

## The Baha'i Minority and Nationalism in Contemporary Iran

JUAN R.I. COLE

The Baha'i religious minority would on the surface appear to have been well placed to benefit from the rise of modern Iranian nationalism. As one of only four extant religions that arose on Iranian soil (the Zoroastrian, the Ahl-i Haqq, and the Babi comprising the other three), it has the advantage of being indigenous and thus, in the terms of romantic nationalism, presumably authentic. Its scriptures are largely in the Persian language, the vehicle of modern Iranian nationalism. It also has a generally modernist orientation. It has suffered, however, because nationalism in Iran has tended to be either secular, and thus suspicious of any sectarian division in the body public, or religious, coding non-Shi'ites as somehow un-Iranian. The issue of nationalism and the Baha'i religious minority has been complicated by the emergence of the Islamic Republic of Iran insofar as it is a clerically ruled state and among the few real theocracies in the contemporary world.<sup>1</sup> As a theocracy, Iran rejects – on the surface at least – many of the premises of nationalism developed in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century modernity. In addition, a theocracy is premised upon a state ruling on behalf of a specific religious community, which raises difficult questions about the position of religious minorities. From the point of view of both the Enlightenment and the twentieth-century elaboration of a human-rights discourse, it is expected that all citizens of a state, regardless of religious adherence, will enjoy the same rights under the law. This ideal is at odds with the Islamic

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Republic of Iran's treatment of religious minorities, including even sects of or orientations within Shi'ism, all of which have faced varying degrees of discrimination or persecution. The Baha'i minority is unique, however, insofar as the Islamic Republic does not recognize it as a religious minority at all, instead designating it a political party in defiance of everything social scientists know about the movement. It is true that a significant contemporary group within the Baha'is is itself comprised of theocrats who envisage a Baha'i-ruled state in the future, but this utopian hope, which in any case directly contradicts the Baha'i prophet's own teachings, hardly qualifies them as a political party.<sup>2</sup>

Theocracy challenges both of the major nationalist traditions that developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The "revolutionary" or "civic" tradition in eighteenth-century France and the United States equated the nation with the people in a democratic society, regardless of their language or ethnicity. Often even the individual's religion was declared irrelevant to membership in the nation. Of importance was one's commitment to a set of secular ideals and, at most, one's willingness to acquire the national language, criteria that authorized a pluralist conception of the public. The later Central and Eastern European ideals of exclusionary nationalism based on language and "race," which emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, envisioned a singular source of national identity.<sup>3</sup> Benedict Anderson has argued that nationalisms in the global South were modular, having been modelled on nations in South America and Europe.<sup>4</sup> He has been challenged on this point by Partha Chatterjee, who maintains that nationalisms in the colonized world outwardly adopted the techniques of colonial power (political parties, nationalist discourse, newspapers, etc.) but inwardly demarcated a "spiritual" realm of difference from the colonizer concerned with domesticity, the place of women, and religion.<sup>5</sup>

Iran's theocracy turns Chatterjee's perspective on its head insofar as Rohu'llah Khomeini transformed the latent "spiritual" realm that distinguished Iranian nationalism from that of the North Atlantic imperial powers into the public realm, displacing Western-derived discourses of nationalism in the process. Iran's theocracy mixes elements of both civic and exclusionary nationalist traditions while appearing to reject nationalism altogether. It defines members of the nation by their willingness to accept the rule of the supreme jurispudent and to be subordinate to the apparatus of Islamic law, over which he presides. In a sense, only Shi'ite Muslims are full citizens

(only a Shi'ite may be president), with minorities being ranked in the following order: Sunni Muslims, Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians. Baha'is and secularists have at many points been defined as persons outside the nation altogether because by definition they cannot sincerely accept the rule of the jurisprudential and because he cannot define a legitimate Islamic niche for them to occupy. There is thus both an ideological and an ethnic element in Iranian Muslim nationalism. Yet Iran's nationalism also appeals to nativist authenticity since Iranian Shi'ism gives a distinctive identity to members of the nation, who either were brought up within the Shi'ite faith or are encompassed by it culturally and politically.

Many of Iran's clerical leaders have rejected the notion of nation-states altogether and see the international conception of human rights as a Western invention or a hypocritical means for corrupt imperialist powers to meddle in the internal affairs of an Islamically ruled nation. Antinationalism in the tradition of Khomeini has been tempered over time even though he founded the republic. It has been widely noted that the Islamic Republic has passed through distinct phases of governance. I will characterize these as a radical right-wing populism during the Khomeini era (1979–89), conservative theocracy during the presidency of Hojjatu'l-Islam 'Ali Akbar Hashimi Rafsanjani (1989–97), and polarization (a struggle between radicals, conservatives, and reformists) under President Mohammad Khatami (since 1997). During the Khomeini era of radical theocracy, many religious minorities were treated with extreme harshness. During the succeeding era of conservative theocracy, policies became less draconian (although on the whole they remained unsatisfactory to the international human-rights community and to many members of the religious minorities themselves). Here I concentrate on the 1990s and investigate the question of minority and nation in Iran. How did changes in regime policy affect the conception of the nation and the place of the Baha'is within it in this period of great change? The Iranian Baha'is are, among all the minorities, perhaps the most anomalous in contemporary Iranian law and politics, and from their case we may therefore expect to learn a great deal about the considerations driving Iran's minorities policy more generally.

The issue of the place of religious minorities in the Iranian nation is more important than it might appear on the surface. Non-Muslim religious minorities probably account for only 1 per cent of Iranians today (around 600,000 persons). But in fact, the proportion is much higher if we take into account that Sunni Muslims are a religious

minority in Iran that, although traditionally estimated at only about 7 to 8 per cent of the population, some observers put at 10 to 20 per cent. (Sunnis belong to tribal groups on Iran's periphery, such as Kurds, Lurs, Arabs, Turkmen, and Baluch, and many are pastoralists who have probably been undercounted in censuses; they also include the some 2 million Afghan refugees in Iran, many of whom seem unlikely to return to Afghanistan.) It should also be remembered that Shi'ism itself is differentiated into Sufi orders such as the Ni'matu'llahi and theological schools such as the Shaykhi, both of which have been persecuted in Khomeinist Iran. The heterodox Ahl-i Haqq sect, being syncretic, coexists uneasily with Shi'ism. Religious minorities are therefore a more pressing national issue than the undifferentiated social statistics might suggest.

Ofra Bengio and Gabriel Ben-Dor have distinguished between "compact" minorities in the Middle East (Druze, Maronites, Kurds) and diffuse minorities. They note that groups such as the Eastern Orthodox Christians in Syria and Lebanon lack a strong regional base or close political connections with centres of power. They have an impact on culture and in private business. Elaborating upon the observations of Bernard Lewis, they also point out that the melding of Islamic themes with Middle Eastern nationalisms in the past thirty years has had the effect of excluding or marginalizing Christians and others. This problem has been especially acute for the Christians of Southern Sudan, who are neither Arab nor Muslim in a state that has increasingly defined itself as both.<sup>6</sup> The Baha'is in Iran resemble the Eastern Orthodox Christians in being such a dispersed minority with no strong regional base (although they are significantly concentrated in a few towns, such as Sangesar). They benefit from being Persian-speaking Iranians in the main, although there is a substantial Azeri minority among them. The rise of the Islamic Republic, however, positioned them unfavourably, just as Islamically tinged nationalisms in the Arab world tend to exclude Eastern Orthodox and Coptic Christian minorities. Understanding the position of Iranian Baha'is in contemporary Iran requires an understanding of how nationalism now manifests itself in this country.

#### NATIONALISM AND THE BAHA'IS IN IRAN

Iran as a nation, like most other modern nations, was first imagined into being in the nineteenth century. Prior to this time, the Iranian

plateau had been ruled by polyglot empires that, despite having a conception of the peoples who had dwelt on the plateau (e.g., Persian-speaking "Iranis" and Turkic-speaking "Turanis"), had no conception of the nation-state in the modern sense. The Achaemenids kept their records in Elamite or Aramaic for the most part, even though they themselves spoke Old Persian. The plateau was ruled by Arabs from the Muslim conquest to the rise of the Buyids in the tenth century and then by ethnically Turkic dynasties such as the Saljuqs, Safavids, and Qajars for much of the rest of the medieval and early modern period. Even in what is now Iran, only about 51 per cent of the population speaks Persian as its primary language, with Turkic dialects, such as Azeri, Qashqa'i, and Turkoman, being spoken at home by at least a third of Iranians. Other Iranian languages, such as Kurdish, Luri, and Baluch, are also significant. Some intellectuals in the nineteenth century began to fall under the spell of romantic nationalism, which posited nations as eternal essences intimately linked to land, blood, and tongue and which sought ancient origins for modern polities. A few Iranian thinkers found these ideas attractive insofar as they underlined the greatness of the Achaemenid Empire in antiquity and constituted Iranians not as backward Muslim tribespeople and villagers but as cosmopolitan heirs to Cyrus the Great. Ominously, many of these early nationalists were especially attracted by the scientific racism of Joseph-Arthur comte de Gobineau, and others,<sup>7</sup> which put "Aryans" at the pinnacle of a racial hierarchy. By becoming nationalists, Persian speakers could thus hope to join the system at the top (although in actuality the idea of Europeans accepting Iranians as equals in the age of empire was foredoomed to failure). Thinkers such as Akhundzadieh and Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani excoriated the Arab Muslims for having, in their view, ruined the ancient and proud Iranian Aryan civilization, characterized by Zoroastrianism and empire.<sup>8</sup> Needless to say, this view of things struck most Iranian Shi'ite Muslims as bizarre.

