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Modern Antisemitism in Iran: Old Themes and New Trends

The "Jewish people are the greatest enemy of Islam" and Jews are the "most corrupt" and "the most seditious group among all human beings" are but a few among the many harsh statements raised against the Jews and Judaism in the post-1979 Shi'i discourse. The prevalence of anti-Jewish statements and the extensive preoccupation with the Jews, particularly their supposed enmity towards [Shi'i] Islam, reflect the role of anti-Judaism alongside anti-Zionism as an important pillar in the ideology of the Islamic Republic of Iran. At the same time, Jews are one among a group of external enemies of the Islamic Republic, and it is not always clear whether they are the number one enemy or they stand on equal footing with the West and other enemies.

The current anti-Jewish discourse constitutes both continuity and departure from past Shi'i attitudes towards Jews. Pre-modern Shi'ism espoused a dual approach towards the Jews. Like the Sunnis, the Shi'is blamed the Jews for rejecting the teaching of the Prophet Muhammad, for distorting and falsifying the true scriptures given to them by Moses, and for a host of immoral activities. Unlike the Sunnis, and most likely due to the survival in Iran of pre-Islamic Zoroastrian concepts of ritual purity, Shi'i doctrine regarded the Jews as ritually "unclean."²

^{1 &}quot;Qawm-e yahud ra behtar beshenasim," issued June 16, 2013, http://article.tebyan.net/248084, see also "In a speech given to the Revolutionary Guards, Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi, Ahmadinejad's spiritual mentor, accused the Jews and the Zionist of corruption and fanning resistance against the regime as part of their effort to 'take over the world and destroy Islam'," *Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center*, issued January 25, 2010, http://www.terrorism-info.org. il/en/article/18156; M. Ta'eb et al. *Tibar-e enheraf: pazhuheshi dar dushman shenasi-ye ta'rikhi* (Qom: mu'assasah-ye farhangi vala'-e muntazar, 2011), 1:8; S. 'Ali Hosseini Qurtani, "Yahud ra behtar beshenasim," issued May 27, 2012, http://rasekhoon.net/article/print/213036/; "Yahudiyan, sarsakhtarin-e doshmanan," issued June 13, 2014, http://mouood.org/component/k2/item/20369; "Bozurgtarin-e dushman-e idiuluzhik-e Islam, amrika ast, ya inglis, ya vahabiyan va-salafiyan," issued 2014, http://www.islamquest.net/fa/archive/question/fa29589. The number of books and articles dedicated to the discussion of Jewish enmity toward Islam and Shi'ism in particular is too vast to be enumerated here.

² On the transfer of such themes from Zoroastrianism to Shi'ism, see S. S. Soroudi, "The Concept of Jewish Impurity and its Reflection in Persian and Judeo-Persian Traditions," *Irano Judaica: Studies Relating to Jewish Contacts with Persian Culture throughout the Ages III (1994):* 142–70. On Jewish impurity in Shi'i law, see Daniel Tsadik, *Between Foreigners and Shi'is: Nineteenth-Century Iran and its Jewish Minority* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 17–21.

Conversely, early Shi'i traditions often equated Shi'ism with the biblical "Children of Israel" or more moderately saw the Jews as a prototype of Shi'ism.³

However, following the unification of Iran by the Safavids in 1501 and the transformation of Shi'ism into the religion of state, attitudes towards Jews worsened significantly. One reason for Shi'i intolerance towards the Jews was Sunni polemics against Shi'ism, which pointed to parallels between the Shi'i and Jewish doctrines and culminated in the maxim "the rafida (Shi'is) are the Jews of our umma." Conceivably, one way to refute such accusations was to take a stronger anti-Jewish position. Consequently, the Jews of Iran suffered greater discrimination and persecution than any other Jewish community in the Middle East, culminating in forced conversions and even pogroms well into the nineteenth century.

By contrast, the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah (1941–1979) was the "Golden era" of Iranian Jewry, which reached unprecedented achievements both intellectually and materially. It was also a period of extensive Iranian-Israeli economic, military, and strategic cooperation. Concurrently, various clerics and pro-Islamist intellectuals propagated strong anti-Zionist and anti-Jewish views.5

It was Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, founder and leader of the Islamic Republic, who made antisemitism a central component of Iran's Islamic ideology. Already in the first page of his major ideological work, Velayat-e Faqih: Hukumat-e Eslami [The Governance of the Jurist: Islamic Government], Khomeini charged "from the very beginning" Islam "was afflicted by the Jews, for it was they who established anti-Islamic propaganda and engaged in various stratagems" against the Muslims. As proof of the wickedness of the Jews, Khomeini often quoted passages from the Qur'an describing the Jews as immersed in sin and as being constantly reprimanded by God for their evil doings. Following their ancestors during the Prophet's time, the Jews and Christians, according to Khomeini, conspired against Islam in the modern period as well, seeking to undermine the most important feature of Islam as a comprehensive and total system of law

³ For an analysis of this dualism, see M. Barasher, "Les fils d'Israël, prototypes de la Chi'a: notes sur quelques traditions exégétiques du chi'isme duodécimain," Perspectives: Revue de l'Université Hébraïque de Jérusalem 9 (2002): 125 - 37; S. Wasserstrom, "Shi'ite and Jew between History and Myth," in Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 93-135.

⁴ For an analysis of these parallels and of the cultural implications of this maxim, see Wasserstrom, "Shi'ite and Jew between History and Myth."

⁵ D. Menashri, "The Jews of Iran: Between the Shah and Khomeini," in Anti-Semitism in Times of Crisis, ed. S. Gilman and S. Katz (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 353-71; M. Ahouie, "Iranian Anti-Zionism and the Holocaust: A Long Discourse Dismissed," Radical History Review 105 (2009): 58-78.

that governs society and state. In order to achieve their objective, the Jews joined hands with other groups that were "more satanic than they" in order to facilitate the imperialist penetration of the Muslim countries. Their main goal was the "extirpation of Islam" in addition to sowing doubt and confusion in the hearts of Muslims, since "Islam and its ordinances" was the "main obstacle in the path of their materialistic ambitions." In addition, the West, consisting of Jewish and Christian elements, resists the righteous cause of Islam to expand to the "four corners of the globe." The Jews, "may God curse them," Khomeini adds, "are opposed to the very foundations of Islam and wish to establish Jewish domination throughout the world." They "meddle with the text of the Qur'an" and disseminate false translations that distort its meaning in order to slander Islam. Like other Islamic thinkers, Khomeini sometimes describes the Jews as fifth columnists in the world of Islam and as agents of the West, and at other times as the real power that stands behind the West in its offensive against Islam. Linking Judaism and Zionism, Khomeini maintained that the most overt manifestation of the Jewish-Christian conspiracy against Islam was the establishment of Israel by Western imperialism in order to oppress the Muslims. Both Khomeini and his successor as supreme leader, Ayatollah 'Ali Khamene'i, stated that "the occupation of Palestine [by the Jews] is part of a satanic design by the world domineering powers, [...] to weaken the solidarity of the Islamic world, and to sow the seeds of disunity among Muslims."7

After assuming power in 1979, the new Iranian leaders sought to render their anti-Jewish animosity more presentable. In addition, as jurists they may have wanted to portray Iran as a model for Islamic states policy towards religious minorities.

