

Religious Contentions in Modern Iran, 1881-1941

By

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Abstract

It has been suggested that in mid-twentieth century Iran, anti-Bahā'ism played a seminal role in transforming Iranian Shī'ī religious piety into the political ideology known as Islamism. This dissertation charts this transformation by offering a historical genealogy of the politicization of anti-Bahā'ism. Using the post-colonial theory of Othering as a theoretical framework, and discourse analysis and microhistory as methodologies, it interrogates a wide range of hitherto neglected primary sources to analyze how Bahā'īs were gradually branded the nation's internal Other. It tests the thesis it was mainly through the Othering of Bahā'īs that of the two national identities that struggled for supremacy in the decades that immediately followed the Constitutional Revolution, the pendulum swung towards a religious national identity and away from an ethnic-language based national identity (which had been officially dominant in the 1920s and 30s) as the nation approached the midpoint of the twentieth century.

The process of Othering the Bahā'īs had at least three components; 1) religious, carried on by the traditionalist theologians; 2) institutional and formal, sanctioned by the state; and 3) political, the result of a joint and gradual process in which Azalīs, former Bahā'īs and reformist

theologians all played a role. This process reached its culmination with the widespread publication of *The Confessions of Dolgoruki* which resulted in a fundamental paradigm shift in the anti-Bahā'ī discourse. With the widespread impression of Bahā'īs as spies of foreign powers, what up to that point constituted a sporadic theme in some anti-Bahā'ī polemics now became the dominant narrative of them all, including those authored by traditionalist clerics. Consequently, as Iran entered the 1940s, the process that would transform Islamic piety to political ideology was well under way.

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND STYLE

Names or terms of Arabic and Persian origin are transliterated according to the Library of Congress Persian transliteration guide (LC). Proper names are transliterated according to their Persian form, e.g., Afghānī rather than al-Afghānī, Salafī (or Salafīyah) rather than al-Salafīya, ḥadīṣ rather than ḥadīth; ghuluvv rather than ghulūw. Exceptions are when quoting an Arabic text. To achieve consistency, foreign words found in direct quotations are transliterated according to LC. The only exception in this regard is the name of authors, e.g., Mohamad, Abbas.

While words of Persian or Arabic origin found in common English lexicons (e.g., ulama, ayatollah, sharia, Islam) are not transliterated, their derivatives are transliterated (e.g., *islāmī*). For famous places and proper names, the common English forms are used, e.g., Tehran, Iran, Bahā'u'llāh, 'Abdu'l-Bahā'; while less familiar places and names are transliterated, e.g., Tūysirkān. The derivatives of all places, proper names and terms are transliterated, e.g., Islāmī, Īrānī.

In general, dates are provided according to the Gregorian calendar. Where deemed necessary, the Persian solar (*Shamsī*) calendar date precedes the Gregorian date. Dates in Islamic lunar (*Qamarī*) calendar are indicated by Q.

Citations follow the Chicago Manual of Style, 15th edition, even when rules are peculiar, such as is the case with encyclopedia entries which do not appear in the bibliography but do appear in footnotes in the following format, e.g., *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. "NOWRUZ."

Introduction

Analyzing the full-fledged emergence of Islam as a political ideology in twentieth century Iran, Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi suggested in 2001 that anti-Bahā'ism played a major role in converting "Islamic piety" (*īmān-i islāmī*) into a force of "political opposition" (*mubārīzah-i siyāsī*), i.e., revolutionary ideology.¹ This proposition raises an important question: how does religious antagonism become a political phenomenon? Perhaps the simplest answer is through the politicization of antagonism. In the pages that follow, I will historicize the process through which anti-Bahā'ism became politicized.

This dissertation begins in 1881 with the politicized anti-Bahā'ī sentiments voiced by the famous Islamic ideologist, Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī.² I conclude my study sixty years later when a paradigm shift occurred in anti-Bahā'ī discourse leading to the complete politicization of anti-Bahā'ism. This shift, I argue, was parallel with a fundamental change in the dominant mode of national identity from an ethnic-language based mode during the Constitutional Revolution to a religion-based mode in the early 1940s. The theoretical framework I elicit in my work is that of Othering as discussed in post-colonial theory. I will also rely on discourse analysis in some chapters and micro history in others.

Theologian Harvey Cox has shown that throughout [Western] history there have been recurring themes or myths used to characterize deviant and minority religions. He classifies

¹ See Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, "*Bahā'ī'sitizī va Islām 'garā'ī dar Iran*," *Iran Nameh* 19, no. 1 & 2 (Winter2000/Spring 2001), 79-124.

² Jamāl al-Dīn Ḥusaynī, "*Ḥaqīqat-i mazhab-i naychirīyyah va bayān-i ḥāl-i naychirīyān*," in *Ārā' va mu'taqadāt-i Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī* (Tehran: Iqbāl, 1337/1958), 23-63.

these myths as: 1) the “subversion myth” in which “these movements are seen as mainly religious fronts for politically subversive movements, or as movements that will endanger the civil authority;” 2) the myth of sexual or behavioral deviancy sometimes directed to alleged orgiastic behavior; 3) the myth of dissimulation in which the targets are thought to have been “carefully coached in not telling the truth and in misleading you;” 4) the myth that participation in the movement is involuntary and those involved are the victims of their leaders. He explains that these themes are repeated in polemics “as though the same scenario were there, and only the names of the actors needed to be changed.”³

Anti-Bahāʾī polemics include elements of all four categories outlined by Cox. The focus of this dissertation however, is the political accusations which fall under the category of “subversion myth.” Themes related to gender issues and the moral behavior of women, corresponding to Cox’s second category, although ultimately related to themes of politics, have not been included, simply because more direct political accusations have been intended. My investigation of the polemics, therefore, is very specific, and will result in a specialized understanding of the polemics involved.

Historical Background

Since the mid-nineteenth century, the anti-Bahāʾī movements in Iran have been interlinked with the development of modern and contemporary Iranian Shīʾī orthodoxies.⁴ The

³ Harvey Cox, “Deep Structures in the Study of New Religions,” in *Understanding New Religions*, ed. Jacob Needleman (New York, 1978), 122-130, quote from pages 126-127.

⁴ I am reluctant to use the problematic term, “orthodoxy,” but will qualify my decision by tentatively defining “modern and contemporary Iranian Shīʾī orthodoxies” as the ideals and praxis of the majority of Iranian Twelver Shīʾa from the mid nineteenth century to the present.

earliest polemical works written in the 1840s dealt mainly with theological and eschatological issues, repudiating the claims advanced by the young merchant, Sayyid ‘Alī-Muḥammad Shīrāzī (1819-1850), known as the Bāb (Gate), to be the twelfth Imam or promised deliverer of Shī‘ī Islam. Considered apostates, the Bāb and thousands of his followers – known as Bābīs, including many who had received training to join the ranks of the ulama⁵ – were subjected to severe persecution by the combined forces of the Shī‘ī religious establishment and the Qājār rulers.⁶ The refutation of the claims of the Bāb and the persecution of his followers were concomitant with significant developments within Shī‘ism, perhaps none more salient than the consolidation of the institution of the *marja’-i taqlīd* (the source of emulation)⁷ and the ulama’s growing interest in political matters.⁸

Less than two decades after the Bāb’s public execution, one of his followers, Mīrzā Ḥusayn-‘Alī Nūrī (d. 1892), known as Bahā’u’llāh, declared himself to be the divine figure foretold by the Bāb. Most of the Bāb’s remaining votaries would eventually become followers of

⁵ The Arabic term ‘*ulamā*’ (also used in Persian) refers to the body of religious scholars who have jurisdiction over legal and social matters in Islam or more specifically in this case, Shī‘ī Islam. The word is the plural of ‘*ālim*’ and can be translated as “theologians,” “the clergy,” “the religious learned.” One of the shortcomings that must be acknowledged in using the term is the implied suggestion that it is a completely uniform and homogenous body of believers. However, as Mansoor Moaddel has rightly pointed out, there have long been internal social, economic, and political (not to mention regional) divisions amongst the Shī‘ī ‘*ulamā*’, a fact often neglected by area specialists. See Mansoor Moaddel, “The Shī‘ī Ulama and the State in Iran,” *Theory and Society* 15.4 (1986): 520.

⁶ For an extensive discussion of the background and first six years of the Bābī movement, see Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Bābī Movement in Iran, 1844-1850*. 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2005).

⁷ *Marja’-i taqlīd* (Pers. for the Ar. *marji’ al-taqlīd*; pl. *marāji’-i taqlīd*) refers to an elite Shī‘ī jurisprudent (*mujtahid* or *faqīh*) whose opinion on all aspects of religious practice and law serves as a model of reference for observant Shī‘ī Muslims. The *marja’-i taqlīd* has the potential to exert great influence and a particularly strong *marja’* can be a powerful unifying force. For more on this institution, see Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic political thought: the response of the Shī‘ī and Sunnī Muslims to the twentieth century* (1982; repr., New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 162; Ahmad Kazemi Moussavi, “The Institutionalization of Marja’-i Taqlīd in the Nineteenth Century Shi’ite Community,” *Muslim World* Vol.84, no.3-4 (July-Oct. 1994), 279; Linda S. Walbridge, “Introduction: Shī‘ism and Authority,” in *The Most Learned of the Shi’a: The Institution of the Marja’ Taqlīd*, ed. Linda S. Walbridge (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4; Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd ed., s.v. “*Marja’-i Taqlīd*.”

⁸ See Enayat, *Modern Islamic political thought*, 162.

Bahā'u'llāh, known thereafter as Bahā'īs. Bahā'ī doctrine regards the two movements as essentially one.

Following Bahā'u'llāh's death, the leadership of the Bahā'ī community passed first to his son 'Abdu'l-Bahā' (d. 1921), and then to the latter's grandson, Shoghi (Shawqī) Effendi (d. 1957). Bahā'u'llāh's half brother, Mīrzā Yaḥyā (surnamed Azal), did not declare his allegiance to Bahā'u'llāh, and instead founded a separate, competing movement. His followers are known as Azalīs.

In the early years of the Bahā'ī religion, anti-Bahā'ī polemics continued to advance more or less the same religious arguments as those written against the Bābī movement, mainly condemning Bahā'īs as apostates from Islam (*murtadd*) – a crime punishable by death – and accusing them of sexual immorality. One can find traces of politically charged accusations, but they are negligible compared to other themes.⁹ However, during the Constitutional Revolution (1906-1911),¹⁰ which some of the Shī'ī clerics supported and others rejected, anti-Bahā'ī discourse began to incorporate more of the accusations that went beyond purely religious concerns. 'Abdu'l-Bahā', the leader of the Bahā'īs at the time, advocated a policy of dialogue between the government (*dawlat*) and the people (*millat*) and called for the intermingling of the two like “milk and honey” (*shahd va shīr*) for constructive socio-political change to occur.¹¹ He communicated this view to both sides, i.e., the Qājār monarchy and the Constitutionalists.¹²

⁹ See sections of Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī and Za'im al-Dawla in this dissertation.

¹⁰ See *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Constitutional Revolution,” and the sources mentioned in the appended bibliographies.

¹¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahā', *Makātīb-i Ḥaẓrat-i 'Abdu'l-Bahā'*, vol. 5 (Tehran: Mu'assisah'i Millī-i Maṭbū'āt-i Amrī, 1975), 173; Idem., *Makātīb-i Ḥaẓrat-i 'Abdu'l-Bahā'*, vol. 4 (Tehran: Mu'assisah'i Millī-i Maṭbū'āt-i Amrī, 1964), 44. Edward Browne has published three letters from 'Abdu'l-Bahā' that convey the same meaning. Edward G. Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1909* (London: Frank & Cass, 1966), 426-428.

¹² 'Abdu'l-Bahā', *Makātīb*, 5:173.

Moreover, he rejected a confrontational attitude between the people and the government as counter-productive and maintained that internal conflict opened the door for the neighboring states (*duval-i mutajāvarah*) to interfere.¹³ Nonetheless, contradictory political accusations were leveled against Bahā'īs. After having turned against the Constitutionalists, Shaykh Faḡl Allāh Nūrī (d.1909), the prominent *Mashrū'ahkhvāh* (one who advocates for the Islamic *sharī'a* to become the legal basis of society) cleric, declared that Bahā'īs were the major instigators behind the movement.¹⁴ Bahā'īs were simultaneously accused of being either politically passive or of supporting Muḡammad-'Alī Shāh (d. 1925), the Qājār monarch.¹⁵ The anti-Bahā'ī rhetoric at this time was further complicated by the activities of Azalīs, some of whom were prominent figures of the Constitutional Revolution.¹⁶

Following the Constitutional Revolution and during World War I, the contents of polemics remained primarily religious for some time. Beginning in the mid-1920s, traces of new type of political accusation in the form of foreign dependency appeared in the writings of some former Bahā'īs. In the 1930s, a constellation of socio-political factors, which I will discuss in detail, opened the floodgates of conspiracy theories. In this context, the forged memoirs ascribed to the one-time ambassador of Russia to Iran, Dolgoruki, emerged. This document

¹³ See Browne, *The Persian Revolution*, 426.

¹⁴ See 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Āyatī, *Al-Kawākib al-durrīya fī ma'āthir al-Bahā'īya* (Egypt: 1924), vol. 2: 163-4. One of the clauses in the supplement to the Constitution which Shaykh Faḡl Allāh strongly opposed granted equal rights to all Iranians regardless of religious affiliation. Faḡl Allāh believed such a notion contradicted the teachings of the Qur'ān. See Mangol Bayāt, *Iran's First Revolution: Shī'ism and the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1909* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 175; Homa Rīzvānī, *Lavāyih-i Shaykh Faḡl Allāh* (Tehran: Nashr-i Tārīkh-i Iran, 1362/1893), 18-19.

¹⁵ For a study of the Bahā'ī writings on issues related to the Constitutional Revolution, see Mina Yazdani, *Awzā'-i ijtimā'ī-i Iran dar 'ahd-i Qājār az khilāl-i āṣār-i mubārakah-'i Bahā'ī* (Hamilton: Association for Bahā'ī Studies in Persian, 2003), 255-322.

¹⁶ On the role played by Azalīs in the Constitutional Revolution see Abbas Amanat, "Memory and Amnesia in the Historiography of the Constitutional Revolution," in *Iran in the 20th Century: Historiography and Political Culture*, ed. Touraj Atabaki (London: I.B. Tauris and Iran Heritage Foundation, 2009), 23-54.

sought to “unravel” the Russian plot to “create” the Bābī and Bahā’ī religions by means of a well-conceived conspiracy. From this point on, anti-Bahā’ī polemical works depicted a movement arising from within the heart of Iran’s religious heritage as the country’s internal “other.” This fundamental shift was concomitant with what has been referred to as the “revival of Shī’ī thought” in post-World War II Iran.¹⁷

The Structure of the Dissertation

Chapter one, “**The Forefathers,**” explores the late nineteenth century background. It is composed of two sections. Section one probes the anti-Bahā’ī stance of one of the most influential Muslim thinkers of modern times, Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī, regarded by many as the father of modern political Islam in the Middle East. This study of Afghānī is needed to understand the intellectual background of some of the reformist theologians and Afghānī’s intellectual heirs who played a significant role in the politicization of anti-Bahā’ism. The second section focuses on Shaykh Hādī Najmābādī whose intellectual circle served as a nexus for the intermingling and transmission of ideas and perhaps linked Afghānī with the Iranian reformist theologians.

Chapter two, “**Bahā’ī and Foreigners,**” investigates the conditions that set the stage for the emergence of allegations of clandestine connections between Bahā’īs and foreigners. It brings together three sections related to the topic in different ways. The first section explores the relationship between Bahā’īs and Russia and investigates some of the key issues adduced in anti-Bahā’ī polemics to accuse Bahā’īs of having political ties with Russia. The second section

¹⁷ See Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic political thought: The Response of the Shī’ī and Sunnī Muslims to the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 162. What transpired in the 1940s and 1950s up to the Islamic Revolution, although of great historical significance and interest, is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

examines the 1903 pogrom. Both the context of the pogrom and the way it was recorded and interpreted by anti-Bahā'ī memoirists and historians make it particularly relevant to the topic. The third section revisits the 1924 murder of the American vice consul in Iran, an event that illustrates how many Iranians at the time associated Bahā'īs with foreigners.

Chapter three, **“Anti-Bahā'ī polemics,”** introduces three different categories of polemics. Section one covers the works of the early twentieth century journalist, Za'im al-Dawlah, while section two shifts the focus to reformist theologians and their reactions to the appearance of the new religion. After discussing the relevance of these theologians to our study, the following reformists are examined in depth: Kharaqānī, Sangalajī, Khālīshī and Lankarānī. The third and final section looks at the polemics of three former Bahā'īs: Āyatī, Nīkū and Ṣubḥī. The chapter includes two addenda on polemics produced by Shaykhīs and traditionalist theologians.

Chapter four, **“Riḏā Shāh, the Crafting of National Identity, and the Quintessential Iranian Religion,”** includes a study of Riḏā Shah's reign, his westernization policies, the simultaneous promotion of an ethno-language based Aryanist Iranian identity, and his treatment of Bahā'īs. This chapter contextualizes the social and political atmosphere of most of what is discussed in chapters two, three and five. It also features an addendum on Azalīs in the post-Constitutional Revolution period which is of seminal importance to our study.

Chapter five, **“The Confessions of Dolgoruki: Fiction and Masternarrative in Twentieth Century Iran,”** investigates a spy fiction that effected a fundamental paradigmatic shift in anti-Bahā'ism in Iran in the late 1930s and early 1940s. In discussing this work, the chapter brings together the main elements of the preceding chapters.

3. Review of Previous Scholarship

Despite the long history of persecution faced by Bahā'īs in Iran, to date no book-length monograph has been devoted to a study of anti-Bahā'ism from the inception of the religion to the present. A number of articles and book chapters have studied the subject, the lion's share having been published in the past ten years. In an appendix to his 1973 PhD dissertation, cultural anthropologist Michael Fischer referred to two incidences of Bahā'ī persecution in Iran in the 1950s.¹⁸ The first was the pivotal 1955 anti-Bahā'ī campaign, and the second was a 1956 incident in which seven Bahā'ī citizens were killed near the city of Yazd. Fischer's thesis dealt with the Zoroastrian community of Iran, but his appendix may constitute the first treatment of anti-Bahā'ism in post World War II Iran by a western academic. While probing in some detail the political developments in Iran between 1953 and 1955, Fischer did not offer an explanation for the anti-Bahā'ī episodes that transpired but did make a curious statement about "the 1955-56 Bahā'ī Riots."¹⁹ In a later work, Fischer made further references to the persecution of religious minorities in Iran and again included the Bahā'īs in his discussion. In passing, he proposed the source of these persecutions to be religious minorities being "seen as clients of European powers."²⁰ In the same work, Fischer suggested that of all of Iran's religious minorities, Bahā'īs are the "most vulnerable" because "the idiom of Bahā'ism is so close to that

¹⁸ Michael Max Jonathan Fischer, "Zoroastrian Iran between Myth and Praxis" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1973), 441-449.

¹⁹ Fischer, "Zoroastrian Iran," 441.

²⁰ Michael M.J. Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), 100.

of Islam that it denies the normal construction of significance that Muslims place on their idiom.”²¹

Later, Fischer spoke of anti-Bahā’ism in a published article on the Bahā’īs of Yazd.²² This anthropological study, while original, does not shed any further light on the relation between anti-Bahā’ism and the larger socio-political issues in Iran, a link which he began to hint at in his 1973 thesis but never seems to have pursued.

A more extensive treatment of the pivotal 1955 anti-Bahā’ī campaign is found in Shahrough Akhavi’s *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran: Clergy-State Relations in the Pahlavi Period*.²³ In a chapter titled, “Revival of ‘Ulamā’ Influence and Clergy-State Alignment: 1941-1958,” Akhavi relied on difficult-to-access primary sources to closely examine the 1955 anti-Bahā’ī events in which the state collaborated with the clergy to attack Bahā’ī institutions and properties before ultimately caving in to pressures brought on by the international community and refusing to comply with clerical demands to exterminate the Iranian Bahā’ī community once and for all.²⁴ Yet despite the pioneering nature of his study, Akhavi failed to recognize the consequences of the ensuing resentment harboured by a number of prominent clerics against the state on the eventual rupture between them and the Shah’s regime. As a result, Akhavi likewise failed to appreciate the implications of the link between anti-Bahā’ism and the emergence of revolutionary Islam in twentieth century Iran.

²¹ Fischer, *Iran : From Religious Dispute*, 186-187.

²² Michael M.J. Fischer, “Social Changes and the Mirrors of Tradition: Bahā’īs of Yazd,” *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogue in Postmodernity and Tradition*, edited by Michael M.J. Fischer and Mehdi Abedi (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990):222-250.

²³ Shahrough Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran: Clergy-State Relations in the Pahlavi Period* (Albany: State University Press, 1980).

²⁴ Akhavi, *Religion and Politics*, 60-90.

The first scholar to investigate the roots of anti-Bahā'ism in Iran was Irish Islamicist Denise MacEoin. Within the span of just a few pages, MacEoin discussed the background of the “controversy” regarding the Bahā'īs of Iran since the inception of the religion to the time he is writing.²⁵ Juxtaposing the emergence of the Bahā'ī community in Iran to New Religious Movements (NRM) in North America, MacEoin suggested that both Bahā'īs and NRMs present “threats” to the social systems within which they operate by offering “radical alternatives.” In the case of Iranian Bahā'īs, MacEoin believed that their anti-clericalism, advocacy of a post-Qur'ānic revelation and promulgation of what he refers to as “Western-inspired reforms” constitute such changes. Inasmuch as Bahā'īs have sought to fulfil the theocratic vision of messianic Shī'ism, there could be “no room for a *modus vivendi*” between them and the advocates of a Shī'ī order.²⁶ MacEoin's work is limited to offering suggestions for the reasons behind the persecution of Bahā'īs. As such, his study is ahistorical and homogenizing, failing to address larger questions of how the anti-Bahā'ī discourse has been in dialogue with larger socio-political developments in Iranian society.

A few years after MacEoin, legal scholar Payam Akhavan explored the human rights implications of applying Islamic law in Iran to its Bahā'īs minority.²⁷ Akhavan attempted to suggest alternative readings of the *sharī'a* (Islamic religious law) that could reconcile discrepancies between the treatment of Bahā'īs with Iran's obligations under international

²⁵ Denis MacEoin, “The Bahā'īs of Iran: The Roots of Controversy,” *Bulletin (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)* Vol.14, No. 1 (1987): 75-83.

²⁶ MacEoin, “The Bahā'īs of Iran,” 81.

²⁷ Payam Akhavan, “Implications of Twelver Shi'ih Miḥdism on Religious Tolerance: The case of the Bahá'í Minority in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” in *Islamic Law Reform and Human Rights*, Tore Lindholm and Kari Vogt (Copenhagen: Nordic Human Rights Publications, 1993): 197-218.

law. Although related to anti-Bahā'ism, Akhavan's article was not a study of the phenomenon *per se*, but would best be described as a study exploring alternative readings of Islamic law.

Two years later, Nikki Keddie, writing on the theme of Iranian minorities, offered a short but accurate account of the treatment of Bahā'īs since the inception of their religion.²⁸ Keddie observed that the “lack of legitimate religious status under strict Muslim law” is the cause of the persecution of Bahā'īs under the Islamic Republic. However, she did not make any connections between anti-Bahā'ism and wider socio-political issues affecting modern Iran.

In 1998, Negar Mottahedeh pursued the question of “the enforced participation of the Iranian people in the extermination of the Bābīs” with a sophisticated methodology and language.²⁹ For Mottahedeh, the issue was closely tied to the broader topic of Iranian modernity and modern subject formation. She explained how in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Iran, the term “Bābī” denoted negative notions of modernity. It was stereotypically attached to “any gesture of resistance to traditional Islamic values” and “a fixed type of representation that masqueraded behind an untold carnival of images of foreignness, of modernism, of nihilism and of irreligion.”³⁰

In her analysis, Mottahedeh relied on psychoanalytic Freudian concepts, Frantz Fanon's and postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha's formulations of fetishism in the analysis of race relations and national imaginings; and Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi's conceptualization of the

²⁸ Nikki R. Keddie. *Iran and the Muslim World: Resistance and Revolution*. (New York:: New York University Press, 1995): 150-53.

²⁹ Negar Mottahedeh, “The Mutilated Body of the Modern Nation: Qurrat al-'Ayn Tahirih's Unveiling and the Iranian Massacre of the Bābīs,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*. Vol. XVIII no.2 (1998): 38-47 quote from page 39.

³⁰ Mottahedeh, “The Mutilated Body,” 39.

image of unveiled European woman as the scapegoat in the political struggle against Iranian modernism. Using Bhabha's redefinition of stereotypes or fetishes,³¹ she discussed how "the Bābī" constituted the "negative stereotype and fetishized image against which and through which the modern nation identified itself."³² This fetishized image attached to the public unveiling of the Bābī poetess Qurrat al-'Ayn Ṭāhirih (d. 1852) and to aspects of Iranian modernity complicated "the modern subject's relation to himself/herself and to the constitution of the modern nation as homogenous and whole."³³

Mottahedeh certainly went further than MacEoin in addressing not only the dynamics of early anti-Bābism, but also in presenting, for the first time, the role the presence of "the Bābī" as the nation's internal "other"³⁴ played in modern Iranian subject formation. Her study however, remained limited to the early years of the Bābī movement and did not include later interactions. Furthermore, it only tangentially broached the issue of identity.

The next published work that addressed the topic was Eliz Sansarian's 2000 monograph *Religious Minorities in Iran*,³⁵ a study of the relationship between the Iranian state and the country's non-Muslim religious minorities. In the four pages of this work devoted to the Bahā'īs, the author described the persecution of Bahā'īs as being "the most widespread, systematic, and uninterrupted" among all of Iran's religious minorities. According to Sanasarian, Bahā'īs "represented everything that it [sic] was sanctioned (by the state, the

³¹ For Bhabha, "the fetish or stereotype gives access to an 'identity' which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defense, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it." Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism," *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 75.

³² Mottahedeh, "The Mutilated Body," 44.

³³ Mottahedeh, "The Mutilated Body," 41.

³⁴ Mottahedeh, "The Mutilated Body," 40.

³⁵ Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

ulama, the Shīʿī Muslim community, and the secular, even Western educated) to hate—namely, apostasy, association with the West and Israel, pro-monarchism, and an elite club bent on self-promotion and propaganda.”³⁶ However, in the case of Bahāʾīs, her work failed to adequately meet the stated goal of investigating the relationship between the state and religious minorities.

The following year, for the first time a Persian academic journal of Iranian Studies devoted an entire issue to religious minorities in Iran.³⁷ Two of the articles published in this issue were historic events in and of themselves as they constituted the first academic articles written by Iranian Muslim scholars on the situation of the Bahāʾīs of Iran—a cultural taboo by that point.³⁸

The first article by Tavakoli-Targhi was a groundbreaking study offering completely new analysis of anti-Bahāʾism (*Bahāʾī-sitīzī*, a term coined by him and used ever since among scholars writing in Persian) and its far-reaching socio-political implications in twentieth century Iran. According to Tavakoli-Targhi, the political discourse in Iran in the past half a century has otherized the Bahāʾī faith, a genuinely Iranian intellectual and religious movement. This ‘otherization’ was concomitant with a process of constructing a self-identity. It was in reaction to the Bahāʾī religion that an Islamist movement flourished, aimed at establishing an Islamic future in Iran. In this process, Islamist periodicals and organizations played a crucial role in the gradual formation of a Shīʿī public sphere which constituted a

³⁶ Sansarian, *Religious Minorities*, 53.

³⁷ *Iran Nameh* Vol. 19 no. 1&2 (Winter/Spring 2001).

³⁸ Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, “Bahāʾī-sitīzī va Islām-garāʾī dar Iran,” *Iran Nameh*, Vol.19 no. 1&2 (Winter/Spring 2001), 79-124; Reza Afshari, “Naqz-i ḥuqūq-i bashar-i Bahāʾīyān dar Jumhūrī-yi Islāmī,” *Iran Nameh* Vol. 19 no. 1&2 (2001): 151-164. Yet, another article in that special issue of *Iran Nameh* was written by lawyer and human rights activist, ‘Abd al-Karīm Lahijī. In this piece, Lahijī investigated the roots and consequences of “religious *apartheid*” in the Islamic Republic of Iran and spoke briefly about human rights violations committed against Bahāʾīs as one Iran’s religious minorities. ‘Abd al-Karīm Lahijī, “Murūrī bar vaḡʾ-i ḥuqūqī-i Irānīān-i ghayr-i musalmān,” *Iran Nameh*, Vol. 19, no. 1&2 (Winter & Spring 2001).

counter sphere vis-à-vis the national public sphere that included the followers of all religions. Relying on propaganda against Bahā'ism, this Shī'ī public sphere grew to become a powerful social force. Through mass mobilization, the Shī'ī clergy both laid the foundation of numerous organizations and produced a public discourse. Together, the two paved the way for attaining political power at the threshold of the 'Islamic Revolution.' According to Tavakoli, it was in reaction to Bābīs and Bahā'īs that "the expectation of the advent of the Mahdi which was believed imminent, was gradually postponed to more distant future." This delay paved the way for the conceptualization of *vilāyat-i faqīh* (the governance of the jurisprudent); instead of waiting for an unpredictable future, the Shī'a were called upon to build an Islamic future.³⁹

Tavakoli's article investigated the inter-related and dialogical aspects of Islamism and anti-Bahā'ism in the period between 1941 and 1955. In his study of anti-Bahā'ism in Iranian history, Tavakoli recognized two phases or two different ways of confronting Bābīs and Bahā'īs. The first began in the 1840s with the inception of the new religion and dealt with internal debates concerning Shī'ī eschatology. These debates laid the foundation for a transformation in the conceptualization of such traditional Shī'ī categories as "the Lord of the Age" (*ṣāhib-i zamān*) and "expecting the advent of the hidden Imam" (*intizār*). In the phase that commenced in 1941, the internal debates were replaced by a political discourse in which a sense of collective paranoia attributed primary agency to imperial forces rather than to Bahā'īs as self-motivated Iranian subjects. In 1955, the state and clergy jointly participated in attacking the Bahā'ī community and damaging its national headquarters in Tehran. The international outcries following these events caused the state to stop collaborating with the clergy in continuing such attacks. This episode signalled the beginning of a rupture between the Shī'ī clergy and the

³⁹ See Tavakoli-Targhi, "Anti-Bahā'ism," 204.

state. The open confrontations of the years 1962 and 1963 were in fact a result of the 1955 schism. Anti-Bahā'ism coalesced with Islamic propagandistic activities in the 1940s to play a crucial role in “transforming ‘Islamic faith’ into ‘political confrontation.’”⁴⁰

As such, Tavakoli is suggesting an alternative explanation for the Islamicization of the 1979 political rupture in Iran, despite the heterogeneity of the groups and factors contributing to its culmination. The numerous scholars that have theorized on the roots of the 1979 revolution and the reasons behind the triumph of the Shī'ī clerics over other political forces have focused on different factors ranging from the intrinsic qualities of Shī'ism, the complex social tensions that existed in the country, the semiotic unity of the diverse and antagonistic forces made possible through the use of common but ambiguous terms, to the construction of an Islamic identity against western hegemony.⁴¹

Tavakoli's interpretation is unique among these scholars in that it sheds light on a phenomenon in modern Iranian history which despite its ubiquity had ironically remained hitherto unexplored: the linkage between Islamism and anti-Bahā'ism in modern Iran. In doing so, he suggests a different periodization for the history of twentieth century Iran, with the turning point in the state-clergy relationship—a phenomenon crucial in the later development of the Islamic Revolution—having occurred with the events of 1955, rather than 1962-63, the prevailing view among historiographers.

The second article in that issue of *Iran Nameh*, written by Reza Afshari, was a detailed and well-informed description of human rights abuses committed against Bahā'īs in the Islamic

⁴⁰ Tavakoli-Targhi, “Anti-Bahā'ism,” 224.

⁴¹ See bibliography for the works of Abrahamian, Algar, Amir-Arjomand, Burūjirdi, Dabashi, Keddie, Tavakoli-Targhi (diss.) among others.

Republic of Iran. He indicated that while the rise in the level of political and social consciousness has created a public sphere in recent years with room for the discourse of respecting the human rights of all Iranians, the rights of Bahā'īs have been categorically excluded from the same discourse.⁴²

Nazila Ghanea's 2002 monograph studied the impact of United Nations human rights protection measures in the particular case of the Bahā'ī community of Iran between 1979 and 2002.⁴³ Originally a doctoral dissertation, Ghanea's work highlighted the clash between religion and human rights in Iran within the framework of UN human rights charter-based and treaty bodies. In addition, she put forward a number of recommendations for the resolution of the Bahā'ī human rights predicament. Ghanea employed a very specific legal methodology in her work, which like Akhavan's, is focused exclusively on the post-Islamic revolutionary period.

In 2005, with a new wave of persecutions underway, independent scholar Moojan Momen's article, "The Bābī and Bahā'ī Community of Iran: A Case of 'Suspended Genocide'?",⁴⁴ presented a four phase periodization for the history of persecution against Iran's Bahā'īs.⁴⁵ Relying on terminology developed in the field of genocide studies, he concluded that the first phase can be accurately classified as genocide, while the fourth (current) phase may be called "suspended genocide." He proposed that in this fourth phase, the Iranian government has been actively

⁴² Afshari, "Naqẓ-i ḥuqūq," 162.

⁴³ Nazila Ghanea, *The Interaction between the United Nations human rights system and the Bahā'īs in Iran* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2002).

⁴⁴ Momen, Moojan, "The Bābī and Bahā'ī Community of Iran: a case of 'Suspended Genocide'?" *Journal of Genocide Research*, 7 no. 2 (2005): 221–241

proceeding towards genocide only to have its plans continuously thwarted by vigorous campaigns launched by the international Bahā'ī community.

In the same year, an article was written by Friedrich W. Affolter, a scholar of the socio-emotional dimensions of conflict and social change who investigated the situation of the Bahā'īs of Iran as a case study of “how ideological genocide evolves, and how those affected can persevere and survive despite all odds.”⁴⁶ Affolter overviewed the history of their persecutions with a focus on the post-revolutionary period and international reactions to those persecutions. He concluded that this study illustrated how a community, its social support networks, as well as the international human rights machinery can work together to prevent perpetrators from engaging in ideological genocide.

In a 2007 study focusing on the role of the state, Eliz Sanasarian and co-author Avi Davidi attempted to identify patterns and trends in the treatment of non-Muslim communities in Iran in the post-2000 era.⁴⁷ In this period, with the state policy of persecuting the Bahā'īs in place, Bahā'ī citizens bore the brunt of systematic state attempts to limit Iran's religious minorities. Their study showed that under current President Ahmadinejad's administration (2005 to the present), the hostile environment for religious minorities has intensified “in both words and deeds.” Neither this paper, nor another recently published study by Sanasarian⁴⁸ that also

⁴⁵ Phase 1: Early Bahā'ism; Phase 2: From the suppression and silencing of the Bahā'īs to the end of the Qājār period (c. 1852-1925); Phase 3: Pahlavi Period (1925-1979); and Phase 4: from the Islamic Revolution of 1979 to today.

⁴⁶ Friedrich W. Affolter, “The Specter of Ideological Genocide: The Bahā'īs of Iran,” *War Crimes, Genocide & Crimes Against Humanity*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Jan, 2005): 75-114.

⁴⁷ Eliz Sanasarian and Avi Davidi, “Domestic Tribulations and the International Repercussions: The State and the Transformation of Non-Muslims in Iran,” *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 60 no. 2. (Spring/Summer 2007): 55-70.

⁴⁸ Eliz Sanasarian, “The Comparative Dimension of the Bahā'ī Case and Prospects for Change in the Future.” In Dominic Brookshaw and Seena Fazel, eds., *The Bahā'īs of Iran: Socio-Historical Studies* (London: Routledge, 2008): 156-169.

compares the conditions of Bahā'īs with other religious minorities in Iran, go beyond offering descriptive information.

In 2008 a volume was published *Five on the Bahā'īs of Iran*,⁴⁹ in which five chapters deal with anti-Bahā'ī activities. One is an abridged English translation of Mohamad Tavakoli's article discussed above,⁵⁰ the second is Sanasarian's comparative article just mentioned; and the other three are written by Abbas Amanat, H.E. Chehabi, and Reza Afshari.

Amanat's article investigates the historical roots of the persecution of Bābīs and Bahā'īs in Iran.⁵¹ Acknowledging that "the scope and frequency of Bābī-Bahā'ī persecutions still awaits thorough" studies, Amanat seeks in this "preliminary inquiry" to "detect a historical pattern in recurring cycles of anti-Bābī and anti-Bahā'ī violence and highlight its doctrinal and societal dimensions." Limiting his study to the Qājār period (1785-1925), Amanat verifies how "predicatably," the anti-Bābī pogroms and campaigns usually coincided with episodes of harvest failure, famine, epidemics or other provincial and national crises. The Bābīs (and later, Bahā'īs) served as a scapegoat to cover the failure of the policies of the state in relation to European economic or political intrusion. Drawing the attention of the public to the evils of this 'devious sect' served to consolidate the relations between the Qājār government and the clergy. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, a decade marked by growing dissention against the Qājār state, charges of "Bābī" subversion were brought against anyone with anti-

⁴⁹ Brookshaw, Dominic Parviz and Seena B. Fazel. *The Bahā'īs of Iran: Socio-historical Studies* (London: Routledge, 2008).

⁵⁰ Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi. "Anti-Bahā'ism and Islamism in Iran," trans. Omid Ghaemmaghami, in Dominic Parviz Brookshaw and Seena Fazel, eds., *The Bahā'īs of Iran: Socio-Historical Studies* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2007): 200-231.

⁵¹ Abbas Amanat, "The Historical Roots of the Persecution of Bābīs and Bahā'īs in Iran," in Dominic Brookshaw and Seena Fazel, eds., *The Bahā'īs of Iran: Socio-Historical Studies* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2007): 170-183.

clerical or anti-despotic proclivities. Beyond the state-clergy symbiosis in eradicating Bābīs and Bahā'īs, there was a third dimension to recurring violence against them: the mob incited by the clergy.

Dismissing theories of “class conflict” as inadequate for explaining the pattern of anti-Bahā'ī violence, Amanat interprets the Bābī-Bahā'ī persecutions as a “socio-cultural phenomenon.” The Bahā'īs, he argues, “were a sore point of non-conformity within a society seeking monolithic unanimity in the face of overwhelming threats from within and outside of its boundaries; a society fearful of losing its perceived ‘uniqueness’ as the Shī'ī ‘saved sect’.” The anti-Bahā'ī sentiments were in Amanat’s analysis, “a doctrinally admissible ritual to forge a sense of collective ‘self’ versus an indigenous ‘other’ at a time when the alien ‘other’ was too intimidating and inaccessible to be viewed as an adversary.” The rejection of “the indigenous modernity of the Bābī-Bahā'ī world view” was the corollary to “Shī'ī particularism,” a term he uses to refer to the sense of “exclusive self” that Uṣūlī Shī'ism aims to construct “out of the fragile complex of the existing religious and social identities.”⁵² Amanat shares with Tavakoli and Mottahedeh the idea of Bahā'īs constituting the “other” against which modern Shī'ī identity in Iran has constructed itself. What his analysis lacks however, is the dialogic relationship between the construction of identity in both Bahā'īs and Shī'a.

In “Anatomy of Prejudice: Reflections on Secular Anti-Bahā'ism in Iran,” H. E. Chehabi pursues the question of antipathy against Bahā'īs among secular and anti-clerical Iranians. According to him, until “very recently,” almost any discussion of Bahā'īs that did not use “abusive, disparaging, or at least sarcastic language” was considered apologia. Any one speaking of Bahā'īs in just “a matter-of-fact way” was automatically accused of being a Bahā'ī.

⁵² Amanat, “Historical Roots,” 180, 181.

Furthermore, while secular opponents of the Iranian government immediately condemned any human rights abuses in Iran, they remained almost completely silent about the murder of approximately 300 Bahā'ī citizens since the start of the Islamic revolution. In an attempt to find the reasons behind such "social attitudes," Chehabi recognizes three basic secular anti-Bahā'ī lines of argumentation: 1) Bahā'īs are forces of division; 2) Bahā'īs have been used by foreign powers in ways harmful to the national interests of Iran; 3) Bahā'īs were disproportionately represented in the inner circles of power during the Pahlavi regime. After demonstrating that these arguments were all unfounded, citing examples from contemporary Persian literature, scholarly works, and personal communications, Chehabi comes to propose that the anti-Bahā'ī prejudices of many secular Iranians derive from the anti-cosmopolitan nature of Iranian nationalism. Iranian nationalism "espoused by a majority of secular Iranians," Chehabi argues, has from the beginning "contained strong xenophobic elements." The cosmopolitanism of Bahā'īs has its roots in the tenets of their religion and is reflected in their effortless ease to interact socially with Westerners in contrast to Iranian Muslims whose concept of *nijāsāt* (ritual impurity) might work as an obstacle in the way of such interaction. According to Chehabi, their cosmopolitanism makes Bahā'īs a prime target for conspiracy theorists who attribute "anti-Iranian" proclivities to them while ghettoizing Bahā'īs as "the quintessential internal Other of the nationalist imagination."⁵³ Chehabi's work addresses a very specific aspect of anti-Bahā'ism from only one angle and does not engage issues of state attitudes or the far reaching social aspects of the problem.

⁵³ H.E. Chehabi "Anatomy of Prejudice: Reflections on Secular Anti-Bahā'ism in Iran." In Dominic Brookshaw and Seena Fazel, eds., *The Bahā'īs of Iran: Socio-Historical Studies*. (London: Routledge, 2008): 184-199. Quotes from pages 192 and 194.

Afshari's article is an expanded version of his *Iran Nameh* article, featuring new data and further analysis.⁵⁴ In Afshari's view, political considerations and state expediencies alone do not fully explain the anti-Bahā'ī policies and actions in the Islamic Republic of Iran, as Bahā'īs did not present a challenge to the consolidation of the Islamic regime. Rather, such actions originated "in the clerics' aversions, whose roots lay in a pre-modern religious prejudice" and "their dislike of a homegrown religious faith." He demonstrates that in post-revolutionary Iran, whenever the political factions have vied with one another for power—such as during the presidency of Banīšadr—the persecution of Bahā'īs has increased. While Afshari blames the Iranian people for their "quiet indifference" to the attacks on Bahā'īs in the early years of the Islamic republic, he presents a different perspective vis-à-vis the new generation of Iranians who he identifies as being "far less inclined to recreate 'otherness' and [to] demonize the targets in religious terms." He concludes his essay by deploring the "dearth of information with reference to the Bahā'īs of Iran" and emphasizing the need for "some monographs and field studies" on the subject.⁵⁵

In a soon to be published article,⁵⁶ Moojan Momen analyses the process by which the Bahā'ī community of Iran was cast in the role of internal enemy. Momen holds the combined forces of the government, the religious leaders and the intellectual elite during the Pahlavi regime responsible for laying the foundation for the ongoing persecution of Iranian Bahā'īs after the revolution. He categorizes the attacks during this period into five areas: 1) charges of moral

⁵⁴ Reza Afshari, "The Discourse and Practice of Human Rights Violations of Iranian Bahā'īs in the Islamic Republic of Iran." In Dominic Brookshaw and Seena Fazel, eds., *The Bahā'īs of Iran: Socio-Historical Studies*, (London : RoutledgeCurzon Curzon, 2008): 232-277.

⁵⁵ Afshari, "The Discourse and Practice," 238, 271, 273, 274.

⁵⁶ Moojan Momen, "Conspiracy Theories and Forgeries: The Bahā'ī Community of Iran and the Construction of an Internal Enemy," *forthcoming* (to be published in *Iran Nameh*).

indecenty made in apostate literature at the instigation of religious leaders; 2) accusations made by secular intellectuals of Bahā'īs lacking patriotism and being anti-nationalistic; 3) religious attacks which were in fact a resurgence of arguments and allegations made in the early years of the Bahā'ī religion; 4) baseless and fallacious criminal charges; and 5) governmental policies such as dismissing Bahā'īs from the Army in 1935-6. While Momen does hint at the wider socio-political ramifications of anti-Bahā'ism in the abstract to his article, he does not elaborate on this in the article itself. Nonetheless, his work offers penetrating insights vis-à-vis the continuities between anti-Bahā'ism in Pahlavi and Islamic revolutionary Iran. Finally, in recent years two studies in Persian on the topic of the persecution of Bahā'īs have been published providing useful first hand sources and insightful analysis.⁵⁷

By studying an important and neglected aspect of the socio-political life of Iranians in nineteenth and twentieth century Iran, carried successfully, this project can contribute to a major revision of the Iranian historiography of this period. Through offering a more democratized version of Iranian history, it can also deepen our understanding of the plight of Iran's Bahā'īs and help cultivate the acceptance of this minority by their fellow citizens, a need that has already been expressed by a number of Iranian scholars living in the Iranian diaspora.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Fereyduṇ Vahmān, *Yikṣad va shaṣt sāl mubārīzāh bā dīyānat-i Bahā'ī: gūshah-i az tārikh-i ijtimā'i-dīnī-i Iran dar dawrān-i mu'āṣir* (Darmstadt, Germany: 'Aṣr-i Jadīd, 2009); Suhrāb Nikūṣīfāt, *Sarkūb va kushtār-i digarandīshān-i mazhabī dar Iran*, 2 vols (Luxembourg: Payām, 1388/2009).

⁵⁸ See for example, Afsaneh Najmabadi's recognition of the need to "re-imagine an Iranian identity that would entertain a different relationship between citizenship and difference." Najmabadi laments that "it still remains tragically dangerous to try to speak as Iranian and Bahā'ī." Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Authority and Agency: Revisiting Women's Activism during Rīzā Shah's Period," in *The State and the Subaltern: Modernization, Society and the State in Turkey and Iran*, ed. Touraj Atabaki (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 177.

Chapter One

Forefathers

1.1. Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī: The Progenitor of Islamism and his Anti-Bahā'ism

Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838-1897) has been described as “one of the outstanding figures of nineteenth-century Islamic history,”⁵⁹ and “perhaps the most famous proponent of modernist Islam,” who “enjoyed the stablest popularity of all modernists in the century since his death.”⁶⁰ He has been credited as “the first to realize the potential of Shī'ī riyāsāt,” and

⁵⁹ Nikki R. Keddie, *Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn “al-Afghānī,” A Political Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 1.

⁶⁰ See Charles Kurzman, ed., *Modern Islam 1840-1940: A Source Book* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 103. The sources on Afghānī are many. In addition to Keddie's political biography of him mentioned above, the following are some of the more important works on him: Iraj Afshar, “Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Afghani,” in *Savād va biyāz: majmū'ah-yi maqālāt*. (Tehran: Dehkhuda, 1344/1965), 2: 178-195. Idem, *Majmu'ah-i asnād va madārik-i chāp nashudah darbārah-yi Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn mashhūr bi Afghānī, 1838-1897* (Tehran: Chāpkhānah-i Dānishgāh-i Tehran, 1963). See also, Mangol Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent: Socio-religious Thought in Qājār Iran* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1982), 143-148; Edward G. Browne, “Sayyid, Jamāl ad-Dīn, the Protagonist of Pan-Islamism,” in *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1909* (London: Frank Cass, 1966), 1-30. Juan R. I. Cole, “New Perspectives on Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani in Egypt,” in *Iran and Beyond: Essays in Middle Eastern History in Honor of Nikki R. Keddie*, edited by Rudi Matthee and Beth Baron (Costa Mesa: Mazda, 2000), 13-34; Ḥāfiẓ Farmānfarmā'iyān, ed., *Khāṭirāt-i siyāsī-i 'Alī khān Amīn al-Dawlah* (Tehran: Iran, 1962), 128-131. Albert Hourani, “Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī,” in *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 103-129. Şifat Allāh Jamālī, *Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Asadābādī* (Tehran: Kitābkhānah-i Ibn Sīnā; Nikki R. Keddie, “Religion and Irreligion in Early Iranian Nationalism,” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 4 (1962): 265-95; Idem, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran: The Tobacco Protest of 1891-92* (London: Cass, 1966); Idem, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn “al-Afghānī” Including a Translation of the “Refutation of the Materialists” from the original Persian* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Afghānī, Jamāl al-Dīn”; Elie Kedourie, *Afghani and 'Abduh: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam* (London: Frank Cass, 1966); Muḥammad Makhzūmī, *Khāṭirāt Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: al-Ahliyah lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī, 2003). Murtaẓā Mudarrisī Chahārdahī, *Ārā' va mu'taqadāt-i Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī* (Tehran: Hajj Muḥammad Ḥusayn Iqbāl va Shurakā, 1337/1958); Idem, *Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn va andīshah'hā-yi ū* 3rd ed. (Tehran: Parastū, 1968). Muḥammad Muḥīt-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Asadābādī va bīdārī-i mashriqzamīn, with an introduction by Sayyid Hādī Khusrowshāhī* (Tehran: Daftar-i Nashr-i Farhang-i Islāmī, 1370/1991); Idem, *Naqsh-i Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Asadābādī dar bīdārī-yi mashriqzamīn* (Dār al-Tablīgh-i Islāmī, 1972/1350). Homa Pakdaman Natiq, *Djmal-ed-Din Assad Abadi dit Afghani* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1969); Ḥasan Taqīzādah, *Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Asad-Ābādī* (Tabriz: Mu'assasah-i Intishārāt-i Surūsh, 1969). Some of the above articles and book chapters have been compiled in a recent anthology: M. Ikram Chaghatai, ed., *Jamāl ad-Dīn al-Afghānī: An Apostate of Islamic Resurgence* (Lahore: Sang-e-meel, 2005). For a study of Afghānī's relationship with his foremost student Muḥammad 'Abduh and the latter's relationship with 'Abdu'l-Bahā', see: Oliver Scharbrodt, *Islam and the Bahā'ī Faith: A Comparative Study of Muhammad 'Abduh and 'Abdul-Baha 'Abbas* (London: Routledge, 2008).

recognized as the person who “reminded the ‘ulama of the possibility of utilizing such leadership...for explicit political ends.”⁶¹ Given his importance in the history of the contemporary Middle East, a close look at his anti-Bahā’ī sentiments and activities is in order.

Raised in Iran and active in the Iranian exile intellectual circles of the Ottoman Empire intermittently in the 1870s-90s, it may be expected that Afghānī had extensive contact with Bābīs and Bahā’īs.⁶² He denigrated the Bābī and Bahā’ī religions in his earlier writings and displayed an anti-Bahā’ī stance in his interactions with a number of prominent Azalī Bābīs in Istanbul toward the end of his life. In what has been called his “most famous work,” known in the West as *The Refutation of the Materialists* (*Ḥaḳīqat-i mazhab-i naychirīyah va bayān-i ḥāl-i naychirīyān*),⁶³ written in 1881, Afghānī disparaged the Bābīs (by which he mostly meant

⁶¹ Abbas Amanat, *Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shī‘ism* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2009), 174.

⁶² According to Keddie, Afghānī was “well acquainted with both Shaykhī and Bābī doctrines.” As a child in 1852, Afghānī was exposed to the persecution of the Bābīs in Tehran. During his adolescence in the Shī‘ī shrine cities, he was “almost surely exposed to the discussions of these new religious doctrines.” Following Homa and Nasser Pakdaman, Keddie points out that there were echoes of Shaykhī ideas in his 1870 talk in Istanbul. She also suggests that “the political activist and meliorist ideas of the Bābīs may have contributed to Jamāl al-Dīn’s revision of Islam in these directions.” Keddie further adds that witnessing several activist religions, including that of Bābīs, may have caused Afghānī to realize “the power of religious appeals to Muslim masses.” See Keddie, *A Political Biography*, 21-22. Juan Cole maintains that both the “esoteric, cabalistic Shaykhī school and the messianic Bābī movement” influenced Afghānī “to one degree or another.” Cole, “New Perspectives,” 14. Momen correctly observes that Afghānī’s belief that “all three religions, Islam, Judaism and Christianity, were in perfect agreement in their principle and their purpose” (Kedouri, *Afghānī and ‘Abduh*, 15) was an influence from the Bahā’ī teachings. See Moojan Momen, “The Bahā’ī Influence on the Reform Movements of the Islamic World in the 1860s and 1870s,” *Bahā’ī Studies Bulletin*, Vol. 2 No.2 (September 1983), 47-65, also at http://bahai-library.com/momen_influence_reform_movements (accessed 17 Aug. 2009). For Afghānī’s views on the matter, see Makhzūmī, *Khāṭirāt*, 134-139.

⁶³ Jamāl al-Dīn Ḥusaynī, “*Ḥaḳīqat-i mazhab-i naychirīyah va bayān-i ḥāl-i naychirīyān*,” in *Ārā’ va mu’taqadāt-i Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī* (Tehran: Iqbāl, 1337/1958), 23-63. For the English translation, see Nikki R. Keddie and Hamid Algar, trans. “The Truth about the Neicheri Sect and an Explanation of the Neicheris,” in Nikki R. Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 130-174. Despite her own translation of the title of the work in English, Keddie uses the short title, “Refutation of the Materialists,” better known in the West, to refer to this work. “Refutation of the Materialists” is a translation of the title of the Arabic translation: *al-Radd ‘alā al-dahrīyīn*, which is—like the Arabic text itself—a paraphrase rather than a verbatim translation. See Keddie, *An Islamic Response*, vii. Regarding this book, Keddie writes that “the main point to be noted throughout is its thoroughly pragmatic and this-worldly defense of religion.” Keddie, *An Islamic Response*, 73.

Bāhā'īs). Following a historical overview and critique of the materialists,⁶⁴ in which he emphasized their “corrupt” teachings and behavior, Afghānī moved on to discuss the Bāṭinīyah.⁶⁵ “The superiority and greatness” of the Muslims continued “until the fourth century [AH, when] the *naychirīs*, or naturalists, appeared in Egypt under the name of the Bāṭinīyah and the knowers of the hidden.”⁶⁶ As can be inferred from Afghānī’s discussions, he identified the Bāṭinīyah with the materialists because he saw both as lacking moral principles. It is in the context of speaking about the Bāṭinīyah and their “corruption” that he brings up the Bābīs, who Afghānī maintains, “spilled the blood of thousands of God’s servants.” Comparing them to groups identified in classical Islamic heresiography works as “Ismā’īlī,” he called them “apprentices of those same neicheris of Alamūt and slaves, bearers of begging bowls, of those men of mountain.” As such he accused them of being anti-establishment and supporters of anarchism, perhaps, having in mind the early Bābī-state confrontations. Moreover, having in mind the Bābī-Bahā’ī tendency to interpret religious texts allegorically, he labeled their doctrines “examples of *bāṭinī* [esoteric] teachings” and warned about the “further effects their beliefs will have among the Iranian people in the future.”⁶⁷

⁶⁴ According to Keddie, “this section seems to be based partly on arguments traditional in Muslim world and partly on often inaccurate things that Afghānī had heard about Darwin.” Keddie, *An Islamic Response*, 73.

⁶⁵ Bāṭinīyah is “a name given (a) to the Ismā’īlīs in medieval times, referring to their stress on the *bāṭin*, the “inward” meaning behind the literal wording of sacred texts; and (b), less specifically, to anyone accused of rejecting the literal meaning of such texts in favour of the *bāṭin*.” See: Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd ed., s.v. “Bāṭiniyya.”

⁶⁶ Keddie, *An Islamic Response*, 156. Translation of Chahārdahī, *Ārā’ va mu’taqadāt*, 46.

⁶⁷ Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism*, 158. For the original Persian, see Murtazā Mudarrisī Chahārdahī, *Ārā’ va mu’taqadāt-i Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī* (Tehran: Iqbāl, 1337/1958), 49. Afghānī’s comparison of Ismā’īlīs and Bābī-Bahā’īs is unfounded with respect to the claims that he is advancing. However, the two traditions clearly have theological-philosophical cognates which need to be further explored. See Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Bābī Movement in Iran, 1844-1850*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Kalimāt, 2005).

Even though Afghānī's remarks in *The Refutation of the Materialists* portrayed Bāhā'īs as social and political dissidents (comparing them to the warriors of Alamūt and associating them with the early Bābī armed confrontations with the state), he did not accuse them of being servants, agents or stooges of foreign powers, which of course became the dominant accusation found in later anti-Bahā'ī works. This is when his critique of the pro-British Sir Sayyid Aḥmad Khān is clearly along those lines.⁶⁸ He ascribed the spread of Aḥmad Khān's doctrine to the British plot to weaken Islam and destroy the unity of Muslims.⁶⁹ In his critique of Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, Jamāl al-Dīn created a concept, a category that was used in later decades by his followers and others in order to accuse the Bahā'ī religion of having been created by imperialist powers. Because of the importance of this concept as a child of the mind of one who can be considered the father of modern political Islam in Iran, a closer look is necessary. In an article titled "The Materialists in India" and published on 28 August 1884 in *al-Urwa al-wuthqá*, the journal Afghānī published in Paris, he wrote that the British believed that as long as the Qur'an was read among the Muslims in India, "it would be impossible for them to be sincere in their submission to foreign rule." Therefore, they sought to "weaken the beliefs

⁶⁸ On Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, see Christian W Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1978). Afghānī's concern with Sayyid Aḥmad Khān can be inferred from Keddie's remark that *The Refutation of Materialists*, more than being directed against materialists, was directed against Aḥmad Khān. See *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. "Afghānī, Jamāl al-Dīn." Keddie posits that Afghānī's attack against the Naturalists was "essentially pragmatic," accusing them of harming the Muslim community. A doctrinal attack would have been more difficult because doctrinally, they were close to Afghānī in advocating greater rationalism and a return to the Islam of the early days. See Keddie, *An Ismamic Response*, 70. According to Keddie, "Refutation should be read as a political tract written to mobilize existing Islamic sentiment against the West." Keddie, "Religion and Irreligion," 280.

⁶⁹ On this issue see Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 125. As Hourani tells us, "After a visit to England in the 1870's, Sayyid Aḥmad began to preach a new Islam to which was applied the term 'Naychiriyya' (derived from the English word 'Nature')." According to Hourani, Sayyid Aḥmad Khān believed that "the laws of nature, as deduced by reason, were the norms by which Islam should be interpreted and human acts judged." Hourani interprets this belief as implying that "there was nothing that transcended the world of nature," and unlike Keddie who, in years later than Hourani, sees the work rather directed against Aḥmad Khān, Hourani believed that in *The Refutation of the Materialists*, Afghānī refuted all those "from Democritus to Darwin...who gave an explanation of the world not involving the existence of a transcendent God." See Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 124-125.

of the Muslims.” They first attempted to write books that defamed Islam. As this measure failed, they searched for another means. A man named Aḥmad Khān Bahādūr came to their service, by “sowing division among the Muslims and scattering their unity.” He called himself a *naychirī* or naturalist, invited people to reject religion, “disparaged to them the interests of their fatherland,” and “strove to erase the traces of religious and patriotic zeal.”⁷⁰ It is important to note that Afghānī himself never ever made such comments about Bahā’īs. In fact, he would be very surprised to see how his casting of Sayyid Aḥmad Khān’s cause was used in later decades for those he considered the heirs of the revolutionary Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ. In any case, what Afghānī wrote about Aḥmad Khān created a category which at least partly fits the Canadian philosopher Ian Hacking’s idea of “making up people.”⁷¹ Hacking tells us how in “human sciences,” there is a constant attempt to classify people. “Creating new names and assessments and apparent truth is enough to create new ‘things’. Making up people would be a special case of this phenomenon.”⁷² The case being discussed here, is similar in some ways: Afghānī created a concept, i.e., pseudo-religions fashioned by imperialists to “sow division” among the Muslims. Once he created this category or concept, those that followed him in the twentieth century searched to find cases they thought would “fit” that category (and applied the concept even to those the original would not and did not fit).

⁷⁰ In Keddie, *A Islamic Response*, 175-180. Quotes from 176-178.

⁷¹ See Ian Hacking, “Making Up People,” *London Review of Books*, Vol. 28 No. 16 (17 August 2006), also at <http://www.generation-online.org/c/fcbiopolitics2.htm> (accessed 9 January 2010). I mentioned this case “partly fits,” Hacking’s idea, because what Hacking is interested in is the interaction of the “name” (i.e., the category created) with the named (people put in that category), what he calls Dynamic Nominalism, wherein people cast in a category, under a name, actually change just because of that “naming,” or (the investigation that led to that naming) so that they no longer are “quite the same kind of people as before.” They are “moving targets.” In our case, since the category was never accepted by those named, only the first aspect of Hacking’s theory applies: a name or a category is made and subjects that fit this category are found.

⁷² Ibid.

While Afghānī clearly does not express similar accusations against Bābīs, and his critique of them is of a different sort—an important point in historicizing the accusation of foreign connection leveled later on against Bahā'īs—his conceptualization of the foreigners creating a new religion to disunite Muslims was used against Bahā'īs later on by his ideological heirs, as we shall see.

Why does Afghānī make the comment regarding “Bābīs” in *The Refutation of the Materialists*, to begin with? The question becomes particularly relevant in light of the assertion made in recent scholarship that Afghānī was “himself almost certainly an agnostic or atheist.”⁷³ The answer might be in what Keddī suggests regarding Afghānī's aim of writing this work as a way to “ingratiate” himself with the Ottoman Sultan “to obtain a position from him.”⁷⁴ Knowing that Bahā'īs were not the favorites of ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, the inclusion of the paragraph criticizing them could give the work a higher chance of being well received by the Sultan.

Afghānī also authored an article in the newspaper, *Miṣr*, on the Bābī-Bahā'ī faiths.⁷⁵ The same essay was published in 1881 in the first Arabic encyclopedia, Butrus al-Bustānī's *Dā'irat al-*

⁷³ See Juan R.I. Cole, “New Perspectives on Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī in Egypt,” in Rudi Mattee and Beth Baron, eds., *Iran and Beyond: Essays in Middle Eastern History in Honor of Nikki R. Keddie* (Costa Mesa: Mazda, 2000), 13–34. Quote from page 15. See also, Kedouri, *Afghānī and ‘Abduh*, 45; Keddie, “Religion and Irreligion,” 279–280. Cole asserts that Afghānī's “dedication to Islam was political and instrumental rather than a matter of personal belief.” Ibid. In another article, Cole emphatically rejects Hourani's attempt to explain Afghānī's “dislike of Bābism in terms of his strict Sunnī orthodoxy.” Cole, “Muḥammad ‘Abduh and Rashīd Riḏā: A Dialogue on the Bahā'ī Faith,” *World Order* Vol. 15 (Spring-Summer 1981): 7–16. Quote from page 4n. Even if Afghānī's dedication to Islam was as Cole says, just political, it remains that despite his changing almost every aspect of his life, Afghānī's “consistent aim,” “was to revive the power and image of the Islamic world through modern-style reforms.” Kurzman, *Modernist Islam*, 103.

⁷⁴ See Keddie, *An Islamic Response*, 25.

⁷⁵ For ‘Abd al-Bahā'’s reference to the publication of this article in *Miṣr*, see ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Ishrāq Khāvarī, ed., *Mā'idah-yi āsmanī* Vol. 9 (Tehran: Mu'assissah-i Millī-i Maṭbū'āt-i Amrī, 1965), 117. The microfilm of the newspaper *Miṣr* at the University of Toronto, the only copy listed on WorldCat, is unfortunately missing.

ma'ārif.⁷⁶ Briefly, in this article, described by Cole as, “outrageously biased,”⁷⁷ he included inaccurate information about Bahā'ī beliefs and doctrines. For example, he stated that Bābīs [i.e., Bahā'īs] believe in reincarnation, that they have borrowed their ideas from idol worshippers, that they kill anyone who refutes their faith, and that they launched anti-government campaigns of bloodshed. Speaking about the Bāb, Afghānī claimed:

Many Persians followed him and his movement became excessively dangerous. His message attracted some people but his followers terrorized the masses and struck fear into their hearts. They would try to learn the inner thoughts of the people and would not hesitate to kill anyone who criticized their beliefs. They sowed seeds of enmity and treachery wherever they went. They would appear in different guises, such as mendicants and the like, so they could kill anyone they suspected or thought had insulted their sect. In this manner, they spilled the blood of many people. They resembled the assassins who became infamous during the era of the Fātimids (q.v. Ismā'īlīyah). But they did not stop here. They continued (their treachery) until they ignited a revolt against the government in three regions. Their gall and insolence had no likeness. Each of them would wrap himself in a loincloth, take his sword and attack thousands of soldiers completely naked other than the cloth around his loins! They believed that if one of them died in battle, he would be resurrected forty days later. Their rebellions became a matter of grave concern for the government. It attempted to restrain them but they resisted and stood their ground before the government until this man, Sayyid Muḥammad 'Alī, was arrested, imprisoned for 18 months, and executed in Tabriz by firing squad in 1850 after the ulama issued a fatwa...

In the same article, Afghānī fabricated laws and ascribed them to the Bahā'ī writings such as the permissibility of marriage between sisters and brothers. In the article's conclusion, he

⁷⁶ S.v. “Babisme,” *Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif*, Vol.5 (Beirut, 1881), 26-28. It is odd that Bayat makes no mention of Afghānī's encyclopaedia and *Miṣr* newspaper articles on the Bābīs in the section of her work dealing with Afghānī. See: Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 143-148.

⁷⁷ See Juan R.I. Cole, “New Perspectives,” 23. Cole finds Afghānī's desire to “distance himself from the heterodox movement,” as the only explanation one can think of as to why he wrote that article. Cole believes that Afghānī had “a generally favorable view of the movement.” His source for drawing such conclusion is an article that the disciples of Afghani wrote that Cole interprets as a positive representation of the Bābīs. See Cole, *Ibid*. His view demands a more thorough investigation. The first western scholar to have noticed this article was EG Browne. Browne noted that the article “contributes some important facts not previously published, but also contains one or two grave errors.” Edward G. Browne, *Traveller's Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bāb* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891), 199. A portion of the article was translated by Browne in *idem*, “The Bābīs of Persia,” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, XXI (1889): 942-3.

maintained that antinomian actions (*ibāḥīya*)⁷⁸ were asserted by the Bābīs as one of the pillars of their religion. Afghānī again emphasized that the Bābīs confiscate properties and kill anyone who refutes their religion.

A short time after publishing the above article, however, while in Paris in 1883-84, publishing the “modernist and anti-British”⁷⁹ journal *al-‘Urwa al-wuthqā*, he sent issues of the journal on a weekly basis to Acre to the son of Bahā’u’llāh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’, expressing friendship and inviting him to send him articles to be published in the journal. His requests were not accepted, and the move was interpreted as an apologetic one to compensate for his previous antagonism.⁸⁰ Juan Cole has seen in this the possibility that he considered the Bahā’ī faith “an ally in reform.”⁸¹

That Afghānī had prominent Azalīs in his circle of acquaintances is a well known fact. During his stay in Istanbul in 1892, he formed a circle of Iranian exiles that consisted of “Azalīs for the most part.”⁸² Two of his closest associates were well-known Azalīs, the sons-in-law of

⁷⁸ By mentioning *ibāḥīya*, Afghānī sought to compare the Bābīs with Sufi and Shī’ī groups mentioned by Muslim heresiographers who did not fixed laws regulating social behavior, that everything was now permitted and accepted for them. See *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Ibāḥa.”

⁷⁹ See *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Afghānī, Jamāl al-Dīn.”

⁸⁰ See two pieces of the writings of Bahā’u’llāh on this issue, in ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Ishrāq-Khāvarī, *Raḥīq-i makhtūm*, Vol. 1 (Tehran: Mu’assissah-i Millī-i Maṭbū’āt-i Amrī, 1973/1352), 739. Also see idem, *Mā’idah-yi āsmānī*, Vol. 4 (Tehran: Mu’assissah-i Millī-i Maṭbū’āt-i Amrī, 129BE/1972/1351), 120-21. It must be mentioned here that there is also evidence for some correspondence between ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ and Afghānī at some point. We have a short letter written by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ to Afghānī and complementing him for an article he had written, apparently sending him, as an enclosure, a copy of an article written by Miḥat Pāshā. See I. Afshār and A. Mahdavi, eds., *Majmū’a-yi asnād va madārik-i chāp nashudah dar bāra-yi Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Mashhūr bi Afghānī* (Tehran: University of Tehran, 1963), tableau 62, picture 133.

⁸¹ Juan R.I. Cole, “Rashīd Rizā on the Bahā’ī Faith: A Utilitarian Theory of the Spread of religions,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 5,3 (Summer 1983): 276-291. Quote from 278.

⁸² See *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Iṣlāḥ ii. Iran.” See also Keddie’s reference to the presence of the “schismatic Bābīs” among Iranians working with Afghani, sending letters to Shī’ī ulama asking their support for the pan-Islamic claims of the Sultan. Keddie, *An Islamic Response*, 30.

Yaḥyá Azal: Mīrzā Aghā Khān Kirmānī (d. 1896) and Shaykh Aḥmad Rūḥī (d.1896). ‘Abdul-Bahā’ has provided details of Afghānī’s collaborations with these two prominent Azalīs staging public debates in the presence of ministers of the Ottoman Empire and its chief intelligence officer. During these staged conversations, Afghānī subtly reaffirmed the statements of Kirmānī and Rūḥī and presented a distorted picture of the Bahā’ī faith in the guise of expressing his disinterested opinion at the urging of others.⁸³ He maintained that the Bahā’ī beliefs “were not conducive to social progress, and failed to conform to governmental laws.” Moreover, Bahā’īs “were opposed to all governments (*duwal*), sought to uproot the foundations of the world of humanity, destroy all the nations of world, plunder and raid the properties of the people, and enslave the families and children of its various tribes.”⁸⁴ This account seems fairly reliable, as its content is in line with Afghānī’s depictions of Bahā’īs in the aforementioned encyclopedia article as anti-establishment, posing a threat to the state, and a danger to the people. We can assume that perhaps following the wishes of his Azalī cohorts, Afghānī sought to instigate the Ottoman authorities to suppress the Bahā’ī exiles.

There is another account of his anti-Bahā’ī activity, aimed at instigating Sultan ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd to suppress the Bahā’īs during his sojourn in Istanbul. In 1892, he collaborated with two prominent Azalīs and gradually grew closer to the Sultan. He is reported to have tried to interpolate some horrifying material into the most holy book of the Bahā’īs, the *Kitāb-i aqdas*, translated it into Turkish and gave it to ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd to instigate a reaction against the Bahā’īs. He included such horrendous material as injunctions to demolish all the mosques of

⁸³ See ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Ishrāq-Khāvarī, *Raḥīq-i makhtūm*, Vol. 1, 737-752.

⁸⁴ Ishrāq-Khāvarī, *Raḥīq-i makhtūm*, 1:741.

Islam and destroy Mecca and Medina. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd left the issue to the *marja’ al-taqlīd* of the Shī‘ites, himself thought to have been a crypto Bahā’ī according to one account.⁸⁵ It can only be imagined what fate would have awaited Bahā’īs had the Sultan accepted the veracity of the added clauses.⁸⁶

To conclude, it is important to note that despite Afghānī’s “passionate and consistent devotion to anti-imperialism”⁸⁷—or more correctly, anti-British imperialism,⁸⁸ and despite his unfriendly attitude towards Bahā’īs, there is no indication in his extant works that he ever sought to connect Bābīs or Bahā’īs to foreign powers. His accusations did have a political aspect, but in the form of Bahā’īs being threats for the establishment and the order. However, as mentioned above, he is the one to have created a concept – i.e. the imperialists forging pseudo-religions to weaken the Muslims and rule over them – that was used by anti-Bahā’ī polemicists in the twentieth century.

⁸⁵ See Afnān, Mīrzā Ḥabību’llāh. *The Genesis of the Bābī-Bahā’ī Faiths in Shīrāz and Fārs*, trans. Ahang Rabbani (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 133.

⁸⁶ To appreciate the dangers posed by instigating these suspicions, see Necati Alkan, *Dissent and Heterodoxy in the late Ottoman Empire : Reformers, Bābīs and Bahā’īs* (Gorgias, 2009).

⁸⁷ See Cole, “New Perspectives,” 34.

⁸⁸ According to Cole, he was in India during the “Great Rebellion” and watched it being put down by the British. “He began to fear that the British having subdued India, would now seek to conquer the Middle East.” Later in Afghanistan, he started “supporting Russia against what he saw as the more dangerous British.” Cole, “New Perspectives,” 14. The British and some Afghāns, as Keddie tells us, believed him to be “a Russian agent, and he evidently asserted at the end of his stay that he was such.” Keddie, *An Islamic Response*, 15. His anti-British stance did not stop him from, at one point, offering to assist them. See Keddie, *An Islamic Response*, 24-25; and Kurzman, *Modernist Islam*, 103. Upon the dismissal of Afghānī from Iran, according to ‘Alī Khān Amīn al-Dawlah, the Russian minister in Iran, Prince Nicolos Dolgoruki went to the Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah and expressed the dissatisfaction of his government. Farmānfarmā’iyyān, *Khātīrāt-i siyāsī-i ‘Alī khān Amīn al-Dawlah*, 130.

1.2 Shaykh Hādī Najmābādī and His Intellectual Nexus

Any serious attempt to chart the intellectual history of the decades prior to the Iranian Constitutional Revolution must take into account the seminal role played by Shaykh Hādī Najmābādī (1250Q/1834-1320Q/1902), “one of the more pious and learned men”⁸⁹ of his generation who has been largely neglected by western scholars.⁹⁰ It remains for scholars of modern Iranian intellectual history to investigate the life and thought of this unusual and influential figure. An introduction will suffice our immediate needs.

Najmābādī was openly critical of mainstream Shīʿī clerics and clashed with many of his contemporaries.⁹¹ Some clerics contended that he had no religion or labeled him a Bābī.⁹² The well-known 19th century *mujtahid*, Sayyid Ṣādiq Ṭabāṭabāʾī publically called him an infidel.⁹³

⁸⁹ Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy, and the Origins of Feminism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 48. Among other things, he established a clinic that was named after him. Ibid.

⁹⁰ A few studies on Najmābādī have been published in Iran in recent years. Not surprisingly, they deny fundamental aspects of his identity and thought including his Bābī proclivities. Moreover, they contend that his excommunication by an eminent *mujtahid*, Sayyid Ṣādiq Ṭabāṭabāʾī, and his being called an “infidel” resulted from Najmābādī’s critical stance against the clerics. For two such works, see Ḥasan Mursalvand, *Ḥājj Najmābādī va mashrūṭīyat, bih munāsibat-i yik ṣadumīn sāl-i riḥlat-i Ayatollah Ḥājj Najmābādī raḥmat Allāh ‘alayh 1320-1420 H.Q.* (Tehran: Vizārat-i Farhang va Irshād-i Islāmī, 1378/1999); *Zidigīnāmah va khadamāt-i ‘ilmī va farhangī-i Ayatollah Ḥājj Najmābādī* (Tehran: Anjuman-i Āṣār va Mafākhīr-i Farhangī, 1385/2006). The only study of Najmābādī’s unorthodox views is the recent Persian article by Tūraj Amīnī, “Ḥājj Shaykh Hādī Najmābādī,” *Guftmān-i Iran* (8 Mihr 1385/16 Oct. 2006) <http://www.goftman-iran5.info/-othermenu-13/505>.

⁹¹ ‘Abd al-Hādī Ḥā’irī, *Tashayyu’ va mashrūṭīyat dar Iran va naqsh-i Īrāniyān-i muqīm-i Iraq* (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1364/1985-6), 195. Yaḥyā Dawlatābādī, *Hayāt-i Yaḥyā*. 4 Vols (Tehran: Ibn Sīnā, 1331/1952-3), 1: 59. Dawlatābādī writes: “He is critical of the pseudo-clerics and their greedy behaviour, without any reservations.” For Shaykh Hādī’s harsh criticism of the ulama, see *Tahrīr al-‘uqalā’* 88.

⁹² Mahdi Malikzādah, *Tārīkh-i inqilāb-i mashrūṭīyat-i Iran* (Tehran: Sukhan, 1383/2004), 1: 170.

⁹³ Edward G. Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1909* (1910; repr., London: Frank & Cass, 1966), 406.

Despite this fact, he was so highly respected that Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh is reported to have visited him in person at his home.⁹⁴

Najmābādī created an intellectually vibrant environment in his classes⁹⁵ and is said to have trained most of the “intellectuals of the Nāṣirī period.”⁹⁶ He was simultaneously in contact with prominent thinkers with different, even opposing, intellectual orientations. His circle included reformist theologians who we will study in the following chapter as well as prominent Azalīs, both with strong anti-Bahā’ī sentiments.⁹⁷ Najmābādī was in regular contact with prominent Bahā’īs and appears to have respected the Bahā’ī faith.

Najmābādī is identified as one of the “friends and associates” of Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī.⁹⁸ According to some sources, after Afghānī began promoting his Pan-Islamist ideologies, a secret society was formed in Tehran to support him. Najmābādī was an active

⁹⁴ Browne, *The Persian Revolution*, 406.

⁹⁵ Najmābādī’s pedagogy was ahead of its time. According to an account by Mīrzā Ḥusayn Mu’allim, an acquaintance who had attended his theological classes, Najmābādī’s classes were highly interactive. Upon entering the class, Mīrzā Ḥusayn observed a heated debate among Najmābādī’s students over the issue of the *Nubuvvat-i khāṣṣah* (Muḥammad’s Specific Prophethood—incidentally, a subject that interested the Bābīs as well as the Bāb had written a treatise on the topic). Najmābādī explained to Mīrzā Ḥusayn that he commonly posed a question for his students to debate. See ‘Azīz Allāh Sulaymānī, *Maṣābīḥ-i hidāyat* (Tehran: Mu’assisah-’i Millī-i Maṭbū’āt-i Amrī, 1968), 6:402-403.

⁹⁶ Mahdī Malikzādah, *Tārīkh-i inqilāb-i mashrūṭiyat-i Iran* (Tehran: Sukhan, 1383/2004), 1: 170. Keddie maintains that Shaykh Hādī’s “enlightened ideas were responsible for his being denounced by others among ulama as an unbeliever. This did not impair the great influence which his sanctity and learning had secured him, however. His teachings were of very great influence, and it was thus a blow to the enlightenment, when he now in September, 1902, died at the age of seventy. Nikki R. Keddie, “Iranian Politics 1900-1905: Background to revolution,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1969): 151-167. Quote from p.154.

⁹⁷ Many reformist clerics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth were among Afghānī’s disciples. See Rasūl Ja’fariyān, *Sayyid Asad Allāh Kharaqānī: rawḥānī nawgarā-yi rūziḡār-i mashrūṭah va Rīzā Shāh* (Tehran: Markaz-i Asnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī), 22.

⁹⁸ Nūr al-Dīn Chahārdahī, *Vahhābīyat va rīshah’-hā-yi ān* (Tehran: Fathī, 1363/1984), 117, 122. Quote from page 117.

member of this group.⁹⁹ According to one account, someone from Afghānī's circle sent him politically charged materials that were smuggled into Iran. 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Ṣan'atīzādah Kirmānī provides an account of his father, Ḥājī, an Azalī¹⁰⁰ who travelled to Istanbul to visit Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kirmānī and Shaykh Aḥmad Rūḥī, sons-in-law of Yaḥyá Azal. Mīrzā Āqā Khān took Ḥājī to visit Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī "who was working for the freedom of the people of Iran." When time came for Ḥājī to return to Iran, Mīrzā Āqā Khān charged him with a "mission." Mīrzā Āqā Khān explained that since the Iranian postal service had outlawed "the messages, newspapers and magazines" that they published to "awaken" the Iranian people, he wanted Ḥājī to "risk his life, if necessary," to smuggle their circulars inside Iran and deliver them to Najmābādī. The mission was apparently accomplished.¹⁰¹ Moreover, according to reports from Mīrzā Rīzā Kirmānī's interrogation after he had assassinated Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh, Kirmānī contacted Najmābādī upon his arrival in Tehran before murdering the monarch.¹⁰² Apparently, Najmābādī was the only person who dared to arrange a memorial service for Kirmānī after his execution.¹⁰³

Najmābādī's relationship with Azalīs went beyond those in Afghānī's circle. Three prominent Azalīs who would later play key roles in the Constitutional Revolution were in

⁹⁹ See Yaḥyá Dawlatābādī, *Ḥayāt-i Yahyá*. Vol.1 (Tehran: Ibn Sīna, 1331/1952-3), 123-24; 'Abd al-Hādī Ḥā'irī, *Tashayyu' va mashrūṭiyat dar Iran va naqsh-i Īrāniyān-i muqīm-i Iraq* (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1364/1985-6), 91-92; idem, *Shī'ism and Constitutionalism in Iran: A Study of the Role Played by the Residents of Iraq in Iranian Politics* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977), 73.

¹⁰⁰ On Ṣan'atīzādah's father Ḥājī 'Alī Akbar Ṣan'atī, see the addendum to Chapter 4, "Azalīs, Post Constitutional Revolution." Ṣan'atīzādah is deliberately subtle here on the Azalī affiliation of his father but there are still clues indicating that in the book. Ḥājī was a student of a certain Ākhūnd Mullah Muḥammad Ja'far who had formerly been a Shaykhī but "changed his beliefs" after meeting a visitor to Kerman. The two participated in a private circle away from the eyes of the "government agents and the mullahs who were connected with the government." 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Ṣan'atīzādah Kirmānī, *Rūziḡārī ki guzasht* (N.p: 1346/1967), 16-17.

¹⁰¹ Ṣan'atīzādah Kirmānī, *Rūziḡārī ki guzasht*, 34-43, 50-51.

¹⁰² See Edward Browne, *The Persian Revolution*, 63-85.

¹⁰³ See Edward Browne, *The Persian Revolution*, 408.

regular contact with him: Yaḥyá Dawlatābādī, Malik al-Mutakallimīn, and Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Vā‘iz. Najmābādī’s circle was in fact the place where these men interacted with one another.¹⁰⁴ Nūr al-Dīn Chahārdahī, who maintains that Najmābādī “secluded himself from the public (*‘āmmah-yi mardum*)” and attracted a circle of young “knowledgeable and talented” disciples, lists the names of four of his students, all of whom had Azalī leanings: Muḥammad Qazvīnī, Muḥammad-‘Alī Furūghī, Abū al-Ḥasan Khān Furūghī, and ‘Alī-Akbar Dihkhudā.¹⁰⁵

What about Najmābādī’s interactions with Bahā’īs? We know that he was mentioned in a letter (*lawḥ*)¹⁰⁶ written by Bahā’u’llāh, the founder of the religion. Responding to the Bahā’ī scholar, Abū al-Faḍl Gulpāyigānī, who had apparently mentioned Najmābādī in a letter to Bahā’u’llāh, the latter asked Gulpāyigānī to convey his greetings to Najmābādī, adding that “it behoves (Najmābādī) to arise with greatest steadfastness in the path of his Lord,” and assuring him of his prayers that “God aid him to guide the people to the path of guidance (*rashād*).”¹⁰⁷ Najmābādī also received at least one letter from ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ admiring his altruism and acts of philanthropy and inviting him to remove his “old garb” and “put on the garment of sanctity.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ stated that doing so would ultimately have greater spiritual benefits than the

¹⁰⁴ See Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 48. On the Azalī orientation of these Constitutionalists, see Abbas Amanat, “Memory and Amnesia in the Historiography of the Constitutional Revolution,” in *Iran in the 20th Century: Historiography and Political Culture*, ed. Touraj Atabaki (London: I.B. Tauris and Iran Heritage Foundation, 2009), 23-54.

¹⁰⁵ Chahārdahī, *Vahhābīyat va rīshah’hā-yi ān*, 117. On the Azalīs leaning of these figures, see the addendum to Chapter 4, “Azalīs, Post Constitutional Revolution.”

¹⁰⁶ Bahā’ī sources refer to letters written by Bahā’u’llāh as *alwāḥ* (sing. *lawḥ*) or “Tablets.” See *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Lawḥ.”

¹⁰⁷ See Fāḍil Māzandarānī, *Asrār al-aṣār* (Tehran: Mu’assisah-‘i Millī-i Maṭbū‘āt-i Amrī, 1973), 5: 251. Also cited in idem, *Tārīkh-i zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, Vol. 8, part 2 (Tehran: Mu’assisah-‘i millī-i maṭbū‘āt-i amrī, 1976), 1132.

respect and adulation he currently enjoyed. ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’s letter included a prayer for Najmābādī who is described as a pious man of erudition in many fields.¹⁰⁸

In addition to Abū al-Faḡl Gulpāyigānī, Najmābādī was also in touch with other well-known Bahā’ī scholars such as Āqā Muḥammad Nabīl Akbar Fāḡil-i Qā’inī (d. 1309Q/1892)¹⁰⁹ and Ḥājī Mīrzā Ḥasan Adīb al-‘Ulamā’ (d. 1337Q/1919).¹¹⁰ The latter engaged in theological discussions with Najmābādī. In an anecdote that illustrates his familiarity with the Bahā’ī teachings, Najmābādī recounts pursuing a series of theological debates with someone named Adīb al-‘Ulamā’. He observed that his interlocutor’s views were similar to those of “the Bābīs,” by which he apparently meant the Bahā’īs. Najmābādī’s comment led Adīb al-‘Ulamā’ to read Bahā’u’llāh’s *Kitāb-i īqān* and subsequently convert to the nascent religion.¹¹¹

The Bahā’ī historian Fāḡil Māzandarānī has noted that although he received letters from Bahā’u’llāh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ and was in contact with a number of Bahā’ī scholars, Najmābādī himself never became a Bahā’ī. He did, however, “believe” (*i’tiqādī dāsht*) in the Bāb and enjoyed regular contact with Bābīs,¹¹² by which Māzandarānī means Azalīs. In this light, historian Abbas Amanat has called Najmābādī a “*mujtahid* of Bābī leanings.”¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ See Fāḡil Māzandarānī, *Tārīkh-i zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, Vol. 8, part 1 (Tehran: Mu’assisah-‘i Millī-i Maṭbū’āt-i Amrī, 1974), 507- 511. This source also contains a biography of Najmābādī. pp. 511-513. “Abdu’l-Bahā”s letter may have been an invitation to Najmābādī to accept the prophetic call of Bahā’u’llāh.

¹⁰⁹ See Rūḥ Allāh Mihrābkhānī, *Sharḥ-i aḥwāl-i jināb-i Mīrzā Abū al-Faḡā’il Gulpāyigānī* (Tehran: Mu’assisah-‘i Millī-i Maṭbū’āt-i Amrī, 1974), 15. On Fāḡil Qā’inī, see: *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Nabīl-i Akbar.”

¹¹⁰ On him, see *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “ADĪB ṬĀLAQĀNĪ.”

¹¹¹ Fāḡil Māzandarānī, *Tārīkh-i zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, 8/1: 463-64.

¹¹² Fāḡil Māzandarānī, *Tārīkh-i zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, 8/1: 513.

¹¹³ Amanat, “Memory and Amnesia,” 33.

The only work by Najmābādī to have been published is his *Tahrīr al-‘uqalā’* (The Emancipation of the Rationalist Scholars),¹¹⁴ printed posthumously by Murtaẓā Najmābādī, with an introduction by the “educator and author,” Abū al-Ḥasan Khān Furūghī.¹¹⁵ Amanat has described this book as “a reform-oriented critique of the clerical establishment” that “epitomized dissent even among senior *mujtahids*.”¹¹⁶ In *Tahrīr al-‘uqalā’*, Najmābādī expresses his views on some of the main religious issues being debated in his time, including the Bābī movement, the Bahā’ī-Azalī conflict, and the rise of the Salafī movement. The book offers a rare window into the theological and social concerns that occupied Najmābādī’s mind, even if it is deliberately vague in some places—understandable given his elite social position and the precarious themes that he wrote about.

Considering the importance of Najmābādī and his circle in understanding the interaction that occurred between different—and at times opposing—leaders of thought in Iran at the time, the book is a valuable source for understanding aspects of Iran’s intellectual milieu in the decades that preceded the Constitutional Revolution. Before discussing *Tahrīr al-‘uqalā’*, however, a few words need to be said about Furūghī’s introduction.

The introduction *Tahrīr al-‘uqalā’* is in and of itself an important document. It is one of the few places where there is a textual evidence and acknowledgement (even if it is allusory) on the part of the author that he is an Azalī from the second generation of Azalīs, the rest of

¹¹⁴ Shaykh Hādī Najmābādī, *Tahrīr al-‘uqalā’* (Tehran: 1312/1933). According to Ṣan‘atīzadah Kirmanī, Najmābādī was forced to postpone the publication of a second book because “its topics are such that they do not agree with the current attitudes and beliefs in Iran.” However, when Najmābādī’s son was asked about this book, he “completely denied” its existence. See Ṣan‘atīzadah Kirmānī, *Rūziḡārī kih guzasht*, 53.

¹¹⁵ See *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Furūghī, Abū al-Ḥasan.”

¹¹⁶ See *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Constitutional Revolution i. Intellectual Background.”

whom had chosen to dissimulate their beliefs.¹¹⁷ In addition, Abū al-Ḥasan Khān Furūghī suggests that Najmābādī is his co-religionist in the path of Mīrzā Yaḥyá Azal.

Furūghī begins the introduction by speaking about allusions (*ishārāt*) found in the Qur'an to the mysteries of existence. He quotes the following verse from Sūrat Maryam: "O Zakariyyā! We give thee good news of a son: His name shall be Yaḥyá: on none by that name have We conferred distinction before."¹¹⁸ Furūghī glosses this verse as announcing the glad-tidings (*bishārat*) of the coming of the promised one, "a pure gem." Just as Zakariyyā was given a son in his old age, the "father of knowledge" has been given sons worthy of the address, "(To his son came the command): 'O Yaḥyá! Take hold of the Book with might.'"¹¹⁹ Such sons reside in "the noble house of Najmābādī."¹²⁰ He then proceeds to provide the reader with background information about the Najmābādī family and a biographical narrative of Shaykh Hādī, "one of the men preparing the way for the awakening of Iran (*bīdārī-i Iran*) and the approaching Islamic movement (*nihzat-i Islam*)."¹²¹

The first forty-fifty pages of *Tahrīr al-'uqalā'* leave the reader with the impression that it is a Bābī text written in circumspect language. The work begins by discussing the general theme of the appearance of prophets and the way people respond to them and the religions that they have founded at different stages in history. The first few pages are devoted to an account of

¹¹⁷ On the Azalī practice of *taqīyah*, see addendum to chapter 4, "Azalīs, Post Constitutional Revolution." See further discussion of Abū al-Ḥasan Khān Furūghī's introduction to *Tahrīr al-'uqalā'* in the introduction to the chapter on reformist theologians.

¹¹⁸ Qur'an 19:7.

¹¹⁹ Qur'an 19:12.

¹²⁰ Abū al-Ḥasan Furūghī, introduction to *Tahrīr al-'uqalā'* by Shaykh Hādī Najmābādī (Tehran: 1312/1933), p. *dāl*.

¹²¹ Furūghī, introduction to *Tahrīr al-'uqalā'*, page *law*. Furūghī's words are important in ascertaining the extent of collaboration between Azalīs and reformist theologians which I will discuss in the section on these theologians.

the prophets from Abraham to Muḥammad,¹²² and are followed by a discussion of why people fail to recognize a new messenger of God, or in Najmābādī's cautious and prudent language, "the great one of the time" (*buzurg-i zamān-i khud*), when he appears.¹²³ The content is similar to Bahā'u'llāh's *Kitāb-i īqān*. Najmābādī adduces the same verses from the Qur'an as are found in the *Kitāb-i īqān* to argue that whenever a prophet of God appears, initially, the majority of the people reject him because he does not fulfil their criteria and expectations for a new messenger. Later, after the death of the prophet, the people slowly come to recognize the veracity of his claims and begin to exaggerate the majesty of his station.¹²⁴ Najmābādī then discusses his views on the reasons behind people's resistance to recognize a messenger of God when he first appears.¹²⁵ The renewal of religions,¹²⁶ the allegorical meaning of some of the verses of the holy books,¹²⁷ and the agreement and lack of conflict between the content of the holy books of different religions¹²⁸ are some of the topics that the Shaykh explores in ways that are very similar what one finds in Bahā'ī sources.

Najmābādī then gives a short historical-theological account of the appearance of the Shaykhī,¹²⁹ Bābī, Bahā'ī and Azalī movements.¹³⁰ Despite his attempt to appear neutral, his

¹²² Najmābādī, *Tahrīr al-'uqalā'*, 1-13.

¹²³ Najmābādī, *Tahrīr al-'uqalā'*, 13.

¹²⁴ The verse cited in both works is Qur'an 40:34: Joseph brought you the clear signs before, yet you continued in doubt concerning that he brought you until, when he perished, you said, "God will never send forth a Messenger after him." (Arberry trans.) Cf. Najmābādī, *Tahrīr al-'uqalā'*, 11-12 and Bahā'u'llāh, *Kitāb-i īqān* (Hofheim: Bahā'ī verlag, 1998), 140.

¹²⁵ Najmābādī, *Tahrīr al-'uqalā'* 16-24.

¹²⁶ Najmābādī, *Tahrīr al-'uqalā'*, 27.

¹²⁷ Najmābādī, *Tahrīr al-'uqalā'*, 29.

¹²⁸ Najmābādī, *Tahrīr al-'uqalā'*, 34.

¹²⁹ See Encyclopedia of Islam, s.v. "Shaykhiyya."

account of the Bāb does give away some dedication on the part of the author,¹³¹ whereas with regards to the rest of the story, i.e., Bahā'ī vs. Azalī confrontation, it does not reveal any personal convictions, and remains a description offered by an outsider. However, on the division between Bahā'u'llāh and Yaḥyá Azal, he seems to have given more weight to his Azalī sources, even though there are no signs of dedication to either side.¹³² He also criticizes Bahā'u'llāh and Yaḥyá Azal for failing to resolve their conflicts: “Gracious God! The two of them could not to sit down, empty their hearts, and talk out [their differences].”¹³³

The rest of the book deals with various theological topics. Najmābādī rejects that miracles are a sufficient proof for the authority of a messenger of God,¹³⁴ denies the claim that the religious scriptures have been interpolated (*taḥrīf*),¹³⁵ discusses the unity of religions¹³⁶ and the meaning of “encountering God” (*liqā' Allāh*), a Qur'anic eschatological promise. In each of these cases, Najmābādī's views are close to what is presented in the Bābī and Bahā'ī writings. Some of the concerns and preoccupations of the reformist theologians (*iṣlāḥ*),¹³⁷ who we will study in the next section and with whom some of Najmābādī's students ended up identifying with, are also discussed: *shirk* (joining partners with God), *taqlīd* (the theory that “the unlearned masses

¹³⁰ Najmābādī, *Taḥrīr al-'uqalā'*, 54ff.

