

The Constitutional Movement and the Baha'is of Iran: The Creation of an 'Enemy Within'

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Abstract

This article looks at the role of the Baha'is in the Constitutional Revolution of Iran, 1906–1911. It propounds three major theses. First, that when the royalists and anti-constitutionalist clerics accused the Constitutionalists of being “Babis”, it was the Baha'i community that they were referring to rather than the Azali Babis. Second, that the Baha'is had a complex relationship with the Constitutionalist Movement, sometimes supporting it and sometimes abstaining from involvement in politics, but that in any case, the impact of the Baha'is on the reformers and on the Revolution has been underestimated by most writers. Third, that, despite their closeness in terms of ideas about social reform, the enmity of the Azalis and clerics caused the Baha'is to be excluded from the reform legislation resulting from the Constitutional Revolution and effectively to be excluded from Iranian society. It resulted in the creation of an “enemy within”. Some of the consequences of this both for the Baha'is and for Iran are discussed.

Jump to section

- [Who Were 'the Babis'?](#)
- [The Azali Babi Role in the Constitutional Revolution](#)
- [The Role of the Baha'is in the Emergence of the Constitutional Revolution](#)
- [The Role of the Baha'is in the Constitutional Revolution](#)
- [The Creation of an 'Enemy Within'](#)
- [The Results of the Constitutional Revolution](#)

This article looks at the role of the Baha'is in the Constitutional Revolution of Iran, 1906–1911. It propounds three major theses. First, that when the royalists and anti-constitutionalist clerics accused the Constitutionalists of being “Babis”, it was the Baha'i community that they were referring to rather than the Azali Babis. Second, that the Baha'is had a complex relationship with the Constitutionalist Movement, sometimes supporting it and sometimes abstaining from involvement in politics, but that

¹ This paper was presented at the conference ‘The Iranian Constitutional Revolution 1906–1911’, Oxford, 30 July–2 August 2006. The author is grateful to Dr Houshang Chehabi, Dr Peter Smith, Sen McGlinn, Ismael Velasco and Peter Terry for their helpful comments on this article.

in any case, the impact of the Baha'is on the reformers and on the Revolution has been underestimated by most writers. Third, that, despite their closeness in terms of ideas about social reform, the enmity of the Azalis and clerics caused the Baha'is to be excluded from the reform legislation resulting from the Constitutional Revolution and effectively to be excluded from Iranian society. It resulted in the creation of an "enemy within". Some of the consequences of this both for the Baha'is and for Iran are discussed.

Several books have appeared in recent years on the Constitutional Revolution in Iran.¹ One area that has been largely neglected in these studies, however, is the role of the Baha'i community. Janet Afary has noted the role of two Baha'is, Shaykh al-Ra'is (c.1848–1918) and Tayirih Khanum (c.1872–1911), in the discourse in this period on constitutionalism and the modernisation of Iran.² Mangol Bayat, while paying particular attention to the large role played by the Azali Babis in the Constitutional Revolution itself, says very little about the Baha'is, apart from noting Shaykh al-Ra'is's role.³ Most writers, including Martin and Bayat, content themselves with saying that the Baha'is played a 'quietist' or 'apolitical' role in the Revolution.⁴ A few have gone further and perpetuated the idea that the Baha'is supported Muhammad 'Ali Shah and the anti-constitutionalists.⁵ Authors from Iran have either remained silent on the Baha'is or, perhaps mindful of their positions and careers, have repeated unproved conspiracy theories and forged evidence.⁶

Who Were 'the Babis'?

¹ See in particular: Vanessa Martin, *Islam and Modernism: the Iranian Revolution of 1906*, (London: I B Tauris, 1989); Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy & the Origins of Feminism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Mangol Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution: Shi'ism and the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1909* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). In Persian, there have been a number of offerings. Those of particular interest include: Masha'ullah Ajudani, *Mashrutih-yi Irani* (Tehran: Nashr Akhtaran, 1382/2003) and Husayn Abadiyan, *Buhran-i Mashrutiyat dar Iran* (Tehran: Mu'assisih Motali'at va Pazhuhish-ha Siyasi, 1383/2004). I am grateful to Dr Houshang Chehabi, Dr Peter Smith, Sen McGlinn, Ismael Velasco and Peter Terry for their helpful comments on this paper.

² Afary, *Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, pp. 47-8, 197-9; for more on Shaykh al-Ra'is, see Juan Cole, 'Autobiography and Silence: The Early Career of Shaykh al-Ra'is Qājār', in Christoph Bürgel and Isabel Schayani (eds.), *Iran im 19. Jahrhundert und die Entstehung der Baha'i Religion* (Hildesheim: George Olms, 1998), pp. 91-126 and idem, 'The Provincial Politics of Heresy and Reform in Qajar Iran: Shaykh al-Rais in Shiraz, 1895-1902', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 22, nos. 1-2 (2002), pp. 119-26. For more on Tayirih Khanum, see Tayirih, 'Namih-ha va Nivishtih-ha va Ash'ar', *Nimih-ye Digar*, 2nd series, no. 3 (Winter 1375/1996), pp. 146-195. The most detailed study of the Baha'is in the period of the Constitutional Revolution is Mina Yazdani, *Awza '-yi Ijtima'i-yi Iran dar Ahd Qajar az Khilal Athar Mubarakih-yi Baha'i* (Hamilton, Ont.: Association for Baha'i Studies in Persian, 2003), pp. 255-316. Juan Cole, *Modernity and Millennium: the genesis of the Baha'i Faith in the Nineteenth-Century Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) deals mainly with an earlier period and has little about the Constitutional Revolution. See also Kavian Milani, 'Baha'i discourses on the Constitutional Revolution', in Dominic Parviz Brookshaw and Seena B. Fazel (eds.), *The Baha'is of Iran*, (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 141-155

³ Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution*, pp. 68-9.

⁴ Martin, *Islam and Modernism*, p. 22; Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution*, p. 54.

⁵ See, for example, Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-modernism, 1926–1979* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 70n; Afary, *Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, p. 47; and Hamid Dabashi, 'The End of Islamic Ideology', *Social Research*, 67(2) (2000), pp. 475–518.

⁶ For an example of a book that remains completely silent on Azalis and Baha'is, see Ajudani, *Mashrutih-yi Irani*; for an example of a book that creates and perpetuates erroneous material, see Abadiyan, *Buhran-i Mashrutiyat*, see esp. pp. 208-228.

In the years of the Constitutional Revolution itself, the constitutionalists were routinely identified as ‘Babis’ by their opponents. During the late nineteenth century, an image of the Babis as heretics and disrupters of social stability had been created and an atmosphere of fear and suspicion towards them generated. It was very convenient for the Shah and the royalist forces that the reformers could be easily identified in the public mind with the ‘Babis’ and thus the negative image of the latter could be transferred to the former. Clerics who were allied to the court, such as Shaykh Fazlullah Nuri (1843–1909), assisted the court by providing the arguments and rhetoric for this identification and he and others, such as Sayyid ‘Ali Yazdi, regularly attacked the ‘Babis’ in their sermons against the Constitution.⁷ Nuri accused the ‘Babis’ of being the principal villains in the origination and promulgation of the Constitution in pamphlets (*lavāyih*) distributed from printing presses under his control.⁸ Outside Tehran, also, anti-constitutionalist ‘*ulama*’ attacked the Baha'i community as well as accusing the secular constitutionalists of being ‘Babis’.⁹

It therefore became part of the rhetoric of the royalist forces to label all of the constitutionalists ‘Babis’. In the first stages of the Revolution in December 1905, when the reformers tried to gain a foothold in the Shah Mosque, Sayyid Abul-Qasim the Imam-Jum‘ih of Tehran shouted down Sayyid Jamal Va‘iz as he was preaching, accusing him of being a ‘Babi’ and causing the reformers to withdraw to refuge in the shrine of Shah ‘Abdul-‘Azim.¹⁰ In June 1906, to put pressure on the reformers, the government arrested several of them, accused them of being ‘Babis’ and exiled them to Kalat.¹¹ When Shu‘a‘ al-Saltanih, acting for the reactionary Prime Minister ‘Ayn al-Dawlih, wanted to sow division among the constitutionalist ‘*ulama*’ who had taken refuge at Qumm, he accused them of having fallen victim to a Babi-inspired plot.¹² In Tabriz in 1906–1908, the ‘*ulama*’, wishing to discredit the constitutionalist association (*anjuman*) there, accused it of being a Babi agency and all constitutionalists of being ‘Babis’.¹³ And then when Tabriz was besieged, the Royalist forces were told by their commanders that the constitutionalists of Tabriz were all ‘Babis’:

One prisoner was taken, and from him confirmation was received of the rumour that the Royalist officers had circulated amongst their men the disgusting calumny that the inhabitants of Tabriz had all turned Babis—i.e., heretics to Islam,—so that fighting against them might be looked on

⁷ Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution*, p. 211.

