

Biographical Zoning and Baha'i Biographical Writing: The Case of Rose Henderson

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Abstract

This paper explores biographical zoning as a phenomenon of Baha'i biographical writing. It draws on a number of Baha'i vignettes and, in particular, on the life of an early Canadian Baha'i, Rose Henderson, to illustrate the phenomenon. Biographical zoning refers to the process whereby the individual or the affiliated group claims exclusive privilege of particular biographical information at the expense of other biographical data. Although autobiographical accounts understandably undergo biographical zoning, the process also applies to other biographical writing and brief biographies in particular.

The act of biographical zoning seems to be particularly prevalent when the individual shares memberships, informal or formal, with a variety of groups. In that case, the individual chooses which membership activities to highlight, or the biographer, by dint of partisan enthusiasm, stresses the subject's total involvement in merely one group. If the biographer's context of membership is the same as that of the subject, there is often an unwitting urge to follow the group's claim on that person and the group's disavowal of that person's affiliation with other groups.

The paper also explores the existence of four Baha'i world views that may account for the practice of biographical zoning. The four world views can be described as the embryonic view, the integrative view, the oasis view, and the composite view. Each of these views underscores a particular relationship to the world at large; some views are more likely to engage in biographical zoning than others.

Cathy Freeman, Dizzie Gillespie, Alain Locke, Carole Lombard, Lydia Zamenhof, the Dowager Queen Marie of Romania: What do these prominent athletes, musicians, intellectuals, actors, and royalty share? They were, or are, part of the Baha'i community. They also share a distinctive feature of their lives: they occupy biographical zones with strict boundaries.¹

¹ I presented earlier versions of this paper at the Newcastle-upon-Tyne Baha'i Studies Seminar and the Baha'i Biography Conference at Landegg International University (Switzerland), both held in December 2002. The present form follows more closely the paper I presented at the Annual Meetings of the Canadian Historical Association, held at the University of Toronto in May 2002. I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Mr Daniel Dubé, National Archives of Canada, Ottawa. I am grateful to Dr Peter Campbell, Queen's University at Kingston, Ontario, Ms Deirdre Bonnycastle of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and Dr Tamara Myers of the University of Winnipeg for their generous help. Dr Linda Kealey of the University of New Brunswick kindly offered her papers on Rose Henderson for photocopying. Dr Deborah K. van den Hoonaard, St Thomas University in Fredericton, offered helpful comments in the further development of this paper, as has Ms Marlene Macke of St Marys, Ontario. I also thank Mrs Farzaneh Bastan for undertaking some Persian-English

Biographical zoning refers to the process whereby the individual or the affiliated group claims exclusive privilege of particular biographical information at the expense of other biographical data. Although autobiographical accounts understandably undergo biographical zoning, the process also occurs in other biographical writing, and in brief biographies in particular. As a Baha'i biographer in the making, I am a particular suspect in the 'crime' of biographical zoning.

The act of biographical zoning seems to be particularly prevalent when the individual shares informal or formal memberships with a variety of groups. In that case, the individual chooses which membership activities to highlight, or the biographer by dint of partisan enthusiasm, stresses the subject's involvement in merely one group. If the biographer's context of membership is the same as that of the subject, there is often an unwitting urge to follow the group's claim on that person and the group's disavowal of that person's affiliation with other groups.

The disavowal can be unintentional or intentional. When the disavowal is unintentional, as it usually is, the act of zoning entails a complete lack of familiarity or knowledge of the individual's other associations or memberships. Aside from the partisan enthusiasm I referred to above, the most profound reason lies in the dearth of historical records. Moreover, the fact that not all groups are equally interested in producing biographies of the same person produces an unevenness and can lead to zoning. It is quite unusual to have a cadre of biographers who would tackle biographies from a variety of perspectives and memberships. The community of Baha'i scholars is small and the number of non-Baha'i scholars interested in writing about Baha'is is even smaller. We do have a few examples, however, where the Baha'i affiliation of particular individuals is gradually being recognized, not by the general public, but by writers on the lives of such people as Lydia Zamenhof, Mark Tobey, the Dowager Queen of Romania, W. Sutherland Maxwell, Bernard Leach, Richard St Barbe Baker, Auguste Forel and Dizzie Gillespie. In several of these cases, however, there is no in-depth consideration of their involvement with the Baha'i Faith or its community.

If the disavowal is intentional, there are much greater issues at stake – the kind that are not easily resolved by 'more research'. When biographical zoning occurs there is a clear background and foreground. The background – usually ignored by the group who claims biographical privilege – constitutes that person's other memberships and/or associations. The foreground is, from the perspective of the relevant group, the only biography that is visible and meaningful. From a scholarly perspective, biographical zoning becomes problematic when one relies only on documentary sources vested in one of the affiliated groups. Turning to those sources of information is much like relying on the one side of a coin that perpetually faces upwards, so that the other side of the coin is relegated to invisible status.

There are parallels in other areas, as in, for example, medical staff-patient relationships. Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss² developed the idea of 'awareness contexts' to characterize the relationship between terminally ill hospital patients, their families, and

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² Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, 'Awareness Contexts and Social Interaction', *American Sociological Review* 29 (1964) 669-679.

medical staff.³ The distribution of knowledge about the dying person's condition is quite uneven, ranging from 'closed awareness', when knowledge is withheld from the patient, to 'open awareness', when there are no secrets among all the parties:

An *open awareness* context obtains when each interactant is aware of the other's true identity and his own identity in the eyes of the other. A *closed awareness* context obtains when one interactant does not know either the other's identity or the other's view of his identity. A *suspicion awareness* context is a modification of the closed one: one interactant suspects the true identity of the other or the other's view of his own identity, or both. A *pretence awareness* context is a modification of the open one: both interactants are fully aware but pretend not to be.⁴ [*emphasis mine*]

Before coming to the main example of biographical zoning, it is useful to draw briefly on a number of historical examples – all of which demonstrate either the invisible Baha'i identity of the featured person from the perspective of the larger society, or the invisible social significance of that person from the Baha'i standpoint.⁵ Biographical zoning can go in various directions, as the next vignettes will demonstrate.

