

# The Baha'i 'Race Amity' Movement and the Black Intelligentsia in Jim Crow America: Alain Locke and Robert S. Abbott

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I attended every session, day and night ... Many times throughout the meetings did with much effort restrain my tears. My heart leaped and throbbed and many times almost burst within my breast. I am a colored man ... My race as a whole, I believe, is quite ready to welcome the glad day when all will be brothers. ... The trouble is nearly unilateral. God give us the day.

– M. F. Harris, audience member at the 'Convention for Amity Between the Colored and White Races Based on Heavenly Teachings' (19–21 May 1921)<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

*This study demonstrates how the Baha'i 'Race Amity' efforts effectively reached the black intelligentsia during the Jim Crow era, attracting the interest and involvement of two influential giants of the period – Alain Leroy Locke, PhD (1885–1954) and Robert S. Abbott, LLB (1870–1940). Locke affiliated with the Baha'i Faith in 1918,<sup>2</sup> and Abbott formally joined the Baha'i religion in 1934. Another towering figure in the black intelligentsia, W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963) – whose first wife, Nina Du Bois (d. 1950), was a member of the New York Baha'i community – had sustained, for a period of time, considerable interest in the Baha'i movement, as documented in a forthcoming special issue of the Journal of Religious History, guest edited by Todd Lawson.<sup>3</sup> These illustrious figures – W. E. B. Du Bois, Alain L. Locke and Robert S. Abbott – are ranked as the 4th, 36th and 41st most influential African Americans in American history.<sup>4</sup> It is not so much the intrinsic message of the Baha'i religion that attracted the interest of the black intelligentsia, but rather the Baha'i emphasis on 'race amity' – representing what, by Jim Crow standards, may be regarded as a socially audacious – even radical – application of the Baha'i ethic of world unity, from family relations to international relations, to the prevailing American social crisis.*

## Keywords

Alain Locke  
Robert S. Abbott  
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In 19–21 May 1921, the Baha'i 'Race Amity' movement was launched in the nation's capital, Washington DC, as 'a practical effort to influence public discourse on race in the United States'.<sup>5</sup> This came at a time when the 'color line' between black and white was drenched red with lynchings and race riots that infected Jim Crow America with fear and dread. One of the African American participants was a certain 'M. F. Harris' whose voice rings out as the black Everyman of his day. The epigraph above,

from Mr Harris's unpublished letter, reflects, first-hand, a genuine, even profound, response to the Baha'i principle of the oneness of humankind, that sought to promote interracial harmony in race-stricken America during the so-called 'Jim Crow era' (approximately 1883 to 1964).

The Jim Crow period has euphemistically been called America's apartheid. Although America had no counterparts to South African passbooks, tribal homelands and an overwhelming black majority, Jim Crow America was nevertheless commensurable with South Africa's former apartheid system for its social effect, as one historian expressed it: 'Exceeding even South Africa's notorious apartheid in the humiliation, degradation, and suffering it brought, Jim Crow left scars on the American psyche that are still felt today.'<sup>6</sup> By 1914, every southern state had established two separate societies – one white, one 'colored'. Segregation was enforced by the creation of separate facilities in virtually every sector of civil society – in schools, streetcars, restaurants, healthcare institutions and cemeteries.

The American regime of legalized racial segregation was sanctioned by the notorious US Supreme Court decision, *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896).<sup>7</sup> Named after a pre-Civil War minstrel-show character, Jim Crow laws were late 19th-century statutes enacted by southern states that codified and institutionalized an American form of apartheid, which, while distinct from that of South Africa, was comparably separationist and systemic in nature. In 1883, although slavery had been abolished in 1863, the Supreme Court declared the Civil Rights Act of 1875 unconstitutional, reflecting the widespread white supremacist attitudes of the day and effectively demolishing the foundations of post-Civil War Reconstruction Era. In 1896, the high court promulgated the 'separate but equal doctrine' in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, thereby sanctioning a profusion of unabashedly discriminatory Jim Crow laws.

In 1954, this racial caste system was successfully challenged in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, which declared segregation in the public schools unconstitutional. *Brown* was not the first challenge to the 'separate but equal' regime, but was the culmination of earlier challenges, particularly during the 1930s and 1940s. While *Brown* was a landmark decision in the history of the civil rights movement, that movement was ongoing, such that *Brown* was a splendid moment in a complex and extended historical trajectory. The Jim Crow system was finally dismantled by civil rights legislation in 1964–68.

In stark contrast to the Jim Crow social nightmare, the Baha'i 'Race Amity' movement infused in the American dream a vision of interracial harmony, in which social capital was arguably seen as a more precious resource than mere economic prosperity. The Baha'is sought to counter racial discrimination (and the racial terrorism of lynchings, such as the 'Red Summer' or the 'race war' of 1919, which represented the worst racial violence against blacks in the early 20th century) by interracial friendship, which went far beyond the mere tolerance advocated by even the most liberal of whites at that time. The idea was to convert racial enmity into racial 'amity', and to do so both in private life and on a public scale.

One notable example of the racial harmony that the Baha'is endeavoured to promote was the conference for interracial amity, held on 2, 8 and 9 November 1930 and co-sponsored by the National (Baha'i) Teaching

Committee, the Urban League and the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of New York, with two sessions at the Baha'i Center and one at the New York Urban League Auditorium, 201 West 136th Street.<sup>8</sup> Significantly, the white participants were invited as guests of the black participants in their homes in Harlem, thus crossing the Jim Crow 'color line': 'White members of the movement were guests of Harlem members in their homes.'<sup>9</sup> A photograph of participants in this event was published in *The Chicago Defender*, which, in its heyday, was the leading African American newspaper in the United States,<sup>10</sup> whose founder became a notable Baha'i.

Robert S. Abbott, LLB (1870–1940), in his role as founder and editor of *The Chicago Defender*, gave widespread publicity to Baha'i race relations ideals and efforts to counter America's racial crisis by addressing its root causes, welling up from the deep-seated racial animosities and disparities that persisted in the aftermath of American slavery and institutionalized by Jim Crow laws. Alain Leroy Locke, PhD (1885–1954) promoted ideal race relations, both nationally and internationally, and was directly involved in the Baha'i 'Race Amity' movement. Ironically, despite their common cause and the fact that both were adherents of the Baha'i religion, Locke and Abbott moved in different professional circles and social worlds, and had little contact with each other.

Notwithstanding the absence of a definitive history of African American Baha'is, important work has been done on the 'Race Amity' movement, which is surely the most significant aspect of African American Baha'i history during the Jim Crow era (leading, in later decades, to 'mass teaching' of the Faith to blacks in the American South and the emergence of the first interracial local Baha'i communities there). 'Race amity' simply means interracial unity. The Baha'i 'race amity' era lasted from 1921–36, followed by the 'race unity' period of 1939–47, with a whole range of race relations initiatives (such as 'Race Unity Day') experimented with down to the present. More than progressive, Baha'i 'race amity' initiatives were quite radical by the standards of the day. Such efforts were by no means exclusive, as the Commission on Interracial Cooperation<sup>11</sup> (1919–44) comes to mind. The Quakers (Society of Friends), for instance, held a Conference on Inter-racial Justice on 24 October 1924, one day after the Fourth Race Amity Convention (organized by the Amity Convention Committee of which Alain Locke was a member) was held in Philadelphia.<sup>12</sup> The Baha'i race amity movement was distinct in that it did not focus so much on 'racial justice' as it did eradicating the root causes of racial injustice.

How best to assess the contributions of the Baha'i race amity movement? It was timely, yet ahead of its time. Can it be said that Baha'is were arguably in the forefront of race relations endeavours during the Jim Crow era? Did this Baha'i activism qualitatively have a 'leavening' effect? Or were the Baha'is too few, too marginal and too unimportant to leave their mark on history, even though the race amity initiatives sought to make history by remaking society vis-à-vis race relations? The full impact of the race amity effort is impossible to determine, and is further complicated by the fact that historians virtually ignored what the Baha'is were doing. Indeed, no reference whatsoever to the Baha'i race amity movement is to be found in the standard American histories; in fact, American history textbooks do not

even mention the Baha'i efforts, whether parenthetically or in footnotes. These early race relations initiatives were part of a social evolution (some might say revolution) that historians will perhaps come to recognize as a minor but significant milestone in American social history.

This article will begin with the origins of the Baha'i race amity movement, which traces back to Sir Abbas Effendi, better known as 'Abdu'l-Baha (1844–1921).

## I. The power of a personality: 'Abdu'l-Baha and the abolition of prejudice

The Baha'i race amity movement traces back to 'Abdu'l-Baha, eldest son and successor to the prophet-founder of the Baha'i Faith, Baha'u'llah (1817–1892). It was in 1912 that 'Abdu'l-Baha came to America. He spent 239 days in the United States and Canada, from his arrival on 11 April 1912 to his departure on 5 December 1912. During his historic visit, practically his every word and deed was recorded for posterity, and there was extensive press coverage. His anecdotal legacy was nearly as important as his numerous discourses and speeches. The following incident illustrates 'Abdu'l-Baha's attitude towards African Americans. One of 'Abdu'l-Baha's entourage, in a letter dated 28 September 1913, observed:

I can never forget the day in Washington, when our Beloved Abdu'l-Baha called on the Ambassador of Turkey. He was sitting near the window, watching the number of men and women passing by. At the time[,] a young negro as black as coal passed by. 'Did you see that young black negro?' He asked. 'Yes,' I answered. 'I declare by Baha'O'llah [sic] that I wish him to become as radiant as the shining sun which is flooding the world with its glorious lights,' He said earnestly.<sup>13</sup>

After spending his first days in New York, on his tenth day in America – Saturday 20 April – 'Abdu'l-Baha arrived in Washington DC and stayed until Sunday 28 April. Toward the end of his visit, *The Washington Bee*, one of the country's most important black newspapers, with a substantial readership in the South, published a story that read, in part:

Its [the Baha'i Faith's] white devotees, even in this prejudice-ridden community, refuse to draw the color line. The informal meetings, held frequently in the fashionable mansions of the cultured society in Sheridan Circle, Dupont Circle, Connecticut and Massachusetts avenues, have been open to Negroes on terms of absolute equality.<sup>14</sup>

This expression, the 'color line', is particularly poignant in light of W. E. B. Du Bois's famous statement in 1903: 'The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line, – the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea.'<sup>15</sup> Crossing 'the color line', as Du Bois famously termed the racial divide in America, through such a deliberate rejection of Jim Crow social norms was quite revolutionary, but in a reconstructive way. Here, by 'revolutionary' is not meant the overthrow of a government, but the reconstitution of society according to principles of confraternity based on

unity, not on subordination of one race to another on the pretext of ‘separate but equal’.

On Tuesday morning, 23 April, ‘Abdu’l-Baha spoke in Rankin Chapel at Howard University. Well over a thousand faculty, administrators, students and guests<sup>16</sup> crowded the relatively small space of this modest chapel to hear him speak. This is how he opened his talk:

Today I am most happy, for I see here a gathering of the servants of God. I see white and black sitting together. There are no whites and blacks before God. All colors are one, and that is the color of servitude to God. Scent and color are not important. The heart is important. If the heart is pure, white or black or any color makes no difference. God does not look at colors; He looks at the hearts.<sup>17</sup>

While making the point that, in the natural world, colour has no intrinsic value except to enrich human diversity, in the human world colour had taken on huge and determinative proportions. All too cognizant of this fact, ‘Abdu’l-Baha continued to stress character over characteristics.

## **II. The power of metaphors: the pupil of the eye, precious jewels**

‘Abdu’l-Baha expressed his genuine delight that the meeting itself was inter-racial – an attitude articulated in poetic eloquence the very next night. On 24 April 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Baha spoke at the home of Mr and Mrs Andrew J. Dyer. As one of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s translators, Dr Zia Mabsut Bagdadi (who would later serve with Alain Locke on inter-racial amity committees),<sup>18</sup> wrote in his diary: ‘In the evening, ‘Abdu’l-Baha addressed the white and colored believers and their friends at the home of Mrs Dyer, a member of the colored race.’<sup>19</sup> To the degree that it was out of the ordinary, and contrary to the prevailing Jim Crow social norms, the mixed racial audience was extraordinary. Imagine the impact of the following statement on the racially mixed audience, especially on those African Americans who were present:

This evening is very good. This evening is in reality very good. When a man looks at a meeting like this, he is reminded of the gathering together of pearls and rubies, diamonds and sapphires put together. How beautiful! How delightful! It is most beautiful. It is a source of joy. Whatsoever is conducive to the unity of the world of men is most acceptable and most praiseworthy. And whatsoever is the cause of discord in the world of humanity is saddening.<sup>20</sup>

This text is based on the extemporaneous translation by Dr Ameen U. Fareed and taken stenographically by Joseph H. Hannen. One of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s entourage, Mīrzā Maḥmūd Zarqānī, in his diary entry for 24 April 1912, *Badā-yi al-Āthār*, states:

The Master [Abdu'l-Baha] remarked: ‘Before I arrived, I felt too tired to speak at this meeting. But at the sight of such genuine love and attraction between the white and the black friends (ulfat va injizāb aḥibbā-yi sīyāh va sīfid), I was so moved that I spoke with great love and likened (tashbīḥ namūdam) this union of different colored races (ittīḥād-i alvān-i mukhtalifah) to a string of gleaming pearls and rubies (la’ālī va yaqūt).<sup>21</sup>

In comparing his audience to pearls and rubies, sapphires and diamonds, 'Abdu'l-Baha's imagery was quite striking. On that night in Washington DC, 'Abdu'l-Baha concluded his address in saying:

When the racial elements of the American nation unite in actual fellowship and accord, the lights of the oneness of humanity will shine, the day of eternal glory and bliss will dawn, the spirit of God encompass and the divine favors descend. ... This is the sign of the 'Most Great Peace'.<sup>22</sup>

Social transformation can be effected through the reorienting of racial attitudes, and rhetoric can be a potent tool, as the immortal speeches of Dr Martin Luther King, Jr, demonstrate. 'Abdu'l-Baha's most influential rhetorical strategy in promoting racial uplift and ideal race relations was his likening of people of African descent to the 'pupil of the eye'. The choice of this ennobling and empowering metaphor was deliberate. Its provenance is all the more significant in that 'Abdu'l-Baha ascribes this very metaphor to Baha'u'llah: 'Bahā'u'llāh once compared the colored people to the black pupil of the eye surrounded by the white. In this black pupil is seen the reflection of that which is before it, and through it the light of the spirit shineth forth.'<sup>23</sup> In so saying, 'Abdu'l-Baha makes it clear that the 'pupil of the eye' metaphor for people of African descent harks back to the very origins of the Baha'i religion.

In a letter sent through Phoebe Hearst (the mother of newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst, widow of mining magnate and US senator, George Hearst, and an erstwhile Baha'i at this time), to her servant, Robert Turner, the first African American Baha'i, 'Abdu'l-Baha wrote:

O thou who art pure in heart, sanctified in spirit, peerless in character, beauteous in face! Thy photograph hath been received revealing thy physical frame in the utmost grace and the best appearance. Thou art dark in countenance and bright in character. Thou art like unto the pupil of the eye (*insān al-'ayn*) which is dark in colour, yet it is the fount of light and the revealer of the contingent world.

I have not forgotten nor will I forget thee. I beseech God that He may graciously make thee the sign of His bounty amidst mankind, illumine thy face with the light of such blessings as are vouchsafed by the merciful Lord, single thee out for His love in this age which is distinguished among all the past ages and centuries.<sup>24</sup>

In Arabic, the 'pupil of the eye' is *insān al-'ayn*. Literally, the Arabic means 'eye-person'. The Persian counterpart for the Arabic term *insān* is *mardumak*, and for 'pupil of the eye', '*mardumak-i chashm*'.<sup>25</sup> Both terms also refer to a 'man' or 'human being'. There appears to be a wordplay in 'Abdu'l-Baha's employment of 'pupil of the eye' as a metaphor for people of African descent in which, collectively, they ideally serve as the 'eye-person' illuminating social conscience. There is a parallel etymology in the English word, 'pupil', as it relates to the eye. The *Oxford English Dictionary* explains that 'its etymon [is] classical Latin *pūpilla* in same sense, transferred use of *pūpilla*, female child, also doll ... , so called on account of the small reflected image seen when looking into someone's pupil'. Thus, these linguistically parallel Persian and English wordplays trace back to their respective etymologies.

Whether in Arabic or in Persian, 'Abdu'l-Baha was consistent in his use of this metaphor for people of African descent. In a letter (referred to by Baha'is as a 'tablet') to Alan A. Anderson (the second African American convert to the Faith in Washington DC), 'Abdu'l-Baha wrote:

O thou who hast an illumined heart! Thou art even as the pupil of the eye (*mardumak-i chasm*), the very wellspring of the light, for God's love hath cast its rays upon thine inmost being and thou hast turned thy face toward the Kingdom of thy Lord.

Intense is the hatred, in America, between black and white, but my hope is that the power of the Kingdom will bind these two in friendship, and serve them as a healing balm.

Let them look not upon a man's colour but upon his heart. If the heart be filled with light, that man is nigh unto the threshold of his Lord; but if not, that man is careless of his Lord, be he white or be he black.<sup>26</sup>

In contrast to prevailing social habits, 'Abdu'l-Baha emphasizes character over characteristics. That is, one should not focus on another's extrinsic racial characteristics ('colour'), but rather on that person's intrinsic character ('heart') as a determinant of moral worth.

The following tablet from 'the Master' (as 'Abdu'l-Baha was called by Baha'u'llah himself), was 'revealed' (written) to one Mrs Pocohontas Pope, in Washington. The recipient of the tablet, according to Fādil Māzandarānī, was, according to US census records, either mulatto or black.<sup>27</sup> As mentioned earlier, it was through Pauline Hennen that Mrs Pope learned of the Baha'i Faith. This is what 'Abdu'l-Baha wrote to Pocohontas Pope:

Although the pupil of the eye is black, it is the source of light. Thou shalt likewise be. The disposition should be bright, not the appearance. Therefore, with supreme confidence and certitude, say: 'O God! Make me a radiant light, a shining lamp, and a brilliant star, so that I may illumine the hearts with an effulgent ray from Thy Kingdom of 'Abha.'<sup>28</sup>

The reader is struck by the profusion of light imagery in this densely ornate passage. The tablet concludes with a prayer both to receive enlightenment and for the power to enlighten others as well. The individual conduit for this spiritual and social illumination is, obviously, Pocohontas Pope herself. Yet there is also a collective application to all people of African descent.

As said, the 'pupil of the eye' was a potent, transformative metaphor. As Richard Thomas observes, 'Abdu'l-Baha 'transformed the traditional racist color symbolism and imagery into the symbolism and imagery of racial unity'. By so doing, "Abdu'l-Baha enabled them to counter and transcend the racist cultural tendencies so ingrained in the American national character'.<sup>29</sup> In *Lights of the Spirit*, Thomas notes:

There is a direct connection between the Baha'i teachings on the spiritual qualities of Black people and the cultivation of African American racial identity. Many African American Baha'is of the present generation have internalized the imagery of the 'pupil of the eye, through which the light of the spirit

shineth forth' as a fundamental component of their racial identity within the larger Bahá'í community.<sup>30</sup>

'Abdu'l-Baha, in fact, employed this image in a number of tablets. As previously stated, the origin of this metaphor is ascribed by 'Abdu'l-Baha to Bahá'u'llah himself, although there has been no independent attestation of this. The idea, which is more or less self-evident, is that it is the pupil itself that admits light into the eye. In comparing blacks to the pupil of the eye, 'Abdu'l-Baha appears to be saying that African Americans and people of African descent can, in a sense, illuminate the rest of the human race, by serving as the aperture of light whereby the 'eye' or consciousness of the rest of humanity can 'see'. This is no doubt because of the experience of slavery and subsequent oppression that the race was made to suffer in the course of what is sometimes characterized as America's original sin.

### III. 'Abdu'l-Baha: 'Man of the Month'

A little-known aspect of W. E. B. Du Bois's life was his interest in the Bahá'i religion. For instance, on 27 February 1932, Du Bois spoke at the interracial banquet that the Bahá'ís hosted in honour of the NAACP and the National Urban League.<sup>31</sup> A couple of anecdotes further illustrate this: 'In 1935', as Guy Mount points out, 'Du Bois himself was "accused" of being a Bahá'i by fellow black communist George Streator, largely because of Du Bois's stance against violence.'<sup>32</sup> In his letter of 29 April 1935, Streator complains: 'In writing about violence, you write like an apostle of Abdul Bahia [sic].'<sup>33</sup> In 1953, and after the death of his first wife, Nina, W. E. B. Du Bois was denied a passport by the US government, as he was petitioning to attend a World Peace Council meeting in Budapest and the Inter-Continental Conference of the Bahá'i Faith in New Delhi.<sup>34</sup>

Du Bois had significant Bahá'i contacts, some of whom were quite supportive of his work. In 1932, for instance, the chairperson of the Bahá'i race amity committee, Loulie A. Mathews, was noted as the 'donor of the DuBois literary prize'.<sup>35</sup> Another notable example was Cora Calhoun Horne, an African America Bahá'i civil leader who was an erstwhile member of the Urban League, the National Association of Colored Women and the International Council of Women of Darker Races, whose obituary Du Bois published in *The Crisis*; she was described as a woman 'of unusual public spirit and intelligence' and who 'was widely known' and 'a member of the Bahá'i movement'.<sup>36</sup> There were other significant Bahá'i contacts as well.<sup>37</sup> Relations were cordial, and Du Bois's interest in the 'Bahá'i movement' sustained, until an unfortunate misunderstanding developed regarding Bahá'i meetings that took place in Nashville in January 1937.<sup>38</sup>

As editor of *The Crisis*, Du Bois ran a series called 'Men of the Month'. This column regularly featured African American men (and women) of interest. In an unusual and remarkable departure from this practice, Du Bois devoted the first part of the May 1912 column to the Bahá'i leader, 'Abdu'l-Baha. Here are some highlights from that tribute:

On April 12 Abdul Baha, the head of the religious movement known as Bahaism, arrived in America to visit his rapidly increasing band of followers. His coming is of particular interest to those of us who believe in the

brotherhood of man, for that is the doctrine the Baha'i's emphasize above all other things. ...

Naturally, he is interested in the question of race prejudice in this country, where he has so many disciples. Recently he sent this message to one of them, Mrs M. L. Botay, who has sent it to *The Crisis*:

'Give Mrs Botay my greetings and love and tell her she must greatly endeavor ... to cast light among the colored people, so that they may become as our brothers, no blacks, no whites, both as one. ... By this means you shall free America from all prejudice. ... God looks upon hearts, not upon colors. He looks upon qualities, not upon bodies.'<sup>39</sup>

Doubtless Du Bois saw in the Baha'i movement an ally, as it were, in the crusade for minority rights and racial equality. Guy Mount has drawn attention to the remarkable attention that Du Bois lavished on 'Abdu'l-Baha in the May 1912 issue of *The Crisis*:

In the month after the Fourth Annual NAACP conference, but a month before the formal write up of the event cited by most scholars, Du Bois devoted almost the entire body of his 'Men of the Month' column to Abdu'l Baha. Adorned with a full page picture followed by a full page write up, the article is less remarkable for what it says and more fascinating for what it is. In a column reserved exclusively for African American accomplishments (which often included black women) Abdu'l Baha's inclusion seemed to be an obvious anomaly. The space devoted to him relative to the other men of that month as well as those recognized throughout that year is also striking. No other figure that Du Bois honored that year warranted a full page article much less a full page photo. For most months, each biographical sketch was given roughly equal space with a lucky few earning a small inset photo. Abdu'l Baha however dominated that month's section and literally pushed the other honorees into a tiny space at the bottom of the page. This new find is perhaps the most extensive article on the Baha'i Faith attributed to Du Bois and given the space he devoted to it in his paper, his meeting with Abdu'l Baha must have had a significant impact on him.<sup>40</sup>

In the very next issue (June 1912) of *The Crisis*, Du Bois published the text of 'Abdu'l-Baha's speech presented at the Fourth Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).<sup>41</sup> After 'Abdu'l-Baha's death on 28 November 1921, Du Bois wrote: 'Two men sit high before the world today – Eugene Debs and Abdul Baha. One is free of chains which should never have bound him – the other ['Abdu'l-Baha] of Life which he tried to free of race and national prejudice.'<sup>42</sup> Here, Du Bois's profound respect for 'Abdu'l-Baha is still in evidence. But Du Bois's opinion of the Baha'i religion would later change.<sup>43</sup>

#### **IV. A brief history of the Baha'i 'Race Amity' event, with timetable**

Following the historic visit of 'Abdu'l-Baha in 1912, the Baha'i religion, as a minority faith, perhaps made its most dramatic debut as a historical 'actor' in the 'Convention for Amity Between the Colored and White Races Based on Heavenly Teachings' on 19–21 May 1921 at the Congregational

Church on 10th and G Street NW in Washington DC,<sup>44</sup> and ‘was the first large interracial gathering since violence had torn the city apart less than two years before’.<sup>45</sup> This flagship event launched a series of further ‘Race Amity’ conferences. There was some involvement by individuals at Howard University, most notably by professors Coralie Cooke<sup>46</sup> and Alain Locke.

The Baha’i ‘race amity’ era lasted from 1921–36, followed by the ‘race unity’ period of 1939–47, with a whole range of race relations initiatives (such as ‘Race Unity Day’) experimented with down to the present. The historical origins of the Baha’i race amity movement, therefore, can be traced not only to ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s vision of ideal race relations, but to ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s own personal involvement. It was ‘Abdu’l-Baha who conceived of the race amity movement, and undertook to inaugurate it.

The first ‘Race Amity’ conference was organized by Agnes S. Parsons (a white woman prominent in Washington high society) at the instruction of ‘Abdu’l-Baha who, during her second pilgrimage to Haifa (1920), said to her: ‘I want you to arrange in Washington a convention for unity between the white and colored people.’<sup>47</sup> This came as quite a shock to Mrs Parsons, who had no prior experience in race relations. ‘Abdu’l-Baha advised Agnes Parsons not to undertake this alone. Accordingly, Parsons consulted with the Washington Baha’i assembly for advice and called upon several of her friends to form an ad hoc race amity convention committee. This task force included Agnes Parsons herself, Mariam Haney, Louise Boyle, Gabrielle Pelham and Martha Root.<sup>48</sup>

A Baha’i journalist from Pittsburgh, Martha Root travelled the world to teach the Baha’i Faith abroad. Her most outstanding achievement was her audience with Queen Marie of Romania, who was won over to the Faith, thus becoming the first monarch to become a Baha’i. While doing so, she kept in contact with the Baha’is of the United States. During one of her world travels, for instance, Martha Root sent Alain Locke a photograph of ‘Abdu’l-Baha, with this note written on the back: ‘A souvenir from Martha Root. Finland.’<sup>49</sup>

Since Mariam Haney appears to have been Locke’s primary contact with the Baha’i community in the early years, there is every reason to believe that, once the organizing committee decided to enlist Locke’s support, advice and participation, Mariam Haney would be the one to solicit his help. The strategy of the committee was to appoint a Baha’i chairperson to preside over each session,<sup>50</sup> which featured more non-Baha’i speakers than Baha’i speakers. According to Agnes Parsons, ‘At each session of the convention there was a Bahai chairman and the chairman invariably gave the keynote for the whole evening.’<sup>51</sup> Based on this single fact, one could deduce that, as early as 1921, Locke was already considered a professing Baha’i. All of the thoughtful planning paid off, as the convention was a resounding success.

The historic ‘Convention for Amity Between the Colored and White Races Based on Heavenly Teachings’ took place on 19–21 May 1921 at the Congregational Church on 10th and G Street NW in Washington DC. Locke served as session chair on Friday evening, 21 May.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps the best way to begin to describe the programme as performed is to examine the programme as printed, which contained the essence of what the convention was designed to convey. A facsimile of this programme has been

published.<sup>53</sup> The work of the convention, in terms of its desired influence and to the extent that the audience had read it beforehand, began to take effect in advance of the event itself. The official programme for the Convention for Amity Between the White and Colored Races Based on Heavenly Teachings begins with this message:

Half a century ago in America slavery was abolished.

Now there has arisen need [sic] for another great effort in order that prejudice may be overcome.

Correction of the present wrong requires no army, for the field of action is the hearts of our citizens. The instrument to be used is kindness, the ammunition – understanding. The actors in this engagement for right are all the inhabitants of these United States.

The great work we have to do and for which this convention is called is the establishment of amity between the white and the colored people of our land.

When we have put our own house in order, then we may be trusted to carry the message of universal peace to all mankind.<sup>54</sup>

Written by Agnes Parsons herself (with some feedback from her friends), this is something of a manifesto. The primary metaphor is military. The enemy is prejudice. The battleground is the hearts of Americans. The weapon of choice for the protagonists is kindness backed by understanding. To not only the victors go the spoils of victory, but to the world, in which universal peace is made a coefficient of overcoming the social pernicious of racial hatred. This social agenda is not only representative of the African American dimension in American Baha'i history, but is emblematic of the priorities of the American Baha'i community as a whole. The printed programme<sup>55</sup> featured short aphorisms by Jesus Christ, Baha'o'llah [sic], Terence, Lao-tze, Epictetus, Zoroaster and Moses. The classical references may well have been due to Locke's influence in his role as consultant.