⁸ Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution*, pp. 186-7.

⁹ In Sari, for example, Shaykh Ghulam-‘Ali Mujtahid and in Barfurush, Shaykh Salman Sayf al-Islam, both opposed the Constitution and persecuted the Baha'is. See Moojan Momen, ‘The Baha'is and the Constitutional Revolution: The Case of Sari, Mazandaran, 1906–1913’, *Iranian Studies*, 41(3) (2008), pp. 343–363; Mohammad Ali Kazembeyki, *Society, Politics and Economics in Māzandarān, Iran, 1848–1914* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), pp. 174–175; Asadullah Fazil Mazandarani, *Tarikh Zuhur al-Haqq* (Tehran: Mu'assisih Melli Matbu‘at Amri, 132 B.E./1975), vol. 8, part 2, pp. 822–824. Other conservative ‘*ulama*’ who came out against the Constitution and attacked the Baha'is included Mulla Qurban-‘Ali in Zanjan, Haji Mirza Husayn in Nishapur, Haji Aqa Muhsin in Irak (Sultanabad), Mirza Hasan Mujtahid in Tabriz and Sayyid Kazim Yazdi in Najaf. See Mahdi Ansari, *Shaykh Fazlullah Nuri va Mashrutiiyyat* (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1369/1990), p. 193; Mahdi Malikzadih, *Tarikh Inqilab Mashrutiiyyat Iran* (Tehran: Kitabkhanih Suqrat, 1328/1949) (7 vols), vol. 3, pp. 29–31. The interchange of correspondence and telegrams between the senior ‘*ulama*’ of Mazandaran and the Shah and Nuri in Tehran contains several references to the Babis and Baha'is through the use of such terms as ‘*mazhab-i bātilih*’ and ‘*tā'ifih-yi dālih*’. See Isma‘il Mahjuri, *Tarikh-i Mazandaran* (Sari: Athar, 1345/1966), vol. 2, pp. 235–242, esp. 236 and 238.

¹⁰ Ibrahim Safa'i, *Rahbaran Mashrutih*, vol. 1 (Tehran: Intisharat Javidan, 1362/1983), pp. 322-3; Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution*, p. 111.

¹¹ Muhammad Mahdi Sharif Kashani, *Vaqi‘at Ittefaqiiyyih dar Ruzigar* (3 vols., Tehran: Nashr Tarikh Iran, 1362/1983), vol. 1, p. 64; Nazim al-Islam Kirmani, *Tarikh Bidari Iraniyan* (3 vols in 1, [Tehran]: Bunyad Farhang Iran, 1346/1967), vol. 1, p.188.

¹² Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution*, p. 132, 236.

¹³ Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution*, p. 151.

as a religious duty. After the victory this unfortunate was hustled into the presence of Sattar Khan [the Constitutionalist leader] ... The prisoner, in the centre of the circle gyrated on his axis, salammng abjectly to each of his captors and babbling, 'I too am a Babi, gentlemen; I too am a Babi.'¹⁴

Later, when Muhammad 'Ali Shah staged his coup against the Constitution in June 1908, he stated that his aim was to wage war against the 'Babis' and he later refused to negotiate with the Tabriz constitutionalists until the 'Babis and ruffians' had been punished.¹⁵ So strong was this identification of the constitutionalists with the Babis at all levels of society that when the two eminent clerics who supported the Revolution in Tehran—Bihbihani and Tabataba'i—were being exiled to Iraq, the people along the route would malign them saying: 'Cursed be the Babis.'¹⁶

Thus, the first questions to be asked are: what did it mean when the anti-constitutionalist figures attacked the constitutionalists as 'Babis'? With whom were they identifying the constitutionalists in these attacks? These questions will be examined by looking at the two main groups who were at this time both being described by the generality of Iranians as 'Babis': the Azali Babis and the Baha'is.

The Azali Babi Role in the Constitutional Revolution

When the Baha'i religion emerged from the Babi movement in the 1860s under the leadership of Baha'u'llah, there were a small number (probably less than 5 per cent) who rejected him and continued to follow the Babi leader Mirza Yahya Azal, thus becoming known as the Azalis. Despite their small numbers in absolute terms, they formed a large proportion of the leading figures in the reform and constitutionalist movement as it grew in the late 1890s and early 1900s. Indeed, as Bayat has described, it can be said that it was the Azalis who were the main engines driving forward the Constitutional Revolution. They created the coalition of masthead figures who had the credibility to lead the Revolution (see below), formed the *anjumans* (associations) that organised the movement, published the *shabnamih*s (propaganda leaflets distributed at night) and newspapers that created the agenda for it and provided the oratory that generated the public support for it.¹⁷ Given this important role played by the Azalis movement, it may be imagined that it was the Azalis to whom reference was being made when the constitutionalists were described as 'Babis'.

The concealment of their beliefs, their wearing of clerical garb, their assertions of upholding Islam, their constant manipulation and switching of roles has led historians such as Bayat to classify the Azalis as freethinkers and atheists who cynically used religion as it suited them.¹⁸ There is certainly evidence for this in their actions. But given that they concealed their real opinions, it is

¹⁴ Albert Wratislaw, *A Consul in the East* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1924), p. 246; this story is confirmed in Safa'i (*Rahbaran Mashrutih*, vol. 1, p. 393n.), who expresses surprise that a very orthodox and pious Shi'i like Sattar Khan could have been considered a Babi.

¹⁵ Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution*, pp. 232, 240.

¹⁶ Safa'i, *Rahbaran Mashrutih*, vol. 1, p. 198.

¹⁷ Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution*, see esp. pp. 53-75, 110, 120, 152, 205. Although Bayat has given a detailed description of the role of the Azalis in the Constitutional Revolution, the full impact of her work is somewhat diluted by the fact that she often refers to these individuals as 'religious dissidents' rather than as Azalis.

¹⁸ Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution*, pp. 22, 54.

impossible to know what their true motivations were. The Baha'i historian of the constitutional movement, Haj Aqa Muhammad 'Alaqihband, says that the Azali involvement in the Constitutional Revolution was duplicitous in that their real aim was to completely overthrow the Qajar monarchy and place Azal himself on the throne of Iran.¹⁹ Evidence for 'Alaqihband's assertion comes from the Azali book *Hasht Bihisht* which prophesies that the Qajar dynasty would be overthrown and a descendant of Azal placed upon the throne²⁰ and from the statement of one Azali, Sayyid Jamal ad-Din Va'iz, to another, Nazim al-Islam, regarding their cynical use of the religiosity of the people to achieve their purpose: 'our goal must be attained through such actions and such people and such designs; any sacred cause had to be achieved through profane means.'²¹

The Azali enmity towards the Baha'is stemmed from their belief that Baha'u'llah had usurped the position of their leader Azal. There was a long history of Azalis attacking the Baha'is either overtly or covertly. Thus, for example, the two major Azali figures of the previous generation, Shaykh Ahmad Ruhi and Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani, who had collaborated with Sayyid Jamal al-Din Asadabadi ('Afghani') in the production of the leading reformist newspaper *Akhtar* from Istanbul, had together produced an Azali anti-Baha'i polemic, the *Hasht Bihisht*.²² One must also ask the question that if the involvement of the Azalis in the reform movement was purely political and had no other aim, why were they so inimical to the Baha'is (as described below), who were potentially their allies in the reform of Iran? Even years later when the Azali leader Yahya Dawlatabadi was writing his memoirs, he could not resist implicating the Baha'is in conspiracy theories that he must have known were false.²³ In all, while it must be conceded that many of those identified as Azalis during the Constitutional Revolution probably had no religious convictions that drove their activities, they nevertheless retained a profound hatred for the Baha'is and acted against them whenever they could.

The Role of the Baha'is in the Emergence of Constitutionalism

During the 1890s and 1900s, as the pressure for reform was building in the country and the constitutional movement was getting under way, it was not just from Europe that the reformists were getting their inspiration and ideas. There was a native source for these ideas that was, at this time, being discussed widely. As will be demonstrated shortly, the Baha'i teachings were gaining widespread interest and most of the ideas later to be part of the agenda of the constitutionalist reformers were already present in these teachings. Both Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha were among the first of those writing in Persian to call for social reform and democracy. Thus, at a time in the 1870s–1890s when much of Europe was subject to authoritarian regimes and most Iranian secular reformers like Malkam Khan were only suggesting that the shah should rule with the help of an appointed

¹⁹ 'Alaqihband, *Tarikh Mashrutiiyyat* (manuscript in Afnan Library), pp. 43, 428-9; 'Alaqihband attributes this idea particularly to Hamid al-Mulk, an Azali who was killed fighting Na'ib Husayn Kashani in about 1910.