Alain Locke represents a good case of closed awareness, for both 'parties' (i.e. the Baha'i community and the larger society) were unaware of his activities in the other party. Alain Locke (1885-1954), the African-American philosopher and aesthete, was the 'ideological mastermind behind the Harlem Renaissance'⁶ and a Baha'i. He embraced the Baha'i Faith in 1918, the same year he graduated from Howard University. At least one leading authority doubted Locke's affiliation with the Baha'i Faith,⁷ although the Baha'i Faith was well known among the circle of African-American intelligentsia at that time.⁸ Locke is always listed as an Episcopalian in his biographies.⁹

A striking form of biographical zoning, the equivalent of pretence awareness according to the typology developed by Glaser and Strauss, belongs to Aboriginal activist 'Burnam Burnam', aka Harry Penrith. Burnam/Penrith (1933 or 1936-1997), one of the first Aboriginal Baha'is in Australia, was at one time a charismatic figure in the Baha'i community.¹⁰ What was less known to the Baha'is was his 'fierce individualism or his confrontations with other Aboriginal leaders'.¹¹ His flamboyant behaviour included his

³ Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles and Practice* (London: Tavistock, 1983) 182.

⁴ Glaser and Strauss, 'Awareness Contexts' 669.

⁵ Biographical zoning in the Baha'i community is the obverse of what David Piff, *Bahā'ī Lore* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2000) has found in terms of the informal Baha'i lore claiming Baha'i membership of celebrities. Piff lists nearly 80 of them, from Captain Kangaroo to Cher and the Archbishop of Canterbury..

⁶ Christopher Buck, 'Alain Locke: Baha'i Philosopher', *Baha'i Studies Review* 10 (2001) 19.

⁷ Buck, 'Alain Locke' 21.

⁸ In the 1920s, for example, there were considerable contacts made by Baha'is with W. E. B. Du Bois, Franz Boas, James Weldon Johnson, and Jane Addams – all vitally interested in the steps taken by the Baha'is in promoting racial unity.

⁹ Buck, 'Alain Locke' 47.

¹⁰ Graham Hassall, email to W. C. van den Hoonaard, 28 February 2002.

¹¹ Fiona Capp, 'Review of Marlene J. Norst, [1999] *Burnam Burnam: A Warrior for Peace*' in *The Age* at <http://www.theage.com.au/daily/991120/books/books/0.htm> (2002).

planting of the Aboriginal flag on England's soil during the Australian bicentenary.¹² None of his activities in the other biographical zones were featured (as far as I know) in Baha'i publications, where he was regarded as an icon of a tribal person who had entered the Baha'i community.

One group's background becomes another group's foreground. Carole Lombard (1908-1942) provides an interesting example of biographical zoning. Baha'is were aware of her role as an actor, but one wonders to what extent the world at large knew she was a Baha'i. A contemporary fan of Carole Lombard describes her as an 'icon of the Golden Age of Hollywood'¹³ who died in a plane crash in 1942. Lombard was introduced to the Baha'i Faith by Lorol Schopflocher, a young New Yorker who married Hand of the Cause of God Siegfried ('Freddie') Schopflocher. Lorol Schopflocher was herself introduced to the Baha'i Faith by Rose Henderson, an early Baha'i and leading social activist. There is, however, no record that the 'larger' society outside the Baha'i community knew Lombard as a Baha'i.

Another Australian Aboriginal, Cathy Freeman, achieved considerable fame in recent years as an Olympian athlete who at the age of 27 had already won over 30 international races as a runner.¹⁴ Worldwide, few Baha'is know she was raised in a Baha'i family. In her case, biographical zoning also represents the type of pretence awareness. A major work on sport heroines has an extensive biographical account on Cathy Freeman, but her Baha'i background is not in evidence at all.¹⁵

The Canadian Context

Turning now to the lives and biographies of a number of early Baha'is in Canada, many of my findings in this area come from my historical research on the Canadian Baha'i community.¹⁶ Focussing more narrowly on the Baha'i community, a number of authors¹⁷ observed that many early Baha'is were also social activists. While from its earliest days the Baha'i teachings encouraged social and economic development,¹⁸ they brought special attention to the plight of the poor, the status of women, illiteracy, orphans, health, women's suffrage, racism and education, to varying degrees in Britain, the United States, France, Iran and Canada. As Weinberg suggests, for 'some of them, the Baha'i movement was simply another organisation they belonged to alongside other cherished causes.'¹⁹ Biographical zoning was easily maintained even in those years of social activism outside the Baha'i community. Following the example of 'Abdu'l-Baha, one expressed one's Baha'i identity

¹² Marlene J. Norst, *Burnam Burnam: A Warrior for Peace* (East Roseville: Kangaroo Press, 1999).

¹³ Anonymous, 'Great for Research', 2002, a customer review of Robert D. Matzen's *Carole Lombard*, Amazon.Com website, 1 January 2002.

¹⁴ Nike Melbourne Track Club, 'Profiles: Cathy Freeman', at <http://www.melbournetrackclub.com.au/freemanprofile.html> (2002).

¹⁵ Jennifer Hargreaves, *Heroines of Sport: The Politics of Difference and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2000) 91-101. Dr Hargreaves confirmed that she remembered reading somewhere that Ms Freeman's family was Baha'i (email from J. Hargreaves to author, 19 July 2004).

¹⁶ Will C. van den Hoonaard, *The Origins of the Bahā'ī Community of Canada, 1898-1948* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996).

¹⁷ See, for example, Robert Weinberg, 'Sounding: Early European Baha'i Involvement in Social Activism', *Baha'i Studies Review* 10 (2001); van den Hoonaard, *Origins* 29-42.

¹⁸ Will C. van den Hoonaard, 'A Pattern of Development: An Historical Study of Baha'i Communities in Development', *Bahā'ī Studies Notebook* (1984) 3 (3-4) 107-27.

¹⁹ Weinberg, 'Sounding' 129.

through social action, rather than through verbal assertion. Any non-Baha'is involved in the zoning process were, however, often unaware of the religious identity of the person who also happened to be a Baha'i.