Consequently, spokesmen of the Islamic regime claimed to distinguish between Zionists, whom they vehemently opposed, and Jews, who should be treated with tolerance.8 Thus, the Islamic constitution allocated one seat in parliament to a representative of the Jewish community, who always backs the regime's anti-Zionist line. Under the Islamic regime Iranian Jews enjoy tolerance,

⁶ R. Khomeini, al-hukuma al-islamiyya (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1979), 7; ibid., Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini, trans. H. Algar (Berkeley: Mizan, 1981), 27, 47, 109, 127; H. Dabashi, Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 426.

⁷ Reuters, issued December 22, 2000; Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), issued April 24, 2001.

⁸ Cf. R. Khomeini, Al-qadiyya al-filastiniyya fi kalam al-imam Khomeini (Beirut: Dar al-wasila, 1996), 47-51; 'A. Akbar Velayati, Iran wa-falastin (1867-1937), judhur al-'alaqa wa-taqalubat al-siyasa (Beirut: Dar al-Hagg, 1997), 14.

though not full equality. This attitude presumably seeks to demonstrate that under the benevolent rule of Islam, Jews can live peacefully as a protected subordinated minority, and therefore there is no justification for Jewish statehood.⁹

Yet, as far as ideology and religious discourse towards the Jews as a historical or cultural collective are concerned, there is hardly any distinction between Judaism and Zionism. Anti-Jewish expressions and motifs appear in the writings and statements of senior and mid-level clerics, in scholarly books, and journal articles published by the Qom learning complex, in scholarly TV programs and in hundreds of semi-official websites. In addition, Israel has often been referred to as "the Jewish entity," as a "bunch of Jews," or as the "Jewish nation," while at other times the Jews in the diaspora and Jews in pre-modern periods were referred to as Zionists.

The two most blatant expressions of the confluence between anti-Zionism and anti-Judaism in Iran are the widespread dissemination of the notorious antisemitic tract the Protocols of the Elders of Zion and of Holocaust denial. The popularity of the Protocols world-wide and particularly in Iran was partly due to the inclination towards conspiracy theories of societies in crisis as they simplify a complex and often perplexing reality by attributing every development to the intended machination of a group of individuals. In recent years, the Protocols have been cited widely by numerous clerics and other writers in Iran as an au-

⁹ There are some exceptions to this approach. Ayatollah Ruhollah Qarahi, for example, accuses the Iranian Jews of serving Israel and Zionism, cf. "Yahud shenasi az negahi-ye ostad Qarahi," issued December 14, 2011, http://qarahi.andishvaran.ir/fa/showinterview.html?DataID= 1062&ReturnPageID=79.

¹⁰ To cite one example, the Institute for Applied Historical Research, an active promotor of the anti-Jewish discourse, in October 2017 listed fifteen PhD dissertations dedicated to Jewish negative involvement in Islamic history, cf. shorturl.at/ahDNZ.

¹¹ Kayhan, issued June 13, 2002; Jomhuri-ye Eslami, issued May 20, 2003.

¹² Cf. "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion: An Iranian Perspective," MEMRI, Special Dispatch Series, no. 98, June 7, 2000, https://www.memri.org/reports/protocols-elders-zion-iranian-per spective; "Iranian TV Series Based on the Protocols of the Elders of Zion and the Jewish Control of Hollywood," MEMRI, Special Dispatch Series, no. 705, April 30, 2004, https://www.memri.org/reports/iranian-tv-series-based-protocols-elders-zion-and-jewish-control-hollywood. For Holocaust denial in Iran, see M. Litvak, "Iranian Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust," in *Antisemitism Before and Since the Holocaust: Altered Contexts and Recent Perspectives*, ed. A. McElligott and J. Herf (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2017), 205–29; M. Küntzel, "Judeophobia and the Denial of the Holocaust in Iran," in *Holocaust Denial: The Politics of Perfidy*, ed. R. Wistrich (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 235–54.

¹³ For the popularity and spread of conspiracy theories in modern Iranian political culture, see A. Ashraf, "Conspiracy Theories," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 6, Fasc 2. 138–47, http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/conspiracy-theories.

thentic historical document exposing Jewish machinations. In the words of Basij writer Keyvan Majidi, if the Iews claim that the Protocols are a forgery, how do they explain the fact that everything that has been written in them has eventually taken place?¹⁴ There is no need to elaborate here on the antisemitic meaning of Holocaust denial.

Significantly, most Shi'i writers while speaking of Jewish-Muslim, and particularly Jewish-Shi'i conflict, refer to the Jews as a "people" [qawm], and explain that Jewish identity is based on genealogical continuity and not on religious belief. The usage of the term *qawm* probably stems from the emphasis on the continued Jewish identity and mode of action of those Jews who had converted to Islam but allegedly harmed Islam from within as part of the Jewish scheme. 15 In other words, Jewishness was and is an immutable attribute, regardless of conversion to other religions. This designation differs from the dominant Arab terminology that refuses to recognize Jewish peoplehood and insists that Jews only share a religious belief. This discourse is different from racist European antisemitism since it focuses on the religious and cultural conflict and the idiom of speech is religious. Yet, considering the widespread resort to themes and vocabulary borrowed from modern western antisemitism, the current Iranian case fits the category of modern antisemitism more than the traditional pre-modern phenomenon of anti-Judaism.16

The subject or target of present-day Shi'i anti-Judaism is the Jews as a collective and as a concept as well as Jewish culture and history. The post-1979 discourse conflates them with other modern perceived threats and challenges of [Shi'i] Islam and of Iran be they the West in its various manifestations from the Free Masons to capitalism and rock music all the way to Wahhabism and radical Sunni Iihadi Salafism. 17

¹⁴ K. Majidi, "Vaki'iyat-e yahud setizi: protocolha-ye zu'ama-ye sahyun," issued January 8, 2011, http://basij-ganjnameh.persianblog.ir/post/84/.