²⁰ [Shaykh Ahmad Ruhi and Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani], *Hasht Bihisht* ([Tehran], n.d.), p. 161.

²¹ Nazim al-Islam Kirmani, *Tarikh-i Bidari-yi Iraniyan*, vol. 3 ([Tehran]: Bunyad Farhang Iran, 1346/1967), p. 243; Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution*, p. 128.

²² Mangol Bayat, *Mysticism and Dissent: Socioreligious thought in Qajar Iran* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1982), pp. 140-42, 157-61; Hasan M. Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahā'ī Faith* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1970), pp. 18-28

²³ See for example Yahya Dawlatabadi, *Hayat-i Yahya*, vol. 1 (Tehran: Ibn Sina, 1st edition, n.d.), pp. 315-8, containing accusations about the Baha'is being backed by the Russians and English that Yahya Dawlatabadi must have known were false.

consultative council,²⁴ Baha'u'llah writing in the *Kitab Aqdas* (completed 1873) looks forward to the 'reins of power' in Tehran falling 'into the hands of the people'²⁵ and, writing in 1891, urges elected parliaments along the lines of Britain's,²⁶ while 'Abdu'l-Baha in his seminal work of 1875, *Kitab-i Asrar-i Ghaybiyyih li Asbab al-Madaniyyih* (translated as *The Secret of Divine Civilization*), is advocating that the representatives on these councils and consultative assemblies should be elected by the people.²⁷ Also in this work, 'Abdu'l-Baha was calling for the extension throughout the country of education, which should be according to modern curricula, including arts and sciences, a uniform code of law, equality before the law, security of property, ridding the government bureaucracy of corruption and a systematisation of the chaotic court procedures in Iran. Writing in 1886, 'Abdu'l-Baha states that the government should ensure the individual's freedom of conscience (*āzādigī-yi vujdān*).²⁸ During the 1880s, Baha'u'llah was also writing of such issues as the importance of studying the modern arts and sciences, the necessity of raising the social role of women, the need for universal education (especially for girls and especially in the arts and modern sciences), the importance of justice and the need to devote particular attention to agriculture. Many of these issues did not appear in the writings of most of the secular reformers until later.

Unlike most of the Iranian reformers, and indeed many Middle Eastern modernisers, 'Abdu'l-Baha does not encourage Iranians to model themselves on Europe. He does not see the future of Iran as being best served by a slavish adoption and mimicry of European attitudes and modes of government. While allowing that European science and social administration have certain lessons for the Middle East, he strongly criticises Europe in some respects. He condemns European society as being essentially a superficial materialistic culture that is morally bankrupt. He is very emphatic that what is needed is not an overlay of European ideas and models onto the contemporary Iranian society, but rather a moral and spiritual regeneration of Iran which will then become a suitable substrate for concepts of constitutionalism and social reform.²⁹

Perhaps even more important than priority in bringing these matters into public debate in Iran was the fact that the Baha'is were introducing ideas in a native and culturally more sympathetic manner than the secular reformers. As Guity Nashat has commented in relation to the earlier generation of secular reformers, while the ideas they introduced and even the words they used were not intelligible to most Iranians, the writings of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha were built up and developed from existing native concepts and vocabulary, resulting in a discourse that was more familiar, better understood and hence more easily accepted.³⁰

²⁴ See for example Malkam Khan, *Kitabchih-yi Ghaybi*, in *Majmu'ih-yi Athar-i Mirza Malkam Khan* (Tehran: Kitabkhanih-yi Danish, 1327/1948), pp. 15-16. See also Shaul Bakhash, *Iran: Monarchy, Bureacracy & Reform under the Qajars: 1858-1896* (Oxford: Middle East Centre, 1978), pp. 7-11, 96-98.

²⁵ Baha'u'llah, *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1992), v. 93, p. 54.

²⁶ In the *Lawh@-i Duniyā*, see Baha'u'llah, *Tablets of Bahā'u'llāh revealed after the Kitāb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1978), p. 93.

²⁷ *Risalih Madaniyyih* (2nd ed., Bombay, 1892 with the title: *Kitab-i Asrar-i Ghaybiyyih li Asbab al-Madaniyyah*), pp. 30-31; trans. by Marzieh Gail as *Secret of Divine Civilisation* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1957), p. 24.

²⁸ ['Abdu'l-Baha], *A Traveller's Narrative written to illustrate the Episode of the Bāb* (ed. and trans. Edward G. Browne, 2 vols., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891), vol. 1, p. 193 (trans. vol. 2, p. 158); see also Juan Cole, *Modernity*, pp. 36-8.

²⁹ For a more detailed discussion of these concepts in the writings of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, see Moojan Momen, 'The Baha'i Influence on the Reform Movements of the Islamic World in the 1860s and 1870s' *Baha'i Studies Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 2 (Sept 1983), pp. 47-65 and Juan R. I. Cole, *Modernity*, esp. pp. 45-6, 81-91, 131-2, 163-87.

³⁰ Guity Nashat, *The Origins of Modern Reform in Iran, 1870-80* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), pp. 162-3.

There is, moreover, much evidence that Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha's writings and views were well known to the leading Iranian secular reformers. It has been suggested that Sayyid Jamal al-Din Asadabadi ('al-Afghani') was in contact with Baha'u'llah in Baghdad in the 1850s.³¹ Certainly he was very familiar with the movement and provided the information on this subject that went into Butrus al-Bustani's Arabic Encyclopaedia.³² He appears to have wanted to remain in contact with the Baha'i leaders in 'Akka since he sent them copies of his newspaper, '*Urwat al-Wuthqa*, from Paris in the 1880s.³³ It would appear from Asadabadi's writings that he felt some antipathy towards the Baha'is, whom he saw as potentially breaking up the unity of the Islamic world, therefore his continued contacts may well have been because he found the ideas emanating from this source useful to him in formulating his own views.³⁴ The evidence for Mirza Malkam Khan's close association with the Baha'is is much stronger. Malkam Khan was exiled from Iran to Baghdad in 1861 and came into contact with Baha'u'llah there³⁵ before his further exile in April 1862 to Istanbul. Both at this time and earlier in Tehran, Malkam Khan had had such close contact with the Babis that when Ernest Renan met him in Istanbul in June 1865, Malkam Khan represented himself as being knowledgeable about Babis and so we find Renan in 1866 encouraging Malkam Khan to write on the subject.³⁶ The reformist Prime Minister Mirza Husayn Khan Mushir al-Dawlih Sipahsalar (1827–1881, Prime Minister 1871–1873), while he was the Iranian Minister at the Sublime Porte, had been instrumental in bringing about the various stages of Baha'u'llah's exile from Baghdad to Istanbul, to Edirne and finally to 'Akka, and he had used all his influence to restrict the activities of the Baha'is. But it is reported that in 1870, after reading the petitions addressed to Baha'u'llah that had been confiscated when Baha'u'llah's courier was arrested in Aleppo, he altered his attitude and, from that time on, he is reported to have been sympathetic.³⁷ Certainly there were no persecutions of the Baha'is during the time he was Prime Minister. One of his close relatives, Mirza Muhammad 'Ali Kadkhuda Qazvini, was a Baha'i³⁸ and this may have been one way in which information about the Baha'is reached Mushir al-Dawlih, but it may also have come from Malkam Khan with whom he was closely associated both in Istanbul and Tehran.

³¹ Nikki Keddie, *Sayyid Jamal al-Din 'al-Afghani'* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 20-22.

³² *Da'irat al-Ma'arif* (Beirut, 1881), Vol. 5, s.v. 'Babis'; see also Keddie, *Afghani*, p. 20n.

³³ See Baha'u'llah's reference to this in Lawh@-i Donyā, *Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, p. 95.

³⁴ His opposition is confirmed by Baha'u'llah in Lawh@-i Donyā (*Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, pp. 94-5).

There is some evidence of Afghani having been influenced by Baha'i teachings in the fact that he is said to have considered Islam, Judaism and Christianity to be in perfect agreement, see Elie Kedourie, *Afghani and 'Abduh* (London: Cass, 1966), p. 15.

³⁵ Hasan M. Balyuzi, *Baha'u'llah, King of Glory* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1980), pp. 151-153.

³⁶ Ernest Renan, *Oeuvres Completes*, vol. 10 (ed. H. Paichari, Paris, n.d.), p. 453. In 1891, Rukn al-Dawlih, then governor of Khurasan, reported that Mirza Malkam Khan had travelled to Akka and met with Baha'u'llah and that they were planning something together; Ibrahim Safa'i, *Panjah Namih-yi Tarikhi* (Tehran: Intisharat Babak, 2535 Shahanshahi/1976), pp. 120-21. This report would appear false in that it is unlikely that a person as prominent as Malkam Khan could have done this without some report of it appearing in Baha'i sources. It is also inherently unlikely as for the whole of this year, Malkam Khan was single-handedly producing the *Qanun* newspaper in London monthly and he could scarcely have done this and also undertaken a journey to Akka; see Hamid Algar, *Mirza Malkum Khan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 192. A little further on in the report Rukn al-Dawlih amends his initial statement to say that either Malkam Khan himself went or he sent 'someone like himself'. It may be that this report is a reference to the visit to Akka of Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani (Balyuzi, *Baha'u'llah*, p. 385, 394-5) who was in close touch with Malkam Khan (Hamid Algar, *Mirza Malkum Khan*, pp. 212-227; Ajudani, *Mashrutih*, pp. 329-30).