The Baha'i faith has its roots in the nineteenth-century millenarian Babi movement, which around 1849 may have had as many as 50,000 to 100,000 adherents in a population of around 6 million.<sup>9</sup> However, it was brutally suppressed in the 1850s, and these numbers, if they were really this high to begin with, certainly declined dramatically during the persecution launched after leading Babis attempted to assassinate the shah in 1852. Baha'i numbers in Iran have always been a matter of informed guesswork.<sup>10</sup> From the late 1860s, the movement

was reinvigorated and transformed by Baha'u'llah, who founded the Baha'i faith, which from all accounts grew rapidly in Qajar Iran. His modernist message of world peace, world unity, and adoption of both parliamentary democracy and Western technology struck a chord with many Iranians.<sup>11</sup> It would not surprise me if there were 200,000 Baha'is by 1900 in a population of 9 million, and the movement appears to have garnered enormous numbers of adherents and sympathizers in the early twentieth century under the charismatic, liberal, and universalistic leadership of 'Abdu'l-Baha (head of the religion from 1892 to 1921). By the 1920s an internal census conducted by the Baha'is is said to have found that about a million persons in Iran came at least occasionally to Baha'i meetings. This number seems surprisingly high, but it is plausible given that it reports only attendees, not actual members of congregations, and that it includes many persons who would now be categorized as vague sympathizers, as friends of believers, or perhaps even as idly curious.<sup>12</sup>

Because the Baha'i faith originated in the mid-nineteenth century on Iranian soil, it could conceivably claim advantages over the "foreign" Islam of the Arabs. In actuality, the movement out of which it developed, Babism, was a form of hyper-Shi'ism focused on the advent of the Shi'ite Mahdi, or promised one. In contrast, the Baha'i faith itself shed most of the particularistic practices of Shi'ism and Babism, seeking instead to engage modernity by emphasizing values such as globalization and world unity. As neither Shi'ism nor Babism lent itself to modern nationalism, both sects were often dismissed by nationalists. Akhundzadieh, a Voltairean who deeply disliked Islam, sniffed that given what the Bab's grandfather (the Prophet Muhammad) had achieved, it seemed unlikely that the "grandson" (Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad Shirazi, the Bab [1819-50]) had founded a beneficial movement.

Mirza Husayn 'Ali Nuri (1817-92), known as Baha'u'llah, the founder of the Baha'i faith, was deeply suspicious of modern European nationalism. He said, "Glory does not lie in loving one's nation but rather in loving the whole world." Still, he took pride in Iran's ancient civilization and urged Iranians to adopt modern institutions, such as parliamentary democracy, and to embrace science in order to recover their honoured place among the nations. In 1891, during the Tobacco Revolt against a European monopoly, he wrote, "O people of Persia! In former times you have been the symbols of mercy and the embodiments of affection and kindness. The regions of the

world were illumined and embellished by the brightness of the light of your knowledge and by the blaze of your erudition. How is it that you have arisen to destroy yourselves and your friends with your own hands?" He added, "How strange that the people of Persia, who were unrivalled in sciences and arts, should have sunk to the lowest level of degradation among the kindreds of the earth."<sup>13</sup>

Much earlier, in a book published in Bombay in 1882, his son 'Abdu'l-Baha 'Abbas, later the leader of the movement from 1892 to 1921, had written words about Iran that any romantic nationalist would recognize:

O people of Persia! Look into those blossoming pages that tell of another day, a time long past. Read them and wonder; see the great sight. Iran in that day was as the heart of the world; she was the bright torch flaming in the assemblage of mankind. Her power and glory shone out like the morning above the world's horizons, and the splendor of her learning cast its rays over East and West. Word of the widespread empire of those who wore her crown reached even to the dwellers in the arctic circle, and the fame of the awesome presence of her King of Kings humbled the rulers of Greece and Rome. The greatest of the world's philosophers marveled at the wisdom of her government, and her political system became the model for all the kings of the four continents then known. She was distinguished among all peoples for the scope of her dominion, she was honored by all for her praiseworthy culture and civilization. She was as the pivot of the world, she was the source and center of sciences and arts, the wellspring of great inventions and discoveries, the rich mine of human virtues and perfections. The intellect, the wisdom of the individual members of this excellent nation dazzled the minds of other peoples, the brilliance and perceptive genius that characterized all this noble race aroused the envy of the whole world.<sup>14</sup>

He went on to recount legends, based on Firdawsi's epic, *Shahnameh*, of how "the first government to be established on earth, the foremost empire to be organized among the nations, was Persia's throne and diadem" and then to speak of the glory of the Achaemenids, who ruled much of the ancient world.<sup>15</sup> The Baha'i emphasis on peace and globalism led outside observers, such as E.G. Browne, to assume that they would side with foreign powers against the interests of their own nation, but there seems little evidence for such an allegation.<sup>16</sup> The Baha'i leaders were more critical of Europe and European imperialism than Browne realized.

With the rise of the Pahlevi dynasty in the mid-1920s, ideas of race and nation began to be spread through the modern school system. On the one hand, nationalists such as Reza Shah and his supporters attempted to reduce the power of Shi'ite Islam and to foster a civil Iranian identity. Many Baha'is saw this emphasis as beneficial to them at least in the short run. On the other hand, strong secular nationalists such as Ahmad Kasravi attacked the Baha'is and other religious groups as a source of disunity for the Iranian nation. Throughout the twentieth century, Shi'ite religious nationalists saw the Baha'is as dangerous heretics and as channels by which dangerous Western ideas, such as equality for women, entered Iran. Insofar as the Baha'i faith was a post-Islamic religion, its legitimacy was rejected by the Shi'ite clergy, who could not recognize any religion arising after Islam as a real religion. They categorized it as a political movement, a somewhat bizarre characterization given the Baha'i leaders' quietism.<sup>17</sup> It is true that in the 1930s some Baha'i leaders turned their back on the earlier scriptural principle of separation of religion and state championed by Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha and began to advocate a theocracy in which Baha'i institutions would ultimately supplant civil governments and impose censorship and Baha'i law on the populace. Such theocratic dreams, however, were not regarded as a practical goal to be implemented but as a mystical vision that God would bring about by visiting sudden catastrophes on humankind. From the 1960s, the Baha'is' bestowal on these apocalyptic motifs of a patina of anticlericalism, modernism, and cosmopolitanism made them hated among Shi'ite activists, such as the Hujjatiyyih movement, which was dedicated to fighting Baha'i influence and disrupting the religion and which cooperated with the shah's SAVAK, or secret police, in order to do so.

The Baha'i faith has no trained formal clergy and deals with its affairs by electing or appointing lay officers. From the late 1920s, a rigid administrative structure was imposed on the Iranian Baha'i community involving elections in which nominations or overt campaigning were forbidden. While such a system worked relatively well in small local communities where everyone was known and interaction was face to face, the newly invented electoral system of the 1920s and 1930s posed great problems at the level of national elections, and administrators, despite their wide popularity, gradually discovered that incumbents could almost never be unseated and could, behind the scenes, create a "buzz" around informal candidates



they favoured to fill open seats. This openness of the system to such irregularities and authoritarian tendencies at the national level was reinforced by the Baha'i authorities' insistence that these institutions be obeyed implicitly and never publicly criticized and by the creation in 1951 of a body, the "hands of the cause," charged with both propagation and "protection" of the Baha'i faith. In the view of the more narrow-minded "hands," the latter function authorized them to conduct a standing Inquisition against Baha'is with innovative ideas. They were empowered to suggest excommunication and shunning as punishments for thought crimes, giving them great informal power. Strict prepublication censorship was required of adherents who wrote anything for publication about their own religion, and Baha'i books and histories, even some scriptures, were routinely suppressed by the Baha'i leaders. That is, the universalist and liberal principles of the founders of the religion had by the mid-twentieth century been reduced to an attractive facade for a movement that now had a secret authoritarian agenda. It is instructive that several of the religion's major intellectuals in twentieth-century Iran ended up being largely marginalized or even shunned inside the community, which produced only a handful of writers willing to brave such opprobrium.

From the mid to late 1920s, Baha'is in Iran were forbidden by their ecclesiastical authorities to maintain dual membership in the Baha'i faith and any other religion, to belong to political parties, to hold political posts, or to belong to organizations such as the freemasons or Sufi orders. Baha'is were excommunicated and shunned for declining to relocate from their homes to some other region when ordered to do so by the Baha'i authorities. An anti-intellectualism emerged that alienated many Baha'is who entered higher education as students or professors. These policies had the effect of transforming an open and universalistic movement of great popularity, with many adherents and sympathizers, into a closed, quietist, and somewhat narrow-minded ethnic community that sometimes sought inordinate control over the lives of the faithful. Among the few high positions open to Baha'is in Iranian society were those in the Pahlevi military, and many became officers. Prominent Baha'i military men emerged as power brokers within the community and began to impose almost military-style discipline at Baha'i meetings and study classes. Because of the Baha'i administration's rigidity and controlling tendencies, as well as the hatred many Iranian Shi'ites entertained for

the new faith, many Baha'is left the religion in the course of the twentieth century. By 1978 there were only about 90,000 registered Baha'is in Iran and perhaps another 200,000 ethnic Baha'is and sympathizers who never declared formal membership. Many of the sympathizers who did not formally join were unwilling to submit to the degree of control over their lives or isolation from Iranian political and civil society demanded by Baha'i leaders of formally registered believers. In addition to regimentation inside the community, Baha'is faced occasional attacks from outsiders and even, in 1955, a nationwide pogrom.<sup>18</sup> Many of these developments devastated the movement in Iran, where most supporters and many members voted with their feet by melding into secularist groups.