¹⁵ See for example, S. Mohammad Taqi Zahedi in "dar hamayeshi-ye takhassosi-ye 'din-e zaw' barresi shod," issued December 13, 2013, http://www.mashreghnews.ir/news/270442.

¹⁶ On the difference between anti-Judaism and antisemitism, see G. Langmuir, Towards a Definition of Antisemitism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), particularly 57-99; S. Heschel, "Historiography of Antisemitism versus Anti-Judaism: A Response to Robert Morgan," Journal for the Study of the New Testament 33, no. 3 (2011): 257-79.

¹⁷ Cf., for example, Salman Qasemi, Yahudiyan bani Isra'il va-faramasoneri (Isfahan: Kiyarad, 1391/2012); H. Yahya, "Dastan-e haqiqi-ye Qabala," Mawoud 62 (Farvardin 1385/April 2006), 34-39; "Asrar-e faramasonha: yahudiyan faramason chegune jahan re idara mikonand?" issued June 8, 2017, http://www.historywonders.ir/2017/06/08/; "Faramasonery farzand-e khwande namashru'-e yahud," http://masoner.persianblog.ir/post/7/; "Nemadha-ye faramasoneri vayahud," http://www.gehraz.ir/1393/10/21; "Iritbat faramasoneri ba sahyunism va-shaytan para-

The Shi'i anti-Jewish discourse harbors many similarities to the Sunni Islamist one and is influenced by it. But, in recent years, distinct Shi'i features are emerging as well. Some of them are rooted in earlier Shi'i traditions, but they seem to have attained greater scope and power than before, and more importantly, they are articulated as part of a more comprehensive vision of Islamic history.

This phenomenon is best explained by two insights. The first, formulated by Esther Webman, is the evolution of the Jew into a metaphor for evil. Put differently, the "Jew" is being constructed as a functional metaphor, an all-purpose villain, to explain the changing circumstances and catastrophes that have befallen Arab societies. 18 The second is David Nirenberg's definition of "Judaism" and "anti-Judaism." "Judaism" is not only the religion of specific people with specific beliefs but also a category, a set of ideas and attributes, with which non-Jews can make sense of and criticize their world. Hence, "anti-Judaism" is not simply an attitude toward Jews and their religion but "a powerful theoretical framework for making sense of the world." Accordingly, anti-Judaism puts old ideas about Judaism to new kinds of work in thinking about the world, it engaged the past and transformed it, and reshaped the possibilities for thought in the future." In other words, it repeatedly invoked the threat of Judaism to make critical sense of its cosmos.19

Nirenberg's observation is particularly helpful in explaining the Shi'i Iranian case, with the Jews serving as the explanation and source of many of the misfortunes that have befallen upon the Shi'is in history and they are associated with the perceived modern threats to the correct Shi'i-Islamic way of life. A case in point is Ayatollah Ja'far Sobhani's argument that the slogan "fewer children, better life," that had originally promoted birth control, is Jewish when it identifies modern westernized lifestyle as Jewish and as a threat to Islam.²⁰

The central theme in the anti-Judaism discourse in Iran constitutes an almost classic case of psychological projection by the depiction of the Jews as historical yet active enemies, who are motivated by hatred against Islam and the

sti," issued December 16, 2014, http://www.adyannet.com/fa/news/14930. The Masonic conspiracy was invented by right-wing groups in Europe already in the eighteenth century and became a popular theme in both antisemitic and anti-enlightenment literature ever since. See "Freemasonry," Holocaust Encyclopedia, accessed September 27, 2019, https://www.ushmm. org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007186.

¹⁸ Cf. E. Webman "The 'Jew' as a Metaphor for Evil in Arab Public Discourse," The Journal of the Middle East and Africa 6, nos. 3-4 (2015): 275-92.

¹⁹ D. Nirenberg, Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013), 3, 5, 169, 464.

²⁰ Cf. "Ayatollah Sobhani: farzand-e kamtar zendegi behtar, shi'ari yahudi va-bar khelaf-e Islam ast," issued June 15, 2010, http://www.irna.ir/fa/NewsPrint.aspx?ID=2000621401.

Muslims, especially the Shi'is.²¹ If the West is the greatest threat to Islam at present, then the Jews are portrayed as Islam's greatest enemy from its inception, and they merge with the West in the modern age. Moreover, the Jews, according to this narrative, play a key role in disseminating Islamophobia all over the world.

The reasons for the Jews' enmity towards Islam are ingrained in their inherent negative traits, which are enumerated in the Our'an and which had been revealed by their conduct throughout history. The most important among these are disobedience and defiance of God; brutality and the shedding of blood like animals; aggression and rancor against all others, greed and hostility towards reason. They are cunning, manipulative, and lack any conscience; they are morally corrupt and as such they threaten the morality of the family, the bastion of Muslim society. Thus in discussing Jewish conspiracies against Iranian youth, one writer explains that the "rootless jazz music" had borrowed heavily from Yiddish music so that the "Jewish Michael Jackson overcame church music." Some polemicists go further and describe the Jews as "enemies of religion" and of humanity as a whole. In addition, Jews were notorious for their greed and dubious financial and economic practices, from money lending to playing a major role in the American slave trade. Still, while describing the Jews as the greatest enemy during the formative Islamic period, the semi-official islamquest.net conceded that in recent centuries, the imperialism of Christian countries did not commit fewer crimes against Islam and the Muslims.²³

All of these traits, which are associated with western capitalism, stand in complete contrast to the ideals and essence of Shi'i Islam. The unanimous view in the Shi'i discourse is that Islam, particularly Shi'ism, by its very essence

²¹ Psychological projection denotes a shift of the border between the self and the world in favor of the self, attributing to the "other" those repulsive or harmful aspects of the self.

²² Qurtani, "Yahud ra behtar beshenasim"; 'A. M. Shirazi, Donya bazicheh dast-e yahud, cited in http://montazer-mousa.blogfa.com/post/14; "'Ellal va-'avamel-e dushmani-ye yahud bar Islam"; "Goftegu-ye 'Ali Khalil Isma'il ba dustan-e javan dar masjid Imam-e Sajjad 'alayhi alsalam," http://atm.parsiblog.com/Posts/119/; 'Ali Akbar Ra'ifi-Pur, "Va'qi'iyat-e yahdud setizi 1," issued February 12, 2009, http://antisemitism.blogfa.com/post/1; "Towti'eh-ye yahud baraye javanan-e Irani," shorturl.at/cgxT5; Kayhan, June 30, 2016.