³⁷ See Haji Mirza Haydar 'Ali, trans. in Balyuzi, *Baha'u'llah*, pp. 441-4.

³⁸ Shaykh Kazim Samandar, *Tarikh Samandar* (Tehran: Mu'assisih Milli Matbu'at Amri, 131 B.E./1974), pp. 268–270.

Coming on to the period immediately before and during the Constitutional Revolution (i.e. 1895–1909), the Baha'is did not just have the above well-established discourse on social reform and constitutionalism but they were instituting these social reforms in their own community, which extended not only throughout the main cities of Iran but also to many rural areas. They were moving away from a system of traditional leadership and towards a system of democratically elected Baha'i councils to administer their affairs. Baha'u'llah had called in 1873 for the establishment of a House of Justice (*bayt al-'adl*) in every locality. Various councils were set up by the Iranian Baha'is and it is not clear when these councils first became elected bodies but there are indications that, in 1897, 'Abdu'l-Baha sent instructions that the Tehran council should become an elected body.³⁹ Baha'i councils were then established in all of the major Baha'i communities of Iran during the first few years of the twentieth century. The Baha'is were also at the forefront of establishing schools run according to modern pedagogic principles and with a modern curriculum. The first such boys' school was established in Tehran in about 1900 and gradually a network of some 80 such schools was established throughout Iran in towns and villages where there were Baha'i communities.⁴⁰ The Baha'is were also at the forefront of promoting the social role of women.⁴¹ Thus in most places where a boys' school was established, a girls' school was also set up. A Committee for the Advancement of Women (*Mahfil-i Taraqqī-yi Nisvān*) was established in 1909 and organised classes for women to learn public speaking, general knowledge, knowledge about the Baha'i Faith, and literacy.⁴²

In light of the reforms that the Baha'is were promoting within their own community, an interesting insight into the way that Iranian Muslims thought of the Baha'is at this time is given in a diary entry reporting a conversation in a coffee shop in Tehran in July 1907 at the height of the crisis caused by the attack on the Constitution by Muhammad 'Ali Shah and Shaykh Fazlullah Nuri:

Today several people were speaking in the coffee shop. One of them Mirza Taqi and some others were saying that Aqa Sayyid Jamal [Va'iz Isfahani] is preaching from the pulpit saying: 'why do you go to Karbala thus both wasting your money and [suffering injury from] falling from mules? It all comes to nothing. Come and spend your money on schools; put it in the bank.' This sort of talk is what the Baha'is say. They say: why do you go on pilgrimage to visit a piece of wood and your wife and children only see the muleteer? Why is it that you are spending perhaps ten or fifteen thousand *tumans* in holding a celebration of the *majlis* [parliament]? Why is it that you do not say that you want to strengthen the foundations of the *majlis* [by building schools etc.]?⁴³

³⁹ On election of councils, see Siyavash Sefidvash, *Yar Dirin* (Tehran: Mu'assisih Milli Matbu'at Amri, 132 B.E./1976), p. 55.

⁴⁰ Moojan Momen, 'The Baha'i Schools in Iran', in Brookshaw and Fazel, *The Baha'is of Iran*, pp. 94-121.

⁴¹ Moojan Momen, 'The Role of Women in the Iranian Baha'i Community' in Robert Gleave (ed.), *Religion and Society in Qajar Iran* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), pp. 346-69.

⁴² 'Azizullah Sulaymani, *Masabih-i Hidayat* (9 vols., Tehran: Mu'assisih Milli Matbu'at Amri, 104-32 B.E./1947-1976), vol. 9, pp. 409-11. Although the text may appear to imply this committee was set up after the return of Qudsiyyih Ashraf from USA in 1919, there are several clear indications in the text that the committee was in fact set up before her departure in 1911. There is for example reference to the Tarbiyat school for girls having just been established (which occurred in 1909).

⁴³ Iqbal Yaghma'i, *Shahid Rah-i Azadi: Sayyid Jamal Va'iz Isfahani* (Tehran: Tus, 2537 Shahanshahi/1977), p. 283.

It is also important to realise that the Baha'i Faith was going through a phase of rapid expansion at this time and much of this expansion was among the emerging middle class of educated government officials, merchants (*tujjār*) and the new modern professional classes that were becoming important (school-teachers, physicians, journalists). There is independent evidence for this rapid expansion. For example, by 1884, the increasing conversions had even begun to affect relatively small communities such as Asadabad in central Iran, from where Mirza Sharif Mustawfi wrote to his uncle Sayyid Jamal al-Din Asadabadi ('al-Afghani'), urging him to write something against the Baha'is. He writes: 'In all of the provinces of Iran, a large number of people are now following Mirza Husayn 'Ali 'Akkāwī [i.e. Baha'u'llah], such that there is no counting or describing them. They have some books of his such as the Bayan and the Iqan and many others, and night and day they are thinking and speaking of him. He has taken the title Baha'.⁴⁴ In 1887, the Christian missionary agent Benjamin Badall reported: 'the religion of Baha increases daily, and one of them said that since our last visit more than four hundred men have become Baabis in Yezd alone, besides those in the surrounding villages.'⁴⁵

Accounts from this period even speak of the possibility of the Baha'i Faith replacing Islam as the predominant religion of Iran (see statements to this effect by Napier Malcolm, a British missionary in Yazd, 1898–1904;⁴⁶ and reported by Professor E.G. Browne in 1903⁴⁷ and Arthur Hardinge, the British Minister in Tehran 1900–1905⁴⁸). It is not surprising, therefore, that Western estimates of the total number of Baha'is in Iran at this time are very high. Some careful observers estimated as many as 500,000–1 million in 1892⁴⁹ and 3 million Baha'is by the turn of the century (i.e. a third of the estimated total population of 9 million).⁵⁰ This estimate of one-third of the population is also found in the second volume of the *Gazetteer of Persia*, compiled by the Intelligence Branch of the Indian Government and published in 1905.⁵¹ Although these numbers are, of course, gross overestimates, there can be no doubt that the Baha'i Faith was making great strides among the more educated classes in the cities and it seems likely that these overestimates were the result of European observers, who interacted only with these classes, extrapolating what they observed there to the whole country. Thus we may be safe in concluding from these accounts that, at the very least, the Baha'i teachings were being actively discussed and considered by about one-third of the educated and professional classes in Iran—exactly the same group of people who were also the main supporters and drivers of constitutionalism and the social reform movement. Ideas were filtering through from the Baha'i teachings into the discourse of the reformers.⁵² There is even evidence that the secular

⁴⁴ Asghar Mahdavi and Iraj Afshar, *Documents Inedit concernant Seyyed Jamāl-al-Din Afghānī* (Tehran: Danishgah Tehran, 1342/1963) document 86, photograph 57, letter dated 15 Ramadan 1301/29 June 1884.

⁴⁵ *Bible Society Monthly Reporter*, April 1887, 55-6, cited in Moojan Momen, 'Early Relations between Christian Missionaries and the Bahā'ī Faith' in Moojan Momen (ed.), *Studies in Bābī and Bahā'ī History*, vol. 1 (Los Angeles: Kalimāt Press, 1982, pp. 49-82), p. 66.

⁴⁶ Napier Malcom, *Five Years in a Persian Town* (London: John Murray, 1908), pp. 61, 87.

⁴⁷ Browne in Introduction to Myron H. Phelps, *The Master in 'Akkā* (Los Angeles: Kalimāt Press, 1985), p. xiv.

⁴⁸ Arthur Hardinge, *A Diplomat in the East* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1928), p. 298.

⁴⁹ George N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question* (2 vols., 2nd imp., London: Frank Cass, 1966), vol. 1, p. 499.

⁵⁰ T. Greenfield, *Die Verfassung von persischen Staates* (Berlin: Franz Vahlen, 1904) p. 31, based on an article by H. Arakelian published in Tiflis in 1898.

⁵¹ Vol. 2, p. 74; see also the statement by Valentine Chirol that Baha'is number 1.5 million or 20 per cent of the population of Iran; *The Middle Eastern Question* (London: John Murray, 1903), p. 123.