Conversely, Baha'is normally did not (and are still reluctant to) assert their occupational or professional interests within the Baha'i community. Nathalie and Steven Thirlwall, veteran Baha'is in the Baha'i community of Ottawa, claim that Baha'is 'deliberately downplay these interests'.²⁰ 'It is dangerous territory,' says one, 'when giving praise about things that are not directly related to the Baha'i Faith.' By downplaying external involvements, the Baha'i community is informally stating that there is 'no rank'.²¹ Marlene Macke²² claims that as primacy is given to spiritual equality, individual rank based on other criteria is considered less important.²³ Such an attitude prevailed even more so during the 1920s and 1930s when the Baha'i subculture 'did not emphasize knowledge of fellow Baha'is outside their role as participating believers'.²⁴ There are a myriad additional explanations, such as the fact that Baha'i communities have been so small that there were no other members with the same particular external interest or that no other members could appreciate the significance of an individual's prominence in his or her own field.²⁵ However, there are times today when particular talents are showcased, such as in the case of music (e.g. Dan Seals and Dash Croft, Dizzy Gillespie) although in these cases it is probably because they themselves were quick to acknowledge publicly their Baha'i affiliation.²⁶ Nevertheless, as David Piff points out in *Baha'i Lore*, celebrity status is a 'mixed blessing, attractive, yet dangerous'.²⁷ On one hand, testimonies about the Baha'i Faith coming from those with 'fame, great learning, power . . .' serve to underscore the truth claims of the new religion. On the other hand, being a celebrity 'may lead to unhealthy growth of pride at one's status or accomplishments and result in personal disaster'.²⁸

Within the early days of the Canadian Baha'i community there were a relatively large number of adherents whose work 'outside' the Baha'i community was zoned biographically, whose professional and other interests were muted inside the Baha'i community and whose Baha'i identity remained unknown to the larger society. Biographical zoning thus worked both ways. Honoré Jaxon (1861-1952) was the secretary of Louis Riel, and his later affiliation with the Baha'i community (as Canada's first Baha'i) was largely ignored by his

²⁰ Nathalie Thirlwall and Steven Thirlwall, interview by W. C. van den Hoonaard, Ottawa, 25 January 2002.

²¹ *ibid.*

²² Marlene Macke is a biographer of Laura Davis – a close associate of Rose Henderson.

²³ Marlene Macke, letter to W. C. van den Hoonaard, St Marys, ON, 16 April 2002.

²⁴ van den Hoonaard, *Origins* 288.

²⁵ I thank Reviewer 1 for this particular insight.

²⁶ Macke, letter, 16 April 2002.

²⁷ Piff, *Bahā'ī Lore* 139; the reader should bear in mind that inasmuch as biographical zoning may apply to biographical writing in many cultures, the notion of fame and the like does vary across cultures. This paper represents a western perspective on these matters simply because it is a case study of Rose Henderson, a Canadian.

²⁸ Piff, *Bahā'ī Lore* 140.

peers. Ironically, it took a non-Baha'i historian, Donald Smith,²⁹ to bring Jaxon's Baha'i affiliation to the attention of Baha'is themselves.³⁰

A second Canadian case will suffice as a good example of biographical zoning. It involves the life of Albert Durrant Watson (1859-1927), known widely in intellectual circles in Toronto as an astronomer, mystic and poet.³¹ He was the main promoter of the 'Twentieth Planers' who believed that refined souls such as Plato, major composers and others, inhabit the 'Twentieth Plane' in the afterlife.³² The Twentieth Planers practised communion with them during rather startling, highly publicized seances.³³ Watson's Baha'i affiliation has only very recently come to the attention of such scholars as Walter Meyer zu Erpen, who is authoring an entry on Watson for the *Canadian Biographical Dictionary*. Even within the contemporary Baha'i community, there is virtually no knowledge of either Watson's Baha'i membership or his extensive involvement in the literary and intellectual circles of Toronto.

We will now consider in detail one of Canada's earliest Baha'is, Rose Henderson, as a telling case of a suspicion awareness context whereby one party suspects the true identity of the other or the other's view of his or her own identity.

Rose Henderson

Rose Henderson is a captivating research subject for a number of reasons. Long forgotten, Rose was part of the early Baha'i community in Canada during the first two decades of the 20th century, but seems to have disappeared after that. She is, however, resurfacing in this paper, being brought into the Baha'i community through the contemporary back door, as it were. A study of Rose's engagement with the earlier Baha'i community says something about the condition of that community and, indeed, what it was like to be a Baha'i. A study of Rose's Baha'i involvement makes the case of how this particular Baha'i and others have contributed to the wider society. I strongly suspect that every national Baha'i community has a 'Rose' in its historical lapel. No less important, Rose Henderson represents a case of biographical zoning.

Rose's contributions to society, let alone her Baha'i involvement, have never been systematically studied, but one finds scattered references to them. Tamara Myers, at the University of Winnipeg, came upon Rose in her research on girls who came before the Montreal Juvenile Delinquents' Court in the 1910s, while Peter Campbell, at Queen's University, is exploring her life as a social activist.³⁴ Biographical zoning in Rose's case reveals the complexity of zoning: do we, as Baha'is, have enough material about her to be

²⁹ Donald B. Smith, 'William Henry Jackson: Riel's Secretary', *The Beaver* (Spring 1981) 10-19; 'Honoré Joseph Jaxon: A Man Who Lived for others', *Saskatchewan History* 34/3 (1981) 81-101; 'Right Dream, Wrong Time', *Globe and Mail* 15 December (2001) F 6-7.

³⁰ Robert Stockman, *The Bahā'ī Faith in America: Origins, 1892-1900*, vol. 1 (Wilmette, IL.: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1985); van den Hoonaard, *Origins*.

³¹ See, for example, Albert Durrant Watson, *The Poetical Works of Albert Durant Watson* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1924).

³² Albert Durrant Watson, *The Twentieth Plane: A Psychic Revelation* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1918).

³³ Such seances were, and are, not part of Baha'i beliefs.

³⁴ Peter Campbell at Queen's University is exploring her life as a social activist ("Working-Class Hero" Rose Henderson and the Canadian Left, 1919-1920', paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, University of Toronto, 29 May 2002). Sadly, regarding Rose's papers, Scott Young, the husband of Rose's granddaughter, Anne, 'got rid of everything' after Anne's death (Deirdre Bonnycastle, interview by W. C. van den Hoonaard, Saskatoon, 6 June 2000).

able to ignore her 'non-Baha'i' activities, or (as the case may likely be) was Rose herself responsible for her own biographical zoning?

Rose Henderson, née Wills, was born in Ireland³⁵ in 1868 or 1869 and came to Canada in 1893 when she was about 24 years old. Rose married an American accountant³⁶ and in 1889 she had given birth to Ida Rose, who ran off, at a young age, to British Columbia where, in 1908, she married W. R. Bonnycastle, nine years her senior.³⁷ In 1912, Rose had become a young widow and took in boarders from McGill University.³⁸

Many of Rose's interests spanned her whole life, while a number of others seem more concentrated in particular periods. Rose had long-term interests in promoting health. She succeeded in getting Parliament to amend the 1912 Drug Act to prevent the sale of medications except by doctor's prescription,³⁹ and was in touch with Dr. John Esslemont, a British Baha'i, who was a member of the executive committee of the State Medical Service Association, a body set up to promote the concept of a national medical service.⁴⁰ The Association provided evidence to the government committee that produced the Dawson Report, a report that is acclaimed by medical historians as one of the most important and far-sighted documents of the modern age and as one of the foundations of the British National Health Service.