As to the actual sessions themselves, there exists an unpublished report, 'A Compilation on the Story of the Convention for Amity', dated 31 May 1921, that provides many valuable details as to the behind-the-scenes planning and execution of the programme. It contains Louis Gregory's report, which was published.<sup>56</sup> Of Locke's role as a session chair and its keynote, Louis Gregory simply states: 'Friday evening[,] Dr Alain L. Locke, professor at Howard University, presided. He expressed the great spirit of the convention as the unity of the heart and mind in human uplift.'<sup>57</sup> The local press covered all five sessions in three published reports, one for each day of the conference. In its story of the evening session that took place on Friday 20 May, a reporter for *The Haleigh* wrote: 'At the evening session Dr A. L. Locke of Howard University was the chairman. A refined, cultured, discriminating gentleman of knowledge, presiding with the utmost grace.'<sup>58</sup>

The two lectures that were presented during Locke's session were: (1) 'Duties and Responsibilities of Citizenship' by Hon. Martin B. Madden; and (2) 'The New Internationalism and Its Spiritual Factors' by Alfred Martin, president of the Ethical Culture Society. Madden said that anti-lynching legislation was slated for the next session of Congress, that Congress definitely would enact it and that the president would sign it into law. Martin

struck linkages between the brotherhood of man and world democracy.<sup>59</sup> Although the reporter is not named, this valuable press coverage was due to the efforts of Martha Root. She was assisted in this capacity by Louis Gregory and Neval Thomas.<sup>60</sup>

The conference was a spectacular success. It featured a rich artistic programme, both musical and literary. Among the musical performers was solo violinist Joseph Douglass, grandson of the great abolitionist, Frederick Douglass. The Howard University chorus performed as well. The convention attracted crowds of fifteen hundred or more.<sup>61</sup> ‘An interesting after effect of the first amity convention’, Louis Gregory observed, ‘was the stimulus it gave to orthodox people [established churches and other religious groups], who started the organization of interracial committees very soon thereafter.’<sup>62</sup> Apart from this, the convention had no measurable historic impact, since its goal was to foster goodwill rather than achieve a distinct objective, such as the passage of anti-lynching legislation, although part of the programme did address this very issue.<sup>63</sup> Within the Baha’i community, however, the first amity convention was truly the ‘mother’ of all future Baha’i-sponsored race relations initiatives. Retrospectively, in its 1929–30 annual report, the nine-member Interracial Amity Committee, of which Locke was an active participant, reaffirmed the significance of the first amity convention and concluded: ‘There can be found in America today no more effective teaching, no stronger magnet to attract souls.’<sup>64</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Baha considered this meeting to have had paramount symbolic and social importance. In a message conveyed by Mountfort Mills (an American Baha’i recently returned from a visit to Palestine), ‘Abdu’l-Baha was reported to have said:

Say to this convention that never since the beginning of time has a convention of more importance been held. This convention stands for the oneness of humanity. It will become the cause of the removal of hostilities between the races. It will become the cause of the enlightenment of America. It will, if wisely managed and continued, check the deadly struggle between these races, which otherwise will inevitably break out.<sup>65</sup>

Since the convention was open to the public at large, it was to this audience that ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s message was addressed. Race riots in decades to come gave poignancy to this warning, a dire prophecy fulfilled, but with a means for averting racial violence.

When the convention ended, Agnes Parsons cabled ‘Abdu’l-Baha: ‘Convention successful. Meetings crowded. Hearts comforted.’ To which ‘Abdu’l-Baha cabled back: ‘The white colored Convention produced happiness. Hoping will establish same in all America.’<sup>66</sup> In a letter dated 4 October 1921, Mariam Haney refers to these communications from ‘Abdu’l-Baha regarding the convention:

We were pleased to have a word from you and look forward to a visit, when I hope to have the joy of telling you of the very interesting happenings of the summer, and the prospects for the future. Most important of all, the very wonderful Tablets which have come to Mrs Parsons and myself about the Amity Convention.<sup>67</sup>

Louis Gregory reports:

It is reliably stated that the President of the United States, the late Mr [Warren] Harding, upon reading the press reports which were so friendly and widespread, said, 'Thank God for that convention!'<sup>68</sup>

*The Washington Bee* published a two-part story on 28 May 1921 and 4 June 1921, headlined, 'Great Convention for Amity Between the Colored and White: Brilliant Meeting – Record Attendance – Powerful Enthusiasm – Inspiring Music – Lofty Purposes Set Forth'. Locke's chairing of Friday night's session is nicely described: 'On Friday evening, Dr Alain L. Locke, presiding, expressed the great effort of the convention to the unity of heart and mind in human succor, exemplifying the power of a new spirit in a new age.'<sup>69</sup> The first instalment recounted this surprising occurrence:

Master Lenore Cook, accompanied by his uncle, as a vocal solo, sang one of the latter's selections, 'Mammy'. Repeating this request on the closing night, a white lady who was touched by his theme and voice, presented the boy with a beautiful diamond, set in platinum.<sup>70</sup>

The story finished up on this note: 'So ended this historical convention, different in scope and power from anything of the kind held before ...'.<sup>71</sup>

The 'Convention for Amity Between the Colored and White Races Based on Heavenly Teachings' was a landmark event in American Baha'i history. It proved to be a milestone in Baha'i social history because it was the progenitor of all future race amity conferences. Despite positive coverage by the black press at the time, the convention did not make it into standard American histories. (See Appendix 1: Timeline of Baha'i Race Amity Conferences.) Doubtless there were other race amity conferences as well, as they were encouraged on the part of all American Baha'i communities, resources permitting.

## **V. The Baha'i race amity movement and the black intelligentsia**

In the American context, the 'Baha'i Faith', as the religion is now known, is obviously a 'minority faith'. Minority faiths, of course, stand in relation to the 'majority faith' of 'Protestantism' – the collective rubric of a medley of denominations that have fissiparously multiplied in the course of American religious history. In a major multi-author work on the role of minority religions in American thought and history, *Minority Faiths and the American Protestant Mainstream*, Jonathan Sarna notes that minority faiths 'appear all too often as victims of history, acted upon by the majority', yet have emerged 'as historical actors in their own right, operating within a comparative – and competitive – religious setting'.<sup>72</sup>

The Baha'i Faith makes no appearance whatsoever in *Minority Faiths and the American Protestant Mainstream*, whether as an 'actor' or even as an 'extra' in the ongoing historical drama of interfaith relations. Notwithstanding Sarna's omission, one of the ways in which the Baha'i religion, as a minority faith, emerged as a significant 'actor' was in the arena of race relations, which was a controversial issue, to say the least, during the Jim Crow era. As the Baha'i's themselves represented their interracial

unity efforts to reverse Jim Crow racialism across America, '[t]he actors in this engagement for right are all the inhabitants of these United States'.<sup>73</sup> Compared to the social reality, the rhetoric here was hyperbolic. The impact of the Baha'i race amity movement is difficult to assess. It may well be that Baha'i estimates of the contemporary and historical significance their initiative were overly optimistic, given the relatively modest numbers of people they were actually able to reach.

While minority faiths may be said to be 'historical actors in their own right', certain individual adherents stand out as significant actors within the religion. When such adherents also have a place in American history outside the context of their faith community, such adherents accrue an added historical significance. In this study, Alain Leroy Locke and Robert S. Abbott will be profiled in order to show how a minority faith made significant inroads among African American 'race men'. Such an approach articulates, through the public 'voices' of black notables, some of the key issues and aspirations that emerged as ideological and social earmarks of the Baha'i religion in the historical context of American thought and culture.<sup>74</sup> While this article prescinds from positing a Baha'i social impact, it is worth noting that, according to Gayle Morrison, 'the Bahá'í Faith was not only the first religion to initiate racial amity activities in America but the first to elicit interfaith support'.<sup>75</sup>

The use of 'historical portraits' for such a purpose has been undertaken in previous scholarship on this topic,<sup>76</sup> especially in view of the fact that a coherent history of African Americans in the Baha'i Faith has yet to be written. Historian Richard Thomas provides a brief biographical history and motif analysis of the entry of African Americans into the American Baha'i community.<sup>77</sup> Besides *Lights of the Spirit: Historical Portraits of Black Bahá'ís in North America, 1898–2000* (2006), the other major work in this area is by the aforementioned historian, Gayle Morrison, whose book, *To Move the World: Louis Gregory and the Advancement of Racial Unity in America* (1982),<sup>78</sup> is foundational to any serious study of the Baha'i 'Race Amity' movement. Morrison's work is an account of Baha'i efforts to build an interracial religious community and to promote interracial harmony more broadly during the first half of the twentieth century.

The Baha'i initiatives to foster interracial harmony enjoyed the participation, besides that of Locke, of other intellectuals of the period. In a 2010 conference paper – 'Locke, Shock, and Abbott: Baha'i Theology and the Acceleration of the African American Civil Rights Movement' – Guy Mount addresses the question of whether or not the Baha'i religion 'influenced' the black intelligentsia:

Beyond the more obvious and well documented work done on Alain Locke and Robert Abbott, a study of this connection between W. E. B. Du Bois and Baha'i theology is long overdue and may open the door to some of the most important impacts that Abdu'l Baha may have had on the direction of African American history. Yet to precisely trace Baha'i theology through the infinitely complex thoughts that circulated Du Bois's mind, and other African Americans generally, may prove to be an impossible task. However, as R. Laurence Moore, Christopher Buck, and other scholars of American religious history have demonstrated, it is not unheard of for small, upstart, religious outsiders

to circumvent conventional religious lines and shift the collective direction [of] American religion while remaking its parameters in their own image.<sup>79</sup>

The purpose of this article is not to argue ‘influence’ in terms of effecting social change in a historically documented or sociologically determined way, but ‘influence’ in the more literal, etymological sense of what the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as the ‘action or fact of flowing in; inflowing, inflow, influx: said of the action of water and other fluids, and of immaterial things conceived of as flowing in’. It is the influx of the Baha’i message of interracial harmony and world unity (the former being a precondition of the latter) among the black intelligentsia that this article will illuminate, thereby lending further substance to the claim by historian Gayle Morrison made in 1982:

In the North, conferences and other activities sponsored or cosponsored by the Bahá’ís resulted in a significant public role for the religion in the fields of race relations and civil rights. These events provided a platform for the exchange of views by outstanding leaders, white and black. Among them were W. E. B. Du Bois, A. Philip Randolph, William Stanley Braithwaite, Franz Boas, James Weldon Johnson, Jane Addams, and Roy Wilkins, to name a few who were not Bahá’ís.<sup>80</sup>

Morrison further states that ‘the Bahá’í message of unity reached beyond the NAACP to virtually all of the leaders concerned with the struggle for racial equality in America’ and names, in addition to the foregoing: Walter F. White, Arthur B. Spingarn, John Hope, Mary White Ovington, Stephen S. Wise, ‘to name a few’.<sup>81</sup> By any measure, this is an impressive list, and merits further inquiry as to the ‘significant public role for the religion in the fields of race relations and civil rights’ that Morrison has postulated.

During the Jim Crow era, the Baha’i religion in America promoted the principle and practice of ‘race amity’ – that is, of ideal race relations, particularly between black and white. As will be documented below, Alain Locke played a key role in organizing and promoting the Baha’i race amity initiatives, whereas Robert S. Abbott, before and after he became a Baha’i, published a number of articles on the Baha’i Faith (highlighting its message of race amity) in *The Chicago Defender*. Apart from some minor correspondence archived in the Alain Locke Papers, Locke and Abbott moved in different social circles and operated in independent contexts. Thus, Locke helped ‘make the news’, while Abbott reported it.

Whether or not the more familiar sense of ‘influence’ (what the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as ‘ascendancy, sway, control, or authority, not formally or overtly expressed’) was a result of such influx is indeterminable here. It is the currency of ‘influence’ (i.e. influx of ideas put into practice) as historical fact that is stressed here, not the result of such ‘influence’.

## VI. The Baha’i race amity movement and Robert S. Abbott

In his heyday, Robert S. Abbott was similarly prominent as a black leader, but arguably more influential in terms of his impact on American society.<sup>82</sup> It was historian Mark Perry who effectively rediscovered Robert S. Abbott’s Baha’i story.<sup>83</sup> Since the visit of ‘Abdu’l-Baha in 1912, the black press giant

had been a long-time friend of the Baha'i Faith, and finally joined it in 1934. Abbott was not part of the race amity movement, but reported, from time to time, on it, and, through a number of articles published in *The Chicago Defender*, gave widespread, even national publicity to the Baha'i principles of ideal race relations.

Robert Sengstacke Abbott, the son of former slaves, was born on 28 (or 29) November 1868 in Frederica, on St Simon's Island, Georgia. In 1897, he moved to Chicago, where eight years later he established *The Chicago Defender*, one of the nation's most influential newspapers. 'Through the voice of *The Defender*', writes Baha'i historian, Mark Perry, 'Abbott played a major role in the promotion of racial equality in America.'<sup>84</sup> Throughout much of the South, *The Defender* was banned by law. An African American person possessing or distributing the newspaper stood in danger of mob violence.<sup>85</sup> On 15 May 1917, Abbott launched his historic 'Great Northern Drive', calling for African Americans in the South migrate to the North. This mass movement became known as 'The Great Migration'. By 1918, over 110,000 African Americans had migrated to Chicago, nearly tripling the city's black population.<sup>86</sup> As the first black newspaper to have a circulation over 100,000, *The Defender* obviously wielded great influence among its black readership. Indeed, Gunnar Myrdal, analyst of the American race crisis and 1974 Nobel Prize Laureate in Economics, described the 'Negro press' that Abbott was so instrumental in developing as 'the greatest single power in the Negro race'.<sup>87</sup> Yet it is also a little-known fact that, like Alain Locke, Robert S. Abbott became a Baha'i.

In 1912 – the year *The Defender*'s first newsstand sales began – Abbott attended 'Abdu'l-Baha's first of three visits to Chicago, in a meeting held at Jane Addams's Hull House. As Abbott recalled years later, 'Abdu'l-Baha placed his hand on Abbott's head and said that 'he would get from me some day a service for the benefit of humanity'. Abbott's relationship to the Baha'i community was somewhat fluid. Perry notes that, as early as 1924, Abbott and his wife, Helen, appeared in the Chicago Baha'i community membership list.<sup>88</sup> Abbott read and studied a number of Baha'i books prior to his conversion during the 1934 National Baha'i Convention, held in Foundation Hall at the Bahá'í House of Worship in Wilmette.

A news story published in *The Chicago Defender* in March 1924 reports that Robert S. Abbott presented a lecture, 'Friendly Race Relations', to students and faculty at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, under the auspices of the Race Friendship League. In describing the gist of the lecture, the reporter states: 'By way of introduction attention was directed to the great Bahai movement that is attempting, through religious forces of the present day, to bring about the hoped-for fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man.'<sup>89</sup>

Little is known about Abbott's relationship with the Baha'i community in the intervening years prior to his conversion in 1934. Dr Zia Bagdadi, perhaps the most active promoter of the Baha'i Faith among Chicago's African Americans, had served as one of 'Abdu'l-Baha's attendants in 1912. Perry notes that 'it is quite likely that Dr Bagdadi first met Abbott at the Hull House talk and was present when 'Abdu'l-Baha spoke to the fledgling publisher'. After Abbott's conversion, Shoghi Effendi ('Abdu'l-Baha's grandson and appointed successor) wrote to Dr Bagdadi, stating that

Abbott 'may truly be regarded as your spiritual son'. This is evidence that friendship with Dr Bagdadi was Abbott's primary connection with the Baha'i community before his conversion.<sup>90</sup>

The story of Abbott's declaration of his adherence to the Baha'i religion is as follows. On Sunday 3 June 1934, being the final day of that convention, Dr Bagdadi and the convention delegates witnessed a 'touching and impressive incident', which he recounted a few days later in a letter to Shoghi Effendi:

Just before the closing of this Convention, speaking on the subject of publicity, I happened to think of Doctor Abbot [sic], Negro publisher of a newspaper in Chicago. I mentioned how I succeeded in publishing Bahá'í articles on the first page of his paper. As I finished this statement, someone in the audience shouted, 'Dr Abbot is now here with us.' The Delegates expressed their desires to hear a word from him, and he responded by declaring his faith in the Bahá'í Cause! This was one of the happiest moments in the Convention. The publisher is to appear before the Chicago Assembly next Tuesday to answer the formal questions required from any one who wishes to join the Bahá'í Faith.<sup>91</sup>

As reported by Louis Gregory, this is what Abbott said:

Dear friends: Sorry I am hoarse and do not want to find it necessary to speak all over again. Happy am I to see people whom I have been praying to God all my life to see, those who recognize me as a man. Everywhere I have travelled I have been received as a man save in my own country. Here my people have been cruelly treated and even burned at the stake! ... Abdu'l-Baha when in America put His hand on my head and told me that He would get from me some day a service for the benefit of Humanity. I am identifying myself with this Cause and I go up with you or down with you. Anything for this Cause! Let it go out and remove the darkness everywhere. Save my people! Save America from herself!<sup>92</sup>

On 9 June 1934, *The Chicago Defender* reported the convention, stating, in part:

Robert S. Abbott, editor and publisher of *The Chicago Defender*, addressed the delegates and visitors to the convention Sunday afternoon. His talk was one of the highlights of the program. The editor is intensely interested in the Baha'i movement, and is thoroughly in accord with its broad principles as was evidenced by his excellent remarks during the convention.<sup>93</sup>

Abbott's interest in the Baha'i religion was no mere incidental matter; rather, Abbott published a number of articles on the Baha'i movement in *The Chicago Defender*, which reached a remarkably wide readership within the black community. Abbott's relationship with the Baha'i community has not been investigated in depth, but there is evidence that Baha'is were advising Abbott of the Baha'i principle on non-involvement in politics, since political partisanship is divisive, whether locally or nationally. Divisiveness, after all, is the very antithesis of the social unity that the Baha'i religion endeavoured to promote.

Abbott 'vigorously promoted the Baha'i Faith' in *The Defender*, from 1934 to 1937.<sup>94</sup> The coverage tended to be even-keeled, but with occasional feature stories. Shortly after the convention, for instance, the Schoenys, a white family from Phoenix, Arizona, appeared in a photograph published in *The Chicago Defender*, the caption of which read, in part:

This picture was made in *The Chicago Defender* office where the Schoenys were guests of Editor Robert S. Abbott on a tour of the plant of the World's Greatest Weekly. They were also Mr Abbott's guests at luncheon Monday. The Schoenys, who motored here from their western home to attend the conference of their faith, attest to the fact that here is at least one religion in which the color line is unknown.<sup>95</sup>

After his public declaration of belief on Sunday 3 June 1934, Robert S. Abbott personally wrote and published, in the 'Chicago Defender Features' section, this article: 'Baha'ism Called the Religion that will Rescue Humanity: Christianity Has Proved Faithless To Its Trust, Says Robert S. Abbott; Praises Mohammedanism', which was 'Installment XLIV' of a series of editorials that Abbott published, with his photograph featured as well as his by-line.<sup>96</sup> This was a somewhat daring editorial, given its critique of Christianity, which is not typical of Baha'i self-representation, in which other religions are treated more diplomatically in an effort to promote transconfessional affinity and interfaith accord. Another noteworthy article was 'Leaders of Baha'i Faith Pay Visit to Publisher: Spreading the Baha'i Movement' (13 May 1939, 23), which read, in part: 'Mesdames Ethel Gross and Vernita Mason, delegates from Boston, Mass, to the thirty-first convention at Bahai Temple in Wilmette, took time out to visit their friend, Robert S. Abbott, at his home on South Parkway, Tuesday afternoon, May 2.' What is significant about this article is that the publisher of *The Chicago Defender* was so publicly associated with this new religion.

Over the next several years, many other articles on the Baha'i religion followed. From 3 June 1934 to the date of Abbott's death on 29 February 1940, *The Defender* published 28 articles with the word 'Baha'i' in the headline.<sup>97</sup> Another 10 articles have the word 'Baha'i' without the apostrophe, for a total of 38 headlined articles on the Baha'i Faith during the last years of Robert S. Abbott's life.<sup>98</sup> Including these 38 stories, there are 53 articles that mention 'Baha'i' during this time period, such as these two stories: 'Promote Race Amity' (25 January 1936, 12 (in 'The Voice of the Church' section)); and 'Baha'is Hold Race Amity Assemblies' (8 February 1936, 4). Abbott authored two articles during this period. The first has already been mentioned. The second: 'New Book Sets Forth Growth of Baha'i In 40 Countries' (*The Chicago Defender*, 15 February 1936, 5). These, as well as articles published in *The Defender* prior to Abbott's conversion on 3 June 1934, resulted in unprecedented publicity for the Baha'i Faith ever since 'Abdu'l-Baha's highly publicized lecture tour in 1912.

In his article prominently featuring his photograph and published shortly after his conversion, Robert S. Abbott publicly testified to his faith in the purpose and precepts of the Baha'i movement:

If, during the twenty-eight years of my journalistic career I have been relentless in my campaign against race prejudice and discrimination, it is because I know the disastrous effects upon the human souls. Race prejudice would not have marred our civilization if the churches had fought it and met the issues in true Christian spirit. ... Against this background Bahaism stands as the supreme expression of all those modern religious tendencies animated by social ideals which do not repudiate the reality of spiritual experience but seek to transform it into a dynamic striving for unity. Bahaism, when clearly understood, gives the world the most potent agency for applying mystical vision or idealistic aspiration to the service of humanity. It makes visible and concrete those deeper meanings and wider possibilities of religion which could not be realized until the advent of Abdul Baha [sic].<sup>99</sup>

In the 44th instalment of what evidently was a series of articles, Abbott added this personal endorsement of the Baha'i religion:

A Sound Gospel: My experience with the followers of this cult has convinced me of the true and sincere humanitarian gospel which animates their souls. They fear not to break bread with the members of the darker races for the cardinal theme of their spiritual postulate is the oneness of mankind. ... For thousands of years the human race has been at war. Enmity and hatred have ruled. Now comes a new prophet bearing a new warrant of love, amity and peace. Baha'iism [sic] seeks to advance religion to its ultimate cultural sphere in which all consciousness of racial differences and religious traditions shall be flooded out by the spiritual light of greater understanding and love. The frontiers of civilization will not, appreciably, be advanced and the souls of nations will not be retrieved from the abomination into which they have sunk, unless the fundamental principles embodied in the teachings of Abdul-Baha are faithfully and fervently embraced. No religion can bring peace which sanctions prejudice and discrimination at its very door.<sup>100</sup>

As a result of Abbott's 22-year interest in the Baha'i movement (dating from his meeting with 'Abdu'l-Baha in 1912 through to his conversion in 1934), and during his affiliation as a Baha'i during the last six years of his life, the Baha'i religion received what probably was its most widespread exposure among African Americans due to the numerous articles published in *The Chicago Defender*, a paper of truly national significance, especially given its widespread distribution in the South by sleeping-car porters. The publicity for the Faith was thus not just in the Chicago area, but in black communities around the country.

One of these articles stands out in particular. On page 10 of the 17 June 1933 edition of *The Chicago Defender*, an article was headlined, 'Baha'i Movement Seen as Hope of Religion. New Philosophy Wipes Out All Prejudices Based on Race, Color and Creed'. This article states, in part: 'Baha'is are made up of all races, nationalities and religions.'<sup>101</sup> A few brief excerpts from this article will suffice to show how the Baha'i Faith was presented in 1933. Author Louis Gregory, a former Washington DC attorney and graduate of Howard University's School of Law, writes:

The Baha'i religion ... demolishes all superstitions, all prejudices. Here racial boundaries disappear as men gaze upon the souls and characters of their

fellows ... Here men and women have the same rights and neither tries to enslave the other. Here each person must investigate and see the truth for himself. Here religion and science in their common origin support each other. Here is encouragement ... to speak one language. It [the Bahá'í Faith] has the power to unify mankind.<sup>102</sup>

Abbott died on 29 February 1940. A little over twelve years later, Abbott was presented to the African American community as one of the two most well-known African American Bahá'ís. In the October 1952 issue of *Ebony* magazine, a feature article appeared: 'Bahá'i Faith, Only Church in World That Does Not Discriminate'. Opposite a photograph of Alain Locke, displayed prominently on page 39, was a photograph of Robert S. Abbott.<sup>103</sup>

## VII. The Bahá'i race amity movement and Alain Locke

Alain Locke is acclaimed in his 2008 biography as 'the most influential African American intellectual born between W. E. B. Du Bois and Martin Luther King, Jr'<sup>104</sup> and has been called 'the father of multiculturalism'.<sup>105</sup> The Reverend Dr Martin Luther King, Jr, exclaimed, in his speech at the Poor People's Campaign Rally in Clarksdale, Mississippi on 19 March 1968: 'We're going to let our children know that the only philosophers that lived were not Plato and Aristotle, but W. E. B. Du Bois and Alain Locke came through the universe'.<sup>106</sup> It is a little-known fact that these iconic 'race men' were initially attracted to the Bahá'i religion, with Du Bois eventually becoming critical of the Bahá'i movement as of 1937, while Locke actually joined the Bahá'i religion in 1918, and remained a Bahá'i until his death in 1954.

Locke's prestige and national renown as a national spokesman for African Americans may be illustrated by Locke's association with Eleanor Roosevelt, the illustrious wife of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, during her tenure as America's first lady (1933–45). In his day, Locke was one of a select few African American leaders to be invited to the White House, such as when the first lady, on 26 December 1940, invited Locke, along with five other members of an advisory board, 'incident to the Library of Congress book exhibit, music and art festival commemorating the proclamation of the thirteenth amendment to the constitution',<sup>107</sup> the day after 'President Roosevelt received the members of the festival committee at the White House, Wednesday morning',<sup>108</sup> which was Christmas Day in 1940. Locke had first met the first lady in 1937 when he spoke at the Willard Hotel in Washington DC at the launching of a peace campaign by the Women's International League.<sup>109</sup> On 7 May 1941, Locke introduced First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt at a dedication of the Southside Community Art Center, a predominantly African American centre in Chicago, built as part of the Illinois Federal Art Project, an event that was nationally broadcast on radio.<sup>110</sup> In another historic photo, Locke appears together with First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, Judge James S. Watson, Clarence Holt, Nnamdi Azikiwe, and K. O. Mbadwie.<sup>111</sup> On 28 June 1947, *The Chicago Defender* published a photograph of Locke and the first lady, along with other 'Harlem members of the African Academy of Arts'.<sup>112</sup>

In their University of Chicago Press monograph published in December 2008, authors Leonard Harris and Charles Molesworth have contributed

what is now the definitive biography of Alain Locke – almost. For the authors note, only in passing, the fact that Locke was a Baha'i:

On May 28, 1942, for a radio program titled America's Meetings of the Air, Locke discussed spirituality and democracy, a talk that was eventually published under the title 'Is There a Spiritual Basis for World Unity' in the *Bahá'í World*. The Bahá'í [sic] were a marginalized sect in America, especially because of their promotion of racial amity and their approval of interracial marriage. Locke did not wear his affiliation openly nor practice as a doctrinaire Bahá'í, but he did serve on the group's National Committee on Racial Amity. Encouraging cross-racial dialogues, Locke reportedly said, prior to attending a fireside with a group of educators in New York: 'How surprised they will be to know me as a Bahá'í.' ... An issue of the group's publication, *Bahá'í World*, was dedicated to Locke in 2006.<sup>113</sup>

This statement, unfortunately, contains factual and bibliographic errors. The words ascribed to Locke – 'How surprised they will be to know me as a Bahá'í' – was definitely not 'reportedly said, prior to attending a fireside with a group of educators in New York', as Harris and Molesworth have asserted. The source of that statement is historically and anecdotally retraced as follows:

On 15 June 1925, Locke was fired from Howard University for his support of equal pay between black and white faculty. Shortly after *The New Negro: An Interpretation* was published in December 1925, between 6 February and March 1926, Locke travelled with Louis Gregory on a Baha'i lecture tour, which took him to the following lecture venues: Cleveland and Cincinnati; Dunbar Forum at Oberlin College; Wilberforce University (all in Ohio; Daytona Normal & Industrial Institute for Negro Girls; and Robert Hungerford Normal and Industrial School (Orlando). In a letter in late 1925 in advance of this tour, a fellow Baha'i wrote: 'In regard to Dr Locke – he is at present in NY but has written me saying he "will keep his promise (to go South) in spite of many things." ... When he looked over the list of educators supplied by Mrs Kehler, saying he knew about one third of them personally, he remarked smilingly[,] "How surprised they will be to know me as a Bahai".'<sup>114</sup>

Harris and Molesworth are partly correct, and partly incorrect, in saying that 'Locke did not wear his affiliation openly nor practice as a doctrinaire Bahá'í, but he did serve on the group's National Committee on Racial Amity'.<sup>115</sup> It is certainly true that Locke served on national Baha'i 'race amity' committees. He did so over a period that spanned 12 years, from 1924 through to 1932 (see 'Baha'i Organizer of "Race Amity"', *infra*). Considering that Locke was also instrumental in organizing and participating in the first Baha'i 'Race Amity' event in 1921, his involvement, to varying degrees, was sustained over a period spanning some 15 years, which is not insignificant.