⁵² Thus for example in December 1905 - January 1906, when a large number of 'ulama', merchants and others took sanctuary (*bast*) in the shrine of Shah 'Abdul-'Azim, their demands crystallised around the call for an '*adalat-khanīh* (a house of justice). Various suggestions have been made as to the origins of this word and

reformers, as they planned their campaign to bring about the Constitution, modelled themselves on the Baha'is in terms of strategies that they saw were being successfully used by them.⁵³

It is now appropriate to return to the question of the identity of the group that anti-constitutionalist figures such as Shaykh Fazlullah Nuri had in mind when they accused the constitutionalists of being 'Babis'. Given the work of Bayat on the important role played by the Azalis in the Constitutional Revolution, it would be tempting to reach the conclusion that it was the Azalis who were intended. It must, however, be borne in mind that the Azalis routinely and continuously practised *taqiyya* (dissimulation of their real beliefs). Not only did they conceal their beliefs but several of the most important of the Azalis even dressed and passed themselves off as Shi'i clerics. In their writings they strictly avoided mentioning the Babi religion. It is not at all clear to what extent it was realised by most people that these people were in fact Azalis. Of course, the anti-constitutionalists accused them of being 'Babis', but this was a general accusation made against all constitutionalists and therefore has no evidentiary value. One must ask the question: would orthodox clerics such as Bihbihani and Tabataba'i have associated closely with these individuals and allied themselves with their proposals if they had known that they were in fact Babis? It seems unlikely.

On the other hand, in the 1890s and early 1900s, the Baha'i community not only had a discourse on constitutionalism and social reform, but they were also taking practical steps in advancing this discourse by electing their ruling councils, building schools and advancing the social role of women. As we have seen above, possibly as many as one-third of government officials and the educated and professional classes were engaged with the Baha'i community to some degree. This same social group was also the main group behind the drive for constitutionalism and social reform that was just emerging at this time. It seems very likely, then, that one of the main sources of the ideas emerging in the reformers' discourse was the teachings and practices of the Baha'i community.

Fortunately we also have a few instances in which prominent anti-constitutionalist figures clearly identified whether it was in fact the Azalis or the Baha'is that they meant by their attacks on 'Babis'. There were two episodes that were very similar except for the fact that one occurred in Tehran and the other in Shiraz. Shaykh Fazlullah Nuri ascended a pulpit in front of the crowd assembled in Maydan-i Tupkhanih (Artillery Square) in Tehran in December 1907 and read to the crowd the passage in Baha'u'llah's *Kitab Aqdas* that addresses Tehran and predicts: 'Erelong will the state of affairs within thee be changed, and the reins of power fall into the hands of the people.'⁵⁴ He then said that the leader of the 'Babis' urged this 40 years ago and now his followers were carrying out his instructions.⁵⁵ Similarly in Shiraz the anti-constitutionalist Qavam al-Mulk summoned the people of the town to the Masjid Naw and read to them the same passage of the *Aqdas*, asking them whether they really wanted to bring about the constitutional government that Mirza Husayn 'Ali

why it suddenly sprang forth at this time (see discussion in Martin, *Islam and Modernism*, pp. 76-80). It is entirely possible, however, given the fact that many Baha'is were contributing to the debate as to the nature of the reforms being sought, that the name came from the House of Justice (*bayt al-'adl*) that is called for in the *Kitab Aqdas* of Baha'u'llah (v. 30) and which the Baha'is were engaged in establishing in many cities of Iran at this very time. Some of the confusion over what exactly was meant by the '*adalat-khanih*', whether it was to be a court of appeal or an elected body, may be due to the fact that the Baha'i houses of justice were both.

⁵³ Nazim ul-Islam Kirmani, *Tarikh Bidari*, vol. 1, pp. 29-30.

⁵⁴ Baha'u'llah, *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1992), v. 93, p. 54.

⁵⁵ 'Abdul-Husayn Avarih [Ayati], *al-Kawakib al-Durriyyah* (3 vols. in 2, Cairo: al-Sa'adah, 1923), vol. 1, pp. 163-4; 'Ala'iqhband, in one place (*Tarikh*, p. 58), states that it was a *rawzih-khan* who did this in the Madrasah Marvi after the crowd had repaired there from the Maydan Tupkhanih; on p. 203 however 'Ala'iqhband attributes this action to Nuri, Sayyid 'Ali Yazdi and others in both the Maydan Tupkhanih and Madrasah Marvi.

[Baha'u'llah] had promised his people. Did they not realise that everything they did to promote this matter brought upon them the curse of God and His Messenger?⁵⁶

Therefore, despite the major—one might almost say decisive—role of the Azalis in the Constitutional Revolution, the thesis of this article is that it was, in fact, the Baha'is that the anti-constitutionalist clerics and writers had in mind when they attacked the constitutionalist and social reformers as 'Babis'. It was being claimed that these reformers were promoting the same concepts and were therefore indistinguishable from the Baha'is.

The Role of the Baha'is in the Constitutional Revolution

The second point to be examined in this article is the reason that the Baha'is, despite the fact that they were so much aligned with the aims and ideology of the constitutionalists, are reported to have played only a small role in the Revolution itself? Indeed, why did they become considered by many of the constitutionalists as their enemies and thus become considered by both sides (the constitutionalists and anti-constitutionalists) as their enemies?

During the early stages of the Constitutional Revolution, the Baha'i leader 'Abdu'l-Baha encouraged the Baha'is to support the constitutional movement, although his instructions to the Baha'is were to refrain from participating in public disorder and opposing Mozaffar al-Din Shah, this being in accordance with the Baha'i teaching that religion should be a source of order and unity in the world: 'Let not the means of order be made the cause of confusion and the instrument of union an occasion for discord.'⁵⁷

Apart from Haji Shaykh al-Ra'is who was a member of the leading group of reformers and the above-mentioned Haj Aqa Muhammad 'Alaqihband, a prominent merchant, a number of other Baha'is were closely involved in the reform and constitutionalist movement. Haji 'Abdul-Husayn, known as Haj Navvab, who was one of the notables of Ardekan and a Baha'i, came to Tehran after the anti-Baha'i pogrom in Yazd in 1903 and became a supporter of the constitutionalist cause.⁵⁸ Four of the prominent owners or editors of reformist newspapers were also Baha'is: Sayyid Farajullah Kashani, a Baha'i who took over as proprietor of the *Surayya* newspaper in Egypt in 1900 and transferred it to Tehran in 1903 and to Kashan in about 1910;⁵⁹ Muhammad 'Ali Hidayat founded the *Bisharat* newspaper in Mashhad in 1906; Sayyid Ahmad Khavari Kashani (who had the titles *Lisan ul-Islam* and *Fakhr ul-Va'izin*), the owner of the *Mizan* newspaper in Tehran;⁶⁰ and from an earlier period

⁵⁶ Habibullah Afnan, *Tarikh Amri Shiraz* (photocopy of the manuscript provided by the son of the author), pp. 537-41. Further examples can be given, for example, the conversation in a Tehran coffee shop translated above from Yaghma'i, *Sayyid Jamal*, p. 283. The two episodes in Tehran and Shiraz need not have been coincidences. There had been a meeting in Tehran of supporters of the shah to decide strategies in the summer of 1907 and Nuri was frequently writing to these supporters of the shah with advice on actions to take, see note 9 above.

⁵⁷ Baha'u'llah, *Tablets*, p. 222.

⁵⁸ Mazandarani, *Zuhur al-Haqq*, vol. 8, part 2, pp. 920-21.

⁵⁹ Asadullah Fadil Mazandarani, *Asrar al-Athar* (5 vols., Tehran: Mu'assisih Milli Matbu'at Amri, 124-129 B.E./1967-1972) vol. 2, pp. 190-1; idem, *Amr va Khalq* (repr., 4 vols. In 2, Langenhain, Germany: Bahā'ī-Verlag, 1986), vol. 3, p. 346; Browne, *Press and Poetry of Modern Persia* (repr. Los Angeles: Kalimat, 1983), pp. 66-7.