¹³¹ Najmābādī, *Taḥrīr al-'uqalā'*, 54-63.

¹³² Najmābādī, *Taḥrīr al-'uqalā'*, 64-65.

¹³³ Najmābādī, *Taḥrīr al-'uqalā'*, 65.

¹³⁴ Najmābādī, *Taḥrīr al-'uqalā'*, 182-183.

¹³⁵ Najmābādī, *Taḥrīr al-'uqalā'*, 110-111.

¹³⁶ Najmābādī, *Taḥrīr al-'uqalā'*, 127.

¹³⁷ On *iṣlāḥ* (reform) and its main concerns and elements see the next chapter.

are dependent for their knowledge of the law on the learned”),¹³⁸ *ghuluvv* (exaggerating; in theological terms, those accused of *ghuluvv* traditionally ascribed divine characteristics to members of the Prophet’s family, in particular ‘Alī, and hence exaggerated their station),¹³⁹ and general criticism of the clergy.¹⁴⁰ Najmābādī’s approach to all the issues is that of a rationalist. For him reason (*‘aql*) is the final judge in all matters. He considered reason “the first prophet that God had sent to mankind” and urged against blind imitation and superstition.¹⁴¹

Following Najmābādī’s treatise, the book contains two other essays¹⁴² devoted to the topic of “meeting God” (*liqā’ Allāh*), the aforementioned Qur’anic topos¹⁴³ and a major topic of discussion in Bahā’u’llāh’s *Kitāb-i īqān*.¹⁴⁴ A short note appears at the beginning of each essay, written either by Murtaẓā Najmābādī, who published the book, or Abū al-Ḥasan Furūghī, who authored the introduction. The note states that the essay has been written to refute “one of the new sects” (*yikī az firaq-i jadīdah*).¹⁴⁵ Given the background of the people involved (an Azalī and a descendent of the Shaykh, perhaps wary of the dangers posed by being associated with a condemned religious group), the short notes aim to cast the book as an anti-Bahā’ī polemic. The work’s content, however, does not support this proposition. Najmābādī’s comments on

¹³⁸ Najmābādī, *Tahrīr al-‘uqalā’*, 119. See *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, s.v. “Taḳlīd.”

¹³⁹ Najmābādī, *Tahrīr al-‘uqalā’*, 132.

¹⁴⁰ Najmābādī, *Tahrīr al-‘uqalā’*, 88.

¹⁴¹ Najmābādī, *Tahrīr al-‘uqalā’*, 93.

¹⁴² Najmābādī, *Tahrīr al-‘uqalā’*, 205-284. Pp. 265-284 feature several sermons and prayers.

¹⁴³ See Qur’an 6:31, 10:45, 29:5.

¹⁴⁴ See Bahā’u’llāh, *The Kitāb-i īqān*, 2, 12, 91, 94, 106, 110, 147.

¹⁴⁵ See Najmābādī, *Tahrīr al-‘uqalā’*, 205-211, 209-265. The quote is from p. 205. At the beginning of the second treatise, on p. 209, we read, “Also in response to the same sect, he wrote:”

“meeting God,” are very similar to the Bābī and Bahā’ī understanding of the Qur’ānic concept, i.e., that it refers to encountering the manifestation of God.¹⁴⁶ A similar compatibility with Bābī and Bahā’ī thought can be seen in Najmābādī’s statements regarding miracles. Najmābādī states that while it is possible for the manifestations of God (*mazāhir-i ḥaqq*) to perform miracles, they are not meant to be used or relied on as proof for their claims. The revelation and words of a prophet or messenger are the greatest proofs of the validity of his claim.¹⁴⁷

These treatises are followed by a number of prayers and sermons.¹⁴⁸ Next comes two short pieces inviting people to *tawḥīd* (the affirmation of the oneness of God) and prohibiting them to commit *shirk* (joining partners with God; the opposite of *tawḥīd*).¹⁴⁹ In one of these two pieces, we find the only direct address to the followers of the Bāb (*ahl al-bayān*). Najmābādī refutes the claim that the latter’s writings comprise the exposition of the Qur’ān, since Muḥammad invited people to God and prohibited them from *shirk*. Immediately following this statement, Najmābādī addresses the Muslims (*ahl al-furqān*) and asks if they have forgotten the covenant of Muḥammad who commanded them to worship only one God. He blames the Muslims—apparently the Shī’ites—for having broken their covenant by “making the Imams partners [with God or with Muḥammad],” and for making (Muḥammad) a partner with God (*ja’altum al-a’imma shurakā’ wa-min qabl ja’altum nafs [Muḥammad] sharīkan li-llāh*).¹⁵⁰ The last statement, criticizing the Shī’a for having gone beyond the limits of moderation in their

¹⁴⁶ See Najmābādī, *Taḥrīr al-‘uqalā’*, 207, 211, 212-217, and *passim*.

¹⁴⁷ Najmābādī, *Taḥrīr al-‘uqalā’*, 233-234, 238-39.

¹⁴⁸ Najmābādī, *Taḥrīr al-‘uqalā’*, 265-78.

¹⁴⁹ Najmābādī, *Taḥrīr al-‘uqalā’*, 278-84.

¹⁵⁰ Najmābādī, *Taḥrīr al-‘uqalā’*, 283-283.

reverence of the Imams, is in line with the Salafī (and Wahhābī) critiques of the Shī'a.¹⁵¹ As mentioned above, Najmābādī did incorporate other Salafī themes.

Najmābādī's religious self-identification is very difficult to pinpoint from these essays. One might draw the conclusion that Najmābādī crisscrossed ideological and confessional barriers and cannot be classified as belonging to any one group alone. Yet despite his use of sometimes coded language, it is difficult not to see that he accepted many of the fundamental theological tenets found in the writings of the Bābī: the unity of the messengers of God, the unity of religions, progressive revelation, the need for revelation to correspond with the spiritual capacity of humanity at any given age,¹⁵² and the continuity of prophethood which amounts to a belief in non-finality of the prophethood of Muḥammad.¹⁵³ As for his passing criticism of the Bābīs, it may simply be a smoke screen hiding Najmābādī's connection with a movement that was heavily suppressed.

As far as the present study is concerned, more important than identifying Najmābādī's convictions is understanding how this multi-faceted character and his vibrant intellectual

¹⁵¹ See the next chapter for a discussion of Salafī thought.

¹⁵² Najmābādī, *Tahrīr al-'uqalā'*, 213.

¹⁵³ He asserts: "Do not think [for a second] that God is unable to manifest Himself in a different manifestation or reveal Himself in another revelation, now or at any point in the future." (*lā tatakhayyal anna Allāh lays bi-qādirin 'alā an yatajallā bi-jilwatin ukhrā aw an yazhara bi-zuhūrin ākhir fī al-ḥīn wa-min ba'd*). Najmābādī, *Tahrīr al-'uqalā'*, 215. To add to the difficulty of identifying Najmābādī's religious affiliation, we should mention here that his grandson considered him a secret Bahā'ī. For Afsaneh Najmabadi's account of her father's opinion of his own grandfather, Shakh Hādī Najmābādī being a Bahā'ī who practiced dissimulation, See Zohreh T. Sullivan, "Interview with Afsaneh Najmabadi," in *Exiled Memories: Stories of Iranian Diaspora* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 73. There is nothing in *Tahrīr al-'uqalā'* that would disprove this assertion.

circle provided the locus of collaboration for two groups of people: Azalīs and reformist theologians, sometimes called Salafī. The alliance between these two groups would lay the foundation upon which the edifice of anti-Bahā'ī-Islamist thought was erected in twentieth century Iran.

Chapter Two

Bahā'īs and Foreigners

Bahā'īs and Foreigners

Introduction:

Napier Malcolm, a Christian missionary who lived in Yazd, Iran for five years, has remarked, “The Behā'īs [sic] consider that they have a creed which enables them to meet the foreigner without continual jar or offence. In this they are right, for they do not veil their women, they do not consider infidels unclean, and they go further than does the broadest Shiah[sic] in the matter of respect to other forms of faith.”¹⁵⁴ In these few lines Malcolm provides us with a valuable first-hand account of the social disposition of Bahā'īs, even in the relatively conservative environment such as that which would be found in Yazd at the turn of the century. Similar comments were made by W. St. Clair Tisdall, another missionary, in 1906, though this time with particular focus on women. Concerning the “social condition” of Muslims, Tisdall wrote that Bahā'īs “are more liberal in their views with regard to women’s education, and some Behai [sic] women have risen high in the esteem of the members of the sect. Some have become Behai [sic] missionaries to their own sect.”¹⁵⁵

Regardless of their particular views as missionaries, Malcolm and Tisdall’s observations help explain a phenomenon observed in several accounts of early twentieth century Iran: There was an impression in the minds of Iranians of their Bahā'ī countrymen as being similar to or culturally and behaviourally connected with Westerners. There were several instances in

¹⁵⁴ Napier Malcolm, *Five Years in a Persian Town* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1905), 93.

¹⁵⁵ W. St. Clair Tisdall, “Islam in Persia” in *The Muḥammedan World of To-Day*, ed. S.M. Zwemer, E.M. Wherry, and James L. Barton (New York: The Young People’s Missionary Movement, 1906), 115-130.

the first quarter of the twentieth century where the presence of Westerners in Iran provided the context for the expression of such an impression. Presenting below a number of such cases, I suggest that this perception that Bahā'īs were similar, and hence connected, with foreigners, provided the context in which the later accusations of espionage could find their way into the minds of Iranians.

Three Anecdotes Indicating the Existence of this Perception:

1. When the British Orientalist, Edward Grandville Browne (d. 1926), traveled throughout Iran in 1887-88, he acquired a suit made of a local fabric, but cut in a British style. His young Persian assistant “laughingly” commented that “people would say” Browne “had turned Bābī.” Analyzing the incident, Negar Mottahedeh writes that the native informant identifies the “the foreign” element. “The Bābī ,” as the scapegoat for the ills of Iranian society, is here recognized by the white color of the foreigner. The suit, Mottahedeh posits, “would recall ‘the internal foreigner.’”¹⁵⁶

2. Some two decades after Browne’s experience in Yazd, an even more telling incident occurred when William Morgan Shuster (d. 1960), the General-Treasurer of Persia by appointment of the Iranian parliament, traveled to Iran in 1911. After several weeks in Iran, he began to hear rumors that “Americans were believed to be Bahā'īs” and that they had not come to Iran to “reform the financ[ial system],” as generally thought, “but to proselytize.” Finally, the Minister of Finance “very gravely” called Shuster’s attention to the matter, and suggested that he should discharge their servants, as “they were all Bahā'īs.” Shuster wrote,

¹⁵⁶ Negar Mottahedeh, *Representing the Unrepresentable: Historical Images of National Reform: from Qājārs to the Islamic Republic of Iran* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 27, 50.

This was news to me...I told the Finance Minister that the Americans were not Bahā'īs, but that I did not propose to have the Persian Government or people pass on the religious faith of ourselves, or our servants, or the color of our neckties, and that if the Government had not something more important than that to think about it should find something. That was the last I heard officially, but the tale was broadcast by certain elements who were antagonistic to our work...¹⁵⁷

3. Ahmad Kasravi recounted that around the year 1295/1916 when he was teaching at the American School in order to simultaneously learn English, the “*mullāyān*” (mullas) concluded that he was going there to “study Bābī lessons.”¹⁵⁸

As the brief references made by Malcolm and Tisdall demonstrate, it can be suggested that what cultivated the conception that Bahā'īs were similar to, and connected with Westerners, was largely based on elements of their lifestyle.¹⁵⁹ Factors affecting the social behavior of Bahā'īs in ways that likened them to Westerners in the eyes of the external observers include their belief in the equality of men and women,¹⁶⁰ a greater emphasis on the education of girls in families,¹⁶¹ a lack of the concept of ritual impurity (*nijāsāt*),¹⁶² and the encouragement of

¹⁵⁷ William Morgan Shuster, *The Strangling of Persia* (New York: Greenword, 1968), 21-22.

¹⁵⁸ Aḥmad Kasravī, *Zindigānī-i man* (Tehran: Jār, 1355/1976), 69.

¹⁵⁹ H.E. Chehabi has addressed these issues in his reflections on the causes of anti-Bahā'ism. See Chehabi, “Anatomy of Prejudice,” 192.

¹⁶⁰ For a recent scholarly work on the Bahā'ī faith, women and gender, see: Siyamak Zabihi-Moghaddam, “The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions and the Advancement of Women in Iran, 1848–1954” (PhD diss., University of Haifa, 2010). According to Zabihi-Moghaddam, by the mid-1950s, vis-à-vis the wider Iranian society, Bahā'ī women had a significantly greater say in the affairs of their community. See also, Moojan Momen, “The Role of Women in the Iranian Bahā'ī Community during the Qājār Period,” in *Religion and Society in Qājār Iran*, ed. R. Gleave (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005); *Encyclopaedia of Women and Islamic Cultures*, s.v. “Bahā'ī Women.” For a study of the letters written to Bahā'ī women by the founder of the Bahā'ī religion and his successor, see: Dominic Parviz Brookshaw, “Instructive Encouragement: Tablets of Bahā'u'llāh and Abdu'l-Bahā' to Bahā'ī Women in Iran and India,” in *The Bahā'īs of Iran: Socio-historical Studies*, ed. Dominic Parviz Brookshaw and Seena B. Fazel (London: Routledge, 2008), 49-93.

¹⁶¹ For ‘Abdu'l-Bahā's statement of the education of girls being more important than boys, see: ‘Abdu'l-Bahā', *Makātīb-i Ḥaẓrat-i ‘Abdu'l-Bahā'*, vol. 1 (Tehran: Mu'assisah-'i Millī Maṭbū'āt-i Amrī, n.d.), 335.

¹⁶² See, Bahā'u'llāh, *The Kitāb-i Aqdas* (Haifa: Bahā'ī World Center, 1992), paragraph 74.

interaction with followers of other religions.¹⁶³ Moreover, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ encouraged his followers to learn foreign languages, including English,¹⁶⁴ and to receive training in music,¹⁶⁵ both of which further contributed to this perception. Although important, these elements of lifestyle were not entirely what accounted for the attribution.

Foreigners Become Bahā’īs—Why?

The conversion of Westerners to the Bahā’ī religion was another important factor contributing to the perception of Bahā’īs as connected with and similar to foreigners.¹⁶⁶ This impression was further reinforced by the exchanges between the Iranian and North American Bahā’ī communities. In the early twentieth-century, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ sent a number of Iranian Bahā’īs to the United States to deepen the American Bahā’ī community’s knowledge about the nascent religion.¹⁶⁷ Later, in the 1920s and 1930s, he sent a number of American Bahā’ī women to teach at the Bahā’ī schools in Iran.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ Bahā’u’llāh, *The Kitāb-i Aqdas*, paragraph 144.

¹⁶⁴ See Asad Allah Fāẓil Māzandarānī, *Asrār al-āṣār*, vol.1 (Tehran: Mu’assisah-i Millī Maṭbū‘āt-i Amrī, 1967), 244-45. See, also: ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’, Iran National Bahā’ī Archives (INBA), vol. 85, p. 190.

¹⁶⁵ ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’*, Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, Translated by a Committee at the Bahā’ī World Center and by Marzieh Gail (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahā’ī Publishing Trust, 1997), 112.

¹⁶⁶ The first Western Bahā’ī, Thornton Chase (d. 1912) was an American who became a Bahā’ī in 1895. See: *The Bahā’ī Encyclopaedia Project*, s.v. “Chase, Thornton (1847–1912)” <http://tinyurl.com/28ncmmc>. For an introduction to the Bahā’ī community of the United States, see: Peter Smith, “The American Bahā’ī Community 1894-1917: A Preliminary Survey,” in *Studies in Bābī and Bahā’ī History*, vol.1, ed. Moojan Momen (Los Angeles: Kalimāt Press, 1982), 85-220. See also: Robert H. Stockman, *The Bahā’ī Faith in America*, 2 vols. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahā’ī Publishing Trust, 1985); for a study of the Canadian Bahā’ī community see: Will. C. Van den Hoonaard, *The Origins of the Bahā’ī Community of Canada, 1898-1948* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1996).

¹⁶⁷ See: *The Bahā’ī Encyclopaedia Project*, s.v. “Chase, Thornton (1847–1912)” <http://tinyurl.com/28ncmmc>

¹⁶⁸ See: R.J. Armstrong-Ingram, “American Bahā’ī Women and the Education of Girls in Tehran, 1909-1934” in *Iran: Studies in Bābī and Bahā’ī History*, ed. Peter Smith, vol. 3 (Los Angeles: Kalimāt Press, 1986): 181-210.

Since its inception, the growth of the Bahā'ī community in the West puzzled many Iranians, instilling in them mixed attitudes of disbelief, denial and even suspicion. If such attitudes were ever overcome, they would then try to discover an explanation for why the foreigners have turned to the Iranian prophet. Qahramān Mīrzā Sālūr ('Ayn al-Salṭānah) (d. 1324/1945), a Qājār prince, recorded more than one such instance in his memoirs.¹⁶⁹ For some time, 'Ayn al-Salṭānah received issues of the bilingual Bahā'ī magazine, *Najm-i bākhtar* (*Star of the West*),¹⁷⁰ from As'ad al-Ḥukamā, a Bahā'ī acquaintance.¹⁷¹ In 1912, he saw pictures of 'Abdu'l-Bahā's visit to America in the same journal. "As it turns out," he wrote, a group of "the irreligious of the world, that mostly live in America, have donned themselves in this garb and have named themselves as such (i.e., Bahā'ī), otherwise, how would an American, who knows neither Persian nor Arabic," accept Islam [i.e., as a pre-requisite for accepting the Bahā'ī faith, as is the case], and then the Bahā'ī faith. He added, "anyways, there is something here (*ḥikāyatī ast*) that is beyond my understanding, and since the degree of my knowledge is not so high that I can convince them [the Bahā'īs] or get convinced, I have never been inclined to discuss issues with them, except to the degree of my deficient understanding."¹⁷² Elsewhere in his memoir, 'Ayn al-Salṭānah gives an account of his discussion with another Iranian nobleman regarding 'Abdu'l-Bahā's travels to America and Europe—a trip that 'Ayn al-Salṭānah seems to have been

¹⁶⁹ Qahramān Mīrzā 'Ayn al-Salṭānah, *Rūznāmah-i khāṭirāt-i 'Ayn al-Salṭānah*, 10 vols (Tehran: Asāṭir, 1374-1380/1995-2001). 'Ayn al-Salṭānah was the grandson of Muḥammad Shah (d. 1264Q/1848) and the nephew of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah.

¹⁷⁰ The Chicago based *Star of the West* (*Najm-i bākhtar*), with one part in English and one in Persian, was originally published as Bahā'ī News the first issue of which appeared on 21 March 1910 and appeared thereafter once every Bahā'ī month, i.e., nineteenth times a year. It was renamed *Star of the West* in 1911. For more on this magazine, see: Peter Smith, "The American Bahā'ī Community 1894-1917: A Preliminary Survey," in *Studies in Bābī and Bahā'ī History*, vol.1, ed. Moojan Momen (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1982), 85-220, see p. 116.

¹⁷¹ On Mīrzā Bāqir As'adī Qazvīnī, see: Asad Allāh Fāṣil Māzandarānī, *Tārīkh-i zuhūr al-ḥaqq*. vol.8, part 1 (Tehran: Mu'assisah-i Millī-i Maṭbū'āt-i Amrī, 1975), 613-14.

¹⁷² 'Ayn al-Salṭānah, *Rūznāmah-i khāṭirāt*, 5: 3766, 3769. Quotes are from the latter page.

following with interest through *Najm-i bākhtar*. The author quotes his associate to have commented:

No surprise! America is a country which accepts new creeds and beliefs very quickly. For example, if ten people gathered together to announce that it was forbidden to use charcoal, immediately, a group gathers around them, and discusses the issue. Then they form a society, a newspaper, and a system for the improvement of it. Gradually, it turns to a creed and a sect. Examples are those who have abandoned drinking or the consumption of animal products. Now, you should not be surprised that a group of people has become Bahā'ī. What 'Abdu'l-Bahā' is saying is more sublime and newer than that of saying eggplants must be forbidden since it paralyzes the liver or shortens human life, while thousands would follow these incorrect statements.¹⁷³

Both the socio-cultural patterns of the Bahā'īs in the early twentieth-century as compared with that of the larger Iranian community, and the impact of the Westerners' adoption of the Bahā'ī faith on the Iranian Shī'ī perception of Bahā'īs, deserve in-depth independent studies. The above, however, was the minimum required to set the context for what follows in this dissertation, and to clarify the common thread justifying the arrangement of the three sections of this chapter.

¹⁷³ 'Ayn al-Saltānah, *Rūznāmah-i khāṭirāt*, 5: 3921. A similar challenge about Westerners becoming Bahā'īs can be seen even today. A good example is the statement that the highly conspiratorial minded anti-Bahā'ī polemicist 'Abd Allāh Shahbāzī has recently made about the American historian Juan Cole, "At some point he was a Bahā'ī. I do not know why? [sic]. I have heard his parents were Bahā'īs, or, maybe what motivated him was the emotional attraction to a 'dream-like East' or the exploratory concerns of a scholar." 'Abd Allāh Shahbāzī, "*Iran, Israel va bomb: bāzgasht-i Jifri Guldbirg [Jeffrey Goldberg], qismat-i sivvum*," http://www.shahbazi.org/pages/Goldberg_Iran3.htm.

About this Chapter

Of the three sections put together in this chapter, two (the first and the third) have directly to do with the image of Bahā'īs as connected with, or similar to foreigners. While one deals with aspects of the life of the first large Bahā'ī community in the diaspora (i.e., Turkestan, Russia), the other deals with an incident which clearly reveals how Iranians of the 1920s, in Tehran, the largest and most advanced city in the country, thought that the American vice-consul was a Bahā'ī—an assumption with tragic consequences for the vice-consul. Using the 1903 pogrom as a platform for analysis, the remaining section discusses Bahā'ī persecution at the intersection of international and intra-national rivalries, also considering important aspects of the cleric-government relationship in the late Qājār period. This section is included in the chapter because 1) the intensity of the pogrom in Yazd had, as an historian contemporary to the event suggests, at least partly to do with how Bahā'īs freely and with no hesitation consorted with the Zoroastrians, which was not in accord with the generally accepted Shī'ī attitude at the time and in line with the manner in which Europeans would conduct themselves. 2) The way in which two anti-Bahā'ī sources (Dawlatābādī and Kasravī) interpreted the pogrom nearly three decades after its occurrence played a major role in the creation of the image of Bahā'īs as stooges of the Russians. These two reasons justify tying this section with the other two in a chapter on “Bahā'īs and Foreigners”.

2.2 Bahā'īs and Russia

In the process of the Othering of Bahā'īs of Iran, as we shall see, allegations of covert connections with Tsarist Russia have been an ubiquitous element in anti-Bahā'ī polemics, ever since the start of the politicization of this process. In the pages that follow, I will discuss key events and phenomena which have been exploited in these polemics.¹⁷⁴

I. Early Contacts

On August 15, 1852, a small group of Bābīs, outraged by the execution of the Bāb (d.1850), made an attempt on the life of Nasir al-Dīn shah (d. 1896). The attempt failed, but incited a frenzy of violence and fear on the part of the government, in which many Bābīs were publically put to death in particularly barbaric fashion.¹⁷⁵ Among those arrested and slated for execution was Mīrzā Ḥusayn 'Alī Nūrī (d. 1892), surnamed “Bahā'” (Later “Bahā'u'llāh”) founder of the Bahā'ī religion. He was seized at the home of his sister whose husband Mīrzā Majid Āhī served as secretary of the Russian mission. The latter accompanied the prisoner to

¹⁷⁴ For a related academic study, see: Robert D. Crews, “An Empire for the Faithful, A Colony for the Dispossessed,” in *Cahiers d'Asie central* 17/18 (2009): 76-106< <http://asiecentrale.revues.org/index1145.html>>The work suffers from heavy and uncritical reliance on the following source which is closer to an anti-Bahā'ī polemic than a scholarly work: I.V. Bazilenko, “Bakhaizm i politika Rossii na musul'manskom Vostoke [Bahā'ism and Russian politics in the Muslim East]”, *Rossija, Zapad i musul'manskij Vostok v kolonial'nuju epokhu* [Russia, West and the Muslim East in the colonial period] (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo “Dmitrij Bulanin”, 1996), 44-70. I am grateful to Firuz Kazemzadeh and Youli Ioannesyan for familiarizing me with the work of Bazilenko written in Russian, and for answering my questions regarding Bazilenko's sources.

For a study on this topic in Persian see: Vahid Rafati, “Dīyānat-i Bahā'ī dar Rusīyah,” *Pazhuheshnameh* 1:2 (Spring 1997) <http://www.pazhuheshnameh.org/content/view/259/139/>. An upcoming related work is Shahvar, Soli, Boris Morozov, and Gadi Gilbar, ed. *Bahā'īs of Iran, Transcaspia and the Caucasus*, 2 vols. (London: I.B. Tauris, forthcoming 30. August 2011).

¹⁷⁵ On that attempt, see: Abbas Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe: Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah Qājār and the Iranian Monarchy, 1831-1896* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 204-218.

the royal camp, “in order to explain the innocence of his brother-in-law.”¹⁷⁶ Four months later, Mīrzā Ḥusayn ‘Alī was abruptly released from confinement in the dreaded dungeon of Tehran, a turn of events attributed to a number of reasons, not the least of which was the intervention of the Russian Minister, Prince Dmitrii Dolgoruki (d. 1867).¹⁷⁷ The latter the Bahā’ī sources attribute to the intercession which his brother-in-law was ideally placed to make.¹⁷⁸ Mirza Ḥusayn ‘Alī was subsequently exiled to the Ottoman Empire, where he spent the rest of his life.¹⁷⁹ Bahā’ī sources also assert that Dolgoruki offered to take Mīrzā Ḥusayn ‘Alī under the protection on his government, an invitation which was declined.¹⁸⁰ However, it is notable that an Iranian officer and an officer representing the Russian legation together escorted Bahā’u’llāh and his family on their way to the Ottoman Empire.¹⁸¹

Neither the release from prison nor the Minister’s role in it seemed particularly significant in the view of Qājār historians.¹⁸² Until at least up to 1903, when Za’īm al-Dawlah wrote his

¹⁷⁶ Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*, 215. Quotation originally from *Rūznāmah-yi vāqāyi’ ittifāqīyah*, no. 83 (17 Zūl-Qa’da 1268 Q/September 1852).

¹⁷⁷ On Dolgoruki, see Chapter Five of this dissertation. Another possible contributing factor for the release of Bahā’u’llāh, as Amanat has observed, was that, “in response to repeated warnings from the foreign envoys concerning the savagery committed against the Bābīs, the premier [Mīrzā Āqā Khān Nūrī] could hold up the release of Bahā’u’llāh as proof of the government’s fair treatment.” Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*, 216. For a good discussion of this topic in Persian, see: Fereydun Vahman, *Yikṣad va shaṣt sāl mubārizāh bā diyānat-i Bahā’ī: gūshah-i az tārikh-i ijtimā’i-dīnī-i Iran dar dawrān-i mu’āṣir* (Darmstadt, Germany: ‘Aṣr-i Jadīd, 2009), 235-48.

¹⁷⁸ H.M. Balyuzi, *Bahā’u’llāh: The King of Glory* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1980), 99.

¹⁷⁹ Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*, 215.

¹⁸⁰ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 3rd ed. (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahā’ī Publishing Trust, 1974), 105.

¹⁸¹ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 108.

¹⁸² Both court Chroniclers of the early years of Nāsir al-Dīn Shāh’s reign, Lisān al-Mulk Sipīhr and Hidayat cover up to 1274/1857, but neither mentions the captivity and release of Mīrzā Ḥusayn ‘Alī. See Mīrzā Muhammad Taqī Lisān al-Mulk Sipīhr, *Nāsikh al-tawārikh: dawrah-i kāmīl tārikh-i Qājārīyah*, ed. Jahāngīr Qā’immaqāmī (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1337); Rizā Qulī Khan Hidāyat, *Rawzat al-Safā-yi āirī* (Tehran, 1274). Likewise, I’tizād al-Saltanah while addressing the topic of the assassination and what befell upon Bābīs thereafter, does not mention Mīrzā Ḥusayn ‘Alī, at all. See: Alīqūlī Mīrzā Itizād-al-Saltanah, *al-Mutanabb’īyn*, section on the Bābīs ed. Abd al-Ḥusayn Navāī as *Fitnah-yi Bāb*, 2nd ed. (Tehran, 1351 /1972), 79-95.

anti-Bahā'ī polemic, Dolgoruki's intercession was regarded as a fabrication devised by Bahā'īs to enhance their status in the public mind.¹⁸³

Years later, announcing his claim to be a manifestation of the Divine Will,¹⁸⁴ Bahā'u'llāh (the title he had by then assumed), wrote letters ("tablets,"¹⁸⁵ in Bahā'ī lexicon) to several contemporary monarchs, including Napoleon III (d.1873), Tsar Alexander II (d.1881), Queen Victoria (d.1901), and Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah, acquainting them with his mission. In his letter to Tsar Alexander II, he mentioned Dolgoruki's assistance:

Whilst I lay chained and fettered in the prison, one of thy ministers extended Me his aid.¹⁸⁶ Wherefore hath God ordained for thee a station which the knowledge of none can comprehend except His knowledge. Beware lest thou barter away this sublime station.¹⁸⁷

This statement as well as those to other monarchs has to be read in the context of Bahā'u'llāh's warnings with respect to the future of royalist autocracy.¹⁸⁸ In the early 1880s, apparently shortly after the Tsar's death, Bahā'u'llāh referred to this familiar theme in his writings, i.e., that as a consequence of the new spiritual revival, "from two ranks amongst men, power hath been seized: kings and ecclesiastics." In that statement, he made particular reference to the

¹⁸³ See the section on Za'im al-Dawlah.

¹⁸⁴ On this concept, see Juan Cole, "The Concept of Manifestation in the Bahā'ī Writings," *Bahā'ī Studies monograph* 9 (1982): 1–38.

¹⁸⁵ A translation for "*lawh*," an Arabic "term used distinctively in the Bahā'ī writings as part of the title of individual compositions of Bahā'u'llāh addressed to individuals or groups of individuals." See: *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. "*Lawh*."

¹⁸⁶ The reference, of course, is to the action of Dolgoruki, who at the time represented the government of Tsar Nicholas I (d.1855).

¹⁸⁷ Bahā'u'llāh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, trans. ? (Haifa: Bahā'ī World Center, 2002), 83–88. Quote from page 83. The letter must have been written sometime between 1863 to 1868, when Bahā'u'llāh was living in Adrianople. He has referred to the Minister's assistance elsewhere as well. See: Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 105.

¹⁸⁸ For more on Bahā'u'llāh's views on this topic, see: Juan R.I. Cole, *Modernity and the Millennium: The Genesis of the Bahā'ī Faith in the Nineteenth-Century Middle East*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

tragic circumstance of the Tsar's death and its implication as an example of the point being made:

Behold how the Tsar of Russia, considered the most eminent person on earth, left the world in the utmost abasement, as thou hast heard....¹⁸⁹ Fear hath so seized the new Tsar that he is unable even to leave his residence.¹⁹⁰ Notwithstanding the fact that this poor man hath not harmed anyone nor committed any evil deed, yet he hath been made to suffer the darkest anguish.¹⁹¹

II. Life in Diaspora: Ashkhabad

From the inception of the Bahā'ī religion believers were encouraged to promote their faith by travel and resettlement, both domestically and to other lands.¹⁹² It was probably this idea of “pioneering” (*muhājirat*) that endowed Bahā'ī of Iran with a trans-national sense of community, and an early familiarity (compared to other Iranians) with life in a diaspora. On the other hand, it also had the undesired consequence of leaving them vulnerable to allegations of foreign sympathies and attachments.

¹⁸⁹ On 1 March 1881 Alexander II was assassinated at the hands of terrorists of *Narodnia Volia* (People's Will), a few hours after the liberal-leaning Tsar had approved the draft government report on the upcoming reforms. See: Larisa Zakharova, “The Reign of Alexander II: a Watershed?” in *The Cambridge History of Russia, vol. II, Imperial Russia, 1689-1917*, ed. Dominic Leiven (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 593-616. For graphic details on the scene of his assassination, see: Edvard Radzinsky, *Alexander II: The Last Great Tsar* (Free Press: New York, 2005), 415.

¹⁹⁰ A reference to Alexander III (d.1894).

¹⁹¹ Translated from Persian. The original Persian piece may be found in Bahā'u'llāh, *Mā'idah-i āsmānī*, vol.8 (Tehran: Mu'assisah-i millī-i maṭbū'āt-i amrī, 1972), 80.

¹⁹² The Bāb ordered his followers to leave their homes and travel far and wide to spread his faith: “*fa-ukhrujū min arāzkum wa-ud'ū al-nās bi-al-kitāb al-akbar.*” The Bāb, *Qayyūm al-asmā'*, Iran National Bahā'ī Archives (INBA), vol. 3, page 46. Bahā'u'llāh's statements on the topic are numerous, many of them strongly worded: “They that have forsaken their country for the purpose of teaching Our Cause -- these shall the Faithful Spirit strengthen through its power.” Bahā'u'llāh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahā'u'llāh*, trans. and comp. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1988), 334; “Great is your blessedness, inasmuch as ye have forsaken your homes and wandered the land for the love of your Lord, the Almighty, the Ancient of Days, until ye entered the Land of Mystery at a time when the fire of oppression was ablaze and the croaking of the raven of discord had been raised.” Bahā'u'llāh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, p. 147.

One of the first communities of Bahā'īs of Iranian origin formed in this diaspora was in Ashkhabad (Pers. 'Ishqābād, City of Love) in Russian Turkistan.¹⁹³ Recently conquered by Russia, this trans-Caspian region had attracted a mixed population of Turkmen, Azerbaijanis, Russians, Armenians, and Iranians because the Russian government had created institutions of public welfare. The first Iranian Bahā'ī who saw the potential of the city was Hajjī Mīrzā Ḥasan known as Afnān Kabīr, who passed the area on his way to 'Acre, to visit Bahā'u'llāh in 1299/1881-2.¹⁹⁴ The Hajji decided to purchase land in the promising new city.

In 1882/1300Q, a number of prominent Bahā'īs were arrested in Tehran, Rasht, and a number of other cities in Iran.¹⁹⁵ These new dangers caused a Bahā'ī, by the name of Aqā Sayyid Aḥmad Afnān to consider the wisdom of an appeal to the Russian government. Bahā'u'llāh's response to his inquiry flatly rejected the idea.¹⁹⁶ The question was in a sense repetitive because only a few years earlier, following the brutal execution of two affluent merchant brothers of the Bahā'īs of Isfahan, in 1879,¹⁹⁷ a number of prominent Bahā'īs in Yazd had written Bahā'u'llāh to inquire about lodging a complaint against Iran with the Russian or British governments. In response, he categorically forbade such acts, pointing out that "They (i.e. the Russians and the British governments) are unable to take care of their own affairs,

¹⁹³ Before Ashkhabad Iranian Bahā'īs had embarked on travel teaching activities and settlement in other lands, Georgia and Azerbaijan being particularly early instances: In 1296 Q/1879 when Hājji 'Alī Akbar Mīlānī settled down in Tbilisi, worked as a merchant and started teaching his faith. Bahā'īs persecuted in Ganja, fled to Tbilisi, and stayed there. See: Asad Allāh Fāẓil Māzandarānī, *Tārīkh-i zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol.8, part 2 (Tehran, Mu'assisah-'i millī-i maṭbū'āt-i amrī, 1976), 1062.

¹⁹⁴ See M. Momen, "The Bahā'ī Community of Ashkhabad; its Social Basis and Importance in Bahā'ī History," in *Cultural Change and Continuity in Central Asia*, ed. Shirin Akiner (London: Kegan Paul International in association with the Central Asia Research Forum, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1991), 278-305, see p. 281.

¹⁹⁵ On the events of 1882/1300 Q, see: Yazdani, *Awzā'-i-ijtimā'ī -i Irān*, 143-156.

¹⁹⁶ Aqā Sayyid Aḥmad Afnān asked this question through Hājji Mīrzā Haydar 'Alī Isfahanī who first did his best to convince him that was not a legitimate question to ask. Upon the former's insistence, however, the question was finally posed. See: Hājji Mīrzā Haydar 'Alī Isfahanī, *Bahjat al-Sudūr*, 3rd ed. (Hoffheim, Germany: : Mu'assisah-'i Maṭbū'āt-i amrī, 2002), 199-201. See the English translation in Hājji Mīrzā Haydar 'Alī Isfahanī, *Stories from the Delight of Hearts*, trans. A.Q. Faizi (Los Angeles, Kalimat Press, 1980), 98-99.

¹⁹⁷ On this incident, see Yazdani, *Awzā'-i-ijtimā'ī*, 135-141.

much less your needs.” Stating that he pleaded his “grief and sorrow only to God,” he emphasized that this was what he had always wished his followers to do, and what he desired for them in the future.¹⁹⁸ This position was much in line with his warning, around 1891, that “every day foreign orders and ordinances (*avāmir va aḥkām-i khārijah*)[further] influence (*nufūz*) Iran and, as a result of this influence, the influence of Iran’s own people is blocked (*mutivaqqif*).¹⁹⁹

While the above two incidents taught Bahā’īs that Bahā’u’llāh rejected the idea of applying for protection to a foreign government, his other statements placed great emphasis on the idea of *muhājirat*.²⁰⁰ Both this emphasis and the persecutions inflicted upon Bahā’īs in Iran led some of them to emigrate.²⁰¹ In 1884, four Bahā’īs became the first believers from Iran to settle in Ashkhabad. Gradually, more Bahā’īs followed them, and many Shī’ī Iranians likewise found the conditions of life in Ashkhabad very attractive.²⁰² This latter influx, however, i.e., of Iranian Shiites left the Bahā’ī community feeling once again exposed to the dangers they had

¹⁹⁸ See the account and the text of Bahā’u’llāh’s response in Shaykh Kāzīm Samandar, *Tārīkh-i Samandar va Muḥaqqāt* (Tehran: Mu’assisah-’i millī-i maṭbū’āt-i amrī, 1975), 188.

¹⁹⁹ Bahā’u’llāh, *Mā’idah-i āsmanī*, vol.8 (Tehran: Mu’assisah-’i millī-i maṭbū’āt-i amrī, 1972), 36.

²⁰⁰ See note number 18.

²⁰¹ The twentieth century Bahā’ī scholar, ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Ishrāqkhāvarī ascribed the emigration mainly to the persecutions. See ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Ishrāqkhāvarī, *Muḥāzīrāt*, vol.1 (Tehran: Mu’assisah-’i millī-i maṭbū’āt-i amrī, 1963), 424. This clearly does not imply that teaching their religion was not on the minds of Iranian Bahā’īs, when emigrating.. However, Bahā’īs were allowed, and in fact did, promote their religion where they could. i.e., among non-Russians. Although, as Momen points out, Russian law made it a capital offence for a Russian citizen to convert from Christianity, there were many other ethnic groups to whom such laws did not apply. Momen, “The Bahā’ī Community,” 284; Fāẓil Māzandarānī, *Tārīkh-i zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, 8/2:1061-62.

²⁰² For details, see Momen, “The Bahā’ī Community,” 281-82. For a study of the Bahā’ī community of Ashkhabad, see: Hūshang Ra’fat, “Jāmi’ah-’i Bahā’ī Ishqābād,” *Pazhuheshnameh* 1:2 (Spring 1997) <http://www.pazhuheshnameh.org/content/view/258/139/> See also: *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, “Bahā’ism vi. The Bahā’ī Community of Ashkhabad.”

faced in their homeland.²⁰³ Their fears proved well-founded. The religious hostility led to the murder on 8th September 1889, of a well known Bahā'ī, Ḥājji Muḥammad Riḏā Isfahanī, who openly expressed his religious beliefs.²⁰⁴ Some Shī'ī ulama who had come from Khurasan, and a number of Iranian merchants together had planned for a general attack on the Bahā'īs for 24 hours, using the bands of street ruffians (*lutis*). The murder was to have been the signal for the planned attack. The *lutis* took over the streets, so that for most of the day no one dared even to collect the victim's body. Finally, the Governor arrested those responsible—who were quick to assert that the issue was one of religious conflict between Iranians and there was no need for the Russian government to get involved. Regardless of such this excuse, the Russian authorities brought to trial nine of those involved in the crime.²⁰⁵ Of the nine, the two who had actually carried out the murder were sentenced to death. At this point the Bahā'ī community of Ashkhabad, faced a moral dilemma. Despite their outrage, they felt strongly that what was principally at issue was the moral integrity of their religion itself, and they made a decision that attracted the praise of Bahā'u'llāh,²⁰⁶ as well as the attention of some in Russian

²⁰³ For details see, Ustād Alī Akbar Bannā Yazdī, *Tārīkh-i 'Ishqābād*, manuscript. < <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/arabic/vol4/banna/ashgabat.htm> > (accessed 20 June 2010).

²⁰⁴ For a detailed Bahā'ī account of this event see the letter written by the scholar Abu al-Faḏā'il Gulpāyigānī (d.1914) who was present at the time in Ashkhabad, see: Rūh Allāh Mihrābkhānī, *Sharḥ-i Ahvāl-i Mīrḏā Abu al-Faḏā'il Gulpāyigānī* (Tehran: Mu 'assisah-'i Maṭbū'āt Amrī, 1974), 159-198. See also the account written by the Russian military officer, Captain Tumanski, in Victor Rosen, *Collections Scientifiques de l'Institut des Langues Orientales*, vol.6 *Les Manuscrits Arabes* (St Petersburg, 1891), 411-12. For the English translation, see: Edward G. Browne, ed. and trans. *A Traveller's Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bāb*, by Adbdu'l-Bahā', vol.2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891), 411-12. According to Ishrāqkhāvarī, Ḥājji Muḥammad Riḏā Isfahanī had left Isfahan because of the persecutions inflicted on him by Ḍill al-Sulṭān (on the latter see the chapter on 1903 pogrom). Ishrāqkhāvarī, *Muḥāzīrāt*, 1:426.

²⁰⁵ Bahā'u'llāh expressed his wish for justice to be dealt in Iran as it had been dealt in Ashkhabad: "the sun of justice is expected to arise from the horizon of Iran, now it has arisen from the horizon of Ashkhabad." Bahā'u'llāh, *Mā'idah* 4:36.

²⁰⁶ Referring to the incident, Bahā'u'llāh wrote: "Day and night this Wronged One yieldeth thanks and praise unto the Lord of men, for it is witnessed that the words of counsel and exhortation We uttered have proved effective and that this people hath evinced such character and conduct as are acceptable in Our sight. This is affirmed by virtue of the event which hath truly cheered the eye of the world, and is none other than the intercession of the

intelligentsia. Their appeal that the death sentences be commuted to imprisonment received a favorable response from the Russian judiciary.²⁰⁷

III. *The Influence and Aftermath of the Murder and the Trial*

1. In Iran

When the two death sentences were announced, they aroused intense protest in Mashhad among the influential Shīʿī clerics. The Russian consul general in Mashhad assured Āqā Shaykh Muḥammad Taqī, the leading cleric in Mashhad, that he would arrange for the release of the prisoners. Meanwhile, the entire body of the ulama in Mashhad, supported by the governor of Khurāsān appealed to the Russian legation that the sentence be annulled; “it being pointed out that should they be carried out the Persians would, in future, regard Russia as the foe of Islam and the friend of Bābīs, renegades and the Shah’s enemies in general.”²⁰⁸ Meanwhile, upon the arrival in Ashkhabad of the new Governor-General of Transcaspia, General Alexei Kuropatkin, a group of Bahāʾīs residing in Ashkhabad called on him, “asking for protection and recognition”.²⁰⁹ The news of this meeting appearing in a Russian newspaper aroused the indignation of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah. His Prime Minister, Amīn al- Sulṭān (d.1907),²¹⁰ warned de Butzov, the Russian Minister in Iran, that the Shah would be “exceedingly angry if the Russians in anyway [sic] countenanced Persian Bābīs [i.e., Bahāʾī].” De Butzov’s response was that the

friends with the high authorities in favour of their enemies. Indeed one’s righteous deeds testify to the truth of one’s words.” See: Bahāʾu’llāh, *Tablets of Bahāʾu’llāh Revealed after the Kitāb-i Aqdas* (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahāʾī Publishing Trust, 1988), 90-91.

²⁰⁷ See Mihrābkhānī, *Sharḥ-i Ahvāl*, 159-198. Momen, “The Bahāʾī Community,” 283-84.

²⁰⁸ Memo by Box Ironside (of British Legation in Tehran) 17 Dec. 1889, enclosed in Wolff (British diplomat) to Salisbury (British Foreign Minister), No 235, 18 Dec. 1889: FO 60 502. Quoted in Momen, *The Bābī and Bahāʾī Religions*, 298.

²⁰⁹ The memorandum of Sidney Churchill, British diplomat in Tehran, dated 3 Sept. 1890: FO 248 501. Quoted in Momen, *The Bābī and Bahāʾī Religions*, 299.

²¹⁰ See Encyclopaedia Iranica, s.v. “Atābak-i Aʿẓam, Amīn al-Sulṭān.”

Russian Government would not protect the Bahā'īs, while begging that the Shah not insist on their being forced to return to Persia.²¹¹ Further reassurance was later given by the Russian Government. With Amīn al-Sultān's voicing the Shah's wrath, it was reported by Robert J. Kennedy, British chargé d'affaires in Tehran that "the Russian Minister has, since then, acting apparently under instructions, assured the Amīn al-Sultān and His Majesty need feel no alarm on the subject as the Russian Government do not intend showing the Bābīs any favour."²¹²

2. On Orientalists

Upon reading the news of the murder of Ḥājji Muḥammad Rizā Isfahanī and the extraordinary intercession of Bahā'ī community for the mitigation of the death sentences of the culprits, Aleksandr Grigor'evich Tumanski (d. 1920),²¹³ Russian orientalist, and major-general of the Russian Imperial Army became interested in familiarizing himself with the Bahā'īs and their religion. The telegram of the news was published, in winter 1889-90, in the Russian newspaper *Novoye Vremya*. Tumanski travelled to Ashkhabad in June 1890 and "without difficulty became acquainted with the most interesting Bābīs [i.e., Bahā'īs]." Owing to the "meritorious life-style," they had been accepted most favorably by Russians. "Some of the wealthiest Bābīs," he

²¹¹ The memorandum of Sidney Churchill, British diplomat in Tehran, dated 3 Sept. 1890: FO 248 501. Quoted in Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions*, 300.

²¹² Kennedy to Marquess of Salisbury No. 296, 7 Oct. 1890: FO 60 512. Quoted in Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions*, 300.

²¹³ See, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. "Tumanski, Aleksandr Grigor'evich." Interestingly, in his *Kashf al-ghīṭā' 'an ḥiyal al-a'dā'* (Turkistan, tāshkand, n.p, n.d.), Abū al-Faḍā'il mentions that he discovered Tumanski and the the British Iranologist, E. G. Browne (d. 1926) were privately corresponding with one another. He relates that a friend of his— a certain supporter of the Russian government who considered himself an impartial and fair-minded thinker— once said to him: "Don't be so optimistic in your dealings with these two politically motivated individuals [i.e., Browne and Tumanski]. One pretends to be siding with the Bahā'īs, and the other claims to be supporting the Azalīs!" *Kashf al-ghīṭā'* 15. Here quoted from Mina Yazdani, "Abū al-Faḍā'il Gulpāygānī: An Ante Litteram Critic of Orientalism," article presented at Society for Shaykhī, Bābī, and Bahā'ī Studies, Meeting in Conjunction with Middle East Studies Association (MESA) Annual Meeting, Montreal, 17 Nov. 2007.

wrote, were “even permanent members of the city public assembly.”²¹⁴ Tumanski came into contact with the leading Bahā’ī scholar of the time, Mīrzā Abu al-Fazā’il Gulpāyigānī (d.1914),²¹⁵ who, upon Tumanski’s request, wrote a treatise in response to E.G.Browne’s questions mostly on the life of Bahā’u’llāh, entitling it “*Risālah-i Iskandariyya*,” after the diplomat’s first name.²¹⁶ During his subsequent travels in Iran, Tumanski obtained many Bahā’ī writings, translated and published Bahā’u’llāh’s *Kitāb-i ‘ahdī* (The book of my covenant) in 1893²¹⁷ and his *Kitāb-i aqdas* (The most holy book) in 1899.²¹⁸

Tumanski was one of the several Russian scholar-diplomats familiar with the Bahā’ī religion—perhaps the most prolific and well-informed one among them. His teacher, Baron Viktor Rosen (d. 1908) an academic and a collector of Persian and Arabic manuscripts, classified, identified, and described some of the Bahā’ī writings.²¹⁹ Others among Rosen’s

²¹⁴ See A.G. Tumanski, “Dva poslednikh babidskikh otkroveniia,” *Memoires de l’Academie des sciences de St. Petersburg*, vol. VI, (1892), 314-315. The translation here is quoted from the introduction to Y. A. Ioannesyan, *Pioneers of Bahā’ī Studies in Europe: a Perspective from Baron Rosen’s Archive Materials*, forthcoming. I am grateful to Youli Ioannesyan for graciously sharing with me his, and his late wife Linda’s, translation of this and other related passages.

²¹⁵ See, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Abu’l-Fazl Gulpayigānī.”

²¹⁶ See Mihrābkhānī, Rūh Allāh. *Rasā’il va raqā’im-i Jināb-i Mīrzā Abū al-Fazā’il Gulpāyigānī* (Tehran: Mu’assasah-yi Maṭbū’āt-i Amrī, 134BE/1978), 48-89. See also, Mihrābkhānī, Allāh Mihrābkhānī, *Zindigānī-i Mīrzā*, 387.

²¹⁷ A. G. Tumanski, “Posledneye Slovo Bahauili” (Baha’u’llah’s last Word), *Memoires of the Oriental Branch of the Russian Archaeological Society* (ZVORAO), vol. VII (1893), 193-203.

²¹⁸ A. G. Tumanski, *Kitabe Akdes. Svyashenneyshaya Kniga Sovremennykh Babidov* (The Kitab-i-Aqdas, The Most Holy Book of the present-day Babi’s. Text, Translation, Introduction, Supplements), *Memoires de l’Academie imperiale des sciences de St.-Petersbourg* (ZVORAO). VIII Serie, Vol. III (1899). According to Browne, “The introduction contains much valuable information and many chronological data derived from Russian official records and not otherwise available.” Edward G. Browne, *Materials for the Study of the Bābī Religion* (Cambridge: University Press, 1918), 187. Browne was one of the first people to interpret Russian scholarly interest in the Bahā’ī religion in political terms: “[T]hough the valuable researches of the late Baron Victor Rosen and Captain Tumanskiy were no doubt chiefly inspired by scientific curiosity, there may have been, at any rate in the case of the latter gentleman, some *arrière-pensée* of a political character.” Browne, *Materials*, xvi-xvii.

²¹⁹ Rosen was the head of the oriental branch of the Russian Archaeological Society. He left behind a large collection of unpublished materials, including his correspondences with a number of his students some of whom unlike him (who was just an academic), were scholar-diplomats. He was also in contact with the British orientalist, E.G. Browne (d. 1926). On Rosen, and his communications with Browne and his other correspondents

students, although interested in the affair of Iran were less favorably inclined towards Bahā'īs than Tumanski. One of these, Vladimir Ivanovich Ignatyev (d.?) wrote to Baron Rosen on 1 Dec. 1891: "I surely do not deny that among modern Bābīs there are many sincere and devoted people who are ready to accept death for their convictions, but there are hardly many of them among the Ashkhabad Bābīs." Apart from a personal lack of interest in the Bahā'īs, Ignatyev's attitude towards the Bahā'īs in Ashkhabad was not the only reason he was unhappy with their presence in that city. He had a greater concern, as another passage from the same letter indicates: "Excuse me for talking of the Bābīs in this way. Probably, I am not entirely unbiased in my judgment, but I should be forgiven for that, for I see clearer than anyone else the harm caused to our relations with Persia by the presence of sixty flourishing Bābīs in Ashkhabad close to the very border [with Persia]..."²²⁰ In yet another letter to Rosen, dated 25 March 1892, Ignatyev who had spent some time in Iran, shared his impression on several important topics, such as the balance of power between Iran's ulama and the Shah, and the situation of Bahā'īs to whom he refers as Bābīs. His comments justify quoting the translation verbatim:

It is taken for granted that neither Russia nor England have any reason to support the Bābīs, and it seems inconceivable to me that such a reason would ever (at least in the foreseeable

(especially Tumanski), on Bahā'ī topics, see: Youli Ioannesyan, "Baron V.R. Rosen's Archive Collection of Bābī and Bahā'ī Materials," *Lights of 'Irfān: Papers Presented at the 'Irfān Colloquia and Seminars*, vol.8 (2007), 11-34; Idem, "The St. Petersburg 19th Century Orientalist Collection of Materials on the Bābī and Bahā'ī Faiths: Primary and Other Sources," *Lights of 'Irfān: Papers Presented at the 'Irfān Colloquia and Seminars*, vol. 7(2006), 75-100. See also, Christopher Buck and Youli A. Ioannesyan, "Bahā'u'llāh's Bishārāt (Glad-Tidings): A Proclamation to Scholars and Statesmen," *Bahā'ī Studies Review*, vol. 16 (2010), 3-28. On Russian scholars studying the Bahā'ī religion, see also, Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions*, 40-43. Momen mentions Mīrzā Kazem Beg, separate from "Russian Scholars," as "the first to have an entire book on the Bābī religion published in the West." Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions*, 26-27. Kazem Beg of the University of St. Petersburg published his book titled *Bābī Babidī* in Russian, in 1865. Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions*, 26. Kazem Beg was originally from Māzāndarān, in north on Iran, and emigrated to Russia where he converted to Christianity. He was one of the pioneers of Iranian Studies in St. Petersburg. Momen's mentioning him as separate from "Russian Scholars" might have had to do with Kazem Beg's Iranian origin. I am grateful to Youli Ioannesyan for this information on Kazem Beg.

²²⁰ See N. A. K Kusnetsova "Istoriia Izucheniia Babizma i Behaizma v Rossii" (Notes on the History of the Bābī and Bahā'ī Studies in Russia), *Ocherki po Istorii Russkogo Vostokovedeniya (Essays on the History of Russian Oriental Studies)* Vol. VI (1963), 89-133. Quote from page 106. Again, I am thankful to Youli Ioannesyan for informing me of this source, and for sharing the English translation with me.

future) be found. The English who use every possible means to enhance their influence in Persia, especially among its population, do not, however, consider it possible for themselves to offer the Bābīs any support. Not a single European envoy dared to intercede on behalf of the persecuted with the Shah during the latest executions of the Bābīs in Yazd,²²¹ definitely not because they feared to rouse the discontent of the Shah and his Ministers – after all such discontent is not quite dangerous anyways, but rather out of their concern, as it seems to me, not to set against themselves the majority of the population, which is undoubtedly hostile to the Bābīs, and especially the all-powerful clergy. That the clergy in Persia are all-powerful has been proved by the latest events in Persia around the tobacco monopoly²²² and other monopolies²²³ granted to the English by the Shah.²²⁴

3. In the Ashkhabad Bahā'ī Community

According to the British scholar Moojan Momen, the events related to the murder of Ḥājji Muḥammad Riḏā Isfahānī effectively led to a distinct separation between the communities of Shī'ī and Bahā'ī Iranian immigrants. The latter began to set up social institutions and networks which grew in sophistication as the number of Bahā'īs increased. With the new community thriving and increasing in number,²²⁵ however, an event occurred that caused Russian authorities to examine more closely the religious precepts of these immigrants. That event was the assassination of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah (d. 1896).

²²¹ This is a reference to the murder of seven Bahā'īs in Yazd, on 19 May 1891. For details see: Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahā'u'llāh*, vol. 4 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1987), 347ff.

²²² A reference to granting the tobacco concession to an English company in March 1891, and its subsequent annulment as a result of people's protest lead by the clerics. For a general study of the incident see: Nikki R. Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran: the Tobacco Protest of 1891* (London: Cass, 1966); For the study of the concession in the context of the Britain-Russia influence in Qājār Iran, see: Firuz Kazemzadeh, "The Tobacco Regie: Britain's Retreat ad Russia's Offensive," in *Russia and Britain in Persian, 1864-1914: A Study in Imperialism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 241-301; For the relation between this incidence and the political role of Shī'ī clerics in modern Iran, see: Abbas Amanat, "In-Between the Madrasa and the Marketplace: The Designation of Clerical Leadership in Modern Iran," in *Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shī'ism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 149-178.

²²³ See *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. "Concessions ii. In the Qājār Period."

²²⁴ Quoted in Y. A. Ioannesyan, *Pioneers of Bahā'ī Studies in Europe*. The letter is among the those in Baron V.R. Rosen's archival collection. For details see Ioannesyan, "Baron V.R. Rosen's Archive Collection," 11.

²²⁵ The increase in number did not, however, mean that there were no anti-Bahā'ī activities going on on the part of the Iranian Shiites living in closeby areas also under the Russian government. The Bahā'ī scholar Abu al-Faḏā'il, for example, received several dead threats, because of his teaching activities, while living in Samarkand. See Rūḥ Allāh Mihrābkhānī, *Zindigānī-i Mīrḏā Abu al-Faḏā'il Gulpāyigānīā*, rev.ed. (1975; repr., Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahā'ī-Verlag, 1988), 225.

IV. *The Russian Government Investigating Bahā'ī Beliefs*

On 1 May 1896, Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah (1896) was assassinated by one of the followers of Sayyid Jamal al-Dīn Afghānī.²²⁶ Not surprisingly, in view of the inflammatory accusation spread by their opponents, the first group of people to fall under suspicion were Iran's Bahā'ī minority (in part, of course, the public reaction derived some of its credibility from the Bābī attempt at life of the Shah forty four years earlier).²²⁷ Anticipating such an attempt to scapegoat them, the Bahā'ī in Tehran, as attested by the memoirs of a Bahā'ī living contemporary to the event, were concerned primarily to escape the violence that would inevitably follow.²²⁸ Indeed even the European press, according to Peter Avery, initially gave currency to the rumor.²²⁹ In Iran, late in the afternoon of the day of the assassination, the Bahā'ī poet, Varqā (d.1897) and his twelve year old son, who had some time earlier been imprisoned in Tehran, were summarily put to death by an executioner who, believing that Bahā'īs had killed the Shah, shouted at the poet, "You did what you did!" before plunging a dagger into his heart. Varqā's son was slain immediately thereafter.²³⁰ Several hours after the news of the Shah's death had spread widely, the Prime Minister Amīn al-Sulṭān sought to counteract the danger to public order by announcing that the assassin had been arrested and that the issue had no connection

²²⁶ See Abbas Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe: Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah Qājār and the Iranian Monarchy, 1831-1896* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 441-443. On Afghānī, see chapter one of this dissertation.

²²⁷ Even though Bahā'īs were different in their socio-political approach from the early Bābīs, still as Avery puts it, regarding the Shah's assassination, "it was naturally not difficult to inculcate the Bābīs (by which he means Bahā'īs): ever since 1852 they had been regarded as the arch plotters against the Shah." Avery, *Modern Iran*, 121.

²²⁸ See Isfahānī, *Bahjat al-ṣudūr*, 341.

²²⁹ Avery, *Modern Iran*, 121. Avery adds that the Shah's murder "provided the clerics with an opportunity too good to be missed of denigrating the Bābīs." Ibid.

²³⁰ See 'Azīz Allāh Sulaymānī, *Maṣāliḥ-i hidāyat*, vol. 1 (Tehran: Mu'assisah-'i millī-i maṭbū'āt-i amrī, 1952), 309, 313. In a unique historiographical account, another Bahā'ī, Mīrzā Ḥusayn Zanjānī, who was in jail along with Varqā, recorded the details of their imprisonment and the execution of Varqā. He also records a conversation between a number of the followers of Sayyid Jamal al-Dīn right before the assassination, speaking of a plan to assassinate Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah at that specific time when Varqā, Ḥusayn Zanjānī and a number of other Bahā'īs were in jail. In this way they thought the blame would easily be put on Bahā'īs and the actual assassins would be saved. See Sulaymānī, *Maṣāliḥ-i hidāyat*, 1:308.

with the Bābīs (i.e., Bahā'īs).²³¹ Even so, within the short time-span between the spread of the rumor and the correction of it, some Iranian Shiites, both inside Iran and abroad (for example, in Baku—a point of particular relevance to our discussion),²³² began attacking Bahā'īs.²³³ In Egypt, the diplomat-journalist Za'im al-Dawlah²³⁴ and some other Iranians devised a plan for the massacre of Bahā'īs living there. They were only deterred when the Iranian ambassador to Egypt insisted that they await news of the truth of the matter from Iran. Eventually the telegram from Amīn al-Sulṭān arrived and the danger was averted.²³⁵

It was such circumstances that caused the Russian authorities to become concerned about the nature of the people who they had accepted as immigrants. Despite having seen the intercession for their adversaries in 1891, the rumor that the Bahā'īs had assassinated the Shah caused these authorities to inquire the history and beliefs of the new Iranian religion.

1. From Russian Documents

Upon hearing of the agitation aroused against Bahā'īs, on June 30 [July 12], 1897²³⁶ General A.N. Kuropatkin, Chief of the Trans-Caspian Region wrote from Ashkhabad to Russia's Minister in

²³¹ See 'Alāqah'band Yazdi, Aqa Muḥammad. *Tārīkh-i Mashrūṭīyat*. Tehran: Iran National Bahā'ī Archives (INBA), vol.2, Digital reprint, East Lansing, Mi.: H-Bahai, 2001, pp. 68-70.

Available online <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/arabic/vol5/yazdi/mashrut.htm>

²³² In addition to this, shortly afterwards another Bahā'ī was murdered in Baku, as a result of the agitations against Bahā'īs which continued to persist for some time following the assassination despite the announcement that Bahā'īs were not connected to the act. Mullā Ṣādiq Bādkūbah'i—also a poet-- was shot to death. Before dying, his last words were a request for the murderer not to be punished. See: Fāzil Māzandarānī *Tārīkh-i zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, 8/2:1055-1056.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ On Za'im al-Dawlah see section One of chapter Three.

²³⁵ Mihrābkhānī, *Zindigānī-i Mīrṣā*, 271-71; 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Āyatī (Āvārah). *al-Kawākib al-durrīyya fī ma'āthir al-Bahā'īya* (Egypt: 1924), 2:89.

²³⁶ A.N. Kuropatkin to Y.K. Butzow, No 171, Ashkhabad, June 30 [July12], 1897. (12 July 1897 of the Gregorian calendar corresponds to 30 June 1897 of the Julian calendar).

Tehran, Yevgenii Karlovich Butzow, asking for information.²³⁷ Kuropatkin opened his letter by explaining to Butzow that many Shiites arriving in Ashkhabad from Persia via Julfa carry with them “fire-arms and side-arms,” and remain in Ashkhabad where they plot against Bahā’īs (to whom he refers to as “Bābists”), threatening them with murder, as evidenced by the case of the “attempted murder” of the a Bahā’ī called Haji Abu-Talib Sadykhov. Asserting that he has ordered “vigilant surveillance” of the Muslims who enter the district, as well as the protection of the Bahā’īs, he begged the Minister to inform him,

whether the Babists have been involved in the murder of His Majesty the Persian Shah, and how we are to treat the Babists: permit them as before to live without hindrance in the district or, out of fear that they would build here a source of a new plot, forbid them to live in the district. If you should recognize the latter measure as the most appropriate, kindly let me know how in your opinion that large measure could be carried out.²³⁸

Butzow had been asked the same question, by a subordinate of Kuropatkin named Aleksandr Alekseyevich, Assistant Commander of the Civil Sector,²³⁹ three months earlier, as a letter from him in response to that question indicates (see below). Apparently unaware of the previous communication, and now confronted with the added commotion following the Shah’s assassination, General Kuropatkin repeated the question. While Butzow’s response to Kuropatkin is not available here, his reply to the same question posed by Aleksandr Alekseyevich is:

The followers of the Bāb’s teachings do not pursue political goals, and if they have suffered persecution at the hands of the Persian Government in the reign of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah, at present they enjoy toleration, although they do not openly confess their

²³⁷ This and other communications of the Russian authorities in this section are translations of yet unpublished documents. The translation has been done by historian Firuz Kazemzadeh, and are being cited here by his permission. The full version of the translation of these documents are to be published in online *World Order* magazine. I am grateful to Dr. Firuz Kazemzadeh for graciously informing me of these documents and generously sharing his translations of them with me.

²³⁸ AVPR [Archive of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs] F. 194, op. 528, ed. *Khr.* 2049, 1848–1897.

²³⁹ The surname of the individual is not given in the original document. See Kazemzadeh, “Two Documents,” *World Order*, forthcoming.

doctrine for fear of persecution on the part of Shiite clergy which uses every opportunity to excite the people against them.

The writer then gave the unlikely figure of “a million” as the number of the followers of the Bāb, adding “according to people who maintain relations with these sectaries,” among them there are “even the highest representatives of the Shiite clergy.” At the end, he concludes:

The absence in the Babide teachings of any political aspirations, proved by those sectaries who live within the borders of Russia, their reliability as obedient citizens, point to the fact that they deserve tolerance and protection equally with the followers of other Muslim sects.²⁴⁰

For the Governor of Baku, in Northern (Russian) Azerbaijan, who had apparently remained unaware to that point of the existence of Bahā'īs in Baku, the reality of the “Bābīs” and their beliefs were still matters of concern at the turn of the century. In an opinion expressed in a report of December 5 [18] 1901,²⁴¹ he explained how, upon the request of these immigrants for protection, he

decided that it was necessary first of all to discover all the details concerning the existence of that sect in Baku province, the time of its appearance there, the degree of its development, and also what aims that sect pursues, how its members behave, does its existence constitute any danger for public tranquility and order, and can it be tolerated in general.

He went on to explain that he ordered Staff Captain Voino-Oranskii, “who, as a graduate of a course in Oriental languages, had the requisite preparation for this task” to provide him with the required information. He then shared the information Voino-Oranskii had gathered which included some facts, albeit with slight inaccuracies, on the history of the Bāb and Bahā'u'llāh's lives and writings, concluding:

²⁴⁰ Ye.K. Butzow to Aleksandr Alekseyevich, Tehran, March 4 [16], 1897 *AVPR*, *F. 194, op. 528a, ed. khr. 2049, 1848–1897*.

²⁴¹ According to Kazemzadeh, “the document is damaged, a piece bearing the year having been torn off.” Based on the first three figures shown, Kazemzadeh estimates that the document was written is 1902. See Kazemzadeh, “Two Documents,” *Online World Order*, forthcoming. However, the Gregorian (12 December) and Julian (5 December) dates indicate that it was produced in 1901.

The “Bābī” teaching contains all the principles of Christian religion such as love of one’s neighbor, forgiveness, etc. They do not believe in blood feud, are distinguished by religious tolerance, a complete absence of fanaticism, and in general by striving for progress.²⁴²

3. Gathering Information

Tumanski’s translation of Bahā’u’llāh’s *Kitāb-i aqdas* in 1899²⁴³ was, no doubt, the result of this call by the Russian authorities for the investigation of Bahā’ī writings. In Iran the knowledgeable Bahā’ī Mīrzā Ḥasan Adīb (d. 1909), because of his background and the elite social level he occupied,²⁴⁴ had a circle of acquaintances including prestigious Iranians, both laymen and ulama, and a number foreigners, including “the members of the Russian, French, and other legations.”²⁴⁵ His acquaintance with the Russian diplomat, Georgiy Batyushkov, a Persian and Arabic scholar working in the Tehran legation in 1893-1899, developed into a close friendship.²⁴⁶ In 1896, upon Batyushkov’s request, Adīb wrote a treatise on the history of the

²⁴² The Governor of Baku to [?], December 5 [18] 1902[?] AVPR, F 194, op. 528a, ed. khr. 2049, 1848–1897.

²⁴³ See above.

²⁴⁴ See Encyclopaedia Iranica, s.v. “Adīb Ṭāḷqānī”; for a longer biography of Mīrzā Ḥasan Adīb, see Fāḡil Māzandarānī, *Asad Allāh, Tārīkh-i zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol.8, part 1 (Tehran, Mu’assisah-i millī-i maṭbū’āt-i amrī, 1975), 462–477. Titled “Adīb al-ulama” (The Erudite of the learned) by the Qājārs, he was a learned man of his time, was responsible for the library of the learned Qājār figure I’tizād al-Saltānah, taught at Dār al-Funūn, and was part of a circle assisting the erudite Qājār prince, Farhād Mīrzā Mu’tamid al-Dawlah in writing his book on Imam Ḥusan (*Qamqām-i zakhkhār wa ṣamṣām-i battār* (Tehran, 1305/1887)). He converted to the Bahā’ī religion in 1307 Q/1890. He established the Tarbiyat school (see the chapter on Riḡā Shah).

²⁴⁵ Fāḡil Māzandarānī, *Tārīkh-i zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, 8/1:464.

²⁴⁶ See Fāḡil Māzandarānī, *Tārīkh-i zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, 8/1:465; Ioannesyan, *Pioneers of Bahā’ī Studies in Europe*, forthcoming. Adīb’s association with Batyushkov may have been one of the reasons why Valentine Chirol wrote that Russians were in close touch with the Bahā’ī “leaders.” See Valentine Chirol, *The Middle Eastern Question or Some Polemical Problems of Indian Defence* (London: John Murray, 1903), 125. For a discussion of Firaydūn Ādamiyat’s misquotation of Chirol’s remarks, see Houchang E. Chehabi “The Paranoid Style in Iranian Historiography,” in *Iran in the 20th Century: Historiography and Political Culture*, edited by Touraj Atabaki (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 162–63.

life of the Bāb and Bahā'u'llāh.²⁴⁷ The next year Batyushkov himself published a short, but appreciative, introductory book on the Bābī and Bahā'ī religions.²⁴⁸

It is probably safe to assume that it was this initiative that moved the Bahā'ī leader 'Abdu'l-Bahā'(d.1921) to write Batyushkov a short letter, acknowledging his effort and stating that, while all else would in time perish, “the service” he had rendered would remain. He should then, thank God, “a thousand times for the blessing conferred on him.” (“*şad hizār shukrānah lāzim ki bi in mawhibat fā'iz gardīdīd.*”)²⁴⁹ What is both highly significant and surprising about this otherwise highly warm letter is the absence of any expression of gratitude, as for a favor done.

In an undated letter, obviously written after the Russian government's initiative in investigating Bahā'ī beliefs, 'Abdu'l-Bahā' addressed this larger issue:

When the Russian government saw that there were many Bahā'īs in Russia and their number was increasing by the day, it initiated an investigation into the objectives of this people. It carefully collected all the Bahā'ī writings, tablets and books from various places in a manner that simply baffles the mind. It then formed a committee of numerous experts with an excellent command of oriental languages who researched and verified each and every one of these tablets, books and treatises; learned the true aims, objectives and intentions of this people; and acquired knowledge about the divine teachings and laws. After this committee had completed its work, the state became acquainted with the reality of the matter and exerted its utmost effort to protect this wrongly oppressed people [now established] in its territory.²⁵⁰

It was presumably based on the investigation referred to, and the realization of the non-political--and particularly non-violent--nature of the Bahā'ī beliefs that the Russian authorities

²⁴⁷ Fāẓil Māzandarānī, *Tārīkh-i zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, 8/1:464

²⁴⁸ G. Batyushkov. *Babidy. Persidskaya Sekta* (“The Bābīs: a Persian Sect”) (St.Petersburg: 1897).

²⁴⁹ Fāẓil Māzandarānī, *Tārīkh-i zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, 8/1:465.

²⁵⁰ See: 'Abdu'l-Bahā', *Mā'idah-i āsmānī*, comp. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Ishrāqkhāvarī, vol. 5 (Tehran: Mu'assisah-i millī-i maṭbū'āt-i amrī, 1972/129 BE), 254; also in 'Abdu'l-Bahā', *Mā'idah-i āsmānī*, comp. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Ishrāqkhāvarī, *Mā'idah-i āsmānī*, vol. 9 (Tehran: Mu'assisah-i millī-i maṭbū'āt-i amrī, 1965/122 BE), 76.

sanctioned the development of the Bahā'ī community in Ashkhabad to the point that it was allowed to build a temple there.

V. *The Building of the Mashriq al-Azkār (The House of Worship)*

By 1901-1902/1319 Q, more than one thousand Bahā'īs were living in Ashkhabad.²⁵¹ The community had already erected a number of buildings serving such purposes as a public bath, a traveller's hospice, and a boys' school.²⁵² From the earliest years, the idea of building a Mashriq al-azkār (literally “Dawning Place of the Praises [of God]”) i.e. a House of Worship, according to the ordinances of Bahā'u'llāh, had been a major goal, land having been purchased for the purpose.²⁵³ Ustād 'Alī Akbar-i Bannā, a Bahā'ī from Yazd and an experienced builder-architect, was appointed by Baha'u'llah as the designer of the project.²⁵⁴ Auxiliary institutions of the House of Worship had already been built on the site,²⁵⁵ when the death of Mīrzā Muḥammad-'Alī Afnān in 1896 brought the project to a halt.²⁵⁶ Abdu'l-Bahā' then appointed the latter's brother, Mīrzā Muḥammad-Taqī Afnān (d. 1911) to supervise the completion of the

²⁵¹ Fāẓil Māzandarānī, *Tārīkh-i zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, 8/2:983.

²⁵² Momen, Momen, “The Bahā'ī Community,” 285.

²⁵³ For the Bahā'ī House of Worship, see: *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Bahaism ix. Bahā'ī Temples”; *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Mashriq al-azkār”; *The Bahā'ī Encyclopedia Project*, s.v. “Mashriq al-azkār (Arabic: “Dawning Place of the Praise of God”),” Available online: <http://www.bahai-encyclopedia-project.org/attachments/Mashriqul-Adhkar.pdf>. A communication from a certain Mr. M. M. Holbach, who visited 'Abdu'l-Bahā' in 1914, bears important information about the temple: “At first the Russian government refused permission for the erection of the temple, and a special petition was sent by the Bahā'īs direct to the Czar, who had the matter inquired into, and, finding that so far from there being anything political in the background, the followers of Bahā'u'llāh are enjoined never to take up arms or join in any revolutionary movement against the state, gave the required permission.” *Star of the West*, vol. 5 (1914), 68.

Star of the West, vol. 5, no.5 (June 5, 1914), 68.

²⁵⁴ On Ustād 'Alī Akbar-i Bannā, see: Sulaymānī, *Maṣābiḥ-i hidāyat*, 3: 549-615. He was murdered in 1903 in Yazd. See the chapter on 1903 pogrom.

²⁵⁵ For explanations on these auxiliary institutions, see: “”; *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Mashriq al-azkār.”

²⁵⁶ On Mīrzā Muḥammad-'Alī Afnān, see: Muḥammad 'Alī Afnān. *Khāndān-i Afnān, sidrah-i rahīmān* (Tehran: Mu'assisah-i millī-i maṭbū'āt-i amrī, 1970), 81-95. The date of his death is recorded as 1314Q/1896 in this source (see p.83), and 1318/1901 in another. See Fāẓil Māzandarānī, *Tārīkh-i zuhūr al-ḥaqq* 8/2:996.

project by erecting the temple itself. An affluent merchant, Mīrzā Muḥammad-Taqī had already functioned in his hometown of Yazd as the Wakīl al-tijārah (deputy for trade) of Russia.²⁵⁷ Arriving in Ashkhabad in September 1902, he, as his brother had done, devoted a large share of his wealth to the construction of the temple.²⁵⁸ On 11 Dec. 1902, the cornerstone of the building was laid during an official ceremony attended by the military governor of Turkestan, General Kuropatkin.²⁵⁹ Supported by the donations of the Bahā'ī community generally, the building was completed in 1919.²⁶⁰

The Bahā'ī community of Ashkhabad continued to grow for many years after the completion of the Mashriq al-azkār. Its members experienced an unprecedented freedom in practicing their religion.²⁶¹ Initially, even the Bolshevik Revolution left them relatively unhindered in their faith until 1928, which saw the introduction of Stalinist anti-religious policies, the subject of which goes beyond the scope of the present discussion.²⁶²

To conclude, in historical records, the protections offered by the Russian authorities to Bahā'ī immigrants as inhabitants of their Empire (e.g., permission to build a place of worship in

²⁵⁷ He was also known as Wakīl al-Dawlah, see Asad Allāh Fāzil Māzandarānī, *Tārīkh-i zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol.5 (Digitally republished, East Lansing, Michigan: H-Bahai, 1999), 518; Idem, *Tārīkh-i zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, 8/1: 430.

²⁵⁸ On Ashkhabad Mashriq al-Azkār, see: Asad Allāh Fāzil Māzandarānī, *Tārīkh-i zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol.8, part 2 (Tehran, Mu'assisah-'i millī-i maṭbū'āt-i amrī, 1976), 981-985, 995-1003; Idem, *Asrār al-athār*, vol 5 (Tehran, Mu'assisah-'i millī-i maṭbū'āt-i amrī, 1973), 127.

²⁵⁹ For a contemporary account on Ashkhabad Mashriq al-Azkār, and this ceremony, see: Hippolyte Dreyfus, "Une Institution Béha'ie: Le Machreqou'l-Azkār d' 'Achqābād," dans *Mélanges Hartwig Derenbourg: recueil de travaux d'érudition dédiés à la mémoire d'Hartwig Derenbourg par ses amis et ses élèves* (1844-1908) (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1909), 415-423, esp. p. 416. I am grateful to Houshang E. Chehabi for sending me a copy of this article. A *Star of the West* article also make a reference to this event. See Fraser, "The Bahā'ī Temple," 68. While both Dreyfus and Fraser indicate that the General Kuropatkin represented Tsar in the ceremony, other sources mention the governor of Transcaspia, General Subotich, instead. See Fāzil Māzandarānī, *Tārīkh-i zuhūr al-ḥaqq* 8/2:997; Nancy Ackerman and Graham Hassell, "Russia and the Bahā'ī Faith: A Historical Connection," in *The Bahā'ī World, 1998-99: An International Record* (Haifa: Bahā'ī World Center, 2000), 157-92, esp.163. *Star of the West*, vol 5 (1914), 68.

²⁶⁰ Fāzil Māzandarānī, *Tārīkh-i zuhūr al-ḥaqq* 8/2:1002.

²⁶¹ See Sulaymānī, *Maṣābīḥ-i hidāyat*, 3: 556.

²⁶² For the condition of the Bahā'ī community of Russia from 1928 on see Ackerman and Hassell, "Russia and the Bahā'ī Faith," 184 ff.

Ashkhabad) were read as evidence of official Russian support. Meanwhile, important pieces of contradicting evidence were suppressed in the historical memory of Iranians. Bahā'u'llāh's refusal to grant permission to his followers to turn to Russia in face of mistreatment by the Qājār government and the clerics, and his warnings against the increasing influence of foreign powers in Iran were among the suppressed and actively forgotten facts. Likewise, as we shall see in the next section, the fact that Bahā'īs sought refuge in the Russian Consulate in Isfahan²⁶³ was recorded as evidence of Russian ties, whereas the Consulate's refusal to grant refuge was suppressed and forgotten.²⁶⁴ This combination of active remembrance and deliberate amnesia characterized the historiography of this theme decades later in the 1930s in the works of the Azalī Memoirist Dawlatābādī and the historian Kasravī who also authored an anti-Bahā'ī polemic.²⁶⁵

²⁶³ See next chapter.

²⁶⁴ Valentine Chirol who was contemporary to the events wrote that "on Russian territory outside the Persian frontier," Russians "treated Bābīs with marked favour." He then adds, "it is, however, difficult even for the Russians always to hunt with the hounds and run with the hare, and during the recent riots at Isfahan the Bābīs who tried to seek refuge at the Russian Consulate found it closed against them, and were massacred." Chirol, *The Middle Eastern Question*, 125.

²⁶⁵ Aḥmad Kasravī, *Bahā'īgarī*, n.p., n.d. (c. 1943).

2.3 The 1903 Pogrom

I. Introduction

In the summer of 1903, just a couple of years before the start of the Constitutional Movement, anti-Bahā'ī riots took place across many cities in Iran. Mobs instigated by clerics brutally murdered many of their fellow citizens, raiding their houses and plundering their properties.²⁶⁶ Like other cycles of Bahā'ī persecution occurring during times of socio-political

²⁶⁶ For the record of the events in a letter from the Bahā'ī leader at the time, see: 'Abdu'l-Bahā', *Makātīb-i Ḥaẓrat-i 'Abdu'l-Bahā'*, vol. 3 (Egypt, 1921), 3: 122-146; Idem, *Makātīb-i Ḥaẓrat-i 'Abdu'l-Bahā'*, vol. 4 (Tehran: Mu'assisah'i maṭbū'āt-i amrī, 1964), 118-122; Idem, *Mā'idah-i āsmānī*, vol. 9 (Tehran: Mu'assisah'i maṭbū'āt-i amrī, 1972), 110-111 ; For extensive British Consular reports, and the reports of the events in The Times, see: Moojan Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981), 373-404; For a monthly summary of British Consular reports, see: R. M. Burrell, and Robert L. Jarman, eds., *Iran Political Diaries 1881-1965*, Volume 2: 1901-1905 (Oxford: Archival Editions, 1997); For eyewitness accounts of the persecutions, see: Sayyid Muḥammad 'Alī Jamāl-zādah, *Sar u tah yik karbās yā (Isfahan-nāmāh)*, (Tehran: Ma'rifat, 1323/1944), 87-92, 108-110; and Aḥmad Majd al-Islam Kirmānī, *Tārīkh-i inḥiṭāt-i majlis, faṣlī az tārīkh-i inqilāb-i mashrūṭīyat-i Iran*, with an introduction by Maḥmūd Khalīlpūr (Isfahan: University of Isfahan, 1972), 191-226; For the reports of a Christian missionary living in Yazd at the time, see Napier Malcolm, *Five Years in a Persian Town* (London, 1905), 87-89, 186, 155-156, 157, 186. For graphic accounts based on eyewitness reports, see: Muḥammad Ṭāhir Mālmīrī, *Tārīkh-i Shuhadā-yi Yazd* (Cairo: 1923); For rather detailed accounts of the events in different cities, by the then Bahā'ī author, contemporary to the events, see: 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Āyatī (Āvārah), *al-Kawākib al-durrīyya fī ma'āthir al-Bahā'īya* (Egypt/Miṣr: 1924), 96-160. For a short but informative account by another author contemporary to the events, see: Ḥasan khān Shaykh Jābirī Anṣārī, *Tārīkh Isfahan va Ray va hamah-i jahān* (Tehran: 1943), 340-343. For the most extensive scholarly study of Isfahan at that time, see: Heidi A. Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King: Zill al-Sultan and Isfahan under the Qajars* (London: I.B. Tauris in association with the Iran Heritage Foundation, 2008). For the translation into English of some accounts contemporary to the events, see: Ḥabīb Allah Afnān, "Profile of Turmoil: Spring 1903," in *The Genesis of the Bābī-Bahā'ī Faiths in Shiraz and Fars*, trans. Ahang Rabbani (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 151-169. Siyyid Muḥammad Ṭabīb Manshādī, *The Martyrs of Manshād*, Trans. Ahang Rabbani, <http://sites.google.com/site/ahangrabbani2/manshad1> (accessed 8 July 10). ; Muḥammad-Ṭāhir Mālmīrī, "The Events and Tragedies of Manshād," in *Tārīkh Shuhadā-yi Yazd* (Cairo: 1923), 432-503, trans. Ahang Rabbani, <http://sites.google.com/site/ahangrabbani2/manshad-malmiri> (accessed 8 July 10). The first event happened in Rasht in March 1903. See Abdu'l-Bahā', *Makātīb*, 3: 122-123. For the British consular reports on the Rasht incidence, see: Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions*, 373-76. Next events happened serially in a number of cities and localities starting with Isfahan, then Yazd, Taft (a village near Yazd), Manshad, Ardakan, Kashan, Sulṭān-abad Irāq, Malāyir, Tūsirkān, and to lesser degree Hamedan. See Āyatī, *Kawākib*, 2: 96-190. See also: See Mehdi 'Abedi, "Shī'ite socialization in Pahlavi Iran: Autobiographical Sondages in a Postmodern world," in Michael Fischer and Mehdi Abedi. *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogue in Postmodernity and Tradition* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 50-51.

crisis in Iran (e.g., those of the year 1883/1300 Q. and 1891/1308 Q),²⁶⁷ this one also occurred at a time of socio-political unrest. In terms of the loss of human life this was the largest and most sweeping pogrom of the Bahā'īs in Iran in the twentieth century. It therefore deserves special attention.

A constellation of factors at the levels of the individual cleric, the local government in Isfahan, as well as Iranian national and global international politics was at work. This section summarizes the nature and effect of these factors, leaving an in-depth analysis for the future. However, to the extent possible, it provides a context for these events by sketching a map of the social and political forces at play during that period. Beyond such a description, it examines in particular one key event, which lent itself to interpretations that paved the way for the politicization of anti-Bahā'ism: the refuge taken by Bahā'īs of Isfahan in the Russian consulate.

II. Sociopolitical Context

The turn of the century anti-Bābī and āntī-Bahā'ī upheaval may be regarded as the prototype of the pattern that Abbas Amanat has identified in instances of anti-Bābī unrest in Iran. Such campaigns, Amanat maintains:

usually coincided with instances of famine and harvest failure, urban unrest, epidemics, and other provincial or national crisis and frequently served as scapegoats to cover for the failure of the state policy in the face of European political and economic intrusion

²⁶⁷ On these two episodes, see Mina Yazdani, *Awzā'-i-ijtimā'ī -i Irān dar 'ahd-i-Qājār az khilāl-i āthār-i mubārakah-yi Bahā'ī* (Hamilton: Association for Bahā'ī Studies in Persian, 2003), 143-156, 157-199.

or instances of the hoarding of grain and other forms of profiteering by wealthy *mujtahids* and their allies.²⁶⁸

The Bahā'ī pogrom of 1903 occurred against the backdrop of intense rivalry between British and Russian interests in Iran, as well as between various national and local (i.e., Isfahan) factions. The immediate cause, however, was the deep hatred of Bābīs and Bahā'īs harbored by Shī'ī clerics, aggravated by their non-conformance to Shī'ī standards of behavior, as well as the emergence in the Bahā'ī community of activities which were transnational in nature. The pages that follow discuss the contexts and causes that were in the backdrop to the Bahā'ī pogrom.

1. At the level of the central government

In 1896, Muẓaffar al-Dīn Shah (d. 1906), who was in poor health, succeeded to the throne. His poor health, which was thought to necessitate medical attention in Europe, called for money. The reformist and patriotic prime minister, Amīn al-Dawlah (d. 1904)²⁶⁹, tried to organize and draw on the internal financial resources of the country to avoid getting external loans. To raise capital he discontinued the unjustifiable incomes of courtiers and clerics, resulting in further restriction of clerical interference in the affairs of the country. Simultaneously, he opened modern schools, including the Rushdīyya college. These initiatives lead to the

²⁶⁸ Abbas Amanat, "The Historical Roots of the Persecution of Bābīs and Bahā'īs in Iran," in *The Bahā'īs of Iran: Socio-historical Studies*, ed. Dominic Parviz Brookshaw and Seena B. Fazel (London: Routledge, 2008), 170-183. Quote from p. 178.

²⁶⁹ On Amīn al-Dawlah, see Encyclopaedia Iranica, s.v. "AMĪN-AL-DAWLA, MĪRZĀ 'ALĪ KHAN"; Browne, *The Persian Revolution*, 417. The writer of *Rag-i tāk* refers to Amīn al-Dawlah as the "*Bābī maslak*" (of Bābī leaning) prime-minister but does not explain further. Dilārām Mashhūrī, *Rag-i tāk*, 2:156.

dissatisfaction of the clerics with Amīn al-Dawlah, who together with most courtiers asked the Shah for his overthrow.²⁷⁰

Finally, the insistence and intrigue of the courtiers and influential Tehran clerics were effective. The Shah removed Amīn al-Dawlah from power, and appointed ‘Alī Aṣghar khān Amīn al-Sulṭān, Atābak-i A‘ẓam (d. 1907) as the prime minister.²⁷¹ The Shah wanted Atābak to get more external loans so he could travel one more time to Europe. But all the attempts to raise money failed.

While the central government struggled with the question of how to raise money, in 1898 three Belgian custom-house officials (financial advisors) were invited to Iran for the modernizing customs administration and increasing revenues. In the following year, the custom-houses of Azarbayjan and Kermanshah were handed over to the Belgians on a trial basis. As such, an important area of the administration became subject to foreign control. While the Belgians were undoubtedly efficient, their attempts to expand their jurisdiction over fiscal affairs in general, and their policy of chiefly recruiting Armenians to work for them caused popular resentment. People gradually saw the Belgians as the collaborators and followers of the Russians. This impression arose because the money raised by Shah in 1900 from Russia was a loan guaranteed by customs receipts (except those of the southern provinces where the British trade dominated), and the Belgians were in charge of the customs. Additionally, Russia demanded that Persia pay off a loan given by the British Imperial Bank

²⁷⁰ Majd al-Islam, *Tārīkh-i inḥiṭāt*, 158-171. Majd al-Islam covered the account of the reforms of Amīn al-Dawlah and the resistance against him on the part of the ‘ulama’ and the courtiers with playful, yet polite language. See Majd al-Islam, *Tārīkh-i inḥiṭāt*, 163-174, specifically 171-174 where he recounts the clerical symbolic “threatening” of the king to leave Iran for ‘atabāt and his welcoming of that, and their decision instead to go to the sanctuary of Shah ‘Abdul-‘Azim near Tehran instead!

²⁷¹ On Amīn al-Sulṭān, see *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Atābak-i A‘ẓam, Amīn al-Sulṭān.”

immediately, so that Russia would become the country's sole creditor, thereby increasing its power and influence in Persia.

Resentment of the Belgian administration also increased due to the heavy taxes imposed on items such as meat during the 1901 famine in southern Iran. In particular, the mercantile class became embittered with the imposition of customs due for imports and exports, and a road tax. In 1902, a second Russian loan was arranged and Russia obtained a road building concession in northern Iran. The Shah went on a second journey to Europe. In 1903 riots against new custom tariffs broke out.²⁷²

With the Russian loans, the steadily proliferating political and financial control that Russia gained deemed a menace to Persia's independence. An anxiety over impending breakdown of Muzaffar al-Din Shah's reign and a possible Russian takeover of the country occupied people's minds.²⁷³ The British showed a placid inaction due to the stand off between them and Russia.²⁷⁴ In late 1901 Zill used every opportunity to tell the British that the issue of the Russian loans was entirely in their hands.²⁷⁵

²⁷² Peter Avery, *Modern Iran* (New York: Frederick A. Preager, 1965), 122-123. See also Edward G. Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1909* (London: Frank Cass, 1966), 99.

²⁷³ Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King*, 274.

²⁷⁴ The entente between the super-powers, which led to the 1907 Anglo-Russian Agreement, is said to have "initiated a sprawling undercover politicking by both powers, through enlisting specifically the collaboration of the ulama of all ranks." Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King*, 266. On the 1907 Agreement see Mansour Bonakdarian, *Britain and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911: Foreign Policy, Imperialism, and Dissent* (New York: Syracuse University Press in association with the Iranian Heritage Foundation, 2006), 71-113.

²⁷⁵ According to the British Consular reports, Āqā Nūr Allāh, the brother of Āqā Najafī, probably persuaded by Zill al-Sultān went to the British vice-consul "with the unmistakable offer to mobilize crowds against Russia," and "to test Britain's commitment," he asked "if it was possible for a whole town or district to declare itself as British subjects if they wished...More importantly, he wanted to know whether the British government was willing to support their cause against a power whom the ulama considered exceedingly intolerant of Islam..." Aqanoor to Spring-Rice; No. 11, confidential, 2 July 1900; FO 248/723, in Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King*, 274. The British Consular reports also reveal that Zill al-Sultān himself is said to have mentioned that for the British to conclude the affair [i.e., the Russian loans] in Britain's favor, all they had to do was "to spend a few thousands, placing matters in the hands of a confidential man, who would fee the Mollahs [Sic] and work the people up to oppose the matter in the same way as was done by the Russians with the Régie" ! The British consul, Preece to British

In 1902, the ulama of Isfahan and Ẓill al-Sultān continued to persuade the British to take action against the Russian loan. London was not interested in moving against Russia and did not respond to the overtures of the Isfahan ulama.²⁷⁶ However, “the intense Persian discontent forced the Foreign Office to review the question,”²⁷⁷ and “Britain embarked more seriously on exploring means of influencing Persian affairs through the clergy.”²⁷⁸ On February 5, 1902, the British vice-consul, Graham, met the *Mujtahid*, Sayyid Abd Allāh Bihbahānī, “long a friend of the English”. After presenting the *Mujtahid* “a very small souvenir,” Graham mentioned the Russian loan. Bihbahānī expressed his disapproval of the loan and shared that he and other *mujtahids* were determined to prevent it. The only problem, Bihbahānī added, was that “some clerics were timorous, others venal.” He therefore, “required money to bring them over, and he wished to feel assured that their actions on this matter would be appreciated by England, in whose interests, as much as in those of Persia, he was acting in this matter.”²⁷⁹

While Hardinge, Graham’s superior, did not agree to give Bihbahānī, “out of secret service funds,” the large amount of money he had asked for, he did agree with placing in his hands, a portion of it, “hinting delicately that more might be forthcoming should any practical result, in the form of a clerical protest against the loan, appear.”²⁸⁰ Writing to Preece, the Consul General in Isfahan, about giving the money “to stimulate local mollahs [Sic],” Hardinge

Minister in Tehran, Hardinge; No. 57, Confidential, 1 December 1901; FO 60/650, in Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King*, 275. In yet another attempt on the part of *ulama* to solicit British support against further Russian influence, Shakh Ḥasan ‘Arab, also known as Shaykh al-‘Arāqayn discussed the issue with Hardinge the British Minister in Tehran, in 1902. Harding to Lansdowne; No.77, confidential 5May 1902; FO 60/650, in Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King*, 275-276.