Harris and Molesworth also write: 'On 28 May 1942, for a radio program titled America's Meetings of the Air, Locke discussed spirituality and democracy, a talk that was eventually published under the title 'Is There a Spiritual Basis for World Unity' in the *Bahá'í World*'.<sup>116</sup> This is also historically and bibliographically erroneous, but affords an opportunity to gain an insight into Locke's outlook and wit. On 28 May 1942, on a show called 'Town Meeting', Locke, in with panel of other speakers (Mordecai W. Johnson, Doxey Alphonso Wilkerson, Leon A. Ransom) spoke on the topic, 'Is There A Spiritual Basis

for World Unity?"<sup>117</sup> This is precisely the kind of question that would interest a Baha'i, not to mention the more progressive members of the listening audience. A transcript of the show was printed shortly after, in the June issue of *Town Meeting: Bulletin of America's Town Meeting on the Air*.<sup>118</sup> All four guest speakers – Locke, Mordecai Johnson, Doxey Wilkerson and Leon Ransom – were professors at Howard University, with the exception of Johnson, who was president of Howard. The moderator was George V. Denny, Jr, and the show was broadcast from the campus in Washington DC.

In his introduction, Denny said that each of the presenters 'hold diametrically opposed views on the question we've posed: "Is There a Basis for Spiritual Unity in the World Today?"' With regard to Locke and Johnson, there seems to have not only been a divergence in viewpoint, but personal friction as well, as they may have locked antlers on university-related issues. Johnson, who was the first to speak, began by saying, 'Man is an animal.' He hastened to add: 'But man is a religious animal.'<sup>119</sup> After Johnson had idealized Christianity and the civilizing role it should play, Locke opened his remarks by responding: 'One of the troubles of today's world tragedy is the fact that this same religion, of which Dr Johnson has spoken with his grand idealisms, has, when institutionalized, been linked with politics and the flag and empire, with the official church and sectarianism.' Speaking of the 'brotherhood of man' as an ancient, venerable principle, Locke remarks: 'We must consider very carefully why such notions have for so long wandered disembodied in the world – witness the dismembered League of Nations and Geneva's sad, deserted nest.'<sup>120</sup> With characteristic, extemporaneous eloquence, Locke added, trenchantly:

The fact is, the idealistic exponents of world unity and human brotherhood have throughout the ages and even today expected their figs to grow from thistles. We cannot expect to get international bread from sociological stone whether it be the granite of national self-sufficiency, the flint of racial antagonisms, or the adamant of religious partisanship. ... The question pivots, therefore, not on the desirability of world unity, but upon the more realistic issue of its practicability.<sup>121</sup>

True to his philosophical bent, Locke delivered more on problems than solutions, conveying to the immediate audience the misimpression that he, in fact, saw no spiritual basis for world unity at all. During the question-answer period that followed, a lady asked: 'Dr Locke. As a teacher of philosophy, what do you offer your students as a substitute for the spiritual ideas that you claim do not exist?' (Applause.) To which Locke replied:

Well, that's a poser, and I can't give any of my lectures, some of them dealing with some of the greatest advocates of spiritual ideals that the world has known. One of the tragic things which show our present limited horizons is that there are very few institutions where, let us say, the great philosophies of the East are studied; and when they are and as they are, we will be a little nearer to that spiritual unity, I think, that you think I don't believe in.<sup>122</sup>

Here, it is possible that Locke was being not only witty, but wise, alluding to the Faith but not proclaiming it outright. The moderator would not let

Locke answer a subsequent question from a man in the audience, who asked: 'Dr Locke. If you consider spiritual unity desirable, what do you offer in lieu of the major religions of the world?'<sup>123</sup> Was the moderator studiously avoiding giving Locke a chance to mention the Faith because he may have known of Locke's unorthodox views? How might Locke have answered the pointed question if he had had the chance? It's true that Locke studiously avoided publicly identifying himself with the Baha'i Faith in his contacts with the media, as this might have posed a threat to Locke's career and complicated his role as a 'race man'. But Locke did not oppose being identified (by others) as a Baha'i.

Indeed, Locke authored several publications (most notably in *The Bahá'í World* volumes) that clearly indicated that he was a Baha'i. Locke wrote four essays published in six volumes of *The Bahá'í World*: (1) 'Impressions of Haifa' in vols. 1, 2 and 3 (1926, 1929, 1930), first published in *Star of the West* (1924);<sup>124</sup> 'Unity through Diversity: A Bahá'í Principle' in vol. 4 (1933);<sup>125</sup> (3) 'The Orientation of Hope' in vol. 5 (1936);<sup>126</sup> and (4) 'Lessons in World Crisis' in vol. 9 (1945).<sup>127</sup> Recently, in a 2010 multi-author work that Leonard Harris co-edited, *Philosophic Values and World Citizenship: Locke to Obama and Beyond*, Locke's essay, 'Unity through Diversity: A Bahá'í Principle', has been reprinted, which is a welcome event but, oddly, without citation to the original publication.<sup>128</sup> A cursory look throughout the book (not indexed) reveals scarce mention of Locke's Baha'i affiliation and, in the bibliography, no citations to recent scholarship on Locke as a Baha'i. Although he studiously avoided references to the Faith in his professional life, Locke's *Bahá'í World* essays served as his public testimony of faith as a Baha'i.<sup>129</sup> Mention should also be made of Locke's public association with the *World Unity* magazine (1927–35), a publication of the World Unity Foundation, which was Baha'i-sponsored. Locke's endorsement of the magazine was prominently displayed for promotional purposes: 'The distinctive achievement of World Unity seems to me to be the promotion of universal ideas in a spirit commensurate with their basic ideals. Alain Locke, Howard University.'<sup>130</sup>

Contrary to Harris and Molesworth's assertion, however, the transcript of this debate was never published in any of *The Bahá'í World* volumes. But Locke did publish in several of *The Bahá'í World* volumes, and elsewhere. To a limited degree, Locke was also a public speaker at Baha'i-sponsored events. His Baha'i-themed essays and speeches, along with his work on Baha'i race amity committees, suggest that the Baha'i dimension of Locke's life – heretofore little known but now well documented – should have occupied more than a scant couple of pages in the 432-page Harris and Molesworth biography of Locke.

Locke's activities as a Baha'i are such that a whole book can be written about them – and, indeed, has.<sup>131</sup> There is now a considerable volume of published archival information relating to Locke's Baha'i contributions. In 1933, *The Pittsburgh Courier* published this story, which, by its context, clearly and publicly presents Alain Locke as a Baha'i:

#### **Alain Locke Addresses Bahais**

CHICAGO, June 15 – Alain Locke, professor of philosophy at Howard University, lecturer and author of 'The New Negro', was guest speaker at the

Bahai Temple in Wilmette, Sunday, during the convention of the movement celebrating the 25th anniversary.

Dr Locke spoke to 3,000 people who crowded into the Temple. He came to Chicago for the express purpose of addressing the religious assemblage. ...

The Bahai movement is international with a membership of approximately 12,000,000. A \$3,000,000 temple of worship, which is not completed, is a masterpiece of beauty and an asset to the communities surrounding Wilmette.

In this temple worship the rich and poor, the Jew and Gentile, Catholic and Protestant, the white and colored. They welcome all creeds, doctrines, races, and nations. They believe in the unity of man.

They have done much to abolish racial prejudices and seek to bring about world harmony by evolution rather than revolution.

When one enters their Sacred Temple [sic] he forgets racial differences and think [sic] only of the human race.<sup>132</sup>

The title of Alain Locke's talk was 'The Way Out From Strife to Unity'.<sup>133</sup> That same year – indeed, that very same day – Locke was again publicly identified as a Baha'i, in *The Defender* story cited in the previous section: 'Among the prominent Colored Baha'is may be mentioned Dr Alain Locke, Rhodes Scholar and professor of philosophy at Howard University.'<sup>134</sup> To be publicly identified by both *The Pittsburgh Courier* and *The Chicago Defender* on the very same day – 17 June 1933 – was remarkable, indeed. But it was not completely by sheer coincidence because, in the previous year, Locke had also publicly identified himself as a Baha'i. On 9–10 December 1932, the National Inter-Racial Amity Committee hosted a race amity conference in New York, organized in cooperation with a local Baha'i committee and, significantly, with the New York chapter of the National Urban League.<sup>135</sup> Alain Locke spoke at the second session, which 'covered many phases of racial amity'. Here, Locke was once again on the same platform with Louis Gregory.<sup>136</sup> In his 1933 report on behalf of the national race amity committee, Louis Gregory was delighted with Locke's public declaration of his Baha'i identity and his open endorsement of its principles:

For a number of years, in fact since the first amity convention in Washington, Dr Alain Locke has during the years been a contributor to the work of the Cause, without formally identifying himself with it. Perhaps the most significant feature of this conference was his strong, eloquent and beautiful address, in which he took a decided and definite stand within the ranks of the Cause. This attitude we believe will increasingly with the years influence people of capacity to investigate the mines of spiritual wealth to be found in the Revelation of Baha'u'llah. It will also make what has long been a grandly useful life more glorious, serviceable and influential than ever before. It is to be hoped that the friends both locally and nationally, will largely make use of the great powers of Dr Locke both in the teaching and administrative fields of the Cause. He has made the pilgrimage to Haifa. The Master in a Tablet praised him highly and it is known that the Guardian shares his love for our able brother.<sup>137</sup>

Locke again was publicly showcased as a Baha'i in the October 1952 issue of *Ebony* magazine.<sup>138</sup> The following is the inside story of how Locke's

photograph was first solicited by the editor for years prior. In a letter dated 19 May 1948, the associate editor, Era Bell Thompson, was planning to publish an article in *Ebony* profiling prominent African Americans and featuring photographs of each, as they appeared 'now and way back when'.<sup>139</sup> The concept behind this novel approach was not only to give *Ebony* readers a current picture of their best and brightest, but also a glimpse of these black leaders in their youth. Given his national prominence, naturally Thompson wrote to Alain Locke to request photographs for this issue. For *Ebony* had no original photos of Locke on file. In her postscript, Thompson writes: 'P.S. Please send a recent picture, [sic] also, as we have none in our files that we could use.'<sup>140</sup>

Locke promptly sent these, as requested. In a follow-up letter dated 1 June 1948, Thompson expressed her appreciation on *Ebony*'s behalf: 'Dear Mr [sic] Locke: Thank you for your prompt response to our appeal for pictures of you now and way back when. We will take good care of them and return the earlier one as soon as we had made a print.'<sup>141</sup> This suggests that Locke had sent an original photograph of himself in younger years, and therefore requested its return after *Ebony* had a chance to make a print of it. It is quite likely, therefore, that one of the photos that Locke had sent was the one that later appeared on page 39 in the 12 October 1952 issue of *Ebony* magazine that drew public attention to the fact that Alain Locke was a member of the Baha'i Faith.

A photograph of Alain Locke features prominently in an article, 'Baha'i Faith: Only Church in the World That Does Not Discriminate'.<sup>142</sup> Locke's image appears on the lower, right-hand corner of the first page of the article. The picture bears the caption: 'Alain Locke, Howard professor, joined movement in 1915, wrote for the *Bahá'í Magazine*'.<sup>143</sup> (As mentioned earlier, Locke formally enrolled in the Baha'i community in 1918.) This exact photograph was almost certainly one of the photos that Locke had provided *Ebony* editor, Era Bell Thompson, in 1948.

However fleeting this publicity was, there is no question that Locke was publicly – and quite prominently – identified as a Baha'i in a major publication that literally reached thousands of African American subscribers and purchasers of *Ebony* magazine. This public persona is not insignificant. The inside story of the photographs that an editor of *Ebony* magazine had requested, albeit for different story, is evidence that Locke probably had advance notice of the October 1952 feature article on the Baha'i Faith, and that his photograph and identity as a Baha'i would be part of that story. There is, of course, no validation of this assumption, but, considering the fact that Locke occasionally wrote letters to editors expressing his disagreement over this or that newspaper article, an argument from silence can be made to suggest that Locke had no objection to his photograph being so prominently displayed in this way.

Locke's contributions as a Baha'i are too many to be recapitulated here, so only his race amity activities will be highlighted. According to archivist Roger Dahl, 'Locke was a member of the National Race Amity Committee for at least five years between 1925 and 1932.'<sup>144</sup> This statement can be adjusted to begin on 19 May 1924. A more precise encapsulation would be 1924–32, with the exception of the 1932–33 Baha'i year. Locke was officially appointed to a number of race amity committees (see Appendix 2. Race Amity Committees).

These are seven (six national) committees to which Locke was consistently reappointed, and on which he served for eight out of nine consecutive years (1924–32). It appears that Locke was not selected for the 1932–33 committee.<sup>145</sup> (The National Inter-Racial Amity Committee itself was dissolved by the National Spiritual Assembly in 1936.<sup>146</sup>) While the reason for his absence during 1932–36, the final period of the race amity cycle (1924–36), is not clear, what is certain is that Locke's appointment to seven race amity committees was based on both his willingness and ability to serve in this special capacity, contributing his time and exceptional talents in the process.

Although Locke's involvement in the Baha'i race amity endeavours is more fully documented in *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy*,<sup>147</sup> new information continues to be made available. For instance, the official letterhead of the 'National Bahai Committee for Race Amity' lists 'Dr Alain Locke' among the committee members.<sup>148</sup> That Locke's name appeared on the official letterhead is yet further evidence of his formal involvement in the Baha'i race amity initiatives. Other scholars are beginning to take note of Locke's identity as a Baha'i and as instrumental in the Baha'i race amity movement.<sup>149</sup> His obituary, briefly mentioning his Baha'i affiliation and activities, was published in *The Baha'i World* in 1954, the year of Locke's death.<sup>150</sup>

Locke was committed to race amity practically throughout his whole adult life. 'On the one hand there is the possibility', Locke wrote to the *New York Times* in 1931, 'of a fine collaboration spiritually between these two groups [black and white] with their complementary traits and qualities. They have great spiritual need, the one of the other, if they will so see it.'<sup>151</sup> Locke stated quite the same in *The Negro in America* (1933):

If they will but see it, because of their complementary qualities, the two racial groups have great spiritual need, one of the other. It would truly be significant in the history of human culture, if two races so diverse should so happily collaborate, and the one return for the gift of a great civilization the reciprocal gift of the spiritual cross-fertilization of a great and distinctive national culture.<sup>152</sup>

This latter statement is quoted in a Baha'i compilation on race.<sup>153</sup>

Locke has left a rich legacy, and has several claims to fame. One of these is his foundational role in the birth of multiculturalism, as Locke's biographers note: 'Locke more recently has become best known as one of the founders of what we today know as multiculturalism, though his phrase for it was cultural pluralism.'<sup>154</sup> Locke is also widely credited with having internationalized the issue of race. During World War II, Locke forged a vital link between race relations and world peace. Locke's most successful anthology after *The New Negro* (1925) was *Color: Unfinished Business of Democracy* (1942, cover by Reinold Weiss), for which Locke and *The Survey Graphic* each won a prestigious race relations award in 1943. Locke writes, in part: 'Certainly here, both nationally and internationally, color becomes the acid test of our fundamental honesty in putting into practice the democracy we preach. ... The parity of peoples is the main moral issue of this global conflict.'<sup>155</sup>

The following statement, reported by the press in 1930, eloquently crystallizes Locke's outlook as a philosopher and as a Baha'i: 'No more

progressive step can be made in our present civilization than the breaking down of the barriers which separate races, sexes and nations.'<sup>156</sup> Locke articulated an expansive philosophy of democracy, in nine dimensions, that enlarged on this very social imperative.<sup>157</sup> It is clear that, in Locke's words, which echo and amplify the Baha'i perspective, 'race amity' and world peace are inextricably linked, for peace cannot exist internationally without domestic peace being firmly established nationally. On Locke's significance, historian Derik Smith recently wrote:

Perhaps more than any other twentieth century notable, Locke was an advocate of what I'd call 'Black Americanism'. That makes him a vital figure in the Age of Obama. Among African Americans, Locke was the most lucid and rigorous champion of American egalitarian democracy to come before Obama. Locke's belief in the salutary potential of America emerges from his internationalism, his cosmopolitanism, his philosophical commitment to 'unity in diversity' – a principle that he found in the Bahá'í Faith which he served during a significant portion of his life. ... Obama, although apparently uninfluenced by Locke, is the most effective bearer of Locke's legacy of Black Americanism. In fact, Obama's rise may represent the final (?) triumph of Black Americanism over Black Nationalism. For a contemporary articulation of the efficacy of Black Americanism we need only look toward Obama, but to witness its most eloquent philosophical defense we have to go back to Locke.<sup>158</sup>

A tablet, revealed in 1921, was recently rediscovered in which 'Abdu'l-Baha spoke highly of Locke: 'Dr Locke, this distinguished personage, deserveth every praise. I implore the Kingdom of God to grant him a special confirmation' (ḥadrat-i Dr Locke īn shakhs-i jalil fī al-ḥaqīqih sazāvār-i har sitāyish ast. tadarru 'bi-malakūt-i ilāhī mīnamāyam kih ta'yīdī makhshūs bi-ū farmāyad).<sup>159</sup> This, in fact, may be the very tablet that Louis Gregory referred to in writing: 'The Master in a tablet praised him [Locke] highly'.<sup>160</sup> Years later, Shoghi Effendi said of Locke: 'Shoghi Effendi ... cherishes in his loving heart great hope for your spiritual success. People as you [Locke], Mr. Gregory, Dr. Esslemont and some other dear souls are as rare as diamond. ... The world, more than ever, is in need of spiritual nourishment. You are the chosen ones to render this service to the lifeless world in this present stage'.<sup>161</sup> And further, in gratitude for Locke's 'most helpful' suggestions 'incorporated' in Shoghi Effendi's English translation of Baha'u'llah's *Kitāb-i Iqān* (The Book of Certitude) 'for publication,' Shoghi Effendi, in the postscript penned in his own hand, writes: 'I have always greatly admired your exceptional abilities & capacity to render distinguished services to the Faith ... Your true brother, Shoghi'.<sup>162</sup>

## **VIII. Conclusion**

This study has demonstrated how the Baha'i 'Race Amity' efforts – conceived by 'Abdu'l-Baha in 1920 and inaugurated in 1921 – effectively impressed key leaders in the black intelligentsia during the Jim Crow era, attracting the interest of two of the giants of the period – Alain Locke and Robert S. Abbott. As previously stated, apart from a slender folder of correspondence between the two in the Alain Locke Papers at Howard University, Locke and Abbott had little interaction, much less an

opportunity to collaborate and thus synergize their respective efforts to promote improved race relations. After all, Abbott, the older contemporary of Locke, lived in a professional world at some remove from Locke's. Abbott's affiliation with the Baha'i religion, moreover, lasted only six years (1934–40), while Locke's affiliation spanned three-and-a-half decades (1918–54). Independently of each other, both Locke and Abbott not only embraced the Baha'i ideals of interracial harmony, but effectively championed those ideals. Because of the press coverage previously noted, it would be safe to assume that a wide sector of the black reading public of the early twentieth century had at least some knowledge of the Baha'i Faith, and its association with ideal race relations.

Other black intellectuals of the period were also aware of the primacy that the 'Baha'i movement' – as it was widely known – had placed on ideal race relations. Black and white, the roster of intellectuals included such stellar figures as Jane Addams, Franz Boas, William Stanley Braithwaite, W. E. B. Du Bois, John Hope, James Weldon Johnson, Mary White Ovington, A. Philip Randolph, Arthur B. Spingarn, Walter F. White, Roy Wilkins<sup>163</sup> and Stephen S. Wise, which fact invites further study. It is the remarkable reach of the Baha'i message of interracial harmony among the black (and white) intelligentsia during the Jim Crow era that constitutes the Baha'i 'influence' as previously defined.

The Baha'i 'Race Amity' initiative was an audacious, yet pragmatic attempt at social transformation. The Baha'i movement represented 'a potentially potent theological and social force – defying at once the orthodoxies of race, religion, class, and gender that lay at the heart of white supremacist ideology'.<sup>164</sup> As Venters further observes: 'Through the Race Amity Conferences and similar local initiatives, the Baha'is had created public spaces to speak out against prejudice and segregation in concert with other organizations.'<sup>165</sup> However, the emphasis was not so much to rail against racism, but to positively foster interracialism.

How did the Baha'i Race Amity movement compare to other interracial initiatives in the same period? Of these, the most prominent was the Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC). A predominantly Christian endeavour, the CIC was founded in December 1918 and was led by Will W. Alexander. Based in Atlanta and funded by grants from the Carnegie Corporation, the CIC sought to bring together leading white and black citizens in communities across the South to form local interracial committees to consult on problems of common concern. The CIC represented a Christian mission, promoting goodwill between the races while maintaining the racial status quo insofar as segregation was concerned, and thus kept the segregation of white and black churches intact. Indeed, the CIC refused to confront segregation and disenfranchisement. 'Despite its name, the Interracial Commission was essentially composed of white liberals,' writes John B. Kirby, continuing: '...by 1934, there was only one paid black in the CIC and none in the organization's national office in Atlanta.'<sup>166</sup> The CIC was disbanded in 1943.

As much as the CIC fostered interracial goodwill, it did not go as far as the Baha'i Race Amity movement in advocating interracial unity. In their 'simultaneous transgression of regional racial, gender, and religious orthodoxies', historian Louis Venters notes that '[t]he Baha'is were certainly not the only such transgressors in the early twentieth century South, but among religious



Figure 1: Facsimile of Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha to Mrs Agnes Parsons, July 26, 1921 in which he writes concerning Locke, "His honor, Dr Locke – his distinguished person deserves every consideration for him from the Divine Kingdom."

groups they were probably among the most consistently interracial in character while being among the farthest from the Protestant mainstream'.<sup>167</sup>

'I attended every session, day and night ... Many times throughout the meetings did with much effort restrain my tears. My heart leaped and throbbed and many times almost burst within my breast.'<sup>168</sup> Will ever a Baha'i race relations event again strike such a chord as this? Today, some 90 years later, Harris's hope remains much the same: 'I am a colored man ... My race as a whole, I believe, is quite ready to welcome the glad day when all will be brothers. ... The trouble is nearly unilateral. God give us the day.'<sup>169</sup> What role may the Baha'i principles of ideal race relations yet play, and what impact could they foreseeably have on the black intelligentsia today, are open questions – and open invitations for repeat performances, where a largely unwritten history might repeat itself indelibly.

Historian Richard Thomas's assessment that 'race amity or race unity conferences would become the hallmark of the American Baha'i community's contribution to American race relations'<sup>170</sup> is well taken. But times have changed. Today, the racial situation in America has become more complex, as the Universal House of Justice, the international governing body of the Baha'i world community, has recently observed: 'The expressions of racial prejudice have transmuted into forms that are multifaceted, less blatant and more intricate, and thus more intractable.'<sup>171</sup> 'Even if such a community were to focus the entirety of its resources on the problem of racial prejudice, even if it were able to heal itself to some extent of that cancerous affliction',

the House further observes, 'in the face of such a monumental social challenge the impact would be inconsequential.'

However, there is still room for 'Race Amity' initiatives. The Universal House of Justice has stated, in its 10 April 2011 letter, that 'at the national level, the National Assembly will guide, through its Office of External Affairs, the engagement of the Faith with other agencies and individuals in the discourse pertaining to race unity'. There is a notable instance of this. In January 2010, the National Center for Race Amity (NCRA) in Boston<sup>172</sup> was founded by William H. 'Smitty' Smith, EdD, executive director and special assistant to the president of Wheelock College.<sup>173</sup> The NCRA hosted a 'National Race Amity Conference' in Boston, 10–12 June 2011 and 18–19 May, 2012, one of the co-sponsors of which was the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'i of the United States.<sup>174</sup>

On February 1, 2012, Cornel West, Professor of African American Studies and Religion, Princeton University, paid tribute to the historic Baha'i efforts to foster ideal race relations in America: 'When you talk about race and the legacy of white supremacy, there's no doubt that when the history is written, the true history is written, the history of this country, the Baha'i Faith will be one of the leaven in the American loaf that allowed the democratic loaf to expand because of the anti-racist witness of those of Baha'i faith.'<sup>175</sup> If and when, as suggested by Cornel West, a revisionist history of the Jim Crow era is written, the contribution of the Baha'i 'race amity' initiatives—envisioned and mandated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself—should take its rightful place in the annals of American history.

## Appendix 1.

### Timeline of Baha'i Race Amity Conferences

1921	'Convention for Amity Between the Colored and White Races Based on Heavenly Teachings', 19–21 May 1921, Congregational Church on 10th and G Street NW, Washington DC. Alain Locke served as session chair on Friday evening, 21 May. <sup>176</sup>
1921	Race Amity Conference, Springfield, Massachusetts, 5–6 December 1921. Held in the auditorium of Central High School, <sup>177</sup> a photograph of that event shows the auditorium filled to capacity, with African Americans likely in the majority of those attending. <sup>178</sup>
1924	Race Amity Conference, New York, 28–30 March 1924. The organizers invited representatives from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the National Urban League and the Committee on International Cooperation of the League of Women Voters. This move was of profound importance, for the core of Baha'i organizers enlisted the support of influential organizations whose humanitarian principles were consonant with Baha'i ideals. Moreover, the participation of these organizations, especially the NAACP, served as more than a tacit endorsement of the Baha'i initiative, with an implied-in-fact assent to the objectives of that initiative. Much to the organizers' credit, some impressive speakers were lined up for the event. These included Alain Locke himself, along with James Weldon Johnson, secretary of the NAACP; Franz Boas, professor of Anthropology at

Columbia University; Jane Addams; John Herman Randall of the Community Church; Rabbi Stephen S. Wise; and Mountfort Mills, officially representing the Baha'is.<sup>179</sup> The success of the New York convention surpassed that of its two predecessors. According to Gayle Morrison, it 'put the New York Bahá'í community, which had already been actively teaching in Harlem, into the forefront of Bahá'í racial amity activities for many years to come'.<sup>180</sup>

1924 Race Amity Conference, Philadelphia, 22–23 October 1924. 'Convention for Amity Between the White and Colored Races in America[,] Auspices of the Bahá'í Movement'. Organized under Bahá'í auspices, this event was held in the Witherspoon Building at Juniper and Walnut Streets in Philadelphia.<sup>181</sup> The *Pittsburgh Courier* (1 November 1924) published a story, 'Convention For Amity Meets at Big Local Hall', in which 'Alain Locke' is mentioned, followed by 'Louis G. Gregory'.<sup>182</sup> Locke spoke on 'Negro Art and Culture'.<sup>183</sup> *The Crisis* also briefly reported the event.<sup>184</sup> The printed programme stated:

This is the fourth in a series of Inter-racial Congresses arranged under the auspices of the Baha'i Movement. The first was held in 1921 at Washington DC, the second at Springfield, Mass, and the third at New York City, the purpose being to awaken the people of America to the need of a clearer understanding of inter-racial problems, and a deeper realization of their spiritual solution as set forth in the teachings of the world's greatest prophets and leaders.<sup>185</sup>

1927 'Convention for Amity Between the Colored and White Races', July 1927. Green Acre, Eliot, Maine. Louis Gregory states that 'Dr Alain Locke ... spoke'.<sup>186</sup> A two-sided, three-panel brochure of the event lists the members of the 'National Inter-racial Amity Committee' as: Mrs A. S. Parsons, chairman; Mrs Coralie F. Cook, vice chairman; Louis G. Gregory, executive secretary; Dr Zia M. Bagdadi; Dr Alain L. Locke; Miss Elizabeth G. Hopper; and Miss Isabel Ives.<sup>187</sup> On the programme are two lectures of note, as they both evoke Alain Locke's concept of the 'New Negro' (this term may have been coined by Booker T. Washington, *A New Negro for a New Century*, Chicago, 1900, but it was Locke who popularized it). The first is an address, 'The New White Man', presented by Mr Devere Allen, editor of *The World Tomorrow*; and 'The New Negro', by Professor Leslie Pinckney Hill. This speaks eloquently of the positive reception that Locke's celebrated anthology, *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (1925), enjoyed in the Baha'i community at that time.