⁶⁰ Ni'matullah Dhuka'i-Bayda'i, *Tadhkirih-ye Shu'ara Baha'i Qarn Avval Badi'* (4 vols., Tehran: Mu'assisih Milli Matbu'at Amri, 122-27 B.E./1965-70), vol. 1, pp. 315-23. According to this source, although Khavari tried to conceal being a Baha'i, it became well-known in Kashan and even his anti-Baha'i son referred

Mirza Mahmud Khan (d. 1313/1895), the proprietor of the *Farhang* newspaper of Isfahan (published 1879–1890, although at first under a different proprietor).⁶¹ Tayirih Khanum, in a later period, wrote articles in the *Iran-i Naw* newspaper advocating women's rights.⁶² With a few exceptions,⁶³ most of the Baha'is around Iran were also supporters of the constitution. In Sari, for example, the head and most of the founders of the Anjuman Haqiqat, an association which was formed to support the constitution and established a modern school in the town, were Baha'is and so was at least one of the leading constitutionalists in Barfurush.⁶⁴

In this early stage the Baha'is stood universally identified in the minds of the general population as supporters or even the instigators of the Constitutional Revolution. The French Baha'i, Hippolyte Dreyfus, who was in Tehran in the summer of 1906 at the time of the *bast* in the British Legation, writes:

Some, looking at the altogether progressive tendency of this distinctively peaceful revolution, have not hesitated for an instant in seeing the hand of the Baha'is at work. I recall, last July, in Tehran, while the people had ensconced themselves in the English Legation in order to lean more heavily on the goodwill of the shah's ministers, having heard some merchants (among those, it is understood who had not followed the movement and who lamented the losses inflicted on their businesses by the closure of the bazaars) say that the faithful Muslims had nothing to do with this movement, and that the Baha'is alone must bear the responsibility for all the disorders and for the troubles cast into the affairs of the country.⁶⁵

It was not only Western Baha'is who thought this, moreover. Editorials in the French magazine, *Revue du Monde Musulmane*, credited the Baha'is with a leading role and referred to articles in British newspapers confirming this.⁶⁶ The British-Indian writer Bernard Temple, who was in Iran for a year during the Revolution, went even further and credited the Baha'i teachings with being the inspiration and motivating force behind the constitutional movement.⁶⁷

Up to the signing of the Constitution by the ailing Muzaffar al-Din Shah on 30 December 1906, the disparate leadership of the constitutional movement remained more or less united and had ranged almost the whole of the people of Iran behind it. With the death of Muzaffar al-Din Shah on 8 January 1907 and the accession to the throne of Muhammad 'Ali Shah, the leadership of the constitutional movement rapidly fell apart. The main factions emerging included those who wished to press forward with further democratic reforms, those seeking to reverse some of the gains made and

to this from the pulpit.

⁶¹ Asadullah Fazil Mazandarani, *Tarikh Zuhur al-Haqq* vol. 5 (mss in Afnan Library), p. 365n; vol. 6 (mss. in Afnan Library), p. 192; vol. 8, part 1, (Tehran: Mu'assisih Milli Matbu'at Amri, 131 B.E./1974), p. 136; Browne, *Press and Poetry*, pp. 121-2.

⁶² Tayirih, 'Namih-ha'.

⁶³ The only notable Baha'i supporter of the royalist cause was Muhammad Husayn Mirza Mu'ayyad al-Saltanih (later Mu'yyad al-Dawlih) who was a Qajar prince and became head of the royal cabinet under Muhammad 'Ali Shah; Mazandarani, *Zuhur al-Haqq*, vol. 8, part 2, p. 832; 'Azizullah Sulaymani, *Masabih-i Hidayat*, vol. 2, pp. 266-71. A number of other Baha'is such as 'Azizullah and Valiyullah Varqa were closely associated with Muhammad 'Ali Shah's court but they had positioned themselves there on 'Abdu'l-Baha's instructions so that they could act as intermediaries for 'Abdu'l-Baha's communications with the shah.

⁶⁴ Momen, 'The Baha'is and the Constitutional Revolution'.

⁶⁵ *Revue du Monde Musulman*, vol. 1, no. 2 (December 1906), p. 199 (trans. Ismael Velasco).

⁶⁶ *Revue du Monde Musulmane*, vol. 1, no. 1 (November 1906) pp. 115-6.

⁶⁷ Bernard Temple, 'Persia and the Regeneration of Islam', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, vol. 58 (27 May 1910), pp. 652-5.

strengthen the power of shah, and the conservative clerics led by Shaykh Fazlullah Nuri who wanted to see the Constitution subordinated to Islamic (i.e. clerical) control.

Up to this point, it is certainly incorrect to say that the Baha'is played a negligible role in the Constitutional Revolution. In about February 1907, however, 'Abdu'l-Baha issued strict instructions for the Baha'is to withdraw from involvement in the political process.⁶⁸ He gives a number of reasons for his decision in letters that he wrote at about this time. In one place he states that, although he hopes that the Constitution be firmly established in Iran, since that is clear from the text of Baha'u'llah's *Kitab Aqdas*, he ordered the Baha'is to withdraw from involvement for their own protection, since the Azalis were making accusations to the shah that the Baha'is supported the Constitution. If 'Abdu'l-Baha were then to also encourage this support for the Constitution, it would cause the shah to fall upon the Baha'is and massacre them. Since the Azalis had also told the constitutionalists that the Baha'is were supporting the shah, the Baha'is could expect no help from the constitutionalists either.⁶⁹ Second, he is said to have felt that the reform movement was being held back by the continuing accusations that it was in fact a smokescreen for the advancement of 'Babism' (i.e. the Baha'i Faith) and that the withdrawal of the Baha'is would assist the reform movement.⁷⁰ Third, 'Abdu'l-Baha had repeatedly warned against factionalism and disunity. In particular he urged the shah and the constitutionalists, through messages that he sent to both sides through intermediaries, to reconcile their differences and to act together in the interests of the nation, otherwise the country's prosperity would suffer and there was even a danger of invasion by foreign powers.⁷¹ Since he was attempting to play a mediatory role, 'Abdu'l-Baha may well have felt that this would be impeded if the Baha'is were openly supporting one side.

In late 1908, after Muhammad 'Ali Shah's coup d'état, 'Abdu'l-Baha wrote to several statesmen in Iran and, through intermediaries, to the shah himself. He called for the shah and the people to be reconciled and united and urged the restoration of the Constitution.⁷²

There was another brief period, after the overthrow of Muhammad 'Ali Shah and the restoration of the Constitution, when 'Abdu'l-Baha contemplated involving the Baha'is again in the political process. In a letter written to an Iranian Baha'i, 'Azizullah Varqa, at this time, 'Abdu'l-Baha instructs the Baha'is to strive to get some of the leading Baha'is (the Hands of the Cause) into parliament, although it is not clear whether this means to try to get them elected as regular members or to try to have the Baha'i Faith recognised as a religious minority with its own seats in parliament as the other religious minorities had.⁷³ 'Abdu'l-Baha's encouragement of the Baha'is to participate in the political process may appear surprising when he had forbidden involvement just over two years earlier, but the situation was very different. Engagement in the political process two years before would have involved the Baha'is taking sides in the increasingly bitter and divided political arena.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Marzieh Gail, *Arches of the Years* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1991), p. 31; Afnan, *Tarikh Shiraz*, p. 556, seems to indicate a similar date.

⁶⁹ Sulaymani, *Masabih Hidayat*, vol. 4, pp. 555-6; Edward G. Browne, *Persian Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910), pp. 427-9.

⁷⁰ Browne, *Persian Revolution*, pp. 424-5.

⁷¹ Browne, *Persian Revolution*, pp. 426, 427-9; Sulaymani, *Masabih-i Hidayat*, vol. 4, p. 555; 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Makatib-i 'Abdu'l-Baha*, vol. 5 (Tehran: Mu'assisih Milli Matbu'at Amri, 132 B.E./1975), p. 173; although this last is a letter of 'Abdu'l-Baha written in 1908 or 1909, he refers to this appeal being made in the early days of the Revolution (*'dar badāyat-i inqilāq'*); see also Yazdani, *Iran dar Ahd Qajar*, pp. 258-9, 267.

⁷² Sulaymani, *Masabih-i Hidayat*, vol. 4, pp. 553-6; Yazdani, *Iran dar Ahd Qajar*, p. 291.

⁷³ 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Makatib 'Abdu'l-Baha*, vol. 2 (Cairo: Kurdistan al-'Ilmiyya, 1330/1911), p. 263; Yazdani, *Iran dar Ahd Qajar*, p. 300.

⁷⁴ See for example his statements to the American Baha'is in *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Baha*, vol. 2, (Chicago:

Now with the overthrow of Muhammad ‘Ali Shah, there was a possibility of the Baha’is creating unity around a platform of progressive social reform. Several of the leaders of the Constitutional Revolution at this stage were well informed about and sympathetic to the Baha’i teachings, including, for example, the leaders of the two main columns of forces that converged on Tehran in 1909: Sardar As‘ad, the Bakhtiyari leader, had taken on a Baha’i, Mirza Habibullah Shirazi, as tutor to his children and as collaborator in translating books from French into Persian;⁷⁵ Muhammad Vali Khan Tunukabuni Nasr al-Saltanih (Sipahsalar-i A‘zam) was considered a Baha’i both by the Baha’is and the population when he was governor in Rasht in 1899–1903 and in Tabriz in 1913.⁷⁶ Both of these men met with ‘Abdu’l-Baha in Paris.⁷⁷ Despite these promising elements, this initiative of ‘Abdu’l-Baha to have the Baha’is play a constructive role in Iranian politics and society was not to be. The conservative clerics succeeded in having a new electoral law passed in July 1909 which had articles in it specifically to prevent the Baha’is from membership in the parliament.⁷⁸

Thus the lack of significant Baha’i involvement in the later stages of the Constitutional Revolution stemmed from a number of factors both internal (‘Abdu’l-Baha’s initial prohibition on taking part in public disorder or disruption and his later ban on all political involvement) and external (the opposition of the clerics; their influence on the wording of the various bills that were passed such that the Baha’is were in effect barred from recognition as a minority and were unable to take part in the political process; and the creation of an antagonistic atmosphere by the Azalis).