While always interested in the affairs of humanity, her career spans at least six different periods of activities. Although these periods overlap, one can divide them up into the following interests: mothers and children, peace and the status of women, juveniles, labour, politics and public office, and education, to name just a few of her involvements. She was also a prolific writer and poet.⁴¹ One hundred years ago, early in her career, she published a little book of stories and poetry about poor children, *Kids What I Knows*.⁴² Her foreword states that 'Man through his love of power and greed for gold has created poverty (the worst of all crimes) and through the unequal distribution of wealth he has compelled unequal opportunity.' In an interview with the *Montreal Daily Star* (11 September 1912), Rose is already alerting her readers to the fact that the country's legislators have dealt only with the production and protection of wealth and with the adult – 'mostly with the male adult'. According to her, society had imposed immense responsibilities on mothers without enabling them to fulfil these obligations; she spoke against 'good advice, gifts, and doles', miscalled charity.

More important, she argued against the separation of children from mothers when society used poverty as an excuse, saying institutional care could not replace the nurturing love received at home. Finally, she reminded her readers in the above interview that in 1912 a Member of Parliament had suggested that some \$10 million of the \$39 million surplus be spent on the navy; 'Would we not better spend a little money in defence of mothers and

³⁵ *Globe and Mail*, 1 February 1937.

³⁶ There is some uncertainty about her husband's name.

³⁷ Bonnycastle founded BC Electric and named a lake and a mountain after Ida Rose (Bonnycastle, interview, 6 June 2000).

³⁸ Deirdre Bonnycastle, emails to W. C. van den Hoonaard, 10 January 2002 and 31 January 2000; interview, 6 June 2000.

³⁹ Sir Charles G. D. Roberts and Arthur L. Tunnell, eds., *A Standard Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 2, (Toronto: Times Publications, 1936) 497.

⁴⁰ Moojan Momen, *Dr J. E. Esslemont* (London: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1975) 6-7.

⁴¹ Peter Campbell has collected some 150-200 of Rose Henderson's writings.

⁴² Montreal: W. H. Eaton and Son, 1902.

children?’ She also appeared before a parliamentary committee advocating the establishment of an old-age and mothers’ pension, at the invitation of Prime Minister William L. Mackenzie King. Widely-travelled, she moulded public opinion in favour of these pensions. By 1927 six provinces in Canada were operating ‘mothers’ pensions’.⁴³

As a maternal feminist, she not only spoke of the economic causes of war, but also of women’s ‘maternal aversion to violence and war’.⁴⁴ Rose ‘was a unique blend of socialist and feminist ideas’ which were brought to bear on the establishment of peace.⁴⁵ In 1920, she published ‘Women and War’.⁴⁶ According to Sangster,⁴⁷ Rose believed that because of ‘women’s mothering experiences they better understood the value and sanctity of human life’. Thus peace was seen as both a socialist and a women’s issue. She was the sole Canadian delegate to the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom at The Hague Conference in 1922.⁴⁸

After two years of voluntary service helping children who appeared in the police courts, she had gathered enough facts to assist the federal government to establish juvenile courts; this service was followed by eight years as assistant to the judge of the juvenile court in Montreal,⁴⁹ possibly from 1924 to 1931.⁵⁰ She was also an early advocate of the ‘Big Sister and Big Brother’ movement. She was an opponent to cadet training in schools.⁵¹

As was the case with another early Baha’i, Honoré Jaxon, Rose championed socialist causes and the Labour movement. She was portrayed as a working-class hero in the Labour press during the years 1919-1920,⁵² as evidenced by the extensive press notices that have appeared about her. A proponent of the rights of the working class, she saw middle-class rule as a ‘tragedy’.⁵³ The *Toronto Star*⁵⁴ stated that she was ‘the best known speaker in the Labour movement’. The *Windsor Tribune* described her as a speaker of ‘rare ability, marshalling her facts clearly and delivering them with a force that carries conviction’.⁵⁵ In an interview with the *Montreal Daily Star*, Rose made the following statement: ‘We have established bureaux for the investigation of agriculture, forestry, mines, astronomy, bees, hogs and insects, but the human race, the most wonderful and sacred of all God’s creatures

⁴³ Anonymous, *A Thinker with a Stirring Message: Rose Henderson* [a brochure describing the life and interests of Rose Henderson], Montreal. (Available at the Baha’i World Centre Archives, Haifa, Israel, No. GA001/084/00193, 1927).

⁴⁴ Joan Sangster, ‘The Role of Women in the Early CCF, 1933-1940’, in *Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics*, eds. Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989) 121-2.

⁴⁵ *ibid* 121-2.

⁴⁶ *ibid* 121-2.

⁴⁷ *ibid* 121-2.

⁴⁸ Thomas P. Socknat, *Witness Against War: Pacifism in Canada, 1900-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987) 109. Jameson Bond, a Baha’i since World War II, mentions that his ‘mother knew Rose Henderson in Toronto in the ‘30s when she was [also] active in the League of Nations Association of Canada’. (Letter to W. C. van den Hoonaard, 27 April 1997) .

⁴⁹ Roberts and Turnell, *Standard Dictionary* 497.

⁵⁰ *Globe and Mail*, 1 February 1937.

⁵¹ Roberts and Turnell, *Standard Dictionary* 497.

⁵² Peter Campbell, email to W. C. van den Hoonaard, 18 October 2001.

⁵³ Gerald L. Caplan, *The Dilemma of Canadian Socialism: The CCF in Ontario* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973) 25.

⁵⁴ Cited in Roberts and Turnell, *Standard Dictionary* 497; Anonymous, *A Thinker*.

⁵⁵ Also cited in Roberts and Turnell, *Standard Dictionary* 497; Anonymous, *A Thinker*.

has been the last thing to receive attention.⁵⁶ Desiring first-hand information, Rose worked in 'factories and sweat-shops, laundries, restaurants and private homes' and lived in the homes of miners in Canada and Great Britain.⁵⁷ Rose maintained contact with William MacKenzie King, Canada's prime minister. In July 1926, for example, she wrote to him, urging him to take on reforms 'in the interests of justice, fair play and Constitutionalism'.⁵⁸

According to some, from 1926 to autumn 1930 she travelled to Germany and the Soviet Union to study political and social conditions. Rose's granddaughter, Anne, told the story that Rose Henderson wanted to travel to Russia 'to see what happened' after the Revolution of 1917.⁵⁹ In Britain she studied sociology and economics for two years at London University under Professor Laski (1893-1950) and others.⁶⁰ Laski was a celebrated scholar and socialist at the London School of Economics from 1920 to 1934, and author of 31 books. A 'public intellectual', he was active in the Labour Party and the Socialist League.⁶¹ Like Henderson, Laski undertook a visit to the Soviet Union (in 1934). As it turns out, it was at the height of Rose's involvement with the Labour movement, at the cusp of her becoming involved in partisan politics, that her support of the Baha'i Faith waned.