1927 Dayton, Ohio.<sup>188</sup>  
1927 New York, Friday 21 October 1927, Nazarene Congregational Church.<sup>189</sup>  
1927 Washington DC, 10, 11 November 1927. Mount Pleasant Congregational Church and the Playhouse.<sup>190</sup>  
1927 Boston, November 1927.<sup>191</sup>  
1928 Chicago, 22 January 1928, Masonic Temple.<sup>192</sup>

1928 'Conference for Inter-Racial Amity[.] Arranged by Inter-Racial Amity Committee of the Bahá'ís of Montreal', 11–12 February 1928. Three sessions, three venues: YMCA, Channing Hall, Union Congregational Church. Louis Gregory ('International Lecturer on Race Relations') spoke in the first (11 February) and second (12 February) of three sessions. Agnes MacPhail, first Canadian woman Member of Parliament, was the first speaker at the first session.<sup>193</sup>

1928 'Amity Meeting for Peace and Goodwill[.] Arranged by Inter-Racial Amity Committee of the Bahá'ís of New York[.] At 119 West 57th Street[,] Baha'i Center, Sunday, April 29, 1928.' 'The effort of Inter-Racial Amity has a direct bearing upon the peace of the world.'<sup>194</sup>

1928 Urbana, Illinois. 26 May 1928.<sup>195</sup>

1929 'Conference for Inter-Racial Amity. Arranged by Inter-Racial Amity Committee of the Bahá'ís of Buffalo, NY. Sunday, March 10th, 1929.' Louis Gregory ('International Lecturer on Race Relations') spoke at each of the three sessions at 10:20 a.m. (Michigan Avenue Baptist Church); 4:00 p.m. (YMCA, Michigan Avenue Branch); 8:00 p.m. (Hotel Statler).<sup>196</sup>

1929 Detroit, 14 March 1929.<sup>197</sup>

1929 Dayton, Ohio, 12 April 1929.<sup>198</sup>

1929 'Conference for Inter-Racial Amity. Arranged by the National Inter-Racial [Amity] Committee of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada', 23–25 August 1929, Green Acre, Eliot, Maine. 'This conference is one of many held in various cities of the American continent, the purpose being co-operation and harmony between the white and colored races. By direction of 'Abdu'l-Baha this effort began at Washington, DC about eight years ago.'<sup>199</sup>

1931 Atlantic City, New Jersey, 19 April 1931.<sup>200</sup>

1930 New York. Conference for interracial amity on 2, 8 and 9 November 1930. Co-sponsored by the National Teaching Committee, the Urban League and the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'i of New York. Two sessions at the Baha'i Center and one at the New York Urban League Auditorium, 201 West 136th Street.<sup>201</sup> 'White members of the movement were guests of Harlem members in their homes.'<sup>202</sup>

1931 Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 25–27 October 1931. Three sessions: Central Young Men's Christian Association, Oakland Methodist Church, Frick Training School.<sup>203</sup>

1932 New York, 27 February 1932. The Baha'i hosted an interracial banquet in honour of the NAACP and the National Urban League. W. E. B. Du Bois gave a short speech.<sup>204</sup> According to a story published in *The Chicago Defender*, Walter F. White, secretary of the NAACP, hailed 'the Baha'i movement' as 'one of the great forces of human understanding'.<sup>205</sup>

1932 Los Angeles 27 February 1932. At the banquet dinner, Chief Standing Bear offered a prayer and spoke of peace as a covenant among all races. An Indian tribal dance followed as part of the programme.<sup>206</sup>

1932 'Conference for Racial Amity. Arranged by the National Racial Amity Committee of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada',

26–28 August 1932. Green Acre, Eliot, Maine; Portsmouth, New Jersey; 28 August 1932 (People's Baptist Church).<sup>207</sup>

1932 Racial Amity Convention, New York, 9–10 December 1932. Part of the conference was held in Harlem. The event was planned by the National Inter-Racial Amity Committee in cooperation with a local Baha'i committee and, significantly, with the New York chapter of the National Urban League.<sup>208</sup> Alain Locke spoke at the second session, which 'covered many phases of racial amity'. Here, Locke was once again on the same platform with Louis Gregory.<sup>209</sup>

1933 'The National Bahá'í Interracial Committee[,] assisted by the New York Spiritual Assembly[,] invite you to an Entertainment given in honor of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Urban League, New York Chapter, Saturday Evening, May 13th at eight thirty o'clock, in the Bahá'í Lecture Hall, 119 West 57th Street.'<sup>210</sup> This was the second annual reception in honour of the NAACP and the Urban League given by the National Bahá'í Inter-Racial Committee. Two hundred people attended.<sup>211</sup>

1934 'Bahá'í Race Amity Conferences', Saturday and Sunday 4–5 August 1934, Green Acre, Eliot, Maine; Portsmouth, New Jersey.<sup>212</sup>

1935 'Inter-Racial Amity Conference', 17 August 1935, Green Acre, Eliot, Maine.<sup>213</sup>

1935 'Race Amity Conference[.] Arranged by [t]he Cincinnati Bahá'í Assembly[.] April 11th, 12th, 13th [1935] at the Central YWCA[,] 9th and Walnut Streets, Cincinnati, Ohio.'<sup>214</sup> Organized with the assistance of Louis Gregory and Dorothy Baker. 'Splendid cooperation was given us by the newspapers, with 22 free articles and two paid articles.'<sup>215</sup>

## Appendix 2. Race Amity Committees

- (1) National Amity Convention Committee (1924–25): Agnes Parsons, Elizabeth Greenleaf, Mariam Haney, Alain Locke, Mabel Ives, Louise Waite, Louise Boyle, Roy Williams (a black Baha'i), Philip R. Seville and Mrs Atwater. Appointed 19 May 1924.<sup>216</sup>
- (2) Racial Amity Committee (1925–26): Previous committee re-appointed (except for Philip R. Seville): Agnes Parsons (chairperson), Mariam Haney (secretary), Elizabeth Greenleaf, Alain Locke, Mabel Ives, Louise Waite, Louise Boyle, Roy Williams and Mrs Atwater.<sup>217</sup>
- (3) National Bahá'í Committee on Racial Amity (1927): Agnes Parsons ('chairman'), Louis Gregory (executive secretary), Louise Boyle, Mariam Haney, Coralie Cook, Dr Zia M. Bagdadi, Dr Alain Locke. Appointed 14 January 1927. (Note: The National Spiritual Assembly invited a special committee on racial amity to meet in Washington DC, in January 1927, to consult and make recommendations. The special committee's letter to the National Spiritual Assembly was dated 8 January.)<sup>218</sup>
- (4) National Inter-Racial Amity Committee (1927–28): Agnes S. Parsons (chairperson), Mrs Coralie F. Cook (vice-chairperson), Louis G. Gregory (executive secretary), Dr Zia M. Bagdadi,

Dr Alain L. Locke, Miss Elizabeth G. Hopper, Miss Isabel Rives (later spelled Rieves).<sup>219</sup> This list is confirmed in a letter by Louis Gregory himself.<sup>220</sup> In December 1927, the membership consisted of Agnes Parsons, Louis Gregory, Dr Zia M. Bagdadi, Dr Alain Locke and Mrs Pauline Hannen,<sup>221</sup> replacing Miss Rieves, who was travelling abroad. No mention is made of Miss Hopper in the 27 November issue of the *Bahá'í News Letter*. According to Gayle Morrison, 'Possibly she declined the appointment'.<sup>222</sup>

(5) National Inter-Racial Amity Committee (1928–29): Louis Gregory (secretary), Agnes Parsons, Mariam Haney, Louise Boyle, Dr Zia Bagdadi, Dr Alain Locke and Mrs Loulie Matthews, Shelley N. Parker, Pauline Hannen.<sup>223</sup> For a period of time during this Baha'i administrative year, the National Teaching Committee and the National Inter-Racial Amity Committee were affiliated for budgetary reasons.<sup>224</sup>

(6) National Inter-Racial [sic] Amity Committee (1929–30): Louis Gregory (chairman), Shelley N. Parker (secretary), Agnes Parsons, Mariam Haney, Louise D. Boyle, Dr Zia M. Bagdadi, Dr Alain Locke, Miss Alice Higginbotham and Loulie A. Mathews.<sup>225</sup> No independent amity committee was appointed for the 1930–31 Baha'i administrative year. Amity activities were subsumed under the National Teaching Committee, in which Louis Gregory served as NTC secretary for amity activities.<sup>226</sup>

(7) National Racial Amity Committee (1931–32): Loulie Mathews (chairperson), Louis Gregory (secretary), Zia M. Bagdadi, Mabelle L. Davis, Frances Fales, Sara L. Witt, Alain Locke, Shelley N. Parker, Annie K. Lewis.<sup>227</sup>

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## Endnotes

1. M. F. Harris (1525 '10' St. NW, Washington, DC), Note, 22 May 1921. Agnes Parsons Papers, Box 20: Notes – Race Amity Convention DC, 1921, National Bahá'í Archives (hereinafter NBA), Bahá'í National Center (Evanston, IL), enclosure sent 24 January 2011. Courtesy of Roger Dahl, archivist, and Lewis V. Walker, archivist.
2. See facsimile of Locke's 'Bahá'í Historical Record' card in Christopher Buck, *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy. Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, vol. 18, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2005, 58. Now online at [http://bahai-library.com/locke\\_guardian\\_correspondence](http://bahai-library.com/locke_guardian_correspondence) (accessed 30 January 2011).
3. Christopher Buck, 'The Interracial "Bahá'í Movement" and the Black Intelligentsia: The Case of W. E. B. Du Bois.' *Journal of Religious History* 17 (2012) (special issue on Bahá'í history, guest-edited by Todd Lawson), forthcoming.
4. See Columbus Salley, *The Black 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential African Americans, Past and Present*, revised and updated, Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1999 (1993).
5. Louis E. Venters, III, "'Most Great Reconstruction": The Bahá'í Faith in Jim Crow South Carolina, 1898–1965', PhD dissertation, University of South Carolina, 2010, 126.
6. See, for example, Jerrold M. Packard, *American Nightmare: The History of Jim Crow*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002, back cover; Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998, which focuses on residential segregation and its social impact, rather than its roots in the Jim Crow era.
7. See Christopher Buck, 'Plessy v. Ferguson'. *Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society*, ed. Richard T. Schaefer, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008, 1048–51.
8. Gayle Morrison, *To Move the World: Louis G. Gregory and the Advancement of Racial Unity in America*, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982, 188.
9. 'Racial Barriers Fall at Conference of Bahai Groups Over Week-End Here; Whites Entertained by Harlemites During Two-Day Stay-Sincerity and Brotherly Spirit as Path to Better Relations', *The New York Amsterdam News*, 12 November 1930, 14.
10. Photo Standalone 1 – No Title, *The Chicago Defender*, 22 November 1930, 22. Caption: 'Interracial Amity Conference – The Urban League and the Bahais of New York held a conference in New York City last week. It was held under the auspices of the national teaching committee of the Bahais of the United States and Canada. Many prominent people of both races attended.'
11. On the Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC), see the comments at the end of this paper.
12. Morrison, *To Move the World* 149.
13. Quoted in an untitled compilation of Bahá'í writings on race unity. Typescript in Locke's possession, Alain Locke Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Box 164-176, Folder 13 (Bahá'í Faith). Hereinafter abbreviated ALP with box number/folder number.
14. Quoted in Allan L. Ward, *239 Days: 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Journey in America*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979, 37.
15. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*, Greenwich, CT: Fawcett, 1961 (1903), 13.
16. Ward, *239 Days* 40.
17. 'April 23, 1912. Talk at Howard University. Washington, DC. Translated by Amin Banani', in 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*', comp. by Howard MacNutt, rev. edn. in one vol. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1943, 43.
18. See Buck, *Faith and Philosophy* 127–57 and passim.
19. Zia Bagdadi, 'Abdu'l-Bahá in America', *Star of the West*, 19(3), June 1928, 89. Quoted in Ward, *239 Days* 43.
20. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 'Address of 'Abdu'l-Bahá at the Home of Mrs Dyer, April 24, 1912, 9 p.m.', translated by Dr Ameen U. Fareed and taken stenographically by Joseph H. Hannen, *Star of the West*, 3(3), 28 April 1912, 21.

21. *Mahmúd's Diary*, trans. M. Sobhani. Oxford: George Ronald, 1998, 57 (under the diary page for Wednesday, 24 April 1912). Transliteration based on notes by Dr Khazeh Fananapazir, posting on the Tarjuman translation list Friday, 10 May 2002 based on Mírzá Mahmúd Zarqáni, *Badá-yi al-Áthár*, vol. 1, pp. 48–49. Langenhain: Bahá'í Verlag, 1982. Reprint of the Bombay 1914 edition.
22. Ward, 239 Days 43, quoting *Promulgation of Universal Peace* 54.
23. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, trans. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990 (1939), 37.
24. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982, 114 (sec. 78); 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Múntakhabatí az Makátab-i Haqrat-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 1, sec. 78.
25. Phillott Douglas Craven, *Colloquial English-Persian dictionary in the Roman character, containing all English words in common use with their meanings in modern Persian, with numerous examples*. Charleston, SC: BiblioLife, 2009 (1914), 107.
26. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 113 (sec. 76); 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Makátab* vol. 1, sec. 76.
27. Fádíl Mázandarání, *Tarikh-i Zuhur al-Haqq*, vol. 8, part 2, Tehran: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 132 BE, 1209.
28. From a tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, translated from the Persian, in Research Department, The Universal House of Justice, *Women: Extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and The Universal House of Justice*, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1986, 4.
29. Richard Thomas, *Understanding Interracial Unity: A Study of US Race Relations*, Sage Series on Race and Ethnic Relations, vol. 16. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996, 47.
30. Richard Thomas, 'The "Pupil of the Eye": African Americans in the making of the American Bahá'í Community', in Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis and Richard Thomas (eds), *Lights of the Spirit: Historical Portraits of Black Bahá'ís in North America 1898–2000*, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2006, 19–48, 42.
31. 'Two Groups Observe Interracial Day Here With Banquet and Harlem Tour; Baha'i Committee Fêtes N.A.A.C.P. and New York Urban League – Columbia Professor Leads Party Downtown', *The New York Amsterdam News*, 2 March 1932, 11. See also 'Baha'i to Sponsor Interracial Dinner In New York City', *The Pittsburgh Courier*, 12 March 1932, 2; Morrison, *To Move the World* 192. See also 'Annual Reports of the National Committees of the National Spiritual Assemblies of the United States and Canada 1931–1932', *Bahá'i News*, 62, May 1932, 7.
32. Guy Mount, 'Locke, Shock, and Abbott: Bahá'í Theology and the Acceleration of the African American Civil Rights Movement', MESA 2010 Conference Panel 196: 'Abdu'l-Bahá in America, 21 November 2010, 17. [http://bahai-library.com/pdf/2011\\_06/mount\\_locke\\_shock\\_abbott.pdf](http://bahai-library.com/pdf/2011_06/mount_locke_shock_abbott.pdf). See now also Guy Mount, 'A Troubled Modernity: W.E.B Du Bois, 'The Black Church,' and the Problem of Causality' in Negar Mottahedeh (ed.) *'Abdu'l-Bahá in America: A Persian Reformer comes to the West*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming.
33. George Streator to Du Bois, 29 April 1935. *The Correspondence of W. E. B. Du Bois. Volume II: Selections, 1934–1944*, ed. Herbert Aptheker, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1976, 95.
34. Guy Mount, Locke, Shock, and Abbott 17, citing W. E. B. Du Bois to Ruth R. Shipley, 23 March 1953; Aptheker, *Correspondence* 345. See also Gerald Horne, *Black and Red: W. E. B. DuBois and the Afro-American Response to the Cold War, 1944–1963*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986, 213.
35. 'Two Groups Observe Interracial Day Here With Banquet and Harlem Tour; Baha'i Committee Fêtes N.A.A.C.P. and New York Urban League – Columbia Professor Leads Party Downtown', *New York Amsterdam News*, 2 March 1932, 11.
36. 'Cora Calhoun Horne', *The Crisis*, November 1932, 361; see also 'Mrs Horne, Civic Leader, Succumbs: Funeral Held for Woman Who Served in Numerous Movements in City and Nation – Rites Private Leader Dies', *New York Amsterdam News*, 14 September 1932, 2.
37. In the W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, other Baha'i contacts may be noted: Miriam Haney, 1914 (Reel 4:734); Marion Little, 1937 (Reel 47:748); Louie A. Mathews, 1937 (Reel 47:832); Minta B. Trotman, 1937 (Reel 48:229), 1938 (Reel 49:748); Ludmila Bechtold,

1938 (Reel 48:737); Peggy True, 1942 (Reel 54:265); Louis G. Gregory, 1943 (Reel 55:347); Lawrence A. Hautz, 1951 (Reel 66), 1952 (Reel 68:365), 1954 (Reel 70). See finding aid: W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, 1803–1999 (Bulk: 1877–1963) 382 boxes (168.75 linear ft.) Collection number: MS 312'. Available online at [http://www.library.umass.edu/spcoll/ead/mums312\\_full.pdf](http://www.library.umass.edu/spcoll/ead/mums312_full.pdf) and [http://www.library.umass.edu/spcoll/ead/mums312\\_1a2.htm](http://www.library.umass.edu/spcoll/ead/mums312_1a2.htm) (accessed 2 January 2011).

38. See Buck, *Race Amity*, forthcoming.
39. W. E. B. Du Bois (editor and presumed author), 'Men of the Month', *The Crisis* 4(1), May 1912, 14–16.
40. Guy Emerson Mount, Locke, Shock, and Abbott 13–14. Guy Mount argues the probability that Du Bois was indeed the author: 'As editor it is possible that Du Bois may have had someone else within the NAACP actually write the article, however, the quality of prose, knowledge of Christian history, and overall style indicates that Du Bois himself was the most likely author. ... At the very least his decision as editor to devote the space that he did to this subject speaks volumes as to the impact that his encounter with 'Abdu'l Bahá had on the forty-six-year-old Du Bois' (*id.*, 14, n. 32).
41. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 'The Brotherhood of Man. An Address at the Chicago Conference by Abdul Baha of Persia'. *The Crisis*, 4(2), June 1912, 88.
42. W. E. B. Du Bois, 'Opinion of W. E. B. Du Bois', *The Crisis*, 23(4), February 1922, 151.
43. See Christopher Buck, *Race Amity*, forthcoming.
44. See Buck, *Faith and Philosophy* 76–80.
45. Venters, *Most Great Reconstruction* 126.
46. Coralie Franklin Cook (d. 1942), chair of the Department of Oratory at Howard University, became a Baha'i in 1913, but whether her husband, George William Cook (born a slave in 1855, died 1931), professor of Commercial and International Law and dean of the School of Commerce and Finance, also became a Baha'i is uncertain. See Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis, 'Race, Gender, and Difference: African American Women and the Struggle for Equality', in Etter-Lewis and Thomas, *Lights of the Spirit* 71; cf. Buck, *Faith and Philosophy* 78.
47. Louis Gregory, 'Inter-Racial Amity', in *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record, Volume II*, 1926–1928, comp. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada. New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1929; reprint, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980, 281. See Morrison, *To Move the World* 134–43.
48. Gayle Morrison, 'To Move the World: Promoting Racial Amity, 1921–1927', *World Order*, 14(2), Winter 1980, 15.
49. Root to Locke, undated note on back of photo of 'Abdu'l-Baha, ALP 164-208/16 (Abdu'l-Baha Abbas).
50. Morrison, *To Move the World* 139.
51. Morrison, Promoting Racial Amity 16, citing Bahai Temple Unity, Proceedings of the Annual Meeting, 1922, 310, Bahai Temple Unity records.
52. Louis G. Gregory, 'Convention for Amity Between the Colored and White Races'. In *Star of the West*, 12(6), 24 June 1921, 117–18. See also Gregory, Inter-Racial Amity 281; and *idem*, 'Racial Amity in America: An Historical Review', in *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record, Volume VII*, 1936–1938. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, 1939; reprint, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980, 652–66 (655–56); Mariam Haney (secretary, The Teaching Committee of Nineteen), 'A Compilation of the Story of the Convention for Amity', 31 May 1921, ALP 164-106/7 (re: Amity Convention).
53. Facsimile on p. 168 of National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, *The Bahá'í Centenary, 1844–1944: A Record of America's Response to Bahá'u'lláh's Call to the Realization of the Oneness of Mankind to Commemorate the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of the Bahá'í Faith*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1944. See also Horace Holley, 'Survey of Current Bahá'í Activities in the East and West', in *Bahá'í World, Volume II*, 22–23.
54. Program, Bahá'í Archives of Washington, DC. Courtesy of Ms Anita Chapman.
55. *ibid.*

56. Louis G. Gregory, 'Convention for Amity Between the Colored and White Races', in *Star of the West*, 12(6), 24 June 1921, 114–19, 123–24. Reprinted as vol. 7, Oxford: George Ronald, 1978.
57. Louis Gregory, in Mariam Haney, 'A Compilation on the Story of the Convention for Amity', on behalf of 'The Teaching Committee of Nineteen', 31 May 1921: 5. Bahá'í Archives of Washington, DC. Courtesy of Ms Anita Chapman. See also Gregory, Convention for Amity 118, which reads: 'Friday evening Dr Alain L. Locke, presiding, expressed the great effort of the convention to be the unity of heart and mind in human succor, exemplifying the power of a new spirit in a new day.'
58. *The Hadleigh* (Washington DC), 20 May 1921, quoted by Haney, Story of the Convention for Amity 9.
59. Haney, Story of the Convention for Amity 9.
60. *ibid* 2.
61. Morrison, Promoting Racial Amity 17.
62. Gregory, quoted by Morrison, *ibid* 17.
63. *ibid* 17–18.
64. National Committee on Inter-Racial Amity to the 'National Spiritual Assembly and the Local Spiritual Assemblies of the United States and Canada', 23 February 1927. Bahá'í Archives of Washington DC. Courtesy of Ms Anita Chapman.
65. Gregory, Convention for Amity 115.
66. Untitled report by Martha Root, in Haney, Story of the Convention for Amity 12.
67. Haney to Locke, 4 October 1921, ALP 164-33/49 (Haney, Mariam).
68. Gregory, Inter-Racial Amity 280–85 (see 282).
69. 'Great Convention for Amity Between the Colored and White: Brilliant Meeting – Record Attendance – Powerful Enthusiasm – Inspiring Music – Lofty Purposes Set Forth' (Part 2), *The Washington Bee*, 42(1), 4 June 1921, 4.
70. 'Great Convention for Amity Between the Colored and White: Brilliant Meeting – Record Attendance – Powerful Enthusiasm – Inspiring Music – Lofty Purposes Set Forth' (Part 1), *The Washington Bee*, 41(52), 28 May 1921, 1.
71. Great Convention for Amity (Part 2) 4.
72. Jonathan D. Sarna (ed.), 'Acknowledgments', *Minority Faiths and the American Protestant Mainstream*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998, ix.
73. Program, 'Convention for Amity Between the Colored and White Races Based on Heavenly Teachings', 19–21 May 1921, Bahá'í Archives of Washington, DC. Courtesy of Ms Anita Chapman.
74. See the chapter, 'Bahá'í Myths and Visions of America', in Christopher Buck, *Religious Myths and Visions of America: How Minority Faiths Redefined America's World Role*, Westport, CT: Praeger, 2009, 173–200.
75. Morrison, Promoting Racial Amity 9–31 (see 19).
76. Etter-Lewis and Thomas, *Lights of the Spirit*.
77. Richard Thomas, The 'Pupil of the Eye' 19–48.
78. Morrison, *To Move the World*. (See note 2, *supra*, for full citation.)
79. Guy Emerson Mount, Locke, Shock, and Abbott.
80. Morrison, 'Gregory, Louis George (1874–1951)', The Bahá'í Encyclopedia Project. Online at <http://www.bahai-encyclopedia-project.org> (accessed 21 December 2010).
81. Morrison, *To Move the World* 150.
82. See Roi Ottley, *The Lonely Warrior: The Life and Times of Robert S. Abbott*, Chicago: H. Regency Co., 1955.
83. Mark Perry, 'Robert S. Abbott and *The Chicago Defender*: A Door to the Masses', *World Order*, 26(4), Summer 1995, 15–24. Reprinted in *idem*, 'A Door To The Masses: Robert S.

Abbott and *The Chicago Defender*', *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 11 November 1995, 7. See also *ibid*, *Michigan Chronicle*, 59(2), 4 October 1995, 1-A.

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146. Morrison, *To Move the World* 213–14, 244.

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192. *ibid* 659. See also Perry, The Chicago Bahá'í Community 289–91.

193. NBA. Courtesy of Roger Dahl, archivist; Gregory, Racial Amity in America 660.

194. NBA. Courtesy of Roger Dahl, archivist.

195. Gregory, Racial Amity in America 660.

196. NBA. Courtesy of Roger Dahl, archivist.

197. Gregory, Racial Amity in America 662.

198. *ibid* 658.

199. NBA. Courtesy of Roger Dahl, archivist.

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210. NBA. Courtesy of Roger Dahl, archivist.

211. Morrison, *To Move the World* 193.

212. NBA. Courtesy of Roger Dahl, archivist.

213. *ibid.*

214. *ibid.*

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222. Morrison to author, email dated 19 June 2002.

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224. 'Committees of the National Spiritual Assembly 1929-1930', *Bahá'í News Letter*, 32, May 1929, 4. See also 'Interracial Amity Committee', *Bahá'í News Letter*, 40, April 1930, 10–12, and Morrison, *To Move the World* 186.

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# Shoghi Effendi's letters to the Baha'is of India and Burma during the 1930s

Peter Smith

## Abstract

*A short review of Shoghi Effendi's published letters to the Baha'is of India and Burma during the 1930s. The article includes a survey of the main statistical, administrative, and teaching developments of the Burmese and Indian Baha'i communities during the period.*

## 1. Prologue

There have as yet been few studies of the development of the Baha'i Faith during the inter-war period or of the Indian and Burmese Baha'i communities – some of the oldest in the world outside the religion's homeland in Iran and the Ottoman lands. The present article is a small contribution to both of these areas of study, as well as being a sequel to an earlier study of Shoghi Effendi's letters to India and Burma during the 1920s.<sup>1</sup> It adds a little, I trust, to our understanding of the Baha'i world in the early period of the Guardianship. Although the primary focus is on Shoghi Effendi's letters, the article will also describe the general development of the Indian and Burmese communities during this period. I am not seeking to provide more than a very general sketch of the period, however – a detailed history of these years will have to await future researchers with an opportunity to examine the Indian and Burmese Baha'i archives.

### 1.1. The letters

To date, some 127 letters and cables from Shoghi Effendi to the Baha'is of India and Burma from the 1930s have been published. Most of the letters take the form of a substantive address to a particular named recipient written on Shoghi Effendi's behalf by his secretary followed by a generally short postscript in Shoghi's own hand, sometimes reiterating some of the points made in the main letter but often merely offering encouragement and gratitude to the addressee in their service to the Faith – or in some cases expressing concern about their health. Of the letters, only 33 (26 per cent) lack the postscript. As the body of the letters frequently tells the recipient that the letter is written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi (he is pleased with this; he hopes you will do that; he believes such-and-such; 'I am now directed by the Guardian'; etc.), and in most cases had evidently been read by him prior to posting, it is reasonable to suppose that the entire body of letters essentially represents his thoughts and directions, albeit not always in his phraseology. Unlike the compilation of his letters to Australasia – the

## Keywords

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administration  
teaching plans

best edited collection of his letters so far – the names of his secretaries are not given. Sadly, we do not as yet have access to the other part of the correspondence – the letters from the recipients – but the context and referents of the letters from Shoghi Effendi are generally fairly clear. It is likely that there are other letters written to Indian and Burmese Baha'is that have not yet been discovered or published, but there is no reason to suppose that the letters that we do have are not comprehensive in the issues and concerns that they cover.

Of the addressees, the greatest number of letters and cables were written to Mr N. R. Vakil (57, or 45 per cent), the long-serving president of the national spiritual assembly, and the second greatest to Syed Mustafa Roumie, the pioneer Baha'i teacher in Burma (25, or 20 per cent). There were comparatively few to the national spiritual assembly (probably 26).<sup>2</sup> The rest comprise 6 to Professor Singh, 5 to other individuals, 4 to local assemblies, 2 to youth groups and 2 that are unidentified.<sup>3</sup>

### **1.2. India and Burma**

The wider political and social context rarely impinges directly on the content of these letters. During this period, of course, India and Burma were both part of the British Empire, and the growing nationalist movements in the two territories were making a significant impact on people's understandings and attitudes. British India itself was not a unitary state – with numerous semi-autonomous princely states coexisting with the areas under direct colonial control.

## **2. The Baha'i community**

It seems reasonable to refer to a single Baha'i community of India and Burma during this time. Although the Burmese Baha'is appear to have been relatively isolated from those of India, and even within India local concerns remained important, there were sufficient bonds to knit a trans-local community of Baha'is together. A common national spiritual assembly had existed since 1923, and acted a conduit for communication with Shoghi Effendi and the world centre of the Faith. Various Baha'i periodicals were circulated, particularly *Kawkab-i Hind*, which was popular amongst the Urdu- and Persian-reading Baha'is who predominated in India proper (i.e. excluding Burma). 'National' gatherings were occasionally held, which many of the most active Baha'is attended. Although few in number, Baha'i teachers increasingly travelled from one Baha'i group to another, enhancing personal linkages between community members.

As to numbers, there is no evidence for any massive growth in community size during this period – or during the previous decade, and it seems likely that the community as a whole numbered less than 3000, and perhaps not that many more than the earlier estimate (from the 1910s) of around 2000 including men, women, and children.<sup>4</sup> In the 1930s, as earlier, the two largest concentrations of Baha'is were in Bombay and the Burmese village of Daidanaw, each with about 800 Baha'is.<sup>5</sup> None of the other local Baha'i communities seems to have been particularly large, and the actual number of communities – as measured by the existence of Baha'i local spiritual assemblies – remained fairly stable across the entire period, with from 5 to 6 local assemblies in India, and between 3 and 4 for Burma over the decade (Bombay, Calcutta, Karachi, Poona, Mandalay, Rangoon, and the

Kunjangoon-Daidanaw area throughout the period; Surat, Lahore, and Tounggyi briefly in the early 1930s; Delhi from the mid-1930s) (see Tables 2 and 3, below). On the other hand, there was a significant increase in the number of localities in which Baha'i resided in India proper (i.e. excluding Burma) by the mid-1930s (from 10–11 in the early 1930s to 21 in 1935), but as this increase need not represent more than the pioneering moves of a few individuals, it does not suggest a significant rise in the overall number of Baha'i (Tables 1–3, below). It is of note that a report from 1938 – when a very active teaching campaign was in operation – refers to only 53 new Baha'i across the whole of India and Burma during the preceding year,<sup>6</sup> so that at most, the increment of new Baha'i would have only been a few hundred for the whole decade.