²⁷⁶ See Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King*, 275-276. For the British attempts to reach an accord with Russia around this time see Bonakdarian, *Britain and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 23-26.

²⁷⁷ Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King*, 276.

²⁷⁸ Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King*, 277.

²⁷⁹ Memorandum by Mr. Grahame, Tehran, February 5, 1902. Cited here from Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia, 1864-1914: A Study in Imperialism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 390.

²⁸⁰ A. Hardinge to Lansdowne, No. 23. Tehran, February 14, 1902. Cited here from Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia*, 391.

emphasized, “only nothing must pass in writing which would indicate this, and your dealings with them must be direct not through Zil [sic] who had better not know of any presents we may give to clergy.”²⁸¹ Ultimately, “step by step a secret alliance between the British legation and the clerical leadership was forged in Tehran, Isfahan, and elsewhere.”²⁸²

When the uproar reached Yazd, the four chief mujtahids²⁸³ of Karbala and Najaf sent a letter to the Shah “protesting against the employment of Europeans (i.e., the Belgians) in the Persian service and against the alleged proposed reorganization of the national finances under European auspices, and declaiming against Bābism, and infidelity and heresy in every form.”²⁸⁴

2. At the Local Level: Isfahan

A. The Governor Ṣill al-Sulṭān and the Increased Russian Influence

Mas‘ūd Mīrzā Ṣill al-Sulṭān (d. 1918) was the eldest surviving son of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah (d. 1896), but he was not eligible to succeed to the throne since his mother was a concubine and not a Qājār. Greedy for power, he reigned over a vast area, “from south of Kashan to west of Kerman,” until 1888 when his father the king, in consultation with his powerful prime minister, Amīn al-Sulṭān, restricted his reign to Isfahan.²⁸⁵ Heidi Walcher, author of the most extensive scholarly book on Ṣill al-Sulṭān’s Isfahan, describes the “political matrix” of the city

²⁸¹ A. Hardinge to Preece, no.55, Secret, Tehran, March 16, 1902. Cited here from Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia*, 393.

²⁸² Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia*, 393.

²⁸³ Among these *mujtahids* was Āqā Muḥammad Sharābīyānī who “received a regular stipend from the Qudh” (or Awadh) Bequest, and with whom Hardinge tried to build a rapport in Najaf. See Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King*, 277-278. On Awakh Bequest and its political significance, see: Meir Litvak, *Shī‘ī Scholars of Nineteenth-Century Iraq: The ‘Ulama’ of Najaf and Karbala’* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

²⁸⁴ Quoted in the British consular report from Hardinge the British Minister in Tehran to the Foreign Secretary Lord Lansdowne, No. 102, 9 July 1903. See Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā’ī Religions*, 365. For more on the context of this communication see section “IV. Yazd and the Rest of Iran,” below.

²⁸⁵ Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King*, 91-92.

at the time when the anti-Bahā'ī riot happened as being in a state of “disintegration” resulting “directly from Muẓaffar al-Dīn’s inept regime.” The massacres, Walcher asserts, “were a symptom of the political break-up, while enforcing at the same time the collapse of any sense of cohesion or security in the city’s *guarded domains*.”²⁸⁶

During the time of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah, Isfahan was effectively under British hegemony because its governor, Mas'ūd Mīrzā Ẓill al-Sulṭān, was in alliance with the British. After the death of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah, the Russians opened a consulate in Isfahan in 1897. Being the partisan power of Muẓaffar al-Dīn Shah, the Russian Consulate was an ‘agent’ of the Shah in Isfahan, undermining Ẓill al-Sulṭān’s position. The latter, therefore, did whatever he could to prevent the establishment of the Russian Consulate. He encouraged some of the ulama of Isfahan—who were associated with the famous Āqā Najafī—to protest against the new Russian Consulate. Also, endorsed by Ẓill, Āqā Najafī’s brother, Shaykh Muḥammad ‘Alī, issued a public diatribe against the Europeans in general and the Russians (their religion, habits, principles, etc.) in particular.²⁸⁷ There were “intricate and constantly changing” alliances between Ẓill al-Sulṭān, the ulama, the merchants and the British. There were times when Ẓill al-Sulṭān would have liked to get rid of Āqā Najafī and his two brothers who interfered with his power. Russian presence changed the parameters. At this time, however, Ẓill now needed the three cleric brothers for balancing the powers.²⁸⁸ Britain supported Ẓill al-Sulṭān, and in a sense even functioned as the intermediary conveying his requests, like asking at the court in Tehran for sending more armed forces to Isfahan.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁶ Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King*, 267.

²⁸⁷ Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King*, 267-269.

²⁸⁸ Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King*, 268-274.

²⁸⁹ Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King*, 269-273.

B. Zill al-Sultān seeks Agitation

The Prime Minister Amīn al-Sultān, partly responsible for securing Russian loans, was considered by Zill al-Sultān as the person to blame for the gradual erosion of his position in Isfahan. Angered, Zill al-Sultān became especially critical of his Prime Minister's foreign policy, and is reported to have indicated that he "would gladly see an agitation against it set on foot," though he was also "reluctant to let such agitation begin in his province."²⁹⁰

C. The Influential Anti-Bābī, Anti-Bahā'ī Cleric, Āqā Najafī

One of the clerics whose power was severely restricted during the premiership of Amīn al-Dawlah was Shaykh Muḥammad Taqī Najafī (d.1914), the influential and fiercely anti-Bābī and anti-Bahā'ī cleric of Isfahan, with a long history of persecuting Bahā'īs.²⁹¹ Majd al-Islam recounts that after the overthrow of Amīn al-Dawlah, Shaykh Najafī summoned him and two other "head seminarians" (*ru'asā-yi tullāb*) to his presence, and shared with them his plans to regain his former power by "finding Bābīs and killing them."

²⁹⁰ Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King*, 275.

²⁹¹ On Shaykh Muḥammad Taqī Najafī, see M. 'A. Ḥabībādī, *Makārim al-āthār dar aḥwāl-i rijāl-i dawrah-i Qājār* (Isfahan: Kamāl, 1362/1983), 5: 1662-67. M. 'A. Mudarris, *Rayḥānat al-adab* I, (Tabriz, 1346 /1967), I: 56-57; III: 403-04. *Encyclopedia Iranica*, s.v. "Āqā Najafī Isfahani." Maḥdī Bāmdād, *Sharḥ-i ḥāl-i rijāl-i Iran*, 3:326. His anti-Bahā'ism was such an integral part of his life that when a descendent composed a biography of him, he devoted a full chapter to this topic. See Najafī, *Ḥukm-i nāfiz*, 165-190. In 1890 he caused the bloodshed of Bahā'īs in Sidah near Isfahan. He was proud of his anti-Bahā'ism and is reported to have said following the 1903 events, "when I killed six Bābīs in Sidah a few years ago and was called up to Tehran, the Amīnah Aqdas [one of Naṣir al-Dīn Shah's wives] sent for the water in which I had washed my hands." Aganoor to Hardinge No.35, 26 July 1903: FO 248 788, in Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981), 399. On his activities against the Christian missionaries and the Jews of Isfahan see, David Tsadik, *Between Foreigners and Shī 'īs: Nineteenth Century Iran and Its Jewish Minority* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 137-141, 144-148 and *passim*.

Furthermore, he instructed the three clerics to tell their agents to look for drunks, people playing music, and those engaging in similar acts and to bring them to him for punishment.²⁹² These measures were accompanied by some persecution of the “Bābīs” [by which Majd al-Islam meant both Azalīs and Bahā’īs] in Isfahan and Najafabad.²⁹³ But this was merely the beginning for more terrible events were yet to come.

III. *The Actual Event in Isfahan*

1. The Prelude to the Upheaval in Isfahan

It was in such a milieu that the Qājār prince, Abū al-Ḥasan Mīrzā, Shaykh al-Ra’īs²⁹⁴ entered Isfahān as a scholar poet crypto-Bahā’ī cleric, and drawing on his great oratorical and literary skills gave very successful public talks in a tent erected in the house he resided in. In his lectures, which attracted large audiences, *inter alia* he indirectly criticized the clerics including Shaykh Najafī. The latter had taken many steps like propagating the word that Shaykh al-Ra’īs was a Bābī, in order to prevent people from attending his talks. People’s attention to these lectures infuriated Shaykh Najafī, but he could not do anything given the high status of the Qājār prince.

²⁹² Majd al-Islam, *Tārīkh-i inḥiṭāt*, 209-210.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ On shaykh al-Ra’īs see: Ni’mat Allāh Zūkā’ī Bayzā’ī, *Tazkarah-i shu’arā-yi qarn-i avval-i Bahā’ī*, (Tehran: Mu’assisah-i millī-i maṭbū’āt-i amrī, 1964), 278-291; Asad Allāh Māzdandarānī (Fāḥil), *Tārīkh-i zuhūr al-ḥaqq* (East Lansing: H-Bahai Digital Publication, 1991), 6:44-65 < <http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~bahai/arabic/vol3/tzh6/tzh6.htm> >; Idem, *Tārīkh-i zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, vol. 8 part 1 ((Tehran: Mu’assisah-i millī-i maṭbū’āt-i amrī, 1974), 207-226; ‘Azīz Allāh Sulaymānī, *Maṣābīḥ-i hidāyat*, vol. 7 (Tehran: Mu’assisah-i millī-i maṭbū’āt-i amrī, 1972), 419-448; ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, *Ishrāqkhāvarī*, *Muḥāẓirāt*, vol. 2 (Tehran: Mu’assisah-i millī-i maṭbū’āt-i amrī, 1964), 942-952. Cole, Juan R.I. “Autobiography and silence: the early career of Shaykh al-Ra’īs Qājār,” in *Iran im 19. Jahrhundert und die Entstehung der Bahā’ī-Religion*, ed. Herausgegeben von Johann Christoph Bürgel and Isabel Schayani (Hildesheim: Olms, 1998), idem, “The provincial politics of heresy and reform in Qājār Iran: Shaykh al-Ra’īs in Shiraz, 1895-1902,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 22 no. i-ii (2002):119-126, idem, “Shaykh al-Ra’īs and Sultan Abdulhamid II: The Iranian Dimension of Pan-Islam,” in Israel Gershoni, Hakan Erdem, and Ursula Wokoeck, eds. *Histories of the Modern Middle East: New Directions* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002), pp. 167-185.

Once Shaykh al-Ra'īs left, a number of other prominent Bahā'īs including 'Azīz Allāh Varqā, whom Majd al-Islam describes as highly charismatic and charming (“*gīrandah, ya'nī šāhib-i quvvah-i jāzibah būd*”), and who happened to be the secretary and translator at the Russian bank, and Adīb al-ulama²⁹⁵ travelled to Isfahān and were well received by their co-religionists.²⁹⁶ This further infuriated Shaykh Najafī and in the spring of 1903 he started a new wave of persecutions by first arresting Āqā Muḥammad Javād-i Šarrāf, one of those who had a role in preparing for Shaykh al-Ra'īs's lectures. Āqā Muḥammad Javād, however, was arrested on the accusation that he had consumed alcohol. He was severely beaten. Unconscious, his body was carried to his home “on the shoulders of the porters.”²⁹⁷ The rumor went around that the ulama had issued an order to beat and kill (*zarb va qatl*) Bahā'īs.²⁹⁸ Bahā'īs could now feel the imminent danger.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁵ On Adīb al-ulama see section titled “Bahā'īs and Russia.”

²⁹⁶ See Majd al-Islam, *Tārīkh-i inḥitāt*, 210-215; Āvārah (Āyatī) also mentions the travel of Āyatī, *Kawākib*, 2: 97-99.

²⁹⁷ Majd al-Islam, *Tārīkh-i inḥitāt*, 216. Āyatī also maintains that beaten and injured the Šarrāf was carried home “on a piece of board.” Āyatī, *Kawākib*, 2: 99-100. Jabirī Anšāi also just mentions he “returned.” Jabirī Anšāi, *Tārīkh-i Isfahan va Ray*, 341. However, Yaḥyā Dawlatābādī, and a British consular report state that after being beaten the Šarrāf went to the Consulate of Russia. Dawlatābādī, *Ḥayāt-i Yaḥyā*, 1:318; Aganoor dispatch dated 6 June 1903, in Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions*, 378.

²⁹⁸ Āyatī, *Kawākib*, 2: 99-100.

²⁹⁹ Two other events were reported in the Bahā'ī sources as aggravating factors adding to the feeling of danger on the part of Bahā'īs at this time. One was Shaykh Najafī's concocting of a telegram purporting to be from Amīn al-Sultān, the prime minister, giving the Shaykh full power in religious matters. Four hundred copies of this telegram were distributed overnight in Isfahan, and made Bahā'īs particularly worried. See 'Abdu'l-Bahā', *Makātīb*, 124-125. British consular reports also do mention this concocted telegram, but record the timing to have been right *after* Bahā'īs took refuge in the consulate. See the telegraph of Aganoor, the British Acting Consul, dated 30 May 1903, in Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions*, 377. The other event was the brutal murder of two brothers, both credible merchants, most probably Azalīs. They had previously lent money to a number of prominent figures of the city. Finding the two brothers in a vulnerable situation, given their religious affiliations, those who owed them money brought their Bābī identity to the fore, and instigated people against them. A mob killed them in a brutal way and dragged their bodies around the city, insulting their corpses in unmentionable ways. Āvārah reports this as having happened prior to Bahā'īs taking refuge at the Consulate. Āvārah, *Kawākib*, 2:100. Other sources state that it happened a few days after. See Aganoor, 4 June 1903, in Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions*, 377. Majd al-Islam gives the details of their murder and the brutal acts done to their bodies, and records the event to have happened after the Consulate event. His very sympathetic account of the incident is one the areas in his book that suggest his own possible affiliation with the Azalīs. Majd al-Islam, *Tārīkh-i inḥitāt*, 220-224.

2. The Decision to Go to the Consulate

Among the accounts available to us today, Majd al-Islam's account provides his reader with extremely valuable information worthy to be discussed with precision. According to Majd al-Islam, Bahā'īs (to whom he refers as "Bābīs") worried about the dangers posed to them by the schemes of the ulama and gathered together at the place of Adīb al-ulama, another prominent Bahā'ī visiting Isfahan, to consult on what to do. Majd al-Islam recounts:

I do not exactly know what their discussions were. All I know is that most of them supported the idea to take *bast* (take sanctuary)³⁰⁰ in either the Russian or British consulate so that under the protection of one of the two, they escape the lashes of the Āqā (Shaykh Najafī). A number of them were given the duty to go to both consulates in the morning to see if they will be accepted.³⁰¹

He then goes on to say that he did not know what the response of the British Consulate was, but he did realize that the Russian Consulate gave a positive response. The Consul, Kiniaz Dabizha, was in Petersburg, and the young vice-consul, Baranovskii was in charge. The first secretary of the consulate, Mīrzā Asad Allāh khān Nā'īnī,³⁰² "a young, very ambitious, careless

³⁰⁰ See *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. "bast." Taking *bast* (Sanctuary) was an important way for people to seek justice during the Qājār period. Nāẓim al-Islam Kirmānī refers to *bast* as a "usual and prevalent" (*ma'mūl va marsūm*) practice, and mentions how "sometimes because of the high status of the one taking *bast* or the significance of the specific issue in question (*sha'n-i 'ārīz, va yā buzurgī-i maṭlab*) they would take refuge in one of the embassies." He then shares several examples of taking refuge to foreign embassies in Tehran, one being during the time of Ḥājji Mīrzā Āqāsī, when some of the notables of the country took *bast* in the embassies of Russia and Britain and asked the Shah for Ḥājji's. Muḥammad Nāẓim al-Islam Kirmānī, *Tārīkh-i Bīdārī Irānīān*, ed. 'Alī Akbar Sa'īdī Sīrjānī, 4th ed. 2 Vols (Tehran: Nuvīn and Āgāh), 1:507-509. Writing on the large scale *bast* in the British consulate in Tehran during the Constitutional Movement (just 3 years apart from the incident under study in this chapter), Kasravī explains, "this act [i.e., taking *bast* at a foreign embassy] was not considered ungraceful/ hideous (*zisht*) back then (*īn kār rā dar ān zamān zisht nimīshumārdand*)." Aḥmad Kasravī, *Tārīkh-i mashrūṭah-i Iran* 6th ed. (Tehran, 1965), 666. More traditional places of *bast* were "the religious shrines, the royal stable and place gates, and houses of *mujtahids*." See Amanat, *The Pivote of the Universe*, 150.

³⁰¹ Majd al-Islam, *Tārīkh-i inḥiṭāt*, 216.

³⁰² This person must be clearly distinguished from Mīrzā Asad Allāh Khān Vazīr, also in Isfahan at the same time, and mentioned in the recordings of the 1903 upheavals. Mīrzā Asad Allāh Khān Nā'īnī was the secretary of the Russian Consulate, while Mīrzā Asad Allāh Khān Vazīr was the minister of finance for the local government of Isfahan. See note 45 below. Making this distinction is important because of the role that Nā'īnī had in encouraging the Bahā'īs to go to the Consulate. At least one historian has mixed the two up, writing of "Mīrzā Asad Allāh Khān Nā'īnī Vazīr"! See Heidi Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King: Zill al-Sultan and Isfahan under the Qajars* (London: I.B. Tauris in association with the Iran Heritage Foundation, 2008), 280.

and haughty man who always wanted to be part of important issues/jobs to gain material benefits and fame,” was approached by the Bahā’īs. As he heard their request, Majd al-Islam’s account goes on, “without thinking (*bi dūn-i fikr*), he invited ³⁰³them [Bahā’īs] to the Consulate.” He promised the Bahā’īs the consulate’s protection, so Majd al-Islam’s account goes, and they believed him.³⁰⁴ Having no other way to protect themselves, a large number of Bahā’īs from Isfahan and neighboring areas entered the Russian consulate.³⁰⁵

Louise Alphonse Daniel Nicolas, the French orientalist, gives another account that, though varying in some details, is consistent with Majd al-Islam’s record in its general contours. According to the Frenchman’s account, on the same night the Sarrāf having received “80 lashes with the whip,” returned home, Adīb al-ulama and some other Bahā’īs were invited to the garden of Vazir.³⁰⁶ Having consulted on the imminent danger, they decided to seek refuge in the Russian consulate. Adīb knew Baronovskiii, then the Acting Consul. He wrote a letter to Mīrzā Asad Allāh Khān, the secretary of the Consulate who then related it to Baronovskiii, and asked him if Bahā’īs could take refuge in the Consulate. Accepting the request, Baronovskiii advised that he would be in a better position to help if the number of those gathered in the Consulate was large enough. As a result, an increasing number of Bahā’īs attended the

³⁰³ Nicolas, *Massacres de Bābīs en Perse*, 22-8, trans. Momen, in *The Bābī and Bahā’ī Religions*, 382-385, citation from p. 383. The number of people gathering in the consulate has been recorded as ranging from “around two hundred,” by Jābirī Anṣārī, and Aganoor’s 29 May 2003 telegram, to three hundred by Dawlatābādī, to the unbelievably high –and obviously wrong–figure of about four thousand suggested by Nicolas. See Jābirī Anṣārī, *Tārīkh Isfahan*, 341; Aganoor 29 May 1903 in Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā’ī Religions*, 377; Dawlatābādī, *Ḥayāt-i Yahyá*, 1:318; Nicolas Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Majd al-Islam traces the reason behind Mīrzā Azad Allāh’s inviting the Bahā’īs to the consulate also to the old rivalry between Ṣill al-Sulṭān and his sister Bānū-yi ‘Uṣmā. In his account, Mīrzā Azad Allāh was antagonistic to Ṣill and in good terms with Bānū-yi ‘Uṣmā. Therefore, to oppose Ṣill’s [at this point] collaborator, Aqā Najafī, he chose to give shelter to Bahā’īs who were under attack by the latter. Majd al-Islam, *Tārīkh-i inḥitāt*, 217.

³⁰⁵ Majd al-Islam, *Tārīkh-i inḥitāt*, 217. Āyatī, *Kawākib*, 100.

³⁰⁶ Mīrzā Asad Allāh Khān Vazīr, a descendent of Faṭḥ ‘Alī Khān I’timād al-Dawlah, the vazīr (minister) of Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn Ṣafavī. He was a Bahā’ī, and the minister of finance in Isfahan under Zill al-Sulṭān’s government. His being in that position despite the heterodox religious affiliation can probably be explained by his noble familial lineage. On Mīrzā Asad Allāh Khān Vazīr, see Asad Allāh Fāẓil Māzandarānī, *Tārīkh-i zuḥūr al-ḥaqq* (Tehran: Mu’assisah-’i millī maṭbū’āt-i amrī, 1974), 8/1:125-126; see also, Isfahānī, Bahjat al-Ṣudūr, 272-274.

Consulate on the 26th and 27th of May 1903. Nicolas, British Consular reports and Bahā'ī sources all assert that Bahā'īs also pleaded to the Iranian government several times asking for its protection (as expected by law). They received no responses to their petitions.³⁰⁷ This was the first and probably the only time Bahā'īs took refuge at a foreign embassy,³⁰⁸ at least as far as hitherto known historical documents show.³⁰⁹

3. In the Consulate, but not Protected

According to Majd al-Islam, after Bahā'īs took *bast* in the consulate, consultative sessions were held between the governor, the Imām Jum'ah and Shaykh Najafī. Finally, they decided that the latter two would write a statement (*nivishtah*) indicating the safety³¹⁰ of the life and property of the “Bābīyyah,” that the governor would sign it, and that they would hand in the statement to the consulate so that each Bābī taking *bast* might receive a copy. In other words, a promise of protection by the government was prepared to be delivered to the refugees, through the Consul.

Majd al-Islam added his own impressions, saying, “I guess the agents of the Russian government (*kārguzārān-i dawlat-i rūs*) did not consider their complete involvement and intervention in this issue as appropriate, which is why the matter was wrapped up quickly (*bi*

³⁰⁷ Nicolas, *Ibid.* Aganoor dispatch dated 6 June 1903 in Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions*, 378. ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’, *Makātīb*, 3: 127-28. Mīrzā Ḥasan Adīb, the prominent Bahā'ī who apparently knew some people at the Court is also reported to have written and informed them of the brutalities that were going on in Isfahan, to no avail. See Fāzil Māzandarānī, *Tārīkh-i zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, 8/1:470.

³⁰⁸ Āyatī emphasizes, “this was the first time Bahā'īs took refuge in a foreign embassy, and it was perhaps the last time, as well, since the head of the Bahā'īs did not—and does not—approve of taking refuge with the foreign powers.” Āyatī, *Kawākib*, 2: 100.

³⁰⁹ There is an account of Shujā' al-salṭānah, a son of Muḥafar al-Dīn Shah, praising Bahā'īs for having been under pressure for sixty years and yet never taking refuge with a foreign government. See ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’, *Mā'idah-i āsmānī* (Tehran: Mu'assisah-i millī-i maṭbū'āt-i amrī), 5:205-206.

³¹⁰ The original sentence by Majd al-Islam referring to this point is vague. He must mean they guaranteed the safety of Bahā'īs but does not use the word guarantee. Majd al-Islam, *Tārīkh-i inḥiṭāt*, 217.

in ikhtiṣār khatm shud).³¹¹ Nicolas also affirms Majd al-Islam's account of the governor's statement: "The Prince (Ẓill) wrote that henceforward no one had the right to any longer make observations about what [religion] one was and why! Several copies were made of this, and in the margin Baronovskii wrote his guarantee. The Russians distributed these papers among Bābīs and told them to leave."³¹²

Upon the instigation and machination of Āqā Najafī a large mob of thousands gathered around the Russian Consulate, "used abusive language, and threatened to enter and kill the refugees." Baronovskii was at the time out of town. On his return, he saw the mob, and realized he could not safely enter the Consulate. He went to Ẓill al-Sulṭān,³¹³ and asked him as the governor to provide safety for the Consulate. Ẓill al-Sulṭān asked Āqā Najafī to disperse the mob from around the Consulate. Āqā Najafī accepted to do so on the condition that "the Consuls pledge in writing that they do not interfere in our 'religious and national' (*mazhabī va millatī*) issues." Both the British and the Russian Consuls accepted the conditions. The latter agreed to deliver the refugees to the clerics (*āqāyān*).³¹⁴

Āqā Najafī then got the mob to disperse. Baronovskii went to the refugees "sent them all away, telling them he could not do anything more for them."³¹⁵ He possibly "had instructions from his legation not to go on with the matter."³¹⁶ As the refugees left the Consulate some of them were taken into carts, carried out of the city and left there.³¹⁷ Some others were severely beaten by people from the dispersed mob who had hidden themselves and were waiting to

³¹¹ Majd al-Islam, *Tārīkh-i inḥitāt*, 217.

³¹² Nicolas, *Ibid.* Also, Aganoor dispatch dated 6 June 1903, in Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions*, 378.

³¹³ Aganoor dispatch dated 6 June 1903, in Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions*, 378.

³¹⁴ Jābirī Anṣārī, *Tārīkh Isfahan va Ray*, 341. Also reproduced in Najafī, *Hukm-i nāfiz-i Āqā Najafī*, 173.

³¹⁵ Aganoor dispatch dated 6 June 1903, in Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions*, 378.

³¹⁶ Aganoor telegram dated 13 June 1903, in Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions*, 381.

³¹⁷ Jābirī Anṣārī, *Tārīkh Isfahan va Ray*, 341.

attack them. A number of Bahā'īs were severely beaten and some were murdered.³¹⁸ The excitement continued in Isfahan for a few more days.³¹⁹ People began to agitate around the houses of the Bāhā'īs.³²⁰ The incident of the Consulate emboldened the clerics involved. As the British Acting Consul in Isfahan, at the time, observes, Baronowskii's sending away people who needed protection "had the effect on the Mollah [Sic] mind that their fear of foreign interference and protection was uncalled for."³²¹ Agitation was soon spread to other cities.

IV. Yazd and the Rest of Iran

It has been argued that Āqā Najafī prepared for the transmission of the turmoil to other cities.³²² In many places the main danger was for the rich Bahā'īs.³²³ The worst case was that of Yazd. Returning from Karbala, on his way to Yazd, Sayyid Ibrahim, the Imam Jum'ah of Yazd, stopped in Isfahan in the midst of the agitations. He met Āqā Najafī, who is said to have given him advice on the persecution of Bahā'īs. As a result, he started speaking of killing them immediately upon arrival in Yazd.³²⁴ A period of brutal persecutions, beatings, killings and

³¹⁸ Majd al-Islam, *Tārīkh-i inḥiṭāt*, 219. Majd al-Islam estimates the number of Bahā'īs killed that night at between five and fifteen.

³¹⁹ Aganoor dispatch dated 6 June 1903, in Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions*, 378. Even after the episode subsided in Isfahan, it was thought that unless severe measures were taken, "the richer members of the Bābī community" were still in danger. See Hardinge to Lansdowne, the monthly summary dated June 23, 1903 in Burrell, *Iran Political Diaries*, 2: 118.

³²⁰ Nicolas, *Massacres de Bābīs en Perse*, 22-8, trans. Momen, in Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions*, 385.

³²¹ Aganoor dispatch dated 13 June 1903, in Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions*, 381.

³²² Āyatī, *Kawākib*, 2:101.

³²³ See for example the case of Najafabad a small town near Isfahan: Aganoor telegram dated 13 June 1903, in Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions*, 381. For the list of cities in which the agitation happened, see note no. 1 above.

³²⁴ Āyatī, *Kawākib*, 2:101-104. Before entering Yazd, Sayyid Ibrāhīm wrote a letter to his family, informing them that he had a *tawqī* [a religiously charged word to refer to a piece of writing] "in green color" from Najaf, "in the handwriting of His Highness Amīr (Imam 'Alī)" indicating that the killing of Bahā'īs is mandatory. Āyatī, *Kawākib*, 2:104. According to Āyatī (Āvārih), there were several issues that made the [Shī'ī] Yazdīs particularly antagonistic towards Bahā'īs. One was, as mentioned above, their contacts with the Zoroastrians, the other was the increasing number of religious gatherings of Bahā'īs since the previous year when a prominent Bahā'ī had first settled in Yazd. Āyatī, *Kawākib*, 2:102-103.

plunder ensued in Yazd and its surroundings.³²⁵ It was the longest and bloodiest of all that was inflicted in different cities in Iran in that year.³²⁶ There were multiple reasons for this, some of which are discussed below.

According to some sources, one reason was a transient interest in the Bahā'ī religion on the part of the governor Jalāl al-Dawlah (who had executed seven Bahā'īs twelve years earlier).³²⁷ A Muslim cleric and representative of the Majlis, who was a witness to the 1903 Yazd incident, interpreted the atrocities against Bahā'īs as having been based purely on religious grounds, and primarily the result of the recent positive inclination of Jalāl al-Dawlah towards the Bahā'ī religion.³²⁸ He recorded that at one point a crowd of 4000 people chanted together in rhyme: “We do not want a blue garb/we do not want a Bābī governor” (Qabā-yi ābī *nimīkhāym/hākīm-i Bābī nimīkhāym*).³²⁹

³²⁵ Āyatī, *Kawākib*, 2:101-151. For the details of what erupted in Yazd and its neighboring areas, see Muḥammad Ṭāḥir Mālmīrī, *Tārīkh-i shuhadā-yi Yazd* (Cairo: 1923).

³²⁶ Hajī Mīrzā Ḥaydar ‘Alī Isfahānī who was a contemporary of the events recorded, put the duration of the upheaval in Yazd and its environs at “more than two months,” and the number of Bahā'īs killed at 195. Hajī Mīrzā Ḥaydar ‘Alī Isfahānī, *Bahjat al-ṣudūr*, 3rd ed. (Hofheim: Bahā'ī-verlag, 2002), 394. Mīrzā Asad Allāh Fāẓil Māzandarānī has recorded “four months,” eighty killed on the spot and another forty killed after having escaped and been caught. He also mentions that 120 houses were plundered. Fāẓil Māzandarānī, *Tārīkh-i zuhūr al-ḥaqq*, 8/1: 173-174. Another author contemporary to the events recorded the number of those murdered in Yazd to be 83. Āqā Mīrzā Qābil Ābādah'ī, *Vaqāyī-i amrī-i Abadeh*, ed. Ghulām ‘Alī khān Dihqān (Hofheim: Bahā'ī-verlag, 2007), 104-105.

³²⁷ For details of the incident, see: Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahā'u'llāh*, vol. 4 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1987), 347ff; Yazdani, Yazdani, *Awzā'-i ijtimā'ī-i Irān*, 157-163, 179-187. On the short-lived change of attitude of Jalāl al-Dawlah toward Bahā'īs see: ‘Azīz Allāh Sulaymānī, *Maṣābīḥ-i hidāyat*, vol. 3 (Tehran: Mu'assisah-i millī-i maṭbū'āt-i amrī, 1972), 584.

³²⁸ See Sayyid Muḥammad Raḡāwī (Nuvvāb-i Vakīl), *Khātīrāt-i Nuvvab-i Vakīl* ed. Akbar Qalamsīyāh (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Gītā, 1999), pp. 258-283. Also available at < <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/vol6/nuvvab/nuvvab.htm> > At points, the account leaves the reader with the impression that Nuvvāb-i Vakīl might have been more than an eye witness—perhaps an instigator—of the attacks. His account oscillates between contradictory claims to have saved some Bahā'īs, on the one hand, and to have tried hard to postpone—if not prevent—the punishment of the instigators and murderers, on the other.

³²⁹ Raḡāwī, *Khātīrāt-i Nuvvab-i Vakīl*, 267.

Whatever the cause, the incident is said to have “brought out the worst characteristics of a persecuting society.”³³⁰ My aim here is not to go into details. These few lines from a British Christian missionary, who lived in Yazd at the time, suffice. Emphasizing he had no intention to unnecessarily dwell on the “ghastly horrors” being perpetrated, he mentioned a few “unavoidable” details in his book.

The Bahā'īs, he shared, “were not at that time being executed before the *mujtahids*, but were being torn in pieces by the crowd.” On the motivation of the crowd, he maintained: “What had excited the people was not simply religious feeling, but it was very largely the statement by the clerical authorities that the goods of the Behā'īs [Sic] were ‘lawful,’ that is, that any one might plunder them who cared to do so.”³³¹

As the riots broke and in the midst of the massacre of the Bahā'īs of Yazd, the four *mujtahids* sent another telegram to the Shah “disavowing the anti-Christian and anti-European agitation at Tabriz, but approving the executions of Bābī heretics at Isfahan and Yazd [Sic] and expressing a hope that the Persian Government would encourage their repitition in other cities.”³³² Sharing the news of the receipt of this telegram with Hardinge, the British Minister

³³⁰ See Abbas Amanat, “Memory and Amnesia in the Historiography of the Constitutional Revolution,” in *Iran in the 20th Century: Historiography and Political Culture*, ed. Touraj Atabaki (London: I.B. Tauris, in association with the Iran Heritage Foundation), 34. According to Amanat, the members of the local ulama, backed by the *mujtahids* of Isfahan and with the blessing of the governor Sulṭān Ḥusayn Mīrẓā Jalāl al-Dawlah, a son of Ḍill al-Sulṭān, put their seal of approval on a period of mob frenzy that was enforced chiefly by the city thugs known as the *lūṭīs*. Ibid. Pointing to the brutalities that occurred in Yazd, Walcher indicates that those killings “were only possible within the general climate of political disintegration and anarchy, the pre-revolutionary maelstrom and the central government’s chronic incapability.” Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King*, 279.

³³¹ Malcolm, *Five Years*, 88. Presenting a graphic image of the torture and killings, he adds, “it was reported that in one of the villages Bābī children died within full sight of the villagers, after waiting for days under the trees where their murdered parents had left them.” Ibid., 88-89. For the memories of a victim of the persecutions, see: Ḥājj Muḥammad Ṭāhir Mālmīrī, *Khāṭirāt-i Mālmīrī* (Nangen Hain, Germany: 1992), 137-150.

³³² Hardinge to Lansdowne No. 102, 9 July 1903. See Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions*, 366. According to Āyatī, the riot in Yazd started on 24 June 1903 (17 Rabi' al-awwal 1321). Then it subsided for a few days, and restarted after the news of the riots in Taft reached Yazd on 6 July, and the upheaval there lasted for some time after that. Therefore, Hardinge’s report was written in the midst of the massacre of the Bahā'īs of Yazd. See Āvārah, *Kawākib*, 2:115-129.

in Tehran, in order to reassure the Western representatives that Christians were not in danger, Amīn al-Sulṭān expressed that “he regarded the repudiation by Kerbela [Sic] of the proceedings of the Tabriz Ulema [Sic] as very satisfactory, since attacks upon Christian schools and officials might have graver results than a mere outcry against Bābism.”³³³

In the words of historian Firuz Kazemzadeh, this was Amīn al-Sulṭān’s “way of saying that whereas attacks on Christians might lead to European protests and interference, the massacre of a few hundred Bahā’īs would not and therefore would have no importance in the eyes of the Persian government.”³³⁴ According to the British consular reports, the ulama of the ‘atabāt also sent telegrams to Amīn al-Sulṭān, asserting that it was they who sanctioned restriction and persecution of the Bābīs, and giving their full approval of Āqā Najafī’s actions against them.³³⁵

V. Bahā’īs and Foreigners

After the 1903 massacre in Isfahan, the government prepared to dispatch troops commanded by Nasr al-Salṭānah in order to enforce order. Hearing of this, according to British Consular reports, Āqā Najafī contacted a “Persian gentleman” who was the informant of the British consulate and tried “to sound him on various rumors.” In a likely attempt to anticipate how the commander might treat him, Najafī asked the man whether Nasr al-Salṭānah was “a man with European ideas,” “a *farangī ma’āb* or a good Persian.”³³⁶ He also asked if the Consulate

³³³ Hardinge to Lansdowne No. 102, 9 July 1903. See Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā’ī Religions*, 366; Firuz Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia, 1864-1914: A Study in Imperialism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 456.

³³⁴ Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia*, 456. The Russian consul “bluntly and tirelessly proclaimed that the Bābī riots were caused by the Ṣill al-Sulṭān and inspired by the British.” Aqanoor to Hardinge, in Hardinge to Lansdowne; No. 94, confidential, 23 June 1903; FO 60/665. Also see: No. 131, confidential, 31 August 1903; FO 248/66 in Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King*, 283.

³³⁵ Muḥammad Ḥasan Muḥsin to Newmarch, consul general of Baghdad; 15 July 1903; FO 248/788.

³³⁶ Āqā Najafī seems to have been somehow worried about the possible consequences of his bloodshed should the troops arrive and the power matrix of Isfahan change. In addition to this inquiry from the British Consulate informant, he is also reported to have asked Dabizha, the Russian Consul in Isfahan for a *riḡāt namah* [literally a letter expressing one’s approval] “which would clear him of any involvement in the episode at the Russian

informant knew that the clerics of Karbala and Najaf had written to all the leading clerics of Persia pushing them “to work against certain innovations such as the customs, the postal Administration, the Russian loans, and also against the Bābīs.” He went on to say that he intended to write a booklet against “1) The European innovations, and 2) against the Bābīs,” and get all the *mullas* of the country “to give their adherence to it by their signature and seal.”³³⁷ He then asked what the British Consulate informant’s opinion about writing such a booklet was,³³⁸ apparently trying to figure out the reaction of the British to such an act.

Aqā Najafī’s intention to write a pamphlet on these two topics shows that he drew in his mind a relation between the Bahā’īs (which is what he mostly meant when he mentioned “Bābīs”), and the Europeans. The important point, though, is that the relation he saw was *not*--as later sources on the episode have proposed³³⁹--a political one, but one related to daily practices and attitudes of Bahā’īs and European culture. His question whether the army commander was “a *farangī ma’āb*” reflects his main concerns and preoccupations. It was

consulate, but Dabizha refused.” Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King*, 283, 459 n81. The monthly summary of events dated September 16, 1903 by Douglas, the British Military Attaché, also mentions that Āqā Najafī “applied to the Russian Consul for a statement in writing exculpating him from any blame in recent events...” See Burrell, *Iran Political Diaries*, 130. Walcher has read Aqā Najafī’s question re Nasr al-Saltānah as how the former “challenged the government’s mission,” and his sharing of his intention to write the treatise against European innovations and Bābism as “irreverently” announcing it, presenting a kind of bold (even revolutionary) view of Aqā Najafī. Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King*, 282. A close reading of the whole dispatch, however, supports a totally different view. As I mention above, his question about Nasr al-Saltānah was aimed at getting information about him, not a rhetorical one “challenging” the state, and he shared the decision to write the treatise in order to ask the opinion of the informant of the British Consulate about it. I am grateful to Moojan Momen for sharing a copy of this dispatch in its entirety.

³³⁷ According to Āqā Buzurg Ṭihrānī, Āqā Najafī did write an anti-Bābī polemic by the title *al-Radd ‘ala al-Bābīyyah*, see Āqā Buzurg al-Ṭihrānī, *Al-Dharī ‘a ilā taṣānīf al-Shī ‘a* (Beirut, 1983), 10: 188. Āqā Buzurg does not mention when this book was written and whether or not it was published. Al-Dharī ‘a seems to be the only source mentioning this book. In the long list of Aqā Najafī’s publications in his biography, there is no title indicating such content, i.e., *farangī ma’ābs* and Bahā’īs. See Najafī, *Hukm-i nāfīz-i Āqā Najafī*, 28-35. It is possible that he never wrote the treatise he intended.

³³⁸ Aqanoor to Hardinge; No. 94, confidential 26 July 1903; FO 248/788. I am thankful to Moojan Momen for providing me with a copy of the full text of this dispatch, and with helping me read this important handwritten document of which only parts were already published in Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā’ī Religions*, 399; and Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King*, 282.

³³⁹ See the paragraphs on Kasravī, later in the chapter.

primarily the everyday life of Bahā'īs and the ways in which that life differed from those of Shiites—as Napier Malcolm had observed³⁴⁰—(being closer to those of the Europeans) which caused the enmity of the Shiites.

What Āyatī, himself a native of Taft (a village near Yazd), recorded concerning the 1903 incident presents the best example of this: One of the issues which made the [Shī'ī] Yazdīs particularly antagonistic towards Bahā'īs was that the latter freely associated with the Zoroastrians. In Bahā'ī meetings, those from Muslim and Zoroastrian backgrounds gathered together, Āyatī explains, “like brothers.” In as much as this act was considered “praiseworthy, nay ordinary,” by Europeans, for the [Shī'a] Yazdīs it was “the most important sin and the greatest infidelity (*kufr*).”³⁴¹ In this light, it made sense to look at Āqā Najafī's pairing of the “European innovations” with Bahā'īs in the treatise he intended to write.

The transnational attitude and activities of Bahā'īs reflected in the migration of some Iranian Bahā'īs to Ashkhabad in Turkistan and the building of a Bahā'ī House of Worship there,³⁴² reinforced the links Āqā Najafī and his like-minded Shiites drew between the Bahā'īs and foreigners, while at the same time instigating more feelings of unease about this religious minority. What made the Ashkhabad house of worship particularly relevant to these events was the fact that some of the funders and builders were well-known Bahā'īs from Yazd³⁴³—a major scene of the riots.

The building contractor of the House of Worship, Ustād 'Alī Akbar-i Bannā was murdered on the second day of the attacks by a mob of 2,000. He had fled to Ashkhabad from the persecutions in Yazd during the upheavals of 1883/1300 Q, and had returned to Yazd after

³⁴⁰ See beginning of the chapter “Bahā'īs and foreigners,” the quotation from Napier Malcolm.

³⁴¹ Āyatī, *Kawākib*, 2:102-103. Quote from page 103.

³⁴² See the section on Bahā'īs and Russia.

³⁴³ See the section on Russia.

twenty years, around three months prior to the attacks. Opponents of the Bahā'īs had spread the rumor that he was going to build a similar House of Worship in Yazd³⁴⁴—an unfounded idea because given the dangers Bahā'u'llāh had not given permission to his followers to do so at that time—in either Shiraz, Yazd, or a number of other places³⁴⁵. Both Amanat and Māzandarānī have indicated the relevance of the building of the Ashkhabad House of Worship to what transpired in Yazd.³⁴⁶

VI. Analysis

Regarding the incident of the Bahā'īs taking *bast* at the Russian Consulate in Isfahan, a number of points are worth specifically analyzing. When Bahā'īs in Isfahan perceived the danger to their lives and saw that the government (both local and central) was reluctant to intervene or support them, some of them gathered together to consult about what to do. The Bahā'ī teacher Adīb al-ūlama, who happened to be in Isfahan at the time, knew the vice-consul Baranovskii personally, and perhaps thought to use that personal acquaintance to save his co-religionists from danger. It was likely Adīb's involvement in and influence on the consultations of the Bahai's in Isfahan that led to the collective decision to seek refuge in the Russian Consulate. The young and inexperienced Baranovskii was running the Consulate in the absence of the Consul, who was not even informed of the event. Trying to make a name for

³⁴⁴ Sulaymānī, *Maṣābīḥ-i hidāyat*, 3: 583-86.

³⁴⁵ See Bahā'u'llāh, *Āṣār-i qalam-i a'lā*, 2nd ed, vol.3 (vols 5, 6 and 7 of the older edition) (Hamilton, Canada: Mu'assisah-'i Ma'ārif-i Bahā'ī, 2006), 737

³⁴⁶ In his analysis of the roots of the 1903 massacres, Amanat suggests the “sadistic killings, rapes and pillage” of Bahā'īs to have been a reaction to “an opening reassertion of the Bahā'ī identity after 1896 assassination of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah and success in converting to the new faith.” Amanat suggests that other factors motivating the Muslim backlash, may have included “the emergence of the Bahā'ī community of Ashkhabad (Per. 'Ishqābad) in Russian Turkistan,” and “the conspicuous construction of a Bahā'ī house of worship” in that city, partly through the donations of some wealthy Yazdī Bahā'ī merchants (Amanat, *Memory and Amnesia*, 34). Fāḡīl Māzandarānī also suggests that the building of the house of worship begun 1902 might have triggered the “anger and prejudice” of Muslims against Bahā'īs. Asad Allāh Fāḡīl Māzandarānī, *Tārīkh-i zuhūr al-ḥaq* (1976), 8/2: 984.

himself by exaggerating the episode as a major event, Baranovskii told the Bahā'īs who contacted him that not enough of them had come and that there needed to be more of them before he could help. So the Bahā'īs sent word to the other Bahā'īs in Isfahan and the neighboring areas and their number grew. Later, afraid of the mobs that Āqā Najafī had gathered around the Consulate, and probably having received instructions from the Russian delegation not to go on with the matter, Baranovskii asked the Bahā'īs to leave the Consulate.

As one might expect, contemporaries did not view the Consulate episode as a sign of Russians backing the Bahā'īs. The accounts of the Azalī (in all likelihood) author Majd al-Islam, recounted above attest to this point. If anything, the whole event was seen as proof of the contrary. However, two authors writing decades later, in the mid-to-late 1930s and early 1940s, when conspiratorial thinking was a characteristic of the intellectual atmosphere in Iran,³⁴⁷ interpreted the whole incident in ways that distorted the perception of that event as proving political dependence of the Bahā'īs on Russia. Given the influence of both these authors, their accounts, and later developments—both products of the *Weltanschauung* of their own time—were accepted as the “truth” of the events of 1903, and contributed to the consolidation of the idea that Bahā'īs were “agents” of imperialism, an idea which, as we shall see in the next chapter, was fabricated in an early 1930s text.

The first of the two authors was the prominent Azalī, Yaḥyá Dawlatābādī.³⁴⁸ Writing his history thirty-two years later³⁴⁹ with the benefit of hindsight, he was incorporating the image

³⁴⁷ On the prevalence of conspiratorial thinking, specifically in 1930s in Iran, please see chapter five of this dissertation, and sources mentioned there for conspiracy theory among Iranians of the time.

³⁴⁸ See Amanat's entry in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Dawlatābādī, Sayyid Yaḥyá.” See also the addendum to chapter four of this dissertation on Azalīs.

³⁴⁹ According to Amanat, Dawlatābādī's *Ḥayāt-i Yaḥyá* “was based on diaries and notes that he had kept over the years. He completed the first edition of the memoirs in 1314 Sh/1935 and revised it in 1316 Sh/1937, an exercise in which he at times sacrificed immediate impressions to hindsight.”

of the Bahā'īs already in the making in the 1920s through the polemics of Āyatī ³⁵⁰ in his narrative of the 1903 events.³⁵¹

Dawlatābādī crafted a narrative in which Russian support of Bahā'īs was already a given “fact.” In his narrative, the British, in order to overthrow the now pro-Russia Prime Minister Atābak-i A'zam, urged some Shī'ī clerics in Iran and Iraq to protest against the Iranian state. The clerics in Iraq who were instigated by the British and paid for their services, wrote a letter, 1) asking the state to explain how it had spent the Russian loans, 2) rejecting the prevalence, in the country, of non-Islamic practices such as drinking alcohol, and 3) protesting against the activities of the Bahā'īs.

Up to this point, Dawlatābādī's account is more or less similar to the accounts presented here. In fact, he adds to our knowledge that the persecution of Bahā'īs started and promoted by the opponents of the Prime Minister, was also supported by his efforts. In order to avoid explaining the expenditure of the loaned money, which would amount to discrediting the government, the Prime Minister responded positively to the second and third request of the clerics, by closing the liquor shops and allowing the clerics to openly persecute the Bahā'īs.

The rest of Dawlatābādī's narrative is particularly aimed at depicting Bahā'īs as the puppets of the Russians, and the event at the Consulate is offered as a natural part of that depiction. “Bahā'īs are supported by a center they have in Ashkhabad.”³⁵² Russians protect that center, and in order to pursue their own political agendas,” claimed Dawlatābādī, “[using their influence in

³⁵⁰ See the section on the former Bahā'īs.

³⁵¹ At about the same time that Dawlatābādī was revising his diaries (1316 Sh/1937) *the Confessions of Dolgoruki*-- a text forging a Russian genealogy for the Bābī and Bahā'ī religions--was circulating in Iran, in the form of handwritten luck chain-letters, most probably (as I suggest in the next chapter) initiated by a Constitutionalist colleague of Dawlatābādī.

³⁵² A reference to the Bahā'ī House of Worship in Ashkhabad. See section on “Bahā'īs and Russia” in this dissertation.

Iran, they] have given Bahā'īs positions in the [Iranian] state offices (*davā'ir-i dawlatī*).” He then opined that the British “want to take these influential tools [Bahā'īs working in state offices] out of the hands of their rivals and use them for themselves.” The reason for the agitations against the Bahā'īs, Dawlatābadi goes on to assert, was nothing less than the machinations of the British designed to “reprimand” (*gūshmālī*) Bahā'īs “so that they might turn to the British [instead of Russians].”

In his narrative of the Consulate incident, Dawlatābadi artfully reshapes the facts, depicting the decision to take refuge in the Consulate not as the result of considered consultation and one of several options, but rather as the result of an immediate visit to the Consulate by the Sarraf, who, it is implied, one might expect to retreat back to his Russian supporters.³⁵³ Dawlatābādī's well-crafted narrative, distanced as it was in time from the original events, was published in 1957, and had a powerful influence in perpetuating the master narrative fabricated in the 1930s, in which Bahā'īs were depicted as foreign dependents and spies (see the chapter on *The Confessions of Dolgoruki*).

The second author is Aḥmad Kasravī, writing in 1319 sh/1940. He gives a brief sketch of the Azalī-Bahā'ī divide. Like Dawlatābādī, he starts with the assertion that Bahā'īs were “supported” by the Russians. In his account, since in 1903 people were angry at the Belgians for the new customs tariff, and since the Belgians were connected to Russians, people rioted against Bahā'īs.³⁵⁴ What Kasravī ignores in his analysis is the fact that it was Āqā Najafī who,

³⁵³ Yaḥyā Dawlatābādī, *Ḥayāt-i Yaḥyā* (Tehran: Ibn-i Sīnā, 1336/1957), 1: 315-318. On the Ṣarrāf's going to the Consulate upon his release from the hands of Āqā Najafī, Walcher reproduces Dawlatābādī's narrative. Walcher, *In the Shadow of the King*, 280. No other sources include such a seemingly trivial, but in fact significant piece of information.

³⁵⁴ It is important to mention here that the account of a cleric who was at least a witness to, if not the actual instigator of, the attacks in Yazd makes it quite clear that there was no mention of anything having to do with the

out of religious hostility alone, incited people against the Bahā'īs, and that in the original letter of the ulama to the Shah, he was protesting the religious activities of “Bābīs”.

What differs in Kasravī's narrative, as compared to that of Dawlatābādī, is the emphasis in the former's writing on the British backing of the Azalīs, which, of course, was not mentioned in the narrative of Dawlatābādī who was a prominent Azalī. Kasravī tells us that, while the Bahā'īs were supported by the Russians, their religious rivals, the Azalīs, were backed by the British.³⁵⁵ He did not mention that some Azalīs were also attacked, even brutally killed, in Isfahan during the upheaval. This fact would, after all, undermine his theory that people attacked Bahā'īs due to their preconception that the Russians “supported” the group. Kasravī's crafting of the polarization of Azalī-British vs. Bahā'ī-Russian ties was particularly attractive to the conspiratorial mindset of Iranians in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Given his credibility among intellectuals and his nationalistic attitudes—at a time when nationalism was so highly praised—Kasravī's narrative on the Bahā'īs gained great popularity.

Kazemzadeh interprets the 1903 events in the context of “antiforeign agitation.” Starting in Tabriz, the negative sentiments towards the foreigners “easily transformed itself into outbursts against minorities.” He regards the anti-Bahā'ī riot as just part—though a large part—of an attack on all [religious] minorities: “In Tabriz and other towns of Azarbayjan, Christians were threatened. In Hamedan the Jews lived in constant fear of their lives.

Russians or the Belgians in people's mind. What motivated them to attack the Bahā'īs was merely religious antagonism (in addition to the material gain from plundering their homes). See Raḡavī, *Khāṭirāt-i Navvāb-i Vakīl*.

³⁵⁵ Aḥmad Kasravī Tabrizī, *Tārīkh-i mashrūṭah-i Iran*, 6th ed. (Tehran, 1965), 30, 291. Kasravī's remark about the Azalīs might have had its roots in Lord Curzon's statement that while in Cyprus, Mīrzā Yaḥyā Azal was “in receipt of a pension from the British Government.” See George N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol.1 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1892), 499. Chehabi makes the astute observation that in his *Amīr Kabīr va Iran*, after quoting this point from Curzon, Ādamīyat “adds the non sequitur that Russians took Ṣubḥ-i Azal's brother and rival Mīrzā Husayn 'Alī, the founder of the Bahā'ī faith, ‘and consequently the Bahā'īs under their protection’.” Chehabi, “The Paranoid Style,” 162-163.

Throughout the country Bahā'īs became the target of hostility instigated and directed by the more fanatical members of the clergy.”³⁵⁶ As discussed earlier, the major cleric involved was Āqā Najafī, who, as his life history had already proven, did not need to transfer an anger against foreigners to one against Bahā'īs. The “antiforeign agitation” in itself provided him with enough opportunity to harm Bahā'īs, with the assurance that the government would not even interfere, let alone punish him.

The anthropologist Michael Fischer has regarded riots against the minorities as a “less articulate” form of political protest in the past century in Iran. Minorities, he maintains, were “seen as symbols of foreign exploitation and attack on Islam.”³⁵⁷ He considers “the riots around the turn of the century” as one of the examples of this phenomenon:

At the turn of the century protests against financial indebtedness to the British and Russians and against economic concessions to foreigners often took the form of riots against religious minorities who were seen as clients and agents of the European powers. Often staged during Ramadan (a month of rededication to Islam) and Muḥarram (a month of contemplating the vulnerability of Islam and the need to aid Ḥusayn as the Kūfans had not), these riots were frequently directed by the ulama as a way of demonstrating their power against the state.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁶ Kazemzadeh, *Russia and Britain in Persia*, 455-456.

³⁵⁷ Michael M.J. Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), 184.

³⁵⁸ Michael M. J. Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (London: Harvard University Press, 1980), 185. What Fischer then adds, in a footnote, is worth mentioning here, as it clearly shows the need for more studies on religious minorities in Iran. He states,

Relations between the minorities and European powers were diplomatic protection and economic clientship. Many Isma'īlīs and Zoroastrians were British citizens. Jewish philanthropic organizations were English-or French based. Russians attempted to utilize and missionize the Armenians; the English Church Missionary Society and the American Presbyterian Mission made the same attempt on other Iranians. The British preferred to use Zoroastrians and Armenians as trade partners and as employees on the Indo-European Telegraph.

Fischer goes on to clarify this statement, writing that, “Reality, of course, was much more complicated than these connections suggest, but at times of frustration these connections became symbolically magnified in the minds of Muslims.” In an explanation, which highlights the religious nature of anti-Bahā'ī attacks, he emphasizes that of all the minorities, “Bahā'īs were the most vulnerable, being accused of heresy, a capital crime in Islam.” Fischer, *Iran*:

Fischer's published his analysis in 1980, immediately after Ayatollah Khomeini had overthrown the U.S.-backed Shah, and—perhaps reading elements of the present into the past—interpreted religious prejudice as revolutionary anti-imperialism. Looking more closely, however, it would appear that what Fischer saw as an anti-colonial move, a protest against foreign exploitation of the country led by the clerics, was itself, ironically, instigated by the rivalry between the two superpowers over their relative influence in Iran and respective share of its resources. Parallel to their rivalry was the struggle for power by the statesmen, backed by each of the two superpowers, at the local and central governmental levels. Urged to incite a riot, the clerics seized their chance to harm a minority which they hated bitterly. Rather than demonstrating the clerics' power against the state, the anti-Bābī-anti-Bahā'ī riots were a kind of collaboration between the clerics and the government. Ẓill al-Sulṭān needed an agitation to keep the balance of power in his territory and weaken the Prime Minister, Amīn al-Sulṭān. The latter, in turn, welcomed an agitation against Bahā'īs as a bribe to pacify the clerics concerning the manner in which the Russian loans were spent. The persecution of Bahā'īs worked for both sides. For their own benefit, it was easy for the clerics to incite a mob that was already prepared to kill, plunder, and loot the houses of people who, although living in villages around Yazd, lived in a manner similar to *farangīs*.

From Religious Dispute to Revolution, 280 n5. In his list of religious minorities and their connections with foreign powers, he does not link Iranian Bahā'īs to any foreign governments—a sign of greater scholarly precision and responsibility, as compared to his unpublished 1973 PhD dissertation in which, writing on 1903 incident, he made statements such as the following—apparently under the influence of anti-Bahā'ī rhetoric of the time: that “of all, Bahā'īs were the most vulnerable, being the least tightly allied to European interest groups, and being culpable in addition to aiding and abetting foreigners, to heresy, a capital crime in Islam;” and that “at this stage the Bahā'īs were allied to the Russians more closely than to the English as they had been earlier,” without any evidence or source whatever for such a statement. See Michael Max Jonathan Fischer, “Zoroastrian Iran between Myth and Praxis,” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1973), 413, 415.

2.4 Reconstructing the Imbrie (Saqqā Khānah) Affair, July 1924

In the summer of 1924, rumours of a miracle fountain spread throughout Tehran. As is to be expected, the rumors varied but most agreed on at least the following: water from a local *saqqā khānah*, that is, “a religiously-endowed fountain for drinking water,”³⁵⁹ had miraculously blinded a “Bābī” (most likely meaning a Bahā’ī) who had allegedly poisoned the fountain and/or refrained from giving alms,³⁶⁰ and returned the sight of a blind pious Muslim. The report spread like wildfire. Before long, the fountain was drawing daily visits from hundreds of people suffering from various ailments and desperate for a miracle of their own. On the morning of Friday July 18th, the American vice-consul in Tehran, Robert Imbrie, arrived at the

³⁵⁹ Homa Katouzian’s rendering. See *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 289.

³⁶⁰ Almost every account of the Imbrie affair starts with the story of the miraculous Aqa Shaykh Hadi *saqqā khānah*. Different accounts of the rumors have been given. Despite the variety of the versions of the rumours, the dominant element common in them all was anti-Bahā’ism. One version of *saqqā khānah* rumours recounted in the US consular reports brings into more light the particularly anti-Bahā’ī nature of the whole “miracle.” The story goes as “On July 6 a gardner when asked to pay a few cents for the water given him in the name of Abbas late replied that he would give any amount in the name of Abbas late leader of Bahā’ī, but not a cent for Abbas of the Shiites; immediately he lost his sight and then the place became shrine. (Kornfeld to Secretary of State, July 24, 1924). Bahar does not explicitly mention “Bahā’ī.” His account of the “miracle” is that the hand of the “infidel” who wanted to poison the fountain was stuck to the window of the *saqqā khaneh*. See Muḥammah Taghī Bahār (Malik al-Shu’arā), *Tarikh-i Mukhtaṣṣr-i Aḥzāb-i siyāsī-i Iran*. Vol.2 (Tehran: Amīr kabīr, 1363), 117-118. According to Makki, the *saqqā khaneh* was said to have cured a paralyzed man and healed a severely sick person who had slept beside it one night, and turned the eye of a Bahā’ī who wanted to poison it. Ḥusayn Makki. *Tarikh-i bistsālah-i Iran: inqirāz-i Qājāriyah va tashkīl-i silsilah-i dīctātury Pahlavī*, vol.3, 6th ed. (Tehran: ‘Ilmī, 1374/1995), 108-127, esp.108-111. See also, Ḥasan ‘izām-i Qudsī, *Khāṭirāt-i Zindigānī-i man yā Tarikh-i ṣad sālah-i Iran* (Tehran: Kārang, 1372/1993): 1023-1026; and Mahdīqulī Hidāyat, (Mukhbīr al-salṭānah), *Khāṭirāt va khaṭarāt* (Tehran: Zavvār: 1375), 363. Of more contemporary works see Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran*, 289-90; Idem, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926-1979* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 90. Cyrus Ghani, *Iran and the Rise of Rīzā Shah: From Qajar Collapse to Pahlavi Rule* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 327; Michael Zirinski, “Blood, Power, and Hypocrisy: The Murder of Robert Imbrie and American Relations with Pahlavi Iran, 1924,” *Int. J. Middle East stud.* 18(1986): 275-76; Stephanie Cronin, “Popular Protest, Disorder, and Riot in Iran: The Tehran Crowd and the Rise of Riza Khan, 1921-1925,” *IRSH* 50(2005): 189.

saqqā khānah to observe the scene and take photographs for the National Geographic Society. Imbrie was accompanied by another American, Melvin Seymour. Reports allege that a 17-year old Mulla by the name of Sayyid Ḥusayn sprang to his feet the moment he saw Imbrie, pointed to him and yelled, “That’s the Bahā’ī who poisoned the water of our *saqqā khānah* !!”³⁶¹ The crowd immediately attacked the two Americans, who managed to temporarily escape in their carriage. The angry mob, meanwhile, trailed in pursuit. Near the main barracks of the army, the mob – which by now included a number of policemen and some members of the army – stopped the carriage and proceeded to beat and seriously injure both Imbrie and Seymour, all this in spite of the presence of police headquarters across the street. The two Americans were finally taken to the hospital inside the police headquarters. However, the mob entered the hospital and attacked the two men for the third time. Seymour survived, perhaps because he already looked dead, but Imbrie received fatal blows to his upper body. Having received 130 wounds, conscious to the end, Imbrie died at approximately 3:00 p.m., about four hours after the attacks began.³⁶²

Soon after the incident, the main political groups of a period, which can perhaps best be described as volatile, began accusing one another of having a hand in instigating the attack.³⁶³

³⁶¹ Consular report, from W. Smith Murray, Second Secretary of Legation, in charge of Consulate to the Secretary of State, dated August 10, 1924, page 12. According to this report this same Sayyid Ḥusayn was the person “who stormed the operation room with Cossacks.”

³⁶² The mob is said to have numbered some 2000. See the report from W. Smith Murray, Second Secretary of Legation, in charge of Consulate to the Secretary of State, dated August 10, 1924. The incident was followed by blood punishment and blood money. Many were arrested. Three people, a Cossack Private (age 19), a civilian camel driver (age 14) and a mulla (age 17) were executed. Mrs. Imbrie received, in compensation for the loss of her husband, \$60,000 (plus an additional \$25 two years later). Seymour received \$3000 in compensation for his injuries, and the US government received \$110,000 in payment for some of its expenses in the transport of Imbrie’s body to Washington. See Katherine Imbrie, *Data Relating to the Assassination of United States Consular Officer Robert Whitney Imbrie* (Frederic MD: 1939), 11-21; Zirinsky, “Blood, Power, and Hypocrisy,” 275-76.

³⁶³ See Homayoun Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran : The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis* (London: I.B. Tauris), 290. While listing all different interpretations of the event, Husayn Makki also quotes *New York Herald Tribune* from Harold Spencer, the secret agent of Britain in the Middle East, that Imbrie was killed by a

To the critics of the government it was Prime Minister Riṣā Khan, *sardār sipah* (marshal of the army), who instigated the incident to establish his military control over the country and to discredit the opposition.³⁶⁴ The supporters of the government, on the contrary, blamed the royal court and the opposition.³⁶⁵ The prevailing narrative in the weeks and months that followed the incident maintained that Imbrie was the victim of a British conspiracy to prevent Americans from being granted concessions to explore for and exploit oil in northern Iran.³⁶⁶ Despite its outright rejection by prominent historians of Iran,³⁶⁷ this conspiracy legend was embellished and is still accepted by some.³⁶⁸ Still others aver that “it is extremely unlikely” that either Riṣā Khan or “any of the foreign powers” was involved in the episode.³⁶⁹

Defining ‘history’ as “the sum total of all the events that happened in ‘the past,’”³⁷⁰ Hayden White distinguishes between “events” and “facts.” Unlike the events which “have to be taken as given,” White suggests that “facts” are constructed in the documents attesting to the occurrence of events by parties commenting on the events or the documents.³⁷¹ “It is the

group of American and British capitalists who thought Imbrie’s influence might lead to the success of Sinclair Oil company. See Makkī, *Tarikh-i bistsalah-’I Iran*, 3: 92-93, 97-98.

³⁶⁴ See, for example, Bahar, *Tarikh-i Mukhtaṣṣr-i Ahzāb-i siyāsī-i Iran*, 2: 116-123 .

³⁶⁵ For example, Sulaymān Biḥbūdī, Riṣā khān’s chamberlain, wrote in his diary that the incident was a plot by the Crown Prince and members of the minority at the parliament. Ghulām Ḥusayn Mirza Ṣāliḥ, *Riṣā Shāh: Khatir-i Sulaymān-i Miḥbūdī, Shams-i Pahlavī, ‘Alī Izādī* (Tehran: Tarḥ-i Naw, 1372/1993), 164-65.

³⁶⁶ While listing all different interpretations of the event, Husayn Makki also quotes *New York Herald Tribune* from Harold Spencer the secret agent of Britain in the Middle East, that Imbrie was killed by a group of American and British capitalists who thought Imbrie’s influence might lead to the success of Sinclair Oil company, to the disadvantage of the British Shell company. See Makkī, *Tarikh-i bistsalah-’I Iran*, 3: 92-93, 97-98.

³⁶⁷ See Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran*, 289-290; Ervand Abrahamian, “Chocolate Bars from Paris,” the review of *Blood and Oil: Memoirs of a Persian Prince* by Manucher Farmanfarman and Roxane Farmanfarman. *The New Leader* 18, no. 13 (1997):17.

³⁶⁸ Even today: see Mohammad Gholi Majd, *Oil and the killing of the American Consul in Tehran*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006.

³⁶⁹ See Homaoun Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926-1979* (London: Macmillan, 1981): 99.

³⁷⁰ Hayden White, “Response to Arthur Marwick,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 30:2 (April 1995): 238.

³⁷¹ White, “Response,” 239.

“facts” that are unstable, subject to revision and further interpretation, and even dismissed as illusions on sufficient grounds.”³⁷²

Paul Ricoeur's account of the way in which narrative represents the human world of acting turns on three stages of interpretation that he calls mimesis:³⁷³ 1) prefiguration of the field of action which is the preunderstanding necessary to compose a plot; 2) configuration of the field of action i.e., the narrative "emplotment" which brings the diverse elements of a situation into an imaginative order; and finally refiguration of the field of action which concerns the integration of the imaginative or "fictive" perspective offered at the level of configuration into actual, lived experience.³⁷⁴ As time passes, our circumstances give rise to new opportunities for reflection. We can redescribe past experiences, bringing to light unrealized connections between agents, circumstances, motives or objects, by drawing connections between the events retold or by bringing to light untold details of past events. As Hayden White tells us:

In Ricoeur's view...narrative discourse does not simply reflect or passively register a world already made; it works up the material given in perception and reflection, fashions it, and creates something new, in precisely the same way that human agents by their actions fashion distinctive forms of historical life out of the world they inherit as their past.³⁷⁵

³⁷²White, "Response," 239. White's remarks on the linguistic nature of facts further clarify his notion of the 'form' actually being the 'content':

Thus, Barthes's statement that 'facts have only a linguistic existence' I construe as an assertion that 'facts'—unlike events—are linguistic entities; and by this I would mean that, as the philosopher Arthur Danto puts it, 'facts' are 'events under description.' This is why I have stressed that the language used to *describe* a field of historical occurrence in effect constitutes the field itself and sets limits to the kinds of methods that can be used to analyse the events occurring within the field. White, "Response," 239. Emphasis in the original.

³⁷³ Ricoeur links narrative's temporal complexity to Aristotle's characterization of narrative as "the imitation of an action."

³⁷⁴ For the extensive discussion of the topic see Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*. 3 Vols. Translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983-85.

³⁷⁵White, *The Content of the Form*, 178.

In other words, it can be said that each narrative, in its turn, constructs a historical fact.

In this study, I would like to propose a re-description or re-figuration of the Imbrie Affair as a fundamentally anti-Bahā'ī episode. The complex aftermath of Imbrie's murder aside, the incident itself was fueled by religious hatred. It is primarily within this context that many elements of the story can be understood – including the brutality that characterized the attacks and the refusal of the army and police to help Imbrie and his companion, indeed the active participation of some of their ranks in the assault.

Around the same time when the *saqqā khānah* rumours began circulating, widespread anti-Bahā'ī demonstrations broke out in Tehran. The details of these incidents are scant, but as we will see, the sources establish the fact that Imbrie was apprised of these demonstrations and apparently had played a role in protecting Bahā'īs. On two successive nights, the 6th and 7th of July, mobs from the *bāzār* gathered before the residence of Dr. Susan Moody, an American Bahā'ī physician and her companion, verbally abusing them and their religion. Turning to Vice Consul Imbrie the next day, Moody asked for the protection of their government. Imbrie took up the matter with the Chief of Police and demanded immediate police protection for Moody and her companion, protection that was promptly provided. Apparently, this act not only safeguarded the two Americans but also halted the attacks on Tehran's Bahā'ī community. In a letter sent after Imbrie's murder to Joseph Saul Kornfeld, the American Minister to Iran, Susan Moody wrote, "The large Bahā'ī community of Tehran fully realize[s] that if it had not been thus quelled, the night of the 8th of July would have been a holocaust of bloodshed and looting of their people and their homes." In the same letter, Moody expressed

sorrow for the fate of “their rescuer.”³⁷⁶ Kornfeld, in turn, expresses regret that “this insult to an American citizen” was not brought to his attention at the time, because, “it is barely possible that the catastrophe of July 18 [i.e., Imbrie’s murder] could have been averted.”³⁷⁷

Four days before his death, Imbrie reported to the US Secretary of State that “anti-Bahā’ī” demonstrations had begun in Tehran: “At every teahouse,” he writes, “a Mullah harangued the crowd. Mobs, fired by oratory... swarmed through the streets, unhindered by the police, crying against the Bahā’ists[sic]. In the bazaar all shops belonging to Bahaists closed...”³⁷⁸ Meanwhile, the rumours about the miraculous Āqā Shaykh Hādī *saqqā khānah* were quickly spreading and being actively embellished. People from all corners of the city proceeded to visit the *Saqqā khaneh* in large numbers, in an almost ritualistic manner. As they marched towards the fountain, they chanted in unison: “At the corner of Āqā Shaykh Hādī, from giving a cent you were disclined, now, thanks to the miracle of Abu al-Faḍl, the eyes of the Bābī have gone blind.”³⁷⁹

Anti-Bahā’ī demonstrations soon absorbed open allegations of Rīzā Khan being a Bābī. At one point, demonstrators made a dummy out of cotton and cloth, seated him backwards on an ass and followed him singing: “This unprincipled Bābī has rebelled against the nation.”³⁸⁰ It

³⁷⁶ Susan Moody to Kornfeld, Tehran, July 26, 1924.

³⁷⁷ Kornfeld to the Secretary of State, Tehran, July 27, 1924.

³⁷⁸ Imbrie to the Secretary of the Department of State, July 14, 1924. It must be added here that Imbrie interpreted the demonstrations as “engineered by Mullahs, subsidized by the Government,” with the purpose of “diverting the attention of the people from the murder of Ishqī.” The Vice Consul had included, in the same report, an account of the “big demonstration against the two American Bahahist [sic] in Tehran, and his “request for police protection for these ladies,” which was “promptly acceded.” It is, therefore, strange that Kornfeld had remained uninformed of the event (see above). On the murder of the poet and journalist Ishqī see Makki. *Tarīkh-i bistsālah*, 55-87.

³⁷⁹ See Makki. *Tarīkh-i bistsālah*, 3: 109.

³⁸⁰ Although such chants might appear rather inconsequential now, they were in fact quite ominous. According to Homa Katouzian, eyewitnesses of the demonstrations report hearing charged statements threatening “this Bābī’s wife” with sexual assault. (Homa Katouzian, Personal communication with the author, Aug. 3, 08).

was obvious they were alluding to Rizā Khan. The demonstrators were bold enough to march by Rizā Khan's residence, where the premier stood watching, calmly keeping his composure and at times even walking with the group as they left.³⁸¹

On July 20th, 1924, two days after the Imbrie incident, an article published in the pro-Rizā Khan paper, *Shafaq-i Surkh*, drew attention to how “accusations” of being a Bahā'ī were being used to undermine people's positions: “The events of the time of Nasser-ed-Din Shah[sic], when liberal and progressive people were killed under the name of Bahā'īs, are being repeated in Tehran.” It goes on to say that the situation has become so grave that even if a child accuses an adult walking in the street of being a Bahā'ī, it could immediately turn into “a serious incident.”³⁸²

After Imbrie's murder, Rizā Khan admitted that “he had issued orders, previous to the tragedy, that both the police and military should abstain from intervention of any kind in religious demonstrations and that under no circumstances was a shot to be fired.”³⁸³ Such an order can be understood as an attempt by Rizā Khan to distance himself, as categorically as possible, from the religiously disdained group. Following Rizā Khan's order, the army and police did not prevent the mob from attacking the victims. Seymour verified that the Officer of the Day was one of the first people to strike him. This officer, Lieutenant Jaan Muḥammad,

³⁸¹ Makkī, Ḥusayn. *Tarikh-i bistsālah-'i Iran*, 3: 109.

³⁸² Quoted in Kornfeld to the Secretary of State July 23, 1924. *Shafaq-i surkh* also adds, “If an army of forty thousand soldiers is unable to end this disgraceful state of affairs and this so-called anti-Bahā'ī movement, and allows the enemies of Persia's integrity and prosperity to profit from the religious sentiments of the people, then what is the difference between the cabinet of Sardar Sepah and other previous cabinets!”

³⁸³ Consular report, from W. Smith Murray, Second Secretary of Legation, In charge of Consulate to the Secretary of State, dated August 10, 1924. Rizā Khan is reported to have later threatened to “cut the tongue out of any officer or man who opens mouth regarding the tragedy.” Murray to Secretary of State, July 24, 1924. Even this threat can be understood as an attempt to cover-up the fact that Imbrie's murder could have been avoided had there not been a non-interference order to be interpreted by the military as a green light permitting active participation!

later “freely confessed” to another officer of the Army that “not only the men in his charge... had rushed out and joined in the attack, but that he himself had participated. When questioned as to why he did so, he said, ‘I had no idea it was the American Consul. I thought it was a dog of a Bahā’ī.’”³⁸⁴ Similar explanations were given to account for the involvement of some of the members of the army in the incident. Lieutenant Ni‘mat Allāh, a police officer who was on the Investigation Commission, is reported to have said that “they were fired to vengeance by Seyed Hossein crying that he would ‘have the blood of this infidel dog to avenge the death of [Imam] Hossein and his [grand] father.’”³⁸⁵ In other words, the policemen and the army members were provoked by the same anti-Bahā’ī sentiments as the mob in their attack on Imbrie and Seymour.³⁸⁶

That the murder of Imbrie was perceived by its contemporaries in its anti-Bahā’ī context is also evident in the first telegraphic report on the event. Three hours after Imbrie’s death, Kornfeld reported to the Secretary of State in Washington that Imbrie had been killed by a furious mob screaming that he was a Bahā’ī, as he stopped in front of one of “the Anti-Bahā’ī demonstrations” that had been ongoing “for ten days.”³⁸⁷ A week later Kornfeld, emphasizing the fact that “no one knew Imbrie was going to [the] *Saqqā khānah*,” rejected the idea that the attack had been premeditated. Underscoring the religious nature of the whole incident, he suggested reasons for Riẓā Khan’s inactivity: “the fact is that since the Prime Minister has been humbled by the clergy he has not dared to antagonize them.”³⁸⁸

³⁸⁴ Consular report, from W. Smith Murray, Second Secretary of Legation, In charge of Consulate to the Secretary of State, dated August 10, 1924, page 3.

³⁸⁵ Consular report, from W. Smith Murray, Second Secretary of Legation, in charge of Consulate to the Secretary of State, dated August 10, 1924, page 6.

³⁸⁶ See also Kornfeld to the Secretary of State, July 24, 1924.

³⁸⁷ Kornfeld to Secretary of State, “very Urgent, 52, July 18, 6.00 pm.”

³⁸⁸ Kornfeld to the Secretary of State, July 25, 1924.

The recrudescence of clerical power in Iran in the couple of years preceding the Imbrie incidence is said to have “supplied the background and, in large part, the motivation” for the tragedy.³⁸⁹ With the defeat of Riḏā Khan’s republican movement in March 1924, the influence and power of the clergy grew.³⁹⁰ Drawing on this restored prestige, in the summer of 1924, immediately prior to the Imbrie incident, Riḏā Khan’s political opponents raised “the hue and cry of Bahā’ism against him[,] the danger of which could not be underestimated.”³⁹¹ According to the US consular reports, the “continuous preachings” of the clerics in those days so incited the crowds that any act on Riḏā Khan’s part would have been “interpreted as treason to Islam and prima facie evidence that he was a Bahā’ī.”³⁹²

While describing the *Saqqā khānah* incident as having “never been satisfactorily explained,”³⁹³ historian Homa Katouzian regards it as the last attempt on the part of the Qājārs to prevent Riḏā Khan from seizing power.³⁹⁴ Katouzian’s impression is that “some Tehran ‘ulama in collaboration with the Prince Regent were involved” in the incident.³⁹⁵ There is evidence at hand that while most of the major clerics exiled from Iraq were on good terms

³⁸⁹ Consular report, from W. Smith Murray, Second Secretary of Legation, in charge of Consulate to the Secretary of State, dated August 10, 1924, page 9. Murray adds that since the execution of Shaykh Faḏl Allāh Nūrī in 1909 till 1922 when the struggle between Riḏā Khan—then the Minister of War—and Qavām al-saltānah—then the Prime Minister—lead the latter to turn towards the clerics, the clerics had been in a state of eclipse.

³⁹⁰ The US consular reports depict the weakness of Riḏā Khan’s position, and the power of the clergy after the defeat the Republican movement as such: “They dictated what steps the Prime Minister should take thenceforth, that he should proceed forthwith to Qum for consultation with the exiled Mesopotamian Mullas, who ordered him to publish his famous decree forbidding further discussion of the Republic.” From W. Smith Murray, Second Secretary of Legation, in charge of Consulate to the Secretary of State, dated August 10, 1924, page 11.

³⁹¹ Consular report, from W. Smith Murray, Second Secretary of Legation, in charge of Consulate to the Secretary of State, dated August 10, 1924, page 11.

³⁹² Consular report, from W. Smith Murray, Second Secretary of Legation, in charge of Consulate to the Secretary of State, dated August 10, 1924, page 12.

³⁹³ Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran*, 90. Katouzian adds that “it is highly unlikely that there was a specific plot against the life of the American diplomat (which is a favorite view of all the commentators), but the event played into the hands of Riḏā Khan.” *ibid.*

³⁹⁴ Comment made by Katouzian during the questions and answers session following his lecture delivered at the department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations, University of Toronto, Summer 2007.

³⁹⁵ Personal e-mail to the writer dated July 8th, 2008.

with Riẓā Khan, one of the most active among them, the fiercely anti-Bahā'ī Ayatollah Muḥammad Khālīṣīzādah,³⁹⁶ was in close contact with the Prince Regent and through him, with Aḥmad Shah, the last Qājār monarch living in France at the time.³⁹⁷ Khālīṣīzādah was, moreover, seriously opposed to other exiled ulama's acquiescence to the demand of King Faysal I to abstain from participating in politics as the condition of their return to Iraq.³⁹⁸

Soon after the murder of Imbrie, Khālīṣīzādah was charged with “instigating people” to kill Imbrie,³⁹⁹ and arrested as “the leading Mulla” along “with 200 suspected of participation in [the] crime.”⁴⁰⁰ For Khālīṣīzādah and other clerics, the anti-Bahā'ī demonstrations were always justified as part and parcel of their “sacred religious” duty against “heretics”. For their collaborators, that is to say, the opponents of Riẓā Khan including (most likely) the Crown Prince and Ahmad Shah himself, the demonstrations were the best opportunity for accusing Riẓā Khan of being a Bahā'ī, thereby exploiting public anger toward Riẓā Khan, who had just two weeks earlier lost a great deal of popular support due to the assassination of his critic, the

³⁹⁶ On Khālīṣīzādah's anti-Bahā'ī activities and his five anti-Bahā'ī polemics see: 'Alī Aḥmadī, *Shaykh Muḥammad-i Khālīṣīzādah (Rawḥā'iyat dar maṣā'ib ā Inḡlīs)* (Tehran: Markaz-i Asnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī, 1383/2004), 9, 65-66, 133-138; Rasūl Ja'farīyān, *Jaryān'hā va sāzmānhā-yi maḡhabī-siyāsī-i Iran: az rūy-i kār āmadan-i Muḥammad Riẓā Shāh tā Pīrūzī-i inqilāb-i Islāmī*, 1320-1357 (6th repr. Qum: 1385/2006), 158, 116-117, and passim. Having had accessed to a copy of Khālīṣīzādah's handwritten biography Pierre-Jean Luizard tells us that “He was particularly worried about the presence of the Bahā'īs, Bolshevik sympathizers and materialists among the government functionaries” Pierre-Jean Luizard, “Shaykh Muḥammad Al-Khālīṣī (1890-1963) and His Political Role in Iraq and Iran in the 1910s/20s,” In *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times: Religious Culture & Political History*, edited by Rainer Brunner and Werner Ende, 223-235 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 233.

³⁹⁷ Ḥā'irī, *Tashayyu' va mashrūṭīyat* 183.

³⁹⁸ Ḥā'irī, *Tashayyu' va mashrūṭīyat* 183; Idem., *Shī'ism and Constitutionalism in Iran*, 132-142. According to Luizard Khalisi declared his contempt for those *mujtahids* who had gone “back to their shops,” and highlighted their “opportunism” and their “selfish concerns for only their own careers.” Luizard, “Shaykh Muḥammad Al-Khālīṣī,” 234.

³⁹⁹ See Aḥmadī, *Shaykh Muḥammad-i Khālīṣīzādah*, 55. In his biography *Baṭal al-Islam*, Khālīṣīzādah does mention his arrested and exiled by Riẓā Khan, on the night of the day in which Imbrie was killed, without indicating that the arrest and exile occurred in connection with that event. See Luizard, “Shaykh Muḥammad Al-Khālīṣī,” 231-232.

⁴⁰⁰ Kornfeld to Secretary of State, sent as “urgent,” “6 a.m.” July 21, 1924,

young poet and journalist, Mirzadeh Ishqi.⁴⁰¹ Perhaps neither the Crown Prince nor Ahmad Shah could imagine--let alone plan for--the outcome of these demonstrations: the tragic murder of Imbrie. Once the murder had occurred, Rīzā Khan exploited it, declared martial law, censored the press and arrested many of his political opponents.

The emplotment of the Imbrie Affair as an anti-Bahā'ī narrative can be considered another step in the road to recovery from the deliberate amnesia of the Babi-Bahā'ī dimension of modern Iranian history that has afflicted the collective memory and historiography of Iran, and has only recently begun to be properly diagnosed and treated by some leading historians of modern Iran.

Moreover, this narrative will work in its own turn as a historical fact only to be worked out and re-conceptualized by other historians. As Hayden White reminds us, not even a historiographical consensus about a particular event lasts forever, and the relationship between events and facts is always open to reconceptualization.⁴⁰²

⁴⁰¹ According to Katouzian, "On the basis of all the existing evidence, it looks as if, whether or not there had been an organized plot, various conservative, democratic, and opportunistic factions opposed to Rīzā Khan—perhaps including the Royal Court—took advantage of the demonstrations in order to attack him." Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran*, 99.

⁴⁰² White, "Response," 239.

Chapter Three

Anti-Bahā'ī Polemics and Polemicists

3.1 *Miftāḥ-i Bāb al-Abwāb: Introduction of the Concept of “Political Religion”*

In 1903 an anti-Bahā'ī polemic, *Miftāḥ-i Bāb al-Abwāb*, was published which has special importance in this study as regards the historicizing of the political accusations against Bahā'īs.⁴⁰³ The writer, Mīrzā Muḥammad Mahdī Khān-i Za'īm al-Dawlah Tabrīzī, Ra'īs al-Ḥukamā'⁴⁰⁴, was the owner and editor of the Persian weekly *Ḥikmat* published in Cairo.⁴⁰⁵ Similar to Afghānī, Za'īm al-Dawlah depicted Bahā'īs as the heirs to Bābī dissidence and militant behavior, and therefore a danger to the stability of the ruling authority. This is the dominant theme in the political aspect of his accusations concerning the Bahā'īs, although he accuses them also of seeking and accepting foreign support. What is interesting, in light of this latter accusation, is that Za'īm al-Dawlah rejects as invalid a point in Bahā'ī history which, ever since the 1940s, has been often exploited in anti-Bahā'ī polemics as “proof” of Russian ties with Bahā'īs existing as early as 1853 (i.e, in the form of the assistance given by the Russian minister Dolgoruki in releasing Bahā'u'llāh from prison.⁴⁰⁶) These points make *Miftāḥ-i bāb al-abwāb* a particularly important source in the historicizing of the political accusations leveled against Bahā'īs. For these reasons, the document merits particular attention here.

⁴⁰³ Za'īm al-Dawlah al-duktur Mīrzā Muḥammad Mahdī Khān Ra'īs al-Ḥukamā' al-Irāī al-Ādharbāyjanī al-Tabrīzī, *Miftāḥ-i bāb al-abwāb*, 1st ed. (Cairo: al-Manār, 1903). Both Browne and Amanat have the full title as *Miftāḥ-i bāb al-abwāb au tārikh al-Bābiya* which must be the title of a reprint also used by the translator (see note 6 below).

⁴⁰⁴ On Za'īm al-Dawlah see Mahdī Bāmdād, *Sharḥ-i Ḥāl-i Rijāl-i Iran dar qarn-i 12 va 13 va 14 Hijrī* (Tehran: Zavvār, 1968), 4:6-7; Aḥmad Kasravī, *Tārikh-i mashrūṭah-'ilran* (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1965), 41; Yaḥyā Āryānpūr, *Az Ṣabā tā Nīmā*, vol. 1 *Bāzgasht va bidārī*, 2nd ed. (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1972), 251.

⁴⁰⁵ See Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Bābī Movement in Iran, 1844-1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 437.

⁴⁰⁶ See the section on Russia.

The book contains other polemical themes among those in Cox's various categories⁴⁰⁷ including those of sexual or behavioral deviancy. Here, however, I concentrate on aspects of the book which, save for a passing remark in *Hasht Bihisht*,⁴⁰⁸ is arguably almost unprecedented by earlier polemics. My reference is to non-theological and non-sexual/moral matters, early buds of motives eventually elaborated upon and transformed into fully fledged political themes. In what follows, I call these "New Themes."

Another point that makes *Miftāḥ-i bāb al-abwāb* particularly relevant to the present study is that it was translated into Persian by Ḥujjat al-Islam Ḥajj Shaykh Ḥasan Farīd Gulpāyigānī in 1956, just a year after the pivotal anti-Bahā'ī campaign that swept the country.⁴⁰⁹ Farīd Gulpāyigānī, whose strong advocacy of political Islam was years later further demonstrated in a book he wrote on the Fundamental Law (or Constitution) of Islam,⁴¹⁰ took great liberties in his translation of Za'im al-Dawlah's text. So many of his comments were inserted that one might describe his translation as in fact a new text altogether, one that differs from the original in the mentality that it conveys.⁴¹¹ Consequently, in reading the translation one has to be at considerable pains to avoid taking the translator's frequent interjections for Za'im al-

⁴⁰⁷ See the "Introduction."

⁴⁰⁸ In the final chapter of their *Hash Bihisht* Mīrzā Āqā khān Kirmānī and Shaykh Aḥmad Rūḥī maintain that Bahā'īs do not have any "Books" and that the only writings they have chosen to print are what they have published in Russia, "at the end of which they praise the Russian Emperor." *Hasht Bihisht*, (n.p:n.d), 313. The authors were executed in 1896. This oblique passing remark seems to be the first ever regarding a relation between Bahā'īs and Russia.

⁴⁰⁹ Mīrzā Muḥammad Mahdī Khān-i Za'im al-Dawlah Tabrīzī, *Miftāḥ-i Bāb al-abwāb yā tārikh-i Bāb va Bahā'*, trans. Shaykh Ḥasan Farīd Gulpāyigānī, 2nd ed. (Tehran: Shams, 1961). On the 1955 anti-Bahā'ī campaign see Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, "Anti-Bahā'ism and Islamism in Iran," trans. Omid Ghaemmaghami, in *The Bahā'īs of Iran: Socio-historical Studies*, eds. Dominic Parviz Brookshaw and Seena B. Fazel (London: Routledge, 2008), 200-231; Shahrugh Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran: Clergy-State Relations in the Pahlavi Period* (Albany: State University Press, 1980), 60-90.

⁴¹⁰ Ḥasan Farīd Gulpāyigānī, *Qānūn-i asāsī-i Islām* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Farāhānī, 1970).

⁴¹¹ Another example of such a "translation" is the 1960 publication of the translation of *Majlisī's Biḥār al-anwār* which turns a collection of traditions (ahā'īs) in an anti-Bahā'ī polemic, see: 'Ali Davānī, trans. and ed., *Mahdī maw'ūd: tarjumah-i jild-i sizdah-i Biḥār al-anwār-i 'Allāmah Majlisī* (Qum: Ḥikmat, 1339).

Dawlah's own words, since the two authors make allegations of wildly differing natures. This is particularly true with respect to the supposed political activities of Bahā'īs —popular accusations concerning which had changed markedly between the early 1900s, when the original book was published, and the late 1950s/early 1960s when the translation was made.⁴¹² The insertions and interjections of the translator seek to assert the Russian connection of the Bahā'ī community. At least at one point, as we shall see, the translator's interference with the text goes beyond inserting comments in the text, deliberately changing "Syria" to "Russia" to fit the translator's agenda.⁴¹³ As Farīd Gulpāyigānī's polemical stance is an issue relevant to the situation in the 1950s, it is beyond the scope of this chapter. Here, I shall concentrate on Za'īm al-Dawlah's stance as it was in 1903.⁴¹⁴

Za'īm al-Dawlah's Communications with 'Abdu'l-Bahā'

There is at least one letter from 'Abdu'l-Bahā' addressed to Za'īm al-Dawlah.⁴¹⁵ It can be inferred from the content that Za'īm al-Dawlah's own letter had indicated his intention to

⁴¹² At points the distinction between the interjections of the translator and the original is tricky. For example, a long passage is inserted in the text in a way that one can easily take it as the continuation of Za'īm al-Dawlah's narrative. This specific interjection happens where Za'īm al-Dawlah is quoting the rather harsh words of Naṣir al-Dīn Mīrzā, then the Crown Prince, addressed to the Bāb. Then comes the translator's words praising the former for his "religiosity," adding "that is why people in Iran love him even today, and pray for him," as if obliquely sending a message to Muḥammad Riḏā Shah. He went on to say that Naṣir al-Dīn Shah "had realized," —that is at the age of sixteen, in 1864 when the aforementioned meeting happened—that the Bāb's religion "had a political basis," and he "had documents in hand [proving] that the Bābīs were "instruments of the foreigners and agents of schism in the Shiite country." See Za'īm al-Dawlah Tabrīzī, *Miftāḥ-i Bāb al-abwāb*, 128.

⁴¹³ Za'īm al-Dawlah Tabrīzī, *Miftāḥ-i Bāb al-abwāb*, p. 439 of the original, and p.302 of the Persian translation. See the explanation further in the text.

⁴¹⁴ My citations, in more sensitive issues, are from both the original Arabic and the Persian translation. In other cases, I cite the Persian translation.

⁴¹⁵ 'Abdu'l-Bahā', *Mā'idah-i Āsmānī*, vol.9 (Tehran, Mu'assisah-'i Millī-i Maṭū'āt-i Amrī, 1965), 115-119. See note 35 for another letter from 'Abdu'l-Bahā' most probably addressed to Za'īm al-Dawlah without the latter's name having been mentioned. There is yet another letter from 'Abdu'l-Bahā' to someone else in which he makes mention of Za'īm al-Dawlah and his book, emphasizing that if he wants his book to be mentioned with respect, in future, he must write the truth. He adds that there were no harms to Bahā'īs from Za'īm al-Dawlah's previous publications [meaning even though they were meant to do so], and it will be the same with his current

write a “history” of the Bahā’ī Faith. Making a reference to Afghānī’s Encyclopedia entry⁴¹⁶ and to Naṣirī⁴¹⁷ who had distorted the facts about Bahā’īs, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ reminds Za’īm al-Dawlah that for a history to survive and be judged as fair by posterity, it has to reflect the truth of the matter discussed. It can also be inferred that Za’īm al-Dawlah had written to ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ about the 1903 massacre of the Bahā’īs in Yazd, Isfahan and a number of other cities in Iran,⁴¹⁸ implying that attacks had come from both sides. ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ in response pointed out that it was in fact the Bahā’īs who were plundered and murdered and not their assailants.

Miftāḥ-i bāb al-abwāb: General Considerations

In his introduction, Za’īm al-Dawlah states that, since there are differences of opinion about “Bābīyyah” (by which we soon realize he means Bahā’īs), and few people are “aware of the history, beliefs and ordinances” of the group, he has desired to make these various aspects of the Bahā’ī movement known to his readers. The author then adds that he is informed as to the “conditions and circumstances” of “this group” (*in tā’ifah*) since his father had met the Bāb at his trial in the presence of the Crown Prince.⁴¹⁹ Furthermore, he had himself travelled, to Acca, in 1892, to visit Bahā’u’llāh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’, and then on to Cyprus to visit Yaḥyá Azal. These visits, he asserts, prompted him to “deal with the issue,” and in much the same way that he had previously written about Bahā’īs in Persian,⁴²⁰ to write on them in Arabic as well.⁴²¹ The publication of the text itself, he explains, was prompted by events in Isfahan, Yazd, Shiraz,

publication, i.e., *Miftāḥ-i bāb al-abwāb*. See ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’, *Mā’idah-i Āsmānī* (Tehran, Mu’assisah-i Millī-i Maṭū’āt-i Amrī, 1972), 5:157-158. When the *Miftāḥ-i bāb al-abwāb* was published, the Bahā’īs in Rafsanjān asked for a copy from an Egyptian Bahā’ī who then asked ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ for permission to send them the copy, which was granted. See the latter from ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ on this issue in ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’, *Makātīb-i Ḥaṣrat-i ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’* (Egypt: 1921), 3: 326.