In the early 1930s she became a member of the executive of the Ontario Labour Party,⁶² and in 1934 she was successful in defending her Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF)⁶³ candidacy to the Ontario legislature for Toronto-Dovercourt in the general elections.⁶⁴ In 1935 she was the Parkdale, Ontario, candidate for parliament, the same year that she was present at the Congress of the Canadian League against War and Fascism (CLWF).⁶⁵ In 1936 she became a 'leading figure' in the Toronto CCF Women's Joint Committee, while at the same time serving on the executive of the Ontario Labour Party at a time when there was a 'brief flowering of feminist support for the radical left'.⁶⁶ In 1934 she was an active member of the Toronto Board of Education (ward 5).⁶⁷ In 1936 Rose organized a peace-poster contest in Toronto's technical schools, in which Arthur Lismer (of the famed 'Group of Seven' painters in Canada) exhibited.

⁵⁶ 11 September 1912.

⁵⁷ Anonymous, *A Thinker*.

⁵⁸ MacKenzie King Papers, National Archives of Canada, Ottawa, MG 26 J1, Vol. 132 (112399-112408); Microfilm Reel C2289, 8 July 1926.

⁵⁹ Rose's granddaughter, Anne, became right-wing and moved to Hollywood to become an actor. Anne's niece, Deirdre, always knew her as a set-designer (Bonnycastle, interview, 6 June 2000).

⁶⁰ Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, memorandum to the House of Justice, 16 November 1999 (enclosed in a letter from the Department of the Secretariat of the House of Justice to W. C. van den Hoonaard, 16 November 1999).

⁶¹ Isaac Kramnick and Barry Sheerman, 'Laski on the Left', *LSE Magazine* (Autumn 1993) 4-7.

⁶² Socknat, *Witness* 132.

⁶³ A socialist political party, which was transformed into the New Democratic Party (NDP) well after World War II.

⁶⁴ Roberts and Turnell, *Standard Dictionary* 497.

⁶⁵ Beth Light and Ruth Roach Pierson, *No Easy Road: Women in Canada, 1920s to 1960s* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1990) 348.

⁶⁶ Socknat, *Witness* 107, 132-134, 325.

⁶⁷ *Globe and Mail*, 1 February 1937.

Henderson's Baha'i Involvement

Already in the first decade of the 1900s Rose Henderson appears as a Baha'i in Montreal,⁶⁸ probably becoming a Baha'i in 1909.⁶⁹ Her Baha'i teacher, May Maxwell, championed a number of social causes herself, but was particularly devoted to racial amity work.⁷⁰ Rose was also a friend of many Baha'is, including Juliet Thompson.⁷¹ Although information about her specific involvements in the Baha'i community is rather meagre, there are a number of characteristics of the Baha'i community we can draw on that explain the nature of her involvement. Although it is hard to speculate on the precise nature of her involvement with the Baha'i community – given the paucity of scattered information – one can describe three phases in her involvement in it.

Incipient Involvement: 1909-1912

Her involvement in the Baha'i community until 1912 largely corresponds to her interests in the welfare of mothers and children. Until 1912 membership in the Baha'i community was largely undefined by formal membership. May Maxwell, the foremost Baha'i teacher in Canada, attracted a number of leading Montreal citizens who became devoted to the Baha'i Cause. However, because there were not many authorized translations of the Baha'i sacred writings in existence, the Baha'i teaching was largely based on oral traditions. The group of new Baha'is gathered around May Maxwell did not constitute a distinct Baha'i community in the same sense as those of today. Individuals found in 'Abdu'l-Baha a person of enormous charisma, a Christ-like figure whose 56 or so years of imprisonment, charitable work, and exemplary life attracted considerable attention in the Western world. This connection, however, was primarily through May Maxwell. With perhaps an exception or two, the new believers in the new religion were apt to distinguish themselves in good works, keeping their religious faith as a personal matter rather than as a force to organize a group or community. This situation changed in 1912 with the visit to Montreal of 'Abdu'l-Baha, whom Rose met.⁷² His meetings with striking garment workers in Montreal, his talks on economic justice, and his presentations on the need to establish international peace and arbitration (where women would play a particularly significant role) must have confirmed Rose's identity as a Baha'i.

Acquiescent Phase: 1912-1927

'Abdu'l-Baha's visit received extensive press coverage in Montreal, in both English-language and French-language newspapers (in fact, at least 38 articles). By one estimate, some 2,500 people heard presentations by 'Abdu'l-Baha.⁷³ The visit was a keystone in the development of the Baha'i community of Canada for it allowed individual Baha'is to see themselves as a community, rather than as an aggregate of individuals. This process caused individuals to align more closely their 'outside' aspirations and their Baha'i interests: they were now asking themselves how to connect more forcefully these outside interests with their Baha'i interests. It was therefore not uncommon for Baha'is to correspond with

⁶⁸ *Bahā'ī World* (vols 1-12, 1925-54, rpt. Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1980) 8: 636.

⁶⁹ Rose herself explains in a letter dated 14 July 1927 that she heard of the Baha'i Faith for the first time 18 years previously (i.e. 1909) (Research Department memorandum, 16 November 1999).

⁷⁰ van den Hoonaard, *Origins*, 88.

⁷¹ Peter Campbell, email to W. C. van den Hoonaard, 9 September 2002.

⁷² Research Department memorandum, 16 November 1999.

⁷³ van den Hoonaard *Origins* 46.

‘Abdu’l-Baha on these matters. Rose Henderson was no exception. She, in fact, received two letters from him, instructing her how to serve humanity:

O Handmaid of God. Your letter arrived. We have supplicated the Lord of Hosts and begged His favour on behalf of the new believers so that they will remain firm. The infinite grace surrounds the weak and the poor. From the infinite favours of the Merciful One, I hope that you will spend your life in the service of God and I beg God’s confirmations and blessings for the maid servant of God.⁷⁴

and,

O Attractor to the Truth, your letter arrived. Its content was agreeably accepted, because it was proof of the attraction of the heart and the gladness of the spirit, joy, and rejoicing. Thank God that you obtained new confirmation and found intense strength. You had stated that your aim was to write a treatise regarding the education of the children of the poor. Now limit your thoughts in teaching the Cause of God so that confirmations will be showered upon you and become the cause of guidance to others.⁷⁵

One gleans, from the response of ‘Abdu’l-Baha, that she believed she was facing a difficult decision: whether to pursue her ‘outside’ interests (such as educating ‘the children of the poor’) or to place her energies in ‘teaching the Cause of God’. As we shall see later, this struggle characterized the remainder of her Baha’i life until she gradually shifted her attention from the Baha’i Faith to other causes, probably no later than 1930.