In terms of distribution, it will be noted that the main centres of Baha'i activity in India during this period remained in the north, with only Bombay (modern Mumbai) and Poona in the north-west, Calcutta in the north-east, and Karachi in what is now Pakistan having local spiritual assemblies throughout the period, whilst Surat and Lahore had assemblies in the early 1930s, and Delhi an assembly by 1935. A significant number of localities (but no assemblies) were only established in southern India from the mid-1930s onwards.

	1925	1928	1930	1931	1933	1935	1937	1939
India								
Localities	5	9	10	11	11	21	22	23
LSAs	U	4	4	6	6	5	5	5
Burma								
Localities	4	5	7	5	6	6	8	8
LSAs	U	3	4	3	4	3	3	3
Totals								
Localities	9	14	17	16	17	27	30	31
LSAs	U	7	8	9	10	8	8	8

Table 1. The number of Baha'i localities and local assemblies in India and Burma, 1925–39.

Key: U = Unspecified.

	1925	1928	1930	1931	1933	1935	1937	1939
I. Places with a recorded Baha'i presence prior to 1930.								
Amritsar	-	1	1	-	-	1	1	1
Bombay	U	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Calcutta	U	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Cawnpore	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	1
Delhi	-	1	1	1	1	A	A	A
Hyderabad (Deccan)	-	1	1	-	-	1	1	1
[Camp] Karachi	U	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Poona	U	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Surat	U	1	1	A	A	1	1	1

(Continued)

	1925	1928	1930	1931	1933	1935	1937	1939
<i>II. Places with the first recorded Baha'i presence during the early 1930s.</i>								
Agra			1	1	1	1	-	-
Chapra (Saran) / Rawzih				1	1	1	1	1
Chittagong				1	1	1	1	1
Lahore				A	A	1	1	1
Simla				1	1	1	1	1
<i>III. Places with no recorded Baha'i presence prior to 1935.</i>								
Aligarh						1	1	1
Allahabad						1	-	-
Hapur (Meerut)						1	-	-
Jamser (Bikanir State)						1	-	-
Khanpur (Bahawalpur State)						1	1	-
Lucknow						1	1	-
Madras [S]						1	1	1
Sirsa (Hissar)						1	1	1
Siwani (Hissar)						-	-	1
Attock (NWR) / Shadikhan						-	1	1
Bulandshahr (UP)						-	1	1
Mozang (Lahore)						-	1	-
Siwani (Bikanir State)						-	1	-
Vyganellore, Agra-haram [S]						-	1	-
Vyganellore, Kulitalai [S]						-	-	1
Jaipur						-	-	1
Rahimyarkhan (Bahawalpur State)						-	-	1
Srinagar (Kashmir)						-	-	1

Table 2. Local spiritual assemblies (A) and localities in India, 1925–39.

Key: U = Unspecified.

Sources: BW 3: 218, 222; 4: 272–73; 5: 430; 6: 509; 7: 558; 8: 690–91.

### 3. Administration

During the 1920s, the national spiritual assembly had faced various problems: the national assembly itself did not function very effectively; some of the local spiritual assemblies were not very supportive of the national assembly, and the ‘community’ as a whole was somewhat disunited – with possible tensions between the Burmese and Indian Baha’is.<sup>7</sup> These

	1925	1928	1930	1931	1933	1935	1937	1939
<i>I. Places with a recorded Baha'i presence prior to 1935.</i>								
Daidanaw [Kalamzoo]	U	1	1	-	A	A	A	A
Kungyan	-	-	A	-	-	-	-	-
Kunjangun	U	A	A	A	A	-	-	-
Kyigon	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-
Mandalay	U	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Rangoon	U	A	A	A	A	A	A	A
Taubingyoung	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Kawlin (Upper Burma)	-	-	-	1	1	1	1	1
Tounggyi / Tawnggyi	-	-	-	A	A	1	1	1
<i>I. Places with no recorded Baha'i presence prior to 1935.</i>								
Toungoo						1	-	-
Sinthi						-	1	-
Thayetkon						-	1	-
Yemethin						-	1	1
Eimi						-	-	1
Mogaung						-	-	1

Table 3. Local spiritual assemblies (A) and localities in Burma, 1925–39.

Key: U = Unspecified.

Sources: BW 3: 218, 222; 4: 272–73; 5: 430; 6: 509; 7: 558; 8: 690–91.

problems ('challenges') appear to have persisted into at least the early part of our period – and it is of note that even as late as 1937, the national spiritual assembly was still only meeting twice a year.<sup>8</sup>

### 3.1. Shoghi Effendi's concerns

A tone of concern seems evident in Shoghi Effendi's references to the national assembly during the early 1930s. Specific problems appear to have included the infrequency and irregularity of national assembly meetings; the poor attendance at these meetings; a lack of formal reports from the national assembly to Shoghi Effendi (despite a request in 1923 for regular reports);<sup>9</sup> and the lack of an effective secretariat. The very fact that until 1935, Shoghi appears to have addressed his national concerns to Vakil as assembly president rather than to the assembly is itself significant,<sup>10</sup> and suggests that as long as the assembly did not function as effectively as Shoghi wanted it to then he would employ alternative means to receive information and communicate his wishes. Again, his letters to Roumie may well reflect a situation in which Burma was not fully integrated into the framework of 'national' Baha'i activity – though more research is needed on such questions.

It is of note that even as late as December 1933, Shoghi Effendi appears not to have been receiving regular reports from the national assembly, as he then wrote of his pleasure and interest at having now received the

national spiritual assembly's minutes and requested that he be sent the minutes on a regular basis so that he could offer advice and suggestions for their better functioning. His secretary also conveyed his hope that the assembly would meet 'as regularly and as frequently as possible', so as to maintain the efficiency of its functioning, and raise the standard and 'widen the scope of its activities'. The assembly had already taken important steps to extend and consolidate the administrative institutions in India and Burma,<sup>11</sup> but evidently more was needed. Again, writing to Pritam Singh (a member of the national spiritual assembly) in January 1934, Shoghi reiterated his pleasure at the progress that the national assembly had made in consolidating and widening 'the scope of its national activities', but pointed to the necessity of the assembly having frequent meetings. The great amount of travelling that was necessary for the assembly members to come together was a problem, but it was vital not to allow any 'secondary considerations' to impede or delay the work of the assembly. It was always possible for members to communicate through correspondence, and even if some members were unable to attend every meeting, they could send in their views in writing.<sup>12</sup> In October 1935, he expressed his pleasure that eight members had been able to attend the latest assembly meeting (one had been ill),<sup>13</sup> perhaps suggesting that such a large number in attendance was abnormal.

### ***3.2. Finding a secretary***

The problem of finding a reliable secretary also remained. An Iranian called Badri had briefly worked as secretary of the national spiritual assembly in 1929–30, and seems to have been effective, but he then apparently left India.<sup>14</sup> By 1933, Pritam Singh – a man of recognized capacity – had been elected as secretary, but later wrote to Shoghi Effendi expressing his inability to serve.<sup>15</sup> Shoghi replied to him in April 1934, noting his own deep unhappiness at this development and encouraging him to 'make every possible sacrifice' in order to continue serving the Cause in this role. For Shoghi Effendi, Singh's competence, loyalty, experience, and knowledge of 'the essentials of the Faith' made him eminently qualified to take such an 'active and leading part' in the Faith's 'manifold activities'. Shoghi recognized that his appeal might not be successful, however, and told Singh that if he felt unable to assume the position with its heavy workload and responsibilities, he should submit his case to the national spiritual assembly itself at its next meeting so that they could consider his resignation sympathetically and dispassionately and advise him accordingly. The assembly could not refuse a resignation when it was justified and made with the intention of giving someone else the chance to prove themselves worthy of occupying such a responsible administrative post – rather than simply to shirk responsibility. Shoghi Effendi had no wish to force Singh to remain as secretary and praised his 'sustained and inspiring labours under such trying and difficult circumstances'. Singh's assistance in both Baha'i teaching and administration was 'invaluable'.<sup>16</sup> Writing to Vakil on the following day, Shoghi expressed his sorrow that Singh was unable to continue to serve as secretary, but advised that the national assembly should accept his resignation unless there was good reason not to.<sup>17</sup>

A new secretary – Abbasally Butt – was elected in 1935.<sup>18</sup> Shoghi welcomed his appointment, offering his congratulations and hoping that he would be able to adequately discharge the ‘grave and weighty responsibility’ that had been placed on his shoulders. He should be confident and strive to do his best. With Baha’u’llah’s assistance he would doubtless succeed.<sup>19</sup> Shoghi continued to direct much of his correspondence to the national assembly via Vakil, however, and it was not until perhaps 1936 that the secretariat at last appears to have begun to function effectively.<sup>20</sup>

Another challenge felt by at least some of the national assembly members was their own diversity. As Shoghi Effendi’s secretary noted in a letter to Pritam Singh in January 1934, the differences of language and social and intellectual background between members undoubtedly made the assembly’s work more difficult and might even check its efficient and smooth functioning temporarily – but the Baha’is should not seek uniformity in the establishment of any of their spiritual assemblies whether at national or local level. A diversity of members gave the assembly a universality that it would otherwise lack and provided the assembly with a breadth of views that they should cultivate and foster. The bedrock principle of Baha’i administration was ‘unity in diversity’. This was repeatedly emphasized in the Baha’i writings. Unity of purpose and means were fundamental to the effective working of any assembly, but those personal differences that were not fundamental should be maintained.<sup>21</sup>

### ***3.3. Improved assembly functioning***

Despite these problems, by the mid-1930s, Shoghi Effendi evidently felt that the national assembly was beginning to function as he wanted it to. Writing to Vakil in May 1934, he referred to the ‘new spirit’ that now seemed to animate the national assembly. At its recent meeting, it had adopted ‘splendid resolutions’ which indicated both ‘the revival of the spirit of fellowship’ and ‘determination to consolidate the administrative basis of the Faith’. He eagerly awaited news that the assembly had carried out its resolutions, and hoped that the continued development of this spirit would enable the assembly to work more effectively for the Cause.<sup>22</sup> Learning of the results of the elections for the new national assembly and its officers by August, Shoghi expressed his hope that the new assembly would be able to foster and preserve greater unity and cooperation both amongst its own members and in the Baha’i community as a whole. He wished that the present year would witness ‘unprecedented triumphs’ for the Cause in India and Burma and mark a milestone of the progress of the Faith.<sup>23</sup> Again, in November, he noted the ‘decided improvement’ that had occurred in the conduct of Baha’i administration in India.<sup>24</sup> And again, in July 1935, he expressed his pleasure at the ‘splendid and encouraging’ report of the annual convention, which he had read with ‘admiration and gratitude’. Now, the ‘utmost effort’ should be exerted to ensure that the resolutions made at the convention were implemented.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, in November 1935, he wrote of the national assembly as having recently ‘resuscitated’ the Cause and its institutions in India and Burma. Its actions had been characterized by ‘splendid initiative’, solidarity, and ‘unwavering determination’. A ‘mighty power’ deriving from Baha’u’llah himself was flowing through and permeating the institutions of the Faith.

After many ‘trials and vicissitudes’, the assembly had started out on its chosen path, and its members now stood on ‘the threshold of unparalleled achievements’.<sup>26</sup>

These praises continued in subsequent years. Thus, in March 1936, Shoghi referred to recent evidences of the consolidation and expansion of the administrative order in India and Burma as ‘highly significant and most encouraging’ – specifically praising the members of the national assembly for their ‘unity, efficiency and zeal’.<sup>27</sup> In February 1937, he praised the national assembly’s steady and efficient accomplishments in many spheres of Baha’i activity. He was grateful not just for the plans and projects it had initiated, but ‘above all’ for its members’ ‘spirit of exemplary loyalty and magnificent devotion’ which impelled it forward on its destined mission.<sup>28</sup> In April, he prayed for the extension and consolidation of the national assembly members’ ‘noble accomplishments’.<sup>29</sup> In July, he wrote that he was ‘deeply touched’ by the ‘varied and compelling evidences’ of the assembly’s vigour and loyalty. As a result of its members’ ‘self-sacrificing endeavours and inflexible resolve’, the Cause was being ‘firmly consolidated’ and ‘widely propagated’ in India and Burma. Perseverance was needed to achieve their goals and lay an ‘unassailable foundation’ for their future work.<sup>30</sup>

Problems may have remained, however, as exemplified by a letter to Vakil in March 1939 – that is, after the Indian and Burmese Baha’is had embarked on their much praised Six Year Plan (1938–44, see below), when Shoghi expressed the hope that there was now a ‘better understanding’ and ‘more substantial cooperation’ between the Baha’is of India and Burma. It was up to the convention delegates to elect those who they thought were best qualified to serve on the national assembly, but once elected, it was vital that the ‘unity and efficiency’ of the assembly be maintained – ‘at any cost’. He could only pray that the delegates would be guided in their choice and discharge their functions honourably.<sup>31</sup> Correspondingly, perhaps, his message to the national assembly in July conveyed his delight with the news that the convention had been ‘most united’ and ‘constructive’ in its results, but he also stressed the necessity of the assembly gaining the ‘continued moral and material support’ of all the Baha’is – otherwise the plan could not succeed.

### **3.4. *The question of participation was also raised***

In remarks seemingly primarily related to the functioning of the national assembly, he asked the assembly to make it clear to all the Baha’is that membership of a Baha’i assembly or committee was a ‘sacred obligation’ which every ‘loyal and conscientious’ Baha’i should gladly and confidently accept no matter how lowly or inexperienced they were. Once elected to serve on an assembly, the individual’s duty was to do his [or her] utmost to attend all the assembly’s meetings and to cooperate with the other members. If some major problem – such as illness – prevented him from attending, then he should notify the assembly. The national assembly for its part had a duty to both urge and facilitate its members’ attendance. If a member repeatedly absented himself from meetings without good reason, then the assembly should warn him of his wrong action. If this warning was deliberately ignored, the assembly then had the right to deprive him of his

voting rights in Baha'i elections. This administrative sanction was 'absolutely imperative' as an 'effective corrective measure' for the assembly to use against such 'half-hearted and irresponsible' members of the community. This did not constitute a 'complete expulsion' from the Faith, but by its means, the individual's participation in Baha'i administrative matters was suspended.<sup>32</sup>

### **3.5. *Incorporation***

As one of his international goals, Shoghi Effendi encouraged as many national and local spiritual assemblies as possible to acquire some form of legal existence so that they could hold property, receive bequests, and enter into contracts. He also saw legal incorporation as a means of gaining public recognition for the Faith. The actual legal form of incorporation varied between countries but everywhere involved a declaration of trust by the members of the national or local assembly for the year in which the incorporation was made together with a 'constitution' (by-laws) setting forth the objectives and manner of functioning of the assembly. The first national assembly to be incorporated was that of the United States and Canada in May 1929, followed by India and Burma (1933), Egypt and the Sudan (1934), Australia and New Zealand (1938), and the British Isles (1939). The first incorporated local assembly was that of Chicago in February 1932, followed by numerous others worldwide over the next few years.<sup>33</sup> It is of note that the Indian national incorporation (in Lahore in the Punjab on 20 January 1933) was the second in the world.<sup>34</sup> The Indian local spiritual assemblies registered during the 1930s comprised Bombay (September 1934), Poona (February 1935), Karachi (June 1935), Calcutta (December 1935), and Delhi (April 1936); those in Burma were Rangoon (October 1935), Mandalay (January 1936), and Daidanaw (February 1936) – altogether a total of eight. All the Indian and Burmese assemblies were registered under the Societies Registration Act of 1860.<sup>35</sup>

There is a brief mention of these developments in Shoghi Effendi's letters. Thus, in December 1933, he emphasized the importance of the planned registration of the Bombay local spiritual assembly as a recognized religious body as an important new step in the development of the Baha'i administration in India, and stated that the legal 'constitution' of the assembly should exactly conform to that already adopted for the New York City assembly (which he had come to use as a global template). He hoped it could lead on to official recognition of the Baha'i Cause as an independent religious organization by the government authorities in both India and Burma.<sup>36</sup> Again, in April 1934, he informed Vakil that the Indian Baha'i 'National Constitution' should be identical to the original American documents, and asked for a copy of the registration certificate for the next volume of *The Baha'i World*.<sup>37</sup> Again, in August 1935, he thanked Vakil for the documentation for the incorporation of the Karachi assembly and noted that he was 'eagerly awaiting' that for the Delhi and Rangoon assemblies. He hoped that the national assembly would quickly register all the other assemblies of India and Burma so as to 'ensure the stability' of the Baha'i administration in the two countries.<sup>38</sup> In another letter, in November 1935, he stated that the obtaining of these registrations was a historic step in the development of the Baha'i

administrative order in India and Burma. It was a form of official recognition that would enhance its prestige. Ideally six out of the then eight local assemblies would be registered by year's end.<sup>39</sup> In March 1936 [by when all eight local assemblies had been legally incorporated], he referred to the 'historic importance' of these developments, and noted that copies of all the certificates of incorporation would be reproduced in the next *Bahá'í World* volume.<sup>40</sup>

One practical consequence of incorporation was that the registered assemblies had the right to own property. Thus, in May 1936, Shoghi directed the national assembly to ensure that the various Baha'i properties should be transferred under the name of the assemblies – those of national importance (as determined by the national assembly) under the name of the national assembly, and the rest under one or other of the local assemblies.<sup>41</sup>

### 3.6. Other administrative matters

From the outset of his guardianship, Shoghi Effendi was concerned with building up and strengthening the Baha'i 'Administrative Order' as a practical means of organizing Baha'i activity.<sup>42</sup> Many of the fundamentals of this system were delineated by him in his earliest letters to the Baha'i world, and much of his subsequent correspondence on administrative matters was concerned (as in his letters to India and Burma) with the implementation of these basic principles – such as encouraging national spiritual assemblies to function effectively. A later addition was his global campaign to have as many national and local spiritual assemblies as possible acquire a legal identity. Further to these general concerns were various details of administrative procedure that arose in response to situations and questions in one part of the Baha'i world or another.

In India and Burma during the 1930s, these 'secondary' matters included the following:

- (i) In August 1931, Shoghi Effendi expressed his interest in the national assembly's financial accounts which he had read 'with careful attention' – and he appears to have received these on a regular basis thereafter.<sup>43</sup>
- (ii) In November 1935, he instructed the national assembly to use the newer American manual for Baha'i administrative procedure, and to give up the old manual which 'Abdu'l-Baha had given them for the conduct of assemblies some 19 years previously (i.e. c.1916), and which had only been intended to serve as a temporary expedient.<sup>44</sup>
- (iii) He also stressed that changes in assembly officers must follow established procedures. Thus, by May 1934, the Bombay local assembly had written to the national assembly to explain that they needed an English-speaking secretary because of the increasingly large amount of correspondence in English that it received. The national assembly in turn had referred the matter to Shoghi Effendi. He replied that although the situation was an urgent problem, there could be no deviation from the established procedures of Baha'i elections. Only the body of Baha'i electors were able to determine the membership of any Baha'i assembly during the Ridvan elections. The immediate solution to Bombay's problem would be for its assembly to appoint an assistant secretary to

deal with the English-language correspondence, and if necessary this secretary could be someone from outside the assembly.<sup>45</sup>

- (iv) He reminded the Baha'i's that they should turn first to the assemblies when they had matters of Baha'i concern – as in a letter to an individual in November 1934, in which Shoghi stated that although he would have liked to have solved the individual's problem himself, Baha'i administrative principle was for the Baha'i's to deal with local matters with their local spiritual assemblies first, and only then refer the matter to the national assembly as the highest administrative institution in their country.<sup>46</sup>
- (v) In May 1936, he reminded the Baha'i's that all those who were members of Baha'i administrative bodies (including temporary bodies such as a national convention) had the right and obligation to vote, and that not voting implied a shirking of responsibility. Every conscientious Baha'i should feel privileged to be able to vote.<sup>47</sup>
- (vi) In February 1937, he stated that the president of the national assembly did not have the right to issue rulings on matters unless his ruling was approved by the national assembly as a body. He had no special legislative capacity on his own.<sup>48</sup>
- (vii) Also in February 1937, he explained that every local assembly had the right to remove a Baha'i from its local voting list, but it was always better for the local assembly to seek the approval of the national assembly before taking such a serious and far-reaching action.<sup>49</sup>

#### **4. Matters of Baha'i law and communal practice**

Shoghi Effendi also addressed various questions regarding Baha'i law and communal practice.

##### ***4.1. Baha'i holy days: Various aspects of the observance of Baha'i holy days were addressed.***

- (i) Thus, in November 1935, Shoghi praised the Bombay Baha'i's for strictly observing the Baha'i holy day of the birthday of the Bab as a holiday – closing their shops and refraining from work in full obedience to the explicit instructions of 'Abdu'l-Baha. Hopefully, this same spirit of loyalty and attachment to the Cause would continue to develop in their midst so that they could further strengthen the foundations of their community.<sup>50</sup> However, in a second letter in the same month, he deplored the lack of strict observance of the birthday of Baha'u'llah by some of the Baha'i's there. Whilst this attitude might be justified under exceptional circumstances, it was harmful to the Bombay community and would seriously endanger its public influence and prestige if allowed to persist. Unity of action in the observance of Baha'i holy days was essential, and the national assembly had to remind the Baha'i's to faithfully implement the laws of the Faith where these did not openly violate the laws of their country.<sup>51</sup>
- (ii) Again, in February 1937, Shoghi addressed the issue of closing businesses on Baha'i holy days, drawing a distinction between those businesses that were totally Baha'i-owned and those that were not. Thus a Baha'i bakery [a common business amongst the Bombay Baha'i's]

should close – especially as there were always non-Baha'i bakers from whom the public could buy their bread, but a stall-holder selling tea and other refreshments in a cinema could not close if the non-Baha'i owner or partner did not permit it.<sup>52</sup>

(iii) In July 1937, he noted that the Baha'i day began and ended at sunset. The night preceding a holy day was therefore included in the day and work during that period was forbidden.<sup>53</sup>

#### **4.2. Dealing with questions and problems**

Early in his guardianship, Shoghi Effendi had stressed that individual Baha'is with questions and problems should consult with their local and national assemblies rather than writing to him – the volume of correspondence was just too great for him to deal with it adequately. However, he did not wish the Baha'is to be forbidden to contact him directly. He made this clear to the 'Indian' national assembly in March 1936 after the assembly had proposed sending out such an instruction to the Baha'is. Instead, he stated that whilst the assembly should encourage the Baha'is to minimize their correspondence with Shoghi Effendi, it was the right and privilege of every Baha'i to be able to correspond with the Guardian if they so wished. If individuals felt an inner urge to write to him and ignore the assembly's advice on this matter, they should not be prevented or discouraged.<sup>54</sup>

#### **4.3. Pamphlet about the Baha'i laws on personal status**

By March 1936, the national assembly was planning to present a pamphlet regarding the Baha'i laws on personal status to the government authorities – a move that Shoghi Effendi readily approved.<sup>55</sup> However, in December 1937, Shoghi instructed the national assembly to proceed very carefully with the projected English-language translation of the pamphlet as he viewed the existing translation as being of insufficiently high a standard for publication. Ideally, a new translation should be made by someone who had a mastery of both the English language and Muslim law and jurisprudence so that the various legal terms could be properly rendered. This would require considerable effort and needed to be done with 'patience and thoroughness'. Shoghi Effendi himself could not undertake this task because of his heavy and ever-increasing responsibilities.<sup>56</sup> The new or revised English translation appears to have been finally ready by August 1939, Shoghi later acknowledging receipt of a copy, but advising that the national assembly should not yet publish the document – though it could be translated and published in Urdu and Burmese if the national assembly so decided. The Persian-language translation was also now ready and the Indian assembly should consult with its Iranian counterpart before publishing a Persian-language version.<sup>57</sup>

#### **4.4. The two 'chief pillars'**

In September 1936, writing through his secretary, Shoghi Effendi outlined the two 'chief pillars' that sustained 'the edifice of the Cause' and protected it from 'the storms of opposition'. The first principle was that of 'unqualified and wholehearted loyalty to the revealed Word'. This ensured doctrinal unity amongst the Baha'is. The Baha'is should safeguard the purity of the tenets and laws of the Faith, and should not deviate even so much as a hair's

breadth from its teachings. All Baha'i's were subject to the same law of God, and this transcended all personal and local differences – there could be no divisions between Baha'i liberals and conservatives, or between 'moderates' and 'extremists'. The second principle was that of 'complete and immediate' obedience to the local and national assemblies. This ensured administrative unity. The Baha'i's now faced problems that were not easy to resolve and were puzzled by various difficulties. They should be confident that the progress of the Cause would itself enable them to find solutions to their difficulties. The assemblies should work to enable the community to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the Faith.<sup>58</sup>

#### **4.5. Miscellaneous**

Other matters referred to included the following: (i) Shoghi did not object to the use and circulation of photographs of 'Abdu'l-Baha but suggested that a particular photograph (taken in Paris) be used (November 1935);<sup>59</sup> (ii) it was up to the national assembly to decide whether or not to allow publication and general distribution of Shoghi Effendi's instructions conveyed to individual Baha'i's (February 1935);<sup>60</sup> (iii) the Baha'i's were free to recite any one of the three obligatory prayers (April 1937);<sup>61</sup> (iv) the Baha'i's could pray directly to God if they wished, but it was better to turn their thoughts to the Manifestation of God as he is their means of contact with the Almighty (April 1937);<sup>62</sup> (v) it was for the national spiritual assembly to decide whether or not the practice by some Baha'i's [of Zoroastrian/Parsee background] of investing their youths with the traditional sacred thread and inner wear (the *sadra* and *kusti*) was compatible with the principle that Baha'i's should not be members of other religions and should not take part in any ceremonies or customs which were signs of such membership (February 1939);<sup>63</sup> and (vi) although Baha'i law specified that non-Baha'i relatives had no right to inherit from their Baha'i relatives, this measure only applied in cases of intestacy when the division of property would follow the rules set out in Baha'u'llah's book of laws, the *Aqdas*. Otherwise, Baha'i's were free to bequeath their property to anyone, irrespective of religion. Indeed, in the case of a non-Baha'i wife, children and other relatives, it was only fair for a Baha'i to make such a provision in his will (February 1939).<sup>64</sup>

### **5. Historical and doctrinal questions**

Shoghi Effendi also answered several historical and doctrinal questions posed by the local Baha'i's. Thus, in February 1939, he explained that:

- (i) on the basis of a passage in 'Abdu'l-Baha's writings, the David referred to by the Bab as having preceded Moses was not the same figure as King David, the father of Solomon;
- (ii) the severe laws of the Bab could only be understood in terms of the Bab's own statements about the purpose of his dispensation – namely that it was a religious and even social revolution, which was therefore necessarily short and tragic in its course. The Bab and his followers enforced drastic measures in order to undermine the very foundations of Shi'a orthodoxy – and thus prepare the way for the coming of Baha'u'llah. Most of the Bab's laws were never enforced, but they had the function of emphasizing the independent nature of the Babi dispensation. The very

radicalism of his break with Shi'ism was sufficient to create widespread agitation and provoke clerical opposition, in turn causing his eventual martyrdom; and

(iii) the Bab had predicted that his unfinished book, the *Bayán*, would be completed by the promised 'He Whom God shall make manifest' – accepted by Baha'is to be Baha'u'llah. This was believed to have been done spiritually (not in actual form) by Baha'u'llah's *Kitáb-i Íqán*.<sup>65</sup>

Again, in July 1939, Shoghi explained that the term 'Resurrection', often used by Baha'u'llah in his writings, had a figurative meaning, and that the 'tomb' was also allegorical – signifying the tomb of unbelief, whilst the 'Day of Resurrection' was the judgement day – the day when unbelievers would be called upon to give account of their actions and whether or not it was the world that had prevented them from acknowledging the new revelation. He also commented on a verse in Baha'u'llah's 'Tablet of the Sun' and a reference to intercession in one of Baha'u'llah's prayers.<sup>66</sup>

## 6. Teaching

Shoghi Effendi frequently referred to the importance of teaching. In the early 1930s, this took the form of a series of general messages conveyed through his secretary. Teaching 'the principles of the [Baha'i] Movement' was the most 'meritorious of acts' at the present time as it helped to drive away the irreligion that now pervaded society and endangered 'its very life and existence' (September 1930).<sup>67</sup> Whilst the present political unrest (July 1930) would distract many people from religious questions, there would undoubtedly be some 'very intelligent people' whose vision extended beyond the current difficulties, and who desired 'a spiritual rebirth' for India – 'that much divided and troubled nation'. To such people, the Baha'i teachings would present 'a much desired reform movement'.<sup>68</sup> The fact that India and Burma were lands of a great diversity of languages and religions in which religious and racial prejudice were 'at their worst' made them all the more in need of 'the unifying word of God'. If 'the pervading spirit of Bahá'u'lláh' was introduced into their 'millions of homes', it would bring them both peace and 'social and spiritual upliftment'. This was a 'tremendous task', and it had been entrusted to the few Baha'is resident there. They should unite to fulfil 'their sacred duty' and thereby gain 'Divine favour' (September 1930).<sup>69</sup> The conditions in India were now (Summer 1931) quite favourable, and what the Baha'is needed was for a group of them who were 'well-educated and seriously-minded' to devote a lot of time to 'lecturing before large audiences and in writing and distributing books and pamphlets'. As there were very few such Baha'is, a group should be organized or individuals encouraged to form and join such a group.<sup>70</sup>

Global conditions were also important. By December 1931 (when the impact of the Great Depression had reached around the world), 'political and economic difficulties' were reaching a climax, and 'millions of people' were 'perishing through suffering'. Therefore, the Baha'is needed to teach with 'even greater zeal'. If the Baha'i message was not established throughout the world and the 'divine remedy' was not applied to 'the sick body of society', then western civilization would crumble down 'and destroy with it the already poverty-stricken East'.<sup>71</sup>

## **6.1. Baha'i administration and teaching**

The link between the strengthening of the Baha'i administration – a process we have noted above – and teaching was also stressed, as in a letter in November 1934, when Shoghi Effendi directly praised recent improvements in the Indian Baha'i administration, and prayed that as a result the teaching work there would receive 'a fresh and unprecedented impetus'. The administration was but a 'means to an end' – the 'ultimate purpose and supreme objective' of all Baha'i institutions was teaching the Cause.<sup>72</sup> Correspondingly, as the national spiritual assembly began to function more effectively, Shoghi Effendi increasingly directed its attention to teaching (see below).