⁴¹⁶ See the section on Afghānī in this dissertation.

⁴¹⁷ A reference to Riḏā Qulī Khān Hidāyat’s *Tārīkh Rawḥat al-Ṣafā-yi Nāṣirī*, vol. 10 (Qum, 1961).

⁴¹⁸ See the section on the 1903 events in this dissertation.

⁴¹⁹ See above.

⁴²⁰ ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ also refers to Za’īm al-Dawlah’s “previous” writings [about Bahā’īs]. See above. Not much is known of his previous writings on Bābī and Bahā’īs. It is possible that he wrote on them in his weekly *Ḥikmat*.

⁴²¹ Za’īm al-Dawlah Tabrīzī, *Miftāḥ-i Bāb al-abwāb*, p. 5 of the original, and p. 8 of the Persian translation

Tehran and Rasht, recent to the date of publication, in which some Bahā'īs were killed and others exiled.⁴²² Lastly, he cites the differences of opinion held by members of the public and press concerning the nature of the events (some praising what had happened and some abhorring the actions taken) as well as the receipt of instructions from “a high station, and an exalted place” (*min maḥall al-arfa'i al-a'lā wa al-maqām al-manī' al-asnā*) to write the book,⁴²³ as further reason for his writing and publishing the text. He then goes on to describe his book as a strictly factual history leaving judgment to his readers, who he is “sure will be extremely surprised to see such strange truths and terrifying, weird ordinance” (*al-ḥaqā'iq al-gharība wa al-aḥkām al-mudhisha al-jība*). He explains that he first wrote a book of more than five hundred pages and titled it *Bāb al-abwāb* (literally, The Gate of the Gates). Since it would have taken much time for a book of that size to be published, he decided for the time being to publish a shortened version of it and call it *Miftāḥ-i bāb al-abwāb* (The Key to the Gate of the Gates). He devotes one-fifth of the book to a review of other religions from Brahmanism to Christianity and Islam, ending the section with a discussion of nine persons, who over many centuries claimed to be the Mahdī. The remaining four fifths of the book is about Bābīs and Bahā'īs with some reference, as well, to Azalīs.

The original Arabic version of the book was published by the Press of al-Manār, i.e., the publishing house of Rashīd Riḏā's newspaper. Za'im al-Dawlah closes the introduction by indicating that he has left some of the Bahā'ī writings⁴²⁴ in “the greatest scientific libraries in this land [Egypt]” i.e., *al-Azhar* under the supervision of the “Peerless” (if “peerless” is simply

⁴²² He is pointing to the anti-Bahā'ī crisis of 1903 in Iran. Please see the relevant chapter in this dissertation.

⁴²³ Za'im al-Dawla does not specify which “exalted station” “ordered” him to write. The Bahā'ī leader 'Abdu'l-Bahā' thought it was some “rich Iranians in Cairo” who encouraged him to write the polemic. See above.

⁴²⁴ According to Browne, what Za'im al-Dawlah deposited in the library of the Mosque and University of al-Azhar in Cairo was the collection of Bābī and Bahā'ī books he gathered in his trip to 'Acca and Famagusta in Cyprus. Browne, *Materials*, 191.

part of the sentence and not an epithet for Shaykh Muhammad then capitalization is not necessary) (*awḥad* in the original Arabic), the most erudite Shaykh Muḥammad Abduh, the great muftī of Egypt.⁴²⁵ These points indicate Za‘īm al-Dawlah’s friendly relations with the Egyptian Salafī reformists contemporary to him, and his especial respect for Shaykh Abduh.

What gave Za‘īm al-Dawlah’s work the impression of impartiality was his incorporation of many passages from the writings of the Bāb and Bahā’u’llāh (in the latter case, it can be argued, with some special agenda in mind, as I will discuss). His father and grandfather both being clerics contemporary to the Bāb and present at his trial in Tabriz,⁴²⁶ al-Dawlah had access to previously unrecorded information as well as an alternative account of that historic occasion.⁴²⁷ Having been based on *Nāsikh al-Tawārīkh* and a number of other sources, the book contained some of their mistakes, plus some new misinformation of its own.⁴²⁸ My aim here, however, is not to expose those misrepresentations but to focus on the political aspect of the picture Za‘īm al-Dawlah had been creating, as this relates to historicizing the political accusations made against the Bahā’īs.

Za‘īm al-Dawlah starts his book with the verbatim incorporation of Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī’s entry on “Bābism,” in Bustānī’s encyclopedia (a text discussed elsewhere in this

⁴²⁵ Za‘īm al-Dawlah Tabrizī, *Miftāḥ-i bāb al-abwāb*, 7 of the original text and 9 of the Persian translation. On Abduh and Rashīd Riḏā see next chapter.

⁴²⁶ On trial of the Bāb, see Amanat, *Resurrection*, 385-94; idem, *Pivot of the Universe* 61, 81-82, 84-88; Denis MacEoin, “The Trial of the Bāb: Shi’ite Orthodoxy Confronts its Mirror Image,” *Occasional Papers in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha’i Studies*, No. 1 (May, 1997) < <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/bhpapers/babtrial.htm>>; idem, “The Trial of the Bāb: Shi’ite Orthodoxy Confronts its Mirror Image,” in *The Messiah of Shiraz: Studies in Early and Middle Bābism* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 409-449. MacEoin’s comparison of different accounts of the trial is particularly interesting.

⁴²⁷ In his note on *Miftāḥ-i bāb al-abwāb*, Browne writes “the author, though a determined antagonist of the Bābīs, writes with some appearance of moderation. Though often inaccurate, he adds fresh materials derived orally from his father Muḥammad Taqī who saw the Bāb in Tabriz, and from other eyewitnesses.” Edward G. Browne, *Materials for the Study of the Bābī Religion* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1918), 191.

⁴²⁸ Amanat also mentions that Z‘īm al-Dawlah “occasionally makes gross mistakes.” He adds that the latter’s views have in some respects been affected by the teachings of Afghānī and Abduh. See Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Bābī Movement in Iran, 1844-1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 437.

dissertation).⁴²⁹ Consequently, all the distortions, misinformation and bias of that encyclopedia entry are faithfully transmitted here, implying Za‘īm al-Dawlah’s approval of the content. At points, he has inserted his own comments in parenthesis. One of these concerns Sayyid Jamāl’s statement that the Bāb “created a mosque in Shiraz, and made it the point of adoration (*qiblah*) of his followers.” Za‘īm al-Dawlah’s “correction” of this readily identifiable misinformation asserts that the Bāb “made the house in Tabriz in which he was born...the point of adoration” reflecting his own limited familiarity with the history of the Bābī religion.⁴³⁰

New Themes

A. “Political Religion”

Za‘īm al-Dawlah is perhaps the first polemicist who refers to Bahā’ī religion as a “political” phenomenon. His use of the term, however, is strikingly different from, if not contrary to, the kind of allegations that were made in later decades. In using the word “political,” clearly Za‘īm Al-Dawlah intends to describe the Bahā’ī religion as “anti-establishment”, and “dangerous to the ruling class and social order.” Later accusations would range from the support of suppressive government to the advocacy of Constitutionalism, and from dependence on foreign powers to active espionage (often, in fact, swinging back and forth among these disparate and incompatible ideas).

⁴²⁹ Za‘īm al-Dawlah Tabrīzī, *Miftāḥ-i bāb al-abwāb*, pp.97-107 of the original text and 64-70 of the Persian translation.

⁴³⁰ See Za‘īm al-Dawlah Tabrīzī, *Miftāḥ-i bāb al-abwāb*, p. 104 of the original text. The translator has changed “Tabriz” into “Shiraz” where the Bāb was actually born. Za‘īm al-Dawlah Tabrīzī, *Miftāḥ-i bāb al-abwāb*, p. 68 of the Persian translation.

Included in Za'im al-Dawlah's book are many passages from the Bahā'ī writings on various teachings of the religion, its history, laws and ordinances,⁴³¹ as well as excerpts from Bahā'u'llāh's addresses to contemporary world rulers, certain regions, clerics and people. Today, more than a century away from the historical and sociopolitical context in which the book appeared, and amid the profusion of passages quoted, one might easily miss the point of the citations. When these are analyzed, it becomes obvious that the intention is to create the impression of a threat to social order, and to the stability of its ruling powers, specifically the Ottomans in whose territories the leaders of the faith were living in exile. The implication was that the "political religion" Za'im al-Dawlah was describing was one that, based on the evidence of its own texts, was antagonistic to the Ottoman Sulṭān. In one of the passages quoted in *Miftāḥ-i bāb al-abwāb* addressing the city of Constantiople, Bahā'u'llāh laments: "The throne of tyranny hath, verily, been established upon" the capital of the Empire, and openly announces, "We behold in thee the foolish ruling over the wise, and darkness vaunting itself against the light. Thou art indeed filled with manifest pride." He then warns the city, and foretells that its "outward splendor" "shall soon perish," and that its dwellers "shall lament."⁴³² In 1903, when Za'im al-Dawlah published his book, Abdulhamid II's repressive regime still ruled over Ottoman Empire.⁴³³ A passage such as this, juxtaposed against other passages

⁴³¹ Some with great misinterpretation. An example is the prohibition to marry one's father's wives (*Kitāb-i Aqdas* paragraph 107). The author has added a footnote, indicating that this prohibition basically implied the permission for marrying one's daughters and sisters. Za'im al-Dawlah, *Miftāḥ-i bāb al-abwāb*, p227 Persian version. This then came to be the typical distortion of the case in later polemics.

⁴³² Quoted in Za'im al-Dawlah Tabrīzī, *Miftāḥ-i bāb al-abwāb*, p. 409 of the original text, and p.273 of the Persian translation. Originally from Bahā'u'llāh, *The Kitāb-i Aqdas* (Haifa: The Bahā'ī World Center, 1992), 88-90 [paragraph 89]

⁴³³ Abdulhamid II had suspended the 1876 constitution, and closed the parliament in 1878. It was not until 1908 that a constitutional revolution happened in the Ottoman Empire. For the history of the Ottoman Empire in this period see Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, "Culmination of the Tanzimat: The Reign of Abdulhamid II, 1876-1909," in *History of the Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976-1977), 172-272. On Bahā'īs under the Ottoman rule in this period, see Necati Alkan, *Dissent and Heterodoxy in the late Ottoman Empire : Reformers, Bābīs and Bahā'īs* (Gorgias, 2009).

addressing sovereigns of the time written in the language of authority,⁴³⁴ and at times with a sense of admonition and warning,⁴³⁵ was bound to give an anti-establishment impression of the Bahā'īs, as a rebellious group threatening a government already wary of insurgent forces,⁴³⁶ and this especially when set against the backdrop of prior Bābī upheavals. Merely quoting such passages would create enough suspicion among the Ottoman authorities to incite action against Bahā'īs.⁴³⁷ Za'im al-Dawlah may well have been inspired in this by Sayyid Jamal al-Dīn Afghānī own thoughts and writings,⁴³⁸ especially given Za'im al-Dawlah's great respect

⁴³⁴ This, for example, was one of the passages included in Za'im al-Dawlah's book: "Ye are but vassals, O kings of the earth! He Who is the King of Kings hath appeared, arrayed in His most wondrous glory, and is summoning you unto Himself, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting." Bahā'u'llāh, *The Kitāb-i Aqdas*, 79 [paragraph 82], incorporated in Za'im al-Dawlah Tabrizī, *Miftāḥ-i bāb al-abwāb*, p. 407 of the original, and p. 273 of the Persian translation.

⁴³⁵ Addressing Kaiser William I, the King of Prussia, as "O King of Berlin," he called him to remember the fate of Napoleon III, the Emperor of the French who suffered a resounding defeat at the Kaiser's hands at the Battle of Sedan in 1870: "Do thou remember the one whose power transcended thy power, and whose station excelled thy station. Where is he? Whither are gone the things he possessed?" And counsels him, "Be warned, be of them who reflect." Bahā'u'llāh, *The Kitāb-i Aqdas*, 83-86 [paragraph 86], incorporated in Za'im al-Dawlah Tabrizī, *Miftāḥ-i bāb al-abwāb*, p. 408 of the original, and p. 272 of the Persian translation.

⁴³⁶ See note 3 above.

⁴³⁷ According to some Bahā'ī sources, Za'im al-Dawlah wrote his book in 1893, and asked 'Abdu'l-Bahā' for some bribe money to stop its publication, apparently because of the dangers Bahā'u'llāh's warnings to the Ottomans could possibly create for the Bahā'īs. 'Abdu'l-Bahā', however, as the account goes, did not accept to pay the bribe, replying that the writer should feel free to publish the book as he wished. See 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Ishrāqkhāvarī, *Muḥāẓirāt* (Tehran: Mu'assisah-i millī-i maṭbū'āt-i amrī, 1963), 1:2-5. The original source for this narrative is a letter from 'Abdu'l-Bahā' written on 31 May, 1893. The letter starts with "Oh Thou Kind Friend of the Wanderers" and the name of the addressee is not specified. The document purports to respond to another letter, addressed to Abdu'l-Bahā from the addressee, in which are mentioned the "generosity" of others as opposed to the "tightfistedness" (*bukhl*) of Bahā'īs: apparently, an indirect request for a bribe. This request 'Abdu'l-Bahā' rejects, while maintaining the indirect language of his extorter. 'Abdu'l-Bahā', *Makātīb-i Ḥaẓrat-i 'Abdu'l-Bahā'*, Vol 2 (Cairo: Kurdistan al-'ilmiyya, 1912), 2: 186-192. Quote from p. 189. There are hints in the extorter's letter, such as references to the addressee's recent travel and visit (to Acca) which fit the known whereabouts of Za'im al-Dawlah who was in Acca in 1308, and tend to support the notion of al-Dawlah's identity as the addressee. In the absence of external supporting evidence, this cannot be ascertained, however, based solely on the content of the letter. Even if 'Abdu'l-Bahā's response is actually addressed to Za'im al-Dawlah, supporting the idea that he wrote the book in 1893, there are still clues in the text of *Miftāḥ-i bāb al-abwāb* which indicate that parts of the text must have been added as late as 1903 (The most salient example being the reference to the restrictions placed upon the Bahā'īs in Acca which were set in early 1903. See Brown, *Materials*, 147). Abdu'l-Bahā's reference to Za'im al-Dawlah having "recently" devised to write his history (See note 39 below), as stated in the letter to Browne (dated 1903), is also an indication that, at the very least, some parts of the book were written after 1893. It is possible that the longer book *Bāb al-bwāb* --which Za'im al-Dawlah maintains was his own work which he abridged to create *Miftāḥ-i bāb al-bwāb*, was in fact written in 1893, and that in 1903 Za'im al-Dawlah both abridged and added certain sections to it.

⁴³⁸ See the section on Afghānī.

for the latter.⁴³⁹ Whatever the case, later years would see a divergence from the focus on potential rebellion and anti-establishment activities in favor of other methods for politicizing popular anti-Bahā'ī discourse.

Regarding Za'im al-Dawlah's book, we are fortunate to have at hand a record of how its contemporaries perceived its content and aim. Writing after the 1903 massacre of Bahā'īs in Iran, 'Abdu'l-Bahā', in a letter to Edward Browne, indicated that, encouraged by "some wealthy Persians in Egypt," Za'im al-Dawlah,

has recently devised to write a history in order to cast aspersion on Bahā'īs, introduce such themes that would please the divines in Iran, gladden the hearts of the oppressors, and arouse the intense hostility of the people in this region, that perchance in Syria too, as in Yazd, an assault would be made on these exiles.⁴⁴⁰

A further commentary is that of Maḥmūd Zaraghānī, the chronicler of 'Abdu'l-Bahā's travels to the West. Recording Za'im al-Dawlah's visit to 'Abdu'l-Bahā' in Zaytun, Egypt in 1913, on his return from the United States and Europe, Zaraghānī tells us that it was with the intention of instigating the Ottoman Sulṭān against Bahā'īs that the author had incorporated in *Miftāḥ-i bāb al-abwāb* words of Bahā'u'llāh regarding tyranny and oppression in the land of the Sulṭān, and prediction of the revolt and uprising there.⁴⁴¹

B. Countering All Later Polemics: A Different Perception of an Event

At one point, a passing comment in Za'im al-Dawlah's book itself sheds light on the nature of the development and metamorphosis of the accusation of espionage and foreign ties--especially Russian ties--against Bahā'īs. Where he is explaining Baha'u'llah's imprisonment in,

⁴³⁹ See Amanat, *Resurrection*, 437.

⁴⁴⁰ Quoted and translated in H. M. Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahā'ī Faith* (London: George Ronald, 1970), 109.

⁴⁴¹ See Maḥmūd Zarqānī, *Badāyi' al-āthār*, 2 vols. (Mumbai: Krumī, 1921), 2:367.

release, and exile from Tehran to Baghdad, al-Dawlah asserts, “One cannot trust the words of Bābīs [by which he means Bahā’īs] indicating that the exile of their leaders and their being saved from execution was the result of the intercession of the Ministers of Russia and Britain,⁴⁴² and that he has been escorted on the way towards Baghdad by the agents of that (“the two” in the original) Minister. Their goal (i.e., the goal of Bahā’īs) [from saying these things] is to deceive (taghrīr) people in order to exalt their own station.”⁴⁴³

As discussed in the section on Russia, the issue of Dolgoruki’s assistance in the release of Bahā’u’llāh, which Bahā’ī sources explain as the result of the latter’s brother-in-law being secretary to the minister, has been used in polemics appearing from the 1940s on as the key documented “proof” of Russian support of Bahā’īs and a clandestine relationship between the two. Now, Za’īm al-Dawlah’s early 20th century text is close enough to the event to see it in the context of its own time, and interpret it accordingly, i.e. as tied to the issues of dignity and pride over non-political support of dignitaries where the law does not protect one, and where it seems natural for a minister of a country to do so.

C. Trans-National Presence: Source of Suspicion

The above, however, does not prevent Za’īm al-Dawlah just a few pages later, from interpreting the travelling of Bahā’ī teachers from Iran to Caucasia, and the Russian government’s allowing their teaching activities, as the “empowering” of Bahā’īs by the Russian

⁴⁴² See above. It is the assistance from the Russian minister that has been mentioned. See also Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*, 216. Za’īm al-Dawlah has himself inserted mention of a British minister, while offering no historical or textual evidence whatsoever.

⁴⁴³ Za’īm al-Dawlah Tabrīzī, *Miftāḥ-i Bāb al-abwāb*, p. 333-34 of the original text, and p. 215 of the Persian translation. The translator has added a note defying and disregarding the author, saying that “there is no doubt” that like other Mahdīs that have arisen in Morocco, India, and the Sudan, the Bāb and Bahā also were instruments of the British “against the French, Egyptians and Russians.” Immediately contradicting this last sentence he adds: “Therefore, why would it be strange for the Ministers of Britain and Russia to have protected the Bahā’ī leaders. This, surely, has been the case.” He finishes with a remark that is once again an absurd contradiction of his prior assertions of Bahā’ī denials when he delights: “fortunately, Bahā’īs themselves have confessed to this truth.” Ibid.

government “in order to use them for the promotion of its agendas.” He then adds that two Bahā’ī temples have been built, one in Ashkhabad and the other in Badkubeh, again mixing truth with untruth.⁴⁴⁴ These references to the Russian support of Bahā’īs, prompted by the freedom of the teaching activities of Bahā’īs in Caucasia, and more specifically to the building of the temple in Ashkhabad, is perhaps one of the earliest and a close second to Mirza Aqā Khān’s oblique reference to the supposed connection between Russian authorities and Bahā’īs in *Hasht Bihisht*.⁴⁴⁵

In the concluding section of his book, which deals with the emergence of a Bahā’ī community in the United States, a remark on the part of Za’īm al-Dawlah provides another indication of his interpretation of trans-national connections in his own familiar terms of pride and honor. He inserts some misinformation to represent ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’s building of a monument on the resting place of the Bāb as an initiative with political motives: “Abbas wanted to glorify and support his religion by winning over the protection of the American government. Therefore, he began building a temple surrounded by a castle in Haifa and spread the rumor that it was for the Americans.”⁴⁴⁶ This could well be one of the reasons why Browne referred to this section of *Miftāḥ-i bāb al-abwāb* as “a rather malicious version of the propaganda in America.”⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁴ Za’īm al-Dawlah Tabrīzī, *Miftāḥ-i Bāb al-abwāb*, p. 356 of the original, and p.229 of the Persian translation. While the building of a Bahā’ī temple had been started in 1902 in Ashkhabad, there was none in Badkubeh.

⁴⁴⁵ See above.

⁴⁴⁶ Za’īm al-Dawlah Tabrīzī, *Miftāḥ-i Bāb al-abwāb*, p. 439 of the original, and p.302 of the Persian translation.

⁴⁴⁷ Browne, *Materials*, 143. In his footnotes to this section Browne makes it clear what he means by description of Za’īm al-Dawlah’s depiction of Bahā’ī propaganda in America as “malicious” by inserting for the latter’s statements, footnotes such as this: “I know of no foundation for this ill-intentioned assertion.” Browne, *Materials*, 144.

In continuation, Za‘īm al-Dawlah points out that ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’s rival brother “informed” the Ottoman Sulṭān of this, and how as a result the latter ordered the cessation of the construction of the monument and the confining of the “Bābīs” within the fortifications of Acca, “whereas previously they would go anywhere they wanted in Syria.” [As mentioned earlier, the translator has freely replaced “Russia” for “Syria” in this last sentence in Persian, ending up saying the Ottoman Sulṭān gave permission to the Bābīs to go anywhere they wanted in Russia--not worrying about the discordant meaning].⁴⁴⁸

At the heart of the link Za‘īm al-Dawlah’s tries to make between the monument under construction and the American authorities—a relationship that has no historical nor textual basis beyond Za‘īm al-Dawlah’s own assertion-- lies a sensitivity about the attention paid by foreigners, i.e., non-Iranians, and especially Westerners to the Bahā’ī religion. It was in 1898, only a few years before Za‘īm al-Dawlah was writing the last pages of his book, that the first group of the Western Bahā’īs, a group of fifteen, many of them Americans, had travelled to Palestine to visit ‘Abdu’l-Bahā and the resting place of Bahā’u’llāh. Za‘īm al-Dawlah’s concern with the number of American Bahā’īs and his claims that Bahā’ī figures were grossly over exaggerated speaks of the same sensitivity,⁴⁴⁹ one shared by his contemporaries in Iran.⁴⁵⁰ It reflects both a sense of unbelief and a feeling of discomfort at the thought of Western regard for the religion of Bahā’u’llāh. It is as if this sense of discomfort needed to be released simply by rejecting the idea of many Westerners accepting the claims of Bahā’u’llāh.

⁴⁴⁸ Za‘īm al-Dawlah Tabrīzī, *Miftāḥ-i Bāb al-abwāb*, p. 439 of the original, and p. 302 of the Persian translation.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁰ ‘Ayn al-Salṭānah, for example, records his discussion with a friend on why Westerners become Bahā’īs. See Qahramān Mīrzā ‘Ayn al-Salṭānah, *Khāṭirāt-i ‘Ayn al-Salṭānah*, eds. Mas ‘ūd Sālūr, Īraj Afshār (Tehran: Asāṭīr, 1995/1374), 5: 3766.

Whatever the precise nature of Za‘īm al-Dawlah’s concerns, his misrepresentations sowed the early seeds of what would become the dominant form of political accusations against the Bahā’īs.

3.2 Reformist Theologians of Early Post-Constitutional Decades

I. Introduction:

The first decades that followed the Constitutional Revolution saw the rise of a number of reformist ulama in Iran. The emergence of these activist scholars during the reign of Rīzā Shah has been attributed to two factors: the ebb in the fortunes of the conservative Shīʿī ulama and the young monarchy's support of "progressive" ideas. It is important to examine these reformist ulama for four reasons: 1) Even though some of them were not politically active in the sense of anti-establishment activities, their interpretation of Islam influenced the central figures of Islamism in mid-twentieth century Iran.⁴⁵¹ Their xenophobic conception of Islam as a religion staunchly opposed to foreigners (i.e, Europeans or as was more broadly construed, Westerners) was at the heart of the Islamist political ideology that crystallized in later decades;⁴⁵² 2) Some of these reformist ulama were responsible for highly reinforcing the crucial dimension of espionage into anti-Bahā'ism beginning in the 1930s; 3) Some of them collaborated with Azalīs, and considering the fierce anti-Bahā'ī stance of the latter and their

⁴⁵¹ These thinkers have been erroneously described as "non-political." See, for example, the remark made by the contemporary Muslim intellectual Ḥasan Yūsefī-Eshkavarī. Ḥasan Yūsefī-Eshkavarī, *Sharīʿat Sangalajī va tafakkur-i Salafgarī*, Gooya, 10 Āzar 1383, <http://news.gooya.com/culture/archives/019778.php> (accessed 10 Nov. 2006). While it is appropriate to refer to Sangalajī as non-political, the same cannot be said of Kharaqānī, who, as we will see, was not only politically active during the Constitutional Revolution but was one of the architects of modern Islamic governance.

⁴⁵² "One can consider Islamism as a natural outgrowth of the nineteenth century Salafīyah, especially in its 'Abduḥ and Afghānī formulations. Islamism can be summarized both as an indigenous response to triumphant imperialism and the deep sense of political, religious, and intellectual malaise enveloping Arab Society in the interwar period." Ibrahīm M. Abī Rabīʿ, "Editor's Introduction," in *Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 9.

tendency to levy political accusations against the Bahā'īs,⁴⁵³ this collaboration invites particular attention in this study; and 4) Anti-Bahā'ism as an *idée fixe* as championed by these reformist theologians led ultimately to radical changes in some of the core theological doctrines of Shī'ī Islam.

Despite the fact that these reformist theologians heavily influenced many of the Islamists of later generations,⁴⁵⁴ they have remained largely unnoticed.⁴⁵⁵ In this respect, the historiography of modern Iranian Islamic thought suffers from what Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi has called the “genesis amnesia”⁴⁵⁶ of Islamism in twentieth century Iran. Neither scholars who have studied Islamic ecumenism and Pan-Islamism (such as Rainer Brunner⁴⁵⁷ and Jacob Landau⁴⁵⁸), nor those who have authored encyclopedia articles on *işlāḥ* or reform in

⁴⁵³ See Dawlatābādī's views in the section “1903 Pogrom” in this dissertation.

⁴⁵⁴ For example, Ayatollah Khumaynī's unusual acceptance of the first two caliphs in his *Hukūmat-i Islāmī* can be traced back to the influence exerted by these theologians. On Khumaynī's views about the first two caliphs, see Mangol Bayat, “The Iranian Revolution of 1978-79: Fundamentalist or Modern?” *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (Winter, 1983): 36. I will provide further evidence of this influence below.

⁴⁵⁵ The exceptions are the works of cleric-historian Rasūl Ja'farīyān. See his magnum opus, *Jaryān'hā va sāzmān'hā-yi mazhabī-siyāsī-yi Iran: az rūy-i kār āmadan-i Muḥammad Riẓā Shāh tā pīrūzī-yi inqilāb-i Islāmī*, 1320-1357. 6th reprint (Qum: 1385/2006), 703-721. Ja'farīyān has also edited independent volumes about two of them.

⁴⁵⁶ See Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, “Orientalism's Genesis Amnesia,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 16:1 (Spring 1996), 1-14.

⁴⁵⁷ See Rainer Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism in the 20th Century: The Azhar and Shiism between Rapprochement and Restraint* (Leiden: Brill, 2004). Although Brunner neglects to mention these advocates of Islamic ecumenism in the early post-Constitutional period (namely, the 1920s and 1930s), he does refer to the serious undertakings of the 'Irāqī cleric, Shaykh Muḥammad Khālīṣī, as well as the work of Ayatollah Burūjirdī in the 1950s. See Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism*, 195-197, 189-193 and *passim*.

⁴⁵⁸ Jacob M. Landau, *The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). Landau does not mention of any the post-1920 Iranian reformist advocates of Pan-Islamism. He devotes a few pages to discussing the “lack of enthusiasm for a Pan-Islamic union” under the Pahlavīs, but is dismissive of the efforts of Burūjirdī in the 1950s to promote rapprochement. See Landau, *Politics of Pan-Islam*, 257-260.

Iran (e.g., Hamid Algar⁴⁵⁹) have fully appreciated (or even registered) the role played by the 1920s-1930s Iranian reformists and advocates of Islamic rapprochement. The only notable authority that has examined these thinkers is Rasūl Jaʿfariyān, who recently introduced thirteen individuals as advocates of Salafī or Wahhābī thought from the time of Rīzā Shah onward.⁴⁶⁰

While there is no evidence to suggest that this cadre of ulama identified themselves as Salafī, there are indications that they freely exchanged ideas and thoughts with one another. That Sayyid Asad Allāh Kharaqānī (d. 1936) and Shaykh Ibrāhīm Zanjānī(1934) expounded similar theories about the history of Islamic governance is one such indication.

1. The Theologians and their Ideas

In this chapter, I will focus on two theologians, Kharaqānī and Sangalajī, because of the profound influence they exerted on their contemporaries and on future Islamists. Both Kharaqānī and Sangalajī gravely lamented the “decadence” of Islam and urged the purging of harmful practices and innovations that distorted its original message. And they called on Muslims to cease uncritically adopting western values and traditions that ran counter to the tenets of Islam. To accomplish these objectives, Kharaqānī proposed a new political Islamic

⁴⁵⁹ See *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Iṣlāḥ. ii. Iran,” IV: 163-167. The author, Hamid Algar, completely overlooks these influential reformist theologians during the reign of Rīzā Shah, and claims that “modernist thought and expression, in Islamic terms, remained dormant” during this period. Algar likewise ignores these figures in his extensive article, *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. “Iran IX. Religions in Iran (2.3) Shi’ism in Iran Since the Safavids.” There is also no mention of them in the article, *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. “Islam in Iran XIII. Islamic Political Movements in 20th Century Iran.”

⁴⁶⁰ Jaʿfariyān maintains that the arguments advanced by these theologians reflect “currents [advocating] revision in Shīʿī Tenets.” Jaʿfariyān, *Jaryān’hā*, 701. Most of the first generation of theologians that Jaʿfariyān discusses (e.g., Kharaqānī) promoted ideas that were close to those championed by the Salafiya. Sangalajī’s thoughts are described as being closer to Wahhābī ideas and so are most of those in later generations, e.g. Ḥaydar ‘Alī Qalamdārān, Sayyid Abu al-Faḥl Burqa’ī, and Sayyid Ṣādiq Taqavī. See Jaʿfariyān, *Jaryān’hā*, 723-736.

ideology while Sangalajī radically reinterpreted one of the most fundamental doctrines of Shīʿī Islam: *rajʿah* (return).⁴⁶¹ Deemed heretical at the time, Sangalajī’s views paved the way for what has been called the “institutionalization of the Advent.” While anti-Bahā’ism played a smaller role in Kharāqānī’s thought, as we will see, it served as the driving force of Sangalajī’s work.

I will also discuss Shaykh Muḥammad Khālīshī who we met in the discussion of the Imbrie affair.⁴⁶² Even though Khālīshī did not have all of the characteristics of the reformist theologians discussed here, some major elements of his thought were identical. As we will see, he played a major role in politicizing Islam and anti-Bahā’ism. I will also discuss Khālīshī’s close associate, Lankarānī.

Though the specific ideas and propositions advanced by these reformists may have varied, they seem to have shared a number of concerns. Without attempting to impose a false sense of unity on their thought or make it more systematic and consistent than it in fact was, one can trace some common concerns and shared ideas among them. The central idea propounded by these reformists was that the Islamic world was in a state of moral and social decline (*inḥiṭāt*) and under threat by foreigners, or more generally “the West.” In response, they sought to revivify Islam by returning “to the tradition represented by the ‘pious forefathers’ (*al-salaf ṣāliḥ*) of the Primitive Faith.”⁴⁶³ They also subscribed to a belief in what has been called Qur’anism, that is to say a rejection of most, though not all, of the *hadīṣ* in favor of the Qur’an as the only source of religious authority. Furthermore, they advocated Islamic

⁴⁶¹ See the section on Sangalajī.

⁴⁶² See Chapter 2 of the current work.

⁴⁶³ *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Salafīyah.” On the *salafīyah*, see also the sources cited below.

unity and rapprochement between Shī'ites and Sunnīs.⁴⁶⁴ In addition, they looked upon the dominant clerical establishment with disdain despite coming from the ranks of the clerics themselves. Finally, they shared an orientation that, broadly speaking, may be labeled rationalist and were adamant in their rejection of what they perceived to be superstitions, empty rituals and other elements of the Shī'ī ethos.

The reformist movement has been characterized by Ja'fariyān as the Salafī or Wahhābī moment in Iranian religious reform.⁴⁶⁵ However, I argue that rather than being a mirror image of the Salafī movement in Egypt, the reformist current in Iran was the result of a dialogical overlap of identities and ideological affiliations, at times reflecting the liminal identities of its proponents. While no doubt influenced by Egyptian Salafism, the ideas and identities of these reformists were likewise shaped in reaction to, and at times, appropriation of concepts from the Bahā'ī writings.⁴⁶⁶ In order to show both the continuities and discontinuities with the Salafī and Wahhābī currents, I will first present an introduction to Salafī and Wahhābī thought in their early, non-militant forms. Another factor justifying, or perhaps even necessitating, an introduction on Salafī thought here is that contemporary Islamism, in general, has been

⁴⁶⁴ Pan-Islamism (*ittihād-i Islam*) was an important element of most of the Islamic reform movements in the Middle East. According to Landau, "during the nineteenth century, Muslims living in territories which formed an almost continuous land mass, increasingly found themselves wedged between foreign powers and caught between the old and the new. It was their response, largely politicized, to these two challenges that provided the background for Pan-Islam." Jacob M. Landau, *The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 9.

⁴⁶⁵ See Rasūl Ja'fariyān, *Jaryān'hā va sāzmān'hā-yi mazhabī-siyāsī-yi Iran: az rūy-i kār āmadan-i Muḥammad Riḏā Shāh tā pīrūzī-yi inqilāb-i Islāmī*, 1320-1357, 6th repr. (Qum: 1385/2006), 705.

⁴⁶⁶ It is a known phenomenon that nativistic movements that affirm the value of indigenous tradition in the face of foreign domination invariably borrow from the dominant culture they ostensibly reject. Munson, "Ideologization of Religion," 236. Regarding the Salafīyah, it has been proposed that "although critical of imperialist modernity," it "adopted one key of the ideas of Western modernity: the notion of reform and progress." Abu-Rabi', "Editor's Introduction," 9. In case of the Iranian reformist theologians under study, I argue that the main "foreign" entity they were both reacting to and borrowing from was the Bahā'ī religion.

regarded as a “natural outgrowth of the nineteenth century Salafīyah, especially in its ‘Abduh and Afghānī formulations.”⁴⁶⁷

2. What is Salafism?

Rainer Brunner has provided one of the most concise definitions for the variety of religious and intellectual forces that have been placed under the umbrella of the Salafīyah. Brunner writes that the Salafī movement “mainly consisted of scholars and intellectuals who strove to revive a kind of pristine form of Islam in order to counter the growing European dominance over most of the Islamic world.”⁴⁶⁸ In more specific terms, the Salafī movement has been defined as “a neo-orthodox brand of Islamic reformism, originating in the late 19th century and centered on Egypt, aiming to regenerate Islam by a return to the tradition represented by the ‘pious forefathers’ (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*, hence its name).”⁴⁶⁹ The Arabic term *islāḥ* (reform) in contemporary Islamic sources refers to this same current and encapsulates the orthodox

⁴⁶⁷ Ibrahīm M. Abu-Rabi‘, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 9.

⁴⁶⁸ Rainer Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism in the 20th Century: The Azhar and Shiism between Rapprochement and Restraint* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 39. The term ‘Salafī’ has been applied to such a wide range of groups that it has become very fluid, except for the general common elements posited in Brunner’s definition. The definition advanced by Ibrahim M. Abu Rabi‘ is one of the more peculiar. Abu-Rabi‘ considers even the Wahhabīyah as a form of Salafīyah, even though its emergence precedes that of the Salafīyah in time. Emphasizing that the Salafīyah refers to a diverse number of religious and intellectual forces, he divides it into three forms: pre-colonial, “the best example” of which is the “Wahabiyyah” [Sic]; colonial, exemplified by figures such (and as diverse) as Afghānī, ‘Abduh, and Rashīd Riḏā; and post-colonial, represented by scholars such as Mawdūdī and Sayyid Quṭb. Abu-Rabi‘’s classification is clearly a chronological one, listing under the rubric Salafī ‘all groups that centered around a return to the early “pristine” Islam as the remedy to the perceived “decadence” of Islam. What is surprising, however, is his inclusion of Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, the “pro-British” reformer who “sought accommodation with Westernization,” and “was not critical of colonialism.” See Ibrahīm M. Abu Rabi‘, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 8- 9, 19.

⁴⁶⁹ *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Salafīyah.”

reformism enunciated in the writings of Muḥammad ‘Abduh⁴⁷⁰ and Rashīd Riḏā,⁴⁷¹ and in the works of subsequent Muslim scholars who were influenced by ‘Abduh and Riḏā, and who “like them, consider[ed] themselves disciples of the Salafiya.”⁴⁷²

‘Abduh, the central figure of *iṣlāḥ*, was the closest Egyptian disciple of Afghānī during the latter’s stay in Egypt from 1871 to 1879.⁴⁷³ The origins of the Salafiya in that country is connected with both individuals.⁴⁷⁴ ‘Abduh and Afghānī shared a common concern for the decay of Islam and sensed a need for its revival.⁴⁷⁵ For Afghānī, “the political unification and strengthening of the Islamic world and the ending of Western incursion” were primary concerns and the reform of Islam, although present, was secondary.⁴⁷⁶ ‘Abduh, however, after an initial period of interest in Afghānī’s “plans for violent and sudden action,” turned to “slower education and legal reform.”⁴⁷⁷ However, the main principles of *iṣlāḥ* were advanced by

⁴⁷⁰ See *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Muḥammad ‘Abduh.”

⁴⁷¹ See *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Rashīd Riḏā”

⁴⁷² *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Iṣlāḥ.” Henceforth, I will refer to the *salafi* current influencing the Iranian theologians by the term *iṣlāḥ*.

⁴⁷³ See Keddie, *A Political Biography*, 81-128.

⁴⁷⁴ *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Iṣlāḥ 2. In Egypt and Syria.” Afghānī had a profound influence upon ‘Abduh. “It was he who revealed traditional learning to Muḥammad ‘Abduh in a new light, called his attention to European works accessible in translations and attracted his interest finally to Egyptian and Muslim problems of the day.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Muḥammad ‘Abduh.” On the relationship between Afghānī and ‘Abduh, see now, Oliver Scharbrodt, *Islam and the Bahā’ī Faith: A Comparative Study of Muḥammad ‘Abduh and ‘Abdul-Bahā’ Abbas* (London: Routledge, 2008).

⁴⁷⁵ Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, 136.

⁴⁷⁶ Keddie, *An Islamic Response*, 39.

⁴⁷⁷ Nikki R. Keddie, “From Afghānī to Khumaynī,” in M. Ikram Chachatai, ed., *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, Apostle of Islamic Resurgence* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 2005), 817-825. Quote from 818. Originally the piece was published in the introduction to the 1983 edition of Keddie, *An Islamic Response*. Sayyid Jamal al-Dīn was, in Keddie’s words, “primarily a man with a taste for quick and violent action; assassination, wars, intrigues, or revolt were means to his ends.” Keddie, *An Islamic Response*, 33.

Afghānī as well.⁴⁷⁸ Ja'fariyān's thesis that the ideas advanced by the Iranian reformists may be ascribed to the Salafīs may not be accurate. It is more likely that they were influenced by Afghānī who travelled twice to Iran after fully developing his ideas, and who wrote some of his writings in Persian - including his most important work, *The Refutation of the Materialists*.⁴⁷⁹ Thus, it may be more appropriate to refer to these Iranian reformists as followers of Afghānī's drive to reform Islam rather than labeling them Iranian Salafīs.⁴⁸⁰ Below two of the main elements of *iṣlāḥ* will be discussed.

A. Qur'an as a Source of *iṣlāḥ*

In traditional Sunnī thought, knowledge (*ilm*) is based on four fundamental sources: the Qur'an, the Sunnah of the Prophet as represented in the collection of *aḥādīṣ*, consensus (*ijmā'*), and *ijtihād*.⁴⁸¹ The proponents of *iṣlāḥ* adhere to the classical theory of the four sources, without accepting the traditional criteria in its entirety. The reformist stance, on the other hand, can be summarized as follows: they accept the authority of the two main sources (the Qur'an, and the Sunnah), have a new conception of *ijmā'* and *ijtihād*, and reject emulation (*taqlīd*).⁴⁸² With regards to the first two sources, the notion of *iṣlāḥ* tends to attach greater importance to the

⁴⁷⁸ For a summary of Afghānī's ideas, see Keddīe, *An Islamic Response*, 36-97.

⁴⁷⁹ See Keddīe, *A Political Biography*, and my discussion of Sayyid Jamāl.

⁴⁸⁰ See chapter one Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn. Given the fact that these theologians were influenced by both Afghānī and 'Abduh, it is strange to see Ja'fariyān aver that "Ayatollah Ṭāliqānī was influenced, in his study of the Qur'an, by Sangalajī and Kharaqānī, and not by Sayyid Jamāl and 'Abduh, as some have suggested." Ja'fariyān, *Jaryān'hā*, 709.

⁴⁸¹ *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "*Iṣlāḥ*."

⁴⁸² My discussion of the tenets of the Salafīyah that had implications for the anti-Bahā'ism of the reformist theologians is borrowed from *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "*Iṣlāḥ*."

Qur'an than to the classical *ḥadīṣ* collections. The Qur'an is "the foundation of the religion." Since their approach to the interpretation of the Qur'an has implications for the anti-Bahā'ī position espoused by the thinkers discussed in this chapter, a closer look is warranted here.

In traditional sources, the verses of the Qur'an are grouped into two categories: *muḥkamāt*, i.e., verses whose meaning is considered to be self-evident; and *mutashābihāt*, i.e., verses whose meaning is uncertain.⁴⁸³ The latter are the verses that have been subjected to esoteric

⁴⁸³ See Qur'an 3:7. Since the Salafī stance on *mutashābihāt* has greatly influenced the reformist theologians under discussion, it is useful to consider the major Salafī Qur'an exegetical text, 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḏā's *Tafsīr al-manār*, part 3, pages 162-173. In this section, Riḏā often quotes 'Abduh as *al-ustādh al-imām* (the master and Imam), but without quotation marks, it is hard to know where 'Abduh ends and Riḏā begins and vice-versa. The section features quotations by Ibn Taymīyah and commentary by 'Abduh and Riḏā on all seven verses in the Qur'an that include the word *ta'wīl*. A summary of this section follows:

a) The main issue under discussion is why are there *mutashābihāt* verses in the Qur'an to begin with. Why has God put verses that only He and "those firmly rooted in knowledge" (*al-rāsikhūn fī al-'ilm*; Qur'an 3:7) can understand, especially when the *mutashābihāt* prevent the flow of divine guidance and open the gates of sedition (*fitnah*) for the people of *ta'wīl*?

b) 'Abduh or Riḏā say that the famous Sunni *mufasssīr* (Qur'an exegete) al-Rāzī has given five of the benefits (*al-fawā'id*) for the *mutashābihāt* and these have been cited on his authority by ulama who appeared after him. For example, the presence of the *mutashābihāt* makes understanding and discerning the truth more difficult and the more difficult something is, the greater the reward.

c) Riḏā then dismisses these five benefits. He states that 'Abduh has given three answers to the ulama. For example, God has revealed the *mutashābihāt* to test the hearts of men to make sure that they are sincere in their faith; and God has revealed the *mutashābihāt* to motivate the mind and to inspire the intellectual abilities of the believers.

d) Some of the *mutashābihāt* verses carry numerous meanings that are applicable in different conditions. This is illustrated by an example about the set times for the obligatory prayer in regions of the world where the sun only shines for two hours.

e) Riḏā then cites a long passage from Ibn Taymīyah about how there is nothing in the Qur'an that is incomprehensible. Recalling a classical Muslim theological (*kalām*) argument, he maintains that everything in the Qur'an can be understood but the meanings of some of the verses are known only to God. For example, the Qur'an says that God has a hand or a throne. All we know is that His hand, throne, etc. are different than a hand or throne we see in this world and their knowledge is with God alone.

f) Finally, there is a long discussion of the meaning of the word *ta'wīl*.

It is important to note here that one of the answers 'Abduh gives to the question of why there are *mutashābihāt* verses in the Qur'an: "God has revealed the *mutashābihāt* to test the hearts of men to make sure that

interpretation (*ta'wīl*) by certain Muslim (in particular Shī'ī) sects. *Iṣlāḥ* rejects the practice of *ta'wīl* to foreground the “hidden” meanings and symbols beyond the apparent images.⁴⁸⁴ For the proponents of *iṣlāḥ*, *ta'wīl* is a typical example of *bid'ah* (innovating a belief or practice for which there is no precedent from the time of the prophet Muḥammad).⁴⁸⁵ The reformists, therefore, consider the exegetical practices of certain Bāṭinī and Ṣūfī groups to be “heretical.”⁴⁸⁶ As we saw, this was the basis for one of the criticisms of Afghānī against Bābīs (by which he also meant Bahā'īs) in referring to them as Bāṭinīs. This distrust of esoteric interpretation combines with the major Salafī criticism of the religious extremism (*ghuluvv*) practiced by the *ghulāt*⁴⁸⁷ to shape the criticisms leveled against the Shī'a by the Salafī scholar, Rashīd Riḏā (d. 1935),⁴⁸⁸ the foremost disciple of 'Abduh. The Iranian reformist theologians under discussion, in their attempts to promote rapprochement with Sunnīs,⁴⁸⁹ projected the Salafī criticism of Bāṭinī interpretation unto Bahā'īs. Similar to Rashīd Riḏā's criticism of the

they are sincere in their faith.” This view is identical what Bahā'u'llāh has stated in his *Kitāb-i īqān*. [Need reference.]

⁴⁸⁴ *Ta'wīl* is used in the sense of returning the text of the verses to their original or first (*awwal*) meaning. On *ta'wīl* and the dispute over *ta'wīl* and *tafsīr* in early Islamic history, see *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Ta'wīl” and “Tafsīr.”

⁴⁸⁵ See *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Bid'a.”

⁴⁸⁶ Bāṭinīyah was “a name given (a) to the Ismā'īlīs in medieval times, referring to their stress on the *bāṭin*, the “inward” meaning behind the literal wording of sacred texts; and (b), less specifically, to anyone accused of rejecting the literal meaning of such texts in favour of the *bāṭin*.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 2nd ed., s.v. “Bāṭiniyya.”

⁴⁸⁷ See *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Ghulāt.”

⁴⁸⁸ Rashīd Riḏā “used the word *ghuluvv* that has an important connotation in the heresiography and describes the exaggerated reverence held by some (non-Twelve) Shiite groups for 'Alī (the so-called *ghulāt*), which is rejected by most of Twelver Shiites.” Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism*, 101n. However, Brunner also notes that Riḏā did not hesitate to “indirectly accuse” two of the Twelver Shiite writers, with whom he was in a dispute over rapprochement, “of being among these (heretical) ‘exaggerators’ or at least kindred spirits.” Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism*, 101n. This latter point indicates what a crucial role anti-Bahāism could play in helping the Iranian co-thinkers of Riḏā distance themselves from the “*ghulāt*,” the Achilles' tendon of the Shī'a vis-à-vis the advocates of *iṣlāḥ*.

⁴⁸⁹ In case of Sangalajī, rapprochement with Egyptian Salafīs in particular was especially important (see below).

Shī'ī extremist groups (*ghulāt*), the reformist ulama accused Bahā'īs of being extremists (*ghulāt*) rather than adducing other arguments found in the anti-Bahā'ī polemical works written by traditionalist clerics in the same period.⁴⁹⁰

B. Pan-Islamism

As can be noted from the above characteristics of *islāh*, reformists regularly invoked the early days of Islam, the text of the Qur'an, and the teachings of the Prophet. An important component of this longing for the early days of Islam was the political ideology and movement known as Pan-Islamism (*al-waḥda al-islāmīya* in Arabic and *ittiḥād-i Islam* in Persian).⁴⁹¹ One of the main ideologues of Pan-Islamism was Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī.⁴⁹² The Salafīyah of Egypt (connected with Afghānī and 'Abduh) were associated with Pan-Islamism. While the Iranian reformist theologians also sought to promote Islamic unity, their concerns and motivations differed from their Salafī Egyptian predecessors. Whereas the latter made every effort to forge a united front of Muslims against European colonialism,⁴⁹³ their Iranian intellectual heirs

⁴⁹⁰ For a discussion of the Bābī and Bahā'ī religions in context of the Iranian tradition of *ghuluvv*, see Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscape of Early Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

⁴⁹¹ See *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Pan-Islamism."

⁴⁹² In modern Iran, the roots of Pan-Islamism are linked to Afghānī. While it is true that he was one of its main ideologues, it must also be remembered that the idea did not originate with him. Keddie has noted that as early as the first half of the nineteenth century, the Western Christian conquest of Islamic territory had given rise to pan-Islamic sentiments. By the 1860s, western penetration into Islamic lands caused the Ottoman sultan to assert more strongly than before his claim to be the universal Muslim caliph. The original ideologists of pan-Islam were some of the reformist Young Ottomans who in the early 1870s, had already begun to write in favor of pan-Islamic solidarity. "Afghānī was to a large degree carrying forth and expanding on their ideas and methods." Keddie, *An Islamic Response*, 22, 26.

⁴⁹³ Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism*, 39-40.

sought to champion rapprochement between Shī'ites and Sunnis to combat the Bahā'īs. It is interesting to note that at least one of the earliest proponents of Pan-Islamism was willing to include Bahā'īs under the banner of Islam in the struggle against colonialism. In speaking about American converts to Islam in 1908, the Indian secretary to the Pan-Islamic Society in London, Shaykh Mushīr Ḥusayn Kidwai⁴⁹⁴ observed that the “spread of Islam in America has been even greater than in England if we consider Bābism and Behāism [Sic] as sects of Islam.”⁴⁹⁵ This attitude, however, was definitely not shared by ‘Abduh’s student, Rashīd Riḏā, who, according to Brunner, “was not prepared to recognize as Muslims all groupings that had split off from Shiism. The followers of the Bābiyya, for example, were for him outside the pale.”⁴⁹⁶ Kidwai’s view was also not shared by Iranian defenders of Pan-Islamism. As we will see, the Pan-Islamism championed by the Iranian reformist theologians was directed mainly against Bahā'īs.

Interestingly, however, *Ittiḥād-i Islam*, “the only substantial treatment of Pan-Islamism in Persian,”⁴⁹⁷ was written by a crypto-Bahā'ī, the Qājār prince and cleric, Shaykh al-Ra'īs.⁴⁹⁸ A

⁴⁹⁴ On him see Jacob M. Landau, *The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 50, 189-90, 199-201, and passim.

⁴⁹⁵ Moshir Hosain Kidwai, *Pan-Islamism* (London: Lusac & Co., 1908), p. 52.

⁴⁹⁶ Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism*, 40. Brunner cites an issue of Rashīd Riḏā’s magazine as the source for this piece of information, *al-Manār*, 12/10 (Nov. 1909), 755. For Rashīd Riḏā’s critique of Bābī-Bahā'ī allegorical interpretation of the Qur’an.

⁴⁹⁷ See *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., “Iṣlāḥ. ii.Iran.”

⁴⁹⁸ Shaykh al-Ra'īs, *Ittiḥād-i Islam* (n.p: n.d). According to page 86 of the text it was finished on 18 Jumādī al-Ukhrā 1312 Q (17 December 1894). On Shaykh al-Ra'īs, see Juan R.I. Cole, “Shaikh al-Ra'īs and Sultan ‘Abd al-Hamīd II: The Iranian Dimension of Pan-Islam,” in *Histories of the Modern Middle East: New Directions*, ed. Israel Gershoni, Hakan Erdem, and Ursula Wokoeck (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002):167-185; Idem, “The provincial politics of heresy and reform in Qājār Iran: Shaykh al-Ra'īs in Shiraz, 1895-1902,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 22 no. i-ii (2002): 119-126; Idem, “Autobiography and silence: the early career of Shaykh al-Ra'īs

detailed study of this work is beyond the purview of this chapter, but it suffices to say here that Shaykh al-Ra'īs seems to have considered Pan-Islamism a necessary step in the path of achieving the unity of mankind, the central tenet and chief purpose of the Bahā'ī religion. In other words, rather than use Pan-Islamism as a means to combat Europeans, he viewed it as a means for achieving a unified world.⁴⁹⁹

3. Wahhābism

Since some of the reformist theologians under discussion have been labeled Wahhābis,⁵⁰⁰ some comments about this movement are due. Wahhābism (or the Wahhābiyyah) takes its name from its founder, the 18th century Muslim scholar, Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1792). At the core of 'Abd al-Wahhāb's teachings was belief in *tawḥīd* (affirming the absolute oneness of God) and rejection of its antithesis, *shirk* (joining partners with God). *Shirk* included the veneration of tombs or places believed to possess supernatural powers. *Taqlīd* (emulation) was rejected, as was *bid'ah* (literally innovation; for Wahhābīs it meant any religious changes introduced after the period of the pious predecessors (*al-salaf al-ṣālah*)).⁵⁰¹ In the course of the twentieth

Qājār,” in *Iran im 19. Jahrhundert und die Entstehung der Bahā'ī-Religion*, ed. Herausgegeben von Johann Christoph Bürgel and Isabel Schayani (Hildesheim: Olms, 1998).

⁴⁹⁹ It can be argued that Shaykh al-Ra'īs's work is a treatise on Iranian modernity, heavily influenced by the ideas of 'Abdu'l-Bahā expressed in *al-Risālah al-madanīyah* and *Risālah-yi siyāsīyah*

⁵⁰⁰ See the section of Sangalajī.

⁵⁰¹ Cf. Todd Lawson's study of the Shaykhīya where he notes that, “Aḥsā'ī's effort to rescue the unknowable God of Islam from degeneracies of contamination through Islam's unforgivable sin, *shirk*, may indeed be inspired by contemporary religious developments in Arabia. The terms of the argument are interchangeable, except, of course, that Aḥsā'ī was an avid Imāmī Shī'ī, and the Wahhābiyya equally avid Sunni Muslims. But the temperament is strikingly similar, however much both Aḥsā'ī and Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) might be horrified to read this.” Todd Lawson, “Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Twelver Shī'ism: Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī on Fayḍ Kāshānī (the Risālat al-'Ilmiyya)” in *Religion and Society in Qājār Iran*, ed. Robert Gleave (RoutledgeCurzon: London, 2005), 138-39.

century, prominent Salafīs like Rashīd Riḏā (see above) and Shakīb Arsalān rehabilitated Wahhābism.⁵⁰²

Wahhābism aimed to restore Islamic piety and ethics to their original purity and cultivate an idealization of the primitive Islamic social organization. Along with the influence of Western culture, the liberal evolution of the Ottoman regime (its policy of reforms or *tanzīmāt*) and the structural renovation of the Eastern churches, scholars speak of Wahhābism as the force behind the awakening of Muslim consciousness and *iṣlāḥ*.⁵⁰³ Therefore, it is no surprise that some of the dogmas of Salafism were originally those of Wahhābism.⁵⁰⁴

4. Salafīs and Bahā'īs

Muḥammad 'Abduh, the most prominent figure of Egyptian Salafism, first met 'Abdu'l-Bahā' in Beirut in or around 1878.⁵⁰⁵ The two men soon fostered a cordial relationship.⁵⁰⁶ In a talk delivered in Haifa in late December 1919-early January 1920, 'Abdu'l-Bahā' recounted the story

⁵⁰² *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Wahhābiyya."

⁵⁰³ *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "iṣlāḥ."

⁵⁰⁴ For a concise discussion of the similarities and differences between Salafism and Wahhābism, see Tayfun Atay, "The Significance of the Other in Islam: Reflections on the discourse of a Naqshbandi Circle of Turkish Origin in London," *The Muslim World*, No.89 (Jul-Oct 1999): 455-77, particularly 467-77.

⁵⁰⁵ 'Abdu'l-Bahā's trip to Beirut is said to have taken place in 1878. See H.M. Balyuzi, *'Abd al-Bahā': The Centre of the Covenant*, 37. 'Abduh's biography suggests that his stay in Beirut to have occurred in 1885. See *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Muḥammad 'Abduh."

⁵⁰⁶ See William McCants, "I never Understood any of that from 'Abbās Effendī": Muḥammad 'Abduh's Knowledge of the Bahā'ī Teachings and the Friendship with 'Abdu'l-Bahā' 'Abbās," in *Studies in Modern Religions, Religious Movements and the Bābī-Bahā'ī Faiths*, ed. Moshe Sharon (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 275-297; Juan R.I. Cole, "Muḥammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḏā: a Dialogue on the Bahā'ī Faith," *World Order*, vol. 15, nos. 3-4 (Spring/Summer 1981): 7-16. On the relationship between 'Abduh, Rashī Riḏā and the Bahā'ī faith, see also, Moojan Momen, "Bahā'ī Influence on the Reform Movements of the Islamic World in the 1860s and 1870s," *Bahā'ī Studies Bulletin*, 2:2 (1983): 47-65.

of their interactions.⁵⁰⁷ According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’, in the course of one of their first encounters, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ defended the Qur’an in front of ‘Abduh to “one of ‘Afghānī’s supporters” who had made a disrespectful remark (which ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ ascribed to Afghānī) about a particular verse. After this incident, ‘Abduh frequently visited ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ in Beirut.⁵⁰⁸ When time came for ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ to return to Acca, ‘Abduh, facing familial pressures in Beirut, requested to accompany him. ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’, however, felt it unwise, remarking that if ‘Abduh returned with him, the people would say that “one corrupt person (*mufsid*) has brought another corrupt person with him. They are as alike as two peas in a pod.”⁵⁰⁹ Instead, he suggested that ‘Abduh travel first to Jerusalem and from there to Acca. He assured ‘Abduh that he would prepare accommodations and work for him in Acca. However, ‘Abduh was soon expelled from Beirut and forced to settle in Egypt. The two continued their correspondence for some time. ‘Abduh later wrote a commentary on the *Nahj al-balāghah*.⁵¹⁰ As a result, many Iranians believed he had converted to Shī‘ī Islam. Mīrzā Mahdī Khān⁵¹¹ praised his decision to accept the Shī‘ī creed while Iranian dailies hailed him, “the re-newer (*mujjaddid*) of Islam.”⁵¹²

According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’, following the assassination of Naṣīr al-Dīn Shāh, ‘Abduh defended Afghānī in an article published in the Egyptian newspaper *al-Ahrām*, arguing that there was no prior history of animosity (*sābiqah-i shadīd*) to suggest that Afghānī had provoked

⁵⁰⁷ See the text of the talk in Faḥr al-Mazandarānī, *Tarīkh-i Zuhūr al-Ḥaq*, 6: 766-767. <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/arabic/vol3/tzh6/tzh6.htm> (Accessed 27 August 2009). The talk is dated *Rabī‘ al-thānī* 1338 (24 December 1919-21 January 1920).

⁵⁰⁸ It appears that ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ made a profound impression on ‘Abduh.

⁵⁰⁹ For this second sentence ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ uses a common Arabic proverb: *wāfaqa shann ṭabaqihi*.

⁵¹⁰ Lit, “The [Optimal] Path of Eloquence”, “an anthology of dissertations, letters, testimonials and sententious opinions, traditionally attributed to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661).” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. s.v. “Nahj al-Balāgha.”

⁵¹¹ Known as Za‘īm al-Dawlah, an Iranian journalist who published the periodical *Hikmat* in Egypt

⁵¹² According to a tradition attributed to Muḥammad, “at the beginning of each century, God will send a man, a descendant of his family, who will explain the matters of religion.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. s.v. “Mujaddid.”

the monarch's assassination. 'Abduh maintained that Bahā'īs were the ones to blame for the Shah's murder because the monarch had opposed them from day one. 'Abduh "wrote other things" about the Bahā'īs, but when it came to discussing 'Abdu'l-Bahā', he would only "praise him and say, 'no two people disagree about him.'" (*tamjīd kard va guft, ammā fulān, fa-lā takhtalif fīhi athnān*).⁵¹³ After his article in *al-Ahrām* was published, 'Abdu'l-Bahā' advised the Bahā'īs to leave 'Abduh to himself. 'Abduh shared his positive impressions of 'Abdu'l-Bahā' in a letter to his friend Comte de Sacy.⁵¹⁴

'Abdu'l-Bahā's relationship with 'Abduh has been closely scrutinized.⁵¹⁵ The possible intertextuality between 'Abduh's work and the Bahā'ī writings produced decades earlier, however, have not been investigated and warrant an independent study. There are, for example, similarities between 'Abduh's views on the *mutashābihāt* verses of the Qur'an,⁵¹⁶ and those expressed by Bahā'u'llāh in his 1862 work, the *Kitāb-i īqān*.⁵¹⁷ There are also some similarities between 'Abdu'l-Bahā's views on the adoption of Western modernity by Muslim societies as expressed in his 1875 work, *Risālah-i madanīyah*⁵¹⁸ and 'Abduh's stance on the

⁵¹³ See *al-Ahrām* 18 January 1896.

⁵¹⁴ See Amin Banani, "Some Reflections on Juan Cole's Modernity and the Millennium," *Bahā'ī Studies Review* Vol. 9 (1999/2000), available at <http://bahai-library.com/bsr/bsr09/9C1_soundings.htm>. Accessed June 8th, 2010. Banani indirectly quotes 'Abduh's words in that letter, "saying that meeting with 'Abdu'l-Bahā' was more beneficial than seeing the greatest of philosophers, that he had never come across anyone with the intelligence, wisdom and vast knowledge of 'Abdu'l-Bahā', that he seemed to know the secrets of hearts and could respond to inmost questions, that it was evident that the holy spirit dwelled in him, and that his knowledge was innate and his power divine."

⁵¹⁵ For a study comparing 'Abdu'l-Bahā' and 'Abduh, see Oliver Scharbrodt, *Islam and the Bahā'ī Faith: A Comparative Study of Muḥammad 'Abduh and 'Abdu'l-Bahā' Abbas* (London: Routledge, 2008).

⁵¹⁶ See *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. s.v. "Muḥammad 'Abduh."

⁵¹⁷ Bahā'u'llāh, *Kitāb-i īqān* (Hofheim: Bahā'ī Verlag, 1998).

⁵¹⁸ 'Abdu'l-Bahā', *al-Risālah al-madanīya*, 2nd ed. (Cairo:1911).

proper reaction of Muslims who “favored an inner assimilation of western civilisation, without abandoning the fundamental Muslim ideas and a synthesis of the two factors.”⁵¹⁹

In contrast to his teacher and mentor, Rashīd Riḏā was strongly and consistently antagonistic toward the Bahā'īs.⁵²⁰ Riḏā admired Wahhābism and had far more radical views than his teacher.⁵²¹ Not only did he not share 'Abduh's favorable views about 'Abdu'l-Bahā', he went as far as to deny that 'Abduh had ever expressed anything positive about the Bahā'ī sect or its leader.⁵²² His critique of Bahā'īs appears in the context of his rejection of allegorical interpretation (*ta'wīl*) in his Qur'anic commentary, *Tafsīr al-manār*. Parallel to Afghānī's critique of Bahā'īs as *Baṭīnīs*,⁵²³ Riḏā maintained that “Baṭīnī groups claim that no one understood the Qur'an during or after its revelation. Rather, God promised its *ta'wīl* and [they believe that] we must wait for the person God will raise up or send with this *ta'wīl*.”⁵²⁴ Bābism is the most recent Baṭīnī sect that has appeared and claims that the Bāb is that promised one God sent to bring the Qur'an's *ta'wīl*. Among the Bābīs are Bahā'īs who say that no, this promised figure is

⁵¹⁹ See *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. s.v. “Muḥammad ‘Abduh.”

⁵²⁰ See Juan R.I. Cole, “Rashīd Riḏā on the Bahā'ī Faith: A Utilitarian Theory of the Spread of Religions,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 5,3 (Summer 1983):276-291.

⁵²¹ Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism*, 90-91.

⁵²² See William McCants, “‘I never Understood any of that from ‘Abbās Effendī’: Muḥammad ‘Abduh’s Knowledge of the Bahā'ī Teachings and the Friendship with ‘Abdu'l-Bahā’ ‘Abbās,” in *Studies in Modern Religions, Religious Movements and the Bābī-Bahā'ī Faiths*, ed. Moshe Sharon (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 275-297. On the relationship between 'Abduh, Rashī Riḏā and the Bahā'ī faith, see also, Moojan Momen, “Bahā'ī Influence on the Reform Movements of the Islamic World in the 1860s and 1870s,” *Bahā'ī Studies Bulletin*, 2:2 (1983): 47-65.

⁵²³ See Chapter one.

⁵²⁴ The verse of the Qur'an that Baṭīnī groups interpret as such is Qur'an 7:53: “Do they look for aught else but its interpretation? The day its interpretation comes, those who before forgot it shall say, 'Indeed, our Lord's Messengers came with the truth. Have we then any intercessors to intercede for us, or shall we be returned, to do other than that we have done?' They have indeed lost their souls, and that which they were forging has gone astray from them.” (Arberry translation)

Bahā'u'llāh.” Riḏā then recounts his own discussion with a Bahā'ī “missionary.”⁵²⁵ He rejected the Bahā'ī understanding of *ta'wīl* as something that became revealed when God sent a new messenger. Rather, Riḏā contended that the Qur'an's *ta'wīl* is found in the book itself. All of the Qur'an is comprehensible. If some of it seems confusing to certain people, there are others who will know the meaning.⁵²⁶ As we will see, Riḏā's criticism of Bahā'ī allegorical interpretation is reflected in the works of the Iranian reformist theologians under discussion.

5. Salafīs and Azalīs

The close association between Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī and two prominent Azalīs, Mīrzā Aghā Khān Kirmānī and Shaykh Aḥmad Rūḥī, persisted among their heirs, the reformist theologians and the next generation of Azalī leaders. Anti-Bahā'ism and the use of Islam to achieve political aims were at the core of this collaboration. It seems that the Azalīs who practiced dissimulation (*taqīyah*)⁵²⁷ found a most able ally in the Muslim reformist theologians. The historical background of collaboration between their intellectual ancestors, their common disdain for the traditionalist Shī'ī clerics, and their shared negative attitudes about Bahā'īs served as the catalysts for this collaboration. The project of mobilizing the Shī'ī clerics for revolutionary political activities led by Azalīs as early as the Constitutional Movement was in line with the political Islamic ideology advocated by the reformist theologians from the 1930s onward.

⁵²⁵ This is most likely, a reference to Mīrzā Abū al-Faḍl Gulpāyigānī who lived intermittently in Cairo from the mid-1890s until his death in that city in 1914. Gulpāyigānī wrote a commentary on Qur'an 75:19: “Then it is ours to explain it.” See Mīrzā Abū'l-Faḍl Gulpāyigānī, *Miracles and Metaphors*, trans. Juan Ricardo Cole (Los Angeles: Kalimāt Press, 1981), pp. 49-58.

⁵²⁶ See *Tafsir al-manār*, part 3, p. 175. Available online: <http://www.archive.org/details/tfseer_manar>.

⁵²⁷ See the addendum to chapter 4 in this dissertation.

On the association of Azalīs and reformist theologians, it can be added that Muḥammad Ḥusayn Furūghī Zūkā' al-Mulk (d.1907) was a great supporter of 'Abduh. In a 1325Q/1907 issue of his newspaper *Tarbīyat*, he praised 'Abduh for having “penetrated the spirit of Islam and [having] made its principles applicable to the needs of our time.”⁵²⁸ What Zūkā' al-Mulk's son, Abū al-Ḥasan Furūghī,⁵²⁹ wrote in the concluding paragraph of his introduction to *Tahrīr al-'uqalā'*, might be regarded as textual evidence for collaboration between Azalīs and the reformist ulama.⁵³⁰ Referring to Najmābādī as “one of the men preparing the way for the awakening of Iran (*bīdārī-i Iran*) and the launch of an Islamic movement (*nihẓat-i Islam*),” his stated purpose in writing was “so that those wandering astray on the path of modernity (*gumrāhān-i ṭarīq-i tajaddud*) may be saved from error (*ẓalālāt*).” However, Furūghī postpones the task of “investigating the subject of modernity in religious and mundane affairs (*taḥqīq dar amr-i tajaddud-i umūr-i dīn va dunyā*).”⁵³¹ It is safe to assume that by *nihẓat-i Islam*, Furūghī is referring to the Islamic reform movement, i.e., *iṣlāḥ*. Insofar as “awakening” (*bīdārī*) and “the ones awakened” (*bīdārān*) are terms used by Azalīs to refer to their creed and to themselves,⁵³² it may be that in pairing these terms with *nihẓat-i Islam*, Furūghī is alluding to the collaboration between Azalīs and reformist scholars.

⁵²⁸ Quoted in Uṣmān Amīn, *Muḥammad 'Abduh* (Cairo: 1944), 230. Cited in Amīr 'Abbās Haydarī, “Some Aspects of Islam in Modern Iran, with Special Reference to the Work of Sangalajī and Rāshid,” (MA thesis, McGill University, 1954), 74.

⁵²⁹ See the section on Najmābādī *Tahrīr al-'uqalā'* in chapter one. He is the son of the first Zūkā' al-Mulk, and the brother of the second. See Chahārdahī's reference to him in the addendum to chapter 4.

⁵³⁰ For Furūghī's introduction to *Tahrīr al-'uqalā'*, see the section on Najmābādī in chapter one.

⁵³¹ Furūghī, introduction, p. *law*.

⁵³² This has been proposed by the independent scholar Tūraj Amīnī. See Tūraj Amīnī, “*Khwāb-i tārikhī dar tārikh-i bīdārī*,” *Guftmān-i Iran* (25 Khurdād 1386/15 June 2007) <http://www.goftman-iran4.info/-othermenu-13/670> (accessed 9 June 2008).

Furūghī wrote his introduction in 1933, i.e., in the midst of Riḏā Shah’s vigorous modernization programs. His intent to save “those who are wandering astray on the path of modernity” by elucidating that what is meant by “Islamic movement” (*nihẓat-i Islam*) and “modernity in religion” seem to be calls for adopting reformed Islam (*iṣlāḥ*) rather than irreligion under the rubric of modernity. Furūghī’s remarks might also be understood by his own liminal identity and the prevalence of such liminality among the thinkers of his time. Before moving on to the next section, it must be added here that the case of Abū al-Ḥasan Furūghī himself is particularly significant in this study, since two of the later major figures in twentieth century political Islam are said to have been his students: Mahdī Bāzargān (d. 1995) and ‘Alī Sharī‘atī (d. 1977).⁵³³

Afghānī’s association with two prominent Azalīs, Mīrzā Aqā Khān Kirmānī and Shaykh Aḥmad Rūḥī continued, as we shall see, with Kharaghānī and the Azalī activists of the Constitutional Revolution, and passed on to Shaykh Ibrāhīm Zanjānī. He was an advocate of *iṣlāḥ* and shared the main lines of thought of the reformist theologians under discussion, and Zakā al-Mulk Furūghī, and Ḥājj Sayyāḥ Maḥallātī were all known Azalīs.⁵³⁴ Later, another co-thinker of Zanjānī, Muḥammad-Taqī Ḥijāzī⁵³⁵ and the Azalī scholar and writer Muḥammad Muḥit Ṭabāṭabā‘ī were in close association.⁵³⁶

⁵³³ For Ayatollah Ṭālighānī having been Furūghī’s student, see Pūyā K. and Maryam Ḥusnkhāh, “Guftigūy-i Sharqīyān bā Ḥasan Yūsufī Ishkavarī, Part 2,” *Sharqīyān*, Khurdād 4, 1384 (May 25, 2005), <http://www.sharghian.com/mag2/archive/005964.html> (accessed 9 January 2008). Ishkavarī calls Abū al-Ḥasan Furūghī “the father of Iranian religious intellectualism,” and quotes Bāzargān as having said that he learned how to read the Qur’an from his teacher, Furūghī. According to Ishkavarī, Sharī‘atī frequented Furūghī’s class in 1949-50.

⁵³⁴ See note 105 in chapter 5 on *The Confessions of Dolgurūki*, see also the addendum B to chapter 4 on Azalīs.

⁵³⁵ On Ḥijāzī’s thought, see the chapter five.

⁵³⁶ For contacts and collaboration between Muḥammad Muḥit Ṭabāṭabā‘ī and Muḥammad-Taqī Ḥijāzī, see Muḥammad Muḥit Ṭabāṭabā‘ī, *Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Asadābādī va bīdārī-i mashriq zamīn*, with an introduction by Hādī Khusraw-Shāhī (Tehran: Daftar-i Nashr-i Farhang-i Islāmī, 1991).

This collaboration led to sometimes identifying one of these theologians as Azalī, as we will see in the case of Sayyid Asad Allāh Kharaqānī, and as has been the case with Shaykh Ibrāhīm Zanjānī who a contemporary historian of the Constitutional Revolutions refers to as being a co-religionist of Zūkā' al-Mulk.⁵³⁷

II. Sayyid Asad Allāh Kharaqānī (1217-1315/1838-1936)

Kharaqānī is an important figure among the reformist theologians because of his influence on the thought of the other Shī'ī reformists who followed him. To appreciate his importance for Shī'ī religio-political thought in the twentieth century, it suffices to recall that the prominent reformist, Sharī'at Sangalajī,⁵³⁸ attended Kharaqānī's lectures and would follow in the latter's intellectual footsteps, at least in matters related to the Qur'an and its interpretation.⁵³⁹ Ayatollah Ṭāliqānī, the second most important spiritual leader of the revolution in 1979 is said to have been influenced by Kharaqānī⁵⁴⁰ to the extent that he introduced, edited and published one of the latter's most significant works, *Maḥw al-mawhūm wa ṣaḥw al-ma'lūm* [The Nullification of Idle Speculation and the Realization of the Object of Real Knowledge] posthumously in 1339/1960.⁵⁴¹ This book in turn inspired Qalamdārān, who in 1344/1965, wrote *Ḥukūmat dar Islam* (Governance in Islam), one of the first monographs on the subject to be written in twentieth-century Iran. Miḥdī Bāzargān, one of the major figures of the Islamic

⁵³⁷ Ḥusayn Ābādiyān, *Buḥrān-i mashrūṭiyat dar Iran* (Tehran: Mu'assisah-i Muṭālī'āt va Pazhūhish'hā-yi Iran, 2004), 205.

⁵³⁸ See the section on Sangalajī.

⁵³⁹ See Rasūl Ja'farīyān, *Jaryān'ha va sāzmān'hā-yi mazhabī-siyāsī-yi Iran: az rūy-i kār āmadan-i Muhammad Rizā Shah tā pirūzī-i inqilāb-i islāmī*, 1320-1357. 6th rep. (Qum: 1385/2006), 706.

⁵⁴⁰ See Ja'farīyān, *Jaryān'ha*, 709, 711.

⁵⁴¹ Sayyid Asad Allāh Musavī Mīr Islāmī Kharaqānī, *Maḥw al-mawhūm wa ṣaḥw al-ma'lūm*, with an introduction by Sayyid Maḥmūd Ṭāliqānī (n.p: Ghulām-Ḥusayn Khamsahpūr, n.d.). The introduction written by is dated 1339/1960.

Revolution would later draw upon Qalamdārān's book in writing his monograph, *Bi'sat va ideology* (The Rise of the Prophet and Ideology).⁵⁴²

Despite such influences, Kharaqānī has been marginalized in the intellectual history of twentieth-century Iran, a fact that owes as much perhaps to his unorthodox views as to the critical stance he espoused vis-à-vis the mainstream Shī'ī ulama. A rather recently published monograph in Persian and an article in German have begun the process of redressing this disregard.⁵⁴³

A. Kharaqānī's Life History

Kharaqānī received his religious education in Tehran and Najaf where he obtained his degree for *ijtihād*, permitting him to issue legal verdicts on the basis of his knowledge of the Qur'an and hadith. In Tehran, he was one of "an elite circle of" disciples [*az khavāṣṣ*] who studied under Shaykh Hādī Najmābadī (1250/1834-1320/1902),⁵⁴⁴ himself a religious figure who crisscrossed ideological and confessional barriers and could not be assigned an essentialist identity.

At this stage, Kharaqānī was accused of being a Bābī.⁵⁴⁵ The reasons for this remain unknown. Perhaps it was due to the training he received at the hands of Najmābadī who had been rumored to be a Bābī and was announced to be an infidel by the well-known nineteenth-

⁵⁴² Mahdī Bāzargān, *Bi'sat va ideology* (Mashhad: Ṭulū', n.d.) For Kharaqānī's influence on Qalamdārān, and Qalamdārān on Bāzargān see Ja'fariyān, *Jaryān'ha*, 725-26.

⁵⁴³ Rasūl Ja'fariyān, *Sayyid Asad Allāh Kharqānī, rawhanī-yi nawgarā-yi rūzigār-i mashrūṭah va Rizā Shāh* (Tehran: Markaz-i asnād-i inqilāb-i Islāmī, 1382/2003); Reza Hajatpour, *Iranische Geistlichkeit zwischen Utopie und Realismus Zum Diskurs über Herrschafts- und Staatsdenken im 20. Jh.* (Germany: Reichert Verlag Wiesbaden, 2002).

⁵⁴⁴ See the section on Najmābadī.

⁵⁴⁵ 'Ayn al-Saltānah, *Khāṭirāt-i 'Ayn al- Saltānah*. Edited by Iraj Afshar, and Manṣūr Salur Vol. 9 (Tehran: 1379/2000), 6807.

century Tehran *mujtahid*, Sayyid Ṣādiq Ṭabāṭābaʿī,⁵⁴⁶ or perhaps his friendship with Yaḥyá Dawlatābādī, who was known as an Azalī-Bābī.⁵⁴⁷ Perhaps he had a genuine predilection for Bābism, or perhaps it was owed to what Ranajit Guha calls “the prose of counter-insurgency,” a counter-discourse that in the case of Qajar Iran sought to isolate the Constitutionalists by depicting them as “enemies of Islam.”

B. Kharaqānī as a political activist

Whatever the case may have been with the aforementioned accusation, it is known that as a political activist, Kharaqānī was a member of a revolutionary group secretly formed in the very early stages of the Constitutional Movement. The majority of the members of this group had at times espoused an Azalī-Bābī identity even though publicly most continued to identify themselves as Shīʿī clerics.⁵⁴⁸ Kharaqānī was elected to the central committee of this group and later charged with two others to travel to the Shīʿī seminary in Najaf and enlist the backing and support of the *ḥawza*’s most prominent ulama for the Constitutional Movement.⁵⁴⁹ However, following the Constitutional Revolution, and despite his election as a member of the parliament, Kharaqānī’s position on the revolution changed dramatically. He grew disappointed with what he perceived to be the “anti-religious” nature of Iranian

⁵⁴⁶ See: Edward G. Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1909* (1910; repr., London: Frank & Cass, 1966), 406.

⁵⁴⁷ On the close association of Yaḥyá Dawlatābādī and Kharaqānī see Dawlatābādī, *Ḥayāt-i Yaḥyá*, 1:59-60. On Dawlatābādī being an Azalī see the addendum to chapter 4.

⁵⁴⁸ On the Azalī identity of these Constitutionalists, see: Abbas Amanat, “Memory and Amnesia in the Historiography of the Constitutional Revolution,” in *Iran in the 20th Century: Historiography and Political Culture*, edited by Touraj Atabaki (London: I.B. Tauris and Iran Heritage Foundation, 2009), 23-54.

⁵⁴⁹ See Mahdī Malikzādāh, *Tarikh-i inqilāb-i mashrūtiyyat-i Iran* (Tehran: Sukhan, 1383/2004), 1:236-45.

Constitutionalism. He declared the movement a failure and maintained that it had been contrived all along by foreign elements (*ajānib*).⁵⁵⁰

C. Kharaqānī as a Theologian

Following his disappointment at the Constitutional Revolution, Kharaqānī began writing his ideas as a Muslim theologian and political theorist. The most striking characteristic of his political theory was his constant reference to the first forty years of Islamic history as the ideal state to recreate. For Kharaqānī, the Qur'an and the Sunna⁵⁵¹ constituted the main sources for rediscovering Islamic teachings and values in all their authenticity and richness. Kharaqānī held that the equality of human rights was originally an Islamic concept,⁵⁵² and based his political theory on what he called "Islamic Democracy," which he believed embodied the spirit of the first forty years of Islamic history. His views on political authority were markedly different from the prevalent Shī'ī ideas of his time. A prominent example was his understanding of *ulu al-amr* [those who are charged or invested with authority], an expression from Qur'an 4:59, referring in this verse to those whom the believers must obey, besides God and the Prophet. While Shī'ī orthodoxy interprets the locution *ulu al-amr* in this verse – which has obvious implications for religious and political authority in Islam – as applying to the Imams, Kharaqānī believed it referred to the elected Muslim rulers. As such, he was closer in his political orientation to Sunni Islam than Shī'ī sm.⁵⁵³ He also believed that the divisive and pivotal matter of the Prophet's successor was ultimately an inconsequential issue that belonged to the distant past and should be forgotten in favor of the pressing need for Muslim

⁵⁵⁰ Ja'farīyān, *Sayyid Asad Allāh Kharaqānī*, 38, 40, 66.

⁵⁵¹ "Sunna" is the generally approved standard or practice introduced by the Prophet as well as the pious Muslims of olden days. See Encyclopaedia Islam, 2nd ed., s.v. "Islah."

⁵⁵² Sayyid Asad Allāh Kharaqānī, "Risālah-yi Rawḥ al-tamaddun va huwīyyat al-Islam," in Ja'farīyān, *Sayyid Asad Allāh Kharaqānī*, 152. This Risālah was written in 1335Q / 1296sh / 1917.

⁵⁵³ Kharaqānī, *Maḥw al-mawhum* 37-41, 285-93 and passim.

unity.⁵⁵⁴ He goes on to criticize the ulama for not having (re)presented authentic Islam over the centuries.⁵⁵⁵ However, he gives the “glad tidings” that “Islamic politics will finally prevail in Iran,”⁵⁵⁶ an assertion whose at least psychological influence cannot be ignored.

Like the Salafī thinkers,⁵⁵⁷ Kharaqānī rejected the idea of there being many allegorical (*mutishabihat*) verses in the Qur’ān. He claimed that it was only the disconnected letters at the beginning of some of the chapters of the Qur’ān that are allegorical and hence require esoteric interpretation (*ta’wīl*) – an interpretation known only by God. He also rejected the validity of those *aḥādīs* that support an allegorical understanding of some verses, specifically rejecting the validity of a *ḥadīṣ* ascribed to the sixth Shī‘ī Imam and quoted in a major Bahā’ī text indicating seventy-one different esoteric meanings for each word of holy scripture.⁵⁵⁸ In so doing, he attempted to close the door to an allegorical interpretation of the eschatological and apocalyptic verses of the Qur’ān on which the founders of Bābī-Bahā’ī religions based many of their claims.⁵⁵⁹

D. Kharghani as an Ecumenist

Kharaqānī’s ecumenism differed from the nineteenth century Pan-Islamism of Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Afqānī, which was politically motivated by and directed against (British) imperialism. For Kharaqānī, the formation of a united Islamic front, like that which in his mind existed in the first forty years of the religion, was necessary to strengthen Muslims in the

⁵⁵⁴ Kharaqānī, *Maḥw al-mawhum* 78-79. Furthermore, he maintained that the Twelfth Imam was invested with an authority limited strictly to legislative matters (*vilayt-i tashri’i*), and not a comprehensive universal authority that is both existential and generative (*vilayat-i takvini*). For Kharaqānī’s view on this issue see Kharaqānī, *Maḥw al-mawhum* 32-33.

⁵⁵⁵ Kharaqānī, *Maḥw al-mawhum* 34.

⁵⁵⁶ Kharaqānī, “Risālah-yi Rawḥ al- tamaddun va huwiyyat al-Islam.”

⁵⁵⁷ See the introduction to this chapter.

⁵⁵⁸ Kharaqānī, *Risālah nubuwwat-i khaṣṣah va abadīyyat-i Islam va ḥimāsaḥ bā adiyān* (Tehran: Dānish, 1312/1933), 18. The *ḥadīṣ* is quoted in Bahā’u’llāh, *The Kitāb-i Iqān*, 169.

⁵⁵⁹ Kharaqānī, *Maḥw al-mawhum*; Kharaqānī, *Risālah nubuwwat-i khaṣṣah*, 6, 11-12, 18, 19, 116.

battle against its multiple “Others”, namely, “*ajanib*”⁵⁶⁰ “the followers of old religions, new religions, the materialists, and naturalists.” These constituted the forces of unbelief (*kufṛ*)⁵⁶¹ that were marshalled against the forces of Islam. Embodying the dominant world view of the Iranian Islamists of his time, his categorization of all the sects (*firaq*) of Muslims in one group, as opposed to all the different “Others” together in another is an example of what Laclau refers to as the logic of equivalence. This was the constructing of a chain of equivalential identities among different elements that are seen as expressing a certain sameness⁵⁶²—in this case “enmity to Islam.” As such, Kharaqānī’s categorization of the new religions together with the foreign powers, as the threats to Islam, can be regarded as the prelude to an attitude that would crystallize later on in the century – one which cast Bahā’īs as the internal Other in conspiratorial connection with the external Other.

Kharaqānī’s ecumenism also differed from that of the prominent intellectuals of Salafism, and in particular, Rashīd Riḏā. While Riḏā declared the Shī’a to be extremists (*ghulah*)⁵⁶³ and opposed the call of Sunni ecumenists to accept Shī’ism as the fifth legal school of Islam, in a book that can best be described as a subtle anti-Bābī anti-Bahā’ī polemic, Kharaqānī distanced the Shī’a from the accusation of extremism (*ghulūw*) by projecting the same label on Bābīs and Bahā’īs,⁵⁶⁴ and in so doing casting mainstream Twelver Shī’ism in the role of the orthodoxy and effecting a rapprochement between it and Sunnism.

⁵⁶⁰ Kharaqānī, *Maḥw al-mawhum* 2.

⁵⁶¹ Kharaqānī, *Maḥw al-mawhum* 2-3, see also 34.

⁵⁶² See Jacob Torfing, *New theories of Discourse : Laclau, Mouffe, and Zizek* (Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 301.

⁵⁶³ Rashīd Riḏā, “*Al-Bāṭiniyah wa-ākhīr firaqihim, al-Bābīyah wa al-Bahā’īyah.*” *al-Manār* 13 (2 December, 1910): 833-40; (10 January, 1914): 922-32. Here quoted from Cole, “Rashid Rida on the Bahā’ī Faith,” 13.

⁵⁶⁴ Kharaqānī, *Risālah nubuwwat-i khaṣṣah*, 5. Kharaqānī wrote this book, in order to prove “the falsity of those who claim to have brought a new religion.” Ibid. p 3. It can be easily imagined he wrote this book in reaction to the

Iranian religious modernity in the early decades of the twentieth century was a result of the crisscrossing of orthodoxies and heterodoxies which provided multiple scenarios of self-refashioning. Its study has to go far beyond the binary opposition between “true Muslims” and infidels and even between Shī‘ī and Sunni. The liminal identity of Kharaqānī showed the difficulty of assigning essentialist identities to the bearers of reformist ideas -- ideas which were considered heretical at the time of their expression, only to be co-opted later to constitute the leading ideology of the dominant political discourse.

III. *Sharī‘at Sangalajī*

Mīrzā Rizā Qulī (1890 or 1892-1944),⁵⁶⁵ known as Sharī‘at Sangalajī (a combination of his surname Sharī‘at⁵⁶⁶ and his birth place, the Sangilaj⁵⁶⁷ quarter in Tehran), was one of the most controversial and influential reformist theologians of his time, yet remains one of the least studied figures of the modern period.⁵⁶⁸ His father and grandfather were both clerics, and the

rumor that he was a Bābī, or may be, as a result of a conversion back to Islam after having actually been a Bābī for some time.

⁵⁶⁵ There has been a problem with recording the first name of this theologian. Allāyār Ṣālah refers to him as “Muḥammad Ḥasan.” Allāyār Ṣālah, *Marg-i buz, Āyandah* No. 9-10 XI (Āzar-Day 1364/Nov. 1985-Jan. 1986), 687. However, in a corrective note written by Ṣālah’s nephew, we are told that his name was Mīrzā Rizā Qulī. Muḥammad Ḥasan Sharīf al-Dīn Mashkūr, “Nām va nasab-i marḥūm Sharī‘at Sangalajī,” *Āyandah* No. 1-3 XII (Farvardīn-Khurdād 1365/March-June 1986), 73. Yann Richard records his name as Mīrzā Rizā Qulī. Yann Richard, “Sharī‘at Sangalajī: A Reformist Theologian,” in Said Amir Arjomand, ed. *Authority and Political Culture in Shi‘ism* (New York: State University of New York, 1988), 159-177 (see page 161). Ja‘fariyān suggests that it was either Muḥammad Ḥasan or Ghulām Rizā. Ja‘fariyān, *Jaryān’hā* 706. They both share the uncertainty over the year of his birth.

⁵⁶⁶ This surname was given to him by Ayatollah Āqā Sayyid Muḥammad-Kāẓim Yazdī in Najaf after Sangalajī completed his first book whose title is not known. Mashkūr, “Nām va nasab-i marḥūm,” 73; Richard, *Sharī‘at Sangalajī*, 162. At least one source maintains that the epithet was given to Sangalajī by Ayatollah Nā‘inī, without providing a source for this statement. Farhang Rajaei, *Islamism and Modernism: The Changing Discourse in Iran* (Austin: University of Texas, 2007), 49.

⁵⁶⁷ Dihkhudā states that the name of the quarter in Tehran is pronounced Sangilaj; however, he also states that the surname is pronounced Sangalajī. He does not provide an explanation for the discrepancy in pronunciation. See *Lughatnāmah-yi dihhudā*, s.v. “Sangilaj” and “Ḥasan Sangalajī.”

⁵⁶⁸ The scholarship on Sangalajī in English is scant. In 1954 a Master’s thesis was written on him, but was never published: Amir Abbas Haydari, “Some Aspects of Islam in Modern Iran, with Special Reference to the Work of Sangalajī and Rāshid” (MA thesis, McGill University, 1954). In 1988, the above mentioned article by Yann Richard was published. In recent years, Farhang Rajaei has devoted a couple of pages to discussing Sangalajī in his *Islamism and Modernism: The Changing Discourse in Iran* (Austin: University of Texas, 2007), 49-50. There is also a very short article on him in *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, s.v. “Sangalaji, Mirza Riza Quli Shariat.” See also, Ja‘fariyān,

well known anti-Constitutionalist cleric, Shaykh Faḡl Allāh Nūrī (d. 1909), was his father's cousin. He was trained by a number of Shī'ī clerics in Iran, including Sayyid Asad Allāh Kharaqānī (d. 1936),⁵⁶⁹ before travelling to Najaf where he remained for four years (from 1917-1921).⁵⁷⁰ Upon returning to Iran, while retaining the garb of a Shī'ī cleric, he began to express radical reformist ideas for which he was strongly criticized and even anathematized by most of his fellow clerics. Others praised him as the "Great Reformist" (*muṣliḥ-i kabīr*) and he enjoyed a cordial relationship with Riḡā Shah,⁵⁷¹ even during the later stages of the latter's reign when the monarch curtailed the power of the clerics. He was also treated favorably by the young Muḡammad Riḡā Shah who reportedly summoned Sangalajī and his two brothers to the imperial palace for consultations shortly after ascending the throne.⁵⁷²

Sangalajī publicly shared his views during weekly talks at his *Dār al-tablīgh-i islāmī* (Center for Islamic Propaganda). These talks were mainly attended by army officers, governmental employees, and at times by merchants of the bazaar or seminary students.⁵⁷³ *Dār al-tablīgh-i*

Jaryān'ha, 706-710; *Vahhabīyat va rīshahā-yi ān* (Tehran: Faḡhī, 1363), 159-197 and passim; Iḡsān Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'ah-i Iran dar dawrān-i Riḡā Shāh* (n.p: 1356), 111-115; Nāṣir al-Dīn Ṣāḡib al-Zamānī, *Dībāchah-i bar rahbarī* (Tehran: 'Aṭā'ī, 1347/1968), 133-137, 139-141.

⁵⁶⁹ His other teachers were Mīrzā Ḥasan Kirmānshāhī, Ḥājj Shaykh Mukallim Nūrī, and Mīrzā Ḥāshim Ishkavarī. Ja'fariyan, *Jariyān'hā*, 706. Yūsufī Ishkavarī mentions him as among the students of Shaykh Ḥādī Najmābādī.

⁵⁷⁰ Richard, "Sharī'at Sangalajī," 162. Muḡammad Javād Mashkūr mentions that Sangalajī became attracted to Wahhabī ideas during his pilgrimage to Mecca. Ja'fariyān, *Jariyān'hā* 706.

⁵⁷¹ Apparently, in 1917, Sangalajī and his father presided over the wedding of Riḡā Khan (soon to be Riḡā Shah). Riḡā Shah had good relations with Sangalajī and Kharaqānī, but was also on good terms with the high-ranking traditional cleric, Mīrzā Muḡammad Ḥusayn Nā'inī. See Richard, "Sharī'at Sangalajī," 162.

⁵⁷² See Richard, "'Sharī'at Sangalajī," 165-166.