The Creation of an ‘Enemy Within’

This exclusion of the Baha’is from the political process then led on to a further development which was the creation of an atmosphere of fear, suspicion and hatred towards the Baha’is; the creation of an ‘enemy within’. It is not difficult to see how this situation arose. Several of the major groups who had come to power or had increased their power as a result of the Constitutional Revolution had great enmity towards the Baha’is—in particular the Azalis and the Shi‘i clerics.

The result of the intimate involvement of the Azalis with the constitutionalist movement was that they managed to create in the minds of the reformers an antipathy towards the Baha’is. The Azalis asserted to the constitutionalists that the Baha’is were in fact against the Constitution and loyal to the shah.⁷⁹ Both Sayyid Hasan Kashani, editor of the *Habl al-Matin*, an Azali,⁸⁰ and Taqizadih, who was so closely allied to the Azalis that he was thought by some to be an Azali,⁸¹ made this accusation.

Bahai Publishing Society, 1915), pp. 342-3 and his talk recorded in *Star of the West* vol. 4 (13 July 1913), p. 122.

⁷⁵ Abbas Milani, *The Persian Sphinx: Amir Abbas Hoveyda and the riddle of the Iranian Revolution* (London: Tauris 2000), p. 43.

⁷⁶ Marzieh Gail, *Summon Up Remembrance* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1987), p. 100; Moojan Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā’ī Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1980), pp. 375, 515.

⁷⁷ Balyuzi, *Baha'u'llah*, pp. 300-309; Muhammad ‘Ali Faizi, *Hayat-i Hazrat-i ‘Abdu’l-Baha* (Langenhain: Bahā’ī-Verlag, 1986), p. 175.

⁷⁸ Afary, *Revolution*, p. 263.

⁷⁹ See ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s comments on this in ‘Abdul-Hamid Ishraq-Khavari, *Ma’idih-yi Asmani* (9 vols., Tehran: Mu’assisih Milli Matbu‘at Amri, 121-29 B.E./1964-1972) vol. 5, pp. 224-225. See also Browne, *Persian Revolution*, pp. 427-8.

⁸⁰ ‘Alaqihband, *Tarikh*, p. 356; Browne, *Persian Revolution*, pp. 428.

⁸¹ ‘Alaqihband, *Tarikh*, p. 417; Bayat, *Iran’s First Revolution*, p. 152.

Evidence of the spread of this accusation against the Baha'is through the ranks of the constitutionalists comes from E.G. Browne, who heard it expressed in 1908 by Muhammad Nasir Khan Zahir al-Sultan, a cousin of Muhammad 'Ali Shah, who was an active constitutionalist and who presumably heard this from his Azali colleagues.⁸² It was probably also Azalis who were responsible for the production of forged letters from 'Abdu'l-Baha expressing support for the shah which were spread about in 1910. When in 1910 the Baha'i scholar Fazil Mazandarani was sent by 'Abdu'l-Baha to initiate a dialogue with the reformist cleric Ayatullah Khurasani, he was confronted with such a forgery while he was being interrogated in Iraq.⁸³ As pointed out in the opening of this article, this view gained sufficient currency that one finds it repeated even in scholarly works of recent times.

As a result of this Azali activity, a negative atmosphere was created against the Baha'is. Thus we find the anomalous position of strong supporters of the Constitution and of social reform, who in other circumstances were calling for free speech and human rights, voicing highly illiberal sentiments against the Baha'is. Sattar Khan, the leader of the Tabriz constitutionalists, for example, called for the implementation of the *fatwa* of the 'ulama' calling for a general massacre of the Baha'is.⁸⁴ The leader of the constitutionalist forces in Fars, Sayyid 'Abdul-Husayn Lari, issued orders for a general massacre of the Baha'is in 1909 and his lieutenant Shaykh Zakariya Kuhistani proceeded to carry this out in Nayriz, killing some 18 Baha'is and causing others to die of starvation and the cold when they were driven out of the town.⁸⁵

The second major group among the constitutionalists who were enemies of the Baha'is were the Shi'i clerics. While the Azalis were the driving force of the constitutional movement, they were intelligent enough to realise that they could never by themselves get the masses of the people aroused and demonstrating in the streets so as to force the Qajar monarchy into making concessions. They therefore brought into alliance with themselves an unlikely hotchpotch of leading personalities to be the figureheads of the movement—people who were well known to the masses and who could be expected to bring with them either a considerable personal following or wealth with which to fuel the demonstrations. In particular, when the Azalis saw the potential of the Shi'i clerics in mustering popular support in the episode of the Tobacco Regie in 1891–1892, they realised the potential of the Shi'i clerics for garnering mass support. ('Abdu'l-Baha had drawn exactly the opposite conclusion from the episode of the Tobacco Regie and had, at that time, written his Treatise on Politics, *Risalih-yi Siyasiyyih*, warning against involving the clerics in politics and reminding Iranians that each time this had happened in their history, the result had been disastrous for Iran—for example in the Russo-Persian wars in the early nineteenth century.)

In this way, the Azalis were able to hook personalities into the reform movement who had no real interest in reform or constitutionalism but were there because they expected some personal gain from their involvement. Indeed, it could be said that none of the masthead figures in the reformist camp, except for Sayyid Muhammad Tabataba'i, were there because they supported the ideas of the Constitution. They were rather there because the Azalis had cajoled and manipulated them into this camp with the promise of being able to advance personal agendas and rid themselves of hated rivals.

⁸² Browne, *Persian Revolution*, pp. 424-5; that this individual was Zahir us-Sultan can be seen from Browne comments on him on pp. 204, 208n. I am grateful to Dr John Gurney for confirming that this is also his assessment of this matter.

⁸³ Mazandarani, *Zuhur al-Haqq*, vol. 8, part 2, p. 838.

⁸⁴ Ishraq-Khavari, *Ma'idih*, vol. 5, pp. 224-225.

⁸⁵ Muhammad Shafi' Rawhani-Nayrizi, *Lama 'at al-Anwar* (2 vols. in 1, Bundoora, Vic., Australia: Century Press, 2002), pp. 292-353; Muhammad 'Ali Faizi, *Nayriz-i Mishkbiz* (Tehran: Mu'assisih Milli Matbu'at Amri, 130 B.E./1973), pp. 142-62.

The *mujtahid* Sayyid ‘Abdullah Bihbihani, for example, who had supported the shah during the Tobacco Regie and who was said to have neither the enthusiasm for the Constitution of Tabataba’i nor the religious learning of Nuri,⁸⁶ was persuaded to join the reformist camp by playing on his rivalry with Nuri and his hatred of the Prime Minister ‘Ayn al-Dawlih.⁸⁷ Bihbihani was also induced to side with the constitutionalists by the prospect of monetary gain since most of the leading merchants of the capital were supporting the constitutionalists and plying the ‘*ulama*’ who did likewise with money. One writer was witness to the fact that, prior to the Revolution, all Bihbihani could afford as transport was a single old donkey, while after the Revolution his stables contained a fine coach and 35 horses.⁸⁸ Even the reactionary cleric Nuri was cajoled into supporting the Revolution for just long enough in late 1906 to create a united front to present to the shah and compel him to allow the Constitution. Thus using greed and longstanding rivalries and hatreds, the Azalis levered prominent clerics and statesmen who had no interest in supporting political reform into the reformist camp.⁸⁹ Hence the wry comment of Nazim al-Islam Kirmani: ‘people who used to make a living out of tyranny and despotism are now inclining towards justice and constitutionalism.’⁹⁰

These clerics, however, came in to the reformist camp at a price. They had their own agenda to push forward. One of their main concerns was to halt the advances being made by the Baha’is among their congregations. Kasravi quotes the private letter of one of the anti-constitutionalist clerics Sayyid Muhammad Yazdi to his son-in-law in Najaf, writing of how the Babis had infiltrated the Majlis and were even leaders of it and of what damage this had done to the religion of Islam, with people even being encouraged to read newspapers rather than the Qur’an (he writes that reading newspapers was now a religious obligation and saying prayers and reading the Qur’an were forgotten).⁹¹ As Kasravi points out, we see here that the enmity of the ‘*ulama*’ towards the Baha’is was not just a formal response to the religious claims of Baha’u’llah, it was the concern of a religious professional about the loss of his prestige, congregation and income, all of which were intimately tied in with the amount of respect and attachment the people had towards the Qur’an and their religious obligations.