In his book on nationalism in Iran, based in part on interviews with Iranians in the 1950s, Richard Cottam maintains that the nationalist movement of Muhammad Musaddiq curbed those in its religious wing who wished to attack the Baha'is in the early 1950s. He argues that nationalism can benefit indigenous groups such as the Zoroastrians and Baha'is, while those religious minorities identified with a foreign state (Armenians and, after 1948, Jews) are hurt by it. Musaddiq, who nationalized Iran's oil industry and sent the shah into exile, was overthrown by a CIA-backed coup in 1953. Two years later, the conservative clerics who had been allied with the shah launched a major campaign of persecution against the Baha'is. Cottam suggests that Muhammad Reza Pahlevi thereby rewarded those Shi'ite clergymen who had supported him against the nationalist Musaddiq. What Cottam does not know is that the shah also owed debts to the Baha'is. His royal physician, a Baha'i who had grown fabulously wealthy from court patronage, supported him while he was in exile in Italy in 1953. Thus the shah allowed only symbolic damage to be inflicted on the Baha'i centre's dome in Tehran in 1955, which nevertheless served to establish his bona fides with conservative clerics, such as Ayatollah Burujirdi.

But Muhammad Reza Pahlevi then gradually included the Baha'is in his policy of favouring minorities for court patronage as a way of offsetting the demands of nationalists and dissident Shi'ites. He extended a certain amount of protection to minorities in return for their support of his corporatist state. Baha'i industrialists, such as Habib Sabet, benefited enormously from royal patronage, as did bankers, such as Hozhabr Yazdani. (Employees in Sabet's enterprises tended to dominate the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran.) The

Iranian airline bureaucracy came to be staffed disproportionately by Baha'is. This minorities policy of the 1960s and 1970s, which benefited Baha'is, was a source of Khomeini's most vehement denunciations of the shah's regime. Cottam reports that the Iranian Baha'is he interviewed in the late 1950s professed themselves to be strong supporters of the Iranian nation, but he seems ambivalent about whether to believe them.<sup>19</sup> There is no strong reason to dismiss these expressions of fervour. I have been told by older fallen-away Iranian Baha'is that they first experienced an intellectual and cultural awakening during the Musaddiq crisis. In the 1970s, at the height of the minorities policy, Iranian Baha'is frequently told this author that the shah's so-called White Revolution was based on Baha'i teachings, and they were universally proud that "Hadrat-i Baha'u'llah" (His Holiness, Baha'u'llah) had sprung from Iranian soil.

Khomeini's ascension to power in the winter of 1979 shifted the official basis for identity in Iran from nation to Islam. This shift disadvantaged all the religious minorities since a Zoroastrian could be an exemplary Iranian but could be nothing more than an infidel in fundamentalist Islamic terms. Among many other things, the 1979 revolution represented for many committed Shi'ite activists, including Khomeini himself, the opportunity finally to take measures against the Baha'is. Under Khomeini, many activists within the Hujjatiyyih movement, which was obsessed with destroying the Baha'i faith, gained great power in the new government. Among them was Muhammad 'Ali Raja'i, who was elected president briefly before being blown up by the Mujahidin-i Khalq guerrilla movement. In 1979 the Baha'i headquarters was invaded and confiscated, and the membership list naming some 90,000 registered believers was found. Between 1979 and 1989, nearly 200 Baha'is were executed and thousands jailed.<sup>20</sup> Among those killed were the members of the Baha'i national spiritual assembly. A Muslim judge and head of the Revolutionary Court in Shiraz gave a newspaper interview in 1983 in which he maintained that "The Iranian Nation has risen in accordance with Quranic teachings and by the Will of God has determined to establish the Government of God on earth. Therefore, it cannot tolerate the perverted Bahais who are instruments of Satan and followers of the Devil and of the superpowers and their agents."<sup>21</sup> This passage evinces a confusing mixture of nationalist and religious language: It is the "Iranian nation" that has established the Islamic theocracy, and the Baha'is are excluded because of their alleged

cosmopolitan links to the superpowers. They are depicted as both demonic and foreign, whereas true Iranians are Muslim and godly. Even at the height of Khomeini's Pan-Islam, some Iranian clerics saw a role for "the Iranian nation" in the enterprise. In the same year, the Islamic Republic circulated a twenty-page document attempting to justify its treatment of Baha'is, insisting that the Baha'i faith constituted a political movement fashioned by powerful anti-Islamic colonial forces, such as the British, and supported by the neocolonial Government of Israel. They said, moreover, that the Baha'is had been a pillar of the overthrown Pahlevi regime and were thus deeply implicated in human-rights violations of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>22</sup> Of all the charges made, only this latter has a kernel of truth, and then only if it is applied to a handful of the shah's Baha'i cronies, not to the entire community.

It should be noted, however, that the political context of the early 1980s, when most of the killings of Baha'is occurred, was the Great Terror that accompanied the repression of militant guerrilla groups and of ethnic minorities, such as Kurds and Turkmen. The vast majority of those who died during this revolutionary killing spree were not members of religious minorities but political dissidents. For instance, over 10,000 members and sympathizers of the Mujahidin-i Khalq guerrilla movement were killed (mainly by execution) in the 1980s, and hundreds, if not thousands, of Kurdish political and paramilitary activists were also mown down. The European Parliament estimated that between 1981 and 1990, some 90,000 Iranians (about 0.2 per cent of the population) were executed and that 140,000 (about 0.3 per cent the population) were jailed.<sup>23</sup> Political prisoners and prisoners of conscience formed a large proportion of those killed or incarcerated. As late as fall 1988, the Government of Iran admitted to having carried out large-scale executions.<sup>24</sup> Amnesty International said that Iran accounted for 1,200 of the 1,600 executions it recorded throughout the world during the first eight months of 1989.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, the very innocuous character of the Baha'is, who constitute the Iranian equivalent of a "peace church," makes executing them seem particularly egregious. As a result of their persecution by the state, about 30,000 Baha'is emigrated during the 1980s. These were likely disproportionately drawn from the registered group since the regime had firm evidence of their membership and since the Baha'i authorities would validate for the us State Department and other international government agencies only registrants' claims to

being genuine Baha'is deserving of asylum. Registered Baha'is who flew out of Tehran airport before about 1989, acquiring a visa by falsely declaring themselves Muslim, were uncompromisingly excommunicated by the Baha'i authorities in the countries to which they moved, nor would those authorities cooperate in their applications for asylum. This sort of behaviour belies the publicly stated concern of the Baha'i authorities for the welfare of the Baha'is and for upholding human-rights standards since maintaining control over adherents through strict behavioural requirements was clearly more important to them than saving lives.

Many of those formally registered Baha'is who remained in Iran were taken to mosques by Khomeinist fanatics and forced to apostatize; in some instances, the state abducted the children of those who refused to accept Islam and gave them to Muslim families to raise. The fate of the 200,000 or so Baha'i sympathizers inside Iran who had never registered is difficult to know, but it seems likely that many have dissociated themselves from the movement, even as others have stubbornly, if secretly, retained some allegiance to it. Although it may thus be posited that the Baha'i community, however defined, is much smaller now than it was in 1978, it is certainly still tens of thousands strong. The overall near doubling of Iran's population between 1978 and 1998 probably left the Baha'is behind because Baha'i families tend to be middle-class and small.<sup>26</sup> In the late 1980s, measures were undertaken to reduce some of the pressure on the community. In 1986 there were 650 Baha'is in prison as prisoners of conscience.<sup>27</sup> In 1987 there were still 200 Baha'is incarcerated in Iranian jails for their faith. In 1988 the number declined to 129, and signs emerged of a thaw more generally.

#### RAFSANJANI'S FIRST TERM, 1989-93

The year 1989 represented a major turning point for the Islamic Republic. The previous year, Imam Khomeini had reluctantly accepted a ceasefire in the long war of attrition with Iraq; thus, for the first full year since 1980, Iran was not on a war footing. Khomeini himself died of a heart attack on 3 July 1989, bringing to a close a decade during which he and his policies of authoritarianism and mass terror had dominated Iran. The clerical Assembly of Experts met and selected Hujjatu'l-Islam 'Ali Khamenei, who had served as president since 1981, as the new supreme jurisprudent. Presidential

elections were then quickly planned for 28 July, with 95 per cent of the vote going to 'Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who had served as Speaker of Parliament since 1980. The radical wing of Iranian theocracy had advocated strident attacks on the West along with Iranian economic self-sufficiency and state ownership of much of the economy. Having for some time questioned this isolationism and statism, Rafsanjani, once in power, attempted to move the country away from radical right-wing populism and toward policies consistent with a general opening-up of the economy, such as a selective rapprochement with Western European countries and privatization of industry. He surrounded himself with Western-trained technocrats, dubbed the "California mafia," and increasingly moved toward a pragmatic conservatism that not only alienated him from the radical theocrats, but even created tension between him and the somewhat more xenophobic and reactionary supreme jurisprudent, 'Ali Khamenei.<sup>28</sup> Rafsanjani promised in his inauguration speech to respect the "freedom and dignity of individuals,"<sup>29</sup> and although his critics would have found such a pledge on his part laughable, it is remarkable that he should have spoken in such terms at all. This rhetoric was no doubt an attempt to signal the international community that he intended to undertake policy changes. Khomeini's persecuting society, with its ever-widening wave of taboo groups, began to subside in favour of a more selective use of repression.

During Rafsanjani's eight years in power, the absolute numbers of those jailed or killed annually declined. The improvement under Rafsanjani was relative, not absolute, and his regime was much worse than some of the other dictatorships in the second half of the twentieth century if one focuses on incarceration and executions of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience. It is still true that acts of official terror occurred far less frequently than in the frantically bloodthirsty days of the early 1980s. From 1989 to 1997, human-rights organizations continued to report widespread abuse in Iran, including substantial use of torture, arbitrary detentions, lack of fair trials, and restrictions on the rights of women and of workers. Members of the political opposition – such as the Mujahidin-i Khalq, the Tudeh communist party, the Kurdish parties, and others – continued to be brutally arrested and executed on a large scale. The number of political prisoners in Iran as late as 1996 was estimated to be several thousand by Amnesty International.<sup>30</sup> Most religious minorities, in contrast, began to be shown some clemency. By 1989, for instance,

the number of Baha'is in prison as prisoners of conscience had fallen to 15, and this number remained the average in the succeeding decade. This change marked the Rafsanjani years as quite different from the situation under Khomeini.