Shoghi Effendi also sought to inspire the Baha'i community as a whole to teach the Faith. Initially, it would seem, the Indian and Burmese Baha'is saw teaching as a specialized activity conducted by those few individuals who had the time and ability to teach rather than as a general obligation borne by all active Baha'is.<sup>73</sup> Addressing this issue through his secretary in November 1934, Shoghi expressed his pleasure at the national assembly's plans for furthering the teaching work throughout the country, in particular the support it was then giving to Pritam Singh's teaching tour of northern India. More generally, however, he asserted that whilst the lack of competent teachers remained a significant obstacle to the work (a common view amongst Indian Baha'is, it would seem), a greater difficulty was the lack of a collective zeal for teaching on the part of the Baha'is. The Baha'is needed to realize that the responsibility for diffusing the Baha'i teachings was one that they all shared. The Baha'i era was one of individual responsibility. Every individual Baha'i had a 'sacred and vital' duty to spread the Cause and promote and safeguard its interests. The national assembly needed to work to animate the entire community in both India and Burma to rise to this call.<sup>74</sup>

By November 1935, Shoghi Effendi's increasing confidence in the Baha'is of India and Burma was very obvious, as he expressed his joy in their achievements and revived hopes for the future of those lands. The Baha'is were praised for their 'striking evidences' of renewed activity; the recent expressions of 'loyalty, solidarity and self-sacrifice' in both teaching and administration by individuals, groups, and assemblies; the firm foundation which they had laid within the Baha'i administrative order; and their success in surviving 'distressing difficulties' and surmounting 'formidable obstacles'. A 'new era' was opening before them and he did not doubt that they would 'prove themselves worthy of their high destiny'.<sup>75</sup> More pointedly, in March 1936, he wrote that as the basis of Baha'i administration had now been firmly laid in India and Burma, an 'unprecedented effort' in teaching was now urgently required. Such an effort was 'of vital and paramount importance'.<sup>76</sup>

## **6.2. Specific goals**

By May 1936, having read the report of the successful discussions at the national convention, Shoghi Effendi outlined specific goals for future activity. The work that had been accomplished so far in teaching and administration was 'truly meritorious in the sight of God', but it was only a beginning. What was now needed was a 'systematic effort' to settle Baha'i

in those states and provinces in which there was as yet no Baha'i activity, specifically Southern India, Ceylon, the 'outlying centres on the fringe of the Indian Empire', as well as the empire's heartland. This should be an 'immediate objective', and the Baha'is needed to exert 'strenuous, constant and devoted labour' to accomplish it. Their endeavour should be both 'deliberate' and 'vigorously sustained'. He appealed to all the Baha'is to give their 'full and continued support' to the teaching work throughout the country, and suggested that those who were able should settle in localities in which there were not yet Baha'is.<sup>77</sup> In October, he thanked the national assembly for the 'splendid efforts' that were already being made to implement a systematic and nationwide campaign of teaching and urged united, self-sacrificial, and intelligent action by both assemblies and individual Baha'is in the continuing campaign.<sup>78</sup> In November, he expressed his pleasure in the progress of the teaching activities initiated by the assembly. 'Inflexible determination' was now needed to carry them through to a conclusion. The Indian and Burmese Baha'is and their assemblies should model their campaign on that being developed by the North American Baha'is, and should emulate the zeal, initiative, efficiency, and fidelity shown by the Americans [and Canadians] in the prosecution of their enterprise [i.e. in preparing for what was to become the North American first Seven Year Plan, 1937–44].<sup>79</sup> Again, in February 1937, he thanked the national assembly for making 'strong preparations' for the next national convention, and for the focus on teaching that they planned. He prayed that the convention would mark the inauguration of an 'unprecedented campaign' of teaching throughout India and Burma.<sup>80</sup>

### **6.3. National Baha'i fund**

Shoghi Effendi was pleased with the work of the 1937 convention and the subsequent decision by the national assembly to intensify the teaching campaign. He urged it now to maintain the standard of the teaching work and appeal to the Baha'is both to 'rise up' to the teaching call in a spirit of sacrifice, and above all, to support the national Baha'i fund (July 1937). He had already stressed its importance – cabling in June that all Baha'is and particularly local assemblies throughout India and Burma should demonstrate 'THEIR EVER-READY EAGERNESS' to rally round the national assembly by 'STIMULATING' the flow of contributions to the national fund, which was itself the 'BEDROCK' on which the security and expansion of their 'NEW-BORN' institutions rested.<sup>81</sup> Now, in July, he reiterated his appeal. All the activities of the Cause depended upon adequate funding, and without the wholehearted financial support of the Baha'is the progress of the Cause would not only be significantly retarded, but inevitably would come to a complete standstill. There needed to be a continual flow of regular and generous contributions from both local assemblies and individuals to the national fund in order for the national assembly to administer 'the manifold and ever-increasing activities of the Faith'. Every Baha'i, no matter how poor, should realize that they had a 'grave responsibility' to support the Fund. For each Baha'i, his or her spiritual progress largely depended upon the extent to which they supported the Baha'i institutions materially.<sup>82</sup>

#### **6.4. The Six Year Plan, 1938–44**

The adoption of a national Baha'i plan marked a significant new stage in the development of the Indian and Burmese Baha'i community. Clearly modelled on the American Seven Year Plan of 1937–44, it was proposed by the national assembly and endorsed by the (10th) national convention at Karachi in April 1938. Set at six years – from 1938 to 1944, it was timed (like the American plan) to conclude in the centennial year of the Bab's declaration of mission in 1844. Unlike the American plan, it was launched by the Baha'is themselves rather than at the instigation of Shoghi Effendi – although it was subject to amendment as a result of his suggestions. As originally conceived it made each local spiritual assembly responsible for establishing one additional assembly in a nearby town, but at Shoghi Effendi's suggestion, a second (and primary) focus was added: to find volunteer teachers to settle in places where there were not as yet Baha'is. These two goals were clearly defined at the (11th) national convention in Calcutta at Ridvan 1939 and a committee was formed to ensure their successful prosecution.<sup>83</sup>

In July 1938, Shoghi Effendi signalled his full approval of the plan. This was a remarkable undertaking by the national assembly, and he hoped for their success. More generally, he expressed his gratitude and happiness at the 'incessant evidences' of the assembly's 'zeal and united endeavour'. He was impressed by the 'sound progress and expansion' of the Baha'is' activities, which they were undertaking with such earnestness and devotion. The assembly members were noble and staunch in their faith. The 'utmost care' was now needed to 'nurse, foster, multiply and coordinate' their activities and nascent institutions.<sup>84</sup> In December, he again praised the assembly's 'spontaneous devotion, admirable zeal and unflinching resolve' in initiating the plan. As to the plan itself, he noted that it marked a milestone on the 'road of progress' trodden by the Baha'is of India and Burma and by their national assembly. The task that faced them was immense, the time was short and the hour was critical, but the Baha'is were animated and sustained by a faith that was strong enough to surmount all the obstacles that stood in their way, no matter how formidable. He wished that they would persevere, 'redouble their efforts', and win 'signal victories' in their 'mighty enterprise'.<sup>85</sup>

Again, in February 1939, Shoghi wrote to the national assembly, praising their splendid and 'remarkable' initiative. He was elated at its members' 'constancy, vigilance, and devotion' in addressing the 'manifold and pressing needs of the Faith' in India and Burma. They were laying a 'firm and unassailable foundation' on which future Baha'i generations could successfully build. Their courage in the face of formidable obstacles was magnificent. Their fidelity in 'ushering in the spiritual and administrative principles' of the Baha'i administrative order was exemplary. They should persevere and be assured that their 'noble endeavours' would be crowned with success. He also noted that whilst the American Seven Year Plan was more ambitious than the plan adopted by the Indians and Burmese, theirs was in some ways more meritorious in that it was a spontaneous venture on the part of the local Baha'is rather than (as in North America) a plan conceived and formulated by Shoghi Effendi himself. This gave it special

merit and a ‘unique spiritual potency’. When successfully completed, it would constitute an ‘abiding monument’ to the Indian Baha’is’ energy, devotion, and enthusiasm, and would be a source of inspiration and guidance for future generations.

As to the details of the plan, Shoghi continued, with one year already elapsed, there was now an immense amount to be accomplished in the time that remained. The combined and sacrificial effort of every local assembly, Baha’i group and individual was needed. He advised that a special session at the next annual convention in Calcutta should be devoted to considering the best means to accomplish the objectives of the plan as speedily as possible. In particular, great stress should be placed on pioneer moves to those Indian and Burmese provinces where there were as yet no Baha’is. Those with teaching capability who had the means of moving to these ‘virgin territories’ should be encouraged to settle in them until local assemblies – or at least strong groups with the potential of developing into assemblies – could be established. This policy of ‘teaching by settlement’ had been previously urged on the American Baha’is by Shoghi Effendi. It might require great sacrifice on the part of the settlers, but it had been proved by experience to be the most effective way of establishing new Baha’i groups.<sup>86</sup>

Shoghi Effendi again addressed the topic of the plan in another letter to the national assembly in July 1939 shortly after the convention had been held. He longed to hear of the progress of the teaching work in the areas where ‘the light of the Faith’ had not yet ‘shone forth’. Teaching was ‘the paramount task’ that urgently demanded the ‘concentrated attention’ and ‘complete consecration’ of the Baha’is. They had to be united and persistent in their endeavours, not allowing any delays or dissipation of their efforts. All the assemblies, committees, and individual Baha’is had to regard the teaching work as ‘the most essential factor’ in the discharge of their obligations to the Faith, and as ‘the supreme purpose’ of the system of Baha’i administration they had just erected so laboriously. He would pray that they might all fulfil their hopes and that ‘their individual and corporate lives’ might equally reflect the ‘noble principles’ that animated their Cause. Again, in detail, he hoped that the convention deliberations would stimulate the teaching work. It was vital for the national assembly to make frequent appeals for support from the Baha’i community as a whole. The Baha’is needed to be both encouraged and provided with assistance – presumably financial – to become pioneer teachers in new areas if they had an aptitude to teach the Faith. Both virgin areas and those areas that had been recently opened to the Faith but in which strong Baha’i groups had not yet been established needed support. The assembly should also launch a widespread and systematic campaign to disseminate Baha’i literature throughout the entire country.<sup>87</sup>

Returning to the matter in November 1939, Shoghi Effendi expressed his delight at what had been achieved so far. He also insisted that despite the perils and uncertainties of the present hour (the Second World War had broken out in Europe in September), the ‘paramount task’ facing the Baha’is of India and Burma was the ‘energetic prosecution’ of their Six Year Plan. All other activities and projects – no matter how desirable or urgent – had to be subordinated to this. The plan was the ‘fountainhead’

from which all ‘future blessings’ would flow and the only means by which the Baha’i administrative order could be presently established and consolidated throughout the Indian peninsula.<sup>88</sup>

The actual accomplishments of the plan will be discussed in a future article, but we may note here that whilst the plan was eventually very successful in India itself (not in Burma which was convulsed in war), the major expansion successes were gained during the early 1940s and not during the period covered by this article – between 1935 and 1939; the total number of Indian local assemblies remained constant (at 5) whilst the number of localities only increased from 21 to 23. Over the same period, the Burmese assemblies remained constant (at 3) whilst the locality numbers increased from 6 to 8 (Tables 1–3, above).<sup>89</sup>

## 7. Teachers

In the early 1930s at least, there seems to have been a common perception amongst the Indian Baha’is that they needed the help of international Baha’i teachers in order to reach the masses of their countrymen and women. Writing on Shoghi Effendi’s behalf to Keith Ransom-Kehler in November 1931, Ruhi Afnan referred to ‘constantly’ hearing the call for teachers from India, and in 1934, the national assembly itself referred to the Indian Baha’is’ lack of competent teachers and their limited resources and to the consequent great need for Persian and American believers to ‘constantly’ visit the country in order to inspire the local Baha’is to spread the teachings amongst the Indian population.<sup>90</sup> These sentiments seem misleading as in fact there was a growing cadre of competent Indian Baha’i teachers (see below). Nevertheless, international teachers are more prominently mentioned both in Shoghi Effendi’s letters and the *Bahá’í World* accounts of activities – presumably at least in part because additional arrangements had to be made to receive them and assist their work. This said, only four visits by international teachers are recorded during this period: two by Martha Root in 1930 and 1937–38; and one each by Keith Ransom-Kehler in 1932 and Fred Schopflocher in 1936–37.

### 7.1. Martha Root

Having been travelling as a Baha’i teacher more or less continuously since 1923, the American journalist Martha Root (1872–1939) had become extremely effective in arranging public meetings, getting interviews with prominent people, and gaining publicity for the Faith almost wherever she went.<sup>91</sup> Her first visit to India and Burma in the summer of 1930 (mid-May–7 August) included lectures in towns across northern India, as well as visits to the princely state of Hyderabad in the Deccan (where she was a guest of the state) and to the main Burmese Baha’i centres of Rangoon, Daidanaw/Kunjangoon, and Mandalay. Her tour was overshadowed by the political unrest of the time (Gandhi had been arrested in early May following his famous salt march to the sea and disturbances continued throughout the year, leading to the arrest of tens of thousands of protesters and many deaths), but successful meetings were arranged at universities and in cooperation with friendly organizations such as the Theosophical Society and the Brahmo Samaj. Dignitaries she encountered included the Maharaja of Patiala, the Muslim Sufi scholar Khwaja-Hassan Nizami (who had met

'Abdu'l-Baha in Egypt and translated Bahá'u'lláh's Seven Valleys into Urdu), the Parsee social activist and first mayor of Karachi, James [Jamshed] Mehta, and the poetess and independence leader, Saronji Naidu. Root also tried unsuccessfully to meet with Gandhi. As in her travels elsewhere, she also donated Baha'i books to libraries and circulated Baha'i pamphlets.<sup>92</sup>

Although Shoghi Effendi had hoped that Root's visit would attract the attention of educated non-Baha'is to the Faith, he accepted that the political unrest of the time would probably distract people's attention away from religious matters. However, he hoped that the Baha'is could contact some intelligent individuals with the vision to see beyond the present difficulties and desire a 'spiritual rebirth' for that 'divided and troubled nation' in which the Baha'i teachings would provide a movement for reform. After her visit, he encouraged the national spiritual assembly to ensure that there was adequate follow-up to the work she had started and to keep in touch with the people she had interested in the Faith so that tangible results could ensue.<sup>93</sup>

## **7.2. Keith Ransom-Kehler**

The second American teacher to tour the region in the 1930s was Mrs Keith Ransom-Kehler (1876–1933), who had been touring East Asia and Australasia since June 1931.<sup>94</sup> In the event, her stay was quite short (January–April [?] 1932) – cut short it would seem by a cable from Shoghi Effendi requesting that she come to Haifa, from where he reassigned her to work in Iran.<sup>95</sup> Before she arrived in India, Shoghi Effendi had advised her both to encourage the existing Baha'is and to attract new Baha'is through her public speeches – a task for which he considered her well fitted. In India and Burma, there was much need for this work: the people were becoming aware of the need for basic reforms and were ready to listen attentively to anyone who really had something to say. This was particularly true of those who were educated and had come into contact with the West 'in more than a superficial way'. He hoped that the local Baha'is would take full advantage of her visit and arrange for her to meet people in 'important and cultural circles'.<sup>96</sup> He also urged her to try to visit the Burmese Baha'is if that was at all possible (January 1932) – apparently it was not part of her original itinerary.<sup>97</sup> He also wrote to Vakil praising Ransom-Kehler's abilities as a teacher, and asking that she be put in touch with 'open-minded and interested people'. He hoped that her visit to India and Burma would give a 'fresh impetus' to the teaching work. It was a 'splendid opportunity' which the Baha'is should utilize 'to the utmost possible extent'. If possible, she should prolong her stay.<sup>98</sup>

In the event, Ransom-Kehler was able to visit Rangoon, Mandalay, Myamo and 'Kanjangaon' [Kunjangoon] in Burma, and Calcutta, Benares, Lucknow, Agra, Delhi, Aligarh, Amritsar, Lahore, Karachi, Bombay, Poona, Hyderabad (Deccan), and Bolepur in India. In addition to public talks arranged with such groups as the Theosophists, she spoke at several Indian universities, meeting professors and students, as well as religious leaders and other dignitaries: 'the message of Bahá'u'lláh was broadcast to the intelligentsia', or so it seemed. Speaking on such topics as 'The Spiritual Basis of Citizenship', 'The Baha'i Solution of World Problems', and 'The Baha'i Teachings: They Make a Person a Better Follower of His Own Religion', she apparently attracted much sympathetic interest. She also dedicated

the new Baha'i centre building in Karachi at a ceremony attended by the city's mayor, Jamshed Mehta (1886–1952), and gave classes for Baha'is and enquirers. Like Martha Root before her, she was received as a state guest in the princely state of Hyderabad.<sup>99</sup>

Although Ransom-Kehler's visit was regarded as a success, it was evidently too short to lead to definite results. Shoghi Effendi praised the Indian Baha'is for having appointed Pritam Singh to accompany their guest and assist her in making contacts and arranging lecture engagements. Such a practice was of fundamental value if real progress were to be made. Otherwise, no matter how dedicated and determined the teacher was, they would be like a helpless man in a strange country, impotent to achieve their purpose.<sup>100</sup> Again, it had to be admitted that her visit had been too short. Ideally a teacher should stay in a city for several months in order to 'confirm souls' (Ransom-Kehler's work in Australia had been more successful because she had been able to stay longer in each centre that she visited). Merely passing through and giving a few lectures was not sufficient unless there were resident Baha'is to continue the work that had been started. It was vitally important, therefore, for the Indian Baha'is themselves to follow up on the valuable work accomplished by Ransom-Kehler. The national spiritual assembly also had to consider the matter of training up more young local Baha'is to become competent teachers – there were just too few good Baha'i teachers worldwide.<sup>101</sup>

### **7.3. Fred [Siegfried] Schopflocher**

Although Keith Ransom-Kehler had hoped to return to India after her journey to Iran to continue her work,<sup>102</sup> she died unexpectedly in the summer of 1933, and it was not until the brief visit of the prominent Canadian Baha'i Fred [Siegfried] Schopflocher (1877–1953) in December 1936–January 1937, that the Indian and Burmese Baha'is again received a prominent international teacher.<sup>103</sup> Encouraging the Baha'is, Schopflocher also gave many public lectures and met prominent people, including many university professors as well as their students. He apparently created a very favourable impression at both of the Aligarh Muslim University and the Benares Hindu University.<sup>104</sup> News of his impending visit was communicated to the national assembly from Shoghi Effendi in September 1936, together with a short summary of Schopflocher's achievements, and the assembly was asked to welcome him and make his visit as worthwhile as possible.<sup>105</sup> In January 1937, Shoghi conveyed his thanks to the assembly for the cordial welcome they had accorded their visitor, hoping that the visit would have generated a lot of needed publicity for the Faith, and in February, he suggested that the assembly report on the visit to a wider Baha'i audience outside of India and Burma as it had been so successful.<sup>106</sup>

### **7.4. Martha Root's second visit**

The most significant of the four teaching tours was Martha Root's second visit in 1937–38.<sup>107</sup> Coinciding with the beginnings of the Indian–Burmese Six Year Plan, the tour was unprecedented in its length (effectively 15 months including her initial time in Ceylon) and in its extent, with Root and her helpers visiting several towns and regions in which there had been little or no previous Baha'i activity.

Prior to her arrival, Shoghi Effendi had alerted the local Baha'is to the importance of Root's visit, writing in July 1937 that he prayed that her forthcoming tour would further stimulate the 'splendid work' that had already been initiated, and cabling in August to urge the Baha'is to accord this 'BEST BELOVED STAR SERVANT' of Baha'u'llah a magnificent welcome, and to 'VIGOROUSLY' ensure the 'TRIUMPHANT SUCCESS' of her extended stay.<sup>108</sup>

Martha had been expected to arrive in Bombay on 16 September 1937,<sup>109</sup> but in the event she had been delayed. Engaged in Baha'i work in East Asia, she had been in Shanghai when the Japanese bombed the city in August, and escaped to Manila along with other American refugees. From there, she sailed to Ceylon, arriving in Colombo in mid-September. There, she spent about a month, teaching the Faith (there were as yet no Baha'is on the island) and resting, before sailing on to Bombay, arriving on 15 October. For the next 14-and-a-half months, she made an extensive and exhausting teaching tour of India and Burma, finally leaving Bombay for Australia on 29 December 1938.

Her accomplishments during this period are remarkable – especially as she was then aged 65. Travelling normally by train – but in Kashmir during the monsoon by lorry, she criss-crossed India, giving scores of public talks to large audiences, attending conferences, visiting schools, universities and people of prominence (including Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) and Sadhu T. L. Vaswani (1879–1966)) as well as lowly workers. Almost all of the university towns were visited along with several of the princely states. She also visited Burma and made a return trip to Ceylon. Everywhere she went, she sought newspaper publicity (over two hundred articles about the Faith appeared in newspapers in Ceylon and India during the first five months of her tour),<sup>110</sup> she distributed thousands of copies and summaries of her lectures and in some places she broadcast on the radio. In several places, she was the first person to speak about the Faith. She participated in the Second Indian Cultural Conference in Calcutta, presided over by the independence leader Sarojini Naidu (1879–1949); the First Convention of Religions, also in Calcutta; the Ninth All-India Oriental Conference in Trivandrum, Travancore; the International Theosophical Convention in Adyar, Madras; and the All Faiths' League Convention in Indore (to the last of which, at least, Shoghi Effendi sent a cable of greeting and good wishes).<sup>111</sup> During her visit to southern India and Ceylon, there was an extensive distribution of Baha'i literature and newspaper reportage in Tamil, and the Brahmo Samaj organization in Madras undertook the first translation of a Baha'i booklet into Telugu. She also met with the Baha'is, inspiring and encouraging them, attended the annual Baha'i convention in Karachi and the first Indian Baha'i summer school in Simla, and in some towns conducted children's classes. She also found time to finish off and publish the manuscript of her biography of the Babi leader and poetess Qurratu'l-Ayn.<sup>112</sup>

Following her arrival in India, Shoghi Effendi wrote how pleased he was with the magnificent welcome the Baha'is had given her. Martha was an 'outstanding champion of the Cause' and he prayed that she would lend a 'mighty impetus' to the progress of the Faith in India and Burma during her stay. He was pleased with the plans that had been made for her visit, and

hoped that she would be able to contact as many classes and sections of society as 'her time and energies' permitted. He urged the Baha'is to make every effort to make her trip a success, and to use it as an opportunity to get widespread publicity for the Faith, and prayed that her visit would mark the beginning of a new epoch of 'unprecedented expansion' in the history of the Faith in India and Burma.<sup>113</sup> Again, in March 1938, he thanked the Baha'is for the 'warm hospitality and whole-hearted assistance' they had accorded Martha, describing her visit as a 'God-sent' opportunity which the Baha'is should use to attract both the widest possible publicity for the Faith, and the attention and sympathy of 'responsible leaders'. He hoped that the trip would ensure that teaching work would henceforth continue without stop.<sup>114</sup>

After Root had left India and Burma, Shoghi Effendi expressed his appreciation for everything that had been done by the local Baha'is to help Martha and make her visit a success. The national assembly in particular now needed to follow up on the splendid work she had accomplished, maintaining and extending the contacts she had formed with the leading figures in social, religious, and university circles. He wrote that her visit had provided a fresh impetus for the teaching work and every effort should be made to speed up its progress (January 1939).<sup>115</sup> Writing again in February 1939, he reiterated his thanks. He deeply appreciated everything that had been done to help her and opined that the warmth of their love must surely have moved her deeply. It was now vital for the Baha'is – and the local spiritual assemblies in particular – to follow up the work she had started. They should not allow the seeds she had scattered to get lost; rather, these should be watered so that they could germinate and eventually yield abundant results.<sup>116</sup>

### **7.5. Local Indian and Burmese Baha'i teachers**

These appear to have been increasingly active during this period. These included Professor Pritam Singh (1881–1959), Mr Hishmatu'llah [Hashmatullah] Koreshi, Isfandiar Bakhtiari (Isfandīyār Bakhtīyārī) (1893–1975), Syed Mehfoozulhuq Ilmi (Sayyid Mahfūzul-Hāq 'Ilmī) (1894–1978), Mrs Shirin Fozdar (1905–1992) (sometimes accompanied by her husband, Dr K. M. Fozdar (1898–1958)), Professor Abdul Aziz of Hyderabad, Dr S. H. Ali of Rangoon and a Dr G. Y. Chitnis.<sup>117</sup> Several of these had also been active in the 1920s, but a newer and certainly in some cases younger generation of teachers now joined them. No proper record of these individuals' services has yet been compiled, so detailed commentary on their work would be premature, but the general impression is of considerable energy and enthusiasm, and it seems reasonable to suggest that their endeavours indicate a growing confidence and determination amongst the most active Baha'is. It will be noted that of the nine 'teachers' listed above, three appear to have been university or college professors and three medical doctors – indicating the presence of a highly educated group of leading Baha'is. It will also be noted that four of the nine had 'Muslim' names (Koreshi, Ilmi, Professor Abdul Aziz and Dr Ali), three were of Iranian Zoroastrian/Parsi background (Bakhtiari and the Fozdars), and one (Singh) was a Sikh. Only one of the nine was a woman. Singh and Shirin Fozdar appear to have become the best known internationally.