Even in the build-up of events leading to the Constitutional Revolution, the Baha’is had paid a heavy price, being subjected to persecutions in many parts of Iran and a genocidal outburst in Yazd in 1903 led by the clerics, as part of the campaign against Amin al-Sultan.⁹² Then, once the Constitution

⁸⁶ Mahdi Bamdad, *Tarikh Rijal Iran* (6 vols. Tehran: Zavvar, 1347/1968-1351/1972), vol. 2, pp. 284-5, 287.

⁸⁷ Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution*, pp. 112, 123; Afari, *Revolution*, pp. 49-50.

⁸⁸ ‘Alaqihband, *Tarikh*, p. 443. This writer additionally accuses Bihbihani of receiving money from the Russian Embassy; ‘Alaqihband, *Tarikh*, p. 444.

⁸⁹ Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution*, pp. 109-111. The reactionary Amin al-Sultan was cajoled into supporting the reformists with his very considerable financial and political resources in the hope that he could unseat the Prime Minister ‘Ayn al-Dawlih and regain power (Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution*, pp. 112-3). Other examples of such rivalries being used to lever people into the reformist camp are given in Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution*, p. 112. It was Azalis, such as the Dawlatabadis, Malik al-Mutakallimin, Jamal ad-Din Va‘iz and Nazim al-Islam, who were the main agents for putting together this coalition; Bayat, *Revolution* 70, 180, 221.

⁹⁰ Nazim ul-Islam Kirmani, *Tarikh Bidari*, vol. 2, pp. 224.

⁹¹ Ahmad Kasravi, *Tarikh Mashrutih-yi Iran* (4th ed., Tehran: Amir Kabir, n.d.), pp. 289-90. There were some of the ‘*ulama*’, such as Khurasani and Mazandarani in Najaf and Tabataba’i in Tehran who felt that the best way to deal with the Baha’i threat was to have a modernist movement arise within Iran among Muslims and thus neutralise the attractions of the Baha’i Faith (cf. Afari, *Revolution*, p. 29), but most, such as Shaykh Kazim Yazdi in Najaf and Shaykh Fazlullah Nuri in Tehran, feared that the Constitutionalist movement was in fact a covert way for the Baha’is to spread their ideas among Iranian Muslims and so both Constitutionalism and the Baha’is should be opposed.

⁹² Accounts of these episodes can be found in Momen, *Bābī and Bahā’ī Religions*, pp. 373-404.

had been granted, Shaykh Fazlullah Nuri took the lead in insisting that any rights and freedoms given in the Constitution and the supplementary laws that accompanied it did not benefit the Baha'is. They were not to be one of the recognised religious minorities and provisions for freedom of belief and freedom of publication were worded in such a way as to exclude the Baha'is from their purview. Having sought the assistance of the '*ulama*' to gain their Constitution, the reformers were not in a position to refuse these negations of the principles of the Revolution. This weakness of the position of the reformers left Nuri free to issue abusive and vituperative attacks on the Baha'is. The fact that no-one felt able to insist on correcting these lies in public, lest they too be accused of being a 'Babi', set a precedent that this type of behaviour was acceptable under the Constitution. Later laws passed after overthrow of Muhammad 'Ali Shah in 1909 also prevented the Baha'is from becoming members of parliament.

Thus the Baha'is became simultaneously the enemies of the Qajar state, the Shi'i '*ulama*' and the secular reformers. The net result of this was described thus by Nazim al-Islam Kirmani, who himself played no small role in these events:

It has become the norm in Iran that whenever it is desired to overthrow someone and remove them from the political scene, they say that he is a Babi. For example as long as the Majlis has power, if anyone says something that is not liked by others, they immediately say: 'The Babis are the enemies of the Majlis and do not want there to be a Majlis in Iran.' And if, God forbid, at some time either the Shah or the '*ulama*' fall out with the Majlis and want to create the conditions for its overthrow, then they would say: 'The Babis have established this Majlis.' Similarly when it was the matter of schools, we saw that at first when these schools were being established, the people said: 'It is the Babis who are establishing these schools.' However, after Hujjat al-Islam Aqa Sayyid Muhammad Tabataba'i established the Islam School and this became widely known, then suddenly anyone who was saying bad things about these schools was now called a Babi. This is how we Iranians do things and how we eliminate people from the scene.⁹³

By 'othering' the Baha'is and making them into an 'internal enemy', the Shi'i '*ulama*' had neutralised a potential threat and avoided having to confront the Baha'is in open discussion and debate (they had on numerous occasions in the past lost face when in open debate with Baha'i propagandists). This was a continuation of a situation that suited both the Qajar state and the Shi'i clerics. As Tavakoli-Targhi has commented, instead of engaging with the Baha'is in a dialogue that would have promoted a national democratic public sphere of discourse, the Qajar state together with the Shi'i clergy opted to try to violently suppress the movement. Moreover they used accusations of 'Babism' as a means of repressing other secular demands for modernisation and democracy. The Qajar state and the Shi'i clergy thus became the architects of the heritage of the repressive and authoritarian political structure that Iran was to experience for the next century.⁹⁴

The Results of the Constitutional Revolution for the Baha'is and for Iran

⁹³ Nazim al-Islam Kirmani, *Tarikh Bidari*, p. 400.

⁹⁴ Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi, "Baha'i-sitizi va Islam-gara'i", *Iran Namih*, 19:1-2 (2001), pp. 79-124, translated as "Anti-Baha'ism and Islamism in Iran", in Brookshaw and Fazel, *The Baha'is of Iran*, pp. 200-31.

After the Constitutional Revolution, the Baha'is thus found themselves in a worse situation than before. It is true that the position of the Baha'is drew on an already established scapegoating and 'othering' of the Babi community even before the Revolution but the establishment of the Constitution gave a legal basis to this. Before the Revolution, any local cleric or governor could whip up persecution of the Baha'is on a whim or to further their own advantage, but the law was whatever the shah or the governor decided and so the Baha'is were in a position to negotiate and alter their standing. After the Revolution, their social exclusion was now enshrined in an independent code of laws. While the Constitutional Revolution had refashioned the 'Shi'i nation' into the 'nation of Iran', the Baha'is were excluded from this refashioned nation.⁹⁵ As Iran became more centralised and the government more bureaucratic during the Pahlavi regime, room for manoeuvre and negotiation became severely limited. Moreover, due to the hostility of the clerical and Azali leadership of the Revolution, an atmosphere of hatred and an assumption that it was acceptable to say whatever one wanted about the Baha'is had been created. The preconditions were thus established during the Constitutional Revolution for the 'othering' of Baha'is, for the creation of 'an enemy within'.

The fact that a large religious minority had been excluded from the Constitution and thus effectively excluded from Iranian society was to act as a poisonous precedent for the next 100 years. Over the succeeding decades, it meant that conspiracy theories could be concocted and published without fear of contradiction, linking the Baha'is as 'enemies within' to external powers such as Britain, Russia and later America and Israel. It led to anyone who proposed reform or a campaign against corruption being accused of being a Baha'i and thus being silenced. It made it easier for the government to create other 'enemies within' of their opponents and violently suppress them rather than engaging them in debate. Instead of the emergence of a public sphere of discourse in which all could engage openly and honestly, the sphere of national public debate tilted towards one that was imbued with fear, the main protagonists often being demagogues and the agenda much of the time a series of exaggerated conspiracy theories.

Once portrayed as 'enemies within', it became acceptable to mistreat and persecute the Baha'is, since they 'deserved' it. This is the same pathway that the Nazis trod on their way to unleashing a genocide upon the Jews in Germany and the same pathway that justified Stalin in sending millions of 'enemies of the state' to their deaths in Siberia.⁹⁶ This pathway, moreover, justifies the government in taking on authoritarian and totalitarian powers in order to deal with the perceived threat from the 'enemy within'. It encourages emotive demagoguery instead of sane and rational public debate. This atmosphere even penetrates to the academic world, which feels obligated to concoct the evidence to support attacks upon the 'enemies within'. One cannot find a single book or article published within Iran in the last 100 years on the subject of the Baha'is that does not repeat baseless accusations and promote fantasy conspiracy theories. Thus, what happened to the Baha'is in the Constitutional Revolution has not only had an adverse effect upon the Baha'is. It has poisoned Iran's national life, its politics and its academy in ways that still require a great deal of research.

⁹⁵ Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi, "Refashioning Iran: Language and Culture during the Constitutional Revolution", *Iranian Studies*, vol. 23 (1990) p. 93.

⁹⁶ For a comparison of the treatment of the Baha'is in Iran with other examples of the progress towards a genocide, see Moojan Momen, "The Baha'i community of Iran: a case of "suspended genocide"?" *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 7 (2005), pp. 221–241.