations against Bahā'is caused the anti-Bahā'i movement to become an inseparable component of an Islamist movement seeking desperately to establish a one-religion future for Iran. The economic boycotts imposed against Bahā'is were an essential component of this Islamist movement. The first of such boycotts was imposed against

'the imperialist soft drink' Pepsi-Cola in 1334/1955. These economic boycotts played an important role in the formation of an Islamic political discourse.²⁴

The comparatively high social and economic status of the Baha'is only added to the anxieties of the *'ulama* and the Shi'i authorities vis-à-vis an Islamic future in Iran. The propositions of state and local organizations doubled these concerns. Of these, the 16 Mihr 1341/8 October 1962 decision reached by the cabinet to include the phrase, 'the heavenly book' in place of 'the glorious Qur'an,' in the official governmental oaths was especially distressing. The Shi'i *'ulama* interpreted this ruling and other civil reforms as efforts aimed at subverting the Islamic identity of Iran. The *'ulama*, who had become unhappy with the Shah after the Haḏrat al-Quds incident, directly confronted the royal court after the passing of this proposition. As Ayatullah Sharī'atmadārī's letter of 21 Urdībihisht 1342/11 May 1963 to the *'ulama* of Kirman indicates, many of the *'ulama* believed that the government 'trie[d] by different means to strengthen some of the straying, misguided, and anti-Islamic sects, support[ed] their interference in various governmental matters, and entrust[ed] numerous sensitive and high-profile positions to them' (Sharī'atmadārī n.d.a: 55). Following up on this letter, Sharī'atmadārī reminded people that 'Iran has become the arena of activity for a party that is the agent of imperialism and the broker for Israel, a party that falsely calls itself a religion' (Sharī'atmadārī n.d.b: 58). In a Khurdād 1342/June 1963 manifesto to preachers, Islamic speakers and religious organizations, Ayatullah Khumaynī warned:

Know that the danger facing Islam today is no less than the danger posed by the Umayyads. The tyrant's government, with all of its forces, assists Israel and its agents (the misguided and misleading sects). It has handed the information media over to them. In the royal court, they receive whatever they want. It has opened positions for them in the military, the ministry of culture and all of the other ministries and given them all of the sensitive posts. Remind the people of the danger posed by Israel and its agents. In times of reciting mournful songs and beating on chests, remind them of the disasters that have afflicted Islam and its religious centres, the calamities that have beset the helpers of the Shari'a. Express your disgust at this treacherous government for mobilizing and sending several thousand enemies of both Islam and nation to London to participate in an anti-Islamic and anti-nation assembly. **These days, to be silent is to support the tyrant's government and to succor the enemies of Islam.**

(al-Khumaynī 1376/1998: 124, bold emphasis in the original)

Moreover, in Khurdād 1342/June 1963, *Jāmi'a-yi Rawḥāniyat-i Iran* (the Society of Iran's Clergy) denounced Israel as 'the greatest base for the

enemies of Islam and the foremost agent of imperialism in the Middle East.' They anticipated that,

the Baha'is, who are the middlemen of the Israeli state in our government (don't forget that Haifa and 'Akka are centres for the Baha'is and amongst the most well-known cities of Israel), have infiltrated the most sensitive organizations in government and every day, their influence increases in all of the departments, even the prime minister's cabinet. They are especially active in the field of proselytization.

Later in this statement, which reflected the 'the goals of the clergy from the recent campaign,' it was emphasized that 'the clergy can never accept this great shame to be brought on the Muslims of Iran and can never tolerate the influence of the agents of Zionism and their middlemen, i.e. the Baha'is, in their government' (*Jāmi'a-yi Rawḥāniyat-i Iran* n.d.: 75). Ayatullah Sayyid Muḥammad Ṣādiq Rawḥānī, in a letter declaring unlawful the Shahrivar 1342/September 1963 elections of the 21st National Consultative Assembly, accused the Assembly of covering up 'a sinister coup d'état plot that aims to veer and temper the very foundations of religion and state in a single instance.'

Thus, in cooperation with Baha'is, Israel's agents, SAVAK, and women and men who the pen shies away from even mentioning, they initiate meetings in the name of the masses, organize assemblies and create committees that, on behalf of the people, introduce candidates who are home-born slaves or pathetic individuals seeking the rations of colonialism. Of course, these are not people from this country, but rather people from overseas and Israel.