²³ Tabataba'i, "Naqsh-e jarayan-e masihi-yahudi dar tarbiyat-e yazid"; "'Ellat-e dushmani-ye yahudi ba Islam: nezhad parasti," http://mastoor.ir/content/view/7996/1; "Falsafeah-ye ekhtelaf-e yahudiyan ba Shi'iyan"; "'Ellal va-'avamel-e dushmani-ye yahud bar Islam"; "Naqsh-e yahudiyan dar Karbala chist?," https://hammihan.com/answer/27316; "Revayat-e Hojjat al-Islam Taeb az naqsh-e yahud dar dastgah-e khilafat-e Mu'awiya," http://www.farsnews.com/news text.php?nn=13911021000692.

rejects and fights these negative Jewish attributes and conduct. Therefore, it has become the main target of Iewish enmity from its inception.

Concurrently, quite a few writers reject the charges of antisemitism hurled against Iran. Some deny this allegation as a malicious ploy in the psychological warfare, which the Zionists use in order to justify their illegitimate presence in Palestine. Others describe it as a fiction created by Jewish historians in order to portray the Jews as innocent victims and hide their own malicious policies. One writer, for instance, who denies the existence of antisemitism, explains that "Jewishness" [*yahudiyat*] in itself is the problem. Being Jewish is essentially embracing both a sense of superiority over other people and deep fears and paranoia from them. Or in his words, Judaism is neither race nor religion but a "mental disease" [bimar-e ravani]. The only solution for the Jews to cure this disease is to reject and deny Judaism.24

In this paper, I would like to focus on one aspect of contemporary Iranian antisemitism, which is the supposed Jewish role and responsibility for the series of historical events, following the death of the Prophet Muhammad, to the detriment and misfortune of the Shi'a. The main point is the key Jewish role in the usurpation of the Prophet's succession from his rightful heir, his cousin and son-in-law 'Ali. This event is the root cause, in the Shi'i worldview, of the distortion that Islam had suffered from and its divergence from its correct path and is therefore source of many of the ills that afflicted Islam ever since.

This approach is partly a response to Sunni charges that Jewish converts to Islam were responsible for the birth of Shi'ism. Countering these accusations by Judaizing Sunni Islam would have been too provocative for the Shi'i minority. Therefore, the Shi'is responded by presenting themselves as the victims of Jewish enmity, much more than the Sunnis, and by highlighting direct Jewish role or indirect influence in all crucial events in Islamic history that harmed the Shi'a. Such claims, while not absolving the Sunnis from any wrong doing, softened Shi'i criticism against them by portraying ordinary Sunnis as unwise victims of the Jews and of few truly evil and unscrupulous Muslims. Thus, a common bond with broad strata of Sunnis remained possible by turning against the common enemy, the Jews.

At the same time, such claims serve to portray Shi'ism not only as a victim of manipulation by the Jews but also as their absolute opposite. Consequently, if the Jews are first and foremost the enemies of Shi'ism, and if they represent

^{24 &}quot;Himayat bi qayd va-shart az yahudiayn tahdidi 'aleyh-e javame'-e bashari," issued April 12, 2010, http://www.farsnews.net/newstext.php?nn=8901211582. It was disseminated in other blogs and websites dedicated to fight Zionism, for example, http://zionistregime.blogfa.com/ post/43 and http://4palestine.blogfa.com/post-65.aspx.

evil, then Shi'ism must be the symbol of virtue. Moreover, Shi'ism, being the correct and pure Islam, has never been affected by the Jews, ²⁵ unlike Sunni Islam, which has been contaminated and distorted by the Jews, and therefore the dichotomy between Sunni Islam and Judaism is not as strong as it is in Shi'ism. The sharp contrast between Judaism and Shi'ism is manifested in Grand Ayatollah Nuri Hamedani's explanation that Jewish enmity, together with the Muslims' neglect of their social obligations, was the reason for the failure to implement the governance of the jurist [*Velayat-e faqih*] and Islamic government since the Occultation of the Twelfth Imam in 941 C.E. In other words, Jewish enmity was a major factor in preventing Shi'ism from attaining self-fulfillment prior to the 1979 Revolution.²⁶

Formerly, a common Muslim contention against the Jews was the distortion of the true message that God had conveyed to them through Moses. The present narrative goes further by speaking of a comprehensive Jewish plot to falsify Islam and divert it from its correct doctrinal, moral, and historical path. According to this narrative, the Jews have sought throughout history to corrupt the beliefs of other peoples by penetrating them from within and by implanting their own false beliefs and ideas.²⁷ Thus they sought to destroy Islam immediately following the death of Prophet. Among the measures they employed was the dissemination of the "Torah and Jewish ideas," among the Muslims. By spreading these "poisonous ideas" they succeeded in contaminating the pure beliefs of Islam, thereby facilitating the distortion of this divine religion and bringing it to the same state as Judaism and Christianity. Equally important, the Jews were very active in fomenting seditions among the Muslims.

The perpetrators of these plots had been "Jews in Muslim garbs," that is Jews, who converted to Islam outwardly but remained Jewish in their soul and mind, and who sought to distort and corrupt Islam from within. These converts exerted efforts to falsify if not replace whole passages from the Qur'an. They disseminated false exegeses and interpretations of the Qur'an, fabricated numerous

²⁵ See for instance a sermon by Ayatollah Qarahi where he explains that the secret of guarding oneself from Jewish influence is adherence to the Shiʻi Imams, "Velayat; kelid-e usul-e din/ramz-e masvaniyat-e i'tiqadat az nufudh-e yahud chist?," issued October 18, 2015, http://www.mehr news.com/news/2942890/.

^{26 &}quot;Dushmani-ye yahud va-bi towjihi-ye moslmanan beh takalif-e ijtima'il. Ba'eth-e 'adam-e tashkil-e hokumat-e Islami dar dowreh-ye ghaybat ast," issued October 25, 2015, shorturl.at/bquwE; "Ta'eb: Mashai Abu Bakr-e zaman va-nofuzi-ye yahud ast," July 4, 2016, http://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/30644.