⁵⁷³ Chahārdahī, *Vahhabīyat va rīshah'hā-yi ān*, 160, 174. Some very educated youth of the time also attended his talks. For example, the later minister and ambassador Allāyār Ṣālah refers to a philosophical statement he heard from Sangalajī. Allāyār Ṣālah, *Marg-i buz*, 687.

islāmī was an unusual religious center. In contrast to the mosques, it had no minaret,⁵⁷⁴ was furnished with chairs, and had a special hall for women to gather.⁵⁷⁵

In this section, I will carefully study Sangalajī's thought, not only because he is an important figure in the development of the intellectual history of Islam in twentieth century Iran who has remained largely ignored, but also because anti-Bahā'ism played a determining role in the development of his main ideas. The influence of anti-Bahā'ism in forming the ideas of Muslim theologians is perhaps nowhere better demonstrated than in his work. Moreover, I will also argue that he appropriated several key Bahā'ī concepts and practices.

1. *Islam va raj'at*: Transforming theology to undermine Bahā'ī legitimacy

Among the ideas found in Sharī'at Sangalajī's works, the most radical is his rejection of the concept of "Return" (Arabic: *raj'ah*, Persian: *raj'at*). This radical view was adopted mainly to undermine the very foundation of the Bābī-Bahā'ī religions. I will study his thought on this subject in detail in this section, both because anti-Bahā'ism was at the core of the ideas he advanced and because his thoughts were nowhere more innovative and controversial.

The Shī'ī doctrine of *raj'at* stipulates that after the appearance (*ẓuhūr*) of the Twelfth Imam or the Qā'im, and before the Resurrection (*qiyāmah*), both the righteous (*nīkān*) and the wicked (*badān*) will return to the world, the former to be rewarded and the latter to be punished. The rest of humanity will remain in their graves until the Day of Resurrection.⁵⁷⁶ According to the

⁵⁷⁴ "Imitating the Wahhābī mosque," Richard states that it was "without minaret." Richard, "Sharī'at Sangalajī," 164.

⁵⁷⁵ On Sangalajī's *Dār al-tablīgh* see Chahārdahī, *Vahhābīyat va rīshah'hā-yi ān*, 161-164, Richard, "Sharī'at Sangalajī," 164.

⁵⁷⁶ The definition is from Majlis in *Ḥaqq al-yaqīn*, vol. 2, pages 335. Cited in 'Abbās Ḥājjiyānī Dashtī, *Majlis shab'hā-yi shanbah, bayānāt-i Ḥaẓrat-i Ayatollah Āqā-yi Ḥājj Taqī Ṭabāṭabā'ī pīrāmūn-i raj'at va dīgar maṭālib-i arzandah* (n.p. 1416), 69. On the Shī'ī doctrine of *raj'a*, see also *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. "Raj'a" and "Eschatology iii. In Imami Shi'ism."

prominent Ṣafavid scholar Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī⁵⁷⁷ (d. 1699), there is consensus over the validity (*ḥaqqīyat*) of *rajʿat* among all of the pre-modern Shīʿī scholars (e.g., Shaykh Bābūyah, Shaykh Muḥīd, Shaykh Murtaẓā, Shaykh Ṭabrisī and Ibn Ṭāwūs). Moreover, many ulama and traditionists (*muḥaddithūn*) have written treatises exclusively on this issue.⁵⁷⁸ Majlisī’s explanation of *rajʿat* helps us appreciate the radical and shocking nature of Sangalajī’s rejection of this fundamental Shīʿī doctrine.

Sangalajī’s ideas on *rajʿat* appeared in his work, *Islam va rajʿat*.⁵⁷⁹ Although it was published under the name of one of his disciples, a certain ‘Abd al-Wahhāb Farīd, *Islam va rajʿat* was a declaration of Sangalajī’s own ideas. Some have suggested that the real author was Sangalajī himself.⁵⁸⁰ On the cover page, there is a note praising the “bounty of security, freedom, development, and advancement of science and knowledge” during the time of Rizā Shāh, and an invitation for the readers’ criticism of its own content. The introduction to *Islam va rajʿat* is an important document reflecting all of the intricacies of adopting elements of reformist thought seasoned with strong anti-Bahāʿī flavor. By projecting the reformist anti-Shīʿī or anti-extremist (*ẓidd-i ghulāt*) criticism on Bahāʿīs, these reformist theologians sought to “cleanse” Iranian Shīʿism of the content of superstitions (*khurāfāt*). As we will see, such adoption and projection played a vital role in the struggle to promote rapprochement between Shīʿa and Sunnis.

The introduction begins by mentioning the superstitions (*khurāfāt*) currently afflicting Islam as the reason why people “have lost interest” in the religion and the reason why Islam

⁵⁷⁷ See *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Maḍjilisī, Mullā Muḥammad Bāqir.”

⁵⁷⁸ Majlis, *Ḥaqq al-yaqīn*, 2:335. Cited in Dashtī, *Majlis shab’hā-yi shanbah*, 68.

⁵⁷⁹ ‘Abd al-Wahhāb Farīd, *Islam va rajʿat* (n.d, n.p). The introduction is dated 15 Jumādā II, 1355Q (1315/1936). Jaʿfariyān has it as Tehran, 1318. Jaʿfariyān, *Jaryān’hā*, 707.

⁵⁸⁰ Nūr al-Dīn Chahardahī emphasizes that Farīd—one of the students (*tullāb*) at the Qum seminary—was not at a knowledge level to be able to write that book, and the style and language is “certainly Sharīʿat’s himself.” Chahardahī, *Vahhābīyat*, 175.

has deviated from its “original (*avvalīyah*) pristine form,” and hindered its own progress. While pristine Islam, the author laments, promoted “the law of renewal and the acquisition [of knowledge]” (*tajaddud va iqtibās*), Muslims are now drowning in a sea of “ignorant imitation” (*taqlīd-i jāhilānah*). The book seeks to separate Islam from the superstitions that have afflicted it, particularly the issue of *raj‘at* which “has opened the door for unfounded (*bāṭilah*) claims of mischievous (*shayyād*) people, paved the way for new religions to be manufactured, especially in Iran, and inflicted harm on Shī‘ism.”⁵⁸¹ This last sentence is a clear indication that the rejection of *raj‘at* was aimed at undermining the very base in the Shī‘ī ethos on which the Bābī, and by extension, Bahā‘ī religions built their foundation. The author then explains that the book contains talks delivered by Sangalajī in the preceding years in his teaching institute (*Dār al-tablīgh*) on the theme of *raj‘at*. He closes the introduction with a statement that highlights how the desire to get close to the Egyptian (Salafī) critics of Shī‘ism informs the theological positions presented in the book, particularly the rejection of *raj‘at*. He is discussing these issues in order to let their brothers in Egypt and other Islamic countries, who have attacked the Shī‘a on the issues of *raj‘at* and *ghulāt* [SIC, he means *ghuluvv*], know that Shī‘a are free of such innovations.

Judged from the content of *Islām va raj‘at*, it can be said that Sangalajī’s rejection of *raj‘at* was carefully contextualized and calculated. He prepared his audience by warning them that under the “present condition of the world and the extensive administration (*tashkīlāt*) of the synagogue,” Islam is “in danger.” To protect Islam, he invites Muslims to avoid two extremes: one of defining Islam as opposed to progress, hence resorting to seclusion from the world; and

⁵⁸¹ Farīd, *Islam va raj‘at*, jīm-khih.

the other, coming from those infatuated with Europe (*urūpāgarī*),⁵⁸² of trying to accommodate Islam with the “fake civilization” (*tamaddun-i durūghī*) of the West.⁵⁸³ He then proceeds to offer an extensive discussion on Islam being the “religion of intellect and reason” (*fīkr va ‘aql*) and “knowledge and wisdom” (*‘ilm va ḥikmat*), opposed to “imitation and ignorant prejudice” (*taqlīd va ta’aṣṣub-i jāhilānah*).⁵⁸⁴ The law of *iqtibās* (acquisition [of knowledge and virtues from others]), he says, is according to the Qur’an, a sign of the maturity of reason and the cause of progress.⁵⁸⁵ Citing such Shī‘ī authorities as Shaykh Murtaẓā Anṣārī, Shahīd-i Thānī [Ṣānī], and Shaykh Ṭabrisī, he makes the statement that in Islam, one cannot depend on conjecture (*ẓann*) in issues related to one’s belief (*umūr-i i’tiqādīyah*).⁵⁸⁶ He goes on to a long discussion of *ḥadīṣ* and its history in Islam, devotes many pages to the causes of fabrication of *ḥadīṣ*, and focuses on the *ghulāt* (extremists) who “molded a range of superstitions in the form of *ḥadīṣ* and ascribed them to Imām ‘Alī and other Imāms, attributed the miracles of the prophets to them, and claimed that they taught the doctrines of *raġ‘at* and *tanāsukh* (transmigration of souls).”⁵⁸⁷ He explains that the *ghulāt* are a sect among the Shī‘a “who have exaggerated about the Prophet and the Imāms ...and have deified them.” Such exaggerations have their roots in the beliefs of the Jews and the Christians, since “likening the Creator to the creature is a core doctrine of the Jews and likening the creature to the Creator is a core doctrine of the

⁵⁸² It was around the same time that Aḥmad Kasravī wrote his *Urūpāgarī* (Europeanism). Sangalājī (or Farīd) uses “*Urūpaġarī*.” It may be a typo. In any case, a similar concept is intended: infatuation with European culture and values.

⁵⁸³ Farīd, *Islam va raġ‘at*, 20-21.

⁵⁸⁴ Farīd, *Islam va raġ‘at*, 22, 26, 35-36. While rejection of imitation did have precedence in Wahhabī and Salafī thought, the rejection of “*ta’aṣṣub*” seems to be a concept peculiar to Sangalājī among his contemporary Muslim theologians. It is noteworthy that “eradication of prejudices” was a concept frequently referred to by the Bahā‘ī leader ‘Abdu’l-Bahā in his talks delivered during his travels to North America and Europe (1911-1913). These talks had been published in the periodical *Star of the West* which we know ‘Ayn al-Saltānah, for one, used to receive copies of as early as 1330Q/1912. *Urūpāgarī* (Europeanism). See ‘Ayn al-Saltānah, *Rūznāmah-yi khātirāt-i ‘Ayn al-Saltānah*, ed. Mas‘ūd Salūr and Iraj Afshār, Vol. 5 (Tehran, Asāṭir, 1379/2000), 3766, 3938-39, 3769, and Vol. 6, page 3963.

⁵⁸⁵ Farīd, *Islam va raġ‘at*, 37-38. He quotes Qur’an 19:39 as evidence for the support of *iqtibās*.

⁵⁸⁶ Farīd, *Islam va raġ‘at*, 45.

⁵⁸⁷ Farīd, *Islam va raġ‘at*, 60.

Christians.” The Jewish convert ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Saba’, Sangalajī adds, was the first to deify ‘Alī by claiming that he did not die, but would come back to the earth once it was overwhelmed with tyranny and fill it with justice, which is precisely what he as a Jew believed about the successor of Moses.⁵⁸⁸ Sangalajī then cites the 3rdQ/10th century Shī‘ī heresiographical work written by Nawbakhtī, in which *raj‘at* is a belief ascribed to certain fringe “Shī‘ī sects” (*fīraq*) but not the Imāmīyah which became known as the Twelver Shī‘a.⁵⁸⁹ He also blames the “influence of philosophy,” the interpretations of the Qur’an by Jewish converts, and the impact of themes originating in Christian theology as causes for the division of Islam into many sects.⁵⁹⁰

Focusing on the subject of *raj‘at* as one of the themes imported to Islam by Jews, Sangalajī echoes a complaint also registered in the introduction that this issue has “officially activated the machine of fabricating religions (*charkh-i mazhab sāzī rā rasman bikār andākhtah*), created the Bābī, Bahā‘ī and Azalī sects, and misled many poor Muslims into the wilderness of waywardness and misery.” Furthermore, he asserts, it “has made the Shī‘ī sect the target of attacks by other sects (*ṭavā’if*) of Islam.” He specifically mentions,

some of the Sunnī scholars of previous generations such as Ibn Taymīyah, and contemporary scholars such as Rashīd Riḏā, the author of *al-Manār*, and Sakīb Arsalān...and even some of the Western writers such as the Frenchman, Renan, and the American, Stoddard⁵⁹¹ are convinced that the Shī‘a are a political party created by Jews because of the beliefs that the Shī‘ī *ghulāt* have adopted from the Jews. [These scholars] have stated in their works that the Jews have appeared as Shī‘ites with the aim of destroying Islam. Moreover, the ‘*ajam* [non-Arabs, Iranians], out of their enmity for Arabs, have supported them to form their present *mazhab*.⁵⁹²

⁵⁸⁸ Farīd, *Islam va raj‘at*, 63.

⁵⁸⁹ Farīd, *Islam va raj‘at*, 68-70.

⁵⁹⁰ Farīd, *Islam va raj‘at*, 79-85, especially page 81.

⁵⁹¹ This is a reference to Theodore Lothrop Stoddard, the author of *The New World of Islam* (London: Capman and Hill, 1922).

⁵⁹² Farīd, *Islam va raj‘at*, 87-88.

Here, the dual goals behind Sharīʿat's rejection of *rajʿat* are expressed more explicitly than in the introduction. Sharīʿat wants to ruin that foundation in Shīʿī thought on which the Bābī, Bahāʾī, and Azalī movements are based, so that they themselves are undermined. He also wants to purge the Shīʿī creed from what others, especially the reformists, have criticized it for. His reference to the Shīʿa as a “political party” created to destroy the integrity of Islam is of particular importance. While in Sangalajī's writings it is only the blame of *ghuluvv* (exaggeration, extremism) inflicted on the Shīʿa by reformists that is projected onto Bābī-Bahāʾīs, soon, as we shall see, the accusation of being a political group created to disrupt the unity of Islam was also projected on them, most probably by reformist theologians with similar intellectual orientations as Sangalajī.⁵⁹³

Islam va rajʿat, therefore, focuses on different types of *ḥadīṣ*, ways of knowing unauthenticated ones,⁵⁹⁴ and asserts that belief in *rajʿat* is against the law of existence and the ways of God.⁵⁹⁵ Sangalajī proceeds to discuss the traditions (*aḥādīṣ*) mentioned in volume 13 of Majlisī's *Biḥār al-ānwār*, a major Shīʿī source devoted to the Hidden Imam. Quoting 198 of such *aḥādīṣ* in 87 pages,⁵⁹⁶ he rejects them all as *ẓaʿīf* (weak) and hence unreliable, based on the criteria of *ʿilm-i ḥadīth*. Finally, he resorts to the Qurʾan which according to authoritative Shīʿī sources must be taken as the ultimate criterion for determining the authenticity of *aḥādīṣ*. Quoting verses from the Qurʾan which assert that the dead will not return to this world, Sangalajī rejects the validity of all the *aḥādīṣ* pertaining to *rajʿat*.⁵⁹⁷

The final pages of *Islam va rajʿat* are devoted to Sangalajī's criticism of “some of the Muslims, especially, some of the Shīʿa,” for following the ways of “the Jews,” transgressing the

⁵⁹³ See the chapter on the Confessions of Dolgoruki.

⁵⁹⁴ Farīd, *Islam va rajʿat*, 101-111.

⁵⁹⁵ Farīd, *Islam va rajʿat*, 114.

⁵⁹⁶ Farīd, *Islam va rajʿat*, 118-205.

⁵⁹⁷ Farīd, *Islam va rajʿat*, 206-212.

laws of *tawḥīd* (the assertion of the oneness of God) through “worship of stones, trees, and tombs,” just as the Jews worshiped the Calf,⁵⁹⁸ and arrogance (*ghurūr*) in believing that the Prophet and the Imams will intercede for them before God, just as the Jews believed that the intercession of their forefathers would save them from the fire of Hell.⁵⁹⁹ In further anti-Jewish remarks, Sangalajī compares the Muslims he is criticizing to the Jews in their hypocrisy (*nifāq*), weak morality (*akhlāq-i nikūhīdah*) and corruption of the Book of God—by which he means the fabrication of *aḥādīṣ*.⁶⁰⁰

In the closing paragraphs of the book, Sangalajī contends that if the traditions that mention *rajʿat* were authentic, all one can conclude is that “by *rajʿat* is meant the return of the signs and power (*āṣār va dawlat*) of the Imāms.” He then speculates: “Since the minds of men are always in progress and evolution, there will come a time when the majority of people are wise and thoughtful. At that time, people will understand the realities of Islam...and finally the original majesty and glamour of Islam, which are, in fact, ‘the signs of the Imams,’ will return in their original form.”⁶⁰¹ In other words, *rajʿat* is the return of the majesty of Islam as it was at the time of the Imams. As we see, Sangalajī created an interesting hybrid of Salafī and Shīʿī thought. The ‘Salaf’ whose time is desired are the Imams. But these closing words of *Islam va rajʿat* have other important implications.

Sangalajī’s definition of *rajʿat* is similar to the Bahāʾī interpretation of the concept as referring to the return of qualities (*rajʿat-i ṣifātī*) rather than the physical bodies of deceased individuals.⁶⁰² Sangalajī thus concludes his book by affirming an interpretation that is similar

⁵⁹⁸ Farīd, *Islam va rajʿat*, 218.

⁵⁹⁹ Farīd, *Islam va rajʿat*, 218–219.

⁶⁰⁰ Farīd, *Islam va rajʿat*, 224–225.

⁶⁰¹ Farīd, *Islam va rajʿat*, 226–227.

⁶⁰² The concept of *rajʿat-i ṣifātī*, i.e., the return of qualities, attributes or realities is a fundamental concept in the writings of the Bāb (for example, in *Persian Bayān* and *Dalāʾil a-sabʿah*), Baha’u’llāh (for example, in the *Kitāb-i īqān*), and ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ (for example, in *Some Answered Questions*, chapter 33).

to the one advanced by the same group he seeks to criticize. Moreover, Sangalajī's interpretation of *raj'at* and the appearance (*ẓuhūr*) of the Hidden Imam as an ideal state rather than a tangible event paved the way for the “institutionalization of the advent” in the form of an Islamic government. The buds of this teleological institutional *ẓuhūr* appeared in Khumayni's *Kashf-i asrār*, flourished in his *Ḥukūmat-i islāmī*, and after the 1979 Revolution, in the ideals of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

While the rejection of *taqlīd* is a well-known element of reformist thought,⁶⁰³ and Sangalajī seems to be adopting that idea, his rejection of “prejudice” (*ta'aṣṣub*) suggests other possibilities. Even though there are references to rejecting “*ta'aṣṣub*” in Imam 'Alī's *Nahj al-balāgha* and in traditions from him and other Shī'ī Imams,⁶⁰⁴ the rare emphasis on this rejection both in reformist thought and in mainstream Shī'ī works of Sangalajī's contemporaries on the one hand, and the frequent mention of “*tark-i ta'aṣṣubāt*” (abandonment of prejudices) in the talks and writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahā' in the decades prior to Sangalajī and the publication of his works in Iran, on the other, leaves us room to speculate Sangalajī's possible appropriation of this notion from 'Abdu'l-Bahā'. Sangalajī's used *ta'aṣṣub* to mean “the praise of oneself and the rebuke of the other,”⁶⁰⁵ -- a meaning very similar to that given by 'Abdu'l-Bahā'.

Reactions to Sangalajī's Rejection of Raj'at

It will come as no surprise that Sangalajī's radical rejection of *raj'at* was disparaged by other clerics.⁶⁰⁶ Even before the publication *Islam va raj'at*, when Sangalajī was teaching his

⁶⁰³ They “vigorously criticized the spirit of servile dependence upon traditional doctrinal authorities.” *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Iṣlāh.”

⁶⁰⁴ See Ḥusaynī-dashtī, Muṣṭafā, *Dānistanī'hā-yi Islam: ma'ārif va ma'ārif*. Online version: http://www.al-shia.org/html/far/books/maaref_maarif/te/019.htm#link964 (accessed 29 March 10).

⁶⁰⁵ Farīd, *Islam va raj'at*, 72.

⁶⁰⁶ Between the years 1315/1936- 1323/1944, many books were published by Āghā Buzurg Muḥammad Muḥsin al-Ṭihirānī, *al-Dharī'a ilā taṣānīf al-shī'a*. 25 vols. Najaf: Maṭba'at al-Gharī. 1355Q/1936-1398Q/1978. d on the issue of *raj'at*. See Ja'fariyān, *Jaryān'hā*, 707. For a list of such works, see Āqā Buzurg Ṭihirānī, *al-Zarī'a ilā taṣānīf al-Shī'ah*, 5:290; 8:50, 250; 11:9, 75, 112, 310, 12:210; 18:32, 305, 24:68.

denial of *raj'at* in his *Dār al-tablīgh*, much agitation had been created by this idea.⁶⁰⁷ Interestingly, the *marja'-i taqlīd*, Ḥājj Shaykh 'Abd al-Karīm Ḥā'irī,⁶⁰⁸ when asked his opinion on the issue, refused to charge Sangalajī with unbelief (*takfīr*). He stated that while he himself did “believe in *raj'at* due to the many (*kaṣrat*) traditions [referring to the matter],” he did not consider it as one of the principles of religion or even of the Shī'ī sect. Consequently, anyone who rejected it could not be considered outside of the fold of Islam or Shī'ism.⁶⁰⁹ From the several responses that were written to refute the claims of Sangalajī, at least one work at hand makes statements which further clarify that the main aim of Sangalajī in refuting the validity of *raj'at* was to undermine the claims of the central figures of the Bābī and Bahā'ī religions. Ghulām 'Alī 'Aqīqī Kirmānshāhī “clarifies” (*taqdīs*) the aim behind the rejection of *raj'at* as “preventing the abuse of the misled and wayward sects,” but believes that this sanctified goal, “while being praiseworthy,” should not lead to “the denial of the truth, or the opening of a different door to waywardness.”⁶¹⁰ 'Aqīqī Kirmānshāhī is explicit that,

The author of *Islam va raj'at* has sought to block the way for the misinterpretations of the misled, wayward and misleading sect (*firqah-yi zāllah-yi muẓillah*) on the subject of *raj'at*. Therefore, he preferred to deny the principle of *raj'at* altogether, so that there remains no basis for misinterpretations. To be just, [it must be said that] even though his aim was praiseworthy, what he did was wrong.⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁷ A cleric called Sayyid 'Alī al-Naqī Fayḏ al-Islām Iṣfahānī was asked his opinion (by a person named Azgalī) on this issue “that had agitated the minds of people,” and in response wrote a treatise, *Pasukhnāmah-yi Azgalī* (N.I.: n.d. ca. 1311) when Sangalajī propagated his ideas in his *Dār al-tablīgh* before the book was published. Then, again after five years when *Islam va raj'at* was published, Fayḏ al-Islām wrote another response titled *Rahbar-i gumshudagān* (N.I.: n.d. ca. 1316). In both of these works, he emphasized that belief in *raj'at* was one of the “necessary doctrines” of Shī'a, and no one can be a Shī'ī and reject this fundamental article of faith. Furthermore, he refuted, in the latter work, Sangalajī's premise of Islam being a danger, and some Muslims being infatuated with the 'West,' claiming that both were unbiased claims. Fayḏ al-Islām, *Rahbar-i gumshudagān*, 84, 87.

⁶⁰⁸ On Ḥā'irī, see: Encyclopedia Iranica., s.v. "Haeri, Shaikh Abol-al-Karim Yazdi"; Encyclopedia Islam, 2nd ed., s.v. "Hā'irī, Shaykh Abd al-Karim Yazdi"; The Oxford encyclopedia of the modern Islamic world, s.v. "Shii Islam: modern Shii thought."

⁶⁰⁹ See: The progressive/reformist periodical *Humayūn* published the question of the seminary students and Saykh's response. See *Humayūn*. No5 (Bahman 1313/Shawwal 1353 [1934]), 2.

⁶¹⁰ Ghulām 'Alī 'Aqīqī Kirmānshāhī, *Dalā'il al-raj'ah yā imān va raj'at* (Kermanshah: 1323/1944), 2.

⁶¹¹ 'Aqīqī Kirmānshāhī, *Dalā'il al-raj'ah*, 226.

Why was it wrong? His explanation is pragmatic, showing how he shares the central concern of Sangalajī. The measure taken is wrong because it is not effective in challenging Bahā'īs:

Because one of theses tricksters (*shayyādān*) of the misled, wayward and misleading sect might say, “how do you deny *raj'at* when it is one of the central doctrines of the Twelver Shī'ah?” Moreover, neither the proof nor the denial of *raj'at* can prevent the misinterpretations, since such misinterpretations are promoted through false teachings (*tablīghāt-i sū'*) bought with high prices by the leader (*ra'īs*—most likely an allusion to Shoghi Effendi, the head of the Bahā'ī faith at the time).⁶¹²

In light of such open appraisal of Sangalajī's motives for denying *raj'at*, it can be said that Ḥājj Shaykh 'Abd al-Karīm Ḥā'irī, a *marja'-i taqlīd*, also had the anti-Bahā'ī motives of Sangalajī in mind when he issued a fatwa regarding the latter's rejection of *raj'at* as not leading to his excommunication.

2. *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur'an*⁶¹³ (The Key to Understanding the Qur'an)

Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur'an is in essence a treatise on the rationalist understanding of the Qur'an. In the introduction, Sangalajī expresses regret that the lack of complete reliance on the Qur'an has led to a “strange schism” (*nifāq-i gharībī*) between Muslims with each sect having its own set of creeds. In his own effort to understand the Qur'an, he explains, after setting aside “all manner of prejudice” (*har gūnah ta'aṣṣub*) and “each and every imitation” (*har taqlīd*), he turned to God, and as a result “discovered” that the way to comprehend the Qur'an was “to understand the religion from the *salaf* (predecessors/forefathers), rather than the *khalaf* (those

⁶¹² 'Aqīqī Kirmānshāhī, *Dalā'il al-raj'ah*, 226.

⁶¹³ Sangalajī (Sharī'at), Rīzā Qulī, *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur'an*, 2nd ed. N.l.: 1362Q/1322sh/1943. There is no indication in this second edition of when the first edition was published. However, Abū al-Ḥasanī mentions the date of the publication of this book as *Jumādā II*, 1360 (Tīr 1321/July 1942). 'Alī Abū al-Ḥasanī (Munzīr), *Shahīd Muṭahharī, Ifshāgar-i tawṭī'ah-yi ta'vīl-i “ẓāhir-i” diyānat bih “bāṭin-i” ilhād va māddīyat* (Qum: Daftar-i Intishārāt-i Islāmī, 1362/1983), 174.

who came later).”⁶¹⁴ He continues, “to put it more clearly, we must understand what was happening in the early days (*ṣadr*) of Islam and how Muslims understood the Qur’an at that time.” He then uses the familiar reformist theme that religion must be learned from “the pious forefathers” (*salaf-i ṣālah*).⁶¹⁵ He finds his success in understanding the Qur’an to be the result of the punishments inflicted on him by those jealous of his knowledge who targeted him with “all sorts of calumnies and insults” and who twice attempted to kill him.⁶¹⁶ He then laments the fact that “in our society,” some superstitions and teachings from “the false religions” (*adyān-i bāṭilah*) and “empty nations” (*umam-i khālīyah*) have replaced true Islam⁶¹⁷ so that one cannot distinguish between Islam and superstitions. If this trend continues, Sangalajī warns, “no wise and educated person will follow religion.”⁶¹⁸ He ends the conclusion by further reference to accusations of having “false views” (*ārā’-i bāṭilah*) leveled against him or and connecting him with “some [false] religious creed” (*mazhab*). As a result of these accusations, he secluded himself. His seclusion enabled his soul to become enlightened and receive guidance from God about how to properly understand the Qur’an and share his understanding with his audience.⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁴ Sangalajī, *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur’an*, 3-4. Here Sangalajī is in fact, claiming the main Salafī tenet as his own “discovery.” One cannot but admit here the validity of Khumayni’s comment in *Kashf-i asrār* that Sagalajī appropriated ideas from the Salafis.

⁶¹⁵ Sangalajī, *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur’an*, 4-5.

⁶¹⁶ Sangalajī, *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur’an*, 5. From what Yann Richard writes one can infer that he meant “the Lankarānī brothers” might have been behind the story of a cleric sending someone to assassinate Sharī‘at. See Richard, “Sharī‘at Sangalajī,” 165.

⁶¹⁷ This is an obvious extension of a key idea advanced by reformist thinkers—specifically Rashīd Riḏā—that doctrinal differences did not exist in the early history of Islam, and that ‘superstitions and illegitimate innovations’ (false ideas) entered Islam through the machinations of the first Jewish converts to Islam. According to Albert Hourani, this accusation goes far back in time and was a common theme in the polemical works of the classical period. See Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 231. As we shall see, the same idea is found *The Confessions of Dolgoruki*, a historical fiction that appeared around time as Sangalajī’s *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur’an*.

⁶¹⁸ Sangalajī, *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur’an*, 6.

⁶¹⁹ Sangalajī, *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur’an*, 7-8.

Sangalajī's *Kilīd-i Fahm-i Qur'an* is a rationalist approach to the Qur'an, with a combination of ideas found among reformist thinkers, especially those of Rashīd Riḏā, and anti-Bābī/Bahā'ī themes. It may have also been heavily influenced by 'Abdu'l-Bahā's 1908 work (published in 1920), *Mufāwizāt*.⁶²⁰ It provides its readers with Sangalajī's response to some of the major theological issues in the study of the Qur'an.

A lengthy work (249 pages), *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur'an* begins with Sangalajī's dismissal of the idea that the text of the Qur'an has been "corrupted" (*taḥrīf*),⁶²¹ a claim advanced by many Shī'ī scholars throughout history, in particular from the Akhbārī school. Sangalajī next asserts that despite views to the contrary, the Qur'an can be understood from beginning to end.⁶²² He invokes both logical and traditional proofs to establish this point.⁶²³ He then explains that to understand the Qur'an, one must know the *Sitz im Leben* (*asbāb-i nuzūl*) of its verses,⁶²⁴ as well as the conditions (*aḥwāl*) of the Arabs at that time in which it was revealed.⁶²⁵ Next, he provides his reader with a rational interpretation of the notion that the Qur'an encompasses whatever is relevant to religion: it means the Qur'an includes whatever is needed for the education of the soul and empowerment of the rational faculty (*'aql*) of man. Once the mind is empowered, it can acquire knowledge in the sciences and arts. He clarifies, "this is what it [the Qur'an] means when it says, there is the exposition of all things"⁶²⁶ [in the Qur'an], not that it...teaches

⁶²⁰ 'Abdu'l-Bahā', *al-Nūr al-abḥā fī mufāwizāt-i 'Abdu'l-Bahā': Guftugū bar sar-i nahār* (Cairo: Faraj Allāh al-Zakī al-Kurdī, 1920).

⁶²¹ Sangalajī, *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur'an*, 9-16.

⁶²² This particular belief, inter alia, explains why some traditionalists have regarded his ideas as Islamic Protestantism. See 'Alī Abu Al-Ḥasanī (Munzīr), *Shahīd Muṭaḥharī: Ifshāgar-i tawṭi'ah-yi ta'vīl-i zāhir-i diyānat biḥ bāṭin-i ilḥād va māddiyat* (Qum: Darfat-i Intishārāt-i Islāmī, 1362/1983), 170-171. Munzīr refers to the current of Islamic reformism Sangalajī was part of as the "Colonialist current." Ibid.

⁶²³ Sangalajī, *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur'an*, 17-27.

⁶²⁴ Sangalajī, *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur'an*, 28-32.

⁶²⁵ Sangalajī, *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur'an*, 32-33.

⁶²⁶ Qur'an 16:89.

microbiology or the manufacturing of artillery, cars and electricity.”⁶²⁷ Sangalajī’s long discussion of the *ẓāhir* (manifest/literal/exoteric) and *bāṭin* (hidden/allegorical/esoteric) meanings of the Qur’an comprise a large section of the book.⁶²⁸ In short, he rejects the idea of there being an esoteric meaning to the Qur’an’s verses other than what is manifest and literally understood from the text. He regards the traditions indicating otherwise as having been “fabricated” (*maj’ūlāt*) by the Bāṭiniyah⁶²⁹ in the commentaries and books prepared by the Ismā’īlīs,⁶³⁰ and adds that the Bāṭiniyah have adopted the belief in the Qur’an having a *ẓāhir* and a *bāṭin* from the Jews.⁶³¹ “In reality,” he maintains, by *ẓāhir* is meant the “Arabic meaning” and by *bāṭin*, the aim and goal of the Qur’an, and both of these two are conditioned upon not going against the Arabic language and the sharia.⁶³² At this point, he makes a comment which can arguably be interpreted as one main reason behind his rejection of the esoteric meaning of the Qur’an, given that he had previously rejected the major Shī’ī tenet of *raḥ’at* on the same grounds. Having listed three-four historical cases of the abuse of the esoteric interpretation of the verses of the Qur’an, he adds: “Moreover, the followers of the Bābīyah, and Bahā’īyah, and Azalīyah corresponded the verses of the Qur’an, through ugly and irrational interpretations, with certain people.”⁶³³ Contending that “the interpretations of the Bāṭiniyah are invalid (*bāṭil*),” he expressed his main worry that such interpretations “open the door for the claims of

⁶²⁷ Sangalajī, *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur’an*, 33-39. Quotation is from pages 37-38. What Sangalajī was rejecting in the early 1320s/1940s was decades later adopted by other Muslim reformists like Mahdī Bāzārgan who wrote a book titled *‘Ishq va parastish or thermodynamics of insān* [Love and Worship or the Thermodynamics of Human Being] in which he tried, for example, to correspond verses from the Qur’an with the principle of entropy increase. See Mahdī Bāzārgan, *‘Ishq va parastish or thermodynamics of insān*. 2nd ed. (Tehran: Shirkat-i Sahāmī-i Intishār, 1344/1965).

⁶²⁸ Sangalajī, *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur’an*, 41-98.

⁶²⁹ The term Bāṭiniyya refers to those Muslims believing that the esoteric meaning of the verses were more important than the exoteric. In many instances in the history of Islam the term has been applied pejoratively by an opposing party to the one it disliked. Ismā’īlīs and the earlier Shī’ī extremists (*ghulāt*) have been referred to by this title. See *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd ed. s.v. “Bāṭiniyya.”

⁶³⁰ Sangalajī, *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur’an*, 42.

⁶³¹ Sangalajī, *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur’an*, 43.

⁶³² Sangalajī, *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur’an*, 44, 48.

⁶³³ Sangalajī, *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur’an*, 48.

the false claimants (*mudda'iyān-i bāṭil*)”—a common reference to the leaders of the Bābī and Bahā'ī religions in the lexicon of the Iranian Shī'ī clerics. Sangalajī proceeds to list examples of such interpretations that he rejects. The list includes items quite similar to those in the Bahā'ī writings.⁶³⁴ The appearance of such interpretations, Sangalajī posits, “has led to the appearance of misled sects: the Qādiyānīyah, Bābīyah, Azalīyah, Bahā'īyah and the heretical Sufis.”⁶³⁵ It is interesting to point out that Sangalajī's approach to the *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* of the Qur'an, his rejection of *ta'wīl*, and his critique of the Bābī and Bahā'ī faiths is very similar to that of Rashīd Riḏā and Abduh in their *tafsīr*.

The rest of *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur'an* presents a rationalist approach to the Qur'an. It includes sections on epistemology, rejecting empiricism (*ṭarīqah-yi ḥissīyūn va tajrubīyūn*)⁶³⁶ and the methods of the Sufis,⁶³⁷ and expounds on the epistemology of the Qur'an which is “contemplation and reasoning.”⁶³⁸ This then leads to a discussion of the obstacles to proper contemplation, the most important of which is “emulation of religious scholars” (*taqlīd*), a concern that Sangalajī shares with the reformist thinkers⁶³⁹ and to which he devotes many pages.⁶⁴⁰ He considers another obstacle to thinking to be the obedience of the religious authorities. He frames his words so carefully that it almost seems he is referring to non-Muslim religious authorities, but a careful reading suggests that his reference to “evil divines (*'ulamā-i sū'-i*) of today,” is probably a reference to the traditional clerics of his time, the majority of whom were his adversaries—another thing he had in common with the reformist

⁶³⁴ Sangalajī, *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur'an*, 51. For example, Sangalajī criticizes the interpretation of the “rod” of Moses as his “proofs” (*barāhīn*), Baha'u'llāh's interpretation of “the rod” as celestial dominion (*'aṣā-yi 'amr*). See Baha'u'llāh, *Kitāb-i Iqān* (Hofheim: Bahā'ī Verlag, 1998), 6.

⁶³⁵ Sangalajī, *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur'an*, 51-52. Sangalajī's appro

⁶³⁶ Sangalajī, *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur'an*, 136-140.

⁶³⁷ Sangalajī, *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur'an*, 140-156.

⁶³⁸ Sangalajī, *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur'an*, 156-161. Quote from page 161.

⁶³⁹ See *Encyclopedia of Islam*, s.v. “Iṣlāḥ.”

⁶⁴⁰ Sangalajī, *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur'an*, 162-173.

theologians.⁶⁴¹ The next sections of the book are devoted to discussing the proof of the existence of a Creator,⁶⁴² *tawḥīd* (the assertion of the unity of God), the prophethood of Muḥammad, “the prophet of the End of Time,” with an emphasis of Islam being the last religion⁶⁴³ to be followed by a philosophical interpretation of the experience of the revelation (*waḥy*) of the prophets.⁶⁴⁴

His use of the language of Peripatetic philosophy for his discussion here on the one hand contradicts his own assertions in *Islam va rajʿat* that the introduction of Greek philosophy into the study of Islam has been a source of transmitting impurity into Islam and distancing it from its pristine form. On the other hand, his method here resembles that of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ in *mufāwizāt*, which was written more than three decades prior to his work and published two decades earlier.

In his closing pages, he takes up the issues of “resurrection” (*qiyāmat*) and “eschaton” (*maʿād*)⁶⁴⁵, and posits that it is the was the Muslim theologians’ faulty understanding and interpretation of the verses of the Qur’an on these themes that have caused the heretics (*malāḥidah*) and philosophers to attack the Qur’an. The real meaning of such verses, Sangalajī asserts, is something no one in their right mind would reject. “Return,” he contends, does not mean “annihilation and [then] (re-)creation” (*iḍām va ījād*) as is commonly assumed by Muslims and criticized by the philosophers. The real meaning is a “change of form” (*taghyīr-i šūrat*) i.e., God will take the current form of the world and give it a different form.⁶⁴⁶ Sangalajī attempts, especially in *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur’an*, to present a logical picture of core theological

⁶⁴¹ Sangalajī, *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur’an*, 173-175. Quote from page 175.

⁶⁴² Sangalajī, *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur’an*, 183-197.

⁶⁴³ Sangalajī, *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur’an*, 197-217. Quote from page 212.

⁶⁴⁴ Sangalajī, *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur’an*, 222-234.

⁶⁴⁵ Literally “place of return,” *maʿād* is a technical term in religious and philosophical vocabulary, see *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “*maʿād*.”

⁶⁴⁶ Sangalajī, *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur’an*, 238-239.

concepts—one that he considered to be compatible with the requirements and exigencies of living in the modern world.

3. *Tawḥīd-i ‘ibādat*

More than any other work, Sangalajī’s *Tawḥīd-i ‘ibādat*⁶⁴⁷ deals with issues that were of deep concern to reformist thinkers. This work likewise begins by lamenting the condition of Islam which “has been corrupted (*tahrīf*)” with superstitions (*khurāfāt*) and innovations (*bid‘at*). “Idolatries (*butparastī’hā*),” Sangalajī complains, have prevailed in the name of Islam, while true Islam has become a strange thing. “False claimants” (*mudda‘īyān-i bāṭil*) have emerged: “one claims to be God, the other invites [people to] his prophethood and yet another claims Imamate.”⁶⁴⁸ These words were clear references to the founders of the Bābī and Bāhā’ī religions. Quoting the Qur’anic verse, “As for those who strive in Us, We surely guide them to Our paths,”⁶⁴⁹ Sangalajī posits that the verse applies to him. He has been “guided” and empowered to eliminate superstitions. He ends his introduction by citing a *ḥadīth* indicating that it is incumbent upon the ulama to manifest their knowledge once innovations (*bid‘at*) appear in Islam. He concludes, now that innovations (*bid‘at’hā*) have appeared, as a religious scholar he is obliged to share his knowledge, and he would like to start with “the most important issue” for his “Persian speaking brothers:” *tawḥīd*.⁶⁵⁰ Sangalajī criticizes practices such as the veneration of the resting-place of a descendent of an Imām (*Imāmzādah*),⁶⁵¹ the

⁶⁴⁷ Shari‘at Sangalajī, *Tawḥīd-i ‘ibādat (Yiktā parastī)* (Tehran: 1360Q/1320/1941). This book was published for the second and third times in 1327 and 1345. Ja‘fariyān, *Jaryān’hā*, 709.

⁶⁴⁸ Sangalajī, *Tawḥīd-i ‘ibādat*, 4-5.

⁶⁴⁹ Qur’an 29:69. Pickthal translation.

⁶⁵⁰ Sangalajī, *Tawḥīd-i ‘ibādat*, 8. Sangalajī’s statement on writing on this topic for his Persian speaking brethren indicates 1) the existence of the materials already in Arabic, and 2) their appearance for the first time in Persian. This is compatible with the idea that he is basically reintegrating reformist ideas.

⁶⁵¹ Sangalajī, *Tawḥīd-i ‘ibādat*, 35. On the function of Imāmzādahs in the Shī‘ī tradition, see *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. “Emāmzāda.”

wearing of some stone finger rings,⁶⁵² asking for blessings from trees or stones--such as the *al-ḥajar al-aswad* (The Black Stone)⁶⁵³--asking for intercession between God and creation,⁶⁵⁴ and worshipping anything other than God. This last theme is accompanied by a familiar reformist criticism of the *ghulāt*, those who exaggerate (*ghuluvv*) the station of the Prophet and the Imams. He supports this criticism by adducing traditions from the fourth Imām, ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (d. ca. 95/713-14), emphasizing the worship of God only, and stating that *ghuluvv* has been introduced to Islam by the Jews.⁶⁵⁵ He ends this section with more traditions from the Shī‘ī Imāms rejecting *ghuluvv*.⁶⁵⁶ It is important to note here that even when Sangalajī is reinterpreting reformist ideas, he cites Shī‘ī sources and reasserts his Shī‘ī identity.

4. *Maḥw al-mawhūm*

Sangalajī’s short book *Maḥw al-mawhūm* was published posthumously with an introduction by his student Ḥusayn-Qulī Musta‘ān.⁶⁵⁷ Its central theme is the crucifixion of Jesus. In an attempt to liberate Islam from the bonds of irrational doctrines, Sangalajī set out to prove that the Qur’an affirms the crucifixion of Jesus. In doing so, he sought to refute the prevailing Muslim belief that Jesus was in fact not crucified but miraculously taken up to heaven.⁶⁵⁸ He accomplishes this task by analyzing, primarily along linguistic lines, Qur’anic verses and traditions (*aḥādīṣ*) that speak to the issue.

⁶⁵² Sangalajī, *Tawḥīd-i ‘ibādat*, 36-43.

⁶⁵³ Sangalajī, *Tawḥīd-i ‘ibādat*, 43-46. On the Black Stone of the Ka‘ba, see *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Ka‘ba.”

⁶⁵⁴ Sangalajī, *Tawḥīd-i ‘ibādat*, 85-101.

⁶⁵⁵ Sangalajī, *Tawḥīd-i ‘ibādat*, 101-105.

⁶⁵⁶ Sangalajī, *Tawḥīd-i ‘ibādat*, 102-105.

⁶⁵⁷ Sharī‘at Sangalajī, *Maḥw al-mawhūm*, with an introduction by Ḥusayn-Qulī Musta‘ān ([Tehran?]:1323/1944).

⁶⁵⁸ On this issue, see the recent study by Todd Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur’an* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009).

5. Sangalajī's Influence

Although Sangalajī was not politically active, his ideas influenced some of the most prominent figures in the discourse of political Islam that would emerge in later decades. Among his disciples were the fiercely anti-Bahā'ī cleric, Muḥammad Taqī Falsafī,⁶⁵⁹ who played an important role in the interactions between the court and the clerics during the 1930s and 1940s, and Aḥmad Fardīd,⁶⁶⁰ whose radical ideas exerted influence on many, and whose notion of Westoxification was adopted (though modified) by Jalāl Āl-i Aḥmad, an influential figure in the socio-political intellectual circles of the 1960s.

Şāhib al-Zamānī's comment that Sangalaji had no intellectual heirs is difficult to accept.⁶⁶¹ The mere fact that in the 1960s Ayatollah Murtaẓā Muṭahharī feels obliged to explicate, in such works as *Valā'hā va Valāyat'hā*,⁶⁶² the Shī'ī concepts under attack by the Wahhābīs, in order to refute the "*Wahhābīyat-ma'ābī*"⁶⁶³ (literally 'behaving like Wahhābīs') influencing some minds, indicates that the ideas similar to those of Sangalajī did prevail two decades after the latter's

⁶⁵⁹ According to Yann Richard, Muḥammad Taqī Falsafī, "took his first lessons in rhetoric with Sangalajī. Falsafi became a quasi-official personality in the Islamic Republic, despite his collaboration with the Shah's regime in the 1950s." Richard 164-165. Interestingly, Falsafī was the son of Sangalajī's teacher Shaykh Muḥammad Rīza Tunkābunī. Ibid.

⁶⁶⁰ Aḥmad Fardīd [original name: Aḥmad Mīhanī Yazdī] (1909–1994) was an Iranian oral philosopher, conspiracy theorist and avid anti-Semite, who was heavily influenced by Martin Heidegger. He did not publish a book. For an edited collection of his lectures at the University of Tehran see Aḥmad Fardīd, *Dīdār-i farrahī va futūḥāt-i ākhar al-zamān*, ed. Muḥammad Madadpūr (Tehran: Mu'assisah-'i Farhangī Pajūhishī-i, Chāp va Nashr-i Naẓar, 1381/2002). On his coining the concept of *gharbzadīgī* (Westoxication) which was later popularized by Jalāl Āl-i Aḥmad, see Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: the Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 63–65; For more on Fardīd see Darīush Ashūrī, *Uṣṭūrah-yi falsafah dar miyān-i mā: bāzdidī az Aḥmad Fardīd va nazariyah-yi gharbzadīgī*, Nilgoon, Farvardin 1383/2004 http://www.nilgoon.org/pdfs/Fardid-TNR-final_March28_2004_v06.pdf; Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: the Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 76. During the Second World War, Sharī'at Sangalajī was denounced as pro-Nazi and the Soviets wanted to arrest him. One of the "disciples" of Sharī'at, 'Alī Pāshā Şālih, secretary to the Ambassador of the United States, persuaded the American Ambassador, George Allen, to intervene on Sangalajī's behalf. Richard, "Sharī'at Sangalajī," 162. The anti-Semitic sentiments therefore, were shared between the mentor Sangalajī and his young disciple Fardīd.

⁶⁶¹ Şāhib al-Zamānī, *Dibāchah'ī bar rahbarī*, 140. Ja'fariyān rejects this statement of Şāhib al-Zamānī stating that Sangalajī's influence continues to persist among "religious intellectuals." Ja'fariyān, *Jaryān'hā*, 710.

⁶⁶² Murtaẓā Muṭahharī, *Valā'hā va Valāyat'hā*, 6th ed. (Tehran: Şadrā, 1370/1991). First published in 1347/1968, according to page 9 of the introduction to the 1991 edition.

⁶⁶³ This expression is from 'Alī Abū al-Ḥasanī. See 'Alī Abū al-Ḥasanī (Munzir), *Shahīd Muṭahharī, Ifshāgar-i tawḥīd'ah-yi ta'wīl-i zāhir-i diyānat bih baṭīn-i ilhād va mādīyat* (Qum: Daftar-i Intishārāt-i Islāmī, 1362/1983), 123.

death. Another evidence for such continuing influence is Muṭahharī's reference to his "contemporary *Wahhābiyān va Wahhābīma'ābān*" (Wahhābīs and those who behave like Wahhābīs) around 1970.⁶⁶⁴ Referring to Wahhābī critiques of some Shī'ī rituals such as those put forth by Sangalajī in his *Tawhīd-i 'ibādat* and other works and calling them *shirk*, Muṭahharī mentions that this idea "has prevailed to some degree in our time."⁶⁶⁵

In assessing Sangalajī's influence, the Marxist writer Iḥsān Ṭabarī has gone so far as to opine, a year prior to the triumph of the Islamic Revolution, that the later currents in "modernizing" Shī'ite Islam on the part of people like "Engineer Bāzargan, Ayatollah Saḥābī, Dr. Sharī'atī, and even in some ways, Rūḥ Allāh Khumaynī and their followers, is in fact a continuation of the endeavors of Sangalajī." He emphasizes then that the influence was not so much "the direct continuation of the thought [of Sangalajī]," but more the "conceptual" (*mawzū'ī*) and "social" aspects.⁶⁶⁶ It is easy to recognize, today, that Sangalajī's ideas on rejecting certain rituals (such as considering certain trees or ring stones as sacred) have already become the norm among the majority of the Shī'ah in Iran, without anyone considering such moves Wahhābī-inspired.

6. Reactions to Sangalajī

Reactions to Sangalajī ranged from considering him the "Great Reformer" (*Muṣliḥ-i kabīr*) to seeing him an agent of imperialism who sought to destroy Shī'ī Islam by propagating

⁶⁶⁴ Muṭahharī's reference to this issue appears in his "*Jahānbīnī-i tawhīdī*," which has been published many times and the date of its first publication seems difficult to pinpoint. The edition used here appears in Murtaẓā Muṭahharī, *Muqaddamah'ī bar jahānbīnī-i Islāmī* (1-7) (Qum: Daftar-i Intishārāt-i Islāmī, 1362/1983). However, we do know that such works of Muṭahharī were mostly the product of the 1970s. See <http://www.motahari.org/about/bio.htm>.

⁶⁶⁵ Muṭahharī, *Muqaddamah'ī*, 116-118. He then responds by projecting the idea of *shirk* on Wahhābīs themselves. It is they, Muṭahharī maintains, who by ascribing to objects (of veneration) an "essential independence" (*istiqlāl-i zāti*) from God, are in fact, considering an existence vis-à-vis God for those objects. Ibid.

⁶⁶⁶ Iḥsān Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'ah-i Iran dar dawrān-i Riẓā Shāh* (N.p: 1356/1977), 113.

“Wahhābī” ideas. Most Shī‘ī clerics contemporary to Sangalajī dismissed him as a “heretic”⁶⁶⁷ or Wahhābī.⁶⁶⁸ His contemporary Ayatollah Lankarānī spoke of him as a Wahhābī instigated by the British [to combat the Shī‘ah].⁶⁶⁹ Apparently, this view had some harsh behavioral components attached to it.⁶⁷⁰ He is in the memories of another of his contemporaries, Ayatollah Budalā, as “one of the perverted (*munḥarif*) individuals who committed anti-Shī‘ī acts” and a person “inflicted by deviancy of thought” (*duḥār-i inḥiṭāt-i fikrī*).⁶⁷¹

His other critic was no less a figure than the then young Khumaynī. In his response to Ḥakamīzādah’s highly controversial *Asrār-i hizār sālāh*, the young Khumaynī devoted several passages to Sangalajī, who he believed had influenced the writer in his criticisms of some Shī‘ī rites and rituals. In his discussion of Ḥakamīzadeh’s critique of the notion of intercession, Khumaynī traced a line of influence from the Wahhabīs to the Egyptian Salafīs to the Iranian reformist theologians. In Khumaynī’s assessment, the criticism of intercession had its “root” in Wahhabism, was then rephrased by “some Egyptian writers,” and appropriated by Shaykh

⁶⁶⁷ For the “heretic” charge which was leveled against him after he rejected the doctrine of *raʿāt*, which was in fact tantamount to skepticism about the coming of the Mahdī “even though not altogether clearly,” see Ḥaydarī, “Some Aspects of Islam in Modern Iran,” 64.

⁶⁶⁸ Ayatollah Ḥā’irī’s support of Sangalajī over the issue of *raʿāt* can be considered an exception, perhaps stemming from Sangalajī’s anti-Bahā’ī motivations on that issue to which Ḥā’irī was obviously not opposed. It could also have its roots in the two being in the circle of clerics in good rapport with Riḏā Shah.

⁶⁶⁹ A purported SAVAK document dated 50/9/6 (1971/11/27), quotes Lankarānī: “Thirty years ago, Mr. Turat [sp?] the head of the political office (*idārah-yi siyāsī*) of England in Tehran, disguised in the attire of a cleric, introduced himself as Ibrāhīm Kalat and participated in all charity works, and it was he who provoked Sharī‘at Sangalajī, until I made him infamous and he escaped away.” *Markaz-i Barrasī-i Asnād-i Tārīkhī, Shaykh Ḥusayn Lankarānī bih ravāyat-i asnād-i SAVAK*. (Tehran: Markaz-i Barrasī-i Asnād-i Tārīkhī-i Vizārat-i Ittīlā‘āt, 1383), 373. Interestingly, the narrative presented regarding the British politician disguised in the garment of a cleric instigating Sangalajī to promote Wahhābī ideas parallels the similar story of *The Confessions of Dolgoruki*. Lankarānī has had a role in the publication of the conspiratorial “Memoirs of Mr. Hempher, the British Spy to the Middle East,” allegedly unraveling the advent of Wahhābism. See Markaz-i Barrasī-i Asnād-i Tārīkhī, *Shaykh Ḥusayn Lankarānī*, ten. On a similar note, see Lankarānī’s alleged claims on the historicity of the characters of the fictional *The Confessions of Dolgoruki*, in chapter 5.

⁶⁷⁰ On his antagonism against Sangalajī, see Richard, “Sharī‘at Sangalajī,” 176, n 16. Richard mentions the hostility of “the Lankarānī brothers” against Sangalajī in a footnote to a statement regarding a cleric sending someone to assassinate Sharī‘at. Ibid. 165.

⁶⁷¹ Markaz-i Asnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī, *Haftād sāl khātirah az Ayatollah Sayyid Ḥusayn Budalā* (Tehran: Markaz-i Asnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī, 1378/1999), 213–215. Quote from page 213.

Ṭanṭāwī. The “regurgitations” of the Egyptians, Khumaynī asserted, then found their way to Iran. Sangalajī characteristically took credit for them, and the writer of *Asrār-i hizār sālāh* just repeated him.⁶⁷² Elsewhere in the same work, Khumaynī refers to “a number of counterfeit clerics” (*chand akhund-i qāchāq*) who during “Riṣā Khan’s” time were urged to write “in the name of reform, against religion.” If someone refuted their writings, his work would not have been published, as happened in the case of “one of the clerics of Qum” refuting “the lies and treachery” of Sangalajī in *Islam va rajʿat*.⁶⁷³ On yet another page, Khumaynī reduces Sangalajī’s ideas to a matter of personal conflicts with other clerics; it was in relation to some problems with the clerics (*ahl-i minbar*) that Sangalajī, “as he himself said,” insisted, till the end of his life, on a notion that he really “did not believe in,” and as a result, left “shameful” works about which “the learned (not others) know well. His intentions are well known in the scientific and religious community. We do not regard such people as possessing freedom of character and intellect and we convict them at the court of humanity and freedom.”⁶⁷⁴

Some later writers interpreted Sangalajī’s views in ways far different from his contemporary theologians. Ḥaydarī, in his 1954 Master’s thesis, considered him “the first religious leader in modern Iran who expressed the need for religious reform and sought to purge Islam of accretions, of superstitions and innovations.” There was “no evidence,” Ḥaydarī maintained, that Sangalajī was influenced by Wahhābīs, Afghānī or ‘Abduh. Sangalajī and ‘Abdu just happened to have “reached similar conclusions,” and the fact that ‘Abdu’s *Tafsīr al-manār* was listed in the bibliography of Sangalajī’s works was not an indication of any influence. Sangalajī appeared to Ḥaydarī “to have developed his ideas altogether

⁶⁷² Khumaynī, *Kashf-i asrār*, 77.

⁶⁷³ Khumaynī, *Kashf-i asrār*, 333.

⁶⁷⁴ Ruḥ Allāh Khumaynī, *Kashf-i Asrār* (n.p: n.d), 57.

independently.”⁶⁷⁵ Another writer, Nāṣir al-Din Ṣāhib al-Zamānī, writing around a quarter of a century after Sangalajī’s death, did not criticize or label him a Wahhābī. Rather, he spoke of him as an original reformer bent on “repairing and adapting Islam to current issues.”⁶⁷⁶ Interestingly, Ṣāhib al-Zamānī wrote, “it was astonishing” that Ibn Taymīyah, “who influenced Wahhābīs,” had a book on the Qur’an, similar to *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur’an*.⁶⁷⁷ It is as if Ṣāhib al-Zamānī was or pretended to be unaware of Sangalajī having been referred to as a Wahhābī by others.⁶⁷⁸ Ṣāhib al-Zamānī who thought of *ijtihād* as a means of “adapting to new conditions,” praised Sangalajī’s work in *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur’an* as “the best example of his attempt, for acquiring freedom and independence of thought for the future generation of Islamic Iran.” Ṣāhib al-Zamānī further interpreted Sangalajī’s work as “an Islamic response, emerged out of the sense of religious and social responsibility in face of the danger of the attack by the European civilization and thought.”⁶⁷⁹ In Ṣāhib al-Zamānī’s account, in his ideas about the Mahdī, Sangalajī removed the “element of the sword,” omitted an “individual leadership aspect,” and instead presented the Mahdī’s promised appearance “as a progressive collective and social movement.”⁶⁸⁰ Both Sangalajī and Kasravī had attempted to rebuild, repair, adapt, accommodate, and refine their society.⁶⁸¹

Near a decade after Ṣāhib al-Zamānī, Iḥsān Ṭabarī, the then Marxist author and theoretician of the Tūdah party, wrote of Sharī‘at’s rejection of *raj‘at* as his “interpretation of

⁶⁷⁵ Amīr ‘Abbās Haydarī. “Some Aspects of Islam in Modern Iran,” 67,75, 76.

⁶⁷⁶ Nasir al-Dīn Ṣāhib al-Zamanī, *Dibāchah-ī bar rahbarī*, 3rd ed. (Tehran: ‘Aṭā’ī, 1348/1969), 184.

⁶⁷⁷ Ṣāhib al-Zamanī, *Dibāchah-ī bar rahbarī*, 172-173.

⁶⁷⁸ Such unawareness is particularly strange since Ṣāhib al-Zamānī’s own father, Ḥājj Shaykh Ibrāhīm Khurāsānī (known as Ṣāhib al-Zamān) was reportedly jailed for having “condemned” Sangalajī during the time of Rīzā Shah. See Muḥammad Sharīf Rāzī, *Ganjīnah-‘i dānishmandān: kitāb-i inqilāb va shahādat*. Vol. 8 (Qum: 1358?), 279-280.

⁶⁷⁹ Ṣāhib al-Zamanī, *Dibāchah-ī bar rahbarī*, 136-137.

⁶⁸⁰ Ṣāhib al-Zamanī, *Dibāchah-ī bar rahbarī*, 134.

⁶⁸¹ Ṣāhib al-Zamanī, *Dibāchah-ī bar rahbarī*, 139-140.

the appearance of the Twelfth Imam as the triumph of religion and justice over oppression and tyranny.”⁶⁸² Ṭabarī compared Sangalajī’s efforts in *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur’an* to the ideals of the main figures of the Protestant Reformation: Martin Luther and John Calvin.⁶⁸³

In recent decades, reactions against Sangalajī have ranged from those accusing him of being a foreign agent to a reformer influenced by Wahhābī thought. The cleric-apologist Abū al-Ḥasanī mentioned him among the “stooges and puppets” of Britain,⁶⁸⁴ and referred to his “reform of religion” (*iṣlāḥ-i dīn*), along with that of Kasravī, as “a continuation of the line of ‘Islamic Protestantism’ inherited from Malkum Khan’s *Farāmūsh’khanah*,” which was from the beginning, an “imperialistic” (*isti’mārī*) and “imported” current.⁶⁸⁵ The cleric-historian Ja’fariyān considers Sangalajī a theologian influenced by Wahhābism, while the Muslim intellectual Yūsufī Eshkavarī considers him a “Salafī” thinker.

A word must be mentioned here on the wide range of reactions to Sangalajī. On the one hand, it is unrealistic to deny the striking similarity between the ideas he posed in two of his major works, *Tawḥīd-i ‘ibādat* and *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur’an*, and those of the thinkers we have previously discussed. On the other, it would be inaccurate to categorize him a reformist theologian without paying attention to his consistent and repeated use of the uniquely Shī’ī traditions ascribed to the Imāms in the two works just mentioned. We even have an account of

⁶⁸² Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ah-yi Iran*, 112.

⁶⁸³ Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ah-yi Iran*, 112. Contemporary writer Farhang Rajaei, in his short account on Sangalajī, does not draw any connections between Sangalajī’s ideas and those of the Wahhābīs or Salafīs, and mentions him just as a religious reformist. Rajaei, *Islamism and Modernism*, 49-50.

⁶⁸⁴ ‘Alī Abū al-Ḥasanī (Munzir), *Shahīd Muṭahharī, Ifshāgar-i tawḥīd-i ta’wīl-i ṣāḥib-i diyānat bih bāṭin-i ilhād va māddīyat* (Qum: Daftar-i Intishārāt-i Islāmī, 1362/1983), 305. This generally negative appraisal of him is the norm among today’s more traditional scholars. For example, see Shaykh Muḥammad Sharīf Razī, *Ganjīnah-yi dānishmandān*. Vol. 8 (Qum: 1358?), 279-280.

⁶⁸⁵ al-Ḥasanī (Munzir), *Shahīd Muṭahharī*, 170-175.

a meeting between Kasravī and Sangalajī which ended prematurely because the latter refused to admit that there were no differences between Shī'ī and Sunnī Islam.

Sangalajī's relationship to the reformist current aside, there is one obvious aspect in his thought that had been completely ignored up to now: he was extremely concerned with the potential spread of the Bahā'ī religion. His radical rejection of *raj'at* which created very harsh responses from his fellow clerics, was instigated by an urge to combat and undermine any potential Bābī-Bahā'ī theological influence. His own statements quoted in *Islam va raj'at* and the interpretations given by other clerics mentioned earlier attest to the centrality of anti-Bahā'ism in the formation of his thought.

From a historical perspective, the development of reformist ideas was secondary to Sangalajī's primary motivation to combat the Bahā'ī religion. As we have seen, his ideas on *raj'at*, which were tantamount to denying the appearance of the Twelfth Imām, were expressed before 1315/1936, i.e., the date of Farīd's introduction to *Islam va raj'at*. While obviously concerned with *ghuluvv*, he did not share other aspects of reformist thought. According to his nephew, he became attracted to reformist ideas during his pilgrimage to Mecca around 1317/1938-39.⁶⁸⁶ In fact, it was only in the last years of his life, after his return from *hajj* that he published his reformist ideas. But even when he was expressing his reformist ideas, there was a clear anti-Bahā'ī bent to them, more than what was already met in Rashīd Riẓā himself. While the latter had criticized the Shī'a (and Bahā'īs as well, as he considered Bahā'īs a sub-sect of the Shī'a) for their *ghuluvv*, Sangalajī, in a sense, projected all those criticism to Bahā'īs as heirs of the heretical tradition of *ghuluvv*.

⁶⁸⁶ Ja'fariyān, *Jaryān'hā*, 706. Chahārdahī dates Sangalajī's pilgrimage to Mecca as having taken place five years before the latter's death. Sangalajī died in 15 Day 1322/6 January 1944. His pilgrimage therefore must have taken place in 1317/1938-39.

In light of the above, it can be said that Ṣāhib al-Zamānī and others who wrote of Sangalajī as responding, in his reforms, to European civilization did not bring into account the fact that he had a more immediate, and in some ways, more intimidating threat of which he was quite conscious. Sangalajī's concerns in *Islam va raj'at* and *Kilīd-i fahm-i Qur'an* with Bahā'ī ideas and influence indicate that he was also responding to a movement at home. While trying in both books to undermine the Islamic basis for Bahā'ī claims—i.e., the rejection of *raj'at* and *ta'wīl*—he was simultaneously using the new language and theological principles found in the writings of the Bābī and Bahā'ī leaders to reform the Islamic concepts he discussed. His position vis-à-vis the Bahā'ī faith is one of rejection and deep preoccupation, to a degree that caused him to suggest the invalidity of a fundamental Shī'ī notion on the one hand, and appropriation of principles and methods on the other.

IV. *Shaykh Muḥammad Khālīṣīzadah*

Shaykh Muḥammad Khālīṣīzadah (d. 1963), also known as Khālīṣī, the son of the famed *mujtahid* Shaykh Muḥammad Mahdī Khālīṣī (d. 1925), was a major engine of both anti-Bahā'ism and political Islam in the decades that followed the Constitutional Revolution. Originally from Khālīṣ, a farming town north of Baghdad, he was exiled with a fellow cleric to Iran for engaging in subversive activities against British control in Iraq.⁶⁸⁷ Among the reformist theologians

⁶⁸⁷ Since the resistance to the British Mandate in Iraq was strong, the British decided to nominate Fayṣal as king. Fayṣal was made king in 1921, but the conditions of the Mandate continued to remain in force. Fayṣal called for an election to create a Constituent Assembly. Almost immediately, the Shī'ī ulama, including Shaykh Muḥammad Mahdī Khālīṣī and Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nā'īnī (d. 1355Q/1936), issued fatwas boycotting the elections. As a result, Shaykh Muḥammad Mahdī Khālīṣī was deported to the Ḥijāz. In protest, other important clerics like Nā'īnī left Iraq for Persia. Khālīṣī's son was exiled to Persia. See Hairī, *Shī'ism and Constitutionalism in Iran* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977), 129-135. On Ayatollah Nā'īnī, see *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Nā'īnī, Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥusayn Gharawī."

studied in this chapter, he is the one who has received the most attention from Western scholars⁶⁸⁸ due to his political activities, mostly in his native land. To appreciate the historical significance of his role in the development of twentieth-century political Islam in Iran, it suffices to mention Arjomand's suggestion that "his activism may well have influenced Khumayni and his followers" and that "such influences can be documented in one important instance: the unprecedented assumption of the title of Imam."⁶⁸⁹ As indicated by the name of a books published by Khālīshī in 1954, he adopted the title of Imam in Iraq that year.⁶⁹⁰ Here, I will focus on Khālīshī's anti-Bahā'ī and political activities in the 1920s and 1930s.

Political Activities

Most of what has been recorded about Khālīshī's political activities pertains to his early years in Iran, a period that coincided with Riẓā Khān Sardā Sipah's attempts to overthrow the Qājār monarchy and establish a republic. Unlike most of the other influential Iraqi clerics who

⁶⁸⁸ See Pierre-Jean Luizard, "Shaykh Muḥammad al-Khālīshī (1890-1963) and his Political Role in Iraq and Iran in the 1910s/20s," In *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times: Religious Culture & Political History*, edited by Rainer Brunner and Werner Ende (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 223-235; Werner Ende, "Erfolg und Scheitern eines schiyyischen Modernisten: Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Mahdī al-Ḥālīshī (1890-1963)", in *Gottes ist der Oriental, Gottes ist der Okzident. Festschrift Abdoljawad Falaturi*, ed. U. Tworuschka (Köln: 1991), 120-130; Haim, "Shi'ite Clerics and Politics," *Israel Oriental Studies* 10 (1980): 165-72, see page 168; Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism*, 194-197, and passim. Said Amir Arjomand, "Ideological Revolution in Shi'ism," in *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), 178-212, see pages 187-189. For studies in Persian, see: 'Alī Aḥmadī, *Shaykh Muḥammad-i Khālīshīzādah (Rūḥāniyyat dar maṣāf bā Inglīs)* (Tehran: Markaz-i Asnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī, 1383/2004); Ḥamīd Baṣīratmanish, 'Ulamā' va rijīm-i Riẓā Shāh: nazarī bar 'amalkard-i siyāsī-farhangī-i rūḥāniyyūn dar sālḥā-yi 1305-1320 (Tehran: 'Urūj, 1997), 315-358; Islam Dabbāgh, "Āftāb-i pinhān (Yādī az mubārāzāt-i mazhabī-siyāsī-i Ayatollah al-'Uzmā Shaykh Muḥammad Khālīshīzādah dar Iran va Iraq)", *Kayhān-i Farhangī*, no. 100 (Murdād 1993); Ja'fariyān, *Jariyān'hā*, 116-118, 721-723; Ha'iri, *Tashayyu' va mashrūṭīyat*, 205.

⁶⁸⁹ Arjomand, "Ideological Revolution in Shi'ism," 189. Arjomand opines, "The appellation Imam is truly striking." Elsewhere also he makes a similar remark regarding the influence exerted by followers of Ayatollah Khālīshī. See Said Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 101.

⁶⁹⁰ Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Mahdī Khālīshī, *al-Tawḥīd wa-l-waḥda. Muqtaṭafāt muntakhaba min khuṭab wa-durūs samāḥat al-imām al-mujtahid al-akbar al-shaykh Muḥammad al-Khālīshī* (Baghdad: 1954).

migrated to Iran and endorsed Riẓā Khān Sardār Sipah, Khālīshī sided with Aḥmad Shāh and his crown prince,⁶⁹¹ and publicly opposed Riẓā Khān's campaign to establish a republic.⁶⁹²

Khālīshī is best remembered in historical accounts for a brazen public display of opposition. When Ayatollah Mudarris, the main opponent of Riẓā Khān Sardār Sipah, was slapped in the face by one of the latter's supporters in the Majlis,⁶⁹³ the police shut down the Mosque of the Shāh to bar any attempt at mounting a protest. In response, Khālīshī registered his indignation by defiantly reciting prayers in the middle of the bazaar in Tehran.⁶⁹⁴ In a politically charged speech delivered on the heels of this episode, Khālīshī pressed for the "freedom of belief and of the press" and demanded "the release of those arrested."⁶⁹⁵ Yet other than this episode, not much is known about Khālīshī's political activities in Iran during the 1920s. What little information we do possess shows that he harbored the same anti-British sentiments he had held in Iraq,⁶⁹⁶ and that he saw Islam and the ulama as a powerful political force. In several

⁶⁹¹ Ha'iri, *Tashayyu' va mashrūṭīyat* 183, 187, 192; idem, *Shī'ism and Constitutionalism in Iran*, 132-142.

⁶⁹² See Baṣīratmanish, '*Ulamā' va rijīm-i Riẓā Shāh*', 352.

⁶⁹³ For this event see, Ḥusayn Makkī, *Tārīkh-i bist sālah-i Iran*, vol. 2, *muqaddamāt-i taqyīr-i salṭanat*, 6th ed. (Tehran: 'Ilmī, 1995), 483-486; Bahār, *Tārīkh-i aḥzāb-i siyāsī*, 36-44.

⁶⁹⁴ For an eyewitness account of this incident, see 'Ayn al-Salṭanah, *Khāṭirāt-i 'Ayn al-Salṭanah*, 9:6820-21.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁶ According to Abdul-Hadi Hairi, Khālīshī's "hostile attitude toward the British had invited the latter's suspicion of his being fostered by Russians." Hairi, *Shī'ism and Constitutionalism in Iran* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977), 133-34. The suspicion, though, seems to have gone beyond the British. According to the U.S. consular report from Kornfeld to the Secretary of State, dated 12 April 1924, containing the "translation of the extracts from the Persian Press regarding the Anti-Dynastic movement," there is a summary translation of an article in the 4 April 1924 issue of the newspaper *Sitārah-i Iran* regarding Khālīshī:

And on April 4 the same paper claims to have been informed that Khālīshīzādah, a mulla who was expelled from Mesopotamia and who played a very important part in support of the recent anti-republican movement, accompanied by a member of the Russian Legation staff, left the house of the famous merchant Hajī Mu'īn al-Tujjār of Bushīhr at 3 pm April 3, and went to call on one of the leading mullās. Immediately after their departure three more of the Russian Legation functionaries called on the same merchant. This report is accepted by *Sitārah-i Iran* as an evidence of the Russian Legation, the Khālīshīzādah and certain mullās being involved in a conspiracy against the republican movement. The Khālīshīzādah is known to the *Sitārah-i Iran* as a "foreign subject."

Even more significant is Khālīshī's own report of contacts with the Bolsheviks and even correspondence with Lenin! In a booklet titled *Baṭal al-Islam* (Hero of Islam), written about his father's life and his own activities, Khālīshī recounted his political undertakings following his exile to Iran. In this work, Khālīshī emphasized "the foundation of Islamic associations to free Iraq from British domination. He also reported his contacts with the Bolsheviks, in particular Shumyatsky, the vice-ambassador of Russia in Tehran. Shumyatsky was the intermediary for Shaykh

statements published in late 1922 and early 1923, he registered his demand for an end to the British Mandate and the formation of an Irāqī national cabinet.⁶⁹⁷ Moreover, in the course of his sermons in the month of Ramazān, he warned the masses of a British plot to divide (*tajziyah*) Iran and called on them “to exert pressure on their clerics to continue actively preaching,” even after the month of fasting had ended, for the only weapons Iranians had at their disposal to fight the British with were “religion and the pious (*diyānat va mutadayyinīn*) on the one hand and freedom and freedom fighters on the other.” Khālīshī summoned the masses to “unite together and put an end to the infelicitous politics (of the British).”⁶⁹⁸ Among his other political activities, we can mention his reputed attempt to mediate the conflict among the crown prince, Sardār Sipah, and Muddaris.⁶⁹⁹

Khālīshī was an eccentric figure. He was not on good terms with many of his contemporary clerics, one of whom, Sayyid Ḥusayn Budalā states in passing that Khālīshī “on occasion” rejected some of the core Shī‘ī beliefs. Khālīshī is mocked as being “afflicted by a lack of (proper) taste” (*duchār-i kam salīqigī*) and disparaged for having the audacity to “challenge Shī‘ism and

Muḥammad’s correspondence with Lenin in late 1922 and early 1923.” Luizard, “Shaykh Muḥammad al-Khālīshī,” 231-232. We should also note that when Khālīshī’s father died in Mashad in 1923, “the Russian Consulate, and all the Russian entrepreneurial and financial institutions in Mashad” closed for two days. Ibrāhīm Ṣafā’ī, *Panjāh khātirah az panjāh sāl* (Tehran: Jāvīdān, 1992), 107. The day Khālīshī’s father died, the General Consul of the Soviet Union in Khurasan published an official statement expressing, in highly respectful language, his regret over this “greatest calamity” (*muṣībat-i ‘uẓmā*) and his condolences “especially” to Shaykh Muḥammad Khālīshīzādah. The statement went on to invite Russian financial firms and the citizens (*atbā’*) of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to “participate in the honor” of observing the passing of Khālīshī’s father by suspending work for two days. See Ṣafā’ī, *Panjāh sāl*, 113.

⁶⁹⁷ See Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi‘is of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 81.

⁶⁹⁸ ‘Ayn al-Salṭanah, *Khāṭirāt*, 9:6993.

⁶⁹⁹ ‘Ayn al-Salṭanah, *Khāṭirāt*, 7157.

its core doctrines” (*bā tashayyu‘ va afkār-i Shī‘ī ham mubārizah mīkard*).⁷⁰⁰ Contemporary scholars characterized his views as “stringent and radical.”⁷⁰¹

Khālīshī’s political activities in the 1930s are not entirely clear. While some scholars depict him as the champion of anti-dictatorial activities, others paint a different picture. One scholar has interpreted his imprisonment and exile to Tūysirkān as an attempt by Rīzā Shāh’s regime to suppress the politically active cleric by exiling him to an isolated region of the country.⁷⁰² However, the historian, author and lawyer, Aḥmad Kasravī, who served as the judge who ordered Khālīshī’s banishment, presents a different picture. Referring to Khālīshī as “the troublemaker cleric (*akhund-i hawchī*) who had come from Iraq and caused a ruckus (*hawchīgārī buzurgī*) in Tehran in the name of having been expelled by the British,” Kasravī recalls that “in order to make him quiet,” Rīzā Shah had rented land in rural areas surrounding Tehran to Khālīshī that were key endowments associated with the Shrine of Imam Rīzā in Mashhad. According to Kasravī, “in the name of reclaiming the right of the holy threshold of the Imam,” Khālīshī put undue financial pressure on the villagers who farmed those lands. The farmers in suit filed an official complaint against the royal court. In an unprecedented trial, Kasravī ruled in favor of the farmers and against the Shah.⁷⁰³ He judged that “Khālīshī’s harsh treatment [of the farmers] was nothing but tyranny.”⁷⁰⁴ As a result, the royal court annulled the rental contracts and Khālīshī was imprisoned and later exiled to Tūysirkān.⁷⁰⁵ A discussion of Khālīshī’s

⁷⁰⁰ Markaz-i asnād-i inqilāb-i Islāmī, ed., *Haftād sāl khāṭirah az Ayatollah Sayyid Ḥusayn Budalā* (Tehran: Markaz-i Asnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī, 1378/1999), 196.

⁷⁰¹ Baṣīratmanish, ‘*Ulamā’ va rijīm-i Rīzā Shāh*, 352.

⁷⁰² Baṣīratmanish, ‘*Ulamā’ va rijīm-i Rīzā Shāh*, 353; Aḥmadī, *Shaykh Muḥammad-i Khālīshīzādah*, 57.

⁷⁰³ Aḥmad Kasravī, *Zindigānī-i man* (Tehran: jār, 1976), 320-324. Quotes from pages 320 and 324.

⁷⁰⁴ Kasravī, *Zindigānī-i man*, 324.

⁷⁰⁵ Aḥmadī, *Shaykh Muḥammad Khālīshīzādah*, 57. Khālīshī seems to have been politically compliant in the post Rīzā Shah period. The contemporary cleric-historian Rasūl Ja‘fariyān has juxtaposed “the Khālīshīzādah of Rīzā Khān’s period” to the Khālīshī of later years, a man “who collaborated with figures such as Sayyid Zīyā’ al-Dīn Ṭabāṭabā’ī.” Ja‘fariyān, *Jariyān’hā*, 118. With Sayyid Zīyā’ being a known anglophile, Ja‘fariyān’s statement, surprising as it is

political activities and views in 1940s is beyond the scope of this chapter. It suffices it here to say that he was one of the first clerics to speak of the “rights” of the ulama for political rule.⁷⁰⁶

Anti-Bahā’ī activities

Khālīshī commenced his anti-Bahā’ī activities soon after arriving in Iran. As indicated in the last chapter, he was the main cleric incriminated for the murder of the American vice consul, Robert Imbrie, and charged with “instigating people”⁷⁰⁷ in the anti-Bahā’ī riots that led to Imbrie’s killing. Following his arrest, he was summarily exiled to Kalāt, a city in northern Khurāsān, only to return to Tehran a few months later.⁷⁰⁸

In 1926, Khālīshī allegedly challenged a Bahā’ī in Tehran to a public debate.⁷⁰⁹ Our information about this debate comes to us from a small book published two decades after the debate took place. This booklet contains a preface by the publisher, ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Ḥā’irī. Ḥā’irī explains that because Bahā’īs have “the same [evil] nature as the Jews,⁷¹⁰ use everything against Islam,...and tempt (*ighvā*) naïve people into committing sin every chance they get,” Ayatollah Khālīshī, who now resides in Yazd, has denounced “the Bahā’ī devils” (*shayāṭīn-i Bāhā’īyān*) from his minbar and exposed their “superstitions” (*khurāfāt*), “so that every discerning person [who reads these words] will grow to hate them.” In addition to his anti-Bahā’ī sermons, Ḥā’irī notes that Khālīshī regularly invites Bahā’īs to debate him. Since the

given Khālīshī’s strong anti-British stance, problematizes any attempt to depict Khālīshī’s character and political stance in his later years in a monolithic manner.

⁷⁰⁶ See Ayatollah Khālīshī, *Kashf al-astār: javāb bar asrār-i hizār sālah* (n.p: Muḥammad Ḥusayn Muḥammadī Ardihālī, n.d.).

⁷⁰⁷ Baṣīratmanish, ‘*Ulamā*’ va *rijīm-i Riṣā Shāh*, 352. Baṣīratmanish tells us that he instigated Sayyid Ḥusayn Lankarānī (see discussion below) and another cleric by the name of Sayyid Riṣā Fīrūzābādī.

⁷⁰⁸ Baṣīratmanish, ‘*Ulamā*’ va *rijīm-i Riṣā Shāh*, 352

⁷⁰⁹ Muḥammad Khālīshī, *Muballigh-i Bahā’ī dar maḥẓar-i sharīf-i Ayatollah Khālīshī* (Yazd: 1947). The publisher mentions that this edition of the work is based on its third printing in Kermanshah.

⁷¹⁰ The introduction was written in 1327/1948, at a time when, as we will see in the next chapters, anti-Bahā’ī sentiments went hand in hand with anti-Jewish ones.

Bahā'īs have not responded to these requests, Ḥā'irī has taken it upon himself to publish the proceedings of Khālīshī's debate in Tehran twenty years earlier with a Bahā'ī teacher (*muballigh*).⁷¹¹ Ḥā'irī's preface is followed by an introduction by Shaykh Ḥusayn Lankarānī which apparently accompanied the first printing of the text in 1926.⁷¹² The proceedings of the debate between Khālīshī and the Bahā'ī teacher, who is introduced as 'Abd Allāh Taḥqīqī, follow Lankarānī's introduction. The book concludes with the text of a sermon delivered by Khālīshī after the debate, followed by an interview with Khālīshī (conducted by Shaykh Ḥusayn Lankarānī)⁷¹³ and an exposé written by the former Bahā'ī turned anti-Bahā'ī polemist, 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Āyatī.⁷¹⁴

The publication of this book may have been inspired by Sunnī-Shī'ī polemical discourse to which Khālīshī was no stranger.⁷¹⁵ The central issue of the debate was the Bahā'ī doctrine of *maẓhar-i ilāhī* (manifestation of God).⁷¹⁶ Declaring himself “the first teacher of logic (*'ilm-i manṭiq*) in the East,”⁷¹⁷ Khālīshī adduced logical proofs to try and refute the Bahā'ī tenet of ‘manifestationhood.’ The alleged debate was recorded by Shaykh Ḥusayn Lankarānī and two

⁷¹¹ Khālīshī, *Muballigh-i Bahā'ī dar maḥẓar*, 2-3. In a piece written by 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Āyatī in the same volume, it is mentioned that the current reprinting of the debate is the fifth one, “with some additions.” See page 59.

⁷¹² We have no evidence—other than the authors' claim—that this work was in fact published in 1926.

⁷¹³ Khālīshī, *Muballigh-i Bahā'ī dar maḥẓar*, 41-58.

⁷¹⁴ Khālīshī, *Muballigh-i Bahā'ī dar maḥẓar*, 59-68.

⁷¹⁵ His life, as a Shī'ī cleric in Iraq had provided him with ample experience in this regard. For his engagement in Sunnī-Shī'ī polemics, see Baṣīratmanish, ‘*Ulamā' va rijīm-i Shāh*, 355-356. His activities as a polemist continued despite his great interest in Sunnī-Shī'ī rapprochement. According to Brunner, “under the influence of...Sunnī polemics, a type of ‘instructional cliché’ found its way into many writings of Shiite scholars occupied with relations between the denominations in the modern age. This consisted of a stereotyped description of conversations in which the author (or someone else, usually a famous ‘*ālim*) encounters unnamed Sunnis who insult Shiism in a way that manifests both ignorance and intransigence. The Shiite is almost effortlessly able to bring his opponent to see the light, and the scene not infrequently concludes with the Sunni's conversion to Shiism.” Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism*, 232. A different polemical work published during the same time period by another reformist theologian is very similar in format to Khālīshī's work. See: Muḥammad Maḥallātī, *Guftār-i khush-i Yārqulī*, 4th edition, with an introduction by Ayatollah Najafī Mar'ashī, ed. Sayyid Hidāyat Allāh Mustarḥamī (Tehran: Farāhānī, 1965/1344). This work was written between 1915 and 1919 and published for the first time in Najaf.

⁷¹⁶ See Juan Cole, “The Concept of Manifestation in the Bahā'ī Writings,” *Bahā'ī Studies Monograph* 9 (1982): 1-38.

⁷¹⁷ Khālīshī, *Muballigh-i Bahā'ī dar maḥẓar*, 9.

other individuals. Their accounts depict Khālīṣī's Bahā'ī interlocutor as a confused person who spoke in circles.⁷¹⁸ At the conclusion of the debate, the transcript was signed by both sides and all witnesses.⁷¹⁹ Khālīṣī then ascended the minbar and delivered a sermon. In his course of his sermon, he once again ridiculed the Bahā'ī doctrine of the Manifestation of God as tantamount to “lowering the station of divinity.” Similar to Rashīd Riẓā's criticism of aspects of Islam he deemed in need of reform, Khālīṣī jettisoned the Bahā'ī teachings as “superstitions” (*khurāfāt*).⁷²⁰ “Scientific progress,” he contended, discredited not only the superstitions found in the Bahā'ī writings but also the false teachings found of the Bible. To prove the latter, Khālīṣī maintained that in the mid-nineteenth century, scientists began to discover that the Bible (*injīl*) is full of superstitions and examples of polytheism (*shirk*). He reasoned that since the affirmation of the oneness of God (*tawḥīd*) promulgated by Islam was not spread throughout Europe, many of its citizens denied religion altogether. Inasmuch as Muḥammad's teaching of *tawḥīd* was “free of every last trace of *shirk*,” Khālīṣī averred that the latest advances in such fields as astronomy, physics, physiology, geology, and medicine were in complete harmony with the existence of God. He went so far as to assert that even Charles Darwin was a *muwaḥḥid* (a person who affirms the oneness of God) by virtue of having declared that a “wise and governing power” is the source of “*ikhtiyār-i aṣlah*” (natural selection),⁷²¹ an idea which, according to Khālīṣī, is derivative and can found in a prayer ascribed to one of the Shī'ī Imams.⁷²²

⁷¹⁸ Khālīṣī, *Muballigh-i Bahā'ī dar maḥẓar*, 6-25. Quote is from page 9.

⁷¹⁹ It is dated 5 Jumādā al-Ākhira 1345 (11 December 1926/19 Āẓar 1305).

^{720 720} Khālīṣī, *Muballigh-i Bahā'ī dar maḥẓar*, 29, 30, 33.

⁷²¹ He seems have mixed up “natural selection” with “survival of the fittest.”

⁷²² Khālīṣī, *Muballigh-i Bahā'ī dar maḥẓar*, 30-31. Imam Ja'far Ṣādiq is the sixth Imam of the Twelver Shī'a.

Up to now, the debate and Khālīshī's post-debate sermon have dealt purely with religious doctrines. Without any warning, near the end of his talk, Khālīshī shifted the focus to socio-political issues. Using an acerbic tone, he held the Bahā'īs responsible for the problems Iran had faced since the time of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh. Assuming the text of Khālīshī's post-debate speech is verbatim the talk he delivered in 1926, it would be safe to posit that Khālīshī was one of the first people – if not *the* first person – to accuse Iranian Bahā'īs of being agents of foreign powers bent on destroying the country. Without furnishing any evidence, Khālīshī alleged that Bahā'īs were “nothing more than instruments controlled completely by foreign entities (*faqat ālat-i bi-lā irādah-i ajānib*).” “The politics of colonialism,” he exclaimed, addressing Taḥqīqī, his Bahā'ī interlocutor, “has used you as its lapdog to arouse conflict and ferment civil strife,” its greatest weapon for “destroying the nations of the world and asserting control over them (*imḥā'-i milal va tasalluṭ bar ānhāst*).” Khālīshī labeled Bahā'īs “highwaymen on the road of [Islamic] renewal (*rāhzan-i jādah-i tajaddud*),” and “the cause of (Iran's) stagnation if not decline (*vasīlah-i tavaqquf balkah taqahqur*).”⁷²³

As significant as Khālīshī's words are for what they say – representing as they do, the first time anti-Bahā'ī rhetoric is being voiced in a colonialist framework – they are equally significant for what they do not say. As mentioned earlier, Khālīshī was vehemently anti-British, yet he kept a close eye on news and developments in the territories of the former Ottoman Empire. News had reached him, it is safe to presume, that at a ceremony in Palestine on 27 April 1920, the Bahā'ī leader, ‘Abdu'l-Bahā’ (d. 1920),⁷²⁴ was invested with the insignia of the Knighthood of the British Empire for his humanitarian work in Palestine during the First

⁷²³ Khālīshī, *Muballigh-i Bahā'ī dar maḥẓar*, 36.

⁷²⁴ On him, see Firuz Kazemzadeh, “‘Abdu'l-Bahā’ ‘Abbās (1844-1921),” <http://www.bahai-encyclopedia-project.org> (accessed 10 September 2010); Todd Lawson, “‘Abbās Effendī,” *EI*³; *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “‘Abd-al-Bahā’.”

World War. The majority of later anti-Bahā'ī polemicists have adduced the knighting of 'Abdu'l-Bahā' as evidence of their claim that Bahā'īs spy for the colonial powers. It is important to note that Khālīshī does not mention a single word about 'Abdu'l-Bahā's knighting. Perhaps he was aware of the apolitical nature of receiving recognition as a knight? On the other hand, it may have been difficult for him to acknowledge the fact that a Bahā'ī leader had been granted the honor of Knighthood due to his own personal desire for prestige and social recognition, evinced by his adoption of the title of Imam and the lavish accolades showered upon him by friends and acolytes.⁷²⁵ Whatever may have been the reason, the fact that Khālīshī does not mention this issue suggests very strongly that anti-Bahā'ī polemicists in the 1920s interpreted the knighting of 'Abdu'l-Bahā' very differently than later polemicists.

In his sermon, Khālīshī proceeded to accuse the head of the Bahā'ī community at the time, Shoghi Effendi (d. 1957),⁷²⁶ of having issued false circulars against "Pahlavī" following the "Jahrum incident (*qaz̄īyyah*)."⁷²⁷ By the "Jahrum incident," Khālīshī was alluding to an episode of anti-Bahā'ī violence in southern Iran. In April 1926, mobs raided and pillaged the homes of Bahā'īs in Jahrum. According to reports, eight or twelve Bahā'īs were killed and many more were injured.⁷²⁸ In one of his letters on the incident, Shoghi Effendi emphasized that Bahā'īs obey the government and continue to pray for the Shah to rule justly.⁷²⁹ In an attempt to provoke Rīzā Shah to suppress the Bahā'īs, Khālīshī distorted Shoghi Effendi's emphasis on obedience to political authorities and pretended that the latter "has spoken against the

⁷²⁵ For example, Lankarānī writes of him as "the genius of Islam and the East" (*nābighah-i Islam va sharq*). The author of his biography written during his life time refers to him as "the manifestation of godliness and freedom." 'Alī-Akbar 'Alam, *Mazhar-i diyānat va āzādī, Ayatollah Aqā-yi Khālīshī* (Tehran: 1944).

⁷²⁶ On him, see D. MacEoin, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Shawḳī Efendi [sic] Rabbānī."

⁷²⁷ Khālīshī, *Muballigh-i Bahā'ī dar mahẓar*, 37-38.

⁷²⁸ On the Jahrum incident, see the chapter four on Rīzā Shah.

⁷²⁹ For details, see the chapter on Rīzā Shah.

monarchy” (*bar ‘alayh-i salṭanat sukhan guftah*).⁷³⁰ The developments mentioned in Shoghi Effendi’s letter are so close to the time in which Khālīshī is making his comments that we can say with some degree of certainty that he kept a close eye on Bahā’ī communications and writings.⁷³¹

V. *Shaykh Ḥusayn Lankarānī Tīhrānī (d. 1989)*

Khālīshī received help from a fellow cleric in some of his anti-Bahā’ī activities. In 1924, Shaykh Ḥusayn Lankarānī was arrested with Khālīshī and charged for his role in the Imbrie affair.⁷³² Two years later, Lankarānī recorded Khālīshī’s debates with a Bahā’ī teacher⁷³³ and later authored the preface to the published account of the debates. It would be appropriate, therefore, to include some comments about Lankarānī who himself had a long history of anti-Bahā’ī activity both in the period under study and later in the 1940s.⁷³⁴

Even though it might not be easy to refer to him as a “reformist theologian,” Lankarānī was an unusual figure among the clerics of his time to justify discussing him separately from the traditionalist clerics. There is evidence to suggest that he was a forerunner to the militant Islamists that appeared in Iran in the 1940s. We have two accounts dating from the 1920s that detail attempts by Lankarānī to assassinate and assault someone with a deadly weapon.

⁷³⁰ Khālīshī, *Muballigh-i Bahā’ī dar maḥẓar*, 38.

⁷³¹ The first announcement of Queen Mary expressing her interest in the Bahā’ī religion, for example, was made in May 1926. Della Marcus, *Her Eternal Crown: Queen Marie of Romania and the Bahā’ī Faith* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2000). Shoghi Effendi’s mention of this appears in a letter dated Ilvil (between August and September) 1926. See Shoghi Effendi, *Tawqī ‘āt-i mubārakah*, 305-317. Khālīshī’s reference to the Bahā’ī “claim” that the Queen of Romania was a Bahā’ī appears in the sermon he delivered, just a few months later, following the 11 December 1926 debate. See Khālīshī, *Muballigh-i Bahā’ī dar maḥẓar*, 38.

⁷³² Baṣīratmanish, *‘Ulamā’ va rijīm-i Riẓā Shāh*, 352. Abū al-Ḥasanī has tried to pretend that Lankarānī’s arrest and exile was a consequence of his opposition to Riẓā Khān’s campaign to establish a republic. Abū al-Ḥasanī (Munzir), *‘Izhārāt va khāṭirāt*,” 102.

⁷³³ Khālīshī, *Muballigh-i Bahā’ī dar maḥẓar*, 14.

⁷³⁴ For a detailed discussion of his anti-Bahā’ī activities, see ‘Alī Abū al-Ḥasanī (Munzir), *‘Izhārāt va khāṭirāt* Ayatollah Ḥājī Shaykh Ḥusayn Lankarānī darbārah-‘i Bābīgarī va Bahā’īgarī,” *Faṣl’nāmah-i muṭālī‘āt-i tārikhī, vijah’nāmah-i Bahā’īyat*, 4:17(Summer 2007), 67-153.