Shoghi Effendi offered praise for the work of these teachers in several letters. Thus, in November 1935, he expressed his pleasure at the teaching tour of northern India and Bengal then being made by Singh. He hoped that it would both bring into the Cause ‘people of capacity’ and ‘true spiritual vision’, and also awaken a ‘deeper consciousness’ of the obligation of teaching amongst all the Baha’is.<sup>118</sup> Similarly, in May 1936, he asked the national assembly to convey his deep appreciation for Shirin Fozdar’s ‘precious services’. She was meeting with remarkable success and he hoped that as a result ‘some people of capacity’ would become Baha’is. Again, in June, he praised the work she and others were doing in making contact with the editor of the periodical *Illustrated Weekly* – such links were of great help to the Baha’is, and the Baha’is should cultivate them as much as they could.<sup>119</sup> In April 1937, he again expressed his gratitude for Mrs Fozdar’s work – aided at this point by Dr Ali and the Rangoon assembly. He hoped that their example would stimulate young Baha’is to arise to teach and so help to spread knowledge of the Cause ‘by every means in their power’.<sup>120</sup> Again, in July 1937, he praised Dr Ali as a ‘most promising teacher’ who was gaining wide publicity for the Faith. The national assembly should encourage him and give him ‘every possible assistance’.<sup>121</sup>

### **7.6. *The training of teachers***

From at least 1935 onwards, the national assembly turned its attention to the training of new Baha’i teachers. Thus, in July 1935, Shoghi Effendi thanked Abbasalli Butt, the new national secretary, for the teaching outline he had sent, expressing his full approval, and noting that the method they had adopted for the training of teachers was very similar to that used by the American Baha’is, and that was thorough, clear, and effective. He hoped that the Baha’is of India and Burma would make full use of the assembly’s suggestions and directions, and so help inaugurate a ‘new and effective’ national teaching campaign.<sup>122</sup> Again, in November 1935, Shoghi expressed his approval of the training programme for Baha’i teachers which the national assembly was planning to start.<sup>123</sup>

### **7.7. *Summer school***

Another approach was the organization of the first Indian Baha’i ‘summer school’ – an intensive week or more of Baha’i fellowship and study modelled on similar programmes pioneered by the American Baha’is, and encouraged worldwide by Shoghi Effendi at this time.<sup>124</sup> Thus, in April 1937, Shoghi expressed his delight with the national assembly’s idea of establishing a summer school in India as this would greatly stimulate the teaching work. It was not until 1938, however, that the idea became a reality, and a programme of study arranged, with the first school being held in Simla from 19 to 30 September.<sup>125</sup> Shoghi Effendi praised this as an ‘excellent’ and ‘historic’ project and prayed that it would receive the whole-hearted and sustained support of the Baha’i community as a whole. To the school itself, he cabled his prayers, hoping for the success of the participants’ deliberations, and afterwards expressed his delight that it had been well attended and that the young Baha’is, in particular, had been enthusiastic about it. He would commemorate the school by placing photographs of it both in the Bahji mansion and in the next volume of *The Bahá’í World*. As to the

future, it was now essential for the national assembly to arrange for such a school to be held every year so that it could develop into an effective and vital means both for the propagation of the Faith and the ‘education and training’ of Baha’i teachers. Furthermore, he hoped that the institution of the summer school would eventually expand so much that the national assembly would be able to consider establishing more schools across the country so as to enable the poorer Baha’is who could not otherwise afford the transport costs to attend and benefit from them.<sup>126</sup> He reiterated his support for further schools in February 1939. The summer school was a newly established Baha’i institution in India and was highly promising both as a centre for training Baha’i teachers and a means of attracting outsiders to the Cause. Its importance could not be overstressed, and the wide popularity of the first school attested to its value as an essential feature of the formative age of the Faith.<sup>127</sup> A second school was organized in Karachi in September 1939, but with the outbreak of war in Europe, it was poorly attended.<sup>128</sup>

### **7.8. *Baha’i youth***

During the 1930s, Shoghi Effendi also encouraged the development of Baha’i youth activities – mirroring perhaps the increased role of secular youth movements in Europe and elsewhere in the early 20th century.<sup>129</sup> In this vein, Shoghi Effendi wrote to the Baha’i youth of Karachi in April 1936, praising them for a conference they had just organized, and expressing the hope that their deliberations would have led to an increased determination to work for the spread and consolidation of the Faith. Worldwide, the Baha’i youth faced tremendous responsibilities, but they had the power to take up this burden as well as guidance and grace from Baha’u’llah. He prayed that they would be guided in their path of service and sustained in their efforts.<sup>130</sup> Similarly, in February 1939, he wrote to the national assembly, expressing his pleasure at the formation of Baha’i youth groups and the assembly’s own extensive programme for the development of youth activity during the coming year. He was particularly pleased that six of the newly formed youth groups had already responded to the invitation from the American Baha’i national youth committee to hold special meetings parallel to theirs on 26 February. He would offer special prayers for the success of these efforts.<sup>131</sup>

## **8. Non-Baha’i organizations**

As in the 1920s, Baha’i contacts with non-Baha’i organizations were often very useful, the Hindu reform movement the Brahmo Samaj and the Indian branch of the Theosophical Society in particular frequently providing the Baha’is with venues for their public talks, and the Brahmo Samaj going so far as to publish a Baha’i pamphlet in a Telugu translation (see above) – the first Baha’i literature in that language.<sup>132</sup> Earlier links with the Arya Samaj and the Ahmadiyyas seem to have atrophied, however.<sup>133</sup> We should also note that at some point in the 1930s, for reasons that are not yet clear, the Baha’i attitude towards the Theosophists seems to have changed. Thus, in November 1935, Shoghi Effendi conveyed his full approval of Baha’i attendance at an All-Faiths Conference that they were organizing to mark their diamond jubilee celebrations in Madras, but in February 1937 he, or at least his secretary, referred to the Theosophists as ‘opponents’ to the Faith, and

advised the Baha'is to 'totally disregard' them. It was true that they copied and tried to claim as their own certain Baha'i principles, but there was no advantage to be gained by the Baha'is from trying to refute their arguments. It would be better to ignore them altogether.<sup>134</sup> Subsequently, however, as during Martha Root's second visit, the Baha'is seem to have welcomed Theosophist hospitality for their meetings.

One useful new link was with the All-Asian Women's Conference organization, a major gathering of which was held in Lahore in January 1931, attended by some 1200 women from various parts of Asia (Japan, Java, Burma, India, and Ceylon), as well as New Zealand, the United States, and Europe. Shoghi Effendi readily endorsed Baha'i participation in the event, and together with 'Abdu'l-Baha's sister Bahiyyih Khanum cabled the conference asking for divine guidance and blessings for the participants' 'high endeavours'.<sup>135</sup> To the Baha'is, he conveyed his hope that they would be able to 'win the admiration of the assembled delegates' for the extensive Baha'i teachings on the position of women in society. In this regard, the Baha'i ideals were spiritual and educational as well as concerned with legal reform, and as such were both so lofty and so practical that all other views fell short of them by comparison. The Baha'is should always seize such opportunities to present the Baha'i teachings when such opportunities arose – for thereby, they might succeed in rendering 'some service to society' and 'alleviate its ills'.<sup>136</sup> At the gathering itself, Mrs Shirin Fozdar of Bombay represented the Baha'i women of both India and Persia, and a Baha'i pamphlet was specially published for the event and distributed.<sup>137</sup> Mrs Fozdar was also elected on to the organization's executive committee, and represented it at the League of Nations in 1934, where she called for the proclamation of a universal declaration of women's rights.<sup>138</sup> Baha'i participation in the organization was apparently warmly welcomed, but apart from Shirin Fozdar's involvement, I have not yet found any reference to any other significant follow-up by the Indian Baha'is.

There were several visits made by the Baha'is over the decade to Rabindranath Tagore's ashram and educational centre at Shantiniketan in Bengal, and there was a discussion of the possibility of founding a Baha'i chair there, but nothing seems to have come of this idea – Shoghi Effendi left the decision up to the national assembly.<sup>139</sup>

## 9. Publications

Partially linked to teaching was the availability of Baha'i literature. By 1932 (the first year for which a comprehensive list is available), there were a substantial number of Baha'i books and pamphlets available in Urdu and Burmese (25 and 18 titles respectively), as well as one title each in Gujarati and Tamil.<sup>140</sup> The Urdu works included a number of major works by Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, so that it would have been possible for those Indians and Burmese familiar with that language – then still the lingua franca of many educated Indians – to acquire a detailed knowledge of many of the Baha'i teachings. Secondary literature – at least some of it presumably designed to introduce enquirers to the Faith – appears to have consisted largely of translations of works in Persian, but as no details of the books listed are given only further research will tell. It is of note that of those works with dates of publication listed, the earliest was an Urdu

translation in 1902 of the introductory book *The Revelation of Bahá-ulláh in a Sequence of Four Lessons* by the American Baha'i Isabella D. Brittingham, itself first published in 1902.<sup>141</sup> This was published in Rangoon, and so may have been the work of S. M. Roumie. A Tamil translation of this book by V. M. Swami was also published in Rangoon in 1906, and a Burmese translation in Mandalay in 1907, presumably also with his involvement. Many Persian-language Baha'i books were also published in India, and many of the Indian Baha'is were literate in Persian.

Seemingly in the late 1920s, Shoghi Effendi decided to promote a global campaign to publish translations of John Esslemont's book, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, first published in Britain in 1923.<sup>142</sup> By 1940, the book had been published in 36 translated editions worldwide, including Burmese (1933) and five Indian languages – Gujarati (1932), Urdu (1935), Bengali (1937), Sindhi (1938), and Hindi (1939).<sup>143</sup> In effect, it became the basic Baha'i textbook throughout the world, available both as a comprehensive introduction for the serious enquirer and as a study book whereby Baha'is could deepen their knowledge of their own religion fairly systematically.

Shoghi Effendi formally initiated the Indian part of his campaign in March 1932, writing to Vakil that translations should be made into Urdu and Gujarati.<sup>144</sup> This was a 'vital and important task', and he himself was willing to help financially with the project. He noted that he had already mentioned this goal to several [Indian] pilgrims but with no result as yet – an example of Shoghi Effendi's use of informal as well as formal means of communicating with the Baha'is. The Baha'is should hire a competent non-Baha'i translator if necessary – although in a later letter he expressed his preference for a Baha'i translator when one was available as they would be imbued with the spirit of the Faith and be familiar with its terminology.<sup>145</sup> Writing separately to Roumie, his secretary conveyed a request for a Burmese translation to be also made. Shoghi wanted Esslemont's book to be available in as many languages as possible. It was the best introduction to the Faith currently available, being 'comprehensive in its scope' and 'clear and simple in its rendering'. It had also been partially corrected by 'Abdu'l-Baha. In terms of practicalities, the translator needed to be someone who was fluent in both English and Burmese. Shoghi would help defray the costs.<sup>146</sup>

In various letters, Shoghi Effendi's secretary noted that publication of these translations would make the task of Baha'i missionary teachers enormously easier and stimulate the teaching work. The teachers would be able to accomplish much more. At that time, teachers in many countries were hampered by not having good Baha'i literature to give to enquirers and seekers. Teachers lacked the time – and enquirers the patience – for long discourses on the tenets of the Faith, which could quite easily be transmitted by a book. Enquirers who were interested could read to deepen their knowledge.<sup>147</sup> Again, as the general public had now learnt the habit of reading, the Baha'is had to also approach them through that channel. In fact, it was possible for books to be a more effective medium of learning about the Faith than listening to lectures or taking part in discussion groups – the solitary reader was more receptive to the truth.<sup>148</sup> Although Esslemont was a 'Christian' [sic] and had written his book for a Christian readership, it was a fine presentation of the Faith which could appeal to people from other religious traditions.<sup>149</sup> They could not fail to be impressed by the teachings

described in such a book, or imbued by the spirit it inculcated. Shoghi Effendi hoped that scholars would soon emerge who could write deeper and more universal books, but for now this was the best general introduction to the history and teachings of the Faith to give to new seekers. They could delve more deeply by reading such books as Baha'u'llah's 'Book of Certitude', the *Kitáb-i Íqán*.<sup>150</sup>

Over the next several years, the progress of the translation projects remained one of the major themes in Shoghi Effendi's letters. He soon discovered that work on the Gujarati edition had already started – presumably as a result of his conversations with pilgrims, and this became the first of the three to be published (1932).<sup>151</sup> Thereupon, he urged Vakil to focus on the Urdu translation, sending money (\$200 [£48] – a contribution from one of the American Baha'is) – in April 1932 to expedite the work. A 'prompt and careful translation' would be an 'added blessing' to the India masses. He hoped it would act as a prelude to an 'intensive and fruitful' campaign of Baha'i teaching that would bring enlightenment, peace, and hope to the 'distracted multitudes' of India ('that agitated country').<sup>152</sup> In May 1932, he was delighted to learn that a Hindi translation was also being made in addition to his request, again sending money (£50) as his contribution to the work, but advising that the Baha'is should only print 500 copies if the costs were high.<sup>153</sup> Meanwhile, he encouraged Roumie to persevere with getting a Burmese translation published, eventually accepting that Roumie (a non-native speaker) should himself make the initial translation and then have some expert go over the work and 'polish it', and sending money on at least two occasions (£9; £30) to help. To his delight, the Burmese translation was ready by March 1933, Shoghi hailing the work as a landmark in Burmese Baha'i history, and advising an initial print run of a thousand copies. He hoped it would be a prelude to an intensive campaign of teaching. The book was published by September, becoming the second of the projects to be completed.<sup>154</sup>

Work on the Urdu and Hindi editions, however, lagged behind, Shoghi expressing his grief at the delays and his longing for 'this most important and urgent work' to be finished.<sup>155</sup> The more the Baha'is saw the crying need of the world for the Faith's spiritual teachings, the more restless they should be to teach and improve the means of diffusing its precepts. Completion of this project was an 'important and essential preliminary' to an intensive campaign of teaching among the Indian masses (March 1933).<sup>156</sup> He was eager to hear that the work had been completed. The 'utmost effort' should be exerted to ensure its speedy completion (June 1933).<sup>157</sup> He also gave regular updates on the progress of the translations project worldwide.<sup>158</sup> His encouragements were to no avail, and it was not until 1935 that the Urdu edition was published, whilst the Hindi book was not ready until the end of the decade (1939).

Some recompense for these delays was gained from the news of work on a translation of Esslemont's book into Bengali (by at least February 1934), and its rapid completion (by December) and publication (by October 1936). Shoghi expressed his delight at this work, effusively thanking Roumie, who coordinated the work and was involved in the translation, and a local Baha'i (Mr Amiru'l-Islam) who paid for the publication. He referred to this as a historic accomplishment which would bring knowledge and

perhaps acceptance of the Faith to thousands of people.<sup>159</sup> Although Shoghi Effendi continued to urge on completion of the remaining translations, his tone seemed less insistent as the Bengali project progressed towards completion<sup>160</sup> – perhaps because the Indian and Burmese community was so clearly moving towards a more intensive level of activity culminating in the adoption of its Six Year Plan. The final two translations – into Hindi and Sindhi (this last adopted as an additional national goal by at least May 1934),<sup>161</sup> were also delayed by the publication of an extensively revised second edition of Esslemont's book in English in 1937, the national assembly deciding to cancel the publication of the existing translations until the revisions could be incorporated.<sup>162</sup>

As a sign of the importance he attached to the translations projects as a whole, Shoghi Effendi assembled copies of the various books from around the world, placing them in the mansion of Bahji in the Holy Land and other Baha'i sites. In the case of the Burmese edition, we know that he ordered 50 copies to be placed at Bahji in Roumie's name and as 'a constant reminder of the self-sacrificing endeavours of my beloved Burmese brethren'.<sup>163</sup> Fifty copies of the Bengali edition were also to be similarly so placed.<sup>164</sup>

In passing, we should note that the enormous diversity of languages in colonial India was of course a major impediment to the successful diffusion of the Baha'i teachings. Whilst a significant minority might know Urdu, the majority of the population only spoke their own local or regional languages and dialects. It is of note that the five Indian languages into which translations of Esslemont's book were made were all north Indian (Indo-Aryan) languages, no translations of it at this time being made into the southern Dravidian languages (Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, etc.). Of the five languages in which Esslemont was translated, Hindi and Urdu are variants of the same language (Hindustani), but with important cultural differences, including religious connotations. Thus, Urdu, written in Perso-Arabic script and containing many Persian and Arabic loan words, may be seen as a 'Muslim language', whilst Hindi, written in Devanagari script and with many Sanskrit loan words, may be seen as a 'Hindu' one – with Hindi being the official language of modern India and Urdu that of modern Pakistan. During the colonial period, Urdu, the language of the former Mughal court, had the higher status both as a literary language and as an educated lingua franca, and it is not surprising that the Baha'i's should have privileged it over Hindi at that time. The others – Gujarati, Sindhi, and Bengali – are all major regional languages in the north, Gujarati being significant in the Baha'i context as the language spoken by the Parsees. Major north Indian languages into which no Baha'i translations were made at this time included Marathi, Punjabi, and Oriya.

Shoghi Effendi also encouraged other publishing ventures although he did not actively promote them as he did with the Esslemont project. Thus, in June 1933, in a letter to Vakil, he referred to a letter he had received from a young Bombay Baha'i who wanted to translate Baha'u'llah's *Hidden Words* into Gujarati and Hindi. Would Vakil find out how good the young man's language skills were? It would be a splendid idea if he was sufficiently competent – in which case Vakil should help and encourage him.<sup>165</sup> Again, in October of the same year, Shoghi wrote to Roumie, praising him for his history of the Baha'i Cause in India and Burma which was then

being serialized in the American *Bahá'í Magazine*. His work would 'acquire tremendous significance and influence' in the future as a source of instruction, inspiration, and cheer for 'countless souls among the rising generation'. It would add 'fresh laurels' to those that Roumie had already won. For the present, it was of considerable interest to both Bahá'i and non-Bahá'i readers. It was to be hoped that a similar history that Roumie had been asked to write in Persian would evoke a similar response. Roumie should make it as detailed as possible, with as many facts, documents, and photographs to give it 'a scholarly and scientific character'.<sup>166</sup> When Roumie's history was finished (by February 1934), Shoghi Effendi expressed his delight. The work was 'highly meritorious in the sight of God' and 'a real and abiding contribution' to the Faith. He hoped also that the national assembly would approve of a copy of Roumie's history being sent to the Iranian Bahá'ís, and that the history itself would also become a means whereby the Indian Bahá'ís could be 'strengthened and inspired in their labours for the promotion of the Cause'.<sup>167</sup>

## 10. Burma

As in the 1920s, whilst India and Burma were identified as a single Bahá'i community with a joint national assembly, differences between the two appear to have been fundamental and persistent.<sup>168</sup> For the Burmese Bahá'ís, three factors may have contributed to a sense of separateness. First, there was the reality of geographical separation from 'India' – travel to the nearest parts of India required a sea journey across the Bay of Bengal (and presumably as most Burmese Bahá'ís were villagers they lacked the wealth to travel). Second, there was little to link the Burmese and Indian Bahá'ís in terms of Bahá'i activity – although the Burmese Bahá'ís comprised well over a third of the total membership of the joint community, most national events such as national conventions were held in distant India and the Burmese seem to have been only minimally represented on the national assembly (even in several of the letters from Shoghi Effendi in the early 1930s, the reference is to the 'Indian' Bahá'i activities with no reference to Burma<sup>169</sup>): the Burmese may simply have felt left out. Third, there is likely to have been a sense of cultural distinctiveness. This needs further research – no one has yet made a study of Indian and Burmese Bahá'i culture during this period, but in addition to language differences, there do seem to have been differences of identity as evidenced by photographs of the period in which most of the Indian Bahá'i men wear Iranian or western dress (usually with jackets and ties) and the women Indian saris, whilst the Burmese of both sexes wear traditional Burmese costume.<sup>170</sup> This did not necessarily involve different nationalist sentiments although, of course, in the enveloping societies this was also a period of rising Indian and Burmese nationalist sentiment, in the Burmese case including an anti-Indian element and implicitly acknowledged by the British colonial rulers when they separated off the territory from India in 1937.

Whatever the extent of the difference between the Indian and Burmese Bahá'ís, it is noticeable that most matters specifically involving Burma are referred to in separate letters to Syed Mustafa Roumie rather than to the national assembly, except where Shoghi Effendi is asking the Indian Bahá'ís to help the Burmese in some way. One response to Burmese

separation was the first 'All-Burma Baha'i Convention', which was held in April 1935 in Daidanaw.<sup>171</sup> Shoghi Effendi was delighted by the news he received of its success, seeing it as a historic gathering of great importance. He hoped that it would now prove easier for the Burmese Baha'is to organize further such conferences in the future, especially with the help and support of the 'Indian' national assembly, which had done so much to make the recent convention a success. He noted that the Baha'is' achievement in organizing the convention was all the more impressive in the face of the 'malignant opposition' that they had encountered from local Muslim clerics. The Burmese Baha'is had proved themselves worthy of the 'great love and blessings' which 'Abdu'l-Baha had lavished upon them.<sup>172</sup> Opposition to the Baha'is was evidently still strong in 1936, Shoghi Effendi praying that God would 'completely crush' the enemies of the Faith in the Mandalay region.<sup>173</sup>

One of the major concerns of the convention was the Baha'i school at Daidanaw. Shoghi hoped that both Indian and Burmese Baha'is would respond generously to the appeal for funding – following the example already set by the national spiritual assembly (Shoghi Effendi himself sent an immediate donation of £30). The proposed new section for the teaching of foreign languages (English, Arabic, and Urdu) would be an 'invaluable addition' to the school's 'already rich record of service'. He wished the head of the new school (Muhammad Iqbal Khan) every success. The school should be dedicated to the name of 'Abdu'l-Baha as it was when the village was first established.<sup>174</sup> Writing further in November 1935, Shoghi conveyed his appreciation to Roumie for his continuing care of the school as well as the financial assistance for the school provided by some of the Indian Baha'is. He hoped that increasing contributions would strengthen the school fund sufficiently so as to enable Roumie's plans for the wider penetration of the Baha'i message in the Kunjangoon region to be carried out.<sup>175</sup> By July 1936, he was writing desperately to the national assembly, urging it to reconsider its decision to discontinue its financial support for the school, which was at that time in the midst of financial difficulties. He realized that the assembly was faced with heavy and increasing expenditures and that its financial situation was made worse by the world depression, but he wanted the Indian and Burmese Baha'is to realize the 'vital necessity' to maintain the school. In addition to the educational advantage the school gave to the Baha'is, it had great potential to contribute to the promotion of the Cause throughout Burma. He himself was sending another £30 as a contribution to its upkeep.<sup>176</sup> This intervention averted the crisis, and in September, he wrote again to Roumie, delighted with the news that the work of the school was progressing satisfactorily and that his small contribution to its operation had been of help. The school had to be maintained – no sacrifice was too great for this 'vital and highly-meritorious' project. The new English section in particular was potentially of immense value in teaching the Faith. He hoped that with the assistance of the national assembly, the school would steadily expand and attract the non-Baha'is from the surrounding region. It should be legally registered with the authorities as soon as possible.<sup>177</sup>

There does not seem to have been any corresponding divisions between the various parts of the 'Indian' Baha'i community. Indeed, there was no geographical, administrative, or cultural basis for such divisions: most

Indian Baha'is lived in the cities of British-ruled northern India; there were very few Baha'is in the princely states or in the south; culturally, whilst the Baha'is were predominantly of Iranian or Muslim background, there was no reason for them to identify with the then rising Muslim separatist sentiment which eventually led to partition and the creation of Pakistan.

## **11. International projects and endeavours**

### **11.1. *The Bahá'í World* volumes**

Occasionally, Shoghi Effendi would involve the Indian and Burmese Baha'is in some international endeavour. The global campaign to produce translations of Esslemont's book has already been noted. One such project was to ensure proper coverage of the activities and progress of the Faith in India and Burma in the international *Bahá'í World* volumes, which Shoghi Effendi had established in 1925. Thus, in August 1931, he requested the national assembly to prepare a 'comprehensive and detailed' report on the activities and progress of the Faith in India and Burma over the 1930–32 period for inclusion in the next and in the following volumes, and in January appointed Pritam Singh to serve as the representative for India and Burma on the editorial team for the series.<sup>178</sup> Singh's instructions were to correspond with the American editors, ensure that regular reports on Baha'i activities in India and Burma were prepared for inclusion in the books, together with address lists of local spiritual assemblies, photographs of local Baha'i groups, and the details of any Baha'i books published in India and Burma in any language. After this, informative reports on Baha'i developments in India and Burma appeared in each successive *Bahá'í World* volume.<sup>179</sup>

### **11.2. *Nabil Zarandi's narrative of early Babi history***

Another project, in August 1931, was Shoghi's urging the Baha'is to order 'as many copies ... as they possibly can' of *The Dawn-breakers*, his own recently published translation of Nabil Zarandi's narrative of early Babi history.<sup>180</sup> He regarded the book's circulation as 'of vital importance to the Cause'. It was a monumental and authoritative account that would deepen the Baha'is' knowledge and strengthen their faith. Copies should be placed in the leading libraries of India and Burma.<sup>181</sup>

### **11.3. *Petition to the British High Commissioner for Palestine***

Another instance occurred in June 1933, when Shoghi Effendi wrote to Vakil asking him to prepare a 'strongly-worded petition' to the British High Commissioner for Palestine on behalf of the national spiritual assembly in response to a land dispute that he was then having in Haifa in which it was being contended that the Baha'i community did not exist as a legal entity in Palestine.<sup>182</sup> A rough outline of what Shoghi Effendi wanted to convey was included, but Vakil should word the petition as he saw fit and not follow the draft too closely. (As similar requests were being made of the North American, British, German, and Iranian assemblies, Shoghi Effendi presumably did not want the British authorities to receive a set of identical letters.) The petition should be worded carefully, including the facts presented in the draft, stressing the importance and significance of the Shrine of the Bab as a holy site to Baha'is throughout the world, and appealing to the High Commissioner to realize the gravity of the issues involved. Although all of

the petitions were to be sent directly to the High Commissioner, Shoghi assumed that they would then be forwarded to the Colonial Office in London and thereby acquire added significance, possibly leading to British recognition of the Baha'i Faith as an independent religion in Palestine.<sup>183</sup> Vakil had received a reply from the High Commissioner by August, and Shoghi Effendi himself received a positive letter from the Commissioner together with copies of his answers to all the petitions he had received. Shoghi Effendi trusted that the British authorities would keep their promise and consider the case carefully and impartially when it was put before them for a final decision.<sup>184</sup> In the end, the case was abandoned by the plaintiff in 1935 after lengthy litigation, enabling Shoghi Effendi to purchase the land he was seeking close to the Shrine of the Bab.

## 12. A concluding comment

This brief discussion suggests that during the 1930s, the Indian–Burmese Baha'i community was finding increasing strength and confidence. There was increasing activity and several significant innovations – notably the launching of the Six Year Plan. The national spiritual assembly appears to have become increasingly effective in coordinating Baha'i activities across a vast country. During the 1940s, the Indian Baha'is would be able to build on this strong base to achieve further expansion and consolidation. Their Burmese coreligionists, however, were to endure the full horrors of war, with massive movements of population and the collapse of civil order. Thereafter the ending of colonial rule and the establishment of independent states across the region marked the start of a new era in Baha'i history.

### Contributor details

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### Endnotes

1. Peter Smith, 'Shoghi Effendi's letters to the Baha'is of India and Burma during the 1920s', *Baha'i Studies Review*, 13, 2005, 15–40.
2. The addressee of the letter is sometimes given in the heading of the letter but frequently is an interpolation by the editor of MIS (*Messages of Shoghi Effendi to the Indian Subcontinent, 1923–1957*, comp. and ed. Irán Fúrtan Muḥájir, New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995). There are 13 letters addressed to the NSA, but also 5 cables, and 7 letters to Butt and 1 to Badri which were presumably sent to them as NSA secretaries (a total of 26).

3. Author's calculations. On Narayanrao Rangnath Shethji, 'Vakil' (1866–1943), see BW 9: 637–41 (see *The Bahá'í World*, vols. 1–12, rpt. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980); Dipchand Khianra, *Immortals*, New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988, pp. 7–25. On Syed Mustafa Roumie [Siyyid Mus@t@afá Rúmí] (c.1845–1944/45), see BW 10: 517–20; MIS 430–37; Barron Harper, *Lights of Fortitude: Glimpses into the Lives of the Hands of the Cause of God*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1997, 123–28 (Roumie was killed towards the end of World War II when Burma was in chaos – Harper states on 13 March 1945, but MIS gives 1944 as the year of his murder [MIS 437]. I have not been able to resolve this matter). On Pritam Singh (1881–1959), see BW 13: 874–76; BW 13: 874–76; Kh BW 13: 874–76; Khianra, *Immortals* 109–30.
4. Smith, 1920s 17.
5. BW 7: 94; 8: 67.
6. BW 7: 161. Of the 53, the largest number were in Bombay (16). The others were from Poona (11), Delhi (3), Calcutta (3) and Karachi (2) in India, and Rangoon (3) in Burma. There were also 15 new Bahá'ís from outside local assembly areas.
7. Smith, 1920s 23–26.
8. M. R. Garis, *Martha Root: Lioness at the Threshold*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983, 451.
9. MIS 4.
10. Between 1930 and 1935, we have published copies of 43 messages from Shoghi Effendi to Vakil and at most only 5 to the national assembly, but from 1936 to 1939, there are only 14 messages to Vakil and 21 to the national assembly (author's calculation).
11. MIS 106. The editor of the letters has interpolated 'national spiritual assembly' as the addressee of this letter.
12. MIS 109.
13. MIS 129.
14. Smith, 1920s 29.
15. Singh was the national secretary when the legal documents (the declaration of trust, memorandum of association and by-laws) were prepared for the incorporation of the national assembly in January 1933, albeit that Mr Hishmatullah is also listed as 'joint secretary', implying that the work was too much for one man (BW 6: 286, 292). His letter expressing his inability to serve was dated 13 March 1934 (MIS 111). Singh devoted much of his energies to teaching the Bahá'í Faith.
16. MIS 111–12.
17. MIS 112.
18. Abbasally Butt (1894–1959) was born into a Kashmiri Muslim family but became a Bahá'í in Calcutta whilst still a youth. A graduate in education and a qualified Persianist, he was initially the headmaster of the Muslim High School in Rangoon until sacked for his Bahá'í activity. He then taught in a Catholic school. He served briefly in Haifa in 1913–14 as 'Abdu'l-Baha's English-language translator. He was chairman or secretary of the India and Burma (later India, Pakistan and Burma) national assembly for many years. He made a number of major translations of Bahá'í literature into Urdu, and was the first Indian auxiliary board member (BW 13: 885–86).
19. MIS 127.
20. See note 10 (above).
21. MIS 108–09.
22. MIS 113.
23. MIS 116.
24. MIS 117.
25. MIS 128.
26. MIS 133–34.