In the 1990s some Baha'i students who had been expelled from state schools were allowed to resume their studies, and a small amount of property was returned to the Baha'is from whom it had been confiscated.<sup>31</sup> The relative tolerance of Baha'is coincided with a sharp drop in the influence of the Hujjatiyyih and of other radical right-wing Shi'ite populists on the Iranian state. The Baha'is incarcerated during the Rafsanjani period included Bihnam Mithaqi and Kayvan Khalajabadi, who were arrested in Karaj because of their beliefs in April 1989 and continued to be held at Gohardasht Prison without charge or trial for the succeeding decade.<sup>32</sup> The relatively small number of arrests after 1989 took the form of serial harassment of prominent or die-hard Baha'is. In 1990, for instance, fourteen Baha'is were arrested as prisoners of conscience, whereas nineteen were released. A few Baha'is were actually issued visas to leave Iran. Others were allowed to reopen private businesses.

A strong Khomeinist legacy of official discrimination against the Baha'is, who were branded a "misguided sect," did continue. The Baha'is' administrative institutions had been disbanded by official decree in 1983, and they continued to be banned from holding elections for local or national spiritual assemblies, which crippled the Baha'i "administrative order," a sort of one-party structure that normally controls important aspects of adherents' lives. They were also prohibited from proselytizing others to their faith.<sup>33</sup> The government continued to deny that the Baha'i faith was a religion at all. This religious community's property, including administrative offices and places of worship, had been confiscated by the Khomeinist government, and no restitution had been made. Baha'is were largely excluded both from attending universities as students and from teaching on their faculties as professors. In the mid-1990s some Baha'i youth were prevented from attending the final year of high school as well.

Given the position of modern education and of universities in nation-building and nationalist iconography, this exclusion clearly marked the Baha'is as somehow not a part of the Iranian nation. The government regularly ruled Baha'is ineligible for compensation for injury or criminal victimization on the grounds that only Muslim

plaintiffs may receive compensation.<sup>34</sup> They were frequently denied public sector jobs, and the 10,000 Baha'i civil servants fired from the state bureaucracy in the 1980s continued to be denied government employment and the pensions they had accumulated. Indeed, even in the 1990s demands continued that they pay back to the government the salaries they had received while working for the state and that those too indigent to do so be jailed. Again, exclusion from positions in the state bureaucracy marked them as alien, as shape-shifters only pretending to be part of the Iranian nation. Most were not issued passports, although this began to change for a few. Baha'i marriages were not officially recognized. This nonrecognition had been used in the 1980s as a pretext to accuse Baha'is of adultery and the religious officials who married them of being pimps – both capital crimes – but such accusations appear to have become uncommon in the 1990s. The Baha'is allege that they suffer continued discrimination in the judicial system and that revolutionary officials pressure defence lawyers not to accept Baha'i clients, although the Iranian authorities deny this charge. Baha'is have had difficulty meeting together for worship because the government has insisted that no more than fourteen can gather at one time.<sup>35</sup>

How the Baha'is were treated in the 1990s depended a great deal on the jurisdictions in which they lived, and some suffered more than others. Yazd, for instance, was a difficult place for Baha'is to operate businesses. The imprisonment and execution of Baha'is as well as the other acts of persecution to which they were subjected in the 1990s were symbolic, making a statement about the illegitimacy of the community in the eyes of the authorities rather than involving pogroms and large-scale judicial murder, as had occurred under Khomeini. In 1993, for instance, the Tehran municipal authorities tore up the Baha'i cemetery in order to build a cultural centre on the site. Grave markers were reportedly uprooted and sold off, and earthwork often involved desecrating gravesites.<sup>36</sup> This action created the problem for the Tehran Baha'i community of where to bury their dead and elicited widespread condemnation from Western governments and human-rights organizations. In the end, the Baha'is were assigned some wasteland by the authorities for their burials but were denied the right to place tombstones with names over the graves.<sup>37</sup> Like universities and bureaucracies, graveyards tend to have national significance, as repositories of past citizens, some of whom would inevitably be veterans or persons of national significance. Just as



living Baha'is were defined out of the Islamic Iranian nation, so now even their dead were erased from history and dumped unnamed in wastelands.<sup>38</sup>

Some further executions of Baha'is did take place in this decade. Bahman Samandari, a Tehran businessman, was suddenly arrested and summarily executed in 1992. Samandari appears to have been punished in part for having acted as liaison for the leaderless Iranian Baha'is with the religion's officials in Haifa, Israel, and in part for having gotten word out to the United Nations about his arrest. The official reason given for his execution was "espionage," although Iranian officials also openly complained about his having contacted the United Nations about his arrest.<sup>39</sup> Although such executions came to be rare, at times Baha'is were sentenced to death, and a handful appear to remain on death row.

In 1991 Ayatollah Khamenei formalized many of these policies by approving a "blueprint" for dismantling the Baha'i presence and influence in Iran aimed at employing Shi'ite state hegemony gradually to extinguish the community rather than wiping it out through brute force. The document was drawn up by Sayyid Muhammad Gulpaygani, head of the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council, after this body consulted on what to do about the Baha'is. Ironically, as will be seen, this clerical plot resurrected key elements of secular nationalist Iranian identity. The policy decided upon a grudging and partial toleration of individuals but heavy discrimination against the community, the religion, and its organization. Baha'is were not to be arrested, imprisoned, penalized, or expelled from the country for no reason (i.e., for no reason other than that they were Baha'is). As Iranian citizens, they were to be provided routinely with ration booklets, passports, burial certificates, and work permits. They were to be allowed to earn a modest living but not to prosper in such a way as to encourage them to remain Baha'is. They could be schooled but only if they avoided identifying themselves as Baha'is, and they were to be sent especially to schools known for being able to indoctrinate students heavily into Khomeinist ideology. With regard to employment, they were to be denied government posts and university jobs and were generally to be kept out of education as a field. Baha'i attempts to proselytize others and to spread their religion were to be met with counterpropaganda. The memorandum advised, "a plan must be devised to confront and destroy their cultural roots outside the country." This paragraph appears to refer to the Khomeinist

officials' bizarre belief that the Baha'i faith was founded as part of a British or other imperialist plot to divide Iranians. Finally, the document insists that "their political (espionage) activities must be dealt with."<sup>40</sup> This phrase refers to the officials' conviction that Baha'is systematically engaged in spying for Israel and the US, a charge that their apolitical quietism makes absurd and for which not even all the reconstructed shredded documents captured at the US embassy provided an iota of confirmation.

The general tenor of the plan submitted by Gulpaygani and signed by Khamenei was to treat the Baha'is as ordinary citizens of Iran for most purposes and to avoid making them martyrs in the eyes of the international human-rights community for no good purpose; rather, gradual and firm pressure was to be exerted on the community to force it into the ranks of the poor, with the aim of thus making it extremely unattractive to be a Baha'i. They clearly hoped that over the long run, such systematic discrimination would deplete the religion's ranks without any need for wholesale persecution of the sort tried during the early 1980s. Still, in recognizing that the Baha'is were Iranian citizens who should be treated like other citizens, the document found a new way of legitimating their existence as individuals in the country, even while it continued to deny the legitimacy of the religion to which they belonged. Remarkably, this legitimation appealed to the secular principles of Iranian nationhood and citizenship and left out reference to Islamic law altogether. Henceforth, individual Baha'is were to suffer discrimination similar to that visited upon African Americans in the days of Jim Crow in the American South or upon Jews in the Germany of the mid-1930s, but they would not face the sort of extreme persecution they had suffered under Khomeini.

#### RAFSANJANI'S SECOND TERM, 1993-97

Rafsanjani's second term, 1993-97, was marked by increased struggle between the three camps that had now emerged among the theocratic heirs of Khomeini: what I will call (1) the pragmatic conservative, (2) the reactionary, and (3) the radical. *Pragmatic conservatives*, such as Rafsanjani and his followers, continued to advocate economic privatization, an opening to Western Europe, and slightly greater cultural freedom inside the country. Houshang Amir Ahmadi has argued that the second Rafsanjani term witnessed the rehabilitation

of key themes in Iranian nationalism and that the president himself intervened to foster it.<sup>41</sup> As of the 1992 parliamentary elections, the pragmatic-conservative faction held about 30 per cent of the seats in Parliament. It was weakened in the 1993 elections by a very low turnout. Although its candidate, Rafsanjani, received 63 per cent of the vote, only 50 per cent of eligible voters came to the polls, meaning that only a third of the electorate had actually voted for him. The pragmatic-conservative faction was further shaken by the failure of its policies to produce significant economic growth, by high inflation, relatively low oil prices, and continued high population growth as well as by the fact that the Lebanese hostage crisis did not produce any tangible reward for Iran (especially the release of billions of dollars embargoed by the United States because of the 1979–81 Hostage Crisis). The early 1990s were marred by squatters' riots, bombings allegedly carried out by the Mujahidin-i Khalq in places like the Imam Riza Shrine in Mashad, and an assassination attempt on Rafsanjani himself.