²⁷ See for instance the assertion that many Jews "dressed as Christians," assumed leadership of the Church and spread corruption in its ranks in "Yahudiyan-e makhfi," shorturl.at/dzNX1.

oral traditions designed primarily to harm 'Ali's cause and falsified Islamic history. 28

The suspicious attitude towards these converts was not unique to Shi'ism, and it is also prevalent in Sunni Islam under the category of Isra'iliyat, that is Judeo-Christian traditions that entered Islamic exegesis and distorted it.²⁹ Yet, several points regarding these converts seem to be unique to the Shi'a and deserve elaboration: First is the attribution of a significant role and impact to them, and through them to the Jews as a whole on key events, which were detrimental to the Shi'a. Second, they did not act as individuals for personal reasons, but they were motivated solely by their Jewish identity or nature, and they operated as part of the broader Jewish organization and conspiracy against Islam. Thus, their actions or those of any other Jew project upon all Jews at all times. Third is the association of these early converts with modern Jewish converts to Islam in Iran, and even more importantly to Baha'ism as a proof of a continuous Jewish effort to harm Islam from within. Fourth is the equation of the alleged impact of the early converts on Sunni Islam with the supposed Jewish penetration of Christianity and its distortion by the Jews, particularly the role of Christian apostle Paul (d. 67 C.E.), as both brought about the separation of religion from politics and promoted obedience to the powers that be. In other words, the errors of Sunni Islam are products of the Jews.³⁰

A major issue that Shiʻi historiography and polemics have grappled with was the need to explain the turning of the majority of the Companions of the Prophet

²⁸ Cf., for example, "Yahudiyani ke idi'ay-ye muslmani mikonnad," issued June 13, 2014, https://www.mouood.org/component/k2/item/20370; H. Ilahi, 'A. Yazdani, H. Kazemzadeh, *Mahar-e Enheraf: Bazgavi-ye havadeth pas az rihlat-e piyambar akram (s)* (Qom: mo'assaseh-ye ta'rikh-e tatbiqi, 2014),117–18, 123–26; "Siyasatha-ye sazeman-e nefaq baraye nabudi-ye Islam pas az piyambar (s)," shorturl.at/osHQ8; A. M. Amini Golestani, "Intiqam-e yahudiayn az Imam 'Ali (A)," shorturl.at/dfwGT; al-Ta'i, *Fada'ih Yahud mutalabbisun bil-Islam*; "Asib shenasi-ye ta'rikh-e Islam va-naqsh-e yahud dar an," http://analytichistory.blogfa.com/post-3.aspx.
29 For a Shi'i view of Isra'iliyyat, see G. Vajda, "Isrā'iliyyāt," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. H. A. R. Gibb (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 4:211–12; Y. Tzvi Langermann, "Medical Israiliyyat? Ancient Islamic Medical Traditions Transcribed into the Hebrew Alphabet," *Aleph: Historical Studies in Science and Judaism* 6, no. 1 (2006): 373–98. A. J. Sobhani, "moshkel-e Isra'iliyat dar hadith, bekhater-e bid'atha-ye sadr Islam ast," issued July 18, 2011, shorturl.at/jIP47.

³⁰ Cf. "Paulus va-'amaliyat-e yahud baraye takhrib-e masihiyat," in *Tibar-e enheraf: pezhaheshi dar dushman'shinasi-i tarikhi*, ed. M. Ta'eb, 191–92; "Yahudiayan-e makhfi," issued September 14, 2014, shorturl.at/mxDPX; *Mahar-e Enheraf*, 163; "Yahudi makhfi ya anusi," issued January 1, 2013, http://afshin1939.persianblog.ir/post/633; "Yahudi zadegan musalman nema (bakhshe payani)," shorturl.at/lzEI2. The Institute for Applied Historical Research convened on September 26, 2016, a special seminar on the "Jewish distortion (*enherafgari*) in Christianity (messianic Zionism) from Paul to Martin Luther," cf. http://fa.tarikh.org/index.php/en/news/item/1669.

against 'Ali, the Prophet's cousin, son-in-law and rightful heir according to Shi'is belief immediately after the Prophet's death. For centuries, Shi'is blamed several companions, led by 'Umar bin al-Khattab and Abu Bakr, for the usurpation of the Prophet's succession from 'Ali's and his later tribulations.³¹ While not exonerating these persons, the new approach highlights the role of the Jews in these tragic events. Who else but the "Zionist Jews" could have connived such a conspiracy?, they maintain. It is only logical that they had been the mastermind behind these seditions considering their continuous clashes with the Prophet and the numerous warnings against them in the Qur'an.³²

Jewish actions are explained in three complementary ways: Jewish enmity towards the Prophet's household and against 'Ali in particular; Allegations of close friendship and collaboration between the Jews and those Companions, who had played the most harmful role in the conspiracies against 'Ali and Fatima; and the attribution of Jewish ancestry to many of these Companions.

Alleged Jewish enmity towards 'Ali was attributed to several reasons: First, due to their evil nature, the Jews had always opposed true men of God. Therefore, just as they had persecuted Jesus and Muhammad and tried to kill Muhammad several times, they fought against 'Ali. Various Shi'i sources trace Jewish animosity towards 'Ali to his actions in the battle against the Jewish tribe of Banu Qurayza where he had killed many Jews and to his central role in the conquest of the Jewish oasis of al-Khaybar. Concurrently, 'Ali was among the very few who had always distrusted the Jewish converts to Islam.³³ Jewish enmity to the Prophet's household reached new low by their role in poisoning Fatima, the Prophet's daughter and 'Ali's wife, and all other ten Imams, that is the descendants of 'Ali and the only legitimate rulers according to Shi'i doctrine.³⁴

³¹ For Shi'i criticism of the Companions as hypocrites and even as apostates, see E. Kohlberg, "Some Imami Shi'i Views on the Sahaba," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 5 (1984): 143–75.

³² "Saqifat bani Isra'il," http://intiqam.blogfa.com/post-23.aspx; "Gozaresh-e Fars az neshest-e 'naqsh-e yahud dar vaqi'ah-ye khunin-e Karbala (2)," issued November 17, 2012, http://www. farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13910826000113; M. M. Hamidi, *Dushmanan-e mahdaviyat chera? Va-cheguneh?* (Qom: Markaz-e tahqiqat-e rayaneh-ye qa'imiyeh Isfahan, 2008), 96–98; "Jarayan shenasi ta'rikhi-ye nufudh ba tamarkoz bar yahud."

³³ Naqsh-e yahud dar shahadat-e Imaman," http://www.ahbab14.blogfa.com/post/26; "'Umar wal-yahud: dirasa nafsiyya fi khalfiyat 'Umar al-diniyya," shorturl.at/BQW27; "al-Radd al-sarim 'ala a'da' al-Imam al-qa'im," issued May 4, 2016, shorturl.at/bgyN2; M. Dashti, *Raha-vard-e mobarazat-e hazrat-e Zahra 'alayha al-slam* (Isfahan: Markaz tahqiqat-e rayanha-ye qa'imiye-ye Isfahan, n.d.), 19; "Yahudi zadegan musalman nema."