(al-Rawḥānī M.S. n.d. 5: 88)

The manifesto dated 21 Farvardīn 1342/10 April 1963 by 'the religious seminary at Qum' also requested 'all of the exemplary guides and, in particular, Grand Ayatullah Khumaynī to do their utmost to 'protect' their ten 'requests,' number five of which called for 'cutting off the hands of imperialism and the Zionist agents from our country' (*Ḥawza-yi 'Ilmīya-yi Qum* n.d.: 117). Akin to countless other documents written by Islamists, *Biyugrāfi-yi Pīshvā* (The Leader's Biography) which was drawn up in 1348/1969, accused Baha'is of being 'the agents of the inhumane Zionist organization and representatives of the Jews' (Anonymous n.d.a: 63). In this manner, 'imperialism's instruments and Zionism's agents' became the preferred synonyms for depicting 'Baha'is' as foreigners in the revolutionary discourse. Since the Israeli government was deemed the unchanging enemy of Islam, the progress of the Baha'is in advancing politics, economics, and Iranian culture, was

presumed to be proof of the weakening of Islam. Therefore, in the two decades preceding the revolution, numerous spokesmen and Islamic protagonists emphasized above all else that 'Islam is in a very dangerous position.' For example, on 17 Shahrivar 1346/8 September 1967, in a board meeting for the Ḥusayn School, Muḥammad Javād Bā-hunar warned: 'Today, religion is exposed to great danger. Day by day, the propaganda of the Baha'is increases. Wake up and be concerned with the plight of religion . . .' (Mīzbānī 1376/1997: 100, 107). According to this view, all of the cultural initiatives sponsored by the government, be it the Shiraz Art Festival or the decision to replace the Islamic calendar, were dismissed as attempts by 'the misguided and straying sects' and 'the instruments of imperialism and the enemies of Islam' 'to change the Islamic character of the country.'²⁵ In line with this 'revolutionary' view, the Baha'is were held responsible for even the abusive suppression of SAVAK (the Iranian Security and Intelligence Service).²⁶ In other words, the revolutionary and Islamist discourse implicated Baha'is as participants in all of the outrageous policies of the Shah's regime.

The anti-Baha'i movement, which coalesced with Islamic propagandistic activities in the 1320s/1940s, played a crucial role in transforming 'Islamic faith' into 'political confrontation.' Instead of undertaking an objective study of the principles of the Baha'i religion, Shi'i dogmatists and other Islamic protagonists insisted that the Baha'i religion was nothing more than 'a political religion' created by imperialist governments to debilitate Islam. Consequently, more than ever before, members of Islamic boards and anti-Baha'i associations grew concerned with the prospects of an Islamic future in Iran. The intensification of this distress proved to be the means of converting piety and faith into 'political awareness.' It was, moreover, critical in encouraging the synthesis of a campaign to protect Islam. Accordingly, the board and general meetings of anti-Baha'i associations became appropriate venues to win individuals over to such organizations as *Mujāhidīn-i Khalq* (People's Freedom Fighters), *Ummat-i Vāhida* (One Community), *Ḥizb-i Milal-i Islāmī* (International Islamic Party), and *Hay'at-i Mu'talifa* (the United Organization).²⁷ Through associating the anti-Baha'i movement with the anti-Zionist, anti-colonialist, and anti-imperialist movements, the battle to cleanse Iran of its Baha'i citizens was transformed into a campaign to overthrow the Pahlavi monarchy. In the 'Iranian people's' movement 'to win their freedom,' the civil liberties of all Baha'is were taken captive at the hands of 'the Muslim nation.' As a result, in the second half of the twentieth century, Iranian civil society became party to a contradiction that lives on to this day.

Notes

1 This chapter is a translation (by Omid Ghaemmaghami) and adaptation of my 2001 article 'Baha'i-sitizi va Islam-garai dar Iran, 1941-1955', *Iran Nameh*, 19: 79-124.