Lankarānī was a supporter of Ayatollah Mudarris during the premiership of Riḏā Khān. When the conflict between the two heightened, Lankarānī planned, “with a number of people,” to assassinate Riḏā Khān. It was Mudarris who did not permit them to execute the plan, on grounds that Islamic law does not condone assassinations.⁷³⁵ At a second incident recounted by him directly, Lankarānī assaulted a Bahā’ī named Afrūkhtah by pressing a gun on his chest.⁷³⁶ He continued to resort to aggression and violence in later decades. His cousin recalls that in the early 1940s, Lankarānī concealed a gun in his car on the way to attend a religious debate with a Bahā’ī.⁷³⁷ Furthermore, the author of *Tārīkh-i jarā’id va maṭbū’āt-i Iran* tells us that in 1948, when journalist Maḥmūd Mas’ūd (d. 1948) was assassinated,⁷³⁸ Lankarānī was arrested for suspicion of murder and later released. Being their contemporary, the author politely and cautiously adds that Lankarānī and his three brothers, known collectively as “the Lankarānī brothers,” were “so powerful and influential (*ṣāhib-i sha’n*) that almost nothing happened in Tehran without their approval.”⁷³⁹

From an intellectual point of view, also, Lankarānī’s record is unusual. In present day Iran, he is celebrated as a politically active Shī’ī cleric who opposed the Pahlavīs.⁷⁴⁰ Writing in 1948, the author of *Tārīkh-i jarā’id va maṭbū’āt-i Iran* introduced Lankarānī as a “radical nationalist” (*millīyūn-i ifrātī*) and one of the “well-known freedom fighters of Iran.” He added that Lankarānī was “infamous for espousing Communist ideas, for having lived a secluded life

⁷³⁵ Baṣīratmanish, ‘*Ulamā’ va rijīm-i Shāh*, 377.

⁷³⁶ See Abū al-Ḥasanī (Munzīr), “*Iḏhārāt va khāṭirāt*, 120.

⁷³⁷ Abū al-Ḥasanī (Munzīr), “*Iḏhārāt va khāṭirāt*,” 109.

⁷³⁸ Maḥmūd Mas’ūd was the editor of the newspaper *Mard-i imrūz*. In February 1948, he was the victim of a politically motivated murder. See Naṣr Allāh Shīftah, *Zidigīnāmah va mubārizāt-i siyāsī-i duktur Fāṭimī* (Tehran: Āftāb-i Ḥaqīqat, 1985), 231-237.

⁷³⁹ Ṣadr Hāshimī, *Tārīkh-i jarā’id*, 49-50. Yann Richard mentions that Sangalajī received death threats from the Lankarānī brothers because of his unorthodox views.

⁷⁴⁰ See Abū al-Ḥasanī (Munzīr)’s “*Iḏhārāt va khāṭirāt*,” cited above.

during the reign of Rizā Shāh, and for having served time in prison.”⁷⁴¹ Others have alluded to Lankarānī’s ties to “leftist elements” after the downfall of Rizā Shah.⁷⁴²

Lankarānī was the editor of the newspaper *Ittiḥād-i Islam*, founded in Tehran in 1303/1924.⁷⁴³ Muḥammad Ṣadr Hāshimī, the author of *Tārīkh-i jarā’id va maṭbū’āt-i Iran*, has suggested that Khālīshī oversaw the publication of *Ittiḥād-i Islam* which was essentially a mouthpiece for Khālīshī’s thoughts. *Ittiḥād-i Islam*, we are told, was primarily concerned with emancipating Mesopotamia from British control, which at the time was one of Khālīshī’s chief concerns.⁷⁴⁴ From the introduction Lankarānī wrote for *Muballigh-i Bahā’ī dar maḥẓar-i Ayatollah Khālīshī* and the interview he conducted with Khālīshī for the fifth edition of the book in 1948,⁷⁴⁵ one can conclude that intellectually the relationship between the two was one of master and apprentice. In his introduction to *Muballigh-i Bahā’ī dar maḥẓar-i Ayatollah Khālīshī*, Lankarānī repeated the political accusations against Bahā’īs which Khālīshī had made in his post-debate talk published in the same volume.

As the editor of a newspaper, Lankarānī was able to provide space for the publication of anti-Bahā’ī materials written by a number of former Bahā’īs in the 1920s.⁷⁴⁶ Other than this, he

⁷⁴¹ Muḥammad Ṣadr Hāshimī, *Tārīkh-i jarā’id va maṭbū’āt-i Iran*, 2 Vols. 2nd ed. (1327/1948; repr., Tehran: Kamāl, 1363/1984), 1: 48-50.

⁷⁴² Baṣīratmanish, *‘Ulamā’ va rijīm-i Shāh*, 382. ‘Alī Abū al-Ḥasanī (Munzir), a contemporary Iranian cleric, historian and an ardent advocate of Lankarānī’s, indicates that in 1924 “when he was returning from exile in Kalāt and Mashhad to Tehran via Caucasia [?], “he conversed with the authorities of Communist Russia and informed them of the ‘real’ issues of Iran.” Lankarānī convinced them that the strategies of the Russian minister to Iran at the time were wrong. According to Abū al-Ḥasanī, these “conversations” were effective and the minister was subsequently removed from his position and punished. Abū al-Ḥasanī recounts this episode while elaborating Lankarānī’s frequently expressed remark, “It was I who ruined the Bahā’īs’ plans for a temple in ‘Ishqābād.” See Abū al-Ḥasanī (Munzir), *‘Izhārāt va khāṭirāt*,” 102-103.

⁷⁴³ See Muḥammad Ṣadr Hāshimī, *Tārīkh-i jarā’id va maṭbū’āt-i Iran*, 2 Vols. 2nd ed. (1327/1948; repr., Tehran: Kamāl, 1363/1984), 1: 48-50.

⁷⁴⁴ Ṣadr Hāshimī, *Tārīkh-i jarā’id*, 48-49.

⁷⁴⁵ I will discuss the interview extensively in the chapter on the 1940s.

⁷⁴⁶ Abū al-Ḥasanī (Munzir), *‘Izhārāt va khāṭirāt*,” 116-126.

was not much of an author. As the violent examples above illustrate, he was a man of action. Consequently, the author of a recent article highlighting Lankarānī's anti-Bahā'ism was forced to rely almost entirely on "oral statements and memories"⁷⁴⁷ to establish his anti-Bahā'ī credentials. As we shall see in the chapter on *The Confessions of Dolgoruki*, to combat the factitiousness of *The Confessions* and "prove" its authenticity, Lankarānī shared "memories" of his father who, according to Lankarānī, knew personally one of the characters of *The Confessions*.⁷⁴⁸ Nevertheless, two anti-Bahā'ī polemical works are credited to Lankarānī. Both works introduce other works. We have already mentioned his introduction to *Muballigh-i Bahā'ī dar maḥẓar-i sharīf-i Ayatollah Khālīshī*. In this work, Lankarānī maintains that European powers have always sought to create schisms and conflicts in the colonies they establish: "For example, in India, [they divided people into] Hindu and Muslim, and [created new sects like] Isma'īlī, and more recently, Qādyānī. In Iran, [they divided people into] Ḥaydarī and Ni'matī⁷⁴⁹ [or] Shaykhī and Mutisharri',⁷⁵⁰ and [created new sects like] Bābī and Bahā'ī. In all this, their intention has been to ferment conflict and enmity." He goes on to say that in order to uncover the truth about these "social menaces" (*shayāṭīn-i ijtīmā'ī*) and "agents of foreign powers" (*ālāt-i sīyāsī-i ajānīb*), the text of the debate between Khālīshī and a Bahā'ī is being published.⁷⁵¹ Like Khālīshī, Lankarānī was involved in many anti-Bahā'ī activities in the 1940s, but discussing them will take us beyond the scope of the present study.

⁷⁴⁷ Abū al-Ḥasanī (Munzīr), "Iẓhārāt va khāṭirāt," 67. The article was published in a collection of articles by the Political Studies and Research Institute, an institute founded in Iran in the 1980s alongside the Institute for Iranian Contemporary Historical Studies to generate "objective" data in order to rewrite the history of Iran according to the ideologies of the Islamic Republic, with special emphasis on the Bahā'īs of Iran.

⁷⁴⁸ Abū al-Ḥasanī (Munzīr), "Iẓhārāt va khāṭirāt," 96-97.

⁷⁴⁹ See *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. "Haydarī and Ni'matī."

⁷⁵⁰ See *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. "Bālāsarī."

⁷⁵¹ Khālīshī, *Muballigh-i Bahā'ī dar maḥẓar*, 4-5.

3.3 Former Bahā'īs

Introduction

The early 1920s witnessed a dramatic change in the leadership of the Bahā'ī community. The charismatic leader 'Abdu'l-Bahā' died in 1921 and his young grandson, Shoghi (Shawqī) Effendi (d. 1957) succeeded him.⁷⁵² Shortly after, a few Bahā'īs renounced the religion. Some of these individuals proceeded to publish works refuting the Bahā'ī religion altogether.⁷⁵³ In this section, I will introduce three of these former Bahā'īs who exerted the most influence on later generations of anti-Bahā'ī polemicists.

I. 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Āyatī (Āvārah)

'Abd al-Ḥusayn Āyatī (d. 1332/1953) was a Shī'ī cleric, a prolific writer, and a poet,⁷⁵⁴ who converted to the Bahā'ī religion at the age of thirty, and was very active as a Bahā'ī teacher for eighteen years. As a Bahā'ī, he met with the Bahā'ī leader 'Abdu'l-Bahā,' received from him the title *Āvārah* (Wayfarer), and travelled extensively in Turkestan, the Caucasus, the Ottoman Empire, Egypt and different cities in Iran, promoting his new religion. In time, however,

⁷⁵² See Peter Smith, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions: From Messianic Shī'ism to a World Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 115-120.

⁷⁵³ For a study on a similar phenomenon in recent years, see: *Moojan Momen*, "Marginality and Apostasy in the Bahā'ī Community," *Religion* 37 (2007): 187-209.

⁷⁵⁴ He wrote seventeen books. For the list of his publications, see *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. "Āyatī, 'Abd al-Ḥusayn." Among his works was a history of Yazd: 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Āyatī, *Ātashkadah-i Yazdān* (Yazd: Gulbahār-i Yazd, 1317/1938). For a scholarly description of this work, also a concise biography of Āyatī, see: Farzin Vejdani, "Purveyors of the Past: Iranian Historians and Nationalist Historiography, 1900-1941," (PhD diss., Yale University, 2009), 489-492.

conflicts with Bahā'īs developed and he left the Bahā'ī community in late 1924, converting back to Islam, and became a fierce anti-Bahā'ī polemicist.⁷⁵⁵ As a Bahā'ī, he wrote two volumes on Bābī-Bahā'ī history, up to 1921 arguably the most comprehensive one of its kind from the pen of a believer.⁷⁵⁶ In the first few years after his return to Islam, he produced a major anti-Bahā'ī polemic in three volumes, *Kashf al-ḥiyāl* (Exposing the Deceptions).⁷⁵⁷ During the six year period (1308-1315/1929-1936), he also published a monthly journal, *Namakdān*⁷⁵⁸ which formally defined itself as a “literary, social, historical, economical, critical” publication. Practically, however, it constituted a compilation of periodical attacks, mockery, and efforts at the defamation of Bahā'īs and of those figures who they revered as holy. With the emergence

⁷⁵⁵ For a short biography of Āyatī, see *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Āyatī, ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn.” See also: Tīhrānī, Āghā Buzurg Muḥammad Muḥsin, *al-Dharī'a ilā taṣānīf al-shī'a*. 25 vols (Tehran and Najaf: distributed through author, 1355/1936-1398/1978), 9(1): 13; 15:118; 16:191; 18:33. 179; Idem, *Ṭabaqāt a'lām al-shī'a* (Mashhad : Dār al-Murtaḍā lil-Nashr, 1404/1984), 1(3): 1076-1077. See also Khānbābā Mushār, *Mu'allifīn-i Kutub-i Chāpi-yi Fārsī va Arabī: Az Āghāz-i Chāp tā Kunūn* (Tehran: Rangīn, 1340-1344 / 1961-1965), 3: 718-20. For a Bahā'ī account of the reasons for Āyatī's abandonment of his Bahā'ī allegiances, see: Adib Taherzadah, *The Child of Covenant: A Study Guide to the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahā'* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2000), 294; Idem, *The Covenant of Bahā'u'llāh* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1992), 335-36. It was apparently with reference to Āyatī that Kasravī (d. 1946) wrote the “thirst” of Bahā'īs to teach (*tablīgh*) their beliefs provided the context for “some irreligious men,” who all they had was rhetorical talents, to connect themselves with Bahā'īs, as teachers (*muballigh*), and exploit them as much as they can. Then, as soon as they get a bit hurt, they separate themselves [from Bahā'īs] and “in the name of having been deceived, find a place for themselves among Muslims, and this time around with shameless hostility against Bahā'īs, they write about the latter whatever they want.” Aḥmad Kasravī, *Bahā'īgarī* (Tehran: Kitābfurūshī-i Pāydar, n.d.), 121-122.

⁷⁵⁶ ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Āyatī (Āvarah), *al-Kawakib al-durrīyya fī ma'āthir al-Bahā'īya*, 2vols. (Cairo: Sa'ādah, 1923-4). Amanat refers to this work as an “attempt to compile a general history” of the Bābī ad Bahā'ī religions. See Amant, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 438. According to MacEoin, “although the text is frequently inaccurate and must be used with caution, it does retain considerable value for its occasional insights and alternative versions of some events.” Denis MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Bābī Doctrine and History: A Survey* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1992), 174.

⁷⁵⁷ ‘A. Āyatī, *Kashf al-ḥiyāl*, 3 vols. in one, 6th ed. of vol. 1, 3rd ed. of vols. 2, 3 (Tehran: 1326/1947). 1307-10/1928-31 has been given as the date of the book's first publication. See, for example, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Āyatī ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn.” However, the first volume was published earlier than 1307/1928. The first sentence of the introduction to this volume states that it was written eighty years after the birth of the Bābī religion, making 1924 the year of writing the book. The same volume features a letter from the Royal Court that praises the author and indicates that the work was published in the first year of Rīzā Shah's reign (1304/1926). However, the date given for this letter is incorrect (see note # chapter on Rīzā Shah). We do know that the first volume (at least) was published by 1306/1927, when another cleric, ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Ishrāq-Khāvarī, converted to the Bahā'ī religion. See Ṣāliḥ Mawlavī-Nīzhād, ed., *Ishrāqkhāvarī: zindigānī, āṣār va khāṭirāt* (Madrid: Bunyād-i Farhangī-i Niḥāl, 2009), 224, 412.

⁷⁵⁸ On *Namakdān*, see: S. M. Ṣadr Hāshimī, *Tārīkh-i jarāyid va majallāt-i Iran* (Isfahan, 1332), 4: 309-11.

of several Islamist weekly journals in 1320s/1940s, Āyatī became a major contributor and was, of course, very well received by the editors.⁷⁵⁹

Kashf al-ḥiyal

Written in three successively published volumes, for a total of five hundred and ninety pages,⁷⁶⁰ Āyatī's *Kashf al-ḥiyal* went through several editions, becoming in time a virtual reference work for future anti-Bahā'ī polemicists.⁷⁶¹ In its introduction, Āyatī situated himself as particularly well qualified to discuss Bahā'ī subjects. Other works written in refutation of the Bahā'ī religion, he stated, were not as effective as the situation called for, because their authors had not had the benefit of first-hand acquaintance with “mysteries” of “this group.” His own twenty years of association with it had provided him with the required knowledge for the exposure of truth of the matter (*kashf-i ḥaqā'iq*), he asserted.⁷⁶² In fact, *Kashf al-ḥiyal* is essentially an epitome of hate literature created to disparage Bahā'īs and their religion. Most of volume one takes the form of a dialogue between Āyatī and “Āvārah,” a feature that is absent in later volumes. The book includes, in almost no order, a wide range of topics, e.g., theological, historical, ethical/moral, laws and ordinances, and political. The concern of this dissertation is the latter category. A major feature of the entire series, however, is an almost obsessive focus on allegations of sexual misconduct and depravity. The detail and vulgar tone of this material leaves no doubt of the author's determination to do his best to besmirch the character of his former associates.

⁷⁵⁹ On the Islamist journals of that period, see Tavakoli-Targhi, *Bahā'ī-sitizī*, 79-124.

⁷⁶⁰ The first volume 156, the second 243 and the third 191 pages.

⁷⁶¹ To this day, *Kashf al-ḥiyal* remains one of the most (if not *the* most) frequently cited anti-Bahā'ī polemical work.

⁷⁶² Āyatī, *Kashf al-ḥiyal*, 1:1-3.

Political Accusations

The political theme in the form of alleged clandestine connection with foreign powers, which had had its early buds in Za'im al-Dawlah's *Miftāḥ-i Bāb al-abwāb*, acquired far greater attention from Āyatī. Using Za'im al-Dawlah's term, "political religion" (*dīn-i siyāsī*)⁷⁶³ he elaborated extensively on the subject. The opening page referred to the Bābī-Bahā'ī religions as an "intrigue" (*dasīṣah*), outwardly assuming the garb of a religion, but inwardly based on "betrayal of the country" (*khiyānat-i vaṭanī*). Bābīs and Bahā'īs are then virtually accused of being responsible for their own persecution through propagating "nonsense" beliefs that forced the people of Iran to fall into "the snare of [committing] murder and plunder" (*dām-i qatl va ghārat*), so that they [i.e., Bābīs and Bahā'īs] could "seize" the opportunity to raise a cry of being wronged (*maẓlūmīyat*).⁷⁶⁴ Āyatī asserted that it was concern for "national unity" (*vaḥdat-i millī*) and the "interests of the country" (*maṣāliḥ-i vaṭanī*) that compelled him to write, since "Bahā'īs had inflicted great harm" on the unity of Iranian people. The latter form of damage was, to him, even more serious than the religious threat.⁷⁶⁵

Elsewhere in volume one, Āyatī was the first to introduce a subject that would become a constant feature of anti-Bahā'ī polemics for decades that followed. Interestingly, however, the context in which Āyatī raised the issue differed basically from what later transpired. The incident in question was the honorary knighthood conferred on 'Abdu'l-Bahā', by the British Mandate authority in Palestine, on 27 April 1920, in recognition of his humanitarian efforts during World War I for the relief of famine. Although the Bahā'ī leader nominally accepted the

⁷⁶³ Āyatī, *Kashf al-ḥiyāl*, 2:42.

⁷⁶⁴ Āyatī, *Kashf al-ḥiyāl*, 1:1.

⁷⁶⁵ Āyatī, *Kashf al-ḥiyāl*, 1:5.

honor itself, he declined to use the title.⁷⁶⁶ Āyatī recounted this incident, in the context of rejecting the Bahā'ī tradition, that Baha'u'llāh's father was a minister (i.e., that he was *vazīr-zādah*),⁷⁶⁷ such a claim he represented as an indication that the leaders of the Bahā'ī religion were preoccupied with “transitory things of this world” (*shu'ūnāt-i zāhirah*). Improving on the readily available historical record, Āyatī went so far as to claim that ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ had “requested” the title from the British Government, “with pressure to a degree that wore out both General Allenby and Major Tudor Pole.”⁷⁶⁸ This version went on to picture ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ as celebrating the occasion and publicizing it as a means of “showing off himself” (*khud'namā'ī*), arranging for a photograph with the Order and the insignia from the British Government on the table. The display of this picture in the homes of most of the Bahā'īs in Iran, in Āyatī's words, “proved” to “the people of the world” that despite representing his father as a spiritual leader, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ had “abased himself” at the threshold of the British monarch and that he and his family were “worshippers of the world” (*dunyā'parast*).⁷⁶⁹ Interestingly enough, however, Āyatī's reference to the event, at this stage, had no political connotation. Even the passing reference to King George was used to demonstrate ‘Abdu’l-

⁷⁶⁶ For details, see Ahang Rabbani, “‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ in Abū-Sinān: September 1914-May 1915,” in *Bahā'ī Studies Review* 13 (2005): 75-103; Adib Masumian, *Debunking the Myths: Conspiracy Theories on the Genesis and Mission of the Bahā'ī Faith* (Lulu:2009), 37-42; H.M. Balyuzi, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā: The Center of the Covenant of Bahā'u'llāh (Oxford: George Ronald, 1971), 443. Since the 1890s, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ had instructed the Bahā'īs farmers living on his lands in Palestine to cultivate grain, a percentage of which was usually stored. With the beginning of the WWI, he instructed some of the Bahā'ī farmers in Abū-Sinān (a village near Acre) to grow vegetables. In times of famine during WWI, he saved the lives of many including the poor in Palestine and the British soldiers, by providing them with the stored grains and the fresh vegetables. Rabbani, “‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ in Abū-Sinān,”

⁷⁶⁷ Bahā'u'llāh's father Mīrzā ‘Abbās Nūrī (d. 1839), known as Mīrzā Buzurg, served the court of Fath-‘Alī Shah Qājār (d.1834) in several capacities. He was appointed minister to the shah's twelfth son, the il-khan of the Qājār tribe. He grew close to First Minister Mīrzā Abu'l-Qāsim Qā'immaqām, and in 1834 he was appointed governor and tax-farmer of Burūjird and Luristān. See *Encyclopaedia Iranica* s.v. “BAHĀ'-ALLĀH.”

⁷⁶⁸ Edmund Henry Hynman Allenby (d. 1936) was the High Commissioner for Egypt. On Major Wellesley Tudor Pole (d. 1968), see the conclusion to this section.

⁷⁶⁹ Āyatī, *Kashf al-ḥiyal*, 1:22-23.

Bahā's alleged "worldliness," the account being incorporated in one of the sections of *Kashf al-ḥiyal* devoted to this theme.

In the second volume, which apparently was published some two years after the first, Āyatī raised again the topic of the knighthood of 'Abdu'l-Bahā', this time suggesting a political connotation. Without any evidentiary support, he pictured 'Abdu'l-Bahā' as seeking the title and adding sanctimoniously that it was a shame for someone claiming to be a spiritual leader, free of any interest in politics, to make such a request. The reason given for the alleged "request," Āyatī wrote, was that 'Abdu'l-Bahā' thought "by accepting servitude to George of England," the people of the East, especially the Iranians, would be intimidated and thus inclined to accept "the divinity of his, [i.e., 'Abdu'l-Bahā's] father."⁷⁷⁰ Even so, in this now politicized reading of the incident, Āyatī did not imply that the knighthood demonstrated a clandestine relationship with the British government, such as would figure in later polemics.

Here, Āyatī also introduced the Bahā'ī view of the knighthood of 'Abdu'l-Bahā', in which the initiative had been taken by the British and 'Abdu'l-Bahā' had merely accepted the offer out of courtesy. The Bahā'ī claim that 'Abdu'l-Bahā's decision to participate in the ceremony sitting down, with his back to the insignia, indicated his indifference to the honor, was rejected by Āyatī as "shameless."⁷⁷¹ The writer claimed that he had heard such statements from Bahā'īs when he was among them. It seems more likely, however, that this response from

⁷⁷⁰ Āyatī, *Kashf al-ḥiyal*, 2:124-125.

⁷⁷¹ Āyatī, *Kashf al-ḥiyal*, 2:126.

Bahā'īs was elicited after he made the first reference to the incidence of knighting in volume one of his book.⁷⁷²

While the above is the main political accusation by Āyatī against Bahā'īs, he also made other remarks that set the stage for the future full-fledged politicization of anti-Bahā'ism. In a section of *Kashf al-ḥiyal* where he was discussing Bahā'u'llāh's letters to the kings and rulers of the world, Āyatī made a reference to his tablet to Alexander II.⁷⁷³ In setting the background for the authoring of that tablet, Āyatī lists a mixture of information and misinformation as proofs of Tsarist Russia's support of Bahā'īs. He started with, "the Russian Emperor empowered the Bahā'īs in Ashkhabad, gave them freedom, and permitted them to build a *Mashriq al-aẓkār*." Going back several decades, he then referred to the release of Bahā'u'llāh from prison which "had happened through resorting (*iltijā'*) to, and connection (*bastigī*) with the Russian legation," as, he claimed, Bahā'īs themselves "acknowledge." Then taking Bahā'u'llāh's brother-in-law for his brother, he added, "history is the witness," that Bahā'u'llāh's brother, "Mīrzā Ḥasan," was the secretary of the Russian legation.⁷⁷⁴ Finally, Āyatī states that an officer representing the Russian legation escorted Bahā'u'llāh to Baghdad, which he falsely attributed as having been mentioned in "*Maqālah-i sayyāḥ* by 'Abdu'l-Bahā'".⁷⁷⁵ He concluded that Bahā'īs,

⁷⁷² The Bahā'ī community at that time had decided to ignore the polemics against them, and did not respond in writing. See: Mawlavī-Nizhād, ed., *Ishrāqkhāvarī*, 224. The comment of Bahā'īs, however, could have reached Āyatī by word of mouth.

⁷⁷³ For this and all the references to Russia quoted from Āyatī here, see the section titled "Bahā'īs and Russia."

⁷⁷⁴ Bahā'u'llāh had a brother by the name Muḥammad Ḥasan (d. 1867), who lived in Māzandarān and was never a secretary to the Russian Legation. On him, see Muḥammad 'Alī Malik-khusravī, *Iqlīm-i nūr* ([Tehran]: Mu'assisah-i millī-i Maṭbū'āt-i Amrī, 1337/1958), 143-144. It was Bahā'u'llāh's brother-in-law who was the secretary at the Russian legation. See the section titled "Bahā'īs and Russia."

⁷⁷⁵ Āyatī's reference is to this work: 'Abdu'l-Bahā', *A Traveller's Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bāb*, trans. and ed. Edward G. Browne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891).

“at the beginning” relied on Russian support, and “it is not clear what politics motivated the Tsarist State to have undeniably assisted them.”⁷⁷⁶

II. Ḥasan Nīkū

According to a biography written by his close friend Āyatī, Ḥasan Nīkū was a merchant and a political activist in Burūgird during the early stages of the Constitutional Movement (1906-1911). Later, Nīkū converted to the Bahā’ī faith, which resulted in his persecution and a loss of trade opportunities. He was forced to emigrate to Tehran where he served his new found religion for twelve years, after which he then travelled for some time in efforts to share its message with others.⁷⁷⁷ Nīkū left the Bahā’ī religion after his friend and biographer Āyatī did, and subsequently wrote a lengthy anti-Bahā’ī polemic, *Falsafah-i Nīkū dar paydāyish-i rāhzanān va badkīshān* (Nīkū’s philosophy on the emergence of the thieves and the impious). This text consists of four volumes in two, for a total of 945 pages.⁷⁷⁸ Even though *Falsafah-i Nīkū* was not republished as frequently as *Kashf al-ḥiyal* or *Kitāb-i Ṣubḥī*, it had a considerable influence in shaping anti-Bahā’ī thought in the decades that followed.

Falsafah-i Nīkū dar paydāyish-i rahzanān va bad-kīshān

Falsafah-i Nīkū is a collection of a diverse range of topics put together in almost no order. The unifying theme of the book is the attempt to discredit Bahā’īs. There is no publication date on

⁷⁷⁶ Āyatī, *Kashf al-ḥiyal*, 1:62.

⁷⁷⁷ Āyatī (Āvārah), *al-Kawākib al-durrīyya*, 2:238-39. To express his gratitude for the praise that Nīkū had lavished on his book, Āyatī included a short biographical note on the former in the closing pages of his *al-Kawākib al-durrīyya* (1924).

⁷⁷⁸ Ḥ. Nīkū, *Falsafah-i Nīkū dar paydāyish-i rahzanān va bad-kīshān*, 4 vols in 2 (n.p: n.d). *Falsafah-i Nīkū* was published at least once more with an introduction by Iḥsān Allāh Nīkū, the author’s son, by Farāhānī publishing house. The date of the second publication is also not mentioned. For a short Bahā’ī account on Nīkū, see Taherzadeh, *The Child of the Covenant*, p. 296.

the book, but from the content it is clear that it had been written shortly after the first volume of Āyatī's *Kashf al-Ḥīyal* in the late 1920s or the early 1930s. One can trace in *Falsafah-i Nīkū* the influence of Āyatī's *Kashf al-Ḥīyal*, the political thoughts of Sayyid Jamal al-Dīn Afghānī, and the content of Za 'īm al-Dawlah's *Miftāḥ-i Bāb al-abwāb*.

Some of the political themes in *Falsafah-i Nīkū* are the same as *Kashf al-Ḥīyal*, although *Nīkū* brings in new aspects. *Nīkū*'s reference to the knighthood of 'Abdu'l-Bahā' is the same as Āyatī's in the first volume of *Kashf al-Ḥīyal*. Neither shed political light on the issue, instead framing the knighthood in terms of a supposed lack of spirituality and as a quest for worldly honor. *Nīkū* mentions that the title "Sir" was also offered to some Muslim clerics in Iraq, but "since they were spiritual," they refused to accept it. It was also offered to an Iranian and he did not "boast" so much about it.⁷⁷⁹

Nīkū expressed his concern about the "intrigues" (*dasīṣah'ḥā*) that had inflicted the "Eastern world, in general and the Islamic world, in particular." "Ominous policies" he wrote, have endangered our "national unity" (*vaḥdat-i millī*). *Nīkū* cited the "interests of the homeland" (*maṣāliḥ-i vaṭanī*), and national unity as the motivation behind authoring the book.⁷⁸⁰ The founder of the Bahā'ī religion, *Nīkū* wrote, based his teachings on the "policy of the colonialist states" (*siyāsat-i duwal-i isti'mārī*). As proof, *Nīkū* referenced Bahā'u'llāh's statement, "It is not his to boast who loveth his country, but it is his who loveth the world" (*lays al-fakhr li-man yuḥibb al-waṭan bal li-man yuḥibb al-'ālam*).⁷⁸¹ According to *Nīkū*, this

⁷⁷⁹ *Nīkū*, *Falsafah-i Nīkū*, 2: 196-99. The Iranian he named as having been knighted was Sardār Ṣafar Bakhtīārī.

⁷⁸⁰ *Nīkū*, *Falsafah-i Nīkū*, 1:182.

⁷⁸¹ Bahā'u'llāh, *Tablets of Bahā'u'llāh Revealed after the Kitāb-i Aqdas* (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1988), 87-88.

statement “extinguishes the spirit of an Iranian” (*rūḥ-i Īrānī rā makhmūd mīkunad*) and “submits him to foreigners” (*taslīm-i ajānib mīgardānad*) so that they can then take away his country and its independence. Nīkū maintained that spreading such ideas were a “major betrayal to the nation” (*khīyānat-i buzurg bih millat*), and an “important crime against one’s own homeland society” (*jināyat-i muhimmī bih jāmi’ah-i waṭan-i khud*).⁷⁸² Other examples of the teachings of Bahā’u’llāh, which according to Nīkū, were “based on the wish of colonialist countries” (*bar rū-yi tamāyul-i mamālik-i isti’mārī*), included Baha’u’llah’s encouragement of the use of chairs, and his removal of limitations on one’s apparel and beard, leaving these issues to the discretion of the individual.⁷⁸³ At the end of this discussion, Nīkū concluded that Bahā’īs did not know the “instruments of what politics” they had become.⁷⁸⁴ In an abrupt change of topic, Nīkū titles the next section, “Mrs. Schopflocher or the Spy,” where he gave an account of a Western Bahā’ī woman whom he had met in his 1302/1923 trip to Haifa, Palestine to visit the resting places of the Bāb and ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’. Each of them had then embarked on a trip to teach their religion, he to Egypt and she to India, Burma, Java, and China. Upon their return, they met again in Haifa. This time, however, Nīkū wrote, without explanation, that he “realized what it meant to teach the Cause of God [the Bahā’ī religion].” He expressed that the “American lady” was in fact “the colleague” (*hamqaṭār*) of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ and Shoghi Effendi. “The difference between her and a Bahā’ī teacher from Iran was that she knew what was [in fact] going on, and the Iranian did not.”⁷⁸⁵ While these statements implied that unbeknownst to them, Iranian

⁷⁸² Nīkū, *Falsafah-i Nīkū*, 2: 11-12.

⁷⁸³ Nīkū, *Falsafah-i Nīkū*, 2: 15-16. For the two laws of Bahā’u’llāh mentioned, see Bahā’u’llāh, *The Kitāb-i Aqdas*, 75-77 paragraphs 154, 159, and p. 242 note 175.

⁷⁸⁴ Nīkū, *Falsafah-i Nīkū*, 2: 12-13.

⁷⁸⁵ Nīkū, *Falsafah-i Nīkū*, 14-15. Mrs. Schopflocher whom Nīkū was referring to as an “American” was Florence Evaline Snyder (d. 1970), born and raised in Montreal. She was married to Siegfried Schopflocher, (d. 1953) a Canadian Bahā’ī of German-Jewish background. See *The Bah Encyclopedia Project*, s.v. “Schopflocher,

Bahā'īs were being taken advantage of, elsewhere in his book *Nīkū* accuses the Bahā'īs of being “spies” (jāsūs-i khārijah), implying that they consciously chose to commit espionage without, of course, any explanation or evidence.⁷⁸⁶

III. Faḡl Allāh Ṣubḥī Muhtadī

Faḡl Allāh Ṣubḥī Muhtadī (d.1341/1962) was a talented story teller. For twenty years (1319-39/1940-60) he narrated popular stories on the national radio every Friday. Throughout Iran, he was also the first to collect folktales and rewrite them for children.⁷⁸⁷ Ṣubḥī was born into a Bahā'ī family and raised as one. For a couple of years following World War I, he served as a secretary to ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’.⁷⁸⁸ Later, however, he recanted the Bahā'ī religion. At least one Bahā'ī source attributes his separation to the influence of Āyatī.⁷⁸⁹ In 1312/1933, he published an anti-Bahā'ī polemic in the form of his memories, titled *Kitāb-i Ṣubḥī*. The book was repeatedly published both before and after the Islamic Revolution.⁷⁹⁰ In 1334/1955, the year that witnessed an anti-Bahā'ī campaign all over the country, Ṣubḥī published another anti-

Siegfried”<http://www.bahai-encyclopedia-project.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=69:schopflocher-siegfried&catid=37:biography>

⁷⁸⁶ *Nīkū*, *Falsafah-i Nīkū*, 2: 172.

⁷⁸⁷ See *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Children vii.Children’s Literature.”

⁷⁸⁸ On Ṣubḥī, see: Yahyā Ārīyanpūr, *Az Ṣābā tā Nīmā: tārikh-i 150 sāl-i adab-i Fārsī*, 2 vols. (Tehran: Shirkat-i Sihāmī-i Kitābhā-yi Jībī, 1976).

⁷⁸⁹ See Taherzadeh, *The Child of the Covenant*, 296.

⁷⁹⁰ The edition available to this author is Faḡl Allāh Ṣubḥī Muhtadī, *Khaṭirāt-i zindigī-i Ṣubḥī va tārikh-i Bābīgarī va Bāhā'īgarī*, with an introduction by Sayyid Hādī Khusrawshāhī, 5th ed. (Qum: Markaz-i Intishārāt-i Dār al-Tablīgh-i Islāmī, 1354/1976). All citations are from this edition. Based on the information provided in this volume, following the first 1312/1933 publication under the title *Kitāb-i Ṣubḥī* in Tehran, *maṭba‘ah-i Dānish*, the second and third reprints were done in 1343/1964 and 1344/1965 respectively in Tabriz, the fourth in Qum, in 1351/1973. Two more recent publications are: ‘Alī Amīr Mustawfī, ed., *Khaṭirat-i inḥitāt va suqūṭ-i Faḡl Allāh Ṣubḥī, kātib-i ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’* (Tehran: Nashr-i ‘Ilm, 2005); Faḡl Allāh Ṣubḥī and Hādī Khusrawshāhī, *Khaṭirāt-i zindigī-i Ṣubḥī : tārikh-i Bābīgarī va Bāhā'īgarī* (Tehran: Markaz-i Asnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī, 2007). This last volume includes both *Kitāb-i Ṣubḥī* and *Payām-i pidar*.

Bahā'ī polemic, titled *Payām-i pidar* (The message of the father).⁷⁹¹ Şubhī used his story-telling talent in the writing of his anti-Bahā'ī polemics.⁷⁹²

Kitāb-i Şubhī

Compared to Āyatī's and Nīkū's anti-Bahā'ī polemics, *Kitāb-i Şubhī* is short (around 300 pages, pocket size), and an easy read, full of anecdotes. In the opening pages of the book he introduces himself as Fayẓ Allā Muhtadī,⁷⁹³ and shares how the “changes and revolutions” in his “beliefs and spiritual thoughts” led him in 1305/1926 to make statements incongruent with the taste of “the rank and file” (*avāmm*) of the people of Bahā',” and how this led finally in early 1307/1928 to his complete separation from the Bahā'ī community. His goal in writing his book, he declared, was “to awaken and inform souls.” Apart from a relatively brief review on the history, beliefs and scriptures of the Bābī and Bahā'ī religions, as Şubhī saw them, the book recounts stories of his alleged experiences among Bahā'īs—all devoted to depicting members of the faith in a highly negative light. In this, charges of insincerity of belief figured prominently. There is no evidence to corroborate his accounts of these experiences. The tone, though negative, is generally less acerbic than that of Āyatī's.

Kitāb-i Şubhī also has been extensively used as a source by anti-Bahā'ī polemicists over the years. As far as the political themes are concerned, writing a few years after the publication of *Kashf al-ḥiyal*, Şubhī essentially picked up where Āyatī had left off. The text of a letter and a

⁷⁹¹ *Payām-i pidar* was written at a time beyond the purview of this study. It went through several publications. See Faẓl Allāh Muhtadī Şubhī, *Payām-i Pidār*, 4th ed. (Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1356 [2536]/1977). For the 2007 reprint see the note above. The content of *Payām-i pidar* has many similarities with *Kitāb-i Şubhī*. Its language is much more vulgar and foul, especially when writing about 'Abdu'l-Bahā's successor, Shoghi Effendi. See Şubhī, *Payām-i Pidār*, 144.

⁷⁹² For example, he started *Payām-i pidar* with “My Dear Children,” and wrote the polemic in the form of recounting stories subtly aimed at the moral disgrace of Bahā'īs.

⁷⁹³ A footnote, apparently added by Khusrawshāī, who wrote an introduction to the work, indicates that Şubhī changed his name to Faẓl Allāf after converting to Islam. Şubhī, *Khaṭirāt-i zindigī-i*, 24.

prayer written by Abdu'l-Bahā' after the capture of Palestine by the British forces are deftly inserted in the narrative. The former, dated 16 October 1918 and addressed to a Bahā'ī in Tehran, was the first communication from Palestine after a long time of “total lack of communications,” and makes reference to the anxiety and sorrow experienced during the war. The letter expressed joy that now the “dark clouds” were “cleft asunder,” and the light of “tranquility and comfort” (*rāḥat va āsāyish*) brightened Palestine. The “tyrannical rule” (*sulṭah-i jābirah*) was gone and a “just government” (*hukūmat-i ādilāh*) had been established. It also makes reference to “justice” and “good governance” of England.⁷⁹⁴ Ṣubḥī also incorporated a prayer of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ written with respect to the British king⁷⁹⁵:

O Lord...We yield Thee thanks and praise for the appearance of this just kingdom and mighty government that is taking great pains to ensure the comfort of its subjects and the safety of the people. Aid Thou, O my God, the supreme emperor and British monarch, His Majesty King George V, through Thy holy confirmations. Perpetuate the sheltering shadow (of his kingdom) over this great land through the help, protection and support vouchsafed by Thee. Verily, Thou art the Most Powerful, the Most Exalted, the Almighty, the All-Bounteous.⁷⁹⁶

The book finds the circumstances surrounding Ṣubḥī's application for a travel permit to visit ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ in Palestine particularly suspicious. This document was “extremely difficult to get, but was kindly provided, along with a recommendation from the British Embassy, by [a] Mr. Na‘īmī.”⁷⁹⁷ This oblique reference to Bahā'ī political influence focused on a member of the faith ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Na‘īmī, whose knowledge of English had secured him a position as a secretary at the British embassy in Tehran.⁷⁹⁸ The knighthood of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ is mentioned

⁷⁹⁴ Ṣubḥī, *Khaṭirāt-i zindigī*, 125-26. The original letter is also found in: ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’, *Makātīb-i Ḥaẓrat-i ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’*, vol. 3 (Egypt: Faraj Allāh Zakī al-Kurdī, 1921), 345-346.

⁷⁹⁵ George V (George Frederick Ernest Albert, r. 1910-36, d. 1936).

⁷⁹⁶ Ṣubḥī, *Khaṭirāt-i zindigī*, 126. The original prayer of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ is also found in: ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’, *Makātīb*, 3:347. The prayer is dated 17 Dec. 1918.

⁷⁹⁷ Ṣubḥī, *Khaṭirāt-i zindigī*, 127.

⁷⁹⁸ See Sulaymānī, *Maṣābiḥ*, 3: 158. Ṣubḥī also mentions the book titled *Kashf al-ghīṭā’ ‘an ḥiyāl al-a’dā’*, written by Mīrzā Abu al-Faẓā’il Gulpāyigānī (d. 1914), and his nephew Sayyid Mahdī (d. 1928), in which Iranologist E.G.

merely in passing, without any comment, as among the events transpiring when the writer was in Haifa.⁷⁹⁹

The content of these three anti-Bahā'ī polemics can be better understood when placed in the greater socio-political context of the time. Paradoxically, the years of Riṣā Shah's reign, when the country underwent a phase of intense westernization, "produced also the greatest degree of xenophobia in Iran. This xenophobia did not express itself in open conflict with the West, but rather in suspicion and resentment."⁸⁰⁰ The cosmopolitan nature of the Bahā'ī community made it an extremely vulnerable target for such suspicions and resentment.

Nīkū was concerned with the fact that Westerners believed in an Iranian prophet. On the one hand, he attempted to downplay the "claims" of the Iranian Bahā'īs, much like Ayatollah Khālīshī.⁸⁰¹ On the other hand, he tried to find explanations like 'Ayan al-Saltānah's attempts to understand how westerners could become attracted to the Iranian religion.⁸⁰² Yet, the answers given in the xenophobic milieu of the late 1920s/early 1930s were considerably different than those reached by 'Ayan al-Saltānah.

For politically conscious Iranians still recovering from the pains and dangers of a hundred years of *de facto* colonial exploitation and the xenophobia it engendered, the dedication of western Bahā'īs to the Iranian leaders of their community was not an easy thing to grapple with or realistically accept. It felt much more comfortable and congruent with their mindset to

Browne's scholarship was criticized as having been politically motivated, serving the interests of the United Kingdom. Şubhī claims that after the capture of Palestine by the British, 'Abdu'l-Bahā' discouraged propagating that book. Şubhī, *Khaṭirāt-i zindigī*, 127. On *Kashf al-ghīṭā*' see Yazdani, "Abū al-Faḍā'il Gulpāygānī."

⁷⁹⁹ Şubhī, *Khaṭirāt-i zindigī*, 205.

⁸⁰⁰ Banani, *Modernization*, 3.

⁸⁰¹ See the section on Khālīshī in this dissertation. For Nīkū's attempt to downplay the number of western Bahā'īs, see the table at the end of his book, where he records the number of Bahā'īs in America as 100, London 8, Italy 2, Berlin 4, etc. Nīkū, *Falsafah-i Nīkū*, 2:214.

⁸⁰² See the introduction to chapter 2, "Bahā'īs and Foreigners."

interpret this dedication within a conspiratorial framework, rather than to see it as a genuine faith conversion. Āyatī would perhaps have been shocked to learn that Tudore Pole, one of the people from whom he claimed ‘Abdu’l-Baha’ had requested to be knighted, was in fact an admirer of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ and for some time a Bahā’ī himself, and that he in fact had successfully rescued ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ from an Ottoman plot to hang him.⁸⁰³

The political accusations that these former Bahā’ī leveled against Bahā’īs, while comprising a very small portion of their books, buried in an avalanche of other types of accusations, and perhaps unnoticed by their immediate contemporaries, had a recognizable impact in the politicization of anti-Bahā’ism. Writing at a time when nationalistic sentiments were particularly high, both Āyatī and Nīkū seized the opportunity to incite hatred against Bahā’īs by depicting them as threats to national unity. As a former political activist during the Constitutional Revolution who was already familiar with the anti-colonial ideas of Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī, Nīkū was particularly successful at depicting such an image.⁸⁰⁴

⁸⁰³ For details, see Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā’ī Religions*, 332-338. See also, Ismael Velasco, “The Bahā’ī Community in Edinburgh, 1946-1950,” in *Bahā’īs in the West, Studies in Bābī, and Bahā’ī Religions*, vol. 14 (Los Angeles: Kalimāt, 2004), 267.

⁸⁰⁴ Āyatī, Nīkū and Şubhī were close associates. See Āyatī, *Kashf al-ḥiyāl*, 75-80; Şubhī, *Khāṭirāt-i zindigī*, 283-86; Nīkū, *Falsafah-i Nīkū*, 2:198-199. Later in their lives, the three men joined another former Bahā’ī by the name Iqtisād to write an anti-Bahā’ī treatise which Nīkū’s son published after their death as part of a collection of Nīkū’s essays that his son considered Nīkū’s final will and testament. See, Iḥsān Allāh Nīkū, *Pand-i pidar* (Tehran: Farāhānī, 1344/1965), 33-44.

Addendum A) Shaykhī Polemics

The earliest Muslim polemic against the Bāb was written by Ḥājī Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kirmānī (d. 1288Q/1871),⁸⁰⁵ the prominent Shaykhī leader and member of the ruling Qājār family.⁸⁰⁶ Kirmānī finished composing *Izhāq al-bāṭil* (“The Destruction of Falsehood”) on 12 Rajab 1261 (17 July 1845), approximately fourteen months after the Bāb first put forth his claim to be the third gate (after Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā’ī and Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī) of the Hidden Imam. By 1269Q/1853, Karīm Khān had written and widely distributed “five or six books” against the Bāb.⁸⁰⁷ Thirteen years later, he wrote still another refutation of the Bāb at the request of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah.⁸⁰⁸ Karīm Khān’s criticisms of the Bāb, however, were not limited to these works.⁸⁰⁹

Having been a student of Rashtī in Iraq, and having studied the esoteric writings of Aḥsā’ī and Rashtī, Karīm Khān recognized perhaps earlier than any other Shī’ī scholar that the Bāb claimed to be the recipient of a new revelation. In his earlier works he condemned the Bāb’s “apostatic claims” and criticized his “stylistic errors.”⁸¹⁰ Contending that the teachings of the Bāb were opposed to Islam, Karīm Khān declared the Bāb an infidel (*kāfir*) and averred that

⁸⁰⁵ On Ḥājī Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kirmānī see Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: the Making of the Bābī Movement in Iran, 1844-1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 287 ff.; Denise Martin MacEoin, *The Messiah of Shiraz: Studies in Early and Middle Bābism* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 139 and passim.

⁸⁰⁶ According to Murtaẓā Mudarrisī, Karīm Khān Kirmānī was the uncle of the wife of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah and the mother of Muẓaffar al-Dīn Shah. See Murtaẓā Mudarrisī, *Shaykhīgarī, Bābīgarī az naẓar-i falsafah, tārikh, ijtimā’* (Tehran: Kitābfurūshī-i Furūghī, 1351/1972), 243.

⁸⁰⁷ Karīm Khān Kirmānī records the name of these works in his *Risālah-yi sī faṣl* (1269/1853), 34-5. See MacEoin, *Sources*, 123-4; idem, *The Messiah of Shiraz*, 220. Three of these works are well-known: 1) *Izhāq al-bāṭil* (1261Q/1845); 2) *Tīr-i shahāb dar radd-i Bāb-i khusrān ma’āb* (1262Q/1846), the Persian translation of *Izhāq al-bāṭil*; 3) an Arabic tract titled *al-Shahāb al-thāqib fī rajm al-nawāṣib* (1265/1849). On these works, see: Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 291-294, MacEoin, *The Messiah of Shiraz*, 155, 219-221, 294; Armin Eschraghi, “*Irtibāt-i Karīm Khān Kirmānī, pīshvā-yi firqah-yi Shaykhīyah-i Kerman bā diyānat’hā-yi Bābī va Bahā’ī*,” in *Safinah-yi ‘irfān* vol. 9 (163BE/2006): 46-74.

⁸⁰⁸ *Radd-i Bāb-i khusrān ma’āb*, also known as *Īqāz al-ghāfil*.

⁸⁰⁹ He also refuted the Bāb in other works as well as in his sermons.

⁸¹⁰ See Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 262. Karīm Khān summarized his “numerous and often complex objections to the claims of the Bāb” in *Tīr-i shahāb*. MacEoin, *The Messiah of Shiraz*, 220-21.

“our God is not his God, our Prophet is not his Prophet, and our Imam is not his Imam.”⁸¹¹ In later works, written after the orthodox ulama had forced the Bābīs to take a more militant stance, Karīm Khān criticized the concept of jihad in the Bāb’s writings.⁸¹² The issue of jihad was emphasized in the polemic he wrote at the request to Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah, which appears to have been received favorably by the monarch. Accusing the Bābīs of plunder and murder, he presented his refutation of the Bābīs as an act of service to the Shah.⁸¹³ In addition, Karīm Khān invoked his anti-Bābī polemical writings as a means of bridging the divide between the Shaykhīs and the mainstream Shī‘ī clergy. His polemics, especially the earlier ones, were therefore more devoted to arguments in favor of the latter than to condemnation of the Bāb. Future Shaykhī leaders, including Karīm Khān’s son, also wrote anti-Bābī polemics.⁸¹⁴

⁸¹¹ MacEoin, *The Messiah of Shiraz*, 221. The original quote is from *Tūr-i shahāb*, 92.

⁸¹² An example was his *Sī faṣl* compiled in 1269Q/1853 after the Bābī upheavals in Māzandarān, Nayrīz, and Zanjān. See Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 262, 294.

⁸¹³ See Eschraghi, “*Irtibāt-i Karīm Khān*.”

⁸¹⁴ Many of these polemics are now available on the Kirmānī Shaykhī website, <http://www.alabrar.info/>.

Addendum B) Traditionalist clerics⁸¹⁵ (*the Uṣūlī mujtahids*) had a lag compared to the Shaykhīs in reacting to the “new heresy.” When they did react, a flood of anti-Bābī polemics followed.⁸¹⁶ During the period under study, a large number of such polemics were written, most in reaction to a single work. The Shaykh al-Islam of Caucasia, a cleric by the name of Mīrzā Ḥasan Ṭāhirzādah, wrote a rebuttal to the major doctrinal work of Bahā’u’llāh, *The Kitāb-i īqān (The Book of Certitude)*, in 1314Q/1896. A weak response by a Bahā’ī layman emboldened him to write a stronger critique in the same year. This time the Bahā’ī apologist Abū al-Faḍl Gulpāyigānī (d. 1914), himself a former cleric, wrote a lengthy response to Ṭāhirzādah in 1898 under the title *Kitāb al-farā’id*.⁸¹⁷ For the next twenty years, refuting the *Farā’id* became the main objective of anti-Bahā’ī polemicists. A large number of polemics were written by traditional clerics on theological and doctrinal issues.⁸¹⁸ Some of these polemics are quite voluminous. Ayatollah Shāhrūdī’s *Ḥaqq al-mubīn*, for instance, is more than five hundred pages.

⁸¹⁵ I refer to these clerics as “traditionalist” to distinguish them from the reform oriented clerics who are the subject of study in one of the sections of this dissertation.

⁸¹⁶ A cursory look at the list of anti-Bābī and anti-Bahā’ī entries in Āghā Buzurg Ṭihirānī’s comprehensive bibliography of Shī’ī works give us an idea of the degree of opposition against the new religion by traditional clerics. Āghā Buzurg Muḥammad Muḥsin al-Ṭihirānī, *al-Dharī’a ilā taṣānīf al-shī’a*. 25 vols. Najaf: Maṭba‘at al-Gharī. 1355Q/1936-1398Q/1978.

⁸¹⁷ Abu al-Faḍl Gulpāyigānī, *Kitāb al-farā’id* (Cairo: 1898). For details regarding Shaykh al-Islam’s two books, and related issues, see: Rūḥ Allāh Mihrābkhānī, *Zindigānī Mīrzā Abu al-Faḍl Gulpāyigānī*, 2nd ed. (Hofheim-Langenhain: 1988).

⁸¹⁸ The most important of these polemics were: ‘Alī Aṣghar Ardakānī Majd al-‘Ulamā’ Yazdī, *Hidāyat al-mahdavīyah*, 1325Q/1907-1908; Shaykh Zayn al-‘Ābidīn al-Nūrī, *Irghām al-shayṭān fī radd ahl al-bayān wa-al-īqān* (Tehran: 1342Q/1923); Ḥājī Sayyid Ismā‘īl, *Fī ibṭāl mazhab al-ṭā’ifāh al-ẓāllah al-bābīyah* (Tehran: 1322Q/1904); Ḥusayn-‘Alī, *Minhāj al-ṭālibīn* (n.p, n.d); Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn Taftī, *Qāṭi’ al-watīn*, 1321-1342Q/1903-1904--1923-1924; Mīrzā Abū Ṭālib Shīrāzī, *Asrār al-‘aqā’id*, 2 vols (n.p.n.d); Āqā Muḥammad Taqī Hamadānī, *Iḥqāq al-ḥaqq li-ḥujjat b. al-Ḥasan*. 1326Q/1908-1909; Ḥājī Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kirmānī, *Shams al-muḥṭāḥ*; Shaykh Aḥmad Shāhrūdī, *Mir’āt al-ārīfīn*, 1323Q/1905-1906; Shaykh Aḥmad Shāhrūdī, *Ḥaqq al-mubīn* (1333Q/1915); ‘Abd al-Rasūl Madanī Kāshānī, *al-Radd ‘alā al-Bābīyah va al-Bahā’īyah* (Tehran: 1374Q/1954).

Chapter Four

Riṣā Shah, the Crafting of National Identity, and the Quintessential Iranian Religion

Riṣā Shah, the Crafting of National Identity, and the Quintessential Iranian Religion

I. General Considerations

Riṣā Shah (d. 1944/1323) started his political career as Riṣā Khan Mirpanj, commander of the Cossack Brigade⁸¹⁹ in Qazvin. Together with the journalist Sayyid Ẓiyā al-Dīn Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1969/1348), he organized a coup d'état and captured Tehran with no bloodshed in 1921/1299. Riṣā Khan Sardār-Sipah (Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces) assumed the premiership in 1923/1302. Following the failure of the republican movement which Riṣā Khan conducted, the Constitutional Assembly elected him as Shah in 1925/1304. Riṣā Shah chose Pahlavī as the name of the new dynasty.⁸²⁰

Historians who have analyzed Riṣā Shah's reign generally agree on its main ideals:

nationalism, rapid westernization, educational development, secularism and reduction of the

⁸¹⁹ See *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. "Cossack Brigade." See also, Firuz Kazemzadeh, "The Origin and Early Development of the Persian Cossack Brigade," *American Slavic and East European Review*, vol.15, no. 3 (Oct. 1956):351-63.

⁸²⁰ For an overview of the rise and reign of Riṣā Shah, see Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 118-165; Idem, "The Iron Fist of Riṣā Shah," in *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 63-96; Avery, *Modern Iran*, 269-303; Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, Updated edition, with a section by Yann Richard, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 80-104; for a study of the impact of the West on Iran under Riṣā Shah, see Amin Banani, *The Modernization of Iran 1921-1941* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961); for a general assessment of Riṣā Shah's rule see Homa Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qājārs and the Emergence of the Pahlavīs* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 304-342; Idem, "State and Society under Riṣā Shah," in *Men of Order: Authoritarian Modernization under Atatürk and Riṣā Shah* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2004), 13-43; Idem, "The Pahlavi Regime in Iran," in H.E. Chehabi and Juan J. Linz, eds., *Sultanistic Regimes* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).XX; for a study of nationalism under Riṣā Shah, see: Homayoun Katouzian "Nationalist Trends in Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 10, No.4 (Nov.1979), 533-551. For a Marxist reading of radical nationalism during Riṣā Shah's time and its cultural manifestations, see: Iḥsān Ṭabārī, *Jāmi'ah-i Iran dar dawrān-i Riṣā Shah* (N.p. :1977/1356), 100 -103; for a 1960s critique of the archaism of this period, see Jalāl Āl-Aḥmad, *Dar khidmat va khiyānat-i rawshanfikrān* (Tehr: Khārazmī, 1978/1357), 154.

power of the ulama.⁸²¹ However, in keeping with the larger theme of this dissertation - religion and identity politics in Iran in the twentieth century - the primary focus of this chapter is Rīzā Shah's crafting of an ethnic-language based on national identity, and his treatment of Bahā'īs, the followers of the quintessential Iranian religion⁸²². To create a context in which to analyze Rīzā Shah's crafting of an ethnic-language based on national identity, and his treatment of Bahā'īs this chapter provides an overview of some of the main ideals of Rīzā Shah's reign.

Nationalism was the hallmark of Rīzā Shah's reign for historical and ideological reasons.⁸²³

Nationalist sentiments had been prevalent among the Iranian intelligentsia for a couple of

⁸²¹ Banani in 1961 regarded the following as the ideals underlying the changes introduced by Rīzā Shah: "a complete dedication to the cult of nationalism-statism, a desire to assert this nationalism by a rapid adoption of the material advances of the West; and a breakdown of the traditional power of religion and a growing tendency toward secularism." See Banani, *Modernization*, 45. Recognizing the same elements in Rīzā Shah's reign, Abrahamian saw "secularism, anti-clericalism, nationalism, educational development, and state capitalism" all as Rīzā Shah's means to attain his goal of rebuilding Iran "in the image of the West." Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 140.

⁸²² Referring to the Bahā'ī religion as "quintessentially Iranian" is based not only on its founders having been Iranians, but also its philosophical -theological background. The Muslim philosopher Muḥammad Iqbal, in the final chapter of his monograph on the history of metaphysics in Iran maintained, "But all the various lines of Persian thought once more find a synthesis in that great religious movement of modern Persia--Bābism Bahā'ism". See, Muḥammad Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia: A Contribution to the History of Muslim Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Lahore: Bazm-Iqbal, 1959), 143-146. Quote from page 143. The Persian translation of the book was published, with the total omission of the positive remark and the relevant pages. See Muḥammad Iqbal Lāhūrī, *Sayr-i Falsafah dar Iran*, trans. A.Ḥ. Ārīyanpūr (Tehran: Regional Cultural Institute, 1968). Later on, however, in his *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, all that Iqbal wrote in this regard was: "the Babi movement...is only a Persian reflex of Arabian Protestantism." See Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 145. Even this remark was also omitted in the Persian translation. See Muḥammad Iqbal Lāhūrī, *Iḥyā-yi fikr-i dīnī dar Islam*, trans. Aḥmad Ārām (Tehran: Risālat-i Qalam, 1356/1977), 174. For a study of Iranian religions, see Alessandro Bausani, *Religion in Iran: from Zoroaster to Bahā'ullāh*, trans. J. M. Marchesti (New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, 2000).

⁸²³ Katouzian describes Rīzā Shah's nationalism as "official nationalism." Rather than referring to patriotic feelings, "it refers to the European ideology, the origins of which are in the counter-enlightenment movement of the eighteenth century, and which, having developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, found its purest expression in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany." Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran*, 324. However, there is at least one anecdote on Rīzā Shah's patriotic feelings. One of his courtiers, Awrang (*Shakh al-Mulk*) who regularly met Rīzā Shah for five years recounts an episode in which he was talking to the monarch about some stories of ancient Iran from Firdawsī's *Shahnamah*. When he read a line of poetry depicting the sorrow of people of the city of Isfahan following the defeat from Alexander, Rīzā Shah was so moved, that quite uncharacteristically he burst

decades before Rīzā Shah's coming to power.⁸²⁴ Nationalism as “a viable tool of political action” is said to have been born in Iran during the Constitutional Revolution.⁸²⁵ The interference of both Russia and Britain in Iranian affairs created strong nationalism and resentment.⁸²⁶ The resentment was not only directed towards imperialists, but also against Arabs.⁸²⁷ Based on the popular feelings of distrust and resentment, it was natural for the new nationalist movement to call for the revival of the imperial glories of ancient Iran.⁸²⁸ “While classifying the Islamic tradition as Arab, the post-Constitutionalist Iranian nationalists sought to recover ‘national memory’ (*ḥāfiẓah-i millī*) and reawaken the ‘national spirit’ (*rūḥ-i millī*) by exploring all that was pre-Islamic.”⁸²⁹ This “revival” of “the imperial glories of ancient Iran” was considered “the natural form for the new nationalist movement to take.”⁸³⁰

into tears. Covering his face with his hat wept silently for nearly ten minutes in front of his astonished men. See Ḥusayn Makkī, *Tārīkh-i bīst sālah-i Iran*, vol.6, *Istīmār-i dīctātūrī*, 6th ed. (Tehran: ‘ilmī, 1995/1374), 200-206.

⁸²⁴ Mīrzā Āqā Khan Kirmānī, who has been regarded as “one of the most prominent of the creators of the idea of Iranian nationalism,” died in 1896. See Mushā‘Allāh Ājūdānī, *Mashrūṭah-i Irānī*, 4th ed. (Tehran: Akhtarān, 2004/1383), 329.

⁸²⁵ See Ansari, *Modern Iran since 1921: The Pahlavīs and After* (London: Longman, 2003), 16.

⁸²⁶ It is also important to note that “Iranian nationalism did not spring entirely from reaction against Western imperialism. The increasing number of Iranians who went to Europe were impressed with manifestations of nationalism. A majority of these students went to France where there was a strong atmosphere of chauvinism in the years that followed the Franco-Prussian War.” Banani, *The Modernization of Iran*, 14.

⁸²⁷ Writing on Iranian society in years 1921-1936 Miskūb maintains, “...hatred of ‘Arabs and enmity with the West were two motivations for instigating our nationalist sentiments.” Shahrūkh Miskūb, *Dāstān-i adabīyāt va sarguzasht-i ijtīmā’i (sālḥā-yi 1300-1315)* (Tehran: Farzan, 1994/1373), 10.

⁸²⁸ Banani, *The Modernization of Iran*, 15. No discussion of nationalism today is complete without discussing the highly influential work of Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). Anderson traces the birth of nationalism with the demise of feudalism and the rise of capitalism in the 18th century. Suggesting a “more satisfactory interpretation” of the “anomaly of nationalism,” Anderson refers to nationalism as a “cultural artefact of a particular kind,” and proposes the definition of the nation, as “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.” He explains that he calls these communities “imagined” because “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members....yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” (Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 15-16, 20). To reconcile the idea of an ancient Iranian identity with Anderson’s thesis, Ali Ansari draws on “the rich, complex tapestry of historical experience and myth which constituted the idea and the identity of Iran.” He contends that “while Iran at the turn of the century may have been an ‘imagined community’, it was a community bound together by an increasingly fertile and convinced imagination.” Ali M. Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921: The Pahlavīs and After* (London: Pearson Education, 2003), 16.

⁸²⁹ Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, “Narrative Identity in the Works of Hidāyat and his Contemporaries,” in *Ṣādiq Hidāyat: His Work and his Wondrous World*, ed. Homa Katouzian (London: Routledge, 2008), 110. Tavakoli-Targhi

The Revival of the Glory of Ancient Iran

To sculpt a new Iran which mirrored the glory of an imagined ancient Iran under Rīzā Shah's reign, a group of leading Iranian scholars and statesmen took several influential measures.⁸³¹

These measures included the establishment of the National Heritage Foundation (*Anjuman-i Āṣār-i millī*),⁸³² formed under the leadership of Muḥammad 'Alī Furūghī, Zūkā al-mulk (d.

1321/1942)⁸³³ in 1301/1922, the celebration of Firdawsī's millennium in 1334/1913 by this

Foundation,⁸³⁴ the formation of the Society for Public Guidance to instill national

consciousness into the mind of Iranians through textbooks, newspapers, journals and the

provides his reader with a rather comprehensive list of Iranian and European scholars of this period who explored pre-Islamic poetry, music, religion, history, art and architecture: Furṣat-i Shīrāzī (1854-1920), Muḥammad Qazvīnī (1877-1949), 'Abbās Iqbāl (d.1955), Ḥasan Taqīzadah (1878-1969), Ḥusayn Kāẓimzādah Tabrīzī (Irānshahr), Ibrāhīm Pūrdāvūd (1885-1968), Aḥmad Kasravī (1891-1946), James Darmesteter (1849-1894), A.V. Williams Jackson (1862-1937), Arthur Christensen (1875-1945), Erich F. Schmidt (1897-1964), and Ernst Herzfeld (1879-1948). Ibid. For an informative, if biased, overview of archaism and the glorification of the pre-Islamic past in contemporary history of Iran in Persian, see Rīzā Bigdilū, *Bāstāngarā'ī dar tārīkh-i mu'āṣir-i Iran* (Tehran: Markaz, 1380/2001).

⁸³⁰ Banani, *The Modernization of Iran*, 15. In listing the factors in the tradition of Iranian history which nurtured the spirit of nationalism, Banani mentions "the role of the Muslim revivalists of the period," and adds that "the activities and writings of Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī had a great effect among the early nationalists in Iran. A certain amount of the spirit of *Dar al-Islam* versus *Dar al-Harb* was revived, but it was too out of place in the context of modern global power politics to have much meaning. But although nearly forgotten in Iran, the idea is far from dead in the Arab world." Ibid. What Banani found "out of place" in 1961, soon became a social reality in the late 1970s.

⁸³¹ For an in-depth discussion and analysis of these measures, see Tavakoli-Targhi, "Narrative Identity," 108-113, 116-118. On Iranian identity, see: *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. "Iranian Identity i. Perspectives on Iranian Identity"; *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. "Iranian Identity III.-IV. In the 19th and 20th Centuries"; Ahmad Ashraf, "*Huvīyati irānī bih saḥ ravāyat*," *Iran Nameh* 2-3 (Summer and Fall 1387): 251-271.

⁸³² See *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. "Anjuman-i Āṣār-i Millī." The author of the EIr entry, 'Ī. sadīq has chosen "The National Monuments Council" to render the name of the Anjuman into English.

⁸³³ On Furūghī, see the section on Azalīs.

⁸³⁴ See Tavakoli-Targhi, "Narrative Identity," 111-112; An interesting observation is that in the nomenclature of *Anjuman-i Āṣār-i Millī*, the term "Millī" (belonging to the people) is used for an institute whose foundation was very much an act of the state (with the scholar statesman Furūghī leading its establishment, and Sardār Sipah, the future Reżā Shah becoming its honorary president in 1925/1304). This could be considered an attempt at altering "the antagonistic relation of the *millat* [nation] and *dawlat* [state]" "which had emerged out of the polarization of the political space during the Constitutional movement and remained intact until early 1950s." See Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, "The Formation of Two Revolutionary Discourses in Modern Iran: the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1909 and the Islamic Revolution of 1978-1979," PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1988. Later the repressive and non-democratic policies of Reżā Shah annulled such early attempts. The antagonism remained there until Muṣaddiq's government in 1951-53, when "millat came to signify the ensemble of forces demanding the nationalization of British-owned oil industry and supporting the government of Muḥammad Muṣaddiq." Tavakoli-Targhi, "The Formation of Two Revolutionary Discourses," 114.

like,⁸³⁵ the establishment of the Academy of Persian Language (*Farhangistān-i zabān-i Iran*) in 1314/1935 for goals such as purging the Persian language of “inappropriate” foreign words,⁸³⁶ the promotion of a historiography of ancient Iran,⁸³⁷ the support of archeological excavations,⁸³⁸ the changing of the Iranian calendar from lunar to solar, the choice to use choosing the names of ancient Iranian months, and the adoption of “Pahlavī,” a name connected to ancient Iran as the name of the new dynasty.⁸³⁹ Furthermore, Rīzā Shah decreed in 1935 that the name “Iran” which “invoked ancient glory and signified the birthplace of the Aryan race,” would replace “Persia” in order to “create new international image.”⁸⁴⁰

The content of the school textbooks designed during Rīzā Shah’s reign reflected the same nationalistic zeal, which was directed towards crafting a national, particularly an ethnic-based “Aryan” identity. As an example, in 1921 Muḥammad Taqī *Malik al-Sh‘arā* Bahār wrote this poem for children’s school song:

We are all children of Iran/we are the caretakers (*nigahbān*) of our mother/we are the heirs of Kayqubād and Jam [ancient mythical kings of Iran]/we are of the lineage of the son Rustam/born of Kūrush and Achaemenids/the offspring of

⁸³⁵ Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 143; Makkī, *Tārīkh-i bist-sālah*, 6th ed. (Tehran: ‘ilmī, 1380/2001), 6:466; Bigdilū, *Bāstāngarā’ī*, 271.

⁸³⁶ See *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Fanhangistān”; Baygdilū, *Bāstāngarā’ī*, 253-261. Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 142-143; Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran*, 322; Tavakoli-Targhi, “The Formation of Two Revolutionary Discourses,” 112. On this and other measures taken for “restyling Persian” starting from nineteenth century, see: idem, “Crafting National Identity,” in *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 96-112, particularly pages 104-112.

⁸³⁷ Works such as Mushīr al-Dawlah Pīrnā, *Iran-i Bāstānī* (Tehran: Majlis, 1927/1306). It is important to note that as Amanat indicates, “it is a sheer exaggeration to suggest that such historical narrative—and the Persian identity that it aspired to create—were instantaneous products of that time and a mere instrument of Pahlavi state with no precedence in earlier decade and unconnected to Iranians’ collective memory of earlier centuries.” Abbas Amanat, “Legend, Legitimacy and Making of National Narrative in the Historiography of Qajar Iran (1785-1925),” in *History of Persian Literature*, vol.10, general ed. E. Yarshater, vol. ed. C. Mellville (London, I.B. Tauris, 2011 forthcoming), 2.

⁸³⁸ See Wipert v. Blücher, *Safar’-nāmah-i Blücher*, trans. Kaykāvūs Jahāndārī (Tehran: Khārazmī, 1984/1363), 234-247.

⁸³⁹ Tavakoli-Targhi, “The Formation of Two Revolutionary Discourses,” 112.

⁸⁴⁰ Arahmanian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 143; Tavakoli-Targhi, “The Formation of Two Revolutionary Discourses,” 111.

Qāran and Narīmān/son of Mehrdād and Farhād/the kind of Ardshīr and
Sāsān/the land of Iran is a garden/we are the rose flowers of that garden.⁸⁴¹

Speaking of historiography as one of the elements used to craft the ancient “Aryan”

identity, mention must be made here of the speech that the first prime minister of Rīzā Shah, the erudite Muḥammad ‘Alī Furūghī (d. 1942),⁸⁴² gave on the day of the coronation. Furūghī introduced the new monarch as of Iranian genealogy (*īrānīnīzhād*), and the heir to the ancient kings of Iran who had established the mightiest government in the world twenty-five centuries earlier.⁸⁴³ Furūghī was particularly, if not singularly qualified for this talk, as it was in fact, the core of a historiographical development in which both he and his father played significant roles.⁸⁴⁴ Beginning in the nineteenth century, this historiography reconfigured “the pre-Islamic period as a politically and intellectually impressive past.”⁸⁴⁵ Furūghī has been

⁸⁴¹ Muḥammad Taqī Malik al-Shu‘arā’ Bahār, *Dīvān-i Malik al-Sh‘arā’*, 1:549, as cited in Ja‘fariyān, *Jariyān’hā*, 22. Bahār has been mentioned as one of those giving direction to Rīzā Shah’s archaism. In his poems he advocated and urged the revival of the culture and rituals of ancient Iran. Perhaps an epitome of the milieu of the time, he separated Islam from “Arab”, cherishing the former and despising the latter. In his thinking, modernity gets along with tradition. This was a stance quite compatible with a Bahā’ī orientation towards Western modernity, and could reflect the influence of Bahā’ī ideas on Bahār’s mind. He is reported to have had a Bahā’ī identity for a period of his life when he was living in Mashhad, and he was even elected by vote of other Bahā’īs as one of the nine members of the governing councils of the Bahā’ī community, called the Local Spiritual Assembly of Mashhad. Later on, however, he decided to get involved in political activities, therefore distanced himself from the Bahā’ī community. From a personal communication with Keyvan Mahjūr whose grandfather, ‘Ināyat Allāh Suhrāb (d. 1346), was an associate of Malik al-Shu‘arā’ and witnessed his being on the Local Spiritual assembly of the Bahā’īs of Mashhad in their early youth. For an account of the Bahā’ī affiliation of Bahār at some point in life, see also Ṣāliḥ Mawlavī-Nīzhād, ed., *Ishrāqkhāvarī: Zindigānī, āthār va khāṭirāt* (Madrid: Bunyād-i Farhangī-i Niḥāl, 2009), 54.

⁸⁴² See *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Furūghī Muḥammad ‘Alī Zukā’ al-Mulk.”

⁸⁴³ Makkī, *Tārīkh-i bīst sālah-i Iran*, 6th ed. (Tehran: ‘Ilmī, 2001/1380), 4:41-45. The talk was an integral part of what Elwell-Sutton calls the “honourable precedent,” following which Rīzā Shah crowned himself with “due ceremony.” See, Elwell-Sutton, *Modern Iran* (London: Routledge&Sons, 1941), 70.

⁸⁴⁴ For the configuration of the national history of Iran in the service of crafting national identity and the role of Muḥammad ‘Alī Furūghī and his father Muḥammad Ḥusayn Furūghī in this process, see: Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, “‘Arabsitizī, farangsitā’ī va Irānārā’ī,” in *Tajaddud-i būmī va bāzāndishī-i tārīkh* (Tehran: Nashr-i Tārīkh-i Iran, 1381/2002), 41-57; Idem, “‘Tārīkhpardāzī va Irānārā’ī: bāzāsāzī-i huvīyat-i Irānī dar guzārish-i tārīkh,” *Iran Nameh* 12:4 (Fall 1994/1373), 583-628; Idem, “Crafting National Identity,” in *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 96-112, particularly pages 96-104; For extensive and in-depth study and analysis of the late sixteenth- early seventeenth-century background of this nineteenth-century nationalist project see Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, “Contested Memories,” in *Refashioning Iran*, 77-95. See also Farzin Vejdani, “The Furūghīs: Forefathers of the Iranian History Textbook,” in “Purveyors of the Past: Iranian Historians and Nationalist Historiography, 1900-1941,” PhD Diss., Yale University, 2009.

⁸⁴⁵ Tavakoli-Targhi, “Narrative Identity,” 108-109.

regarded as the ideologue of such archaism (*bāstāngarā'ī*) as practiced by the Pahlavīs, as well as the theoretician of their kingship.⁸⁴⁶ Although he was a man of “immediate and practical goals” and not “sympathetic with idealistic theoreticians,”⁸⁴⁷ a closer examination of Rīzā Shah’s reign reveals that a “definite ideological motivation” along the lines mentioned above was present in his activities.

Deeply concerned with crafting an Iranian national identity based on the glorification of the ancient Iran and the “Aryan” race, Rīzā Shah favored Zoroastrian religion and its followers, as they were considered to be the “pure Iranian race.”⁸⁴⁸ He is reported to have promised his protection of the Zoroastrians early on in 1925/1304. The Pārsīs⁸⁴⁹ of India had started returning to Iran, even before the official transfer of the kingship to the Pahlavīs.⁸⁵⁰ Zoroastrians were given equal citizenship rights. They started getting hired in the governmental offices, gaining important job positions,⁸⁵¹ and succeeded in establishing

⁸⁴⁶ Baygdilū, *Bāstāngarā'ī*, 251.

⁸⁴⁷ Banani, *Modernization*, 44. On the character of Rīzā Shah, see Banānī, *Modernization*, 39-40; Katouzian, “Nationalist Trends in Iran,” 543-544.

⁸⁴⁸ For a reference to Iranian Zoroastrians as “pure Iranian,” see ‘Alī Asghar Ḥikmat, *Sī khātirah az ‘aṣr-i farkhundah-i Pahlavī* (Tehran: Vahīd, 1976), 232. In his 1954 Master’s thesis, Amir Abbas Haydari explains that Rīzā Shah “displayed the most marked favor for the small Zoroastrian minority, as a community purely Iranian in race and religion.” He then adds in a footnote: “Bahā’ism, however, though also purely Iranian, was viewed with strong official disapproval.” See: Amir Abbas Haydari, “Some Aspects of Islam in Modern Iran, with Special Reference to the Work of Sangalajī and Rāshid” (Master’s thesis, McGill University, 1954), 54.

⁸⁴⁹ Pārsīs are the members of the diasporic communities formed in India as a result of the migration of Zoroastrian refugees from their original homeland in medieval Islamic Persia. Calcutta became a center of Pārsī settlement in the 18th century. From the 19th century onward, Bombay became the principal Pārsī center and the headquarters of the Pārsīs of India. See *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Pārsī Communities i. Early History,” and “Pārsī Communities ii. In Calcutta.” On the attention to Zoroastrian under Rīzā Shah’s reign, see also Blücher, *Safar’-nāmah*, 296.

⁸⁵⁰ Jahāngīr Ushīdarī, *Tarīkh-i Pahlavī va Zardushtīyān* (Tehran: Hukht, 1355), 92, as cited in Baṣīratmanish, *Ulama va rijīm-i Rīzā Shah*, 156.

⁸⁵¹ Ushīdarī, *Tarīkh-i Pahlavī*, 132, as cited in Baṣīratmanish, *Ulama va rijīm-i Rīzā Shah*, 156; Baygdilū, *Bāstāngarā'ī*, 225-236.

educational and medical centers.⁸⁵² Army commanders were advised to hire more Zoroastrians.⁸⁵³

Riṣā Shah's interest in Zoroastrianism and his support of the Zoroastrians fits into Chatterjee's ideas on anticolonial nationalism. This is despite the fact that Iran was never officially colonized, as India was, despite the widespread idea that the British brought Riṣā Shah to power,⁸⁵⁴ and despite Riṣā Shah's own interest in westernization. In his nationalism Riṣā Shah was similar to the anti-imperialist nationalist elites among the Iranians, and his concern with reviving Zoroastrianism can be viewed as an attempt to highlight "the 'essential' marks of cultural identity." Chatterjee argues that "anticolonial nationalism,"

divides the world of social institutions and practices into two domains—the material and the spiritual. The material is the domain of the 'outside,' of the economy and state craft, of science and technology, a world where the West had proved its superiority and the East had succumbed. In this domain, then, Western superiority had to be acknowledged and its accomplishments carefully studied and replicated. The spiritual, on the other hand, is an 'inner' domain bearing the 'essential' marks of cultural identity. The greater one's success in imitating Western skills in the material domain, therefore, the greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one's spiritual culture. This formula is, I think, a fundamental feature of anticolonial nationalism in Asia and Africa.⁸⁵⁵

⁸⁵² Ibrāhīm Ṣafā'ī, *Riṣā Shah-i kabīr dar ā'inah-'i khāṭirāt* (Tehran: vizārat-i farhang va hunar, 1976/1355), 319, as cited in Baṣīratmanish, *Ulama va rijīm-i Riṣā Shah*, 157.

⁸⁵³ Ushīdarī, *Tarīkh-i Pahlavī*, 139; Baṣīratmanish, *Ulama va rijīm-i Riṣā Shah*, 157.

⁸⁵⁴ On this see Michael P. Zirinsky, "Imperial Power and Dictatorship: Britain and the Rise of Reza Shah, 1921-1926," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24 (1992): 639-663.

⁸⁵⁵ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories in the Partha Chatterjee Omnibus* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 6.

II. *Riṣā Shah and the Ulama*

In the words of historian Abrahamian, Riṣā Shah wanted an Iran “free of clerical influence, foreign intrigue, nomadic uprisings, and ethnic differences...”⁸⁵⁶ Arguably, the reduction of clerical influence was a corollary to Riṣā Shah’s Westernizing reforms, rather than being a primary goal. In areas where he could abstain from infuriating the ulama, such as in dealings with Bahā’īs, he was ready to do so, as suggested later in this chapter.

Restriction of the power of the ulama happened in several domains. In education, restrictions had already started long before Riṣā Shah. He primarily carried on the efforts of the earlier reformer statesmen such as Mīrzā Taqī Khan Amīr Kabīr (d.1852), Mīrzā Ḥusayn Khan Mushīr al-Dawlah Sipahsālār (d.1881), and Mīrzā ‘Alī Khan Amīn al-Dawlah (d. 1904).⁸⁵⁷ In other areas, however, it was through Riṣā Shah’s secularizing reforms that the “ulama lost influence not only in politics but also in legal, social, and economic affairs.”⁸⁵⁸ A detailed discussion of this theme is beyond the scope of this chapter.⁸⁵⁹

Riṣā Shah’s reforms in the judiciary system led to the demise of *shar‘* (religious law) in matters effecting areas as crucial as family, property and commerce. It is important to note that his primary interest in legal reform is said to have been “motivated by nationalistic considerations, for his first objective was to abolish the system of capitulation.”⁸⁶⁰ He knew for the abolition of the capitulations to not attract adverse publicity in Europe, Iran had to have a

⁸⁵⁶ Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 140.

⁸⁵⁷ For a concise and informative overview of early educational reforms in Iran, see Banani, *The Modernization of Iran*, 83-111; Shahrough Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran: Clergy-State Relations in the Pahlavī Period* (Albany: State University of New York, 1980), 32-37.

⁸⁵⁸ Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 141.

⁸⁵⁹ For a thorough study of the court-clerical relationship during Riṣā Shah’s reign see Akhavi, *Religion and Politics*, 28-59.

⁸⁶⁰ Banani, *The Modernization of Iran*, 70. On abolishing the capitulations, see Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 143.

judiciary system along Western lines. He therefore, embarked on such reforms.⁸⁶¹ As far as the clerics were concerned, he seems to have acted cautiously.

The original 1926 judiciary law was expediently announced “temporary,” reflecting, in the words of the historian Akhavi, “a measure of respect” and the “prudent attitude” that Rīzā Shah originally had for the power of the ulama. It was only after 1932 that the legal developments brought a significant defeat for the clergy, as they experienced major reductions in their power due to their removal as registrars.⁸⁶² This change can be looked upon as one example of how Rīzā Shah was prudent regarding the power of the clerics even after he became the Shah, and that it was in the early 1930s that the dramatic changes affecting the ulama took place.

The law on the uniformity of dress in 1928,⁸⁶³ the drastic reduction of clerical presence in the National Assembly, the state takeover of all religious lands (*awqāf*) in 1939/1318,⁸⁶⁴ and the banning of the veil for women (*kashf-i hijāb*, “unveiling”)⁸⁶⁵ were other central areas in which Rīzā Shah’s reforms lead to the reduction of the power of the ulama. Additionally, the two

⁸⁶¹ Banani, *The Modernization of Iran*, 70.

⁸⁶² See Akhavi, *Religion and Politics*, 39. Akhavi explains: “The permanent Law Concerning the Registration of Documents and Property of March 1932 divested the *shar‘* court of the function of registration of documents such as affidavits, power of attorney, and property titles.” Ibid.

⁸⁶³ On Rīzā Shah’s sartorial policies as an example of modernization from above, see Houchang Chehabi, “Dress Codes for Men in Turkey and Iran,” in *Men of Order: Authoritarian Modernization under Atatürk and Rīzā Shah* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 209-237. Rather than having the reduction of the power of the clerics as a goal, Rīzā Shah’s dress codes must be seen in the context of his concern for—even obsession with—gaining an acceptable international image. His concern with his and his country’s image beyond the borders is obvious in the statement he made about his order for the adoption of Western hat (*chapeau*). He told Mukhbīr al-Saltānah, “I want us to look like them so that they do not ridicule us (*ki mā rā maskharah nakunand*).” See: Mahdī-Qulī Hidāyat (Mukhbīr al-Saltānah), *Khātirāt va khatarāt: tūshah’ī az tārikh-i shish pādishāh va gūshah’ī az darwah-i zindigānī-i man* (Tehran: Zavvār, 1965/1344), 407.

⁸⁶⁴ See Akhavi, *Religion and Politics*, 39, 38, 55-58.

⁸⁶⁵ Strangely enough, Akhavi does not include Rīzā Shah’s banning of the women’s veil as one of the issues that “set the clergy at loggerheads” with him. See Akhavi, *Religion and Politics*, 38. Akhavi’s position may be attributed to the lack of a law banning the veil. Although unveiling was not enshrined in a law, it was forcefully implemented, and raised great dissatisfaction. On this critical issue see H.E. Chehabi, “The Banning of the Veil and its Consequences,” in *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society under Rīzā Shah 1921-1941*, ed. Stephanie Cronin (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 203- 220.

events of the Shrine in Qum in 1928/1307, where Rīzā Shah violated the sanctuary of Qum, and in 1935/1314 in Mashhad, where he violently suppressed a cleric-motivated uprising, were hallmarks of the conflicts with the clerical opposition. These occurred mainly in reaction to the monarch's Westernizing dress codes.⁸⁶⁶

Notwithstanding his reduction of the influence of the clerics, Rīzā Shah did show some religious sentiment. Even at the peak of his power, when there was no more reason or incentive for him to want to appease the clerics or the general public, in certain private conversations, in certain occasions he expressed such sentiments.⁸⁶⁷ He also is reported to have occasionally referred to Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥasan Nā'inī (d. 1936), as his *marja'-i taqlīd* (*Source of Emulation*).⁸⁶⁸

As a side but related issue, mention must be made here that the image of the existence of a binary divide between the “ethnic nationalist” (Aryanist) and “Muslim religious” orientation in Iranian society during Rīzā Shah's reign is also far from the truth. Rīzā Shah's policy of endorsing the “Aryan” race and getting close to Germany in foreign relations,⁸⁶⁹ had its own advocates among the Shī'ī clerics and religiously minded Iranian Shiites. In the 1930s, as the psychologist and writer, Ṣāhib al-Zamānī puts it, “the ‘savior-worshiper’ minds of simple minded Iranians even attributed a religious mission to Hitler. The rank and file of the Muslims

⁸⁶⁶ On these two crucial events see: Akhavi, *Religion and Politics*, 58-59; Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 93-94.

⁸⁶⁷ For example, see Hidāyat's record of Rīzā Shah's sharing with him in a personal conversation, about his ample “*irādat*” (literally “will,” used in Persian to denote “dedication”) to Imam Ḥusayn, and simultaneous disdain for “too much lamentation” during the holy month of Muḥarram. Miḥdī-Qulī Hidāyat (Mukhbīr al-Salṭanah), *Khāṭirāt va khaṭarāt: gūshah-i az tārikh-i shish pādīshah va gūshah-i az dawrah-i زندگي-i man*, 2nd ed. (Tehran: Zavvār, 1965), 385. On another occasion, upon passing the shrine-tomb of Imāmzādah Hāshim, he ordered the head (*mudīr-i kull*) of the Ministry of Roads, Aḥmad Muṣaddiq to repair that place which had “saved” him in infancy. Makkī, *Tārikh-i bīstālah-i Iran*, 2:392. Rīzā Shah's own account of the incident of having been “saved” in his infancy appears in Hidāyat, *Khāṭirāt va khaṭarāt*, 385.

⁸⁶⁸ See Yann Richard, “Sharī'at Sangalajī,” 162. On Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥasan Nā'inī, see: Ḥā'irī, Shī'ism and Constitutionalism, 144-151 and passim.

⁸⁶⁹ See Blücher, *Safar-nāmah-i Blücher*, 300-307.

(*‘avām-i Musalmān*) even considered Hitler as a sun that is rising in the West as a preamble for the Advent of the Mahdī of the End of the Time (*Mahdī-i Ākhar al-Zaman*).” Ṣāhib al-Zamānī adds, “What hearts had not beaten for the ultimate victory of Hitler, till the end of the WWII, as a result of the artful propaganda of the God of Nazi propaganda, Goebbels, in Iran!”⁸⁷⁰ Among the clerics, the reformist theologian, Sharī ‘at Sangalajī (d. 1944), and Ayatollah Abū Al-Qāsim Kāshānī (d. 1962),⁸⁷¹ two of the most prominent politically active Shī‘ī clerics of the 1940s and 1950s, were both denounced as pro-Nazi during WWII.⁸⁷²

III. *Riṣā Shah and Bahā’īs*

It is difficult to find a uniform single pattern in the way Riṣā Shah’s regime treated Bahā’īs. In the first years of his rule, he showed uneven (if not contradictory) attitudes in this respect.⁸⁷³ This was followed by four or five years relative leniency towards the Bahā’ī community, after which the last half of his reign (1932-1940) was marked by a repressive attitude that initiated a state-sponsored official restriction of the civil rights of Bahā’īs--a process which has been characterized as the “systematization of anti-Bahāism.”⁸⁷⁴ The one constant feature

⁸⁷⁰ Ṣāḥib al-Zamānī, *Dībāchahī bar rahbarī*, 303.

⁸⁷¹ See *Encyclopaedia Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Kāshānī, Ayatollah Abu al-Qāsim”; *Encyclopedia of Modern Middle East and North Africa*, s.v. “Kāshānī, Abu Al-Qāsim.” See also Yann Richard, “Ayatollah Kāshānī: Precursor of the Islamic Republic?” trans. Nikki Keddi, in *Religion and Politics in Iran : Shi’ism from Quietism to Revolution*, edited by Nikki R. Keddi New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983.

⁸⁷² Sharī ‘at Sangalajī was denounced as pro Nazi and the Soviets wanted to arrest him during WWII. One of the “disciples” of Sharī ‘at, ‘Alī Pasha Ṣāliḥ, secretary to the Ambassador of the United States persuaded the American Ambassador, George Allen, to intervene on Sangalajī’s behalf. See Yann Richard, “Sharī ‘at Sangalajī: A Reformist Theologian,” in *Authority and Political Culture in Shi’ism*, ed. Said Amir Arjomand (New York: State University of New York, 1988), 159-177, quote from page 162. Ayatollah Kāshānī “was arrested by the British in 1943 because of contacts with German agents and not released until 1945.”⁸⁷² Hamid Algar, “Religious Forces in Twentieth-Century Iran,” in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 7:745.

⁸⁷³ There is an interesting account from the time of his premiership, in 1924/1303, telling a mulla, jokingly, that he should convert all “Bābīs” to Islam. See ‘Ayn al-Saltanah, *Khāṭirāt*, 5:6997. The account reflects his awareness of the sensitivity of the ulama to the heterodox religion.

⁸⁷⁴ Douglas Martin, *The Persecution of the Bahā’īs of Iran, 1844-1984* (Ottawa: The Association for Bahā’ī Studies, 1985), 20.

throughout all these years, was a ban on the entry and circulation of Bahā'ī literature. The pages that follow here examine changing phases of the situation of Bahā'īs under Rīzā Shah.

1. Earlier Years, Uneven Treatment

In the early years of his career, Rīzā Khan, as the Minister of War (1921-23), appointed a Bahā'ī in a high-ranking position. During the same period, however, reacting to protests from the ulama, he did not hesitate to order the military government of Simnān, to destroy the temple the Bahā'īs of Sangsar had started to build.⁸⁷⁵ In his first years in office as Shah, he similarly refused to receive complaints when several Bahā'īs were killed in a pogrom in the south of Iran, and he permitted publication of—and even gave official endorsement to-- the most fierce anti-Bahā'ī polemics (This latter case is discussed in the section titled “Former Bahā'īs”).⁸⁷⁶ A detailed discussion of the first case and the pogrom deserves attention here.

Shu'ā' Allāh 'Alā'ī, the Treasurer General of the Armed Forces

Shu'ā' Allāh 'Alā'ī was a Bahā'ī of some prominence. Soon after the coup, Rīzā Shah named him Treasure General of the national military establishment, a post in which he retained him as an appointee for many years. Rīzā Shah is reported to have frequently expressed his

⁸⁷⁵ See 'Azīz Allāh Sulaymānī, *Maṣābiḥ-i hidāyat*, vol 4(Tehran: Mu'assisah-'i Millī-i Maṭbū'āt-i Amrī,), 567-69. During this incident the Bahā'ī school also was destroyed and burned down. Several Bahā'īs were arrested and released after a few days. Another event during this time is the murder of the wife of a certain Āqā Mīrzā Rīzā'ī Qulī Khan in the Fall of 1924 in Farāhān. See: Shoghi Effendi, *Tawqī'āt-i mubārakah* (1922-1948) (Tehran: Mu'assisah-'i Millī-i Maṭbū'āt-i Amrī, 1973), 10. There is no record of the punishment of the murderers.