^{34 &}quot;Naqsh-e yahud dar vaqaye'-e ta'rikh-e Islam"; "Yahudi zadegan musalman nema"; "Naqsh-e yahud dar shahadat-e Imaman"; "Naqsh-e yahud dar shahadat-e ahl-e beit," shorturl.at/

The Jewish connection is particularly strong in the case of the second Caliph 'Umar, who had been a subject of Shi'i vilification for centuries, who is described as the "Jewish Fifth column" in the early Islamic community. Few Shi'i writers even gave a pro-Jewish twist to 'Umar's expulsion of the Jews from the Arabian Peninsula. Accordingly, it was not expulsion but a supportive measure toward fulfilling the Jewish-Zionist dream to return to their holy land.³⁵

The third component in explaining Jewish enmity to Shi'ism is the attribution of Jewish ancestry to leading Sunni figures. This practice was widespread among Muslims (Sunnis and Shi'is) and Christians during the medieval period. It reflects the notion of Jews as a metaphor of evil but also served as a mechanism of self-defense by presenting the accuser as innocent of that charge.³⁶

A prominent example of this practice is the attribution of Jewish ancestry to the Umayyad dynasty, the arch villains in Shi'i worldview, who fought 'Ali when he finally became Caliph and seized power in the Arab empire. The modern sources expanded the Umayyad-Jewish connection beyond genealogy into broad collaboration. Accordingly, the ideological distortions that the Jews had fomented paved the way for Umayyad rule. In a significant twist of the ranking of evil and change between pre-modern and contemporary priorities, a writer of the Mowould organization in Qom explained that "the link of the Umayyads with the Party of Satan [the Jews]" is "the greatest proof of the satanic essence of the Umayvad family."37

In a special seminar dedicated to the Jewish role in the tragedy of Karbala held by the Mowoud Center in November 2012, the various speakers placed the Karbala event within the broader theme of Jewish conspiracies against Islam. Significantly, they highlighted the importance of cursing the Jews as part of the 'Ashura ceremonies, as the mourners are required to curse the enemies of Islam, and the Qur'an places the Jews above all other enemies. Not surprisingly, Hojjat al-Islam Mohammad Ibrahim-niya concluded that the elimina-

jCH12; Hamidi, Dushmanan-e Mahdaviyat chera va-chegune, 125, 128, 147; M. Ibrahim-niya, "Naqsh-e yahud dar shahadat-e hazrat-e Zahra' salam Allah 'alayha," http://intiqam.blogfa. com/post/24; "Enqelabim, sarbaz rahbarim," issued July 26, 2016, https://www.pictaramsite. com/post/BIYE7yuDAdR; "Baznegari naqsh-e yahud dar masa'ib ahl-e bayt 'alayhim al-salam," https://hammihan.com/post/9001251.

^{35 &}quot;'Umar wal-yahud/Yahudiyat 'Umar b. al-Khattab wa-ta'amorihi ma'a al-yahud," http:// marwan1433143.blogspot.co.il/2014/10/blog-post.html; "Dawr al-yahud fi al-mu'amara."

³⁶ Cf. D. Nirenberg, "The Extinction of Spain's Jews and the Birth of Its Inquisition," in Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition, 217-45.

^{37 &}quot;Bani Umayya va-yahud," issued July 15, 2016, http://www.mouood.org/component/k2/ item/36944.

tion of the State of Israel would be the proper revenge [intiqam] for the Karbala tragedy.³⁸

Jewish animosity, conspiracies, and activities against Shi'ism culminate in their efforts to prevent the future rise of the Mahdi or Messiah and to fight him once he appears. Not surprisingly, Grand Ayatollah Nuri Hamedani, who explained the grave danger which the Jews pose to the Iranian people and to the Muslims as a whole, drew the conclusion that "one should fight the Jews and vanquish them so that the conditions for the advent of the Hidden Imam would be met." The significance of the clash between the Mahdi and the Jews and his expected revenge upon them led various writers to associate it with the Qur'anic passage (Sura 17 verse 5) regarding the corruption in the land that the Jews will cause twice and their expected final punishment.

Still, the Shiʻi sources, both traditional and modern, are not unanimous about the punishment and fate of the Jews after the Mahdi establishes his just rule on earth. Three different views can be traced in pre-modern Shiʻism. ⁴⁰ Few senior conservative clerics endorse a moderate view saying that most non-Muslims would accept Islam voluntarily, but the few Jews who will not, will be allowed to live as a protected minority paying the poll tax under the Mahdi's rule. ⁴¹ Others reiterate the traditional approach of mass or total Jewish con-

^{38 &}quot;Imam Hossein va-ifsha kardan naqsh-e yahud dar vaqi'ah-ye 'Ashura"; "Naqsh-e yahud dar vaqi'eh-ye khunin karbala"; "Barresi-ye naqsh-e yahud dar vaqi'eh-ye khunin karbala," http://www.598.ir/fa/news/93309: "Naqsh-e yahud dar vaqi'ah-ye ashura' va-shahadat-e Sayyid al-Shuhada' 'alayhi al-salam."

³⁹ "Ayatollah Nouri-Hamedani: 'Fight the Jews and Vanquish Them so as to Hasten the Coming of the Hidden Imam'," MEMRI, Special Dispatch no. 897, April 22, 2005, https://www.memri.org/reports/ayatollah-nouri-hamedani-%E2%80%98fight-jews-and-vanquish-them-so-hasten-coming-hidden-imam%E2%80%99.

⁴⁰ Um al-Banin Haydari and F. Asgarpur, "Yahud va-yahudiayn dar 'asr-e zuhur," issued September 16, 2017, http://www.hawzah.net/fa/Article/View/95371 and M. R. Aqajani Qonad, "Hoquq-e aqaliyatha-ye dini dar 'asr-e zuhur," in *Majmu'ah-ye athar-e Sovomin-e hamayash-e beyne almilali doktrin-e mahdaviyat ba ruyekard siyasi va-huquqi* (Qom: Mo'assasseh-ye ayande roshan, 2008), 303 – 52, which review four different approaches and show that each relies on hadiths to support it.