- 2 For a comprehensive study on the foundations of the Babi movement, see Amanat 1989. For a historical analysis of the Baha'i religion, see Cole 1998.
- 3 See Rūhīyiyh Khānum 1970: 156-8. Also *idem* 1963: 788-94, particularly 789-91.
- 4 See Mottahedah 1988.
- 5 Firaydūn Ādamīyat claims that 'the author of this anonymous document is 'Alī Javāhir-kalām' (Ādamīyat 1361/1983: 456). However, he has not furnished any evidence for this claim. 'Alī Javāhir-kalām completed his studies in Tehran and Beirut and was fluent in Persian, Arabic, Russian, and English. He was also the translator of numerous monographs, including *Āthār al-Shī'a, Iran-i Naw* (Elwell Sutton) and *Tārīkh-i Tamaddun-i Islam* (Jurjī Zaydān).
- 6 These included the *Anjuman-i Tablighāt-i Islāmī* (Society for Islamic Propagation), *Jam'iyyat-i Mubāriza Bā Bī-dīnī* (the Association for Fighting Irreligion), *Itihādīya-yi Muslimīn* (the Muslim Brotherhood), *Jam'iyyat-i Fada'iyan-i Islam* (the Association of the Devotees of Islam), *Jāmi'a-yi Muslimīn* (the Society of Muslims), *Jāmi'a-yi Ta'līmat-i Islāmī* (the Society for Islamic Education), *Jam'iyyat-i Muravvijūn-i Madhhab-i Ja'farī* (the Association of Promoters of the Ja'farī School), *Anjuman-i Islāmī-yi Dānishjūyān* (the Student's Islamic Association), and *Kungurūh-i Javānān-i Islam* (the Islamic Youth Congress). See Anonymous 1325a: 2. After the murder of Ahmad Kasravī, *Jam'iyyat-i Mubāriza Bā Bī-dīnī* (the Association for Fighting Irreligion) transformed into *Itihādīya-yi Muslimīn* (Muslim Brotherhood). It had been formed through the efforts of Ḥājī Sarāj Anṣārī, Shaykh Qāsim Islāmī, Shaykh Mahdī Shar'iatmadārī, and some of the other 'ulama for the explicit purpose of attacking Kasravī. One of the Brotherhood's objectives was to wage 'a rationalist struggle against all manner of irreligion and a scholarly battle with all publications that are or will be opposed to Islam, the Qur'an, and the true path of Shi'ism.' See Sayyid Muḥammad Mahdī Mūsawī, the general director of the Islamic Youth Congress, Mūsawī 1325: 3.
- 7 These included the *Kānūn-i Intishārāt-i Islāmī-yi Rasht va Babul* (Society for Islamic Publications in Rasht and Babul), *Anjuman-i Payravān-i Qur'an* (the Association of the Followers of the Qur'an), *Kānūn-i Nashr-i Haqāyiq-i Islāmī-yi Mashhad* (the Society for the Publication of Islamic Doctrines in Mashhad), *Jam'iyyat-i Da'vat-i Islāmī-yi Gilan* (the Association for the Propagation of Islam in Gilan), *Jam'iyyat-i Barādarān-i Islāmī-yi Kirmanshah* (the Association of the Islamic Brothers of Kirmanshah), *Anjuman-i Mubāriza bā Kluwafāt-i Isfahan* (the Society for Fighting Superstitions in Isfahan), and *Kānūn-i Tablighāt-i Islāmī-yi Shiraz* (the Society for Islamic Propagation in Shiraz). See al-Sādāt 1326/1947: 3.
- 8 Mujtahid Kamara-ī, *Rawḥāniyat va Islam va fiqh-i Islāmī bā madārik va nuṣūṣ-i aḥkām*; Habbat al-Dīn Shahrīstānī, *Rāhnāmā-yi yalūd va naṣārā*; Maḥmūd Ṭāliqānī (translator), *Rāhnāmā-yi manāsik-i ḥajj*.
- 9 From Farvardīn 1321 to Ābān 1323, 128,000 copies of eleven education leaflets produced by *Anjuman-i Tablighāt-i Islāmī* were published. See Shahābpūr 1323/1944: 3.
- 10 For a report on the role of the *Anjuman-i Tablighāt-i Islāmī* in the election of the members of the seventh National Consultative Assembly in Mashhad, see Anonymous 1373a/1995: 28-40. For information on the close working relationship between this society and SAVAK, see Rawḥānī 1373/1994: 17-27; Anonymous 1373b/1995: 123-5. Several of the historians of the Islamic Revolution have conjectured that the *Anjuman-i Tablighāt-i Islāmī* (the *Anjuman-i Didd-i Baha'i*) is an 'imperialist' organization: 'The evidence for this faction being an imperialist group lies in the fact that at the peak of the Pahlavi dynasty, when SAVAK would not allow any religious group to remain active, the members of