Denouement: 1927

The last-known indication we have of Rose Henderson’s involvement with the Baha’i community came in 1927. For the Baha’is around the world, including North America, it was a watershed year. A year earlier, fanatical elements within Shi’a Islam had undertaken fresh attacks against the Baha’is in Iran, this time in the village of Jahrum, killing 12 Baha’is and pillaging 20 homes.⁷⁶ Shoghi Effendi called upon the North American Baha’i community, however small, to intervene and make representations to the Shah of Iran. There were other setbacks: the Iraqi authorities summarily confiscated the house of Baha’u’llah in Baghdad, which is a point of pilgrimage for the Baha’i world.⁷⁷ Offsetting these ominous developments, the Queen of Romania expressed publicly and in no uncertain terms her allegiance to the new religion. Shoghi Effendi widely circulated the news of her acceptance. It was also in 1927 that the North American Baha’i community embarked on a process of legal incorporation by adopting a ‘Declaration of Trust’ and its by-laws in April.⁷⁸ In conjunction with this Declaration, moreover, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of the United States and Canada adopted, at its 19th national convention, held in Montreal, a set of membership requirements for all believers. For many, the requirements did not alter their convictions and beliefs, but others found themselves in a position of having to choose

⁷⁴ Research Department memorandum, 16 November 1999 (provisional translation by F. Bastan).

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Bahā’ī News*, 17 (April 1927) 4.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Bahā’ī News*, Special Issue (May 1927) 1-3

among their religious and political allegiances, Baha'i and others. The outbursts of attacks against the Eastern Baha'i communities together with the formalization of its constitution and membership brought the Baha'i community in North America to a heightened sense of awareness of itself as a community, an awareness that would dramatically change its criteria of membership and method of propagation.

There appears to have been at least one issue that may have contributed to Rose's irrevocable withdrawal from the Baha'i community: her political interests and activities (and perhaps her reluctance to publicly identify herself as a Baha'i). Rose must have been profoundly aware of the gulf between her desire to become politically involved and the fact that the Baha'i teachings forbade political involvement, as she ventured with her social activism into areas that were now defined by the Baha'i community as 'political' or 'partisan'. In 1932 Shoghi Effendi elaborated on this principle when he wrote, 'Let them [the Baha'is] refrain from associating themselves, whether by word or by deed, with the political pursuits of their respective nations, with the policies of their governments and the schemes and programs of parties and factions.'⁷⁹

There was, however, another issue that loomed large in the renewed efforts of the Baha'is to bring their teachings to the attention of the larger public, namely the 'direct and indirect' methods of teaching the Baha'i Faith. The former entailed bringing the Baha'i message to the public, clearly pronouncing the source of the ideas, namely the founder of the Baha'i Faith, while the latter approach would indirectly bring the Baha'i teachings to the attention of selected audiences without mentioning either 'Baha'i' or the founder of the religion. Rose chose to employ the indirect method, which she believed was important in addressing educated and socially concerned audiences.⁸⁰

In 1927 she presented a number of issues to Shoghi Effendi that were relevant to her as a social activist. It was necessary, she believed, for the Baha'is to study and to be able to explain the events that were taking place in the world so that they could better correlate the Baha'i teachings with the social changes and attract those people who were longing for social change.⁸¹ She offered to make a tour visiting Baha'i communities to inform the Baha'is about the 'present-day movements' so that they might 'understand what the masses are longing for'.⁸² In her letters to 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi, Rose raised issues that would for many years define the relationship between the Baha'is, individually and collectively, and the larger world. On one hand, do Baha'is best promote solutions to the world's problems by directly teaching the Baha'i Faith or by tackling the problems head-on, so to speak? On the other hand, what is the extent to which Baha'is should be informed about the larger world?

A number of her public talks directly reflected Baha'i beliefs and even a usage of words distinctive of the Baha'i teachings. In all of her public utterances and declarations she never referred to the Baha'i Faith. In some sense, then, it is her topics that are the only public evidence that she was a Baha'i. A brochure describing her lectures during 1927 and 1928 reveals Baha'i wording in the following titles of some of her talks: 'The People's Challenge to the Present Social Order', 'The Religion of the New Democracy', 'Woman – The Keystone to a New Civilization', 'The International Web of Economic Forces', 'What is

⁷⁹ Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahā'u'llāh* (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, [1938] 1955), 64.

⁸⁰ Shoghi Effendi addressed the issue of direct and indirect teaching very thoroughly in a letter dated 20 February 1927; *Bahā'ī Administration* (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1974), 124-7.

⁸¹ Research Department memorandum, 16 November 1999.

⁸² *ibid* – there is no record of Shoghi Effendi's reply to Rose Henderson..

True Education?’ and ‘Is Peace Possible?’⁸³ These talks correlate with both the topics and expressions of Baha’i beliefs.

‘The People’s Challenge to the Present Social Order’ mirrors the Baha’i view that ‘Never have there been so many and varied sources of danger as those that now threaten the structure of society.’⁸⁴ The Baha’is were well acquainted with Shoghi Effendi’s understanding of developments in the wider society. With respect to nations, he described them as ‘exhausted and disillusioned’, cherishing ‘anew the spirit of revenge, of domination, and strife’. He described the lives of people as ‘convulsed by economic upheavals, . . . slowly drifting into two great opposing camps with all their menace of social chaos, class hatreds, and worldwide ruin’. He explored the condition of the races as ‘filled with mistrust, humiliation and fear’. Creeds, according to him, were ‘caught in this whirlpool of conflict and passion, [and] appear[ed] to gaze with impotence and despair at this spectacle of unceasing turmoil’.⁸⁵

‘The Religion of the New Democracy’ highlights the democratic principles of some aspects of the Baha’i governance system, which rejects partisan politics. The implications of the Baha’i Faith, according to the Baha’i texts, constitute ‘a challenge . . . to outworn shibboleths of national creeds – creeds that have had their day and which must, in the ordinary course of events as shaped and controlled by Providence, give way to a new gospel, fundamentally different from, and infinitely superior to, what the world has already conceived’.⁸⁶ The Baha’i Faith is thus seen as the religion of the future. A prominent Baha’i, Hooper Harris, spoke on ‘Spiritual Modernism’.⁸⁷ Comparative religion, science and religion, and other similar topics were regular features at the Green Acre Baha’i School in 1927.⁸⁸ The word ‘democracy’ was a pervasive one in Baha’i circles.⁸⁹