⁴¹ N. Makarem Shirazi, *Hokumat-e jahani-ye Mahdi* (Qom: Entesharat-e nisl javan, 2001), 288; "Doctrin-e mahdaviyat va-hokumat-e jahani-ye mahdavi az nazar 'Ayatollah Makarem," issued May 23, 2016; A. Qonad, "Hoquq-e aqaliyatha-ye dini dar 'asr-e zuhur," 338; "Aya Imam-e mahdi (aj) hangam-e zuhuresh ba masihiyan va-yahudiyan sulh mikonad va-ba 'Arabha mijangad?," http://hajj.ir/34/12383.

version to Shi'i Islam. 42 By contrast, quite a few mid-ranking hardline clerics and lay writers conclude that following the battle between the Mahdi and his Jewishwestern enemies, the fate of the Jews will be annihilation [nabudi, qatl tam] as the Mahdi "will purify the world from the filth of their existence [lowth-e vujudeshan]."43

Finally, a recent development in the antisemitic discourse in Iran, which presents the Jews as enemies against Iran and the Iranians as a nation, deserves attention and discussion. Apparently, this new trend seeks to appeal to mostly young people who are less attracted to religion but are Iranian patriots by heart. One such example is the modification of the biblical story of Esther into a tale of a Jewish genocide perpetrated against the Iranian people. Early references to the story on the official website of the Qom seminaries were relatively neutral describing Purim as a holiday which the Jews celebrate to mark their rescue from a massacre. However, since the beginning of the new century, a change took place. Dr. Hasan 'Abbasi, who served as a representative of Supreme Leader Khamenei's office in the Revolutionary Guards, launched the new version when he accused the Jews of massacring more than 70,000 Persians following the fall of Haman, as an example of Jewish brutality and enmity towards Iran, which continues to the present day.44 Other writers took on the story and magnified it into a broader tale of Jewish conspiracy against Iran culminating in what they termed "the Iranian Holocaust." Significantly, the Mashreq news agency, which is affiliated with the Revolutionary Guards and a scholarly journal published in Qom, took over the story. In other words, it moved from the margins of the religious-nationalist discourse to its center. Accordingly, within three gen-

⁴² M. Sadeq al-Sadr, Ta'rikh ma ba<u>´</u>d al-zuhur, 530; "Aya yahudiyan dar dowran-e zuhur nabud mishavand?," issued February 13, 2015, http://www.farsnews.com/printable.php?nn= 13931121000429; K. Sulayman, Ruzegar-e Rahhayi (Tehran, 2008), 1:297-300, 378.

⁴³ Haydari and Fatemeh Asgarpur, "Yahud va-yahudiayn dar 'asr-e zuhur"; "Nabudi-ye qawm-e yahud dar dowran-e akhar al-zaman"; Kurani, 'Asr al-Zuhur, 23-24; "Sufyani, avalin-e neshaneh-ye hatmi-ye zuhur-w Imam-e Mahdi," issued June 2, 2015, http://www.rajanews.com/ news/213604; "Ma'rakat al-Imam al-mahdi 'alayhi al-salam ma'a al-yahud," shorturl.at/ervR6, http://endtimeworld.blogsky.com/1392/03/19/post-1199/; Raja'i, Asrar Yahud va-akhar-e zaman, 669. Various writers cite the hadith of "the promise of the stones and trees" as an indication of the fate awaiting the Jews, cf., for example, H. Shahidi, "Sar-nevesht-e yahud maghrur," I. Shafi'l Servestani cited in http://www.lamia.blogsky.com/1392/11/01/post-211; "Yahud va-akhar al-zaman 1," http://alhadid.blogfa.com/post-55.aspx; "Ma'rakat al-Imam al-mahdi 'alayhi alsalam ma'a al-yahud."

^{44 &}quot;Nazar-e doktor Hasan 'Abbasi dar mowred-e hakhmansihyan," shorturl.at/eDNOW; http:// yahood-mir.blogfa.com/post-10.aspx, http://www.bachehayeghalam.ir/articles/cat_05/009070. php, and http://h-l.persianblog.ir/post/94/.

erations after Cyrus, the founder of the Persian Empire had liberated the Jews and Iran gave them refuge, the lews had acquired great influence over the Iranian economy and the court. Whereas queen Vashti was the model of chastity and modesty typical of Iranian women, Esther was the prime example of the Jews using sexual temptation and prostitution to attain their sinister goals and a model to all Jewish women who served as spies in high political circles in various countries.⁴⁵ The Iranian public resented the "power-hungry conduct of the Mordechai band" and wanted to curb it. The grand vizier Hamman, who was a true patriot, wanted the Jews to obey the law of the land and pay the taxes they owed. He sought to drive out the Jewish conspirators from the court and punish the criminals among them. However, Hamman's plans reached the "Jewish council," which employed Esther to have him killed. 46 Following his fall, the Jews gave vent to their hatred of the Iranians and massacred 74,000 of them. Other writers, who purported to rely on authentic Persian documentary evidence, inflate the number of the Iranian victims to 170,000 or over 500,000 claiming that the Jewish genocide destroyed over 50 percent of Iran's population at the time.⁴⁷ While the day of 13 Farvardin (2 April) is a day of mourning for Iranians, who therefore leave their homes and go to the desert to commemorate the massacre, the Jews all over the world celebrate each year the massacre of the Iranians as a manifestation of their hatred of Iran. The biggest celebrations take place in Israel where the practice of drinking blood-like red wine symbolizes the Zionist thirst for blood. Many of the pictures added to these items showed ultra-orthodox Jews who are either dancing or drinking wine. Thus, these pictures demonstrate the

⁴⁵ "Purim jashn-e irani koshi-ye yahudiyan," shorturl.at/ezHLT; "Jashn-e purim; raqs-e yahud dar holokast-e iranian, 'sizdah bedar' ruz-e jashn-e yahud beh monsebat-e koshtar-e 500 hezar-e irani," April 1, 2013, http://www.mashreghnews.ir/news/148648.

^{46 &}quot;Holocast-e irani tavassot-e yahud," http://anasr121.mihanblog.com/post/1918; "Sokhnan-e ostad-e Ra'ifi-pur dar barah-ye purim va-qatl 'am iranian," http://rozegarrahae.blogfa.com/post/30; "Jashn-e purim; holokast-e iranian beh dast-e sahyunist-ha," April 2, 2016, http://tnews.ir/news/0d3160056199.html; "Davazdah saniyh ta behesht, fahishe-ye yahudi sikandar koshti siyasat," http://zolfaghar12.blogfa.com/post/72; "Jashn-e purim; raqs-e yahud dar holokast-e iranian."

⁴⁷ "Iranian Political Analyst Dr. Majid Goudarzi: The Book of Esther Describes Jewish Genocide Against Iranians," MEMRI TV clip no. 1005, January 4, 2006, https://www.memri.org/tv/iranian-political-analyst-dr-majid-goudarzi-book-esther-describes-jewish-genocide-against/transcript;

[&]quot;Purim jashn-e irani koshi-ye yahudiyan"; "Jashn-e purim; raqs-e yahud dar holokast-e irani-an"; "Qatili beh nam-e ester (holokast-e irani)," issued December 12, 2010, https://ya mahdi313.blogsky.com/1389/09/21/post-39/. The story of Esther is not mentioned in any non-Jewish source, leading various scholars to regard it as a symbolic myth rather than a real historical event.

confluence between Zionism and Judaism but also associate the Jews with unruly conduct, which pious Muslims should abhor.⁴⁸

The new story contains many of the themes and tropes that are typical of traditional and modern European antisemitism. Among them are Jewish shady financial conduct; central semi-secretive all-powerful leadership; the use of sex for the attainment of criminal goals; sharp contrast in moral character and conduct with the indigenous and patriotic people of the land, and finally unbridled Jewish enmity to the indigenous people.