The *reactionary faction* associated with Khamenei supported privatization and free-market economic policies but continued to be suspicious of Western cultural influence and to reject extensive loosening of theocratic controls on politics and culture. This faction controlled about 40 per cent of the seats in parliament in the mid-1990s. The *radical theocrats* – who remained isolationists in foreign policy, advocated national self-reliance in economics, opposed privatization, and desired to reinstitute Khomeini's reign of terror against those they viewed as deviationists – held about 15 per cent of the seats in Parliament. Whereas from 1989 to 1993 the conservative and reactionary theocrats had cooperated against the radicals, moving the country in the direction of some liberalization, increasingly in Rafsanjani's second term, Khamenei and his reactionaries took stances redolent of the radical position. They outlawed satellite dishes and Western television, and they reconstituted the *basij* (irregular volunteers who had fought at the Iraqi front) as a civilian vigilante force with the power to harass and even summarily execute persons they viewed as deviating from Islamic norms. They elevated Khomeini's *fatwa*, or ruling of death, against Salman Rushdie to the status of an irrevocable law, or *hukm* (apparently in the knowledge that this would make it difficult for Western European nations entirely to effect a rapprochement with Iran).<sup>42</sup> The weakness of the pragmatic conservatives and their friction with reactionaries and radical right-wing

populists was played out on many levels, including that of the treatment of religious minorities.<sup>43</sup>

From 1993 through 1997, the Islamic court system, especially in the provinces, became the primary arena for symbolically sanctioning apostates, both Baha'is and others. As President Rafsanjani sought good relations with Western Europe and institutions such as the World Bank, he had a motivation not to engage in unnecessary and egregious human-rights violations on the old Khomeinist scale. A desire to continue to subject the Baha'is to punitive measures remained liveliest among the more radical clerics, who, although comprising only 15 per cent of parliament deputies, retained great power over the judiciary. Radicals could also pressure the private sector, as in Mashad, where businesses were discouraged by Khomeinist activists in the mid-1990s from employing Baha'is.

The UN High Commission on Human Rights denounced the practice in the second Rafsanjani term of "arresting Baha'is and detaining them for short periods and of summoning Baha'is to Ministry of Intelligence agencies on various pretexts" and noted that during the years 1994-97, "nearly 200 Baha'is were arrested and detained for periods ranging from two days to six months."<sup>44</sup> Religious beliefs affected sentencing. Police arrested a group of young men for misconduct and later released the Muslims among them. Two of the arrested, however, Arman Dimishqi and Kurush Dhabih, were Baha'is, and the courts demanded that they recant their faith in order to obtain quick release as well. When they refused, both were sentenced to eight years in prison. Among those in prison in 1997 were Mansur Haddam and Kamyar Ruhi, who had been convicted of "being active in the Baha'i community, of gathering for Baha'i meetings in a private house and of working against the security of the country by organizing a Baha'i children's art exhibit." A Baha'i edifice in Urumiyeh was destroyed in 1997, Baha'is were occasionally summarily expelled by Revolutionary Guards from their homes, which were confiscated, and "it was alleged that the majority of the Baha'is in the city of Yazd were prohibited from conducting any business transactions."<sup>45</sup>

But the courts were entirely capable of going well beyond mere judicial harassment on occasion. Bihnam Mithaqi and Kayvan Khalajabadi, two Baha'is arrested in April 1989 and held without charge or trial until December 1993, were sentenced to death.<sup>46</sup> A *New York Times* editorial explained, "The judicial judgment against two defendants

living in Karaj, near Teheran, accuses them of a new kind of crime – transmitting information that they were on trial for their lives to the United Nations and to Bahai groups outside Iran.”<sup>47</sup> In addition, the two were accused of holding religious ceremonies, owning books, and being “at war” with Islam. The government, however, managed to drag its feet on carrying out the sentence, so the two men simply languished in prison. Also late in 1993, a provincial revolutionary court in Rafsanjan sentenced another Baha’i, Ramadan ‘Ali Dhulfaqari, to death for apostasy. He was released from prison on 6 January 1994, although the charge of apostasy “is said to remain outstanding.”<sup>48</sup> This outcome appears to reflect a conflict between the provincial judiciary, who wanted Dhulfaqari executed, and other officials of the Islamic Republic, who seem to have effectively buried the case, even though it inevitably still hangs over his head.

In January 1996, Dhabihullah Mahrami (b. 1946) was sentenced to death by a revolutionary tribunal in Yazd, joining Bihnam Mithaqi and Kayvan Khalajabadi on death row. In February the Iranian Supreme Court confirmed the death sentences against Mithaqi and Khalajabadi, although one Iranian official floated the bald-faced lie that the charge against them was espionage rather than religious heresy. Their situation differed from that of Mahrami, however, insofar as they had been arrested in 1989 while Khomeini was still alive simply for being Baha’is. Mahrami, born a Baha’i, had succumbed in 1981 after the revolution to pressure to convert to Islam in order to keep his job in the Ministry of Agriculture in the Province of Yazd. His conversion under duress had been announced in the *Kayhan* newspaper in August 1983, and in 1985 he had signed a document at the ministry where he was employed indicating that he was a Muslim. Either because he could not bear the hypocrisy any further, or because he thought that Khomeini’s death and Rafsanjani’s election had made it safer to announce one’s adherence to the Baha’i faith, or both, Mahrami had then apostatized from Islam in 1989.

However, he had not realized that under classical Muslim jurisprudence, such as had been made the law of the land in Iran, apostasy is a capital crime. The clerics might have overlooked those 60,000 or so formally registered, born Baha’is who had neither left the country nor adopted Islam. But apostasy was something they could not accept. For one thing, if citizens began feeling it was safe to say they were Baha’is after having affirmed a primary Muslim identity for over a decade, then not only might thousands of formerly registered

Baha'is return to their religion, but even the 200,000 or so former sympathizers with the religion might begin experimenting again with dual identity. Moreover, the possibility of the religion drawing new converts from Islam could not be ruled out. Mahrami's boldness presented the clerics in control of the judicial system with the difficult choice of either risking the reemergence of the Baha'i faith as at least an informal religious option for hundreds of thousands of people in Iran or provoking economic and diplomatic retaliation against Iran by the world community. They must have likewise been worried about the underground successes of Christian evangelicals in winning converts in northern Iran and about a renewed secularism, both of which would have been emboldened if they had allowed apostasy. The conflict between the radical Islamic republicans among the clerics and their enemies (the pragmatic conservatives) heated up and began to involve charges against an old and favourite scapegoat, the Baha'is.

Mahrami had been summoned to the Islamic Revolutionary Court in Yazd on 24 July 1995 and came before the court on 6 August 1995. In this session, he was questioned about his current religious beliefs. He affirmed he was a Baha'i. The authorities brought Mahrami back for three further court sessions. Each time, they requested that he reconsider, repent, and return to Islam. He repeatedly declined the invitation. As a result, he was charged with "national apostasy," a crime specified in the writings of Imam Rohu'llah Khomeini that had come to have the force of law for judges of the Islamic Republic. The inextricable intertwining of Shi'ite religion with the Iranian nation is underlined by this conception of national apostasy. The phrase implies that abandoning Shi'ism for any other religion is tantamount to renouncing Iranian citizenship, or to treason (also a capital crime). Despite the language of the Gulpaygani document cited above, which recognized Baha'is as Iranian nationals due the rights of citizenship, the conception of national apostasy that still dominated judicial thinking about them continued to define Baha'is as traitors to the nation.

After Mahrami had chosen a defence lawyer, the 2 January 1996 court session took place at which he was condemned to death. It is worthwhile quoting some of the verdict of the Revolutionary Court in Yazd against him:

Concerning the charges against Mr. Dhabihullah Mahrami, the son of Gholamreza, i.e. denouncing the blessed religion of Islam and accepting the

beliefs of the wayward Baha'i sect (national apostasy), in light of his clear confessions to the fact that he accepted the wayward Baha'i sect at the age of maturity, later accepted Islam for a period of seven years, and then returned to the aforementioned sect; and because of the fact that, despite the most tremendous efforts of this court to guide him and encourage him to repent for having committed the most grievous sin, he remains firm in his baseless beliefs, he has, on three consecutive meetings, while being of sound body and mind and in absolute control, announced his allegiance to the principles of Baha'ism and his belief in the prophethood of Mirza Husayn-Aliy-i-Baha, he has openly denied the most essential [principle] of Islam [Prophet Muhammad's being the Seal of the Prophets], and he is not willing to repent for having committed this sin, the following verdict was issued, based on the investigations of the Department of Intelligence of the Province of Yazd, and the damaging consequences of his leaving the true religion of Islam and rejoining the Baha'i sect, which, according to indisputable principles accepted by reasonable people, is a clear insult to the beliefs of over one billion Muslims. By applying the tenth definition of "Nijasat" [ritual impurity] to be found in the first volume of *Tahrir ol-Vasileh* in defining an infidel and an apostate, as well as section ten of the book of *Al-Mavarith* (on the topic of inheritance) and sections one and four of *al-Hudud* (on the topic of apostasy) written by the great founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, His Holiness Imam Khomeini, the accused is sentenced to death because of being an apostate. Furthermore, based on section one of *al-Mavarith* (on the topic of inheritance) and in light of the fact that he does not have any Muslim heirs, a verdict is issued for the confiscation of all his properties and assets [Mahrami's wife and children are Baha'is and this decree would disinherit them].<sup>49</sup>

Mahrami appealed the death sentence against him to the Supreme Court in accordance with a 1994 law governing public and revolutionary courts. Amnesty International reported that on 7 March 1996 the organization "received a letter from the Iranian Embassy in London ... which stated that the Supreme Court had quashed the death sentence against Dhabihullah Mahrami and referred the case back to a lower court for reconsideration." Mahrami's own family, however, may not have been informed that this was the case.<sup>50</sup> And then the "reconsideration" turned sinister, as Mahrami continued to be detained in Yazd while awaiting a new trial in a civilian (rather than revolutionary) court on the same charges!<sup>51</sup> This turn of events suggests some technical flaw in the way the first Yazd Revolutionary Court proceeded against Mahrami or perhaps a conflict between the

Supreme Court judges in the capital and the provincial revolutionary officials in Yazd.