⁸⁷⁶ 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Āyatī, *Kashf al-Ḥīāl*, three vols. in one, 6th ed (Tehran: 1947/1326). First vol. was published c. 1305/1927. On *Kashf al-Ḥīāl* and the details related to publication see the section “Former Bahā'īs.” An official letter signed by the Chief of Police of the Imperial Court, General Dargāhī, dated 9 August 1925 (19 Mordād 1304) appears at the beginning of the book: “Mr. 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Khan Āyatī: Your book, *Kashf al-Ḥīyal* (Exposing the Frauds), together with the appended collection of poems, *Ḥikāyāt-i Shamshīr* (Sword Tales), which you have self-published, have been received by His Imperial Majesty, the Shah, may our souls be a sacrifice unto him. His Imperial Majesty has perused your work and as a token of his appreciation for your labors, he extends to you his royal favors.” The date of this letter, however, cannot be correct because it is before the time Rīzā Shah ascended the throne i.e., 25 Azar 1304 (16 Dec. 1925). See Ḥusayn Makkī, *Tārīkh-i bīst sālah'i Iran*, vol.4, *Āghāz-i dīctātūrī-i Pahlavī*, 6th ed. (Tehran: 'Ilmī, 1380/2001), 18.

satisfaction with ‘Alā’ī’s trustworthiness, integrity and capability. At a later date, the Shah is reported to have recommended Shu’ā’ Allāh ‘Alā’ī to his son, the Crown Prince.⁸⁷⁷ The history of ‘Alā’ī’s tenure reveals an important aspect of the history of anti-Bahā’ism in Iran, in that it was not only the official policy that determined the fate of Bahā’īs, but that the attitude of individuals, in this case those highly placed, could also play a significant role. As a graduate of Dar al-Funūn,⁸⁷⁸ ‘Alā’ī had initially secured a high-ranking governmental job in finance. In 1920/mid 1299, he was sent to Qazvīn by the government to pay the salaries of the Cossack Brigade. Riḏā Khan Mīrpanj, then the Cossack commander, met him and was impressed by his moral integrity.⁸⁷⁹ After the 1921/1299 coup d’ état, Riḏā Khan, now the *Sardār Sipah* (Commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces) located ‘Alā’ī, and appointed him as the treasurer general of the army. ‘Alā’ī remained in this position for five years, but he then “for some reasons,” as he wrote, “insisted” on quitting this “high responsibility” job. Four years later in 1930/1309 Riḏā Shah pressured him to resume his service, which he accepted out of compulsion (*ijbāran*). He remained in the position until 1944/1323 under Muḥammad Riḏā

⁸⁷⁷ ‘Azīz Allāh Sulaymānī, *Maṣābiḥ-i hidāyat* (Tehran: Mu’assisah-’i millī-i maṭbū’āt-i amrī, 1950), 3:378-379. See also the autobiographical account in ‘Abdu’l-‘Alī ‘Alā’ī, *Mu’assisah-’i ayādī-i amr Allāh* (Tehran: Mu’assisah-’i millī-i maṭbū’āt-i amrī, 1973), 621-633, see especially page 632-33; see also Māshā’ Allāh Mushrifzādah, “*Sharḥ-i ḥāl va khadamāt-i mutaṣā’id ilā Allāh ayādī-i ‘azīz-i amr Allāh jināb-i Shu’ā’ Allāh ‘Alā’ī*” *Andalīb* 3, no. 12 (Fall 1984): 74-77; Farīdah Subḥānī, and Nasrīn Raḡavī, “*Chand Khāṭirāh az Ḥaḡrat-i Ayādī-i Amr Allāh Jināb-i Sarlashkar Shu’ā’ Allāh ‘Alā’ī*,” *Āhang-i Badī* 29, no. 328 (Sept.-Oct. 1974): 30-34; “*Yādī az ayādī-i ‘azīz-i amr ilāhī jināb-i shu’ā’ Allāh ‘Alā’ī*,” *Payām Bahā’ī* 303 (Feb. 2005), 22-28. According to an unreliable source, Riḏā Shah appointed another Bahā’ī, Asad Allāh Ṣanī’ī, as the special adjutant of the Crown Prince. See ‘Abd Allāh Shahbāzī, ed., *Ẓuhūr va suqūt-i saltanat-i Pahlavī: Khāṭirāt-i Artishbud-i sābiq Ḥusayn-i Fardūst* (Tehran: ‘ilm, 1990/1369), 1:374. Shahbāzī bases his claim on the memoirs of Ḥusayn Fardūst, a former high-ranking officer of the army during the reign of the last Pahlavī Shah, who was imprisoned after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The memoirs are compatible with the Islamic Republic’s masternarrative of pre-1979 Iranian history and its attendant fabrications about Bahā’ī collaboration with the Pahlavi regime. The editor of the work, ‘Abd Allāh Shahbāzī was the first head of the Political Studies and Research Institute and one of the main contributors to the Institute for Iranian Contemporary Historical Studies. These two institutes were founded in the early 1980s to officially (re)write the modern history of Iran.

⁸⁷⁸ See *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Dār al-Funūn.”

⁸⁷⁹ “*Yādī az ayādī-i ‘azīz-i amr*,” 22. According to ‘Alā’ī’s unpublished personal memoirs, on that occasion Riḏā Khan the head of the Cossacks suggested that ‘Alā’ī hand to him all the money he had brought with him to pay the Cossacks, and that he then would pay their salaries. ‘Alā’ī refused to do so, insisting that he himself had to make sure that everybody received their salary.

Shah, when he took an early retirement. On his high ranking governmental appointments, he writes, “it is clear what problems, hindrances and oppositions one faces, being well-known as a Bahā’ī, while having such responsibilities in Iran.”⁸⁸⁰ At least part of the “opposition” to which he refers seems to have been the extreme anti-Bahā’ī attitude of Major-General Z̤arghāmī, army Chief-of -Staff.⁸⁸¹

The 1926 Pogrom in Jahrum

From 7 April to 10 April 1926, angry mobs raided and pillaged the homes of Bahā’īs in Jahrum, a southern city in Iran. According to reports, somewhere between eight or twelve Bahā’īs were killed outright and many more were injured.⁸⁸² The attacks were apparently instigated by Ismā’īl Khan Qashqā’ī (formerly, *Şawlat al-Dawlah*), a representative from Jahrum to the fifth majlis who sought to gain favor with anti-Bahā’ī religious leaders in order to secure re-election.⁸⁸³ The Bahā’īs complained to the local and national authorities to obtain redress. However, as Herbert Chick, the British Consul in Shiraz, reported in his June 1926 diary, “According to the President of the Bahā’ī community, His Majesty the Shah has had sent to all postal and telegraph offices orders not to accept petitions or complaints from Bahā’īs.”⁸⁸⁴ The

⁸⁸⁰ ‘Ala’ī, *Mu’assisah-i Ayādī-i Amr Allāh*, 632-633.

⁸⁸¹ Z̤arghāmī, for example, had told Riḏā Shah that ‘Ala’ī was building a castle for himself, perhaps counting on the king’s preoccupation with appropriating properties. Riḏā Shah’s personal driver, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Tāmm, also a Bahā’ī, recounted later for a young family friend, Iraj Ayman, that once he was driving Riḏā Shah to a place. The Shah asked Tamm to change his way to go to a specific spot so he could check on the “castle” ‘Ala’ī was reported to have been building. When they see at the spot, a modest house in construction, Riḏā Shah exclaims, “This is the castle they said he was building!” From a personal interview with Iraj Ayman, Tuesday, 31 August 2010.

⁸⁸² According to the reports sent by Bahā’īs to the head of their religion at the time, twelve of their co-religionists were killed. See Shoghi Effendi, *Bahā’ī Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932* (Wilmette: Bahā’ī Publishing Trust, 1980), 103. Another report by a Bahā’ī individual by the name Fu’ād Rawḥānī indicates eight people were killed. See Moojan Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā’ī Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts* (London, George Ronald, 1981), 467-69. Non-Bahā’ī sources at hand are silent about the event. The cleric Khālīṣī in passing referred to it as “the Jahrum incident” with no details. See the section on Khālīṣī.

⁸⁸³ Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā’ī Religions*, 470. According to the report prepared by the British Consul in Shiraz, Herbert Chick, Ismā’īl Khan Qashqā’ī had been in regular communication with the Soviet consulate, M. Walden, in connection with the election campaign. Walden was implicated in the plans to organize disturbances. Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā’ī Religions*, 466.

⁸⁸⁴ Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā’ī Religions*, 470.

suspected murderers were released soon after their arrest, Ismā'īl Khan Qashqā'ī being held on suspicion of having instigated the trouble. However, on the eve of the Shī'ī religious festival of *Ghadīr Khumm* (29 June 1926,)⁸⁸⁵ Riḏā Shah released Ismā'īl Khan “at the personal intercession” of the Prime Minister.⁸⁸⁶ He is further reported to have met the appeals of the National Spiritual Assembly of the American Bahā'īs, and those from the Bahā'īs of other countries, “with complete indifference,” and to have “taken no steps to punish the murderers.”⁸⁸⁷

Other Cases and a Sole Instance of Punishment

After the Jahrum pogrom, in 1926 and 1927 there were sporadic cases of attacks on Bahā'īs, three of whom were murdered in Isfahan, and one each in Ardibīl and Kirmān.⁸⁸⁸ A detailed historical account of the case in Ardibīl, the murder of Amīn al-Ulama, provides us with a valuable insight on the order of things at the time. Amīn al-Ulama was a cleric who converted to the Bahā'ī religion and began to teach his new faith to others. Despite the tact and discretion he displayed, his activities attracted the attention of a certain Mīrzā 'Alī Akbar Aqā, who in consultation with a former parliamentary representative from the city, issued a *fatwa* calling for Amīn al-Ulama's death. A young man in his circle, Āqā Bālā, was persuaded to carry out the task. Assured that he could act with impunity and believing that he was engaged in a

⁸⁸⁵ According to the Shī'a, the 18th of Zū al-Ḥijja is the anniversary of Imam 'Alī's appointment as successor to the prophet Muḥammad. See Heinz Halm, *Shī'ism*. Trans. Janet Watson and Marian Hill. 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 7-8. See also *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Ghadīr Khumm.”

⁸⁸⁶ Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions*, 469-470. The Prime Minister whose intercession released Ismā'īl Khan Qashqā'ī was Mirzā Ḥasan Mustawfī al-Mamālīk (d.1932).

⁸⁸⁷ From the letter dated November 5, 1926, written by the secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the American Bahā'īs, Horace Holly, addressing Hon. Frank B. Kellogg, Secretary of State. See the section on the response from Bahā'īs.

⁸⁸⁸ Moojan Momen, “A Chronology of Some of the Persecutions of the Bābīs and Bahā'īs in Iran 1844-1978,” in *The Bahā'ī World: An International Record Vol. XVIII 1978-1983* (Haifa: Bahā'ī World Center, 1986), 380-391, see specifically page 388.

“jihād” (holy war), Āqā Bālā killed Amīn al-Ulama on 6 Farvardin 1306/27 March 1927. He was, however, arrested by the local military authorities, under whose control the town was at the time. Charged with first degree murder, he was sentenced to death and executed. Mīrzā ‘Alī Akbar Aqā himself was exiled from Ardibīl, a punishment unprecedented in the persecution of the Bābīs ānd Bahā’īs in Iran. This official reaction may have been the consequence of the fact that one of the senior military officers in town at the time was himself Bahā’ī.⁸⁸⁹ Unfortunately, the details of other murders referred to above are unavailable.

2. A Brief Period of Relative Tolerance

The years 1928-1932/1307-1311 were, in many ways, exceptional in the life of the Iranian Bahā’ī community. Not only were no Bahā’ī assassinations recorded, but reports from the period portray a situation of relative security and peace in the community’s life.⁸⁹⁰ According to the biennial reports published in *The Bahā’ī World*, the Iranian Bahā’ī community prospered in many ways because of the relative lack of persecutions, during these four (or five, if we include 1927/1306, putting aside sporadic cases of murder) years.⁸⁹¹ It consolidated its administrative institutions, held its first National Bahā’ī convention in 1927,⁸⁹² purchased a land for the construction of a House of Worship,⁸⁹³ and constructed a *Ḥaẓīrat al-Quds* (literally, “the enclosure of sanctity,” the term used for a Bahā’ī administrative center). It held large

⁸⁸⁹ ‘Azīz Allāh Sulaymānī, *Maṣābiḥ-i hidāyat*, vol 2, 2nd ed.(Tehran: mu’assisah-’i millī-i maṭū’āt-i amrī, 1964/1343), 325-470.

⁸⁹⁰ This is just based on published sources. Unpublished notes of the Bahā’ī scholar, Ḥisām Nuqabā’ī indicate that in 1928/1307, at the time of issuing identity booklets (*shināsnāmah*) for citizens, their religion was asked to be include in the booklets. Based on the information thus provided, the government dismissed the Bahā’īs it employed, first those involved in education, especially teachers, then those working in other branches.

⁸⁹¹ See Horace Holley, “Survey of Current Bahā’ī Activities in the East and West 1928-1930: Bahā’ī Forces Consolidated in Persia,” in *The Bahā’ī World: A Biennial International Record*, vol. III, 85 and 86 of the Bahā’ī era, 1928-1930 (New York: Bahā’ī Publishing Committee, 1930): 29-34; Idem, “Survey of Current Bahā’ī Activities in the East and West 1930-1932: Persia,” in *The Bahā’ī World: A Biennial International Record*, vol. IV, 87 and 88 of the Bahā’ī era, 1930-1932 (New York: Bahā’ī Publishing Committee, 1933): 78-82

⁸⁹² Holley, “Survey,” 3:33; Holley, “Survey,” 4: 81.

⁸⁹³ Holley, “Survey,” 4:81.

public gatherings there, after having been compelled for so many years to hold “small, private meetings here and there.”⁸⁹⁴ Its Spiritual Assemblies were allowed to issue formal marriage certificates based on the Bahā’ī law.⁸⁹⁵ Civil status forms even omitted spaces designating religious affiliations, thus freeing Bahā’īs from classification as Muslims or Jews on passports.”⁸⁹⁶ During those four to five years, although there were isolated incidents of anti-Bahā’ī violence in Kerman and elsewhere,⁸⁹⁷ Bahā’īs also gained the opportunity of serving the larger Iranian society through establishing more schools for boys and girls,⁸⁹⁸ and providing more public baths of modern type in a number of cities.⁸⁹⁹ At one point, in the city of Kermanshah, police even permitted the operation of the local Bahā’ī Library as a Public Library, thus making available a large number of European titles,⁹⁰⁰ although the importation of Bahā’ī books continued to be prohibited.

3. Later Years, Suppression, Severe and Formalized

The short-lived governmental tolerance of Bahā’īs gave way to relatively strict measures against them in 1932/1311 and 1933/1312, followed by much harsher restrictions in the next year. According to a report from two prominent Bahā’īs, Lutfu’llāh Hakīm and Mardīyyih N. Carpenter provided for *The Bahā’ī World*, the original change showed itself in many ways. For example, the Ministry of Post and Telegraph refused to transmit the telegrams intended to

⁸⁹⁴ Holley, “Survey,” 4: 80. This record also indicates “three thousand” as the number of Bahā’īs gathered in some meetings in Tehran, in the *Ḥaḡīrat al-Quds*. The figure, however, seems to be an exaggeration, since it is hard to imagine a late 1920s building in Tehran accommodating such a large number of people.

⁸⁹⁵ Holley, “Survey,” 3:32. Idem, “Survey,” 4:81.

⁸⁹⁶ Holley, “Survey,” 3:32.

⁸⁹⁷ Holley, “Survey,” 3:32.

⁸⁹⁸ As we will see in the section on Bahā’ī schools, the establishment of the first of such schools goes back to a time far before the time of Riḡā Shah. Some new schools were established in this period, like the girls’ school in Najafābād. Holley, “Survey,” 3:33.

⁸⁹⁹ Holley, “Survey,” 3:33.

⁹⁰⁰ Holley, “Survey,” 3:33.

inform Bahā'īs in different parts of Iran of the passing on of the daughter of Bahā'u'llāh in July 1932. More anti-Bahā'ī polemics, written by Āyatī and other former Bahā'īs, were widely published during this period with the “the sanction of the Department of Education.” The Minister of Justice and officials in the Registration Bureau refused to register any Bahā'ī marriages on the grounds that the religion was “not officially recognized in Persia.” The Tavakkul school in Qazvīn was closed on the [unfounded] grounds that Bahā'ī meetings had been held in the building. In certain places like Gulpāyīgān, occasional physical violence against Bahā'īs happened with no protection on the part of the government.⁹⁰¹ The authors of the report reflect on the mysteries of this transitional period by saying that “events demonstrate that a uniform treatment of the adherents” of the Bahā'ī religion “is not to be expected here.” “On the one hand,” they wrote, “we may give meetings attended by thousands of people, with the consent and cooperation of public authorities, and...on the other, our literature, for no tangible reason is forbidden entry.” It seemed “that with us, the exception is the rule,” they added.⁹⁰² Soon, however, the treatment of Bahā'īs turned more “uniform,” but in a negative way.

The permanent closure of Bahā'ī schools in 1934/1313 was the first in a series of quite repressive measures. The head of the Bahā'ī community, Shoghi Effendi, described, in 20 January 1935/30 Dey 1313, the condition of the Bahā'īs of Iran in such terms: “today the friends find their activities in Persia completely paralyzed. Their schools have all been definitely

⁹⁰¹ See the report: Lutfu'llāh Hakīm and Mardīyyih N. Carpenter, “Current Bahā'ī Activities. Part Three-Persian,” in *The Bahā'ī World 1932-1934* (New York: Bahā'ī Publishing Committee, 1936), 114-123, specifically 117-118. The report does not have a date, but the content shows that it has been finished immediately after the death of the American Bahā'ī Keith Ransom-Kehler in Iran, on 23 October 1933, and before the first protest of the Ministry of education in December 1933 to the closure of the Tarbiyat schools, as there is no indication to that important event. Even though the volume intends to cover the events of 1932 and 1933, this specific report does not cover the year 1933 in full. Even the news of Ransom-Kehler's death has been added in a few short lines as an addendum to the original message, which speaks of her activities.

⁹⁰² Hakīm and Carpenter, “Current Bahā'ī Activities,” 117.

closed, their meetings suspended, their correspondence intercepted, and their assemblies and committees for the most part dissolved.”⁹⁰³ Due to the targeted nature of the closure of the Bahā’ī schools, I now focus on their closure, before moving on to the further repression that followed.

3. A. The Bahā’ī Schools

Until the nineteenth-century, education had been monopolized by Iran’s clerics. Elementary education was confined to *maktab*, usually a single room for children of all ages, with one clergyman teaching the basics of reading, writing, and parts of the Qur’ān.⁹⁰⁴ By the beginning of the twentieth century, a number of foreign schools were founded by Christian missionaries in Tehran and in provincial towns.⁹⁰⁵ In 1896, Mīrzā Ḥasan Rushdiyyah founded the first Iranian primary school with a modern curriculum in Tabriz, and by 1906 there were many such schools in different cities all over Iran.⁹⁰⁶

With universal and compulsory education as one of the basic principles of the Bahā’ī religion, and the great emphasis it placed on the study of modern science and art,⁹⁰⁷ Bahā’īs were eager to establish schools.⁹⁰⁸ The Bahā’īs founded their first school, not in Tehran or in another big city, but in Mahfurūzak, a small village in Māzandarān. Here Mullā ‘Alī Jān

⁹⁰³ Shoghi Effendi, *Dawn of a New Day* (New Delhi: Bahā’ī Publishing Trust, n.d. [The preface is dated 1970]), 51.

⁹⁰⁴ Aḥmad Kasravī, *Tārīkh-i mashrūṭah-i Iran*, 6th ed. (Tehran: 1965/1344), 19; Banānī, *The Modernization of Iran*, 86.

⁹⁰⁵ See *Encyclopedia Iranica*, s.v. “Education xv. Foreign and Minority Schools in Persia.” For educational activities in Iran from mid to late nineteenth century, see Shahvar, *The Forgotten Schools*, 23-51.

⁹⁰⁶ Kasravī, *Tārīkh-i mashrūṭah-i Iran*, 38-39. On the history of education in Iran, see: Īsā Ṣadīq (A’lam), *Tārīkh-i farhang-i Iran az āghāz tā zamān-i ḥāẓir*, 7th ed. (Tehran: Zībā, 1975/1354).

⁹⁰⁷ For a collection of Bahā’ī writings on education, see: The Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, comp., *Bahā’ī Education* (Haifa: Bahā’ī World Centre, 1976).

⁹⁰⁸ For an extensive study of the Bahā’ī schools, see Soli Shahvar, *The Forgotten Schools: the Bahā’īs and Modern Education in Iran, 1899-1934* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009); For a concise, yet informative study of these schools, see: Moojan Momen, “Bahā’ī schools in Iran,” in *The Bahā’īs of Iran: Socio-historical Studies*, eds. Dominic Parviz Brookshaw and Seena Fazel (London: Routledge, 2008), 94-121. See also, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Bahā’ism X. Bahā’ī Schools.” For a history of education in Iran, see David Mensioni, *Education and the Making of Modern Iran* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

Bārfurūshī founded a school for both girls and boys before his execution in 1882 for being when he was executed on the basis of being a “Bābī.”⁹⁰⁹ In 1897 a number of prominent Bahā’īs, such as Mīrzā Ḥasan Adīb⁹¹⁰ and Ibn-i Abhar, established a *maktab* in Tehran that evolved over time into the Tarbiyat school in 1899-1900.⁹¹¹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ greatly encouraged the initiative and expressed his hope for the Tarbiyat school to progress to a point where “children will no longer have to go to Europe and bear the burden of considerable expenses.”⁹¹²

Both the boys’ and the girls’ Tarbiyat schools covered elementary and secondary grades and rapidly gained particular prestige. There was no religious teaching in the curriculum of the Bahā’ī schools.⁹¹³ Many non-Bahā’īs also sent their children to these schools.⁹¹⁴ Riḏā Shah himself sent his Crown Prince and his two eldest daughters to Bahā’ī schools for their elementary schooling.⁹¹⁵ Following the Tarbiyat schools, many more Bahā’ī schools were established all over Iran.⁹¹⁶ By 1918-19, Bahā’ī schools accounted for more than 10 percent of the students enrolled in primary and secondary education.⁹¹⁷ The historian Abrahamian

⁹⁰⁹ For a first-hand account of this and the other development work he did, see Isfahānī, *Bahjat al-ṣudūr*, 208. See also, Momen, “Bahā’ī schools,” 97-98.

⁹¹⁰ For information on Mīrzā Ḥasan Adīb, see the sections on Shaykh Hādī Najmābādī, and the section on Russia.

⁹¹¹ For more on the Tarbiyat boys’ school, see ‘A. Ṣābit, *Tārīkhchah-i madrasah-i Tarbiyat-i Banān* (New Delhi: Mir’āt, 1997).

⁹¹² Quoted in ‘Alī-Akbar Furūtan, *The Story of my Heart* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1984), 48.

⁹¹³ Shahvar, *The Forgotten Schools*, 94. ‘Abd Allāh Bahrāmī who as a child attended Tarbiyat school, writes that Bahā’īs did not teach their religion at their schools and “had taken a disinterested (*biṭaraf*) stance. ‘Abd Allāh Bahrāmī, *Tārīkh-i ijtīmā’ī va siyāsī-i Iran āz zamān-i Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah tā ākhar-i silsilah-i Qājār* (Tehran: Kitāb’khanah-i Sanā’ī), 24.

⁹¹⁴ On non-Bahā’ī attendance at Tarbiyat and the other Bahā’ī schools, see Shahvar, *The Forgotten Schools*, 93-96, 179. Shahvar mentions “the fact that the staff of the schools was overwhelmingly Iranian (and not foreign, as in other modern schools)” was one reason for the attraction of non-Bahā’ī families towards these schools. Ibid. 94. However, we know there were some Western teachers among the staff of the Tarbiyat schools. See R.J. Armstrong-Ingram, “American Bahā’ī Women and the Education of Girls in Tehran, 1909-1934” in *In Iran: Studies in Bābī and Bahā’ī History*, ed. Peter Smith, vol. 3 (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1986): 181-210; For an example of children of the family of notables attending Tarbiyat see Sattarah Farman Farmaian, *Daughter of Persia: A Woman’s Journey from Her Father’s Harem Through the Islamic Revolution* (London: Corgi Books, 1993), 17, 75.

⁹¹⁵ Banani, *The Modernization*, 96.

⁹¹⁶ For a database of the Bahā’ī Schools see Shahvar, *The Forgotten Schools*, 147-182. See also Momen, “Bahā’ī Schools,” 99.

⁹¹⁷ Momen, “Bahā’ī Schools,” 101.

estimates the number of pupils of the Bahā'ī schools in Tehran alone to have been 1,500 by 1934.⁹¹⁸

The Closure of the Schools

As Bahā'ī institutions, the Bahā'ī schools were closed on both Bahā'ī holidays and public holidays.⁹¹⁹ In 1933/1312, on the anniversary of the execution of the Bāb,⁹²⁰ as in previous years, the school administrators closed the schools according to the religious rule requiring the suspension of work on that day. Unlike previous years, in 1933 the Ministry of Education questioned the school administrators in writing on the reason for closure. In response, the school administrators explained in writing the closure as being in observance of the suspension of work. The Ministry rejected their letter, returning it as unacceptable response.⁹²¹ As the Principal of the boys' Tarbiyat school later recalled, around this time the Ministry of Education also started to find "excuses" to question the performance of the schools in ways that gave him and his colleagues the impression that the government was looking for a reason to close the schools. An example of one such excuse was the suggestion that the Ministry doubted that the Qur'an was taught properly in the Bahā'ī school.⁹²²

⁹¹⁸ Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 163.

⁹¹⁹ Heshmat Moayyad, "Scholarly Dilettantism and Tampering with History: An Episode in the Bahā'ī History of Iran," in *Yād-Nama: In Memoria di Alessandro Bausani, vol. 1: Islamistica*. B.S. Amoretti and L. Rostagno, eds. (Roma: Bardi Editore, 1991), 327-333. Quote from page 329.

⁹²⁰ 28th of Sha'bān 1352 corresponding to 16th December 1933 and 25th Azar 1312.

⁹²¹ This piece of information only appears in a British consular report which is apparently based on the information provided by Mīā Abū al-Ḥysan khan Na'imī, a prominent Bahā'ī who worked as a secretary in the Legation. See Knatchbul-Hugessen to Sir John Simon No. 554, 15 Dec. 1934, file E7789/7789/34: FO 371 17917 in Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions*, 477. Therefore, Shoghi Effendi's instruction in 1934 had been, in fact, a reassertion of the necessity of the observance of that religious rule rather than a new policy. How strictly the school observed this rule before 1312 our sources are silent about.

⁹²² See Ḥishmat Shahrīyārī, "Ta'ṭīl-i madāris-i Tarbiyat bih ravāyat-i Jināb-i 'Alī Akbar Furūtan," *Payām-i Bahā'ī* 316 (March 2006): 26-34, esp. p. 28.

On July 9, 1934/ 18 Tīr 1313, in response to a question from the newly formed National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahā'īs of Iran, Shoghi Effendi, the head of the international Bahā'ī community, instructed that the Tarbiyat school had to be closed on Bahā'ī Holy Days as according to the Bahā'ī religious law work is to be suspended on such days. Shoghi Effendi's instruction was directed towards asserting the independent nature of the Bahā'ī religion, and an expectation for it to be treated on par with other minority religions, the followers of which were allowed to observe their own religious rules in their schools.⁹²³

After receiving this instruction the Assembly sent two representatives to the Deputy Minister of Education, 'Alī Aṣghar Ḥikmat, to explain the situation to him. This was particularly important as one such "days", the anniversary of the execution of the Bāb on 28th of Sha'bān by the Lunar calendar (equivalent to 15 Azar), was fast approaching. The representatives could not convince Ḥikmat. The Bahā'īs closed the schools on the said day, and on the next working day Ḥikmat sent an official letter to the head of the boys' Tarbiyat secondary school announcing the immediate closure of the school on a permanent basis. The letter indicated that "since again without any reasons" the Tarbiyat school had closed, the Ministry of Education "nullifies the license of that school."⁹²⁴ The government then proceeded with the closure of all other Bahā'ī schools.

3. B. Harsher Measures Following the Closing of the Schools

Following the closure of the schools, the government forbade Bahā'ī meetings in many cities and towns, closed Bahā'ī centers, harassed Bahā'īs over filling-in of census forms,

⁹²³ Shoghi Effendi mentions that Zoroastrians were "allowed to celebrate their own feasts, and as such enjoy full religious freedom." Shoghi Effendi, *Dawn of a New Day* (New Delhi: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, n.d. [The preface is dated 1970]), 52; For schools belonging to other religious minorities in Iran, at that time, being allowed to observe their own holy days, see Moayyad, "Scholarly Dilettantism," 329.

⁹²⁴ For a photocopy of the original letter of the Deputy Minister of Education see Martin, *The Persecution*, 17.

marriage certificates and registration of births. It stripped some Bahā'īs in the army of their rank and imprisoned them. Finally it dismissed some Bahā'ī government employees.⁹²⁵ Such repressive government actions continued in the remaining years in the reign of Rīzā Shah. The National Police Department issued a circular order “throughout the country to the effect that all public declaration of faith by Bahā'īs should be strictly suppressed, that all their meetings and organizations should be strictly dissolved, and that anyone calling himself a Bahā'ī should be arrested and prosecuted.”⁹²⁶

Many Bahā'īs were arrested and imprisoned, some for closing their shops on Bahā'ī Holy Days.⁹²⁷ Several prominent Bahā'īs were arrested in 1937/1316 in Yazd, and then transferred to and imprisoned in Tehran for four years on the false accusation of murder.⁹²⁸ More Bahā'īs employed in the police force, army and government departments were dismissed.⁹²⁹ Some departments in the Ministry of Finance refused to employ Bahā'īs after they filled in the religion column of their application forms with the word “Bahā'ī.”⁹³⁰

Non-recognition of Bahā'ī marriage was another way of putting pressure on Bahā'īs. In 1938/1317 several hundred Bahā'īs were investigated for having married under Bahā'ī law, which the state did not recognize. Some were imprisoned for up to six months. Prior to 1938/1317, Bahā'ī marriages were tacitly permitted and the Department of Justices rarely bothered Bahā'īs on account of their marriages. All of a sudden things changed and severe

⁹²⁵ Momen, “A Chronology of Some of the Persecutions,” 389.

⁹²⁶ “Report Prepared by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahā'īs of Iran,” in *The Bahā'ī World: A Biennial International Record*, vol VI, 91 and 92 of the Bahā'ī Era 1934-1936 (New York: Bahā'ī Publishing Committee, 1937), 94-108. Quote from page 96. The report does not specify the exact date of such events. Momen includes them in the list of the events of the year 1936/1315. See Momen, “A Chronology of Some of the Persecutions,” 389.

⁹²⁷ Bahā'īs were arrested in Bandar Shah and Arāk in 1935/1314, in Sangsar and Bandar Shah in 1937/1316 for closing their shops on Bahā'ī Holy Days. In Yazd several prominent Bahā'īs were arrested and imprisoned in Tehran for four years in 1937/1316. Momen, “A Chronology of Some of the Persecutions,” 389.

⁹²⁸ For details of this event see, Muḥammad-Taqī Afnān, *Bīgunāhān*, unpublished manuscript, 13-33.

⁹²⁹ Momen, “A Chronology of Some of the Persecutions,” 389.

⁹³⁰ “Report Prepared,” in *The Bahā'ī World* 6:96.

penalties were imposed, even for those Bahā'īs who were previously married. They were summoned for trial. The penalty varied from eight days to six months of imprisonment depending on the attitude of the judge about Bahā'īs.⁹³¹ In almost every instance of persecution, the government refused to receive complaints from persecuted Bahā'īs. Throughout the country the telegraph offices were ordered not to transmit to the authorities petitions of appeal from any persecuted Bahā'ī.⁹³²

The Major Concern: Bahā'īs' Public Avowal of the Faith (taẓāhurāt)

The above mentioned suppression of the public declaration of faith by Bahā'īs was what Riẓā Shah himself insisted on. Since 1934/1313, Riẓā Shah is reported to have ordered governmental agencies to prevent Bahā'īs from “taẓāhurāt” (literally demonstrations, and by that he meant “public avowal of faith”).⁹³³ This seems to have been the basis for what the Chief of the General Staff of the army (*ra'īs-i sitād-i artish*), Major-General Ẓarghāmī, who was known for his anti-Bahā'ī attitudes did.⁹³⁴ Ẓarghāmī issued and circulated an order to Bahā'ī officers indicating that since the inspection of the ten-year identification forms disclosed that certain officers had described their religion as Bahā'ī, these officers were to be “informed by His Majesty's order,” that “the word Bahā'ī should on no account be permitted to appear on the identification forms, that no avowal of their faith should be allowed and that the slightest

⁹³¹ Momen, “A Chronology of Some of the Persecutions,” 389; See also ‘Alī-Akbar Furūtan, “Annual Report—National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahā'īs of Iran—1939-1939,” in *The Bahā'ī World*, vol. VIII, 95 and 96 of the Bahā'ī Era 1938-1940 A.D. (Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1942), 172-190, esp. pp.185-188.

⁹³² “Report Prepared,” 96.

⁹³³ See: Mehrdad Amanat, “Negotiating Identities: Iranian Jews, Muslims and Bahā'īs in the Memoirs of Rayan Rayhani (1859-1939),” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2006), 175. Amanat makes the astute observation that the forbidden presence of the Bahā'īs was “subconsciously accepted by the Iranian public who often referred to them in curious euphemism, and the word Bahā'ī was rarely uttered.” Ibid. See also Hishmat Shahrīyārī, “Ta'ṭīl-i madāris-i Tarbiyat bah ravāyat-i Jināb-i ‘Alī Akbar Furūtan,” *Payām-i Bahā'ī* 316 (March 2006): 26-34, esp. p. 34. “Report Prepared,” 6:101, 102.

⁹³⁴ That Ẓarghāmī had strong anti-Bahā'ī stance was mentioned in both the unpublished notes of the Bahā'ī scholar, Ḥisām Nuqabā'ī, and in a personal interview with Iraj Ayman 31 August 2010.

expression of faith by them should immediately be suppressed and reported to the capital.” He then explained the punishment of those who continued to describe themselves as Bahā’īs on the forms: “if they are conscripts,” he announced, they would be “deprived of their ranks and finish their term of service as privates,” and if they belonged to the regular army “they must after being deprived of their ranks be imprisoned until they reimburse the Government for their education.” Then, to block the outlet to which some Bahā’īs had previously resorted, i.e., leaving blank the religion space on the form, Ṣarghāmī emphasized, “His Majesty has especially decreed that leaving the religions column blank in itself constitutes a sort of avowal of faith and this too should not be accepted. Officers may only fill in the blank with the name of one of the officially recognized religions.”⁹³⁵

There is an account of the dismissal of a Bahā’ī officer, Lieutenant Malik-Khusravī, from the army that is particularly informative of Riṣā Shah’s personal stance vis-à-vis the persecution of Bahā’īs. Lieutenant Malik-Khusravī had served in the army for fifteen years and was for some time an instructor at the Military College, where at some point he had tutored the Crown Prince (later Muḥammad Riṣā Shah). He insisted on keeping “Bahā’ī” as his religion in the identification form. The Chief of the General Staff first tried to convince Malik-Khusravī to write down instead one of the four recognized religions. When his attempts proved unsuccessful, the Chief took the matter to the Shah, who is reported to have said: “I never interfere with anyone’s religion, but since this man has not obeyed my commands, the provisions of the circular order apply to him; however, I do not imprison him unless he refuses to reimburse the Government for his education.”⁹³⁶

⁹³⁵ “Report Prepared,” 103.

⁹³⁶ “Report Prepared,” 104-105.

That Rizā Shah forbade Bahā'īs' from declaring their faith left room for junior officials to persecute Bahā'īs as they wished. One example includes the following story. A Bahā'ī youth whose bicycle was stolen complained to the police. The officer in charge asked him his religion. When the young man replied that he was a Bahā'ī, the officer told him, "So you're still declaring yourself a Bahā'ī! Haven't you heard that no one has the right to breathe that word any more!" He then ignored the theft of the bicycle and instead imprisoned the young man for the public declaration of his faith.⁹³⁷ There were many other similar moves on the part of junior officials with anti-Bahā'ī prejudice, who took advantage of the situation: arresting, verbally abusing, and putting Bahā'īs in jail for short terms.⁹³⁸

IV. The Bahā'ī Response

1. Direct Appeals to the Government

For Bahā'īs obedience to the government is a religious injunction. Consequently, the first reaction to the persecution of the community in Iran was to appeal to the local and central government. In the case of the Jahrum massacre of 1926, as previously discussed, the Bahā'īs

⁹³⁷ "Report Prepared," 97. The young man was called Amīn Allāh Panāhī. See: "Shahrīyārī, "Ta'ṭīl-i madāris-i Tarbiyat," 34.

⁹³⁸ Horace Holley, "Survey of Current Bahā'ī Activities in the East and West," in *The Bahā'ī World: A Biennial International Record*, vol VI 91 and 92 of the Bahā'ī Era 1934-1936 (New York: Bahā'ī Publishing Committee, 1937), 13-93. See pp 25-31 "Developments in Iran," esp. p. 30. Eliz Sanasarian has argued that the restrictions imposed on Bahā'īs in the 1930s were similar to measures taken against other religious minorities, the one exception being Bahā'ī marriages which were not recognized. See Eliz Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 52. Sanasarian, however, has not considered the fact that Bahā'īs were forbidden from publicly avowing their faith. This prohibition left the door open for the government and the anti-Bahā'ī elements in society to pursue measures to persecute the Bahā'ī community. See also Eliz Sanasarian, "The Comparative Dimension of the Bahā'ī Case and Prospects for Change in the Future," in *The Bahā'īs of Iran: Socio-historical Studies*, ed. Dominic Parviz Brookshaw and Seena B. Fazel (London: Routledge, 2008), 156-183.

attempted to send telegrams on appeal to the authorities in Tehran, but the telegraph offices refused to accept them based on the order of Riḏā Shah.⁹³⁹ Shoghi Effendi, the head of the international Bahā'ī community, sent a message “addressed in the name of the Bahā'īs of every land to the supreme authority in the State,” expressing their “profound horror at this outrageous act,” and their “earnest entreaty to inflict immediate punishment on the perpetrators of so abominable a crime.”⁹⁴⁰ In his letter to the Central Spiritual Assembly of Iran, Shoghi Effendi indicated that he was waiting to receive details about the attacks so that, “when necessary, the (Bahā'ī) Assemblies in the west may contact the authorities in Iran and abroad [and appeal for justice].”⁹⁴¹ In a later letter, he wrote that, despite written appeals, including one from the National Spiritual assembly of the Bahā'īs of the United States and Canada, the murderers and those who instigated them were released with impunity. The report deplored the “contemptible threats” (*tahdīdāt-i sakhīfah*) made by some “malevolent ulama” (*'ulamā'-i sū'*) that brought about the offenders' release. Shoghi Effendi nevertheless emphasized that “the intention of Bahā'īs has never been to criticize, belittle or oppose the esteemed rulers and leaders of that glorious country.” In accordance with the teachings of Bahā'u'llāh, they would obey the decisions of the regime, continue to be its well-wishers, and pray for the Shah to rule justly.⁹⁴²

Following the closure of the schools, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahā'īs of Iran sent a long and detailed telegraphic petition to Riḏā Shah, a copy being supplied to the Royal Secretariat. This effort, too, was of no avail. Two days after the telegram was handed in to the

⁹³⁹ See the section on Riḏā Shah and Bahā'īs.

⁹⁴⁰ Shoghi Effendi, *Bahā'ī Administration*, 103. Apparently, on this occasion, the Central Spiritual Assembly of the Bahā'īs of Iran also sent Riḏā Shah a letter through Major-General 'Alā'ī. See Mushrifzādah, “Sharḥ-i ḥāl va khadamāt, 75.

⁹⁴¹ Shoghi Effendi, *Tawqī 'āt-i mubārakah* (1922-1926), (Tehran: Mu'assisah-'i Millī-i Maṭbū'āt-i Amrī, 1972), 285-86.

⁹⁴² Shoghi Effendi, *Tawqī 'āt-i mubārakah* (1922-1926), 305-317, quotes from 309-10. Apparently, it was based on this very letter that Ayatollah Khālīzādah accused Shoghi Effendi of having “spoken against” the Palavī ruler.

telegraph office, the head of that office informed the Secretary of the Assembly that “as the cablegram was of a complaining nature, he was forbidden to send it to its destination.” The Assembly, therefore, wrote a letter to the Ministry of Post and Telegraph asking for reconsideration to be given to the matter. Meanwhile, the Assembly petitioned to the Councils of Ministers to remove the difficulties created for the Bahā’ī community. Since the Assembly was not sure if the copy of the petition handed to the Royal Secretariat had been delivered to the Shah, it considered the possibility of transmitting the petition to the monarch through unidentified “high personages.” Most of these persons, however, refused the request since “His Majesty was exceedingly angry with Bahā’īs.” Finally, the Minister of the Interior, Jam (d.1969)⁹⁴³ accepted to hand the petition to the Shah “when a favorable occasion should arise.” The Director of the Tarbiyat Schools Committee forwarded a detailed petition about the closure of the schools to the Board of Education. This was sent by the local post, since the letter would have been refused if sent otherwise.⁹⁴⁴ All such measures failed. Riḏā Shah gave no sign that he had received any of these messages. The Council of Ministers and the Board of Education were likewise silent. In a final attempt, Bahā’īs resorted to a very different approach. The Assembly’s petition was given to an individual Bahā’ī brave enough to dare offering it to the king as he was travelling to his Sa’dābād estate. As he passed by, the monarch saw the man with the letter in his hand and ordered his driver to stop. Although the letter was delivered to its addressee, guards were ordered to arrest the Bahā’ī messenger. The man was held in custody for some time.⁹⁴⁵ No other results came out of the attempt.

⁹⁴³ See Encyclopedia Iranica, s.v. “Jam, Maḥmūd.”

⁹⁴⁴ Holley, “Survey of Current,” 6: 28.

⁹⁴⁵ Shahrīyārī, “Ta’ṭīl-i madāris,” 33-34.

A) Intercession of non-Iranian Bahā'īs

As members of a supra-national network of administrative bodies, Bahā'īs of other lands began appealing for the protection of their co-religionists in Iran. Shortly after the massacre in Jahrum, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahā'īs of the United States and Canada on 16 July 1926 addressed a petition to Rīzā Shah “requesting protection and justice for the Persian Bahā'īs on purely spiritual grounds.”⁹⁴⁶ Again, this initiative, together with appeals from Bahā'īs of other countries, was met “with complete indifference.”⁹⁴⁷ A further cause of disappointment was a pamphlet entitled “The Financial and Economic Situation of Persia,” published by Arthur.C. Millspaugh, the American Administrator General of Persia's Finances.⁹⁴⁸ On page 5 of the brochure was the statement that there was no “religious fanaticism among the Persian people.”⁹⁴⁹ In consequence, the National Spiritual Assembly of the American Bahā'īs wrote to the Secretary of State. They enclosed copies of their letters to the Shah, to the press in United States, Canada and other countries. Emphasizing that their appeal was based on “humanitarian grounds,” with no intention to bring that “grievous situation to the political realm,” the Assembly remarked that, as the facts regarding the cruelties inflicted upon Bahā'īs were widely known, the pamphlet “will tend to discredit the accuracy of this otherwise valuable and interesting economic report.”⁹⁵⁰ The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahā'īs of the United States and Canada also sought to deliver a copy of its petition to the Shah through

⁹⁴⁶ National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahā'īs of the United States and Canada, “Bahā'ī Persecutions in Persia, an Appeal Addressed to His Imperial Majesty Rīzā Shah Pahlavī,” *The Bahā'ī World: A Biennial International Record*, vol. II, April 1926-April 1928 (New York: Bahā'ī Publishing Committee, 1928), 287-294. Quote from p. 287.

⁹⁴⁷ From the letter dated November 5, 1926, written by the secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the American Bahā'īs, Horace Holly, addressing Hon. Frank B. Kellogg, Secretary of State.

⁹⁴⁸ On Millspaugh, see *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Fiscal System v. Pahlavī Period.”

⁹⁴⁹ See the letter from the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahā'īs of the United States and Canada by the Secretary, Horace Holley, to the Department of State, dated November 11, 1926.

⁹⁵⁰ Ibid.

the American Minister in Persia.⁹⁵¹ The Minister's response to the request regretted "that pursuant to existing regulations" he was not able to "transmit communications from unofficial organizations either to His Majesty the Shah or to officials of his Government without being authorized to do so by the Department of State."⁹⁵² (That the Assembly had not attempted to pass its request to the Minister to Persia through the Secretary of State suggests that its approach to the latter had received no response.)

Another effort to elicit a response from the Shah concerned the issue of restrictions on bringing Bahā'ī literature into the country. In early 1930s/1310s, when the Iranian Bahā'ī community could, for some time, have the luxury of having this issue among its major concerns, Shoghi Effendi had recourse to the supra-national nature of the Bahā'ī community in seeking to attract the attention of the Shah and his government. He sent Keith Ransom-Kehler, a distinguished American woman with an impressive record in the field of communications to travel to Iran and petition Rīzā Shah directly.⁹⁵³ In doing so, Shoghi Effendi might have been counting on Rīzā Shah being "extremely sensitive to foreign criticism."⁹⁵⁴ Alternatively, he might have simply been following the example of his grandfather, 'Abdu'l-Bahā', who had sent two Western Bahā'īs to intercede with Muẓaffar al-Dīn Shah about the rights of their Iranian co-religionists.⁹⁵⁵ In any case, Kehler met in August 1932 with the

⁹⁵¹ See the letter from the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahā'īs of the United States and Canada to Philip Hoffman, the U.S. Minister to Persia, dated November 20, 1926.

⁹⁵² From Philip Hoffman, American Minister, to Horace Holley, Secretary National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahā'īs of the United States and Canada, dated December 28, 1926. The Minister then reported to Washington that he had received the communication, and added at the end, "No information of any acts of persecution of Bahā'īs in Persia has reached the Legation since the report of an incident at Jahrum in April 1926." See Hoffman to the Secretary of State, dated January 13, 1927.

⁹⁵³ Janet Ruhe-Schoen, *A Love Which Does Not Wait* (Riviera Beach, FL: Palabra, 1998), 155-156.

⁹⁵⁴ See Bananī, *The Modernization of Iran*, 70.

⁹⁵⁵ See Ruhe-Schoen, *A Love*, 18-19. 'Abdu'l-Bahā' sent Lua Getsinger, an American, and Hippolyte Dreyhus, a French Bahā'ī to present a petition to Muẓaffar al-Dīn Shah requesting that he extend protection to the persecuted Bahā'īs in Persia. The monarch promised he would do all in his power. Not long after that the 1903 pogrom happened. See the relevant section in this dissertation.

Minister of the Court, Taymūr Tāsh who “told her the book ban would be lifted immediately.” This promise was never fulfilled. If Kehler’s several letters to Rīzā Shah did ever reach him, they received no answer.⁹⁵⁶

Official Reaction to the Appeals from Non-Iranian Bahā’īs

In reaction to the above activities on the part of the Bahā’ī community, in 1313/1934, a circular was sent by Iran’s Minister of Foreign Affairs for the guidance of representatives of the Iranian government in foreign countries. Its purpose was to inform the addressees of “the policy of the Iranian government,” so that they can “correct” what might be possibly published in the press, on the one hand, and answer the complaints they receive from Bahā’īs abroad about the closure of the Bahā’ī schools and similar issues, on the other.⁹⁵⁷ The Bahā’ī schools had been closed, it asserted, because they “had been behaving against the rules and regulations of the Ministry of Education.” A passage from the circular deserves incorporating here verbatim, as it reveals how the Iranian government perceived the intercession of the non-Iranian Bahā’īs for the plight of their Iranian coreligionists. “Some prejudiced and selfish people,” the circular said,

have created the image in the mind of Iranian Bahā’īs, who are mostly ignorant and illiterate, that all the Americans have become Bahā’īs, and that the US government, and perhaps all other governments, support the Bahā’īs, and would oppose the government of Iran taking measures against them. This perception has made the ignorant Bahā’īs of Iran arrogant. They imagine that any action of theirs that might be exposed would nevertheless be tolerated by the Iranian government owing to its fear of the American government. They do not realize that no government, whether American or other can under any circumstances interfere in the domestic affairs of Iran.⁹⁵⁸

⁹⁵⁶ See Ruhe-Schoen, *A Love*, 155-162, quote from page 160.

⁹⁵⁷ Iran Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Circular issued to missions overseas re closure of the Bahā’ī schools in Iran, transcript, 1934 (Bahā’ī World Centre Archives GA019/071/003).

⁹⁵⁸ For Shavar’s translation of the same circular, see Shahvar, *Forgotten Schools*, 112-113.

It added that the Iranian government did not wish to trouble anyone for their religious membership, but it also “cannot accept that a community acts contrary to the state’s rules and regulations.” While Bahā’īs did not comprise one thousandth of [the population] of other religions in Iran, the circular said, “they oppose the general religion (*mazhab-i ‘umūmī*) of the country.” The followers of other religions in Iran, “did not show enmity to the official religion of the country,” therefore they are left to themselves. Bahā’īs should do the same, the circular advised. They should “look and see, that notwithstanding the fact that the majority of the populations of most other big and small states (*duval*) [sic] are Christians, do the Christians of Iran oppose Islam, relying on these other states?” Rather than addressing the Iranian State, the circular said, “Bahā’īs of America or other places, should advise the Bahā’īs of Iran, to observe the exigencies of their own country.”

V. Conclusion and Analysis

The closure of the Bahā’ī schools needs to be considered in the context of the increased persecution of Bahā’īs in general during that period rather than as an isolated event.

Futhermore, the heightened level of persecution was an expression of a general change of attitude on the part of Rizā Shah. The change, since the early 1930s concerned not only Bahā’īs, but many other aspects of the reign, to a degree that the historian Homa Katouzian regards it as signaling a new phase in the monarch’s career, namely a shift from dictatorship to arbitrary rule.⁹⁵⁹ Although a detailed discussion of the alteration is beyond the scope of the current

⁹⁵⁹ Katouzian has distinguished three distinctive phases in Rizā Khan/ Rizā Shah’s career:

Rizā Khan led the Cossacks in the *coup d’état* of 1921 when it looked as if the country was doomed to brigandage, civil war and probable disintegration. The period between 1921 and 1926 may be described as a transitional period, a period of interregnum and power struggles, which he won by a series of successful operations, both political and military. It is also the period when he had the highest political legitimacy and widest support of his career. The next five-year period, from 1926 to 1931 was a period of growing dictatorship and autocracy, when the Shah became absolute ruler, though there was still some consultation and participation, and he still had some support among the modern middle classes. Finally,

work, it is possible that the hurt and humiliation inflicted on the Shah by the British, in 1933, through the imposition of another unjust oil concession,⁹⁶⁰ gave rise to extreme suspicion and bitterness on his part. His arrest and murder of some of his closest confidants in that year is the best indication of the augmentation of a suspicious attitude that continued through the rest of his reign.⁹⁶¹ In the study of Rīzā Shah's treatment of Bahā'īs, however, at least two other factors must be brought into consideration: his relation with the ulama, and the role possibly played in his administration by Azalīs. Both these issues warrant discussion here.

The Ulama

While Rīzā Shah had restricted the power of the clerics in the judiciary and educational systems, he cautiously avoided agitating the ulama on matters that were not important to him. The social rights of Bahā'īs clearly fell into this category. His emphasis on the prevention of any public avowal of faith by Bahā'īs, his order to permanently close the Bahā'ī schools, and the other harsh measures he took against the Iranian Bahā'ī community were rooted in his reluctance to irritate the clerics on such causes, especially at a time when he was intending to oppose their wishes on a matter he saw as important, namely the unveiling of women (*kashf-i hijāb*).

over the next ten-year period, from 1931 until the allied occupation in 1941, the Shah's power became not just absolute but arbitrary as well, and he lost the support of all the social classes, both high and low, both modern and traditional. Homa Katouzian, "Rīzā Shah's Political Legitimacy and Social Base, 1921-1941," in *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society under Rīzā Shah 1921-1941*, ed. Stephanie Cronin (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 15-37. Quote from page 15.

⁹⁶⁰ On the new oil agreement see Katouzian, *State and Society*, 256, 321-22.

⁹⁶¹ Out of suspicion, Rīzā Shah arrested and killed his Minister of Court, the extremely influential 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Taymūrtāsh in 1933, followed by the alienation of many other politicians loyal to him. 'Alī Akbar Dāvar, the Minister of justice and finance committed suicide out of fear of a fate similar to Taymūrtāsh. See Katouzian, "Rīzā Shah's Political Legitimacy," 27-28. On Dāvar and Taymūrtāsh, see: *Ibrāhīm Khājahnūrī, Bāzīgārān-i 'aṣr-i ṭalā'ī, Dāvar, Taymūrtāsh, Āyram, Amīr Ṭahmāsbī, Dashtī* (Tehran: Jāvidān, 1978/1357), 9-26 and 27-68 respectively. On Taymūrtāsh, see also: Blücher, *Safar-nāmah*, 248-53.

The Shah was very much a self-contained individual.⁹⁶² By late 1934/1313, when he closed the Bahā'ī schools and started a wave of severe restrictions on Bahā'īs, he surely had in mind his plans for the unveiling of women. He enforced these in January 1936.⁹⁶³ Of the two areas critical to the clerics, the “heretic” Bahā'īs and abolition of the *hijab*, Rīzā Shah was ready to sacrifice the former to ensure achieving the latter. In his view the unveiling of women was a major feature of Iran's modernization and therefore worth fighting for.

No study of the relationship of the state and clerics during the time of Rīzā Shah—or indeed the entire Pahlavī period—would provide an accurate picture if it did not take into account the situation of the Bahā'īs.⁹⁶⁴ Years ago, the historian Roy Mottahedeh expressed the view that “tolerating Bahā'īs was a way of showing mullahs who was the boss.” Referring to Rīzā Shah, Mottahedeh observed:

Although he dissolved their schools, which had been important sources of the “new education” at preuniversity level,...and although he refused to grant them any official standing as a religion, so that they were unable to meet in public or marry according to their religion, Reza Shah made sure that the Bahā'īs were left alone; to do otherwise would be to concede that the mullahs influenced his policies.⁹⁶⁵

This assertion introduced the neglected issue of the treatment of Bahā'īs during the time of Rīzā Shah as highly relevant to a discussion of his relationship with the ulama. Even so, it only partially explained the dynamics of the time. It is true that after the 1926 Jahrum massacre

⁹⁶² On the topic of Rīzā Shah not sharing his decisions with others before implementing them, see Katouzian, “Nationalist Trends,” 533-551.

⁹⁶³ On the universal removal of veils, see: D. L. Wilber, *Rīzā Shah Pahlavi* (New York: Hicksville, 1975), 174. On women's veil see: *Encyclopedia Iranica*, s.v. “Chādūr.”

⁹⁶⁴ See for example Shahrough Akhavi's monograph *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran*. While Akhavi presents an impressive study of the Court-Cleric relationship during the 1955 anti-Bahā'ī upheaval during the time of Muḥammad Rīzā Shah, it is totally silent on Rīzā Shah's treatment of Bahā'īs.

⁹⁶⁵ Roy Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran*, rev. ed. (1985; rept., Oxford: One World, 2009), 238-39. Mottahedeh adds, “as the Bahā'īs throughout most of their history were a pawn that these governments played in their complex game with the mullahs, none of the governments was willing to surrender this pawn in a single move.” Ibid.

there were no similar incidents under Riḏā Shah's reign. The Shah's prevention showed the clerics "who was the boss." However, it is also true that he did not punish the culprits of that massacre. Further, Riḏā Shah's treatment of Bahā'īs in the post-1931 era can be explained in the context of avoiding "undue" conflicts with the ulama or even trying to appease them at a time when he was on the verge of launching campaigns for which he *had to* face the objection and protests of the ulama—campaigns cardinal to his "modernization" project such as the dress codes or unveiling of women.⁹⁶⁶ This is far from the picture generally depicted of Riḏā Shah's treatment of the ulama. The ulama did influence his decisions, even if he made decisions in order to avoid resistance from them. In recent years a number of scholars have paid attention to this issue, but a comprehensive study of power dynamics between Riḏā Shah and the clerics remains a desideratum.⁹⁶⁷

That the clerics were highly sensitive to Riḏā Shah's treatment of Bahā'īs evidenced by the satisfaction that Sharī'at Sangalajī⁹⁶⁸ publically expressed, following the closure of the Bahā'ī schools:

Last night I heard a report which so delighted me that if I had the means I would strew the floor of this mosque with sweets. It was that His Majesty our powerful Shah has ordered the closing of their girls' and boys schools. O people, this is indeed a matter of

⁹⁶⁶ Soli Shahvar proposes a similar analysis: "Riḏā Shah could not risk recognizing or even appearing to favor Bahā'īs, and certainly not when....he needed to avoid arousing clerical or popular opposition (as when he wished to introduce radical reform)." Shahvar, *The Forgotten Schools*, 124.

⁹⁶⁷ In 2003, Chehabi wrote, "To assuage its critics and prove its Islamic credentials, the government resorted to the old trick of sacrificing the interests of minorities: early in 1936 all Bahā'ī officers in the army were dismissed on the direct orders of the Shah, and it was rumoured that he desired to make some pro-Islamic gesture in order to counteract the perception that unveiling had been motivated by opposition to Islam." Chehabi, "The Banning of the Veil," 203. Shahvar also has addressed the power dynamics between the state and the ulama in his discussion of the closure of the Bahā'ī schools. Shahvar, *The Forgotten Schools*, 124-125. A more recent study refers to Riḏā Shah's decision "to sacrifice the Bahā'ī schools for the sake of unveiling women." Fereydon Vahman, *Yikṣad va shaṣṭ sāl mubārīḏāh bā diyānat-i Bahā'ī: gūshah-i az tārikh-i ijtimā'ī-dīnī-i Iran dar dawrān-i mu'āṣir* (Darmstadt, Germany: 'Aṣr-i Jadīd, 2009), 117-119.

⁹⁶⁸ See the section on Sangalajī under "Reformist Theologians," in this dissertation.

thanksgiving! Think what would happen to our Muslim children who would attend those schools. May God Himself assist our mighty and exalted Shah!⁹⁶⁹

Another anecdote indicates how the clerics saw themselves implicated in Riṣā Shah's treatment of Bahā'īs. Ayatollah Khālīshī, for example, recounted that it was under the influence of the publication of his debates with a Bahā'ī that Riṣā Shah "was informed [of the reality of Bahā'īs]", closed their schools and banned their employment in "civil and military" (*kishvarī va lashkarī*) offices.⁹⁷⁰

An in-depth discussion of the possible impact of the relationship of the ulama with Riṣā Shah as it relates to Bahā'īs must also take into account that some of Riṣā Shah's opponents in the early days sought to undermine him by spreading the rumor that he was a Bahā'ī.⁹⁷¹ During his campaign for republicanism Riṣā Khan's opponents made this allegation, adding that he had "conspired to destroy Islam."⁹⁷² The choices Riṣā Khan had made (i.e., political activism, performing the coup) left little doubt that the charge had no grounds in reality and had been invented merely to undermine an aspiring politician's position.⁹⁷³

⁹⁶⁹ "Report Prepared," 6:97. According to this source, the account was originally published in the magazine *Kānūn-i shu'arā*.

⁹⁷⁰ Khālīshī mentions these points years later when 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Ḥā'irī asks him in an interview if there were any "practical results" (*natījah-i 'amali*) to the debate he had with a Bahā'ī teacher. Khālīshī, *Muballigh-i Bahā'ī dar maḥzar*, 42. For details see the section on Khālīshī.

⁹⁷¹ See the section on the Imbrie Affair for details.

⁹⁷² Banānī, *The Modernization of Iran*, 42. See the section on the Imbrie Affair for more details.

⁹⁷³ According to Makkī, in his days before assuming the Ministry of War, Riṣā Khan used to attend Bahā'ī meetings for some time. See Ḥusayn Makkī, *Tārīkh-i bīst-sālah-i Iran*, vol.2, *muqaddamāt-i taghyr-i saltanat* (Tehran: 'ilmī, 1995/1374), 126. Interestingly, another example of calling an individual a Bahā'ī in order to destabilize their situation happened during Riṣā Shah's reign to Ḥusayn Makkī himself when his opponents spread the rumor so that he does not get elected for the *Majlis*. See Ḥusayn Makkī, *Tārīkh-i bīst-sālah-i Iran*, vol.1 (Tehran: 'ilmī, 1989/1368), 54. In later decades also this was familiar tool. The best case in point was the prime minister 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Ḥazhīr (d. 1328/1949) whose opponents called him a Bahā'ī – a totally unfounded allegation used perhaps also to facilitate his assassination by the *Fadā'īyan-i Islam*. See Ja'far Mahdīniyā, *Zindigī-i siyāsī-i 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Ḥazhīr*. (Tehran: Panus, 1373). The purpose of the false rumor other than undermining Hajir might have also been to "prove" that Bahā'īs were tied to the British (since Hajir was).

Anti-Bahā'ī Elements--Azalis?

A very different explanation for the closure was advanced by some Iranian Bahā'īs of the period. These Bahā'īs claimed that the Bahā'ī schools were closed due to Azalī antagonism. 'Alī Akbar Furūtan (d. 2003), an eminent Bahā'ī and a specialist in education, who was the principal of Tarbiyat schools at the time of their closure in 1934/1313, was under the impression that “prominent Azalīs, including Zūkā' al-Mulk,” were behind the closure. Furūtan believed that Azalīs had convinced Rīzā Shah that the Bahā'ī school should be closed on the grounds that it trained pro-Bahā'ī students.⁹⁷⁴ Muḥammad 'Alī Furūghī Zūkā'al-Mulk (d. 1942),⁹⁷⁵ a highly competent politician and scholar, was in the second term of his premiership (1933-1935) at the time.⁹⁷⁶ More than twenty-two years earlier, the Bahā'ī leader 'Abdu'l-Bahā' included Zūkā' al-Mulk's name among the main Azalī figures who instigated different political parties to oppose the Bahā'īs.⁹⁷⁷ 'Abdu'l-Bahā' wasn't the only person who identified Zūkā' al-Mulk as an Azalī.

⁹⁷⁴ See Ḥishmat Shahriyārī, “*Ta'tīl-i madāris-i tarbiyat bih ravāyat-i jināb-i 'Alī-Akbar Furūtan*,” *Payām-i Bahā'ī* 316 (March 2006): 26-34. Quote from page 28.

⁹⁷⁵ On Furūghī, see: *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Furūghī, Muḥammad -'Alī Zūkā' al-mulk.” See also, Ahmad Varedi, “Muḥammad-'Alī Furūghī, Zūkā' al-Mulk (1877-1941): A Study in the Role of Intellectuals in Modern Iranian Politics,” (PhD diss., University of Utah, 1992); Bāqir 'Āqilī, *Sharḥ-i ḥāl-i rijāl-i siyāsī va niẓāmī-i mu'āṣir-i Iran* (Tehran: Guftār, 2001), 2:1107-1120; Mihdī Bāmdād, *Sharḥ-i ḥāl-i rijāl-i Iran* 3:450-451. For some interesting details of his political career and relationship with Rīzā Shah, see the interview with Zūkā' al-Mulk's son: Ḥabīb Lājvardī, ed., *Matn-i kāmīl-i khāṭirāt-i Maḥmūd-i Furūghī* (Tehran: Şafḥah-'i sifid, 1387/2008).

⁹⁷⁶ The first term of his premiership began with the reign of Rīzā Shah and lasted for approximately six months. It has been proposed that given the friendship between the two men, Furūghī might have suggested his own resignation because he thought that without the support of older statesmen like Mustawfī al-Mamālīk (d.1311/1932) who had opposed the deposition of Aḥmad Shah (d. 1930) on legal grounds, Rīzā Shah's rule “would not appear as legitimate” at that point. See Varedi, “Muḥammad-'Alī Furūghī,” 83-84. The second term extended from 26 Shahrivar 1312 (17 September 1933) to 10 Āzar 1314 (2 December 1935). See Lājvardī, *Matn-i kāmīl-i khāṭirāt*, 24, 29. He became the Prime Minister for the third time right before Rīzā Shah's forced abdication and played an important role in preserving the Pahlavī monarchy. See: Bāqir 'Āqilī, *Zūkā' al-Mulk-i Furūghī va Shahrivar* 1320 (Tehran: 'Ilmī, 1367/1988).

⁹⁷⁷ See 'Abdu'l-Bahā', *Mā'idah-'i āsmānī*, 5:224-25. Muḥammad 'Alī Furūghī's father, Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥusayn Khan (d. 1907), was also known as Zūkā' al-Mulk. See: *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Furūghī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Khan Zūkā' al-Mulk.” However, 'Abdu'l-Bahā' could not have speaking about the Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥusayn Khan. By the time of the second Majlis (1327-1330Q/1909-1911), when 'Abdu'l-Bahā' made this statement, Mīrzā

Many years after Zūkā' al-Mulk death, Nūr al-Dīn Chahārdahī stated explicitly that he had been an Azalī.⁹⁷⁸

Zūkā' al-Mulk enjoyed a “close relationship” with Riẓā Shah.⁹⁷⁹ Alī Aṣghar Ḥikmat (d. 1359/1980),⁹⁸⁰ the Deputy Minister of Education, was likewise a close friend of the Prime Minister.⁹⁸¹ Both Furūghī and Ḥikmat were men of letters. None of them wrote an anti-Bahā'ī work. Furūghī hardly made any public statements about the Bahā'īs. One of the rare (if not the only) instances he did do so speaks to his concern with why the Bahā'ī faith had endured and was capable of attracting new adherents. The German Minister to Iran Wipert v. Blücher quotes Furūghī opining about the Bahā'īs: “the main characteristic of these people is that they have not delimited the principles of their religion. As a result, on the one hand one cannot challenge their teachings, and on the other—for the very same reason—people of various creeds and intellectual backgrounds might well convert to it.”⁹⁸²

Contrary to Furūghī, Ḥikmat wrote a short introductory piece on the Bahā'ī religion as part of a longer piece on religious minorities in Iran. He composed it near the end of his life and

Muḥammad Ḥusayn Khan had already died and the epithet Zūkā' al-Mulk was being used by his son, Muḥammad 'Alī Furūghī.

⁹⁷⁸ See Nūr al-Dīn Chahārdahī, *Bāb kīst va suKhan-i ū chīst* (Tehran: Fathī, 1363/1984), 98.

⁹⁷⁹ Varedi, “Muḥammad-‘Alī Furūghī,” 84.

⁹⁸⁰ See: *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Ḥikmat, ‘Alī Aṣghar.” The *Encyclopaedia Iranica* article introduces Ḥikmat as a “man of letters, university professor, cabinet minister, and the chief architect of the modernization of the educational system under Reza Shah (1893-1980). Once Riẓā Shah decided to unveil Persian women, he placed Ḥikmat in charge of mapping out a plan of action, which included co-education in the first four years of elementary school.” See also, Bāqir 'Āqilī, *Sharḥ-i ḥāl-i rijāl-i siyāsī va nizāmī-i mu'āṣir-i Irān*, vol. I (Tehran: Guftār with collaboration of 'Ilm, 2001), 586-88. For a sample of Ḥikmat's writing and details of two years of his life see: 'Alī Aṣghar Ḥikmat, *Rahāmūz-i Ḥikmat: Yād'dāshthā-yi ṣafar-i Ṭihrān-i Mīrzā 'Alī Aṣghar Khan Ḥikmat Shīrāzī*, ed. Muḥammad Dabīrsiyāqī (Qazvīn: Ḥadiṣ-i Imrūz, 1382/2003).

⁹⁸¹ Ḥikmat devoted a section of his book of memories from the Pahlavī era to Zūkā' al-Mulk. The author's admiration for and closeness to Zūkā' al-Mulk are obvious. See 'Alī Aṣghar Ḥikmat, *Sī khāṭirah az 'aṣr-i farkhundah-i Pahlavī* (Tehran: Pars, 1976), 15-29.

⁹⁸² This is my translation into English of the Persian translation of the original German text. See: Wipert v. Blücher, *Safar-nāmah-i Blücher*, trans. Kaykāvūs Jahāndārī (Tehran: Khārazmī, 1984/1363), 298.

four decades after his association with Furūghī.⁹⁸³ His note was not antagonistic, although he referred to the Bahā'ī religion as a “the heretical sect of innovators” (*firqah-i mubtadi'ah*)⁹⁸⁴ and tried to present the number of adherents as relatively small.⁹⁸⁵ An anecdote from a later time in Hikmat's life (1960s) suggests the possibility that he had some anti-Bahā'ī sentiments.⁹⁸⁶

Hikmat's accounts for the reason behind the closure of the Bahā'ī schools varied. What he wrote forty years after the closure of the schools, in 1976, as the reason behind the event contradicted his own official letter ordering the closure.⁹⁸⁷ In Hikmat's 1934 letter, he clearly indicated that the reason for closure was that Bahā'īs had “closed” the schools on a regular working day.⁹⁸⁸ However, in the 1976 account, Hikmat wrote that the day after a religious holiday, Riẓā Shah summoned Hikmat to ask him why the school next to his house was open the day before, and why the students were there in the school making noise on a holiday. In response, Hikmat explained that the girls' Tarbiyat School had been open on the holiday because “the authorities of the school have their own calendar and their own special feasts which are different from those of other schools.” Astonished and angry, the account goes on to say that Riẓā Shah told Hikmat to “warn” the school authorities that they should either follow

⁹⁸³ See Hikmat, *Sī khāṭirah*, 240-241.

⁹⁸⁴ In Islamic terms, innovators are those who inject heretical beliefs or practices for which there is no precedent. See: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Bid‘a”; *Encyclopaedia of the Qur‘ān*, s.v. “Innovation.”

⁹⁸⁵ Basing his argument on a 1350/1971 consensus which had no place for Bahā'īs to declare their religion, Hikmat took the 77,075 figure of those “who have not declared their religion,” as the “number of Bahā'īs who did not express their adherence.” See: Hikmat, *Sī khāṭirah*, 241.

⁹⁸⁶ One of his former Tehran University PhD students, Shahpūr Rāsikh, authored a number of entries for *Irānshahr*, a concise encyclopedia of Iran commissioned by UNESCO of which Hikmat was the editor. (See: *Irānshahr, Barrasī-i sarzamīn, mardum, farhang, dawlat va iqtisād-i Iran*, 2 vol. (Tehran: Chāpkhanah-i Dānishgāh, 1963, 1964). After the book was published, Rāsikh found out that in one of the entries he had written under the title, “Population in Iran,” Hikmat, as the editor, had inserted, without informing the author, a few sentences on recognized religions in Iran (Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism), without making any references to the Bahā'īs, i.e., the largest non-Muslim religious minority. See “*Khāṭirah-i az marhūm-i ‘Alī Aṣghar-i Hikmat*,” *Payām-i Bahā'ī* 303 (Feb. 2005), 38-39.

⁹⁸⁷ For a detailed discussion of Hikmat's later account, see Moayyad, “Scholarly Dilettantism,” 327-333.

⁹⁸⁸ See the section on the closure of schools above. For the photo of the official 1934 letter ordering the closure, see Martin, “The Persecution,” 17.

the official schedule of the country or be closed.⁹⁸⁹ That Ḥikmat changed his story is in and of itself indicative that his report is not completely accurate. Furthermore, even the polished version of the story suggests that Ḥikmat instigated the authoritarian monarch's anger by suggesting to him that Bahā'īs did not follow the official schedule of the country's schools.

The discussion on the Azalī affiliation of some of the influential characters of the time is presented in the addendum to this chapter, "Azalīs, Post Constitutional Revolution." At this point it suffices to say that the claim that there were people with Azalī leanings in highly influential positions who did not use their power to curtail the Bahā'ī presence in a social scene is too optimistic and runs the danger of the historian failing to see the facts due to the subtlety of the protagonists involved.

Riḏā shah's decision to close the Bahā'ī schools and exert other strict anti-Bahā'ī measures must be regarded as multi-causal, and it involved his general change of behavior and increased suspicion, his interaction with the ulama (the unseen influence of the clerics), and the tacit influence of some of the anti-Bahā'ī statesmen involved (whether with Azalī leaning or not).

⁹⁸⁹ Ḥikmat, "*Sī khāṭirah*," 241-43. An almost opposite account is given by Sulaymān Bihbūdī, the special secretary of Riḏā Shah. As he wrote, the Tarbiyat school on Kākh street was close to Riḏā Shah's study and he had grown accustomed to hearing children play in the school playground. When Bahā'īs closed the school for a day and Riḏā Shah did not hear the sound of children playing, he became curious. Apprised that the school had been closed due to someone's death, he became angry and summoned Ḥikmat to investigate the matter. Sulaymān Bihbūdī, *Khāṭirāt-i Sulaymān Bihbūdī*, Shams Pahlavī, 'Alī Izadī, ed. Ghulām Ḥusyan Mīrzā Ṣāliḥ (Tehran: Tarḥ-i Naw, 1372/1993), 336-37.

Addendum A: Iranian Nationalism under Rīzā Shah and the Bahā'īs

In his study on nationalism in Iran, Richard Cottam concluded that “as a secular movement, nationalism in Iran should and apparently does minimize religious differentials.”⁹⁹⁰ Despite Cottam’s expectation, however, the “secular” nationalism of Rīzā Shah’s period led to an institutionalized discrimination against one of the nation’s religious minorities: the Bahā'ī community. It was the emerging Pahlavi bureaucracy that produced this development. What accounted for this outcome was the ubiquitous--if at this period silenced and subtle--presence of the ulama, and the relations of power between them and Rīzā Shah on the one hand, and the presence in the high ranking decision making levels of the state/society of anti-Bahā'ī elements (Azalī or otherwise), on the other.

Considering the subtle influence of the ulama in Rīzā Shah’s decisions, one tends to agree with the statement that “narratives of secularization which argue that the relationship between secularism and religion is a zero-sum game resulting in the retreat of the latter are analytically deficient in explaining the persistence and centrality of religion in supposedly secular Iranian histories.”⁹⁹¹ Farzin Vejdani has problematized the dominant characterization of the first Pahlavi’s secular nationalism as “rooted in pre-Islamic symbols, a celebration of the Iranian dynastic tradition, and a marginalization of Shī'ism and Islam from the national narrative.”⁹⁹² The findings on the treatment of Iranian Bahā'īs during the second half of Rīzā Shah’s rule

⁹⁹⁰ Richard W. Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran, Updated Through 1978*, 2nd ed. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979), 89. Cottam was, of course, writing decades later than Rīzā Shah’s period. His main evidence for making the above statement was “the failure of the strong religious elements in the Mussadiq alliance to persuade the National Front to permit an attack on the Bahā'īs.” Pointing to the 1955 anti-Bahā'ī campaign all over Iran, he asserted, it “occurred when most of Iran’s Nationalists had no voice in the determination of policy.” He then added, “the pervasive belief that the Bahā'īs are traitorous will require time to overcome, but after a few years under a liberal nationalist government this atavistic or totally mythical belief should fade away.” Ibid, 89-90.

⁹⁹¹ Vejdani, “Purveyors of the Past,” 20.

⁹⁹² Vejdani, “Purveyors of the Past,” 20. Emphasis added.

lends support to Vejdani's view. Even Cottam's own observation testifies to the fact that, in Iran, the "religious" and the "secular" were porous categories. Discussing the impact of nationalism on the country's various religious minorities, Cottam commented that the growth of Iranian nationalism influenced negatively the position of those religious minorities, like "the Armenians and the Jews," who granted another nation their "primary loyalty."⁹⁹³ Conversely, it helped to integrate into the Iranian nation a minority like Zoroastrians who were seen as ethnically entirely Iranian. "The Bahā'īs," Cottam asserts, "should fall into the same category as the Zoroastrians. That they do not is due largely to the fact that Iranian nationalism is still under the influence of Shiite religious leaders."⁹⁹⁴

Cottam brings up, as well, the related topic of how Bahā'īs relate to Iranian nationalism. In his words,

to what extent Iranian Bahā'īs adhere to nationalism is, of course, impossible to determine. T. Cuyler Young writes that the universal principles of Bahā'ism run counter to the demands of national particularism.⁹⁹⁵ However, members of the Iranian Bahā'ī community insist that Bahā'īs are the most devoted Iranian nationalists. They claim that since an Iranian was chosen to be the[sic] Bahā'u'llāh, the manifestation of God on earth, the Bahā'īs believe that the Iranian nation has a glory above all others. Probably there is truth in both opinions. It is unlikely that the Bahā'īs, Iranians as they are in language, culture, and history, could be immune to the force of nationalism. But their intense persecution, together with their universalistic outlook, will drive them in the other direction.⁹⁹⁶

Cottam's analysis would have been much less tentative had he known of the glorification of ancient Iran, in the Bahā'ī writings, in a manner similar to that of nationalists (save for the

⁹⁹³ Cottam's generalization regarding both these religious minorities can be questioned. Obviously, there may be members (or even large segments) of both these minorities who consider themselves first Iranians and then Armenian or Jewish. With respect to Jews see Orly Rahimiyan, "Iranian Jewish Identity: Between Diaspora and Homeland," paper presented at the conference "*Facing Others: Iranian Identity Boundaries and Modern Political Cultures*," Yale Iranian Studies Initiative, MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies, New Haven, April 25th-27th 2008.

⁹⁹⁴ Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran*, 89.

⁹⁹⁵ T. Cuyler Young, *Near Eastern Culture and Society* (Princeton, 1951), 136.

⁹⁹⁶ Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran*, 88-89.

absence of a negative depiction of Arabs and Islam). The appearance of this theme in the Bahā'ī scriptures⁹⁹⁷ predates the work of one of the (if not *the*) progenitor(s) of Iranian nationalism, Mīrzā Āqā Khan Kirmanī, in the area.⁹⁹⁸

⁹⁹⁷ See, for example, 'Abdu'l-Bahā', *The Secret of Divine Civilizations*, trans. Marzieh Gail and Ali-Kuli Khan (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1990), 6-10. The original Persian book was written in 1875.

⁹⁹⁸ See Mīrzā Āqā Khan Kirmanī, *Aīnah-i Sikandarī* (Tehran: 1324 Q/1906). The book was completed in 1890. On this work, see Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran*, 100. Vejdani, "Purveyors of the Past," 44 ff. On Mīrzā Āqā Khan, see Fereydun Adamiyat, *Andīshah'ha-yi Mīrzā Āqā khan Kirmanī* (Tehran: Payam, 1357 Q/1978). See also Mangol Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999).

Addendum B: Azalīs, Post Constitutional Revolution

A thorough exploration of the history of the Azalī movement, as important as it may be to the history of modern Iran, lies beyond the scope of this dissertation.⁹⁹⁹ However, a brief review of the Azalī activity in post-Constitutional Revolution Iran, contemporary with Riṣā Shah's reign, is highly relevant to any discussion of anti-Bahā'ism in Iran during this period. Scholarly research has established the followers of Azal "have been mostly reabsorbed by Shiite Islam,"¹⁰⁰⁰ and that "members tend to be secretive about their affiliation, converts are rare, and association appears to run along family lines."¹⁰⁰¹ The intent of these few pages is to establish, on the basis of the historical record, how Azalīs adopted a policy of dissimulation (*taqīyah*),¹⁰⁰²

⁹⁹⁹ Some studies have already addressed the issue of the Azalīs, but there is yet much to be done. For a general introduction on Azalīs, see *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. "Azalī Bābism"; see also, MacEoin, *The Messiah of Shiraz*, 591-95; for the role Azalīs played in the Constitutional Revolution, see Amanat, "Memory and Amnesia." See also Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 129-31, 180-83 and passim; M. Momen, "The Cyprus Exiles," *Bahā'ī Studies Bulletin*: vol. 5, no. 3 and vol. 6, no. 1 (June 1991): 84-113. On the Azalī practice of dissimulation, see Sepehr Manuchehri, "The Practice of Taqīyah (Dissimulation) in the Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions," *Research Notes in Shaykhi, Bābī and Bahā'ī Studies* Vol. 3, no. 3 (September 1999) <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/notes/vol3/taqiya.htm>.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Bausani, *Religion in Iran*, 393.

¹⁰⁰¹ Denise Martin MacEoin, *The Messiah of Shiraz: Studies in Early and Middle Bābism* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 594-95. About the number of Azalīs, MacEoin adds, "It is difficult to estimate current numbers, but these are unlikely to exceed one or two thousand, almost all of whom reside in Iran." Ibid.

¹⁰⁰² The originally Shī'ī concept of "taqīyah" means "the 'prudential concealment' of one's allegiance to a minority religious group in danger of persecution." See: *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Taqīyah." See also, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. s.v. "taqīyah." Oxford Islamic Studies Online, s.v. "taqīyah."

<http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/article/opr/t236/e0784> (accessed Oct 6, 2010). According to Bayat, Azalīs practiced taqīyah because they feared both Muslims and Bahā'īs. Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 130. This seems to be an unfounded pro-Azalī statement, given the fact that Bahā'īs are non-violent by principle, and have been so in practice, at least since the late 1870s. Bayat seems to be basing her argument on an isolated famous case when a number of Bahā'īs, acting in disregard of the teachings of Bahā'u'llāh and much to his dismay, killed three Azalīs. See Adīb Taherzadeh, *Revelation of Bahā'u'llāh*, Vol 3 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1974), 234 ff; H. M. Balyuzi, *Bahā'u'llāh: The King of Glory* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1980). No similar incident is recorded ever to have happened.

and that there *have been* Azalīs--both totally dissimulating, and semi-open--living in Iran, even after the adoption of that policy, some of them highly influential cultural figures.

The Policy of Collective Dissimulation

Ḥājī ‘Alī Akbar Ṣan‘atī,¹⁰⁰³ who according to his own account “used to be an Azalī,” shared with a friend of his (Ghulām-Riḏā Āgāh) that Mīrzā Yaḥyá Azal (d.1912),¹⁰⁰⁴ had appointed Ḥājī Mīrzā Yaḥyá Dawlatābādī (d. 1939) as his successor and as the executor and trustee of his will. Following Azal’s death, Ṣan‘atī and other “heads” of the Azalīs of Tehran, whom Azal had informed of the appointment, gathered together in the home of Dawlatābādī. When his visiting co-believers made reference to his successorship, the latter remained silent. On the fortieth day of the passing of Azal, Dawlatābādī invited forty three of the prominent figures among the Azalīs of Tehran to his residence.¹⁰⁰⁵ In that gathering, Ṣan‘atī recounts, Dawlatābādī first said, “Gentlemen, leave me to myself” (*dast az man bardārīd*). The men pointed out that he was Azal’s successor. He acknowledged that fact, stating that Azal’s letter on the matter was in his possession. His visitors wanted him to guide them on how to proceed in the absence of Azal. As the account goes, Dawlatābādī replied, “I am afraid you would not follow my orders,” and insisted that they swear to do so. This they did. He then requested that they

¹⁰⁰³ Ḥājī ‘Alī Akbar Ṣan‘atī (or Ṣan‘atīzādih) was the founder of a orphanage in Kerman where the Iranian sculptor and painter was raised. See “*Ustād ‘Alī Akbar Ṣan‘atī hunarāfarīn-i hunarhā-yi tajasumī*,” *Kayhān-i Farhangī* 51 (Khurdād 1367/1988). Iraj Afshar in the obituary for his lifelong friend Humāyūn Ṣan‘atī (d. 2009), the poet, writer, translator, innovative industrialist, and the founder of the Franklin Publishing House in Tehran, refers to the latter’s grandfather, Ḥājī ‘Alī Akbar Ṣan‘atī “known as Shaykh ‘Alī Akbar, the deaf.” Iraj Afshar, “*tāzah’hā va pārah’hā-yi Iranshināsī* 64,” *Bukhārā, majallah-i farhangī va hunarī* 72-73 (*Mihr-Day* 1388/2009). <http://bukharamag.com/?p=623>. Afshar’s article suggests some interesting aspects of the lives of the Azalīs, like marriage within the circle of Azalīs, an example being that between the two well-known Azalī families, the Dawlatābādīs and the Ṣan‘atīs. It also mentions Ḥasan Taqīzadah as a close friend and associate in the Azalī circle. Ibid.

¹⁰⁰⁴ See *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Azalī Bābism.”

¹⁰⁰⁵ Holding memorial gatherings for the deceased on the fortieth day is a custom among Iranian Shiites.

pledge their allegiance to him. As they complied, Dawlatābādī said, “Do you see that *samāvar* [water boiling device] on the shelf?”¹⁰⁰⁶ From this very hour, till my next order (*tā dastūr-i s̄ānavī*), each of us must follow the Shī‘a. Whatever the Shī‘a do, from performing the major ritual ablution (*ghusl-i jinābat*), to the morning obligatory prayer (*namāz-i ṣubḥ-i du rak‘at*), to imitating this or that *mujtahid*, you should do, so that people know you are Shī‘ī.” Ṣan‘atī then ended the account by saying, “it is now forty-two years that we are Shī‘ī and he has not issued any other commands.”¹⁰⁰⁷ Dawlatābādī himself lived as a Shī‘ī cleric.¹⁰⁰⁸ In light of what has been suggested earlier in this dissertation, on the association between the Azalīs and the followers of Sayyid Jamāl Afghānī,¹⁰⁰⁹ it should be noted that Ḥājī ‘Alī Akbar Ṣan‘atī’s conduct, over this period, was such that others thought of him as having had unorthodox or revolutionary ideas and of associating with (or having been one of) the follower of Sayyid Jamāl Afghānī.¹⁰¹⁰

¹⁰⁰⁶ Dawlatābādī’s reference to the *samāvar* seems to be an unorthodox way of emphasizing the importance of a moment by mentioning a physical object.

¹⁰⁰⁷ See Ḥusayn Makkī, *Zindigānī Mīrzā Taqī Khan Amīr Kabīr, ba iẓāfāt-i jadīd*, 12th ed. (Tehran: Iran, 1373/1994), 408-409. Since Azal died in 1912 and Ṣan‘atī is sharing the account forty two years later (i.e., in 1954), and Ḥājī Mīrzā Yaḥyā Dawlatābādī had died in 1939, Ṣan‘atī’s remark, “he has not issued any other commands” seems odd.

¹⁰⁰⁸ ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ most likely had Dawlatābādī in mind when he wrote in 1919 that some of the published anti-Bahā’ī materials were in fact the work of “Yaḥyā’īs,” a term ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ used to refer to the Azalīs. ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’ maintained that the writer was a “hidden Yaḥyā’ī who pretended to be a Muslim” (*Yaḥyā’ī sirrī va musalmān-i ṣāḥirī*) by putting on the garb of a Shī‘ī cleric. He added that the writer’s aim was to sow the seeds of “sedition and iniquity” (*fitnah va fisād*) between Shī‘ī and Bahā’ī Iranians. ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’, *Makātīb*, 3:282. The Bahā’ī scholar, ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Ishrāq-Khāvarī, himself a former Shī‘ī cleric, has recounted that in the mid-to-late 1920s, after converting to the Bahā’ī religion, he was approached by a man dressed in clerical garb who introduced himself as Yaḥyā Dawlatābādī. The latter proceeded to tell Ishrāq-Khāvarī that he was in fact a Bahā’ī but chose to keep his Bahā’ī identity a secret. He advised Ishrāq-Khāvarī to do the same. The two men soon met again in a gathering with a number of Shī‘ī clerics. When pressed to comment, Dawlatābādī condemned anyone who believed in a revelation after Muḥammad as a heretic who deserved to be killed. See Mawlavī-Nīzhād, *IshrāqKhāvarī*, 167-170.

¹⁰⁰⁹ See the section titled “Reformist Theologians.” We already recounted there Ḥājī ‘Alī Akbar Ṣan‘atī’s visit in Istanbul with Mīrzā Āqā Khan Kirmani and Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī.

¹⁰¹⁰ Iraj Afshar recalls that Ḥājī ‘Alī Akbar “*tanah’ash bih tanah-i payruvān-i Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī khurdah būd*,” and as they say, “*sarash būy-i qurmah sabzī mīdād*.” Iraj Afshar, “*tāzah’hā va pārah’hā-yi Iranshināsī* 64.”

Life as (Crypto-)Azalīs?

The son of Ḥājī ‘Alī Akbar Ṣan‘atī, ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Ṣan‘atīzādah Kirmānī (d.1352/1973)¹⁰¹¹ has left us, in his autobiography, with what can be, in many ways, regarded as a unique account of the of Azalīs in Iran.¹⁰¹² On the one hand, it appears that regardless of the arrangements about acting as the Shī‘ā, the role of Mīrzā Yaḥyā Dawlatābādī as a leader to the community—and hence a sense of community--were retained. This can be inferred from ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Ṣan‘atīzādah’s account of his consultation with Dawlatābādī as a superior on the major issues of his life. These included his marriage and the solving of social conflicts, such as the one the author had had with the governor of Kerman.¹⁰¹³ He described Dawlatābādī as “a general, and a commander (*farmāndah*) in a war, busy defending and attacking” through writing letters, and guiding and activating the “freedom-seekers” all over Iran.¹⁰¹⁴ One can conclude from this account that a certain level of community cohesion with Yaḥyā Dawlatābādī’s *de facto* leadership existed among the Azalīs. On the other hand, a departure from the laws of the Bāb, and submission to Shī‘ī ones, is obvious in Ṣan‘atīzādah’s autobiography, since Ṣan‘atīzādah practiced temporary marriage (*ṣiḡhah*), which was

¹⁰¹¹ Iran Afshar refers to ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn San‘atizādah as a good writer from the Pahlavi era whose stories had attracted the attention of Western Iranonogists such as Ripka and Makhalski. He was the father of Humāyūn Ṣan‘atī whose obituary Afshar wrote. See Afshar, “*tāzah’hā va pārah’hā-yi Iranshināsī* 64.”

¹⁰¹² ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn Ṣan‘atīzādah Kirmānī, *Rūzigārī kih guzasht* (N.p: 1346sh/1967). Afshar refers to this book as the best among the writings of its author.

¹⁰¹³ See Ṣan‘atīzādah Kirmānī, *Rūzigārī kih guzasht*, 234-236.

¹⁰¹⁴ Ṣan‘atīzādah Kirmānī, *Rūzigārī kih guzasht*, 235.

forbidden to Bābīs.¹⁰¹⁵ In so far as religious life was concerned, therefore, Dawlatābādī's command to act as the Shī'a was accepted and followed and a strict adherence to *taqīyah* was observed.

Open, if Prudent, Self-Identity as Azalīs

Despite the collective agreement among the followers of Mīrzā Yaḥyá to act as the Shī'ā, there clearly remained a sense of self-identity as Azalīs among at least some of them, even as late as 1960s. In his book, *Bāb kīst va sukhan-i ū chīst*, Nūr al-Dīn Chahārdahī (1376/1997) published his exchange on the Azalī persuasion with a self-acknowledged Azalī, a retired judge by the name Muḥammad Ṣādiq Ibrāhīmī. Chahārdahī referred to the latter as the “leader” (*pīshvā*) of the Azalīs and incorporated in his book the text of the latter's letter dated 24 of Murdād 1340 (15 August 1961), answering questions on matters such as the writings of the Bāb, the relations of Mīrzā Aqā Khan Kirmānī and Shaykh Aḥmad Rūḥī with Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī and the like.¹⁰¹⁶ Further evidence for the existence of people who identified themselves as Azalīs—even openly where it seemed safe to do so—comes from historian Nikkie Keddie who had “reliable informants in Iran,” for her information on the Azalī activists of the Constitutional Revolution.¹⁰¹⁷

¹⁰¹⁵ Ṣan'atīzādah Kirmānī, *Rūzigārī kih guzasht*, 254-63. See The Bāb, *Bayān-i Fārsī*, Iran National Bahā'ī Archives (INBA), vol. 24, p. 263 (Vahid 6: Bāb 7); see also Nuṣrat Allāh Muḥammad-Ḥusaynī, *Ḥaṣrat-i Bāb* (Dundas, Ontario: Institute for Bahā'ī Studies in Persian, 152BE/1995), 912.

¹⁰¹⁶ See Nūr al-Dīn Chahārdahī, *Bāb kīst va sukhan-i ū chīst* (Tehran: Fathī, 1363/1984), 215-238, esp. pp. 220-227. While the book is basically an anti-Bābī and anti-Bahā'ī polemic, strangely enough, on the Azalī-Bahā'ī divide it takes a pro-Azalī stance. See, for example, p. 147.

¹⁰¹⁷ Nikki R. Keddie, “Religion and Irreligion in Early Iranian Nationalism,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* vol. 4, no. 3 (April 1962), 265-295, esp. p. 274. Keddie had already thanked Sayyid Ḥasan Taqīzādah in a separate note as one of her “Iranian informants.” Ibid. 265. However, the fact that elsewhere in the article she is preferred to just mention “reliable informants,” suggests that she had Azalīs in mind whose identity she wanted to keep secret.

Prominent Men of Letters

Chahārdahī mentions a number of the learned men of his contemporaries as Azalīs. Of this list, Zukā' al-Mulk Furūghī was already mentioned. He also mentions as Azalīs several of the Constitutionalists whose Azalī affiliation is now a recognized historical fact.¹⁰¹⁸ These included “the brother of Furūghī,” (i.e. Abu al-Ḥasan Furūghī, mentioned in the section “Reformist Theologians”), and finally ‘Alī Akbar Dihkhudā (d. 1956),¹⁰¹⁹ all of whom attended Shaykh Hādī Najmābāī¹⁰²⁰ circle, while strongly rejecting the idea of the latter being a Bābī.¹⁰²¹

Chahārdahī's keen interest in the study of Azalīs, is clear from the way he gathered information in the above mentioned book. This, paired with the fact that his life overlapped for a few decades with the scholars he refers to as Azalīs,¹⁰²² might give a certain weight to his words in making such attributions. This might have lacked credibility had textual evidence been absent. A comparison of the two articles Dihkhudā wrote in his encyclopedic dictionary of the Persian language, *Lughatnāmah*, under the entries, “Ṣubḥ-i Azal”¹⁰²³ and “Bahā'u'llāh”¹⁰²⁴ certainly supports Chahārdahī's view that Dihkhudā was an Azalī. The first of

¹⁰¹⁸ See Amanat, “Memory and Amnesia.”

¹⁰¹⁹ On Dihkhudā see *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. “Dihkhudā, Mīrzā ‘Alī Akbar Qazvīnī.” See also Nahid Mozaffari, “An Iranian Modernist Project: ‘Alī Akbar Dihkhudā's Writings in the Constitutional Period,” in *Iran's Constitutional Revolution: Popular Politics, Cultural Transformations and Transnational Connections* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 193-212; Mangol Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution: Shī'ism and the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1909* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 43-44; Bilqays Sulaymānī, *Hamnavā ba murgh-i sahar: zindigī vashi'r-I 'Alī Akbar-i Dihkhudā* (Tehran: Ṣālīs, 1379/2000).

¹⁰²⁰ On Najmābādī, see the section devoted to him in this dissertation.

¹⁰²¹ Chahārdahī, *Bāb kīst va sukhan-i ū chīst*, 98.

¹⁰²² Chahārdahī (1297/1918-1376/1997); Dihkhudā (1257/1878-1334/1955); Furūghī (1256/1877-1321/1942).

¹⁰²³ See: *Lughatnāmah-i Dihkhudā*, s.v. “Ṣubḥ-i Azal.” <http://tinyurl.com/386twqd>. This comparison was first made by Moojan Momen in “The Baha'is of Iran: the Constitutional Movement and the Creation of an ‘Enemy Within,’” paper presented as “The Iranian Constitutional Revolution 1906-1911: Centenary Conference” at the University of Oxford, 30 July - 2 August 2006.