‘Woman – The Keystone to a New Civilization’ conveys an essential message from the Baha’i teachings: that the future civilization will become less masculine and more feminine.⁹⁰ There are numerous references in the Baha’i teachings to the particular role of women in bringing peace, and it was a topic that held the attention of the Baha’is in 1927. For example, the Montreal governing body of the Baha’is (where Rose resided) published a list of 14 topics for its public meetings that included ‘Women’s Station in this Age’.⁹¹ In that year, as well, a compilation of the words of ‘Abdu’l-Baha on the subject was published under the title, *Equality of Man and Woman*⁹² and a national Baha’i magazine included a ‘Hymn of Marching Women’.⁹³ ‘Abdu’l-Baha asserted that ‘assuredly women will abolish warfare’.⁹⁴

The phrase ‘true education’ – as shown in the title of one of her talks, ‘What is True Education?’ – is a distinctive term that frequently occurs in the Baha’i writings. For

⁸³ Anonymous, *A Thinker*.

⁸⁴ Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 32.

⁸⁵ *Bahā’ī News*, Special Issue (May 1927) 8.

⁸⁶ Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 43.

⁸⁷ *Bahā’ī News*, 9 (December 1925-1926) 5.

⁸⁸ *Bahā’ī News*, Special Issue (May 1927) 16.

⁸⁹ e.g. *Bahā’ī News*, 19 (August 1927) 5.

⁹⁰ ‘Abdu’l-Baha in *Star of the West*, 9/7 (13 July 1918, rpt Oxford: George Ronald, 1982) 87.

⁹¹ *Bahā’ī News*, 13 (September 1926) 7.

⁹² *Bahā’ī News*, 19 (August 1927) 5.

⁹³ *Bahā’ī News*, 20 (November 1927) 4.

⁹⁴ ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Promulgation of Universal Peace* (Wilmette, IL: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1943) 1:104.

example, Baha'u'llah, in *Ishrāqāt*, links the idea of a 'true education' to spiritual education: 'The hope is cherished that ye may obtain true education in the shelter of the tree of His [God's] tender mercies and act in accordance with that which God desireth. Ye are all the leaves of one tree and the drops of one ocean.'⁹⁵ The word 'true' appears in many Baha'i expressions, as well as the idea of 'education'. We find such phrases as the 'true' principles of human progress,⁹⁶ and there were talks on 'Spiritual and Material Education',⁹⁷ the 'new' education,⁹⁸ and 'New Ideals of Education'.⁹⁹

Her talk 'The International Web of Economic Forces' portrays an image of globalization that was far ahead of its time, but ever-present in the Baha'i teachings. Her 'economics' talk is vested in the Baha'i 'Ideal of World Unity' and the 'New Internationalism'.¹⁰⁰

As a final illustration of how the Baha'i teachings permeated her presentations, one finds the topic of her talk 'Is Peace Possible?' a constant Baha'i theme. A search through *Bahā'ī News*, the major national Baha'i news organ of the time, reveals very many references to world peace: 'The Ideals of Peace',¹⁰¹ 'Peace and the World Court',¹⁰² 'A Practical Effort Towards World Peace',¹⁰³ 'Creation of a Peace Psychology',¹⁰⁴ and 'From Chaos to World Peace'.¹⁰⁵ In 1927 *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* was released, consisting of all the talks given by 'Abdu'l-Baha during his sojourn in North America.

Rose, a powerful influence, pulled other Baha'is into her work. In her earlier years she was responsible for attracting such stellar Baha'is as Lorol Schopflocher into the Baha'i Faith, but as time went on Rose also inadvertently exercised a threat to some members of the Baha'i community:

But Lorol [Schopflocher] was always hunting, seeking [new movements]. She went through the . . . movements of the New Thought, and of the authenticity of Rosicrucianism and was never satisfied. And Freddy [Lorol's husband] was always tolerant of all of these interests of his beautiful wife knowing that she would shake them off because there was no real value to them. So she heard of the Baha'i Faith from Rose Henderson. Rose Henderson became a believer in Montreal and later she moved to Toronto. And she was socialist. And of course being a socialist was not exactly what would enter into a realm of interest that fitted into Freddy's scheme of life being naturally a wealthy man, of capitalist background. But she told Lorol about the Baha'i Faith and Lorol became interested.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁵ *Tablets of Bahā'u'llāh Revealed after the Kitāb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1978) 129.

⁹⁶ *Bahā'ī News*, 13 (September 1926) 7.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Bahā'ī News*, 14 (November 1926) 4.

⁹⁹ *Bahā'ī News*, 20 (November 1927) 4.

¹⁰⁰ *Bahā'ī News*, 18 (June 1927) 7.

¹⁰¹ *Bahā'ī News*, 10 (February 1926) 7.

¹⁰² *Bahā'ī News*, 13 (September 1926) 5.

¹⁰³ *Bahā'ī News*, 15 (February 1927) 8.

¹⁰⁴ *Bahā'ī News*, 18 (June 1927) 7.

¹⁰⁵ *Bahā'ī News*, 19 (August 1927) 5.

¹⁰⁶ Rosemary Sala, interview by Evelyn Raynor, Toronto, ON, undated, 4.

The devotion of other people to Rose was unqualified and represents the kind of extensive influence that she might have exercised over a number of Baha'is, of whom Laura Davis was one. Laura would later become the foremost member of the Baha'i community in the Toronto area and secretary of the Canadian national spiritual assembly. It is evident that Laura was very fond of Rose from 'the prominence given to the clippings in Laura's scrapbook'.¹⁰⁷ It was especially Davis who, according to one interview participant, was initially diverted from her Baha'i work by Rose: 'Laura [Davis] was preoccupied with the social groups which were very aware of the social needs in Rose Henderson's socialistic activities and lectures. So this was a phase she went through which I think has proved very valuable for the [Baha'i] Faith now.'¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, Laura Davis became an 'active' Baha'i only after Rose's death in 1937.