- this society (just like the Baha'is) were fully engaged in carrying out their propagandistic plans. These two opposing factions were working together in achieving their malicious imperialist objectives. Baha'ism had prohibited its adherents from interfering in politics. The *Anjuman-i Didd-i Baha'i* had likewise announced that interfering in politics was forbidden and had forced its members to take an oath stating they would not meddle in it. Moreover, Baha'ism claims that the command to wage *jihad* has been nullified. The Society has likewise ruled out any form of fighting or *jihad* under the guise of a motto that would appear to be sacred, but in fact only causes the people to be deceived, i.e. appropriating the right to rule a state to the Lord of the Age alone.' – Anonymous 1365/1987: 111.
- 11 Anonymous 1325b/1947: 4; Anonymous 1325c/1947: 4; Anonymous 1325d/1947: 3–4. See also, Anonymous 1326b/1948: 1, 3.
 - 12 Regarding the Minister of Culture, Dr. Adhar's order and the closing of *Jami'a-yi Ta'limat-i Dini*, see Davani 1332a/1954: 1, 4; Davani 1332b/1954: 1–2; Ghalla-zari 1332a/1954: 1, 4; Ghalla-zari 1332b/1954: 1, 4; Ghalla-zari 1332c/1954: 1, 4.
 - 13 These included *Hay'at-i Muhammadī*, *Hay'at-i Mutavassilin* (the Organization of the Supplicants of God), *Hay'at-i Murtaḍaviyūn* (the Organization of the Champions of Imam 'Ali), *Hay'at-i Anṣār-i Dini* (the Organization of Religious Helpers), and *Hay'at-i Pir 'Aṭā'* (the Pir-'Aṭā' Association). See Anonymous 1326e/1948: 2 and Anonymous 1326f/1948: 3.
 - 14 According to Sayyid Muḥammad Taqavi, this paper, which began being published in Farvardin 1324/April 1945 under the management and editorship of Nuṣratullāh Nūryānī, 'was miles ahead of the rest in the field of propagation' (Anonymous 1325e/1947: 2).
 - 15 Najmābādī 1326/1947: 1, 3; Ṭaliqānī 1325/1946: 4; Shikārī 1326/1947: 3; Nīkū 1325/1946: 2; Āyatī 1325a/1947: 1.
 - 16 Regarding Dr. Birjīs, see Anonymous 1317/1939: 8. Concerning engineer Shahīdzāda, see Anonymous 1326i/1948: 6.
 - 17 On the occasion of the opening of Rāzī Hospital, the pharmacy of which had been donated to the hospital by Tehran's Jewish community, *Iran-i Bāstān* wrote, 'Today the Jews own the greatest share of Tehran's pharmaceutical market. As a result, dissatisfaction and worry prevails amongst the masses and in particular, amongst those who are intelligent and well-informed, because they are unable to determine whether activities of the Jews are reliable and sound considering the reality of the type of people the Jews are...' In this article, *Iran-i Bāstān* accounted Jewish Iranians, the oldest extant inhabitants of Iran, as outsiders: 'Rāzī Hospital is an Iranian-only establishment. Just as all of its employees are Iranian men and women and must remain Iranian, "the pharmacy," its most vital department must be under the watchful eyes of its astute director and be managed by Iranians. In other words, the medicine that is donated or sold by the Jews should not be accepted as reliable medicine since, as the old adage goes, there are wheels within wheels.' See Anonymous 1313/1935: 2, 11.
 - 18 After attaining a post at the Ministry of Industry and later, the Finance Ministry, he became the Prime Minister on 23 Khurdād 1327/13 June 1948. He was familiar with French and Russian. His writings include, Hajīr 1322/1944, Izaak n.d.a, Izaak n.d.b and Hajīr 1308/1930.
 - 19 Sayyid Husayn Imāmī (1303–1328/1924–1949) assassinated Ahmad Kasravī on 20 Isfand 1324 (1 March 1946).
 - 20 Simultaneous with the spread of the rumour of Hazhīr being a Baha'i, another rumour began circulating in Tehran regarding his having become a Christian. See, 'Fawq al-'āda-yi bahman: Hajīr Masīhī shuda va murtadd mī-bāshad,' in Tāfrishī 1371/1992 2: 149, 127–8.

- 21 The proposition was presented in the following format: 'Article 1: The corrupt organization of the Babis and those who follow them, the Azalis and the Baha'is, are opposed to the security of the country and are hereby declared to be illegal; Article 2: Henceforth, membership in or association with this organization in any manner, is a felony. The violator will be sentenced to two years solitary confinement and will be denied his civil rights; Article 3: The immovable material assets of social centres or institutes associated with this organization or any revenues belonging to it will be transferred to the Ministry of Culture. It will be reserved for the founding of educational institutes and the promulgation of religious learning and the fundamentals of religious worship; Article 4: Individuals from this organization who serve in governmental departments will henceforth be discharged from their positions and will in no way be hired again'. From Anonymous 1334c/1956: 3.
- 22 See Anonymous 1349/1970: 789–91.
- 23 For more on this, see Muḥammad Taqī Falsafi's analysis, 'Rawḥāniyat va intikhāb-i al-sharrayn' in Falsafi 1376/1998: 112–17.
- 24 I intend to examine them in a forthcoming study.
- 25 For example, see Anonymous n.d.b: 470, 489.
- 26 See Anonymous n.d.c: 683. Citation from Anonymous n.d.c: 684.
- 27 See Anonymous 1359/1981: 172.

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