¹⁰²⁴ See *Lughatnāmah-i Dihkhudā*, s.v. “Bahā'u'llāh.” <http://tinyurl.com/33969rs>

these two contributions, albeit in a disinterested tone, is quite long, subtly and extensively defending the Azalī position vis-à-vis the Bahā'ī one, whereas the “Bahā'u'llāh” entry is little more than two lines. As we know, Dihkhudā started publishing the *Lughatnāmah*, late in life, i.e. from 1318/1939 on. The entries, therefore, do not reflect just his early youth outlook from the Constitutional Revolution period, when he was active side by side with the major Azalī Constitutionalists. To ignore this orientation in the life and thought of a cultural figure like Dihkhudā, as seems to be the case today even in Western scholarship, leads to a distorted picture of the historical past, pushing off to the margins forces so relevant to Iranian modernity.¹⁰²⁵

A similar case is that of the eminent scholar Muḥammad Qazvīnī (d. 1328/1949), a close friend and associate of both Dihkhudā and Furūghī.¹⁰²⁶ His introduction to the book on early Bābī history, *Nuḡtat al-kāf*, in the name of E.G. Browne is a strong indication of his own Azalī affiliation.¹⁰²⁷

¹⁰²⁵ An example is the recently published article on Dihkhudā, where not only his possible Azalī affiliation has not been acknowledged at all, but also a passage from his article “*Zuhūr-i Jadīd*,” in the newspaper, *Šūr-i Isrāfīl* has been quoted in which he sarcastically refutes the Bāb, Bahā'u'llāh and Azal, perhaps as a silent attempt to refute the allegation that he was an Azalī. See Mozaffari, “An Iranian Modernist Project,” 207. Dihkhudā's sarcastic references to the Bāb and Azal could well be interpreted in the context of practicing “*taqīya*.”

¹⁰²⁶ On Qazvīnī, see Shahpar Ansari, “The Life, Works, and Times of Muḥammad Qazvīnī (1875-1949),” (M.A. Thesis, University of Utah, 1990). On the close association between the Furūghīs and Qazvīnī, see Vejdani, “Purveyors of the Past,” 72. For the history of the literary collaboration between Qazvīnī and E.G. Browne, see: Ibid, 72-79. For Qazvīnī's recollections of his visits with ‘Abdu'l-Bahā' see Muḥammad Qazvīnī “*Yāddāshthā-yi tārikhī, wafayāt-i mu'āširīn*” *Yādīgār*, year 5, no. 6 and 7 (Bahman and Isfand 1327/ Jan. and Feb. 1949): 122-133, also in “*Yāddāshthā-yi tārikhī mulāqāthā-yi 'allāmah Qazvīnī va Ḥasan Taqīzādah bā Ḥaẓrat-i 'Abdu'l-Bahā'*,” *Pazhuheshnameh* 1.1 (summer 1996) <http://www.pazhuheshnameh.org/content/view/252/139/>. For a translation of the latter article, see: Ahang Rabbani, trans. “‘Abdu'l-Bahā' Meeting with two Prominent Iranians,” *World Order*, 30:1 (Fall 1998):35-46

¹⁰²⁷ See “*Muqaddamah-i nāshir-i kitāb*” in, *Kitāb-i nuḡtat al-kāf*, by Ḥājī Mīrzā Jānī Kāshānī, ed. Edward Browne (Leiden: Brill, 1328Q/1910). For Qazvīnī's acknowledgment that he in fact wrote the introduction to *Kitāb-i nuḡtat al-kāf*, see Muḥammad Muḥīṭ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, “*Muḥammad Qazvīnī*,” *Gawhar*, year 2, no. 11 & 12 (Bahman va Isfand 1353), 941. Qazvīnī shared with Muḥīṭ Ṭabāṭabā'ī that he authored the introduction using materials provided by Browne. Ibid. In a different note, however, Qazvīnī indicated that his introduction was a translation of the English introduction written by Browne. Qazvīnī “*Yāddāshthā-yi tārikhī, wafayāt-i mu'āširīn*,” 127. For Qazvīnī's own implicit acknowledgment that he edited the *Kitāb-i nuḡtat al-kāf*, see the obituary he wrote for Browne. *Muḥammad*

In the long introduction that Qazvīnī wrote for *Nuqtat al-kāf*, he did not limit himself to presenting an Azalī narrative of the early history of the Bābī movement or accusing Bahā'īs of distorting the same.¹⁰²⁸ Writing in 1910, on the heels of the most turbulent years of the Constitutional Revolution, he maintained that the most critical issue for the Iranian populace ('āmmah) was no longer religion but politics. Qazvīnī argued that the shift from religion to politics had led to a genuine sense of patriotism (*vaṭandūstī*). Consequently, Iranian men and women from all classes of society were determined “to work for the common-good of the country and the best interests (*ṣalāḥ*) of Iran.” He praised this patriotic sentiment as “one of the best signs of the present promising national movement.” This patriotic sentiment was juxtaposed with the universalism pronounced in the writings of Bahā'u'llāh and 'Abdu'l-Bahā'. Qazvīnī's view on this matter is perhaps most famously captured in the following statement, an English translation of which was incorporated by Browne in his *The Persian Revolution*:

The very universalism of Bahā'ism does not tend to encourage a passionate patriotism, and the following is a well-known utterance of Bahā'u'llāh: 'Pride is not for him who loves his country, but for him who loves the [whole] world.'—an admirable sentiment, but not, perhaps, one which is likely to be of service to the Persians in this crisis in their history.¹⁰²⁹

The language of the above sentence may be mild, but the view expressed in it would become perhaps the central accusation of the anti-Bahā'ī discourse: Iranian Bahā'īs lacked loyalty and

Qazvīnī, *Dawrah-i kāmīl-i bīst maqālah-i Qazvīnī*, vols. 1 & 2 (Tehran: Kitāb'furūshī-i Ibn-i Sīnā va Kitāb'furūshī-i Adab, 1332/1953), 313. On *Kitāb-i nuqtat al-kāf*, see McCants, William and Kavian Milani. “The History and Provenance of an Early Manuscript of the *Nuqtat al-Kāf* Dated 1268 (1851-52),” *Iranian Studies* 37:3 (September 2004): 431-449.

¹⁰²⁸ He also implied that Bahā'īs believe that like Bahā'u'llāh, 'Abdu'l-Bahā' also received revelation from God. Here he is repeating an accusation made against 'Abdu'l-Bahā' by his brother, Mīrzā Muḥammad 'Alī (d. 1937), and his followers.

¹⁰²⁹ Edward Granville Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1909* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1910) 424. For the original Persian of Qazvīnī's statement, see the introduction (*muqaddamah*), pages “‘aw” to “‘aḥ.”

love for their native land. The accusation was made by the former Bahā'ī, Nīkū, in the late 1920s and early 1930s,¹⁰³⁰ and soon became a popular theme in anti-Bahā'ī polemical works.

Given the scholarly talents and accomplishments of such figures as Dihkhudā and Qazvīnī, their non-Azalī public persona put them in a better position to undermine the reputation of the Bahā'ī faith without raising suspicions of partiality. One wonders whether the literary and cultural credibility of such influential figures was a factor in nurturing anti-Bahā'ī sentiment among the Iranian intelligentsia.

¹⁰³⁰ See the section “Former Bahā'īs” in chapter 3.

Chapter Five

The Confessions of Dolgoruki:

Fiction and Masternarrative in Twentieth Century Iran

The Confessions of Dolgoruki was a 1930s political-spy fiction that was taken as history to create the masternarrative of espionage for the Bahā'īs of Iran.¹⁰³¹ The work is the purported memoirs or political confessions of Dimitrii Ivanovich Dolgorukov (d. 1867), the Russian Minister in Iran from 1845 to 1854.¹⁰³² According to these “confessions,” Dolgoruki was commissioned as a translator to the Russian embassy in Iran in the 1830s with a secret mission. He converted to Islam, studied under a certain Ḥakīm Aḥmad Gīlānī, disguised himself in the garb of a cleric, and employed a number of people as spies, not least of which was the future founder of the Bahā'ī religion, Mīrzā Ḥusayn 'Alī. After returning to Russia, he traveled to the 'atabāt (the Shī'ī shrine cities of Iraq) under the alias Shaykh 'Īsā Lankarānī, where he persuaded a young seminary student from Shiraz to return to Iran and launch the Bābī movement. He subsequently returned to Iran himself as the Russian ambassador and began to bring about the appearance of the Bahā'ī religion by giving instructions to Mīrzā Ḥusayn 'Alī. The goal of each of these measures was to destroy the national unity that Islam had created among Iranians in order to serve the interests of his own country.¹⁰³³

¹⁰³¹ As we shall see, this text has been published under several different titles, including, “*Yāddāsht'hā-yi Dolgoruki*,” “*Guzārish-i Ginyāz Dolgoruki*,” “*I'tirāfāt-i siyāsī*,” “*Kinyāz Dolgoruki yā asrār-i paydāyish-i mazhab-i Bāb va Bahā*,” and “*I'tirāfāt-i Kinyāz Dolgoruki*.” In the present study, it will be referred to as *The Confessions of Dolgoruki* or *The Confessions*.

¹⁰³² For some reason, probably the ease of pronunciation, Dolgorukov was more frequently referred to as “Dolgoruki,” in Iran.

¹⁰³³ See the first historiographical study of *The Confessions of Dolgoruki* in Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, “*Bahā'īsītīzī va Islamgarā'ī dar Iran*,” *Iran Nameh*, 19:1-2 (Winter/Spring 2001): 79-124; idem, “Anti-Bahā'ism and Islamism in Iran,” trans. Omid Ghaemmaghami, in *The Bahā'īs of Iran: Socio-historical Studies*, ed. Dominic Parviz Brookshaw and Seena B. Fazel (London: 2008): 200-231. For a discussion of *The Confessions of Dolgoruki* within the context of conspiracy theories, see Ahmad Ashraf, “The Appeal of Conspiracy Theories to Persians,” *Princeton Papers* (Winter 1997): 55-88; idem, “*Tavahhum-i tawḥīd*,” *Guftigū* (Summer 1374/1995): 7-45; and Houchang E. Chehabi, “The Paranoid Style in Iranian Historiography,” in *Iran in the 20th Century: Historiography and Political Culture*, ed. Touraj Atabaki (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 155-176. For a study of *The Confessions* in relation to the persecution of the Bahā'īs of Iran, see

The Confessions is a very complex document. Like a mirror, it reflects the hegemonic socio-political discourses contemporaneous with its invention, later publication, and frequent redactions. In the earliest manuscripts, it looks to the pivotal issue of Islamic unity from a Sunnī perspective. In later editions, this perspective is subject to a Shīʿī twist. It is pro-Islam yet anti-clerical. It promotes “Aryan” nationalism, yet its main concern is the unity of the Muslim world.

In this chapter, I will explore the ways in which *The Confessions* reflected an identity crisis in post-constitutional era Iran. By othering Bahāʾīs, *The Confessions* fused two inconsonant modes of national identity, the “Aryan” and the Islamic. Despite a far-fetched plot, countless textual discrepancies, and numerous testimonies dismissing its authenticity, the text built a masternarrative that powerfully marginalized historical facts and realities.

1. History : How The Confessions Emerged, Different Editions

The work appeared for the first time in the mid-1930s in Mashhad and Tehran in the form of a handwritten luck chain letter (*zanjīr-i khushbakhtī*).¹⁰³⁴ The letter encouraged readers to transcribe and send copies to new people with promises of being protected from an impending calamity.¹⁰³⁵ Apparently, it was published first in 1322/1943 in a number of newspapers,¹⁰³⁶ and

[Moojan Momen], “Conspiracy Theories and Forgeries: The Bahāʾī Community of Iran and the Construction of an Internal Enemy,” forthcoming. See also *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. “Dolgorukov Memoirs.”

¹⁰³⁴ Kasravī, in 1322, wrote that the luck chain letter had appeared “three-four years” earlier. See Aḥmad Kasravī, *Bahāʾīgarī* (Tehran: n.d), 119.

¹⁰³⁵ See Ḥasan Iʿzām Qudsī, *Khāṭirāt-i man yā tārikh-i šad sālah-i Iran*. 2nd edition (Tehran: 1379/2000), 2: 910. Chain letters i.e., letters that explicitly directed the recipient to make and distribute copies of them were a phenomenon prevalent in Europe. In the 1920s and 1930s, there was an upsurge of luck chain letters that appealed primarily to superstition, promising good luck if the letter was replicated and bad luck if it were not. See <<http://www.silcom.com/~barnowl/chain-letter/evolution.html>> visited Dec. 14, 09. Pointing to the dissemination of *The Confessions* at the beginning in the form of a luck chain letter, Kasravī correctly described such letters as an “*afṣānah-yi farangī*” (European tale). Aḥmad Kasravī, *Āftāb-i ḥaqāʾiq yā durūgh-i rusvā*,” *Parcham* 1:4

perhaps in the same year in a book titled *Islam va mahdaviyat*.¹⁰³⁷ The author of *Islam va mahdaviyat*, Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir Ḥijāzī, claimed that *The Confessions* had been published in 1314/1935 by “one of the men of Iran” (*yikī az rijāl-i Iran*) and admitted that he himself had “redacted” it to publish it in his book.¹⁰³⁸ The next edition appeared in Mashhad in the history section of *Sālnāmah-yi Khurāsān* at the end of 1322/1943.¹⁰³⁹ Soon after, it was published independently in Tehran¹⁰⁴⁰ and reprinted numerous times thereafter.¹⁰⁴¹ The original chain letter, which is the oldest version of the text, was published in 1342/1963 in Ḥasan I’zām Qudsī’s *Khāṭirāt-i man yā tārikh-i šad sālah-yi Iran*.¹⁰⁴²

The numerous textual differences among the first editions, and likewise between these and later editions, point to a continuous history of redactions. The I’zām Qudsī, Ḥijāzī, and *Sālnāmah-yi Khurāsān* versions have several key discrepancies. Some of these differences point to the difficulties of reading handwritten copies. This suggests that these editions are independent of one another and each has been written from a separate handwritten text. However, the differences between the various editions go beyond this and at times

(Urdūbihisht 1322/1943), 171. The first propagator of *The Confessions*, therefore, may have been familiar with this European phenomenon.

¹⁰³⁶ Our knowledge of its publication “in two-three newspapers” in 1322 is based on Kasravī’s remarks. See Aḥmad Kasravī, *Bahā’igari* (Tehran: n.d), 119.

¹⁰³⁷ “*Guzārish-i Ginyāz Dolgoruki*,” in Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir Ḥijāzī, *Islām va mahdaviyat* (Tehran: n.d), 109-147. Dating the publication of *Islam va mahdaviyat* (and hence *The Confession* included in it) is not an easy task. Neither the book itself, nor Khān Bābā Mushār’s *Fihrist-i kitāb’ha-yi chāpī*, mentions a date for the publication of *Islam va mahdaviyat*. At one point in the book Ḥijāzī refers to the year 1320/1941 as “last year,” but we do not know if it was actually published in that year. In that case, we would expect Kasravī, who wrote on *The Confessions* in 1322, to refer to its publication and not just the appearance of it in the form of a chain letter. See Kasravī, “*Āftāb-i ḥaqā’iq yā durūgh-i rusvā*,” 169-177.

¹⁰³⁸ See *Vazīfah*, No. 41 (18 Mihr 1323/1944). Ḥijāzī did not clarify who had published *The Confessions* or where he had published it.

¹⁰³⁹ “*I’tirāfāt-i siyāsī: yāddāshthā-yi Kinyāz Dolgoruki*,” in *Sālnāmah-yi Khurāsān* (Mashhad: 1322): 129-160.

¹⁰⁴⁰ *Kinyāz Dolgoruki yā asrār-i paydāyish-i mazhab-i Bābī va Bahā’ī dar Iran* (Tehran: n.d).

¹⁰⁴¹ For example, “*Bāz ham bikhānīd tā ḥaqīqat rā bidīnīd: asrār-i Bāb va Bahā yā i’tirāfāt-i Kinyāz Dolgoruki yā asrār-i fāsh shudah*” 10 ed. (Esfahan, n.d.); and “*Yāddāshthā-yi Kinyāz Dolgoruki yā asrār-i fāsh shudah*,” 11th ed. (Mashhad: n.d.).

¹⁰⁴² “*Yāddāshthā-yi Dolgoruki*,” in Ḥasan I’zām Qudsī, *Khāṭirāt-i man yā tārikh-i šad sālah-yi Iran*. 2nd edition (Tehran: 1379/2000), 2:911-29.

demonstrate clearly the “corrections” that have been made and the discretionary interpolations that have occurred. One of the most salient discrepancies, with serious implications for understanding the religious-intellectual trend from which *The Confessions* appeared, deserves special attention. Earlier versions, the I’zām and Ḥijāzī editions, both present a Sunnī perspective concerning the issue of Muḥammad’s successor: “Before passing,” Muḥammad ordered that the “consensus of the ummah” should be the basis for selecting the leader of the community.¹⁰⁴³ In the *Sālnāmah-yi Khurāsān* edition, this point has been carefully changed to state that after the passing of Muḥammad, ‘Alī accepted the “consensus of the ummah”¹⁰⁴⁴ – NOT that this form of appointing the caliph was the instruction of Muḥammad himself. In other words, the text has been altered to reflect a position that does not openly contradict the mainstream Shī‘ī position on the issue of Muḥammad’s successor. In the Tehran edition, numerous phrases were altered to amend the discrepancies. The most noticeable of these is the change in expression concerning Muḥammad’s successor which now assumes a completely Shī‘ī position and perspective: Before his passing, Muḥammad appointed ‘Alī as his successor.¹⁰⁴⁵ However, in order to prevent discord between the believers, ‘Alī chose to relinquish his right (to Abū Bakr). This edition became the almost fixed version of *The Confessions*. Later publications are more or less based on the Tehran edition with slight editorial changes here and there.¹⁰⁴⁶ This edition is the one I will cite from in this chapter.

¹⁰⁴³ “Yāddāsh’t’ha-yi Dolgoruki,” 915; “Guzārish-i Ginyāz Dolgoruki,” 118-119.

¹⁰⁴⁴ “I’tirāfāt-i siyāsī,” 137-138.

¹⁰⁴⁵ *Kinyāz Dolgoruki yā asrār-i paydāyish*, 18.

¹⁰⁴⁶ This ‘final’ version was also published with a long introduction and footnotes added by Ayatollah Shaykh Muḥammad Khālīshī. In the introduction, Khālīshī alleged that the Russian conspiracy included Shaykh Aḥmad Ahsā’ī and Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī, the intellectual predecessors of the Bābī movement. See *I’tirāfāt-i Kinyāz Dolgoruki, safīr-i rūsīyah dar ‘ahd-i tizār, bih inẓimām-i muqaddamah-i bisyār jālib az marḥūm-i Ayatollah Khālīshī* (Tehran: n.d). In addition to writing the introduction and footnotes that were published posthumously, Khālīshī also had a role in publishing *The Confessions*. See Mehdi Abedi, “Shī‘īte Socialization in Pahlavi Iran: Autobiographical Sondages in a

In addition to the discrepancies between the various editions, the work also contains internal inconsistencies, contradictions and historical errors. A discussion of these errors and internal tensions is beyond the scope of the present study.¹⁰⁴⁷ It suffices to say here that the errors and incongruities included those related to the life of the real Dolgoruki and the life of the founders of Bābī and Bahā'ī religions.

2. The Spectrum of Responses

a) Reaction from the Bahā'ī Community

In 1324/1946, a committee working under the auspices of the national governing body of Iran's Bahā'ī community published an 82-page mimeographed booklet for limited distribution among Bahā'īs (as there were no means to distribute it more broadly).¹⁰⁴⁸ Seeking to prove the fraudulence of *The Confessions*, the booklet spelled out the internal conflicts and incoherencies found in the text. Its authors highlighted its discrepancies with the life of the real Dmitrii Ivanovich Dolgoruki¹⁰⁴⁹ on the one hand, and those of the Bābī-Bahā'ī figures and historical

Postmodern World,” in *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogues in Postmodernity and Tradition*, ed. Michael M.J. Fischer and Mehdi Abedi (Madison, 1990), 51. Since we know that Khālīshī published *The Confessions* during his life and wrote an introduction and footnotes that were published posthumously, it is plausible that he also redacted the text: perhaps the ‘final’ version is his work, which he preferred to publish on its own during his life time.

¹⁰⁴⁷ On these errors and internal tensions, see Aḥmad Kasravī, “Āftāb-i ḥaqāyiq yā durūgh-i rusvā,” 170-172; Mujtabā Mīnuvī, “*Intiqād-i kitāb: sharḥ-i zindigānī-i man*,” *Rāhnāmā-yi kitāb* 6: 1 & 2. (Farvardīn va Urdībihisht 1342): 25-26; Lajnah-yi Millī-i Nashr-i Āṣār-i Amrī, *Baḥṣī dar i'tirāfāt-i maj'ul muntasab bih Kinyāz Dolgoruki* (Tehran: Mu'assasah-yi Millī-i Maṭbū'āt-i Amrī, 1352/1973), 23-109; [Moojan Momen], “Conspiracies and Forgeries: The Attack upon the Bahā'ī Community in Iran: A Response to Dr. David Yazdan's Article, Muslim Brotherhood—Part VIII,” *Persian Heritage* vol. 9, no.35 (2004): 27-29.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Lajnah-yi Millī-i Nashr-i Āṣār-i Amrī, No Title (Tehran: 1324/1945). This booklet was republished in 1352/1973, under the title *Baḥṣī dar i'tirāfāt-i maj'ul muntasab bih Kinyāz Dolgoruki*, with an introduction incorporating the words of Iqbāl-Āshtiyānī, Kasravī and Mīnuvī refuting the authenticity of *The Confessions*.

¹⁰⁴⁹ During the Qājār period, three different Russian ambassadors by the name Dolgorukov came to Iran: the first was Nikolai Andreevich (d. 1847), during the reign of Fatḥ-'Alī Shah. See Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Polovtsov, *Russkii Biograficheskii Slovar* (St. Petersburg, 1905). 6: 553-554; the second, Dmitrii Ivanovich (d.1867) (the one to whom *The Confessions* is ascribed), a contemporary of Muḥammad Shah and Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah. See Polovtsov, *Russkii Biograficheskii Slovar*, 6:533; and finally the third, Nikolai Sergeevich (d. 1913) who came to Iran during the

events on the other. They then asked the two most important questions: Where is the original document that *The Confessions* claims to be a translation of?¹⁰⁵⁰ And why is there no mention of this document in the work of Orientalists who have studied Bābī-Bahā'ī history?¹⁰⁵¹ In 1966, the Bahā'ī journal, *World Order*, published an English translation of excerpts from the original dispatches of Dolgoruki which indicate both a delayed awareness and clear antagonism on the part of the Russian diplomat towards the movement of the Bāb in its earlier stages when his sole source of information was the government. “As the representative of one autocrat [serving] at the court of another,” *World Order* said, Dolgoruki “sympathized with the attempts of the Shah to...prevent the spread of the ideas which might threaten the established order.” Later on, Dolgoruki became acquainted with a number of Bābīs and his knowledge of the movement increased.¹⁰⁵² Although *World Order* did not refer directly to *The Confessions*, it can be

last years of the reign of Nāṣir al-Dīn shah. P.Kh. *Dvor'i 'anskie rody Rossiiskoi imperii* [Noble Families of Imperial Russia] vol.1 (IPK “Vesti,” 1993). 196.

¹⁰⁵⁰ The supporters of *The Confessions* were quick to include a reference to the title and edition of a real journal (the “August 1924/1925” issue of the Russian journal *Novyi Vostok*) in the introduction of later editions, claiming that the original text of *The Confessions* had been published there. With the help of Dr. Marta Simidchieva of York University and the University of Toronto in Mississauga, the present writer reviewed all the 1924 and 1925 issues of the journal and found no references to Dolgoruki or anything written by him. I wish to record my thanks to Dr. Simidchieva for her assistance.

¹⁰⁵¹ Aleksander Tumanskii, Valentin A.Zhukovski, Aleksander Kasumovich Kazembek and Edward Browne were specifically mentioned. *Lajnah-yi Millī-i Nashr-i Āṣār-i Amrī, Baḥṣī dar i'tirāfāt*, 21.

¹⁰⁵² “Excerpts from Dispatches Written During 1848-1852 by Prince Dolgorukov, Russian Minister to Persia.” *World Order* (Fall 1966), 17-24. According to *World Order*, a person “employed as an Oriental secretary by the Russian Legation” was a Bābī. Moojan Momen tells us, however, that this person, Mīrzā Majīd Āhī, was not himself a Bābī, but he may have been regarded as such because he was the brother-in-law of Bahā'u'llāh, a prominent Bābī who would later found the Bahā'ī religion. See Moojan Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981), 6. In 1852, when the latter was imprisoned along with many other Bābīs in Tehran, Mīrzā Majīd urged Dolgorouki to press the government to release him. See H.M. Balyuzi, *Bahā'u'llāh: The King of Glory* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1980), 99. For more on Dolgoruki's dispatches, see Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions, 1844-1944*, 4, 5, 9-10, 75, 77-8, 92-5, and passim. The dispatches were first published in Mikhail Sergeevich Ivanov, *The Bābī Uprisings in Iran* [Bābīdskie vosstaniia v Irane (1848-1852)] (Moskva: Izd-vo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1939). An expanded version of this book was published with some revisions under the title, *Anti-feudal Uprising in Iran in the Mid-19th Century* [Antifeodal'nye vosstaniia v Irane v seredine XIX] (Moskva: Izd-vo “Nauka,” Glav.red.vostochnoi lit-ry, 1982). We do not have data on whether the existence of the real dispatches had been an inspiration for the author of *The Confessions*. Ivanov's short biography does not reveal whether he

inferred that the original dispatches were published to prove that *The Confessions* was forged. In recent years, in order to counter a resurgence in anti-Bahā'ī rhetoric that once again appealed to *The Confessions* to accuse Bahā'īs of espionage for foreign powers, Bahā'īs outside Iran published a number of articles re-asserting that the text is a forgery.¹⁰⁵³

b) Scholars

The Confessions generated the most divergent responses imaginable. Several scholars have completely rejected their authenticity. In 1322/1943, Aḥmad Kasravī argued that the work mythologized Dolgoruki into a “Ḥusayn-Kurd Shabastarī”-type character.¹⁰⁵⁴ He went on to aver that, “Without any doubt, this work has been forged.”¹⁰⁵⁵ In 1328/1949, ‘Abbās Iqbāl-Āshtiyānī described *The Confessions* as a work that had been “completely fabricated...a work of several impostors...filled with ridiculous historical errors.”¹⁰⁵⁶ In the 1330s/1950s, individuals such as Maḥmūd Maḥmūd and Sayyid Ḥasan Taqīzādah registered their views about its fabrication.¹⁰⁵⁷ In 1342/1963, Mujtabā Mīnuvī referred to it as “a sham” containing “historical incongruities and (so-called) facts that contradict historical reality.”¹⁰⁵⁸ In 1371/1999, Denise MacEoin maintained that *The Confessions* was “nothing but a clumsy forgery.”¹⁰⁵⁹ In 1374/1955,

traveled to Iran before 1939 when his book was published or whether he was in touch with Iranians while preparing the dissertation on which the book was based. See <<http://www.mgimo.ru/content1.asp>>

¹⁰⁵³ For example: [Moojan Momen], “Conspiracies and Forgeries,” which was submitted by Katherine Bigelow, Director, Office of External Affairs, The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahā'īs of the United States; and Bahman Nīkandīsh, “Mubārīzah-i nājavānmardānah: Kinyāz Dolgoruki yā asrār-i paydāyish-i mazhab-i Bāb va Bahā' dar Iran,” *Payām-i Bahā'ī* No. 309-310 (2005): 43-49.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Aḥmad Kasravī, “Āftāb-i ḥaqīqat yā durūgh-i rusvā,” 172.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Aḥmad Kasravī, *Bahā'īgarī* (Tehran: n.d), 70.

¹⁰⁵⁶ ‘Abbās Iqbāl-Āshtiyānī, “Mā va khvānandigān,” *Yādīgār* 5: 8&9 (Farvardīn va Urdībīhisht 1328), 148.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Maḥmūd Maḥmūd, *Tārīkh-i ravābiṭ-i siyāsī-i Iran va Inglīs dar qarn-i nūzdahum-i milādī* (Tehran, 1954), 8:143; For Taqīzādah's words, see ‘Abbās Zaryāb Khu'ī, “Taqīzādah ānchinān kih man mīshinākhtam,” in *Yādnāmāh-i Taqīzādah*, ed. Ḥabīb Yaghmā'ī (Tehran, 1349), 166.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Mujtabā Mīnuvī, “*Intiqād-i kitāb: sharḥ-i zindigānī-yi man*,” 25-26.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Denise MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Bābī Doctrine and History: A Survey* (Leiden, 1992), 171.

Aḥmad Ashraf spoke about the deeply rooted effect these “forged memoirs” have had on “the minds of (Iranian) readers.”¹⁰⁶⁰ Finally, in 1379-1380/2001, Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi argued that these “forgeries” epitomized the zenith of “feelings of inferiority among Iranians vis-à-vis foreign powers.”¹⁰⁶¹

Some have vacillated between remaining silent about the work and voicing their rejection of it. Firaydūn Ādamīyat, who in 1323/1944 invented a narrative similar to *The Confessions*, but credited the British and not the Russians for creating the Bābī movement,¹⁰⁶² was initially reticent on *The Confessions* but would refer to it later and assert: “This story doesn’t even possess the wit of a children’s tale. It is a cock-and-bull story – dreamt up by fanatical minds who are far too taken with fairy tales...It has no historical credibility whatsoever.”¹⁰⁶³ Similarly, in the early 1380s/2000s, ‘Abd Allāh Shāhbāzī was silent regarding *The Confessions* when writing his own, equally conspiratorial, British-Zionist version of Bābī-Bahā’ī history.¹⁰⁶⁴ However, he would later refer to *The Confessions* as a forgery.¹⁰⁶⁵

On the other side of the spectrum were those who treated *The Confessions* as a reliable historical source.¹⁰⁶⁶ In an anti-Bahā’ī work published in 1325/1946, Abū Turāb Hudā’ī referred

¹⁰⁶⁰ Ashraf, “*Tavahhum-i Tawṭī’ah*,” 35.

¹⁰⁶¹ Tavakoli-Targhi, “*Bahā’īsītīzī*,” 85-86.

¹⁰⁶² Firaydūn Ādamīyat, *Amīr Kabīr va Iran yā varaqī az tārikh-i siyāsī-i Iran* (Tehran, 1323), 233-244.

¹⁰⁶³ Firaydūn Ādamīyat, *Amīr Kabīr va Iran*, 3rd ed. (Tehran, 1348), 450.

¹⁰⁶⁴ ‘Abd Allāh Shāhbāzī, “*Justār’hā’ī az tārikh-i Bahā’īgarī dar Iran*,” *Tārikh-i mu’āṣir-i Iran* 7:27 (1382/2003).

¹⁰⁶⁵ ‘Abd Allāh Shāhbāzī, “*Sir Shāpūr Rīpurtīr va kūditā-yi 28 Murdād va shabakah’hā-yi iṭṭilā’ātī-i Brītāniyā va Iyālāt-i Muttahidah-i Āmrīkā dar Iran (1320-1332)*” *Faṣlnāmah-yi takhaṣṣusī-i tārikh-i mu’āṣir-i Iran* 6:23 (Fall 1381/2002).

¹⁰⁶⁶ This started even before the publication of *The Confessions*. Majīd Tafrishī and Javād Jānfadā, who edited vol. 1 of Hāshim Muḥītmāfi’s (d. 1321/1942-3) *Tārikh-i inqilāb Iran*, indicate that Muḥītmāfi appended a copy of *The Confessions of Dolgoruki* to his manuscript. The editors did not include that copy (and a number of other addenda found in Muḥītmāfi’s manuscript) since they “had been published frequently in various history books.” See Hāshim Muḥītmāfi, *Tārikh-i inqilāb Iran*, 1, *Muqaddamāt-i mashrūṭiyat*, edited by Majīd Tafrishī and Javād Jānfadā (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Firdawsī va Intishārāt-i ‘Ilmī, 1363/1984), 22. Muḥītmāfi’s appending *The Confessions* is important for two reasons. Firstly, since he died in 1321/1942-3, his inclusion of *The Confessions* predates its first publication. Secondly, Muḥītmāfi incorporated *The Confessions* as the real history of the life of the founder of the Bahā’ī religion in his book. See Muḥītmāfi, *Muqaddamāt-i mashrūṭiyat*, 32, 35, 36. As such, Muḥītmāfi is perhaps the first author to cite *The Confessions* as a work of history. What makes his case more interesting is that he refers to

readers interested in the history of the Bahā'ī faith to *The Confessions*.¹⁰⁶⁷ In the same year, Ayatollah Kāshānī, in a separate polemical work written on the basis of *The Confessions*, wrote an introduction in support of it.¹⁰⁶⁸ In 1331/1952, Ḥujjat al-Islam Ḥājj Shaykh Ḥusayn Khurāsānī recapped the details of *The Confessions* in the introduction of his work.¹⁰⁶⁹ In 1339/1960, 'Alī Davānī extended the influence of *The Confessions* to the realm of Shī'ī theological discourse. While discussing an unrelated *ḥadīth*, Davānī contended that the movement of the Bāb had been instigated by the Russian consul.¹⁰⁷⁰ In 1344/1965, Murtaẓá Aḥmad A. claimed to have discovered “extensive statements in the books of the (Bahā'ī) sect” that “support the contents of *The Confessions*.”¹⁰⁷¹ In 1345/1966, Ayatollah Akbar Hāshimī Rafsanjānī called attention to “the many signs of truth and validity” found throughout *The Confessions*.¹⁰⁷²

The mid-1340s/1960s witnessed an interesting twist. While arguing in support of a Russian connection to the movement of the Bāb, in 1345/1966 Mudarrisī Chahārdahī published the Persian translation of the dispatches of the real Dolgorukov, the English translation of which, as mentioned above, had been published earlier that year by Bahā'īs in *World Order*. Here we see a classical example of how “arguments against a conspiracy are quickly

the movement of the Bāb as a “religious revolution (*inqilāb-i diyānati*)” and one of the “three great revolutions of the past century,” the other two being “the political revolution, culminating in Constitutionalism,” and “the military revolution, the 1299 coup.” Muḥīṭmāfi, *Muqaddamāt-i mashrūṭiyat*, 26. This point, taken with what the author has written on the Bahā'ī-Azalī dispute, suggests that he was probably an Azalī. Furthermore, he has used only the parts of *The Confessions* that mention Mīrzā Ḥusayn 'Alī and completely ignored the sections dealing with the Bāb. See Muḥīṭmāfi, *Muqaddamāt-i mashrūṭiyat*, 32-39.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Abū Turāb Hudā'ī, *Bahā'iyat dīn nīst*, 3rd ed. (Tehran: Farāhānī, n.d.), 30.

¹⁰⁶⁸ See Ayatollah Kāshānī's introduction in Anvar Wadūd, *Sākhtah'hā-yi Bahā'iyat dar ṣaḥnah-yi dīn va siyāsāt* (Tehran: Chāpkhānah-'i Shirkat-i Maṭbū'āt, 1326).

¹⁰⁶⁹ Ḥusaynī Khurāsānī, *Fāji'ah-yi Bahā'iyat yā vāqī'ah-yi qatl-i Abarqū* (Tehran: 1331), 3.

¹⁰⁷⁰ 'Alī Davānī, trans. and ed., *Mahdī-i maw'ūd: tarjumah-yi jild-i sīzdah-i biḥār al-anwār-i 'allamah Majlisī* (Qom, 1339), 817. On his discussion of the *ḥadīth*, see Omid Ghaemmaghami, “The Year Sixty: Notes on the Intertextuality of the Ḥadīth of Mufaḍḍal ibn 'Umar al-Ju'fī,” forthcoming.

¹⁰⁷¹ Murtaẓá Aḥmad A. *Prince Dolgoruki*, 3rd ed. (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub-i Islāmīyah, 1346/1967), 36.

¹⁰⁷² Akbar Hāshimī Rafsanjānī, *Amīr Kabīr yā qahramān-i mubārīzah bā isti'mār*, 2nd ed. (Tehran, 1364), 209.

transformed into arguments for a conspiracy.”¹⁰⁷³ In the 1350s/1970s, Muḥammad Bāqir Najafī and later, in the 1360s/1980s, Bahrām Afrāsiyābī, while not explicitly mentioning *The Confessions*, endorsed and propagated the impressions that *The Confessions* had created.¹⁰⁷⁴ In 1362/1983, ‘Imād al-Dīn Bāqī invoked *The Confessions* as the legitimate history of the Bahā’īs.¹⁰⁷⁵ In 1368/1989, a group of monarchists outside Iran published *The Confessions* in their newspaper, *Shahfarāz-i Āryān*.¹⁰⁷⁶ In 1380/2001, the university professor Zāhid Zāhidānī left open the possibility of “recognizing this report as a historical document,”¹⁰⁷⁷ and in recent years anti-Bahā’ī polemics have repeatedly introduced the work as a legitimate, historically-sound primary source. A new development occurred in 1386/2007. Ḥujjat al-Islam Ḥājj Ḥasanī, in arguing that Bahā’īs were trying to “pretend” that *The Confessions* was fraudulent, presented a name for a worker at the Russian embassy in Tehran at the time who he alleged had translated the text. Furthermore, he presented “historical evidence” for “the existence” of Shaykh Muḥammad, the teacher and father-in-law of the Dolgoruki of *The Confessions*. A posthumous oral statement attributed to Ayatollah Lankarānī was produced describing his encounter in his father’s class with an old man who knew Shaykh Muḥammad well.¹⁰⁷⁸

¹⁰⁷³ See Christopher Partridge and Ron Geaves, "Antisemitism, Conspiracy Culture, Christianity, and Islam: the History and Contemporary Religious Significance of the Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion" in *The Invention of Sacred Tradition*, ed. James R. Lewis & Olav Hammer (Cambridge, 2007), 75-95, quote from page 84. Partridge and Geaves explain the reason for this phenomenon as such: “[O]ne of the problems with conspiracies is that they are difficult to disprove to those committed to them. Cognitive dissonance is quickly and almost instinctively assuaged by incorporating contrary evidence in the theory itself.” This mechanism, they believe, is why in case of *the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* the conspiracy element contributed most significantly to its longevity. Ibid.

¹⁰⁷⁴ See Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir Najafī, *Bahā’īyān* (Tehran: Ṭahūrī, 1357/1978), 619-622. Bahrām Afrāsiyābī, *Tārīkh-i jāmi’-i Bahā’īyat: Nawmasūnī*, 3rd ed. (Tehran, 1368/1989), 342-358; Idem, *Tārīkh-i jāmi’-i Bahā’īyat (kālbudshikāfi-i Bahā’īyat)*, 10th ed. (Tehran: Fam, 1382), 271-283.

¹⁰⁷⁵ ‘Imād al-Dīn Bāqī, *Dar shinākht-i hizb-i qā’idīn-i zamān* (Tehran: 1362), 28.

¹⁰⁷⁶ See Ashraf, “*Tavahhum-i tawṭī’ah*,” 35-36.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Sa’id Zāhid Zāhidānī, *Bahā’īyat dar Iran* (Tehran, 1380), 19.

¹⁰⁷⁸ See ‘Alī Abū al-Ḥasanī (Munzir), “*Izhārāt va khāṭirāt-i Ayatollah Ḥājj Shaykh Ḥusayn Lankarānī dabārah-yi Bābīgārī va Bahā’īgārī*,” *Faṣḥnamah-yi muṭālī’āt-i tārikhī, vīzhahnāmah-yi Bahā’īyat* 4:17 (Tābistān 1386/Summer 2007), 91-97.

3. Key Elements of the Author's Weltanschauung

Despite the frequent, and at times contradictory changes, in the various editions of *The Confessions*, it is still possible to map out key elements in the thought of its author(s). In addition to a dominant anti-Bahā'ism, three distinctive features characterize the overall character of *The Confessions*: 1] A nationalist, racist attitude; 2] a fundamental concern with Islamic unity and rapprochement (*taqrīb*) between Sunnīs and Shī'ah; and 3] an anti-clerical posture.

For the most part, these three elements are found expressed in responses offered by Ḥakīm Aḥmad Gīlānī to questions posed by the narrator concerning why Iran, “with all its grandeur,” was defeated by “the Greek, the Arabs, and Mongols,” and why Islam has been divided into different sects and factions, and which of these factions is the “right” one.¹⁰⁷⁹

Ḥakīm's reply to the nostalgic question of how Iran lost the glories of a bygone age reflects an Aryanist conception of Iranian history and a purist, exclusivist worldview. He ascribes the “weakness” of Iran to the influence of “the stranger and the foreign nations” (*ajnabī va milal-i khārijī*). He describes “the Jews and Mazdakīs” as agents creating schism among Iranians and adds that these two elements and “the influence of Christianity from the West” weakened the country. He concludes his diatribe with the words: “This is how a group of Arabs, obedient to the command of God, defeated such a great nation.”¹⁰⁸⁰ The incongruence between the contempt-filled reference to “a group of Arabs” and the respectful mention of “in obedience to the command of God” reflects an internal tension in *The Confessions* between two conflicting identities: one nationalist and the other Islamist. The nationalist attitude presents itself at

¹⁰⁷⁹ *Kinyāz Dolgoruki yā asrār-i paydāyish*, 8-17.

¹⁰⁸⁰ The Khurāsān edition mentions only “the Jews,” and not “the Mazdakīs.” See “*I'tirāfāt-i siyāsī*,” 132.

another point in the author's praise of the "Aryan race" as "extremely high-minded, patriotic, and intelligent."¹⁰⁸¹

The cultivation and promotion of Islamic unity is a central concern of *The Confessions* and remains a consistent thread throughout the redaction process--from earlier editions that endorse the Sunnī view of the Prophet's successor to later editions that are more in line with the Shī'ī perspective. The consistent message throughout is that "Islam does not have different factions (*shu'abāt nadārad*). Islam means to believe in God and the Qur'an."¹⁰⁸² It has [only] one (set of) principles (*yik uṣūl dārad*)."¹⁰⁸³ The reader of *The Confessions* is told that at the time of the first four Caliphs, "there were no wars and conflicts" (*hīch jang va nizā'ī [nabūd]*).¹⁰⁸⁴ The concern for rapprochement between Sunnīs and Shī'ah is also demonstrated by the fact that the founders of the four Sunnī legal schools are accounted on par with the founder of the Shī'ī legal school, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq.¹⁰⁸⁵ This emphasis on Islamic unity is, of course, called for in order

¹⁰⁸¹ *Kinyāz Dolgoruki yā asrār-i paydāyish*, 21. The Khurāsān edition has "Iranian race" (*nizhād-i irānī*) rather than Aryan. "I'tirāfāt-i siyāsī," 140.

¹⁰⁸² This is a reference to the ideology of Qur'anism which formed an integral component of the thought current from which the author of *The Confessions* emerged.

¹⁰⁸³ "I'tirāfāt-i siyāsī" (Khurāsān), 137-138.

¹⁰⁸⁴ "Yāddāsh't'hā-yi Dolgoruki," 915; "Guzārish-i Ginyāz Dolgoruki," 119; "I'tirāfāt-i siyāsī," 138.

¹⁰⁸⁵ *Kinyāz Dolgoruki yā asrār-i paydāyish*, 19. The history of the notion that Shī'ism constitutes the fifth legal school of Islam sheds light on understanding the context of the author's world view. This idea was proposed for the first time during the reign of Nader Shah who suppressed Shī'ism, but he did allow the Shī'ah to practice their tradition by granting them status as the fifth legal school. See Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order and Societal Change in Shī'ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890* (Chicago: 1984), 216. However, the issue was soon forgotten with the fall of Nādir Shah. Following late 19th and early 20th century attempts at rapprochement, in 1911, six of the Shī'ī ulama residing in Iraq signed a fatwa urging unity among Muslims. In the text of this fatwa, Shī'ism was referred to as "one of the five Islamic legal schools" whose conflicts had led to "the decline (*inḥiṭāt*) of Islamic states" and "the dominance of foreigners (*ajānib*)". See "Ahamm al-akhbār wa-al-ārā," *al-Irfān* 3:4 (Feb 1911): 159-160. See also Rainer Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism in the 20th Century: The Azhar and Shiism between Rapprochement and Restraint* (Leiden: 2004), 43.

to protect “Islam” from “foreign governments” (*dawlat’hā-yi dīgar*) in later editions,¹⁰⁸⁶ and from “Russia” in earlier editions.¹⁰⁸⁷

The third element in the thought of the author is a strong anti-clerical stance despite his passion for Islam. Quoting Ḥakīm Gīlānī, he writes that true Islam (*ḥanīfah-yi ḥaqqah*) brought unity amongst Muslims, but “the ambitious and selfish leaders” created schism.¹⁰⁸⁸ When Dolgoruki is disguised as a mullah, he describes himself as having become “distrustful” of anything new before adding that “like a cleric (*miṣl-i yik ākhūnd*),” he “considers any scientific progress for Iran as blasphemy (*kufr*).”¹⁰⁸⁹ Elsewhere he writes, “So and so donkey-mounted cleric has gathered thousands of naive people around him and is in charge in Iran...So and so ignorant Mullah is conning the people. Sometimes crying and wailing, sometimes lamenting and weeping, and sometimes gathering people together and recounting the sufferings of the Imams, he solicits money from the unfortunate masses and calls upon the people to worship him.”¹⁰⁹⁰ This anti-clericalism is clearly stronger in the earlier versions. The successive redactions gradually changed the anti-clerical text to a text antagonistic to irreligion. In the earlier versions criticism is registered against “the weakness of the faith of religious leaders,” (*sustī-i ‘aqīdah-yi buzurḡān-i dīn*).¹⁰⁹¹ This is changed in the *Sālnāmah-yi Khurāsān* version to “the weakness of the faith of leaders” (*sustī-i ‘aqīdah-yi buzurḡān*),¹⁰⁹² before being given a sudden,

¹⁰⁸⁶ *Kinyāz Dolgoruki yā asrār-i paydāyish*, 10.

¹⁰⁸⁷ “*Guzārish-i Ginyāz Dolgoruki*,” 113; “*Yāddāsh’t’hā-yi Dolgoruki*,” 913.

¹⁰⁸⁸ *Kinyāz Dolgoruki yā asrār-i paydāyish*, 10.

¹⁰⁸⁹ *Kinyāz Dolgoruki yā asrār-i paydāyish*, 15.

¹⁰⁹⁰ *Kinyāz Dolgoruki yā asrār-i paydāyish*, 43.

¹⁰⁹¹ “*Yāddāsh’t’hā-yi Dolgoruki*,” 912; “*Guzārish-i Ginyāz Dolgoruki*,” 111.

¹⁰⁹² “*I’tirāfāt-i siyāsī*,” 132.

abrupt twist in the Tehran ‘final’ edition to “the weakness of the faith of the **irreligious** leaders” (*sustī-i ‘aqīdah-yi buzurgān-i bī-dīn*).¹⁰⁹³

In sharp contrast to the nationalistic, racist tendencies of the text, this anti-clericalism is accompanied by a contempt-filled view of Iranians as “the vulgar” (*mardum-i ‘avāmm*) who “cannot recognize right from wrong.”¹⁰⁹⁴

4. Hegemonic Socio-Political Discourses of the Time

An apprehension of and preoccupation with contemporary Europeans and the threats of imperialism characterized the hegemonic socio-political discourses in the decades that immediately followed the Iranian Constitutional Revolution. Having left behind what has been referred to as “one hundred years of contempt,” Iranians were now obsessively concerned with dignifying Iran. Nationalism was “the response to the emotional need of the patriots.”¹⁰⁹⁵ Next to the more recent memories of the infringements and interventions of the imperialist powers was the memory of the more distant “defeat” at the hands of Arabs, “the destroyers of Iran’s ancient grandeur.” In response to this defeat and in an effort to console “their sense of inferiority in comparison with contemporary Europeans,” the foundational concern of the “nostalgic nationalists” of the time became “the recovery of [Iran’s] ancient grandeur and

¹⁰⁹³ *Kinyāz Dolgoruki yā asrār-i paydāyish*, 8.

¹⁰⁹⁴ *Kinyāz Dolgoruki yā asrār-i paydāyish*, 43.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Shāhrukh Miskūb, “*Millīgarā’ī, tamarkuz, va farhang dar ghurūb-i Qājārīyah va ṭulū’-i ‘aṣr-i Pahlavī*,” in *Dāstān-i adabīyat va sar guzasht-i ijtimā’* (Tehran: 1373/1994), 5-38, quotes from page 8. Miskūb avers that in many places in the world, nationalism looks for a scapegoat among ethnic, racial, cultural, or religious minorities to blame for all national disappointments, to invoke or direct the anger and hatred of the masses to in order to convince them of its own ideals. He then goes on to state that in Iran, the Arabs and the Imperialist powers have been the “scapegoat”(s). Miskūb, “*Millīgarā’ī*,” 9.

purity.” In their “intense desire to forget via a creative remembrance of a remote past,” “they sought to create an *archaeotopia* (archaeo+topia), an archaic and archeologically informed Aryan past.”¹⁰⁹⁶

The imperialist threat evoked a different response in some of the religiously minded Iranian Muslims: a longing for a return to a different past. Following the lead of their late nineteenth century predecessors, the most prominent of whom was Afghānī, these reformist Muslims sought to revive a pristine form of Islam in order to counter the dominance of imperial hegemony over Iran in particular and the Islamic world as a whole. As we have already seen, particularly concerned with saving the Islamic world from what they regarded as its state of “decline” (*inḥiṭāt*) and from the dominance of imperialism, these reformist theologians promoted the unity of all Muslims – a condition they believed prevailed in the first forty years of Islamic history. In their idealization of those forty years, they tended to disregard the Shīʿī-Sunnī conflict over the issue of Muḥammad’s successor and were inclined in their political theory toward a Sunnī approach as opposed to a Shīʿī one, believing in the legitimacy of an elective system of leadership.¹⁰⁹⁷ They also looked upon the clerical establishment with disdain, despite coming from the ranks of the clergy themselves.

¹⁰⁹⁶ See Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, “Narrative Identity in the Works of Hidāyat and his Contemporaries,” In *Sādiq Hidāyat, His Works and His Wondrous World*, ed. Homa Katouzian (London: 2008), 107-128, quote from pages 107-108. This nationalist memory project, Tavakoli tells us, was configured in the nineteenth century based on “a late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century neo-Zoroastrian identity narrative that sought to dissociate Iran from Islam.” This Iran-centered historical memory, “constituted the pre-Islamic age as an archaeotopia—an idealized and memorialized historical period.” Tavakoli-Targhi, “Narrative Identity,” 108-09. See also Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism and Nationalist Historiography* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: 2001).

The Confessions appeared in the context of these two different approaches, each informing a different mode of identity. Its appearance was preceded by a number of related phenomena which paved the way for its creation.

5. The Literary Background and Socio-Historical Context in which *The Confessions of Dolgoruki* Appeared

a) Creation: *The Literary Background*

The Confessions of Dolgoruki was created and circulated in the mid 1930s as a handwritten luck chain letter. It can be said that in a social milieu already filled with religiously motivated anti-Bahā'ism, three texts, each representing a certain mode of thought, provided the context for the creation of *The Confessions of Dolgoruki*. The first two were both forgeries and fully conspiratorial: *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, representing religious prejudice, and the *Testament of Peter the Great* representing Russio-phobia. The third, consisting of an imaginary conversation, was *Siyāsat-i Ṭālibī*, representing an apprehension and preoccupation with imperialist encroachment on Iran.

The first text, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, was a conspiratorial work that appeared at the turn-of-the century in pre-revolutionary Russia, purporting to plan Jewish domination of the globe.¹⁰⁹⁸ The text was translated into many European languages as well as Arabic (in 1920),

¹⁰⁹⁸ *The Protocols* have been described as "one of the most important forgeries of modern times." Richard S. Levy, "Introduction: The Political Career of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," in *A Lie and a Libel: A History of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, by Benjamin W. Segal, trans. and ed. R.S. Levy (Lincoln, NE: 1995), 3-47. See also Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish World-Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (Michigan: 1969); Christopher Partridge and Ron Geaves, "Antisemitism, Conspiracy Culture, Christianity, and Islam: the History and Contemporary Religious Significance of the Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion" in *The*

and was therefore known by many learned Iranians of the time.¹⁰⁹⁹ The author(s) of *The Confessions* were doubtless well aware of *The Protocols*. Given that the news of the anti-Jewish events going on in Europe had reached Iran, and that, as attested by the text of *The Confessions*, anti-Bahā'ism was concomitant with anti-Judaism in the author's(s') mind(s), it is unsurprising that *The Confessions* was inspired by *The Protocols*, a process which is likely to have come about naturally.¹¹⁰⁰

Next was *The Testament of Peter the Great*, the late eighteenth century text according to which Russia had secretly designed to subjugate Europe and “conquer Persia and thereby reach the southern warm waters.”¹¹⁰¹ An intensified Russophobia among Iranians (partly a reaction to Russia's encroachments on Iran during and after the Constitutional Revolution) was the cause of the attention paid to this Russophobic forgery. The link between the alleged design and *The Confessions of Dolgoruki* in the minds of those who propagated it was such that

Invention of Sacred Tradition, ed. James R. Lewis & Olav Hammer (Cambridge: 2007), 75-95. For a comparison between *The Protocols* and *The Confessions*, see Moshe Sharon, “The ‘Memoires of Dolgorukov’ and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion,” *Honestly-Concerned*, <http://honestlyconcerned.info/bin/articles.cgi?ID=IR12607&Category=ir&Subcategory=19> (accessed 10 February 2009).

¹⁰⁹⁹ The Arabic translation of *The Protocols* was available as early as 1920; therefore, the creator of *The Confessions* could have been well aware of it. See Sharon, “The ‘Memoires of Dolgorukov’ and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion.” For the Persian translation of *The Protocols*, see Ghulam Rizā Sa‘īdī, *Khaṭar-i jahūd barā-yi jahān-i Islam* (Tehran: 1335/1956), 116-120.

¹¹⁰⁰ While *The Confessions of Dolgoruki* was inspired by *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, it itself seems to have been a source of inspiration for the forgery of other documents. Nearly ten years after the publication of *The Confessions* there appeared in Iran the forged memoirs of Abū al-Qāsim Lāhūtī. See *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. “Conspiracy Theories.”

¹¹⁰¹ See Ahmad Ashraf, “The Appeal of Conspiracy Theories to Persians,” *Princeton Papers* (Winter 1997), 57-88, quote from page 18. In a book published around the same time as *The Confessions*, Ḥusayn Kūhī Kirmānī, the editor of the newspaper *Ṣabā*, despite indicating in a footnote that *The Testament of Peter the Great* was “created in the name of Peter after him,” in the main text refers to *The Testament* as drawing the main guidelines of Russian politics and foreign policy and then quotes an item from that document: “Do your best to get close to Istanbul as much as you can...Facilitate the demise of Iran, and penetrate up to the Persian gulf.” He then adds, “Almost all the successors of Peter, the Imperialists of Russia, have followed the guidelines set in this document.” Ḥusayn Kūhī Kirmānī, *Az Shahrivar 1320 tā fāji‘ah-’i Āzarbāyjan va Zanjān: tārikh-i ravābiṭ-i Rūs va Iran* (Tehran: 1942), 20-21.

Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir Ḥijāzī, who “redacted” and published *The Confessions* in his *Islam va mahdaviyat*,¹¹⁰² wrote that the sending of Dolgoruki to the ‘atabāt, as appears in *The Confessions*, was part of Romanovs’ attempt to fulfill the testament of Peter the Great.¹¹⁰³ Murtaẓá Aḥmad A., an earnest advocate of the authenticity of *The Confessions*, likewise believed Russia created the Bahā’ī religion through Dolgoruki in order “to reach the southern warm waters.”¹¹⁰⁴

Third was a text representing an apprehension and preoccupation with imperialist infringements: *Siyāsat-i Ṭālibī* (Ṭālibī’s Politics) written by ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Talibov (d. 1911), in which an imaginary dialogue at the office or residence of the Ottoman ambassador is carried on between the two ambassadors of Russia and Britain to devise plans to neutralize and dominate of Iran.¹¹⁰⁵ Talibov was wary that “since the time of the Peter the Great,” he had not “seen any of the Russian statesmen who were not determined in the extreme to capture Iran.”¹¹⁰⁶

That *The Confessions* might well have been inspired by *Siyāsat-i Ṭālibī* can be claimed on some grounds. For example, Talibov writes of Nikolai Sergeevich Dolgorukov’s significant interference in the internal affairs of Iran, like the “deposition of Ẓill al-Sulṭān,” as part of his “missions.”¹¹⁰⁷ Likewise, *The Confessions* also gives an account of how Dolgoruki (in this case, Dimitri Ivanovich) instigated Ẓill al-Sulṭān upon the death of Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shah to claim

¹¹⁰² See section 1 of this chapter.

¹¹⁰³ Ḥijāzī, *Islam va Mahdaviyat*, 93.

¹¹⁰⁴ Murtaẓá Aḥmad A. *Prince Dolgoruki*, 3rd ed. (Tehran: 1346/1967), 38.

¹¹⁰⁵ ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Talibov, *Siyāsat-i Ṭālibī* (Tehran: 1329 A.H/1290S/1911). Talibov wrote *Siyāsat-i Ṭālibī* in 1320Q/1902. The book was published posthumously in 1329Q/1911. See Firaydūn Ādamīyat, *Andīshah’ hā-yi Talibov-i Tabrīzī* (Tehran: 1363/1984), 4.

¹¹⁰⁶ Talibov, *Siyāsat-i Ṭālibī*, 3-4.

¹¹⁰⁷ Talibov, *Siyāsat-i Ṭālibī*, 5.

successorship but then “reversed the process” as soon as he received orders from the Russian court to support Muḥammad Mīrzā, a son of the late Shah, in his bid for kingship.¹¹⁰⁸

When confronted with the rejection of the authenticity of *The Confessions* by scholars such as Kasravī, Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir Ḥijāzī wrote that “incidentally,” he had obtained a copy of *Siyāsat-i Ṭālibī* and had seen that it supported the contents of *The Confessions*. He then referred anyone who doubted the validity of *The Confessions* to read *Siyāsat-i Ṭālibī*.¹¹⁰⁹ Obviously, Ḥijāzī had mixed up Talibov’s Nikolai Sergeevich Dolgorukov, who was the Russian ambassador in the later years of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah’s reign, with Dmitrii Ivanovich Dolgorukov, the alleged writer of *The Confessions* and the Russian ambassador during Muḥammad Shah’s rule. It can be said that the decision to write *The Confessions* in the name of Dolgoruki had been informed by the content of *Siyāsat-i Ṭālibī* and was not a mere accident, even though they are about two different Dolgorukis.

Talibov’s narrative and the story of Gladstone who allegedly raised a copy of the Qur’an in his hand in the British Parliament and said that so long as the Qur’an remained with the Muslims the British would never dominate them, were widespread among Iranians and fairly popular in the decades following the Constitutional Revolution. Dolgoruki’s story was an expression of the same type of apprehension and heightened consciousness regarding imperialist infringement of and encroachment upon Iran.

¹¹⁰⁸ Kinyāz Dolgoruki yā asrār-i paydāyish, 15. In this specific example, the Ṣill al-Sulṭān that the author of *The Confessions* had in mind was the son of Faṭḥ ‘Alī Shah who crowned himself in Tehran under the title ‘Ādil Shah (See ‘Abd Allāh Mustawfī, *Sharḥ-i zindigānī-i man yā tārikh-i ijtimā’ī va idārī-i dawrah-yi Qājārīyah*, 2 vols (Tehran, 1341), 1:42); whereas the Ṣill al-Sulṭān of Talibov’s *Siyāsat-i Ṭālibī* was Mas’ūd Mīrzā, the son of Nāṣir al-Dīn Shah.

¹¹⁰⁹ Muḥammad Bāqir Ḥijāzī, “Mu‘arriḫ-i kitāb-i Islam va Mahdaviyat,” *Vaṣīfah* 41(18 Mihr 1323/10 October 1944).

b) Publication: Socio-political Context

The Confessions were published in the early 1940s, under conditions especially ripe for the widespread acceptance of an anti-imperialist conspiracy theory. It was at a time when Iranians were going through the imposed burden and shock of WWII, a time which saw the demise and forced abdication of a monarch who most believed had been brought to power *and* overthrown by foreign imperialists. The perception that events were orchestrated and manipulated by foreign powers (the invincible External Other), and the suspicion that such events were signs of their heinous ulterior motives in Iran, no doubt heightened receptivity towards conspiratorial theories, especially ones concerning traditionally hated minority groups.¹¹¹⁰

Karl R. Popper refers to conspiracy theories as “the typical result of the secularization of religious superstitions.” He explains the archaic root of this transformation by saying that the “belief in the Homeric gods whose conspiracies were responsible for the vicissitudes of the Trojan War is gone. But the place of the gods on Homer’s Olympus is now taken by the Learned Elders of Zion, or by the monopolists, or the capitalists, or the imperialists.”¹¹¹¹ It seems that *The Confessions of Dolgoruki* embodies many elements of Popper’s discourse. The same transformation is at work here with the secularization of religious prejudice and the depiction of imperialists as the all-powerful forces behind historical events.

According to Leonidas Donkins, the conspiracy theory, while implicit in archaic consciousness, was elaborated by the Christian demonology which “provided a general framework within which various popular beliefs in diabolic agencies and sinister forces on

¹¹¹⁰ Along the same lines, Chehabi writes, “For obvious reasons, the Allied invasion of Iran in 1941 and the country’s occupation by British, Soviet and American forces led Iranians to interpret subsequent events in light of conspiracies.” Chehabi, “The Paranoid Style,” 161.

¹¹¹¹ Karl R. Popper, “Critiques of the Classical Theories of History,” in *Theories of History*, edited by Partick Gardiner (Clencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1959), 281.

earth, on the one hand, and secular forms of the demonization of the Other in general, on the other, came into being.”¹¹¹² As such, ironically enough, while taking an Islamist anti-colonial position, the author(s) of *The Confessions* was (or were), in fact, appealing to a phenomenon of western Christian origins.

6. *The Confessions of Dolgoruki* and the Formation of Iranian Identity

Societies construct two kinds of Others: an external Other which belongs to a different ethnicity or nation, and an internal Other, i.e. the segment of any given society whose race, religion, gender or social class differs from the majority. A nation usually defines itself against one or the other of these two categories.¹¹¹³ In *The Confessions of Dolgoruki*, Bahā'īs, the despised internal Other, were linked to Russians, the feared external Other. The anti-Bahā'ī sentiments inflamed by *The Confessions* are a prime examples of what Abbas Amanat has referred to as, “A doctrinally admissible ritual to forge a sense of collective ‘self’ versus an indigenous ‘other’ at a

¹¹¹² Leonidas Donkins, “The Conspiracy Theory, Demonization of the Other,” *Innovations*, Vol. 11, No.3 (1998), 349-360, quotation from page 354.

¹¹¹³ For the postmodern notion of identity being contingent, only existing in relation to something else (the Other), and the Other conditioning the existence of any given identity see: Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005); Kevin Hetherington, *Expressions of Identity: Space, Performance, Politics* (Sage Publications, 1998). Alberto Melucci, *The Playing Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). For a case study on the identification of self through an Other in a Muslim community see Tayfun Atay, “The Significance of the Other in Islam: Reflections of the Discourse of a Naqshbandi Circle of Turkish Origin in London,” *The Muslim World* Vol. 89, no. 3-4 (July-October 1999): 455-477. For a discussion of the internal Other and the external Other, and their demonization see Ziva Amishai-Maisels, “The Demonization of the ‘Other’ in the Visual Arts,” in *Demonizing the Other: Antisemitism, Racism and Xenophobia*, edited by Robert S. Wistrich (Amsteldijk, The Netherlands: Harwood, 1999), 44-72.

time when the alien ‘other’ was too intimidating and inaccessible to be viewed as an adversary.”¹¹¹⁴

This sense of collective ‘self’ demands special attention. In *The Confessions of Dolgoruki*, two inconsonant modes of self-identity exist side by side: a religion-based identity with Islam as its core and a race-based nationalist identity that was strongly anti-Arab. Casting Bahā’īs as the Other of both these elements served to ‘solve’ the conflict and integrate these two modes. Bahā’īs were already the religious Other. Casting them in conspiratorial connection with imperialism would make them the traitors of the nation as well. The two conflicting identities could now unite against a common ‘enemy.’ *The Confessions of Dolgoruki* fused two inconsonant “Aryan” and Islamic modes national identities.¹¹¹⁵ Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi refers to this very process when he arguing that the Othering of Bahā’īs in political discourse “played a decisive role in the crystallization of the concept of ‘the Muslim nation of Iran.’”¹¹¹⁶

¹¹¹⁴ Abbas Amanat, “The historical roots of the persecution of Bābīs and Bahā’īs in Iran,” in *The Bahā’īs of Iran: Socio-Historical Studies*, edited by Dominic Brookshaw and Seena B. Fazal (London: Routledge, 2008), 180-181.

¹¹¹⁵ The same type of melded national identity has been in order, at least for some Islamists, in post-revolutionary Iran, who have given a central position to “Iran and the Iranian nation but identified both with Islam.” For this “Iranian nationalist form of Islamism,” then, “deviant religion and treason to the nation” have collapsed into one another in Bahā’īs as the nation’s internal Other. It has been alleged “not only that they were spies for foreign powers, but also that they were national apostates, defectors from the Iranian Muslim nation.” See Juan R.I. Cole, “The Bahā’ī Minority and Nationalism in Contemporary Iran,” in *Nationalism and Minority Identities in Islamic Societies*, edited by Maya Shatzmiller, 127-63 (Montreal, Quebec: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), quotes from pages 150, 157.

¹¹¹⁶ Tavakoli-Targhi, “Anti-Bahā’ism,” 202, original Persian in Idem, “Bahā’īsītīzī,” 81. Negar Mottahedeh has also discussed the ways in which “the Bābī” constituted the “negative stereotype and fetishized image against which the modern nation identified itself.” Negar Mottahedeh, “The Mutilated Body of the Modern Nation: Qurrat al-‘Ayn Tahirah’s Unveiling and the Iranian Massacre of the Babis,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*. Vol. XVIII no.2 (1998): 38-47. See also Idem, *Representing the Unrepresentable: Historical Images of National Reform From the Qajars to the Islamic Republic of Iran* (New York, 2008).

It can be said that although the *The Confessions* champions racial nationalism, the work appeals to what can be called “religious nationalism” for its Othering and ultimate demonization of Bahā’īs. In its narrative, Bahā’īs are the tools of foreign imperialism bent on disrupting the national unity achieved by Islam. Defeating and eradicating this internal Other thus becomes crucial for preserving Iranian (Islamist) identity. This is in line with what Chatterjee refers to as the insistence of “religious nationalism” on a single majority-based source of identity.¹¹¹⁷

While the ‘Salafī’ predecessors of the creator(s) of *The Confessions of Dolgoruki* were motivated by anti-colonialism (i.e., dealing with the external Other), *The Confessions* conjoined this external Other with the internal Other, targeting it with all the hatred and suspicion directed towards the colonial powers.¹¹¹⁸

A close reading of the works of the leading reformist theologians of the period under consideration facilitates our ability to understand the linkage between Bahā’īs as the internal Other and colonial powers as the external Other of a Muslim nation. For Kharaqānī, arguably the most prominent of such thinkers in Iran at the time, the formation of a united Islamic front, like that which in his mind existed in the first forty years of the religion’s history, was a vital component for strengthening Muslims in their battle against its multiple Others, namely, “foreigners” (*ajānib*)¹¹¹⁹ and “the followers of old religions, new religions, materialists and

¹¹¹⁷ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments* 113, also discussed in Cole, “The Bahā’ī Minority,” 159.

¹¹¹⁸ This connection that *The Confessions of Dolgoruki* makes between Bahā’īs and the foreign power has been interpreted as a way to appeal to the changes of mentality of younger members of the upper class for whom the earlier purely theological anti-Bahā’ī polemics were no longer attractive. See Firuz Kazemzadeh, “The Bahā’īs of Iran: Twenty Years of Repression,” *Social Research* 67, 2 (Summer 2000): 537-558. While this specific alleged link with the imperialists was a phenomenon of the modern world, the practice of associating the ostracized with enemies outside the community is one “familiar in other times and places.” See Bernard Lewis, “Some Observations on the Significance of Heresy in the History of Islam,” *Studia Islamica* no.1 (1953): 43-63.

¹¹¹⁹ See the section on Kharaqānī in this dissertation.

naturalists.”¹¹²⁰ As such, Kharaqānī’s association of new religious movements working in unison with foreign powers to confront and ultimately destroy Islam can be regarded as the prelude to an attitude that crystallized in *The Confessions*—one which cast Bahā’īs as the internal Other consorting with the external Other in a grand conspiracy. *The Confessions* thus called for and successfully promoted the notion of an exclusionary nation which achieved its “unity” through singling out a minority it considered “un-absorbable” by depicting it as a cultural and political fifth column.¹¹²¹

7. Who was the creator of *The Confessions*? Some Notes on Worldview and Intertextuality

Considering the *zeitgeist* of the period that witnessed the appearance of *The Confessions of Dolgoruki*, it is not difficult to argue that the text was a child of its time. A careful reading of *The Confessions* leaves one with the sense that its author was among the Iranian reformist thinkers. Four pieces of internal textual evidence can be cited as governing this impression: a reading of the early history of Islam consistent with the Sunnī version in earlier un-redacted editions of the text; confidence that Islamic unity is the most effective means to combat western imperialism; belief that the first forty years of Islam constituted a golden age to be emulated; and finally, an aversion to Shī’ī clerics. As we saw, the text also embraces elements of racial nationalism, i.e., Aryanism. One can thus infer that the creator of *The Confessions* possessed

¹¹²⁰ Kharaqānī, *Maḥw al-mawhūm* 2.

¹¹²¹ See Cole’s discussion of Hobsbawm’s comparison between civic nations that make a place for their minorities, and the exclusionary ones that achieve their unity through singling out their minorities: Cole, “The Bahā’ī Minority,” 159; and E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

these rather conflicting characteristics, had some literary talent to write a story, and was fiercely anti-Bahā'ī.

Shaykh Ibrāhīm Zanjānī was among the 'Salafī' reformists contemporary with the emergence of *The Confessions*. He was a Constitutionalist and a member of the parliament from Zanjān.¹¹²² There are striking similarities between Zanjānī's views and the ideas expressed in *The Confessions*. There is also a clear intertextuality between his writings and *The Confessions*. Furthermore, despite being a clergyman himself, Zanjānī was openly critical of Muslim clerics. Last but certainly not least, he was a novelist and an anti-Bahā'ī polemicist.

The similarity of his mindset with that of the author of *The Confessions* is particularly striking in its fusing two disparate, if not contradictory modes: puritan racial nationalism and reformist thought. Zanjānī's writings provide ample evidence for both such tendencies – glorifying the Aryan race on the one hand and striving to revive a pristine form of Islam on the other. The nationalist and anti-Arab views expressed in his *Andakī az tārīkh-i Iran* (A Brief Look at the History of Iran) are very similar to the attitudes voiced by 'Ḥakīm Aḥmad Gīlānī' in *The Confessions*. Zanjānī complained of the "wild and coarse nature" of the Arabs who dominated Iran, boasted about the "Aryan race of Iranians," and regretted that "Bedouin Arabs" "ruined

¹¹²² On Shaykh Ibrāhīm Zanjānī, see Mahdī Bāmdād, *Tārīkh-i rijāl-i Iran* (Tehran: 1347), 1:15; Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alavī, "Rijāl-i ṣadr-i mashrūṭiyat," *Yaghmā*, 5:3 (Khurdād 1331), 133; and his autobiography: Shaykh Ibrāhīm Zanjānī, *Khāṭirāt-i Shaykh Ibrāhīm Zanjānī (Sarguzasht-i zindigānī-i man)*, ed. Ghulām Ḥusayn Mīrā Ṣāliḥ (Tehran: 1379). Regarding the latter, see Mahdī Khalajī, "Naqd-i darūnī-i rawḥānīyat, guzārishī dar secularism," *Iran Nameh* 4 (Winter 1383): 489-511. According to Homa Nateq, the original copy of Zanjānī's autobiography kept in the library of the parliament in Iran, differs markedly from the published version of the book. See Homa Nateq, "Rawḥānīyat az parākandīgī ta qudrat 1828-1909" *Rahāvard* 83 (Summer 2008): 95. On Zanjānī as the prosecutor of the revolutionary court that condemned Shaykh Faḥr Allāh Nūrī to death, see Edward G. Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1909* (London: 1966), 444; Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy, & the Origins of Feminism* (New York: 1996), 258, 265.

the pure Iranian race.”¹¹²³ He called for a return to “real” Islam which he believed advocated an elective process for Muslim leadership.¹¹²⁴ He urged Muslims to unite and referred to the Sunnī-Shī‘ī conflict as “a futile dispute (*baḥs-i bī aṣar*)” Muslims had to cast aside in order to join together to combat the “enemies of Islam.”¹¹²⁵ Zanjānī’s strong anti-clerical stance was reminiscent of the earlier editions of *The Confessions* both in language and content. Even though he himself was once a preacher, he believed that there was no room for clerics in Islam and complained of “a group of turbaned irreligious (men)” who were jealous of and hostile to him.¹¹²⁶

It is difficult to miss the intertextuality between Zanjānī’s *Khāṭirāt* and *The Confessions of Dolgoruki*. The prose styles are similar, especially evident in the expression of contrasting views in the form of the dialogue between two characters featured in both works.¹¹²⁷ In addition, similar statements are found in the two texts. At one point, the same exact sentence is incorporated in similar contexts.¹¹²⁸ At another point, there is a striking resemblance in how the matter of the Muslim clerics’ strategic and pejorative use of the label “Bābī” is treated in both texts. The narrator of *The Confessions* recalled:

We received the greatest help from the clerics. They would label whoever they were opposed to as a “Bābī” and we would proceed to attract these [same] people... We would

¹¹²³ Zanjānī, *Khāṭirāt*, 242, 239, 245.

¹¹²⁴ For a thorough study of Zanjānī’s views on the successorship of Muḥammad and his Islamic political theory, see Zanjānī, *Khāṭirāt*, 30-50. He firmly believed that Islam had been corrupted and he was responsible for establishing “*Islam-i ḥaqīqī*” (real Islam). See Zanjānī, *Khāṭirāt*, 51, 53, 55, 76, 85, 89, 94-95.

¹¹²⁵ Zanjānī, *Khāṭirāt*, 46.

¹¹²⁶ On Zanjānī’s extensive criticism of the clerics, see Zanjānī, *Khāṭirāt*, 53-76 and *passim*.

¹¹²⁷ As examples, compare the dialogue between a Sunnī and a Shī‘ī in Zanjānī, *Khāṭirāt*, 42-50, with the dialogues between the narrator of *The Confessions* and Ḥakīm Aḥmad Gīlānī in *Kinyāz Dolgoruki yā asrār-i paydāyish*, 8-12.

¹¹²⁸ The proverb “*yik murīd-i khar bihtar az yik diḥ-i shish dang ast*” (an imbecile is worth more than the possession of a whole village) appear in both texts in the context of the critique of the clerics. See the oldest published version of *The Confessions*: I’zām Qudsī, *Khāṭirāt-i man*, 925; Zanjānī, *Khāṭirāt*, 116. For passages with strikingly similar prose, compare *Kinyāz Dolgoruki yā asrār-i paydāyish*, 17, with Zanjānī, *Khāṭirāt*, 124; and *Kinyāz Dolgoruki yā asrār-i paydāyish*, 10-11, with Zanjānī, *Khāṭirāt*, 51.

secretly persuade the clerics to call whoever we wanted a “Bābī” and an infidel. Then we would immediately bring them into our circle.¹¹²⁹

As Zanjānī wrote, “(the clerics) would destroy whoever they were hostile to or whoever criticized them, with this accusation [of being a Bābī].”¹¹³⁰

Zanjānī was an ardent reader of Western novels. He himself authored a number of novels, some of which belong to the historical fiction genre in which fantasy and historical reality are interwoven, as is the case with *The Confessions*.¹¹³¹ In his autobiography, he writes that he had read the books of “the late Talibov” and encouraged others to do so as well. In the same section where he states that he ordered “new novels from Tehran,” he adds that he intended to gradually fight against despotism, tyranny, “the superstitions and deceptions of ‘ālim - *namāyān*” (those pretending [religious] knowledge), and “the religious innovations” they have created.¹¹³²

That Zanjānī was fiercely anti-Bahā’ī is no secret. He gave an account of his interrogations with the Bahā’ī teacher, ‘Alī Muḥammad Varqā, during the latter’s arrest in Zanjān prior to his execution. He considered the occasion a cause of “great fame and glory” for himself.¹¹³³ Shortly

¹¹²⁹ Kinyāz Dolgoruki yā asrār-i paydāyish, 54.

¹¹³⁰ Zanjānī, *Khāṭirāt*, 148.

¹¹³¹ For his interest in reading novels see Zanjānī, *Khāṭirāt*, 149, 182, 195. On his novel-like works see ‘Abd Allāh Shāhbāzī, “Zindigī va zamānah-yi Ibrāhīm Zanjānī, justar’hā’ī az tārikh-i tajaddudgarā’ī-i Īrānī,” part 1 *Zamānah* 2:10 (Tīr 1382):13-19, part 2, *Zamānah* 2: 11 (Murdād 1382): 25-28, part 3, *Zamānah* 2: 12 (Shahrīvar 1382): 15-18. Based on the information Shāhbāzī provides in these articles, it can be said that Zanjānī’s novel-like works share with *The Confessions* a melding of fact and fiction and an authorial preference to remain anonymous.

¹¹³² Zanjānī, *Khāṭirāt*, 195.

¹¹³³ Zanjānī, *Khāṭirāt*, 133-39.

after this episode, he wrote an anti-Bahā'ī polemic.¹¹³⁴ His connections with a number of prominent Azalīs may have aggravated his anti-Bahā'ī sentiments.¹¹³⁵

There were a number of other elements in his life and writings that are relevant to our current discussion. Zanjānī read newspapers such as *Ḥabl al-matīn*, and was therefore familiar with the anti-colonial discourse of his time.¹¹³⁶ There are passages in his *Khāṭirāt* that clearly reflect the Russophobia that informed *The Confessions*.¹¹³⁷ His knowledge of the physical sciences may also have been reflected in the “scientific” remarks of ‘Ḥakīm Aḥmad Gīlānī’ found in *The Confessions*.¹¹³⁸

Another person who attracts attention when thinking of the creation of *The Confessions* is Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir Ḥijāzī who, as was mentioned earlier, redacted and published an early version of *The Confessions*,¹¹³⁹ and whose thoughts were in some major aspects similar to the worldview of the author of *The Confessions*. This included, but was not limited to, his views on the pivotal notion of Islam as the force to resist imperialism, and on a return to pristine Islam as the means of achieving Islamic unity.¹¹⁴⁰ Ḥijāzī’s Sunnī-oriented views on early Islamic

¹¹³⁴ *Rajm al-dajjāl fī radd-i Bāb al-ḡalāl*, 2 vols, 1313 Q, Manuscript in private hands. See ‘Alī Abū al-Ḥasanī (Munzir), *Shaykh Ibrāhīm Zanjānī: zamān, zindigī, khāṭirāt, bih zamīmah-yi baḥṣi dar “vilāyat-i takvīnī-i” payāmbār va a’immah-yi ma’ṣumīn* (‘as). 2nd ed. (Tehran: 1387), 23. See also, Zanjānī, *Khāṭirāt*, 149.

¹¹³⁵ Zanjānī was closely associated with Zūkā’ al-Mulk Furūghī and Ṣadr al-Ulama, See Iraj Afshar, ed., *Awraq-i tāzihyāb-i mashrūṭiyat, marbūṭ bih sāl’hā-yi 1325-1330* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Jāvidān, 1359), 335-45. He was also a close friend of and Ḥāj Sayyāḥ Maḥallātī who was closely connected with Azalīs and may have himself been one. See Zanjānī, *Khāṭirāt*, On Sayyāḥ’s Azalī connections, see Mangol Bayat, *Iran’s First Revolution: Shī’ism and the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1909* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 67-8. See also note 1066.

¹¹³⁶ Zanjānī, *Khāṭirāt*, 124, 148.

¹¹³⁷ Zanjānī, *Khāṭirāt*, 185, 202, 204, 209.

¹¹³⁸ See Zanjānī, *Khāṭirāt*, 155, 195. For ‘scientific’ passages in *The Confessions*, see the words of ‘Ḥakīm Aḥmad Gīlānī’ on the influence of narcotics and wine. *Kinyāz Dolgoruki yā asrār-i paydāyish*, 37-38, 41.

¹¹³⁹ See *Vazīfah*, No. 41 (18 Mihr 1323/1944). See also the section ‘Different Editions’ in this chapter.

¹¹⁴⁰ See Ḥijāzī, *Islam va Mahdaviyat*, 4. See also references to Ḥijāzī in the section of this chapter on the socio-historical context of the appearance of *The Confessions*.

history were congruent with those expressed in earlier versions of *The Confessions*.¹¹⁴¹ We also saw his reasoning and insistence on the authenticity of *The Confessions*; however, one major component of the thought of the author of *The Confessions* was lacking in Ḥijāzī: he did not write anything to indicate a serious concern with Aryanism and race-based nationalism, an important feature of *The Confessions*. Furthermore, while he was likewise a fledgling novelist, his prose, unlike that of Zanjānī, does not bear much in common with *The Confessions*.¹¹⁴² As we know, Zanjānī died in 1313/1935, i.e., prior to the wide circulation of the luck chain letter, to the extent that we know of the history of the latter. We also know that Ḥijāzī had access to a copy of *The Confessions* as early as 1314/1936, as he himself has stated. Given this information, the similarities between Ḥijāzī's thought and *The Confessions*, and his admitted role in its “redaction” and publication, we can speculate that he may have had a collaborative role in its creation.¹¹⁴³ A more likely scenario, however, is that Zanjānī started disseminating *The Confessions* in the later years of his life in the form of the luck chain letter, and a copy reached the hands of Ḥijāzī who ‘redacted’ and published it. Another handwritten copy ended up in the hands of the editor(s) of *Sālnāmah-yi Khurāsān*.

8. Discussion and Conclusion

The Confessions of Dolgoruki was a child of its time. Some two decades removed from the Constitutional Revolution, Iran was a nation defining itself in contradictory terms. Produced during the reign of Rīzā Shah, *The Confessions of Dolgoruki* reflects a crisis of identity between

¹¹⁴¹ Ḥijāzī, *Islam va Mahdaviyat*, 32-33, 57.

¹¹⁴² He wrote a number of novels including *Darvīsh qurbān*, *Ṭūfān-i balā*, and *Firūzah*.

¹¹⁴³ Kasravī's reference to a *bī māyah* (unremarkable) man having created *The Confessions* could well have been made about Ḥijāzī, given the latter's romance novels and the former's aversion to such novels in general. See Kasravī, *Bahā'igarī*, 70. For Kasravī's view on novels, see Aḥmad Kasravī, “Yikum-i Daymāh va dāstānash,” *Parcham* 1:1 (Farvardīn 1322), 1-7.

two polar opposites – one “Aryan” (and anti-Arab) and the other Islamic – that afflicted Iran in the 1920s-1930s. *The Confessions* sought to negotiate the crisis through casting Bahā’īs as an internal “Other” engaged in a clandestine conspiracy with the external “Other.” By Othering Bahā’īs, *The Confessions* fused the two inconsonant “Aryan” and Islamic modes of national identity.

Despite a far-fetched plot and numerous textual inconsistencies, *The Confessions* constructed a masternarrative that marginalized historical facts and realities. The historiographers who acknowledged its inauthenticity, in their own turn, reproduced and propagated its fundamental idea. Both Ādamīyat and Shahbāzī wrote that the Bābī-Bahā’ī religions were created and propagated through plots hatched by the British. This in itself supports the notion that such an odd work of fiction created a masternarrative of the foreign origin and espionage of Bahā’īs.

It has been said that conspiracy theories are “difficult to disprove to those committed to them.”¹¹⁴⁴ The case of *The Confessions* and the image it created in the minds of Iranians about their Bahā’ī countrymen would appear to confirm this fact. There were, however, three important elements specific to *The Confessions* that contributed to the influence and longevity of its narrative: 1) The fiction anchors itself to a number of events in the lives of the founders of the Bābī-Bahā’ī religions. In doing so, it jumbles fact and fiction to give the impression that it is a narrative of real events; 2) It was published during a period marked by heightened attention to conspiracy in socio-political discourse following the forced abdication of Rīzā Shah by the Allied Powers. This occurred at a time when the people were inclined to believe the notion that foreign powers had a hand in everything that transpired in Iran; 3) Its long and

¹¹⁴⁴ See Partridge and Geaves, “Antisemitism, Conspiracy Culture,” 84.

complex redaction history made the text a living entity reacting to arguments against its authenticity. Such reactions, originating from proponents of the text who longed to place it in the service of their propagandist goals, ranged from correcting factual errors (such as the dates), to solving internal incoherencies, to claiming that an original Russian version of the text existed, to finally inventing a translator for it!

The redactions not only contributed to the longevity of the text and its unremitting influence, but also reflected the socio-political changes in Iran from the time of the appearance of *The Confessions* in the form of a luck chain letter in the early-to-mid-1930s to the “fixed” form it took in publications that appeared in the mid 1940s. As such, the changes of the text act as a mirror reflection of the history of that period. Its nationalistic rigor, for example, was a reflection of the Aryanist sentiments prevalent at the time of its creation, during the reign of Rīzā Shah, while its softer language regarding the ulama in later editions from the mid-1940s was a reflection of the rise in power and influence enjoyed by the clerics when the second Pahlavī monarch ascended the throne.

Through crafting a foreign political genesis, *The Confessions* created a fundamental shift in anti-Bahā'ī discourse. The production and proliferation of anti-Bahā'ī polemical works in Iran has run parallel to the spread of the Bahā'ī religion since its tumultuous birth in the middle part of the nineteenth century. In the polemical works written in the early period (1844 to late 1930s-early 1940s), Bahā'īs were condemned on straightforward religious grounds or were accused of sexual immorality. Despite many arguments dismissing its authenticity, *The Confessions* created a master narrative of Bābī-Bahā'ī connections with foreign imperialist powers, a theme that has dominated anti-Bahā'ī polemics ever since.

In analyzing conspiracy theories and the demonization of the Other, Leonidas Donkins has shown that a conspiratorial view of the world is a phenomenon radically opposed to the principle of tolerance – one that may jeopardize any viable moral order.¹¹⁴⁵ The legacy of *The Confessions of Dolgoruki* in Iran is living proof of this opposition. The masternarrative it created has dominated the views held by many Iranians – both intellectuals and laymen – about their Bahā'ī compatriots. The response has ranged from suspicion of Bahā'īs to outright support for Bahā'ī persecution as just retribution for the crimes they have committed against the nation. How long this legacy will endure and what forms it will take remains to be seen.

¹¹⁴⁵ Leonidas Donkins, “The Conspiracy Theory,” 360.

Conclusion

This dissertation charted the process through which the Bahā'īs of Iran were transformed from the religious Other in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century to the political Other in the late 1930s-early 1940s. Beginning in the early 1880s, accusations of a political nature began appearing in anti-Bahā'ī polemics, albeit in a form completely different from, if not contrary to, political accusations leveled in the mid-twentieth century. Extending the image of Bābī militancy to the Bahā'ī religion, Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī, the leading ideologue of political Islam, depicted Bahā'īs as an anti-establishment sect that posed a clear and present danger to the social order. The polemicist Za'im al-Dawlah soon followed in Afghānī's footsteps. Yet the Constitutional Revolution brought a fundamental change in direction. During the Constitutional Movement, 'Abdu'l-Bahā's advocacy for the intermingling of the government and the people as a pre-requisite for socio-political progress was interpreted as indifference and support of the status quo. This was in stark contrast to the anti-establishment picture depicted of Bābīs and Bahā'īs previously in the rhetoric of Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Afghānī and Za'im al-Dawlah. It was also during the Constitutional Revolution that Edward Browne and his co-worker of possible Azalī persuasion, Mīrzā Muḥammad Qazvīnī, wrote that the "universalism of Bahā'ism" did not encourage "passionate patriotism"—in effect, accusing Bahā'īs, for the first time, of lacking in loyalty to their homeland (*bī vaṭānī*).

Despite his blatant misrepresentations, Afghānī never claimed that Bahā'īs were connected to imperial powers. However, Afghānī's notion of pseudo-religions fashioned by imperialists to sow seeds of conflict and contention among Muslims created a category or concept, as philosopher Ian Hacking has suggested, which was exploited by his followers to classify the

Bahā'īs. The reformist theologians (such as Khālīshī) and other supporters of Afghānī (such as the former Bahā'ī Nīkū) were inspired by him in the mid-late 1920s to apply his categorization to Bahā'īs, though sporadically and in a rudimentary and undeveloped form. It was not until the 1930s that the model was fully applied in the spy fiction, *The Confessions of Dolgoruki*, most likely by the reformist theologian Shaykh Ibrāhīm Zanjānī.

Around the same time, the Azalī memoirist, Yaḥyá Dawlatābādī, and the historian, Aḥmad Kasravī, in their historical accounts of the 1903 pogrom of Bahā'īs, reinterpreted the event as a narrative about the Russian ties of Bahā'īs. Their accounts actively sought to connect Bahā'īs to the Russian Empire while disregarding evidence to the contrary.

The accusation of Bahā'ī espionage could not have caught on had there not been a context in which Bahā'īs looked similar to foreigners. This context was provided by two factors. One was the manners and behaviors of many Iranian Bahā'īs which made them stand out. The major elements were the lack of the concept of ritual impurity, the ease with which Bahā'īs associated with the followers of other religions (and foreigners), and a more egalitarian view of women. The second factor was the conversion of Westerners to the Bahā'ī religion which was a source of unease, disbelief, and suspicion. Here the negative feelings harbored by several resentful former Bahā'īs found an outlet in the late 1920s-early 1930s. The various accusations they targeted at the Bahā'ī community laid the foundation upon which full-fledged political accusations of espionage and lack of patriotism were built. But these accusations were sporadic, even negligible in terms of their effect on the wider society, as seen in the polemics written by traditionalist clerics which continued to deal with theological and doctrinal issues and reflected the dominant narrative of the time.

Two of the repeated episodes cited in polemical works – assistance provided by the Russian Minister to Bahā'u'llāh as a prisoner in Tehran in 1853 in prison and the knighting of 'Abdu'l-Bahā' by the British Mandate of Palestine in 1920 – were historicized in this dissertation. They are worth mentioning here as examples of how the interpretation of historical memory changes according to the circumstances. The former was dismissed in 1903 by the polemicist Za'im al-Dawlah as a fabrication of the Bahā'īs, while the latter episode was regarded as late as 1928 by Āyatī as proof of the alleged materialistic inclinations of 'Abdu'l-Bahā'.

In addition to anti-Bahā'ism, this dissertation considered the religious-intellectual milieu and examined developments in Shī'ī thought in the modern period. The intellectual circle of Shaykh Hādī Najmābādī, a Shī'ī cleric with Bābī leanings, was a vibrant nexus of intellectual exchange. Najmābādī's circle was characterized by a dialogical overlapping of identities and ideological affiliations, at times reflecting the liminal identities of its proponents. The intermingling of reformist theologians and Azalīs was a salient feature of this circle. Future studies of intellectual history in post-Constitutional Revolution Iran would do well to take this circle into account. The fact, for example, that Ayatollah Ṭāliqānī (who would later play a prominent role in the Islamic Revolution) published the work of one of the reformist theologians in Najmābādī's circle and was the student of another, illustrates the far-reaching influence exerted by his circle on the intellectual history of Iranian modernity.

Anti-Bahā'ism was accompanied by self-refashioning on the part of the Iranian Shī'ī clerics. A salient example was the case of the reformist theologian, Sharī'at Sangalajī. To undermine the beliefs of the Bābī and Bahā'ī religions, Sangalajī radically rejected one of the most fundamental doctrines of the Shī'ī tradition: *raḡ'at*. His reinterpretation of the doctrines of *raḡ'at* as a kind of utopia, paved the way for the institutionalization of the advent of the Hidden

Imam in the form of an Islamic government. As such, although Sanglajī's views, formed in reaction to the Bahā'īs, were deemed heretical by many of his contemporaries, they ironically paved the way for the historic developments in Iranian Shī'ism in the 1970s.

To conclude, the first decades of the twentieth century featured two modes of national identity prevalent in Iran: one was an ethnic-language-based "Aryanist" identity advocated by the intelligentsia during the reign of Rīzā Shah; the other was a religion-based Islamic identity supported by the more religiously-minded, be it the mainstream Shī'ī clerics or the reformist theologians. While these two modes of identity were more porous than dichotomous, the ethnic-language-based mode was dominant under Rīzā Shah. The findings of this study demonstrated that through the politicization of anti-Bahā'ism, and the conceptualization of Bahā'īs as the nation's internal Other, a shift towards Islamic identity began to crystallize by the beginning of the 1940s. The process of Othering the Bahā'īs had at least three components: 1) religious, carried on by the traditionalist theologians; 2) institutional and formal, sanctioned by the state; and 3) political, the result of a joint and gradual process in which Azalīs, former Bahā'īs and reformist theologians all had a role. This process reached its culmination with the widespread publication of *The Confessions of Dolgoruki*, which resulted in a fundamental paradigm shift in anti-Bahā'ī discourse. With the widespread impression of Bahā'īs as spies of foreign powers, what constituted up to that point a sporadic theme in some anti-Bahā'ī polemics now became the dominant narrative of them all, including those of the traditionalist clerics who were latecomers as far as the political accusations were concerned, but nonetheless major beneficiaries of the shift. Consequently, as Iran entered the 1940s, the process that would transform Islamic piety to political ideology was well under way.

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