Prior to the 1979 Revolution, the Shi'i clergy had opposed the monarchy's glorification of the pre-Islamic Achaemenid dynasty, since the pre-Islamic past served as an alternative to Islamic identity. 49 With the partial rehabilitation of the pre-Islamic past in Iran by centrist clerics and populists like then president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, various hardliners used the new story to vilify the Achaemenids as servile allies if not puppets of the Jews. Accordingly, the name Achaemenid appeared after King Darius, together with his Jewish wife Esther and his Jewish grand Vizier, seized control of the empire and the brutal massacre of the opponents of Jews throughout the empire. The defeated and patriotic people of Iran named the dynasty Hacham Menashe (Rabbi Menashe), to denote their servility to the Jewish Rabbi, and the name later evolved into Achaemenid.⁵⁰ Few writers, who spoke of Esther's marriage to Xerxes, pointed to the proximity of the Purim story to the Persian failure in the battle of Thermopylae (480 B.C.E.) in Greece, alluding to her potential role in the defeat.⁵¹ As was the case with other manifestations of Iranian antisemitism, the past and present are conflated. Thus, some writers give Esther's intrigues a Zionist slant, when they claim that she wanted her son to be the Shah of Iran, so that he would save the Jews from their dispersion and help them return to Palestine. Others describe the perpetrators of the alleged genocide as Zionists, or claim that the whole story was written in the service of "the money landers who had dominated the world

⁴⁸ "Hadiyat-e netanyahu beh Obama: sanad-e qatl-e 'am deh-hv hezar-e irani dar 13 farvardin," March 18, 2012, http://www.rajanews.com/news/103775; "Jashn-e purim; raqs-e yahud dar holokast-e iranian"; "Holokast-e Iranian tavasot-e yahud." The thirteenth of Farvardin marks the end of the Nowruz (New Year) holidays in Iran, during which people spend time picnicking outdoors.

⁴⁹ A. Ansari, *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 166–68, 222–23; M. Merhavi, "National Historical Awareness during the Reign of Muhammad Reza Shah" (PhD diss., Tel Aviv University, 2013).

⁵⁰ "Sizdah badr ya holocast-e irani koshi tavasot-e yahud," issued June 5, 2008, http://www. aftabir.com/articles/view/politics/world/c1c1212644796_holocaust_p1.php; "Sokhnan-e ostad-e Ra'ifi-pur dar barah-ye purim va-qatl 'am Iranian."

^{51 &}quot;Falsafa-ye 13 badr - holocast-e irani," http://dusttorbati.blogfa.com/page/purim.

that is the Zionists and Free Masons."⁵² The story uses the modern language of nationalism with the frequent references to the Iranian people and Iranian patriotism in pre-Islamic antiquity and contrasts them with age old Jewish nationalism. It magnifies the nationalist dichotomy by presenting the Jews as harboring hatred, rancor, and disdain towards Iranian culture and identity from antiquity to the present.⁵³

The title, Iranian Holocaust, which was given to the concocted story, was not coincidental. It reflected two broader phenomena in modern culture. First, the evolution of the Holocaust into a metaphor and criterion of absolute evil, even by those who seek to underscore only the universal humanistic aspects of the Holocaust and belittle if not totally ignore its Jewish dimension. Sadly or ironically, it also seems to have borrowed from the evolving "culture of victimhood" in the West, especially since the 1980s and 1990s, as part of ethnic and national identity and collective memory that involves the recognition and rectification of past evils. In this competition for victimhood, having suffered a holocaust in the past is perceived as the ultimate proof and winning card.

To conclude, modern Shi'i discourse on Judaism represents both continuity and change from earlier periods. Unlike the pre-modern discourse, the modern Shi'i discourse is predominantly if not wholly hostile. It is based on the early hostility, but it also draws from contemporary Sunni Islamism and from Western antisemitism. In addition, it has become much more politicized as it discarded the issue of Jewish impurity but associates the Jews and Zionism with the Western cultural challenge and threat to Islam. Another cause for this politicization is the attempt to find a common ground with mainstream Sunnis against the common enemy in order to ease sectarian animosities within Islam.

Two major traits that typify the pre-modern Islamic approach can be found in modern antisemitism as well. The first is the timelessness of Jewish motivations, character, and modes of action, which continue unchanged from the distant past to the present. The second trait presents the Jews as a calculating and organized monolith, motivated solely by their Jewish character or collective aspirations.

A major issue in this context is the measure of acceptance of the anti-Jewish motifs among larger sections of the population. Studies of intellectual history or

⁵² 'A. al-Hossen Ibrahimi, "Haqayqi dar bara-ye yahudiyat," *Ma'aref* 74 (February 2004): 57–65, http://www.hawzah.net/fa/Article/View/89528; "Sokhnan-e ostad-e Ra'ifi-pur dar barah-ye purim va-qatl 'am iranian."

⁵³ See the article linking current Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu with the past Jewish hatred, in "Hadiyat-e netanyahu beh Obama: sanad-e qatl-e 'am deh ha-ye hezar-e irani dar 13 farvar-din," issued March 18, 2012, http://www.rajanews.com/news/103775.

public discourse in the Middle East face a serious methodological problem of ascertaining reception due to the difficulty of acquiring data on public opinion particularly among the "silent classes." In view of the political situation in the Middle East, the ordinary Shi'i consumer of religious or political literature is hardly exposed to alternative attitudes towards Jews, other than the dominant discourse. Several factors seem to facilitate broad acceptance of anti-Jewish arguments: the widespread dissemination of such themes in a wide variety of media may serve as an indication of their popularity; the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and sympathy for the Palestinians further help popular readiness to believe hostile charges against Jews; the resort to themes that are deeply rooted in religious tradition makes such dissemination and absorption easier; and finally the linkage of the Jews with other enemies of Shi'ism, from the West to the Wahhabis justifies their perception as the metaphor for evil and as an explanation for other threats. Conversely, those who are disillusioned by the Iranian government's official ideology may be less inclined to accept the anti-Jewish propaganda.

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