Though formally still a member at least until 1930, Rose's involvement with the Baha'i community may have already been declining by the mid-1920s. After this period, according to Ernest V. Harrison, a long-standing Baha'i, Rose had no further contact with the Baha'i community.¹⁰⁹ On public occasions, Rose had difficulty in separating her personal opinion from the Baha'i teachings, which distanced her from the Baha'i community. One early Baha'i, Rosemary Sala, offered this comment on Rose Henderson:

She was a socialist, leftist, and therefore out of place in a way, in that [Baha'i] community. She gave many lectures, no Baha'i lectures, socialist. I liked her and I really liked her lectures, but she had difficulties with the Baha'i community. So she left in a way, she disappeared later. I never heard of her [again], I don't know what happened to her. But she was not an active Baha'i, she became less and less [active].¹¹⁰

While Rosemary Sala's husband, Emeric, commented:

She was a well known speaker in Montreal. She spoke on many platforms, mostly socialist or leftist orientation. And her statements were often, well, occasionally, in clash with the Baha'i point of view. It was at the end of her life she lost physical contact with the Baha'i community.¹¹¹

Rose Henderson died on 30 January 1937, at the age of 68.¹¹² She died as a 'result of a chill which she caught while speaking from an open truck on a cold autumn night'.¹¹³ Apparently, she was pleading for improvements in the operation of schools. The auditorium of the

¹⁰⁷ Marlene Macke, email to W. C. van den Hoonaard, 27 March 2002.

¹⁰⁸ Sala, interview, 15. Jameson Bond, another early Baha'i, confirmed in a letter Rose's contact with Laura Davis and the Baha'i Faith.

¹⁰⁹ EVH (Ernest V. Harrison) Papers, Baha'i National Archives, Thornhill, ON, Canada.

¹¹⁰ Sala, interview, 36.

¹¹¹ Rowland Estall and Emeric Sala, interview by Michael G. Rochester, Toronto, ON, 24 August 1987, 1-2.

¹¹² Two of Rose's great-grandchildren continue the family tradition of service. Colin Bonnycastle is director of an Aboriginal social work programme in Manitoba, while Deirdre Bonnycastle is specializing in developing curricula for equity students in Saskatoon. The head of the Communist Party, according to one of Rose's great-granddaughters, attended the funeral and sent Ida Rose (Rose's daughter) a bill for the taxi fare to the funeral (Bonnycastle, interview 6 June 2000).

¹¹³ I am deeply indebted to Marlene Macke who found several items related to Rose Henderson in the papers of Laura Davis. (LDP [Laura Davis Papers], Baha'i National Archives, Thornhill, ON, 157-017-6.)

Harbor Collegiate Institute, where the funeral service was held, was filled to capacity, with many waiting on the street. A guard of honour of Boy Scouts kept vigil all day. The service ended with a prayer by Laura Davis.

Rose completely lost contact with the Baha'i community,¹¹⁴ and the Baha'i community with her. By the time of her death, she had become a Quaker¹¹⁵ and had apparently been previously involved in the work of Theosophists. A *Standard Dictionary of Canadian Biography* mentions, as late as 1936, that she was 'Protestant'.¹¹⁶ Rose's involvement with the Baha'i Faith was, until recently, unknown even to members of her own family, as one of her great-granddaughters testified: 'I had no idea she was a Baha'i. Somehow she became couched with shame in my family's history because it was rumoured that she was a communist.'¹¹⁷

The purpose of my pointing out these discrepant accounts is not to demonstrate whether or not Rose Henderson participated in these general social and Baha'i activities, but rather to indicate the problematic nature of biographical information. We can take many steps in resolving the dilemma of biographical zoning. Our research can, and should, be more exhaustive. However, if we are trying to contextualize research in the wider Baha'i culture, then there is something that should be found in that culture, namely the existence of divergent world views, some of which might promote biographical zoning, while others do not.

Baha'i World Views

Elsewhere, I have noted that there is a widely held notion that Baha'is share a common world view.¹¹⁸ The Baha'i sacred writings exhibit a powerful consistency and unity in explaining both spiritual and social realities. The elected and appointed institutions of the Faith follow in primary matters the guiding impulses flowing from the Faith's supreme administrative body, the Universal House of Justice. Upon closer inspection, however, it seems that Baha'is are guided by at least four world views that seem to be at variance with one another.

Such considerations have led me to seek the existence of these world views as the source of the Baha'i tendency to engage in biographical zoning. The four world views can be described as the embryonic view, the integrative view, the oasis view and the composite view. The following is a brief description of these world views.

In the embryonic view, Baha'is do not see their relationship to society as either antagonistic or competitive.¹¹⁹ They see the Baha'i community in its embryonic stage of development. The world offers much in the way of resources and opportunities. The integrative view encourages the participation of Baha'is in the wider society.¹²⁰ There are signs of the convergence of the Baha'i and the larger world, as expressed in the progressive developments in many fields, from politics to the social sciences. By contrast, the oasis view highlights the destructive forces in the world as a whole.¹²¹ The Baha'i community is an

¹¹⁴ Estall and Sala, interview, 24 August 1987.

¹¹⁵ Peter Campbell, email to W. C. van den Hoonaard, 13 March 2002.

¹¹⁶ Roberts and Turnell, *Standard Dictionary* 497.

¹¹⁷ Bonnycastle, interview, 10 January 2000.

¹¹⁸ Will C. van den Hoonaard, 'World Views and the Shape of Communities,' *World Order* 18 (3) (1984) 35-41.

¹¹⁹ van den Hoonaard, 'World Views' 36.

¹²⁰ *ibid* 36-7.

¹²¹ *ibid* 37.

oasis, a refuge for all humanity. The 'outside' world is barren; the Baha'i world is life-giving. From the perspective of the composite view, however, the Baha'i community sees itself as a subset of the fresh wind of the new revelation which affects all humankind. Baha'is perceive no difference in contributing one's talents to the world as a whole or to the Baha'i community: they serve the same end in promoting unity.¹²²

In the life of the Baha'i world, these four distinctions are rather arbitrary. First, an individual will sway among these perspectives over the course of his or her life. Second, an individual may exhibit more than one of these four perspectives at the same time, depending upon the nature of the phenomenon in question. For example, he or she sees family relations from the oasis perspective, but in the world of work may be more inclined to adopt the integrative view and attempt to bring in Baha'i consultative techniques.

Matters become complex when Baha'is collectively are involved. The Baha'i community as a whole experiences these shifts among the world views, creating its own context for biographical work and research. I am inclined to believe that a community with its gaze fixed on the oasis perspective is more likely to engage in biographical zoning (and closed awareness contexts) than a community that advocates the integrative perspective. In the final analysis, matters are not that simple. Not all Baha'i communities share the same world view at the same time, and each Baha'i biographer carries within him or her the social context of the prevailing world view.

¹²² *ibid* 38.