The clerics in the Isfahan judiciary drew the same sort of line in the sand when, in June 1996, they sentenced Musa Talibi to death for apostatizing from Islam to return to the Baha'i faith, in which he had been reared. He appealed the sentence but was reportedly told that it had been confirmed. Talibi had originally been arrested in Isfahan in October 1994 on charges unrelated to religion and sentenced to ten years imprisonment. He appealed, and in February 1995 his sentence was reduced to eighteen months. The prosecutor for the Islamic Republic objected to the reduction in sentence on the grounds that Talibi was an apostate, which had not been taken into account by the courts. The prosecutor's demand for a retrial provoked the June 1996 death sentence.<sup>52</sup> In 1996 there were about 10 Baha'i prisoners of conscience in Iranian jails, including Mahrami and Talibi.

On 14 May 1996 Chief Justice Ayatollah Mohammed Yazdi gave an address in the holy city of Qom, in which he alleged that "The Bahai sect is not a religion, but a web of espionage activities." Here again, deviant religion and treason to the nation are collapsed into one another. It should be underlined that the punishment in Iran for espionage is death. He accused the West of "using the human rights issue as a means to pressure other countries." He added that Iran would "never abandon the application of Islamic law just to please international organizations." He further alleged that recognized Iranian religious organizations "enjoy freedom of faith."<sup>53</sup> Given that the Supreme Court had confirmed the death sentences against Mithaqi and Khalajabadi the previous February but had in March overturned Mahrami's death sentence for apostasy, it is difficult to interpret this speech. Was he announcing a reconsideration of his leniency toward Mahrami and saying that he was now determined to see apostates from Islam to the Baha'i faith punished and that he would attempt to find a fig leaf such as espionage that would not require an open admission that apostasy is a capital crime in Iran? Was he throwing down a gauntlet before Rafsanjani, whose government, eager for good relations with Western Europe, had been hurt by the bad publicity over Mahrami? Or was he simply employing bluster, reminding them that he had reaffirmed the two earlier death sentences in an attempt to exonerate himself in the eyes of more radical, provincial clerics who were angry over Mahrami's acquittal?



European human-rights organizations attempted to intervene. Since Europe traded with Iran and the US did not, Europe was in a stronger position to apply threats of damage to bilateral relations and trade if Iran continued to ignore basic human-rights standards. Thus early in 1997 as the Supreme Court was preparing to make its ruling, Ruprecht Polenz, an Iranian-affairs specialist and member of the ruling Christian Democrat Party in the German Parliament, condemned the Supreme Court verdict, insisted that it was in fact based on a charge of apostasy, and warned that Mahrami and Talibi were in imminent danger of being executed. He noted that as of early 1997, twelve Baha'is remained in custody as prisoners of conscience. The German government wrote letters of protest to the Iranian justice and foreign ministries and also to the Iranian Embassy in Bonn.<sup>54</sup> Polenz's and others' efforts notwithstanding, on 23 February 1997 a higher Revolutionary Court affirmed the sentence of death for Talibi and Mahrami. The Revolutionary Court chief, Ghulam Husayn Rahbarpur, announced the court's confirmation that the two would be executed for "spying for the Zionist" regime (i.e., working for the Israeli intelligence service, Mossad). Because Baha'is have their world headquarters in Israel, they are often falsely suspected in the Muslim world of being espionage agents for Israel.

Rahbarpur vehemently denied that the two had been condemned merely for their faith, calling such charges "false and fallacious." He added, "No one could be punished in Iran because of his beliefs or his religion."<sup>55</sup> The clerics in the judiciary had thumbed their noses at the world community, but the international outcry that ensued may have tied the hands of the executive branch, which was responsible for actually carrying out the sentence. One Baha'i was killed in a provincial prison in Iran in 1997, and another, a soldier, was shot with impunity by his commanding officer that summer. The major capital cases against Baha'is in the 1990s largely grew not out of simple adherence or even practice but out of an attempt to reverse a forced conversion to Islam by returning to the Baha'i fold. The ayatollahs clearly feel that strong sanctions against such reverse apostasies is called for to prevent thousands of reconversions, the death sentences against Talibi and Mahrami being a case in point. This use of judicial murder, however, is mainly a holding action and thus may well fail to intimidate those at whom it is aimed. Talibi and Mahrami have, at the risk of their own lives, already made the point

that in the post-Khomeini era such reversals of the gains of the radical religious right are at least conceivable.

Rafsanjani's shift to a more nationalist discourse probably had some benefits for the Baha'is, who now had to be recognized as owed the basic rights of Iranian citizens. In contrast, the change appears to have benefited the Zoroastrians even more positively. The Zoroastrian minority was subject to certain constraints, mainly various forms of local discrimination, under the Khomeinist government. But its relations with the Rafsanjani government were favourable enough that it was permitted to hold the sixth Zoroastrian International Conference in Iran in 1996, a decision that one community representative said was made "after the fifth Majlis (Parliament) elections," probably a reference to the successive weakening of the radical Islamists.<sup>56</sup> The conference was addressed by President Rafsanjani, who stressed the need for harmony among the religions and cooperation in the face of Western materialism. He said of Zoroastrianism, "The canons of the Zoroastrian faith, including monotheism and the necessity of righteous ideas, speech, and behavior are also evident in Islam." He stressed "freedom of action and a peaceful and tranquil life for the religious minorities in Islamic Iran."<sup>57</sup> The president's speech was remarkable for its Iranian nativism, evoking a sort of nationalist pride in Iran's Zoroastrian heritage that was common in the Pahlavi era and against which the radical Khomeinists had strongly reacted. In a BBC interview, Zoroastrian leaders vehemently denied the implication voiced by the correspondent that "Zoroastrians in Iran are under pressure and being intimidated" and that the conference had been authorized only after years of putting pressure on the Iranian government.<sup>58</sup> A year later in a speech, the Zoroastrian member of Parliament, Parviz Ravani, commended the Iranian government for curtailing foreign influence in the country and confirmed that religious minorities in Iran enjoyed freedom of worship and were allowed to publish their community magazines. He added that "all religious minorities in Iran seriously confront any act of treason against the Islamic government and the nation."<sup>59</sup> Although, of course, all such official speeches and statements must be approached cautiously, it certainly appears to be the case that Zoroastrians enjoyed a warmth in their relations with the central Iranian government during Rafsanjani's second term that was missing with regard to Jews or non-Armenian Christians and that is quite different from the Islamic Republic's hostility to the Baha'is.

The second Rafsanjani term witnessed a renewed power struggle between the far right and the conservative pragmatists, in which the religious minorities often became pawns. Apostasy emerged as the primary issue seized upon by the reactionaries and the radical populists with which to menace the religious minorities. Radical frustration with the pragmatist status quo led to the assassination of prominent pastors and apostates by death squads. The radicals and reactionaries were reduced merely to defending the gains they had made in the 1990s and were unable to return to launching large-scale pogroms or judicial murders against the minorities. Moreover, after 1993 the Iranian electorate began shifting substantially to the left, leaving the radicals and reactionaries in the judiciary and high clerical office increasingly isolated and putting pragmatists and relative liberals in power in Parliament and the presidency from 1996 to 1997. The continued economic difficulties in Iran left it in greater than ever need of foreign investment and good relations with the European Community. Thus the international outcry over the persecution of the apostates from select religious minorities made it difficult for the executive branch to carry out the judicial murders occasionally ordered by the clerical judges, and it appears even to have in some instances dissuaded the Supreme Court from concurring in judgments passed on apostates by provincial courts.

#### THE KHATAMI PERIOD

In 1997, when the mood of the Iranian electorate unexpectedly swung to the liberal side, the dark-horse candidate Ayatollah Muhammad Khatami was elected with nearly 70 per cent of the vote. Khatami, a former minister of culture under Rafsanjani in the early 1990s who had been forced by reactionaries and radicals in Parliament to resign for being too liberal, was unexpectedly allowed to run for president by the Council of Guardians. He became a favourite candidate among youth, women, and the urban middle class. Having lived in Germany, where he had made a serious study of German philosopher Jürgen Habermas's work on civil society, Khatami incorporated the idea of the need for active citizens' organizations at the grass roots into his political ideology. Since both reactionaries and radicals favoured strong state control and regulation of such intermediate organizations, he was bound to come into conflict with them. Khatami also pursued an opening to the West and even called for dialogue and

contact between the Iranian citizenry and Americans on a nongovernmental level.

The Khatami presidency provoked an extensive polarization of Iranian society and politics that was much more extreme than what had occurred early in Rafsanjani's second term. Liberals like 'Abdu'l-Karim Suroush were emboldened to speak to large crowds of students on subjects like freedom of speech and conscience and openly to question the whole idea of theocracy. Ayatollah Muntaziri openly challenged the idea of the Guardianship of the Jurisprudent and was threatened with jail time by Supreme Jurisprudent 'Ali Khamenei. In the summer of 1999, liberal students mounted large demonstrations in the capital. In response, radicals and reactionaries interrupted Suroush's speeches with heckling and violence, opponents of Khatami in the Ministry of Intelligence conducted a series of assassinations against prominent liberal and secular intellectuals in the fall of 1998 and the summer of 1999, and student demonstrations were infiltrated by agents provocateurs from the *basij*, who committed acts of violence in hopes of turning the public against the student activists.

Minorities of conscience have been among the chief victims of this new polarization. As mentioned, a string of secular-leaning and liberal intellectuals were assassinated in the fall of 1998. Some twenty members of the Baha'i faith were in jail in 1998. On 21 July 1998, a Baha'i, Ruhullah Rawhani, was executed in Mashhad on charges of converting a Muslim woman to the religion (a charge she denied). Rawhani, 52, a medical-supplies salesman and father of four, had been imprisoned in September 1997. He was never formally sentenced, was given no access to legal counsel, and was summarily executed.<sup>60</sup> It seems likely that provincial radicals acted in this hasty and arbitrary fashion precisely to avoid interference from the Khatami government in Tehran, which might have resulted in Rawhani being left for years on death row or even being released rather than executed. In late September 1998, Ministry of Information officials raided 500 private homes of Baha'is and arrested thirty-six Baha'is in a number of cities, charging them with teaching informally in the Baha'i "Open University," an institution set up by the community to circumvent the ban on Baha'i students attending university in Iran that had graduated some 140 students in the 1990s. The purge of Baha'i professors in the 1980s had left many with time on their hands and a willingness to teach their specialties in their own homes. The

professors were eventually released, many only after they pledged to close the Open University.<sup>61</sup> Reza Afshari provides a useful summary of the situation in the late 1990s:

Limitations on travel abroad were still in place, although some Baha'is succeeded in receiving limited exit permits. The problems faced by Baha'i physicians and lawyers continued unabated. No bank credit was made available to Baha'i applicants. Baha'i marriages and divorces were not legally recognized, nor was a right to inheritance, a situation Ann Mayer has aptly described as "civil death." The properties of a deceased Baha'i would go to the state if there were no Muslims in the family. The regime continued denying the Baha'is retirement pensions.<sup>62</sup>

Members of other religions suffered in the early Khatami period as well. Some twenty Muslim converts to Christianity disappeared between 1997 and 1998 when authorities learned of their baptisms. In May 1998 Jewish businessman Ruhullah Kadkhuda-Zadieh was summarily executed, possibly for helping Iranian Jews flee the country. And in March 1999 thirteen Jews were arrested and charged with espionage, charges that human-rights analysts generally found implausible on the basis of the information released by the Iranian government. Even Shi'ites, such as members of Sufi orders, reported increasing persecution between 1998 and 1999.<sup>63</sup>

Although Khatami's election signalled the desire of a broad swathe of Iranian society for a certain amount of liberalization, the late 1990s were not noticeably better for religious minorities than before. Khatami's victory galvanized radicals and reactionaries into attacking him by scapegoating outspoken liberal intellectuals and members of religious minorities. Khatami, although president, did not control the armed forces, the police, the *basij*, or even some ministries, such as the Ministry of Intelligence, nor could he always count on the support of Parliament. He was therefore not in a position to push liberalization very far or very fast and was opposed by powerful enemies who often controlled substantial resources, including armed forces. If Iran really does move toward greater liberalization in the coming years, it is unlikely to be without a fight, and the religious minorities are likely to be in the crossfire. Baha'is continue to be branded national apostates by the radical populists and to be subjected to arbitrary arrest and punishment. They are excluded from national institutions and widely considered spies for foreign powers

(despite the lack of any credible evidence for such charges). They are in an even more precarious situation than Iranian Jews, who have faced similar espionage charges on occasion.

### CONCLUSION

The position of the Baha'is as members of the Iranian nation has been in dispute throughout the modern period. As early as the Constitutional Revolution, measures were enacted by a supposedly progressive and newly established Parliament to exclude them from political participation. Still, in the Pahlevis' secularizing form of Iranian nationalism, Baha'is had begun to find a precarious (and sometimes unsavoury) niche. The rise of Khomeinism knocked them off this perch rather decisively. Official Khomeinist discourse rejected the idea of the modern nation-state altogether and aimed at a Pan-Islamic union of the Muslim peoples across ethnic and linguistic, even across sectarian-Muslim, divides. In such a system, the only recognized position for non-Muslim religious minorities would be that of *dhim-mis*, or protected communities. Such a status was accorded Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians but was not available for a post-Islamic religion such as the Baha'i faith. Baha'is were denied any claim to belonging to a religion at all; instead, they were depicted as comprising a political party created and fostered by British colonialism and Israeli imperialism that had no specifically religious character. They were equated with organized atheism, and their adherents were defined as apostates from Islam (although significant portions of the community originated with conversions from Judaism and Zoroastrianism in the nineteenth century and thus had never apostatized). The Baha'is experienced civil death under Khomeinism, facing execution if prominent, imprisonment if vocal, and harassment in daily life. Baha'i marriages were redefined as prostitution, and those officers of the local spiritual assembly who conducted them were redefined as pimps. Parents were charged with endangerment of minors for bringing them up as Baha'is, and their children were sometimes confiscated and raised as Muslims. They were fired from government jobs and expelled from the universities and finally even from the cemeteries. No institution over which the Iranian Muslim state had direct control could tolerate Baha'is given that they were civilly dead.

Along with the official Khomeinist rhetoric of Muslims vs infidels, some Muslim fundamentalists gave a more central position to Iran

and the Iranian nation but identified both with Islam. This Iranian nationalist form of Islamism became more appealing in the course of the Iran-Iraq war of 1980–88, when much of the Arab Muslim world supported secularist Iraq against Khomeini, profoundly disappointing Khomeini's ecumenical hopes. It has been argued that Rafsanjani, in power from 1989 to 1997, rehabilitated the discourse of Iranian nationalism. It was increasingly denied that Baha'is were persecuted because of their conscientious beliefs. It was alleged not only that they were spies for foreign powers, but also that they were national apostates, defectors from the Iranian Muslim nation. Still, the executions slowed dramatically, and the terms of imprisonment shrank to a few weeks, with hundreds of Baha'is being rotated in and out as a means of serial harassment rather than languishing behind bars for long periods of time. The key capital crime for which Baha'is were charged under positive law now became not abstract apostasy but the real thing. It was made clear that those Baha'is who converted under duress to Islam in the 1980s would not be allowed to revert to the Baha'i faith without facing the executioner. Nor would proselytizing other such "new-Muslims" to return them to the Baha'i faith be allowed.

Gulpaygani's document of the early 1990s laid out a plan for the extermination of the Baha'i faith in Iran not through a physical holocaust but through gradual attrition. Ordinary Baha'is would be granted some of the usual rights of Iranian citizenship. In some areas of life, their civil death was annulled, although it remained their lot in many other spheres. They could not be deprived of life and property arbitrarily – that is, just for being (inactive) Baha'is. They could again marry and have families without being unduly bothered. But they could not go to university or perhaps even finish high school. Even informal institutions of education inside the community were closed, forcing Baha'is into the ranks of the day labourers and the indigent. They could not hold government jobs or teaching positions. They were denied the respectability of holding professions. They could not even be properly buried. The icons of the nation – the bureaucracy, the university, the cemetery – were declared off limits to them. The areas of civil life that could in any way be seen as privileges bestowed by the state were denied to them. The hope was clearly that a dynamic middle-class community, finding such a fate intolerable, would convert to Islam to escape it. The Baha'is were to be akin to members of India's lowest castes in the old days – that is,

permanently relegated to the status of low-ranking outsiders. Yet the Gulpaygani document recognized them as Iranians of a bizarre sort, not as Muslim Iranians or *dhimmi* Iranians, but still as Iranians. It made a place for them in the body public, however abject, that Khomeini's divide between Muslims and heretics could not have abided. As the Iranian nation reemerged in the 1990s within the discourse of Islamic republicanism, the Baha'is were at least somewhat renationalized. However, only in relation to the dire pogroms of the 1980s was their position much improved.

The two approaches – that of seeing the Baha'is as dangerous heretics who must be destroyed and that of seeing them as outcasts with Iranian citizenship who merely had to be curbed – coexisted into the late 1990s. Each of these views remained prominent in certain institutional settings. Because Rafsanjani and the pragmatic conservatives, along with Khatami's later reformers, wanted World Bank loans and international recognition, they had reason to put the Baha'i issue on the back burner. By comparison, the radical right-wing populists continued to seek political power within the country by scapegoating the Baha'is. Many of the specific legal cases initiated against Baha'is and members of other religious minorities appear to originate with local, provincial courts controlled by radical right-wing populists, who increasingly lost power in the realm of elective government and were therefore left with the judiciary as their primary means of influencing society. In some instances, the judgments of the provincial courts have been overturned by the Supreme Court despite its dominance by figures such as Yazdi, a radical right-wing populist himself. In other instances, the Supreme Court has called for the death sentence, but the executive branch, controlled first by conservative theocrats and after 1997 increasingly by liberal theocrats, has declined actually to implement it, leaving the accused (mainly those convicted of being apostates from Islam) on death row for long periods of time. Frustration over their frequent inability to secure actual executions of those charged in the provincial courts appears to have encouraged the radical theocrats to resort to death squads and vigilante tactics, resulting in the murders of several prominent evangelical pastors, Sunni activists, and Baha'is.

It is not unusual for nationalism to be construed so as to exclude some communities from the nation despite their long-standing residence on national territory. As Partha Chatterjee has noted, the more



virulent forms of Hindu nationalism in India define Indian Muslims as foreign invaders – that is, essentially as illegal aliens – even though most are converts from Hinduism and their families have lived in what is now India for centuries if not millennia. White Protestant nationalism in the United States has sought to exclude Catholics and blacks and Jews from the American nation. The Nazis defined German Jews not as fellow Germans but as a pollution of German purity. The Iranian Muslim nationalism of Khomeini's successors can therefore be identified as a form of this sort of exclusionary nationalism. As Eliz Sanasarian notes, "This was the unique by-product of the theocratic system. The 'aqaliat' [religious minority] was 'the other,' 'the marginal,' 'the separate from us'; it was an institutionalized 'otherness' which was disturbing and different." She adds, "Before 1979, everyone was an 'Irani' albeit in pretense; after the Revolution, Irani was replaced by aqaliat, Bahai and Sunni."<sup>64</sup> All nations comprise such religious and ethnic communities, but, as Hobsbawm has argued,<sup>65</sup> civic nations make a place for them as constituents of the nation, whereas exclusionary nations achieve their unity precisely by singling out the unabsorbable minority within as a cultural and political fifth column. Islamically based nationalisms, as Ofra Bengio and Gabriel Ben-Dor argued after Bernard Lewis,<sup>66</sup> tend to be exclusionary in this way. Chatterjee has also shown that religious nationalisms, such as those of the Rashtrya Swayamsevak Sangh in India and Khomeinism in Iran, are no less "modern" than secular nationalism. Religious nationalism insists on a singular majoritarian source of identity, such that India must be Hindu and Iran Shi'ite. "Islam here is either the history of foreign conquest or a domesticated element of everyday popular life," Chatterjee observes. "None of these answers, however, can admit that the Indian nation as a whole might have a claim on the historical legacy of Islam."<sup>67</sup> A pluralist conception of the nation, which takes pride in its variegated strands and gives civil equality to all citizens, is the only sort of nationalism that can hope to avoid the virulent pathologies witnessed in the twentieth century. Iranians would have to admit that they might have a claim on the historical legacy of the Baha'i faith and vice versa. Khatami and his reforming supporters often speak as though they seek to make Iran a civic nation. Yet they or their successors cannot hope to do so as long as thousands of Iranians remain under the sentence of civil death.

## NOTES

- 1 See Juan Cole, "The Modernity of Theocracy."
- 2 For a discussion of Baha'i theocrats, see Juan Cole, "Fundamentalism in the Contemporary U.S. Baha'i Community."
- 3 Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalisms since 1780*.
- 4 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.
- 5 Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*.
- 6 Ofra Bengio and Gabriel Ben-Dor, *Minorities and the State in the Arab World*, 10–11, and on Sudan, chapter 4. On Sudan, see also Moshe Ma'oz, *Middle Eastern Minorities*, 91–100.
- 7 Neil MacMaster, *Racism in Europe: 1870–2000*.
- 8 Juan Cole, "Marking Boundaries, Marking Time: The Iranian Past and the Construction of the Self by Qajar Thinkers"; see also Mostafa Vaziri, *Iran as Imagined Nation*, although this source lays too much emphasis on Europeans and European influences and slights the contribution of Iranians themselves to their own nationalist thought.
- 9 Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844–1850*.
- 10 Peter Smith, "A Note on Babi and Baha'i Numbers in Iran," suffers from simply repeating outsiders' guesses, and Smith was unaware of the 1921 census. He was also unaware that only 90,000 Baha'is were registered in Iran in the late 1970s.
- 11 Juan Cole, *Modernity and the Millennium: The Genesis of the Baha'i Faith in the 19th Century Middle East*; and "Millennialism in Modern Iranian History."
- 12 The results of the census, ordered by then leader Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, who headed the religion from 1921 to 1957, and carried out by his aunt Bahiyyih Khanum in the early 1920s, were never published presumably because they became an increasing embarrassment as the twentieth century progressed and the numbers of Iranian Baha'is shrank dramatically. A prominent US academic discovered the surprisingly large results in the Haifa Baha'i archives and reported them to a number of Baha'i academics, but I am constrained by considerations of confidentiality from divulging more at this point.
- 13 Baha'u'llah, *Majmu'ih-'i az alvah-i Jamal-i Aqdas-i Abha kih ba'd az Kitab-i Aqdas Nazil Shudih*, 46, 47–8; translation published as *Tablets of Baha'u'llah Revealed after the Kitab-i Aqdas*, 84, 85.
- 14 'Abdu'l-Baha 'Abbas, *Risalih-'i Madaniyyih*, 8–9; translated by Marzieh Gail, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, 6–7.
- 15 *Ibid.*

- 16 E.G. Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905–1909*, 424.
- 17 For the secular nationalist critique, see Ahmad Kasravi, *Bahayigari*; on anti-Baha'ism and the Islamists, see Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, "Baha'isiti va Islamgarayi dar Iran."
- 18 A.W. Samii, "Falsafi, Kashani and the Baha'is"; Shahrough Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran*, 77–80; and Tavakoli-Targhi, "Baha'isiti va Islamgarayi dar Iran."
- 19 Richard Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran*, 87–9.
- 20 On the Baha'is under Khomeini, see Eliz Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran*, 114–23; Firuz Kazemzadeh, "Baha'is in Iran: Twenty Years of Repression"; and the important memoir by Olya Roohizadegan, *Olya's Story: A Survivor's Dramatic Account of the Persecution of Baha'is in Revolutionary Iran*. For a general overview of jailings and torture in Khomeinist Iran, see Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran*.
- 21 Qaza'i, quoted in Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran*, 117.
- 22 Quoted in *ibid.*, 121.
- 23 European Parliament, "Resolution on Iran," 4 April 1990.
- 24 US State Department, "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1989," 1401.
- 25 See the Gulf2000 news archive at <http://wwws/data/cu/sipa/GULF2000/chronology/data/90-03.html>, which in part summarizes an article published in the *New York Times* on 19 November 1989. See also Amnesty International, *Country Reports for 1995: Iran*.
- 26 Mehri Samandari Jensen, "Religion and Family Planning in Contemporary Iran."
- 27 "U.S. Baha'is Ask Iran's President: Does His Call for Religion and Liberty Apply to Baha'is?" PR Newswire, 16 January 1998.
- 28 On the changes brought about during the early Rafsanjani presidency, see Bahman Bakhtiari, *Parliamentary Politics in Revolutionary Iran*, 184–216.
- 29 US State Department, "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1989," 1400.
- 30 Amnesty International, *Country Reports for 1997: Iran*.
- 31 US State Department, "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1988," 1349.
- 32 Amnesty International, *Country Reports for 1995: Iran*.
- 33 "Bahai Gets Death for Being Infidel," *Diplomat Recorder*, Arab Press Service Organization, 17 February 1996.
- 34 US State Department, "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1996."

- 35 "Baha'is Pray for their Homeland," *Chicago Tribune*, 4 April 1997.
- 36 US State Department, "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1993," 1180.
- 37 Galindo Pohl, quoted in Reza Afshari, *Human Rights in Iran*, 124.
- 38 See Thomas W. Laqueur, "Memory and Naming in the Great War"; and "Cemeteries, Religion, and the Culture of Capitalism."
- 39 Afshari, *Human Rights in Iran*, 122.
- 40 "1991 Memorandum from the Iranian Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council on 'the Baha'i Question,'" in Baha'i International Community, *The Baha'i Question*, 38–9. On this issue, see also the Associated Press article of 23 February 1993, available in the Gulf2000 news archive at <http://wwws/data/cu/sipa/GULF2000/chronology/data/90-03.html>.
- 41 Houshang Amir Ahmadi, "Secular Nationalism."
- 42 "Rafsanjani Elected with Moderate Support," 13 June 1993, ABC-CLIO; "Middle East and North Africa: Iran, Country Risk Guide," IBC International, September 1994; "Regional Implications of Khatami Election Viewed," *al-Wasat* (London), 17 December 1997, trans. FBIS, insert date 19 December 1997, article ID drneso9081997001381.
- 43 On this period, see Bakhtiari, *Parliamentary Politics*, 217–34.
- 44 United Nations, "Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran," 26.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 25–6.
- 46 Amnesty International, *Country Reports for 1995: Iran*. The text says that these two were arrested in Gohardasht, but this is actually the name of the prison in which they were detained; other reports say that they were arrested in Karaj, a town near Tehran.
- 47 "Death Sentences for the Bahai," editorial, *New York Times*, 31 December 1993.
- 48 Amnesty International, "Dhabihullah Mahrami: Prisoner of Conscience," footnote 10.
- 49 *Ibid.*, Appendix A.
- 50 *Ibid.*
- 51 Amnesty International, "AI Report 1997: Iran."
- 52 Amnesty International, "Worldwide Appeals: Iran."
- 53 "Bahai Faith Linked with Espionage," *Diplomatic Recorder*, Arab Press Service, 18 May 1996.
- 54 "German Deputy Urges Iran to Lift Death Sentences," Reuters, 3 February 1997.
- 55 "Iran Confirms Death Penalty on Two Bahai for Spying," Agence France Presse, 24 February 1997.

- 56 "Iran: BBC's 'Propaganda' on Zoroastrian Congress Criticized," Persian article from Mashad, Khurasan, dated 16 June 1996, FBIS, daily report, insert date 10 July 1996, Near East and South Asia, document number FBIS-NES-96-132.
- 57 "Rafsanjani Addresses Participants in Zoroastrian Conference," Tehran IRIB Television First Program Network in Persian, 0930 GMT, 22 June 1996, FBIS, daily report, South Asia, Iran, insert date 26 June 1996, article ID drnes123\_s\_96014.
- 58 "Iran: BBC's 'Propaganda' on Zoroastrian Congress Criticized."
- 59 "Iran: Zoroastrian Deputy: Minorities Free to Practice Rituals," Tehran IRNA in English, 1405 GMT, 3 February 1997, FBIS, daily report, South Asia, insert date 6 February 1997, article ID drnes024\_s\_97059, document number FBIS-NES-97-024.
- 60 "French Bahais Fear More Hangings in Iran," Reuters, Paris, 28 July 1998. See also the US Baha'i community's news release at <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jrcole/bahai/hrbh798.htm>; and Afshari, *Human Rights in Iran*, 122.
- 61 See "Iran's Crimes at Home," *Washington Post*, 25 October 1998; Burton Bollag, "36 Professors Arrested in Iranian Crackdown on Underground Baha'i University," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 13 November 1998; and materials at <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jrcole/bahai/hrbh1098.htm>.
- 62 Afshari, *Human Rights in Iran*, 125-6.
- 63 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "Iran Report," vol. 2, no. 25, 21 June 1999, <http://www.rferl.org/bd/ir/index.html>.
- 64 Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran*, 154.
- 65 Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalisms*.
- 66 Bengio and Ben-Dor, *Minorities and the State*.
- 67 Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, 113.