27. MIS 138–39.
28. MIS 156.
29. MIS 157.
30. MIS 160.
31. MIS 180.
32. MIS 181–82. Also of note here is a letter from Shoghi Effendi to Vakil in May 1940, in which he announced his joy at the result of the recent elections for the new national assembly (MIS 187). Unfortunately no lists of the members of the national assembly in successive years are yet readily available so as to track changes in membership.
33. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1944, 335–36. The North American Bahá’í declaration of trust and by-laws were first adopted by its national assembly in 1927 (BW 2: 90–97), but the legal document of incorporation was only issued on 1 May 1929 (BW 4: 184). *God Passes By* lists 61 local incorporations including Chicago by 1944.
34. MIS 5: 236; 6: 286. For the national assembly’s declaration of trust, memorandum of association and by-laws see BW 6: 284–92.
35. BW 6: 336–41; 7: 410–11.
36. MIS 106. Shoghi Effendi adopted the incorporation documents of the New York assembly as the template for all other local spiritual assembly incorporations worldwide. The New York incorporation was approved on 31 March 1932, and the wording of the Certificate of Incorporation and the ‘By-Laws of the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the City of New York’ (the assembly’s ‘constitution’) are given in BW 4: 158–61.
37. MIS 113.
38. MIS 128.
39. MIS 132–33.
40. MIS 139.
41. MIS 142.
42. See Peter Smith, *The Babi and Bahá’í Religions: From Messianic Shi’ism to a World Religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 120–22.
43. MIS 72, 116.
44. MIS 133. I have not yet been able to identify either of the documents here referred to. It is quite likely that they were cyclostyled typescripts rather than actual formal publications. The American Bahá’í administrative manual, *Bahá’í Procedure* was only published in 1937 (William Collins, *Bibliography of English Language Works on the Bábí and Bahá’í Faiths 1844–1985*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1990, [p.]122, [No.]#7.1955).
45. MIS 114–15.
46. MIS 118.
47. MIS 142.
48. MIS 155.
49. MIS 155.
50. MIS 132.
51. MIS 135.
52. MIS 154–55.
53. MIS 160.
54. MIS 138.
55. MIS 139.
56. MIS 162–63.

57. MIS 184.
58. MIS 145.
59. MIS 133.
60. MIS 155.
61. MIS 157.
62. MIS 157.
63. MIS 175–76.
64. MIS 178–79.
65. MIS 178–79.
66. MIS 182.
67. MIS 67.
68. MIS 65.
69. MIS 66.
70. MIS 71. The letter itself is undated, but is written in reply to one by Vakil of 22 June 1931.
71. MIS 74–75.
72. MIS 118.
73. For example, a national assembly report in 1934 refers to the ‘greatest need’ of the Indian and Burmese Baha’is as being for competent Baha’i travelling teachers who could be sent out to various parts of the country. Alas, they were ‘handicapped’ by the lack of such teachers, and by their own limited resources. Therefore, they hoped that there would be many Persian and American teachers who would come to inspire them to teach (BW 5: 59).
74. MIS 118–19.
75. MIS 135–36.
76. MIS 139.
77. MIS 141–42.
78. MIS 148–49.
79. Systematic teaching projects were already a feature of Baha’i activity in the United States and Canada. A new stage effectively began in April 1935 when Shoghi Effendi cabled the national Baha’i convention that the Baha’is should to prepare for an ‘immediate’ and ‘unprecedented’ increase in their teaching activities. In October, he announced that a systematic nationwide teaching endeavour now needed to be launched, and in May 1936, he gave the Baha’is the twin goals of ensuring that local spiritual assemblies should be established in every American state and every Latin American republic by 1944, the termination of the first Baha’i century. These objectives were subsequently developed in more specific detail, with the additional goals of completing the exterior ornamentation on the as yet unfinished Wilmette temple and settling Baha’is in the unopened Canadian provinces (Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*, Wilmette. IL: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1947, 4, 5, 6, 9).
80. MIS 155.
81. MIS 157.
82. MIS 159.
83. BW 8: 92, 200.
84. MIS 170–71.
85. MIS 173.
86. MIS 177–78, 179–80. In both this letter and the one that follows, the main inspirational section of the letter is in Shoghi Effendi’s own hand, whilst the practical details are addressed by his secretary writing on his behalf.
87. MIS 181, 183.

88. MIS 183, 184.

89. There is no overall assessment of the Six Year Plan readily available, but the Indian assemblies increased from 5 in 1939 to 29 in 1943 whilst the number of localities rose from 23 to 62 (BW 9: 677–78).

90. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Antipodes: Communications from Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá’í Communities of Australasia*, ed. Graham Hassall, Mona Vale, NSW: Bahá’í Publications Australia, 1997 [hereinafter AUS], 62; BW 5: 59.

91. For a biography see M. R. Garis, *Martha Root: Lioness at the Threshold*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1983. See also Barron Deems Harper, *Lights of Fortitude: Glimpses into the Lives of the Hands of the Cause of God*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1997, 112–22; and BW 8: 643–48 (this later seemingly with some minor inaccuracies). For a collection of her essays see Kay Zinky (comp.) and A. Baram (ed.), *Martha Root: Herald of the Kingdom*, New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1983.

92. Garis, *Martha Root* 353–58; BW 4: 89–90, 432–33; Smith, 1920s 34–35.

93. MIS 63, 65.

94. On Ransom-Kehler see Harper, *Lights of Fortitude* 99–109 and BW 5: 23–27, 93, 389–410.

95. Harper, *Lights of Fortitude* 102. By contrast, a letter on Shoghi Effendi’s behalf on 18 April states that Ransom-Kehler had herself only allotted a short period to touring ‘that vast country’ and that Shoghi had advised her to prolong her stay (AUS 67). The dates of her visit to India and Burma are as yet unclear. She appears to have reached India by January – Shoghi Effendi wrote to her on 27 January referring to her now being in India (AUS 65), and a letter to Vakil dated 5 April suggests that she had either just left or was about to leave (MIS 81). Eventually exhausted by her work in Iran, Ransom-Kehler succumbed to smallpox (22 August 1933), Shoghi Effendi according her the rank of a Hand of the Cause and a martyr for the Faith – the first American so honoured.

96. AUS 62.

97. AUS 65.

98. Letter of 11 February 1932, MIS 77–78.

99. BW 4: 91–92; 5: 57–59.

100. MIS 80.

101. MIS 81, 82.

102. MIS 83–84, 98.

103. On Schopflocher, see Harper, *Lights of Fortitude* 384–90, and BW 12: 664–66; 15: 488–89.

104. BW 7: 168. Schopflocher’s wife Lorol (Florence Evelyn) had made a Bahá’í teaching tour of India and Burma in 1927 (Smith, 1920s 35–36).

105. MIS 147.

106. MIS 153, 154.

107. Garis, *Martha Root* 451–71; BW 7: 89, 93–100, 683–92; 8: 61–69, 809–18 (much of the material from *The Bahá’í World* is reprinted in Zinky and Baram, *Martha Root* 247–66, 277–321).

108. MIS 158–59, 160.

109. MIS 160.

110. BW 8: 63.

111. BW 8: 68.

112. Martha L. Root, *Táhirih the Pure: Iran’s Greatest Woman*, Karachi, 1938, rev. ed., Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1981.

113. MIS 161–64.

114. MIS 166–67.

115. MIS 174–75.

116. MIS 176.

117. For a brief biography of Isfandiar Bakhtiari see Khianra, *Immortals* 79–105 (and also BW 16: 554–56); on Syed Mehfoozulhuq Ilmi, BW 17: 446–47; Shirin Fozdar, BW 20: 1027–30; and Dr. Khodadad M. Fozdar, BW 13: 892.

118. MIS 133, 135.

119. MIS 140–41, 143.

120. MIS 156.

121. MIS 158.

122. MIS 127.

123. MIS 133.

124. See Peter Smith, *A Concise Encyclopedia of the Bahá'í Faith*, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2000 hereinafter CEBF, 'summer schools' 329–330.

125. BW 8: 96, 199; Garis, *Martha Root* 466, 467.

126. MIS 156, 170, 172–73.

127. MIS 178.

128. BW 8: 96, 199.

129. The North American Baha'is established a Baha'i Youth Committee in 1933, and surveys of 'Youth Activities Throughout the Bahá'í World' became a regular feature of the *Bahá'í World* volumes from 1934 onwards (BW 5: 370–82 [published 1936]). For a brief account of European youth movements see Elizabeth Harvey, 'The Cult of Youth', in Gordon Martel (ed.), *A Companion to Europe, 1900–1945*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006, 66–81.

130. MIS 140.

131. MIS 177.

132. On these movements and Baha'i linkages with them during the 1920s see Smith, 1920s 35–36.

133. On earlier links with these movements see *ibid.*

134. MIS 135, 154.

135. See BW 4: 90. The conference seems to have been linked to the All India Women's Conference (AIWC), founded in 1927 by Margaret Cousins (1878–1954) to promote 'the upliftment and betterment of women and children'. Cousins, an Irish suffrage pioneer and Theosophist and the first woman to be appointed as a magistrate in British India, was also active in the Indian independence movement. The AIWC is still active: see <http://www.aiwc.org.in/> (accessed 15 March 2012).

136. MIS 67, 69.

137. BW 4: 90.

138. BW 20: 1028.

139. This was in July 1937. See MIS 159–60.

140. BW 4: 304–05. Many entries consist only of the title and omit author and place and date of publication. The first attempt to provide even a 'partial list' in 'Oriental languages' was made in BW 3: 241–42 (1930), but it has very few entries under Indian languages and is not helpful for our purposes (It also includes Italian and Portuguese as 'Oriental languages'). The Urdu works listed were mostly published in Bombay, but titles were also issued from Agra, Delhi, and Rangoon.

141. Brittingham's book went through numerous printings up to 1920 (Collins, *Bibliography*, 64, #7,587).

142. On Esslemont, see Moojan Momen, *Dr J. E. Esslemont*, London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1975; Harper, *Lights of Fortitude* 72–84; *Bahá'í Year Book* (BYB) 1: 133–36; CEBF, 135. The first translation published was in German (1927), followed by Portuguese (1928) and Italian (1929).

143. The other translations comprised 21 European languages (Albanian, Bulgarian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, Esperanto, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Icelandic, Italian, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, and Swedish); 6 Middle Eastern languages (Arabic, Armenian, Hebrew, Kurdish, Persian, and Turkish); and 3 others (Chinese, Japanese, and Amharic) (BW 9: 699–709). Reproductions of the title pages of those published by 1939 are given in BW 8: 739–47.

144. MIS 78–79.

145. MIS 83.

146. MIS 79.

147. MIS 79, 90, 94.

148. MIS 90.

149. MIS 88. The description of Baha'i's in this hyphenated fashion ('Christian-', 'Zoroastrian-', or 'Jewish-' Baha'i's, etc.) seems to have been relatively unusual by the 1930s.

150. MIS 88, 94.

151. MIS 81. Shoghi Effendi wrote to Vakil about the Indian translations some 12 times between April 1932 and November 1933 (MIS 81, 82, 83, 87–88, 90, 92, 95–96, 96–97, 100–01, 104, 106), and to Rourme 6 times about the Burmese translation (MIS 84, 86, 89, 90, 94–95, 102–03).

152. MIS 82–83.

153. MIS 83.

154. MIS 86, 89, 94–95, 101, 104.

155. MIS 93, 95–96, 101, 104, 106, 107.

156. MIS 96.

157. MIS 97.

158. The yearly increments were as follows: 6 by 1930; 8 by 1931; 17 by 1932; 23 by 1933; 27 by 1934; 30 by 1935; 31 by 1937; 32 by 1938; 34 by 1939; and 36 by 1940.

159. MIS 110, 121, 150–51. The actual year of publication is given as 1937 (BW 8: 748).

160. MIS 112, 118, 137, 163, 170.

161. MIS 114.

162. BW 7: 163.

163. MIS 89, 95, 103.

164. MIS 151.

165. MIS 97.

166. MIS 103–04.

167. MIS 110.

168. Smith, 1920s 25.

169. For examples see also MIS 71, 77, 78, 83, 104, 105. Later letters seem to refer more often to India and Burma, although the Simla summer school was quite explicitly labelled as an Indian accomplishment (MIS 156, 170, 172, 178).

170. For example see BW 4: 335, 401, 510; 5: 431, 440, 448, 453; 6: 546, 660; 7: 455, 487, 566, 718; 8: 569, 575, 709, 810, 868, 876, 887.

171. The idea of a 'Central Council' for the Burmese Baha'i's had been considered in the early 1920s (Smith, 1920s 21).

172. MIS 126–27. The statement about Muslim clerics is curious when one remembers that then as now Burma was a predominantly Buddhist country. It suggests that the Baha'i's were still linked to the Muslim community in some way, but as yet this issue has not been researched. Note that according to the Burmese census for 1931, 84.3% of the population were Buddhist; 5.2% belonged to various 'tribal religions'; 4.0% were Muslim; 3.9% were

Hindu; and 2.3% were Christian (David B. Barrett (ed.), *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Study of Churches and Religions in the Modern World, AD 1900–2000*, Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 202).

173. MIS 152.
174. MIS 126–27.
175. MIS 134.
176. MIS 143–44.
177. MIS 146.
178. MIS 73, 76–77. Singh continued to serve in that capacity until 1938 (i.e. for vols. 4–7) when his place was taken by Abbassaly Butt. Hashmatullah had served as the India-Burma representative for volumes 2 and 3 (the 'Staff of Editors' is included in the front-matter of each volume).
179. By contrast, the first three volumes of the *Bahá'í Year Book/Bahá'í World* contain relatively little on India and Burma other than reprints from the American Bahá'í periodical *Star of the West* (BYB 84–86; BW 2: 42) and some photographs. Volume 2 also contains the curious statement that together the Hindu and Muslim Bahá'ís in India were setting such an example of sympathy and cooperation as to have a far-reaching impact on the wider society, particularly in educational centres (BW 2: 40) – this about a fairly small and unknown community that was largely of Zoroastrian heritage and included only one prominent 'Hindu-Bahá'í'.
180. Nabil (-i-A'zam), *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1932. See CEBF, 118, 'Dawn-Breakers'.
181. MIS 72, 73, 74.
182. This particular dispute was with the [‘Aziz Sulayman] Domet (Dumit). See Moojan Momen (ed.), *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1981, 460; and Rúh íyih Rabbani, *The Priceless Pearl*, London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969, 270, 285. The High Commissioner at this time [1932–38] was Sir Arthur Wauchope (1874–1947).
183. MIS 99.
184. MIS 101.

# Anti-Bahā'ī Polemics and Historiography<sup>1</sup>

Mina Yazdani

## Abstract

*This article examines the corpus of anti-Baha'i polemics produced since the mid-19th century as historiographical works, exploring the ways in which they have been exploited in the service of writing the dominant history. It categorizes these polemics, identifies their major themes, and traces the shift in their overtone from religious/moral to political. Suggesting that historiography became an integral part of anti-Baha'i polemics from early on, it focuses on Tahirih, Dolgoruki, and Hoveyda as epitomes of the three main accusations levelled against Baha'is: moral/ethical decadence, clandestine foreign dependency, and political corruption. The article concludes by advancing a short analysis of the role these accusations have played in anti-Baha'i polemics and why they have been blindly accepted by large numbers of Iranians.*

## Keywords

polemics  
historiography  
Dolgoruki  
Tahirih  
Hoveyda  
Iran

## I. Introduction

With the Baha'i Faith's tumultuous 19th-century inauguration and subsequent spread, there has been a simultaneous production and proliferation of anti-Baha'i polemical works. An unending series of anti-Babi and anti-Baha'i polemics have been produced by different authors during different socio-political periods, and these writings now form an abundant body of literature, containing various forms and contents. In writing what has become the master narrative, anti-Baha'i polemicists have utilized a variety of media to foreground their own histories while simultaneously attacking and marginalizing all competing narratives. Representing a critical aspect of modern Iranian historiography, the topic remains largely and inexplicably understudied by scholars and historians.

Refutations and attacks on new religions are, of course, a known phenomenon. Theologian Harvey Cox has shown that throughout western history there have been recurring themes or myths used to characterize deviant and minority religions. He classifies these myths as: 1) the 'subversion myth' in which 'these movements are seen as mainly religious fronts for politically subversive movements, or as movements that will endanger the civil authority'; 2) the myth of sexual or behavioural deviancy fuelling orgiastic behaviour; 3) the myth of dissimulation in which the targets are thought to have been 'carefully coached in not telling the truth and in misleading you'; 4) the myth that participating in the marginalized movement is involuntary and that those involved are the victims of their leaders. He explains that these themes are repeated in polemics 'as though the same scenario was there, and only the names of the actors needed to be changed'.<sup>2</sup> Although they depend largely on the socio-political conditions

and concerns of any particular moment, all these themes have, in varying capacities, appeared in anti-Baha'i polemics.<sup>3</sup> While in the 19th century anti-Baha'i polemics centred around religious, moral, and ethical issues (Cox's second myth), each reflecting larger social concerns, the 20th century revolved predominantly around political slander (Cox's first myth), ranging from earlier depictions of political dissidence to later charges of espionage that became dominant from the 1940s onwards.<sup>4</sup> In polemics published after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, this 'subversion myth' is reflected in the treasonous act of espionage and covert collaboration with the overthrown Pahlavi regime (1925–41). When the bulk of anti-Baha'i literature is assembled and observed, three categories can be posited: moral/ethical, espionage, and connections with the Pahlavi regime. Through the propagation of the accusations located therein, elaborate historical narratives were created.

This paper suggests that historiography became an integral part of anti-Baha'i polemics from early on. In a manner reminiscent of Hayden White's notion of the ideological function of narrative,<sup>5</sup> distorted historical accounts were deployed to demonize, invalidate, and assert the corrupted essence of the new 'sect' (*firqih*) through contrived proofs. This legitimized, nay, necessitated the unabated persecution it was going through. The paper will also examine a composite sample of the corpus of anti-Baha'i polemics as historiographical works and explore the ways in which they have been exploited in the service of writing the dominant history.

While the interplay between contrived historical narratives and anti-Baha'i polemics is of central importance to this paper, I will leave a full discussion of the role of 'historiography' in formulating the anti-Baha'i rhetoric to a later occasion, and focus here on the three dominant categories mentioned above. It discusses three individuals, all of whom are associated with a distinct period of Babi-Baha'i and Iranian history. Their examples illustrate how discussion of them in scholarly and Baha'i narratives differs vastly from their portrayal in anti-Baha'i polemics. Each figure epitomizes one of the three central categories of accusation made against Baha'is as found in anti-Baha'i polemical works. The first case is that of the Iranian poetess Tahirih (also known as Qurratu'l-Ayn (The Solace of the Eyes); d. 1852), who is the epitome of what we will tentatively be calling the promiscuity narrative. The second is that of Dimitri Ivanovich Dolgorouki (d. 1867), the Russian ambassador to Iran from 1845 to 1854. Dolgorouki can be said to epitomize the myth of foreign origin and dependency. The third is Amir Abbas Hoveyda (d. 1980), the prime minister of Iran from 1965 to 1977. It will be argued that the case of Hoveyda serves as the epitome of the myth of Baha'is being agents of the Pahlavi monarchy. From there, relying mainly on interviews, novels, and journal articles, I will demonstrate the ways in which the images presented in the polemics have penetrated and, in turn, influenced popular and elite culture. However, before delving into these topics, some grounding discussion of the polemics is in order.

### ***Anti-Baha'i polemics***

#### ***a) A classification based on the authors***

1. *Shaykhi leaders*: The earliest anti-Babi polemics were written by Shaykhis. Just a year after the declaration of the Bab, Karim Khan Kirmani, the leader of Kermani Shaykhis, in his first of several such polemics, rejected the claims

of the Bab and attacked him mainly on the ground of his own understanding of theological issues, without the distortions common to later works.<sup>6</sup> Even this theological work did, however, have a ‘historical’ element where Karim Khan made reference to the Bab’s changed plans for going to Karbila, taking this as a proof of the invalidity of his claim.<sup>7</sup> The polemics of later Shaykhi leaders laid more emphasis of ‘historical’ elements. Karim Khan’s grandson, Zaynu'l-Abidin Khan, for example, raised questions about aspects of early Babi history including Badasht, and the character of Qurratu'l-'Ayn.<sup>8</sup>

2. *The Court Chronicles*: Though not ‘polemicists’ in the strict sense of the term, the court chronicles of the early years of Nāṣir ad-Dīn Shah’s reign, in the two most significant works of official historiography during the Qajar time, included false historical accounts of the eventful early years of the Babi period. According to Abbas Amanat, both the literary scholar and royal tutor, Ridā-Qulī Khan Hidāyat in his *Rawdat as-Safā-yi Nāṣirī* [The Nāṣirī Garden of Serenity] (Tehran, 1271–74/1854–57); and the scholar and court official, Muhammad Taqī Sipihr in his volumes on the history of the Qajar dynasty *Nāṣikh at-Tawārīkh* (1st ed., Tehran, 1274–76/1857–59) showed ‘extreme partisanship’ and included ‘calculated distortions’ of the Babi history designed both to smear the Babi ‘heresy’ in the eyes of the public and to demonstrate – especially to the ‘ulama – the indispensability of the Qajar state for sustaining social order.<sup>9</sup> Sipihr’s accounts became a major source for numerous later works.<sup>10</sup> The anti-Babi polemic written by Qajar prince I'tidād as-Saltanih also incorporated distorted historical narratives.<sup>11</sup>

3. *Azalis*: Members of this group wrote several anti-Baha'i polemics. The principal and most frequently cited one is claimed to have been written by Baha'u'llah's half-sister 'Izzīyyih Khanum.<sup>12</sup> The content of this work is almost entirely forged and calumnious narratives about the life of Baha'u'llah.

4. *Shi'a scholars*: As might be expected, the ‘ulama were among the main opponents of the new religion. While their early works focused almost entirely on theological and moral issues, their polemics soon came to include ‘history’, especially in decades following the publication of *The Confessions of Dolgoruki* discussed below. One of the first works to advance *The Confessions* as reliable history was published with an introduction by the prominent cleric Ayatollah Kashani.<sup>13</sup>

5. *Apostates*: Not surprisingly, the polemics of this category of writer are particularly bitter. They tend to rely greatly on alleged recollections of the authors from the time they had been nominal Baha'is revealing the ‘facts’ about their former co-religionists and the founders of the Faith. Like the other opponents of the Faith, their writings tend to rely on historical distortion. The main figures in this category in early 20th century were 'Abdu'l-Ḥusayn Āyatī (Āvārih),<sup>14</sup> Hasan Nīkū,<sup>15</sup> and Faḍlū'llāh Ṣubḥī.<sup>16</sup> A more recent case is Mahrāz Ra'ūfī whose story is promoted *ad nauseam* by the Islamic Republic's media outlets.<sup>17</sup>

6. *Miscellaneous authors*: These constitute a diverse group ranging from early 20th-century journalists such as Mirza Mahdi Khan Za'imū'd-Dawlih,<sup>18</sup> who wrote full-length monographs attacking the Baha'i Faith, to outright polemicists, novelists who included anti-Baha'i materials in their works (see below), as well as academics or non-academic researchers who in more

recent years wrote denunciations in the guise of 'scholarly' works.<sup>19</sup> In addition, a few academics wrote encyclopaedia entries on the Babi and Baha'i religions, whose tone and heavy reliance on anti-Baha'i sources were more polemic than academic despite the pretense of scholarly rigor.<sup>20</sup> 'Historical' narratives form a ubiquitous element of all such works.

**b) The intended audience and other features**

While they are defined by their authors not as polemics but rather as religious research, some polemics do not specify their target audience.<sup>21</sup> Others, however, make no such pretensions by directly stating their objective: 'to prove the futility' of the Baha'i claim. Though, even here there is usually a lack of a specified addressee.<sup>22</sup>

In some polemics, however, the intended audience is clearly stated. One particular monograph is dedicated to 'the youth and those who seek knowledge, those who fight to fulfil the ideals of Islam'.<sup>23</sup> Another piece, caustically entitled *Imshī bi Ḥasharāt-i Bahā'ī* [*Insecticide for the Baha'i Insects*], is written 'to guide the misled Baha'is and to prevent the deception of those who are close to being deceived'.<sup>24</sup> In the two-page introduction to the 778-page (excluding 34 unnumbered pages) monograph, *Bahā'iyān* (1979),<sup>25</sup> the author, while emphasizing that his work constitutes 'research' and not 'polemics', writes that the book is 'culturally, an attempt at informing the generation of Iranian youth who, in their search for cultural identity, always need to challenge cultural colonialism'. He then adds, '... socially, it is a step in the path of making known a group that, in receiving foreign aid, are determined to intervene in the Islamic structure of Iran, and politically, it is a step towards making known these anti-national agents who have always been used by external political groups.' It is in achieving such ends that the author 'exposes' the 'corruption' of the Baha'is.<sup>26</sup>

**Availability:** The number of printings is usually not specified inside these works, but many polemics are reprinted or republished (with some modifications) numerous times. Bahram Afrasiyabi's *Tārīkh-i Jāmi'-i Bahā'īyyat* (*Neo-Masonry*) [*The Comprehensive History of Baha'ism (Neo-Masonry)*] was originally published in 1989 with 3000 copies and republished for the tenth time in 1993 with 3300 copies. Anti-Baha'i polemics are now available in most public and university libraries throughout Iran, as was the case before the 1979 Revolution.

In recent years there has been a widespread proliferation of anti-Baha'i websites and weblogs in Persian, many of them sponsored by the Islamic Republic. Likewise, advanced technologies like searchable CDs containing hundreds of anti-Baha'i works have been developed and sent to the market and libraries.<sup>27</sup> Again, forged and distorted historical narratives regarding the Baha'i Faith are integral to not only websites and blogs but also other electronic media.

## **II. A comparison of narratives: three case studies**

### ***Tahirih: disfigured to epitomize sexual promiscuity***

Baha'is understand Tahirih's actions in Badasht as 'the call [that] sounded ... the death-knell of the twelve hundred year old law of Islám'.<sup>28</sup> Badasht is the name of a hamlet in the north of Iran where, in

June–July 1848, 81 Babis camped for three weeks. Due to the importance of the role of Tahirih in this gathering a rather detailed account of it is necessary here. Academic and Baha'i works are more or less similar in their depiction of the role of Tahirih.<sup>29</sup> According to the historian Amanat, it was the first time this group of Babis could review a range of questions essential to the identity and the future strategy of the movement. Chief in the unwritten Babi agenda was discussing ways to rescue their spiritual leader, the Bab, who was incarcerated in a remote castle in Azarbajian, north-west of Iran. Other questions were related to the nature of the mission of the Bab. There were strong differences of opinion as to whether his mission was to rejuvenate Islam's inner truth, or whether it went beyond that to establish a revelatory cycle independent of Islam. Qurratu'l-'Ayn was the chief representative of the radical tendency. 'Her anti-orthodox positions became ever clearer when, in a symbolic act of defiance, she removed her veil in the middle of her speech to the Badasht gathering.'<sup>30</sup> Some of the believers showed extremely negative reactions to this act, to a degree that one of them cut his own throat.<sup>31</sup> However, unrepentant, she proclaimed to the gathering that all religious obligations such as prayer and fasting were abrogated. The Bab would bring a new Shari'ah, and the new obligations he ordained would be compulsory to all. Then she claimed that she was 'the word' that, according to a *hadith* (tradition),<sup>32</sup> the Qa'im<sup>33</sup> will utter, 'the word that shall put to flight the chiefs and nobles of the earth'. The other very prominent disciple of the Bab, Quddus, took side with the Shari'ah-minded, and denounced Qurratu'l-'Ayn as 'the author of heresy'. Finally however, Qurratu'l-'Ayn managed to convince this chief rival. To his followers' dismay, Quddus began to lean towards Qurratu'l-'Ayn's position. Baha'u'llah, the other chief character of the gathering, brought about an uneasy understanding between the two conflicting factions.<sup>34</sup> His was an approach of a break with the past but non-violent moderation in its implementation. Finally, upon leaving Badasht, 'unveiled' Qurratu'l-'Ayn sat 'inside a *huda* next to Quddus', chanting poems out loud together with her companions. The sight of this scene led to a raid on the Babis by a group of angry Muslims led by the local mullas. This was the first fatal clash between the Babis and a frenzied crowd and ended in several deaths.<sup>35</sup>

In anti-Baha'i polemics, the gathering at Badasht has almost invariably been adduced as proof of the promiscuity of Tahirih and by extension all Baha'i women.<sup>36</sup> Each has usually used the polemical works preceding them as their source, quoting them as the support and 'evidence' of the validity of what they are claiming. Here, examples of these works are presented: Najafi the author of *Bahā'īyān*, writes of the discussions between Tahirih ('the beautiful woman'), Baha'u'llah and Quddus, gathering together, 'unbridled in the veil of night'. His language alludes to sexual relations between Tahirih and her companions. His record of the scene of the 'unveiling' is intended to imply Tahirih's exposing her body to the audience. The debate between Tahirih and Quddus is reported to come to an end by the former convincing the latter 'with her eyes'.<sup>37</sup> Najafi goes on to paint a picture of sexual licence and depravity – and many others have written similarly both before and after him. Faza'i, the author who intended to do 'research', not write a polemic, quotes similar materials but doubts their veracity.<sup>38</sup> Surprisingly

enough, Faza'i's own narrative of Badasht is not much different, referring to Tahirih's co-religionists and companions as 'her lovers'.<sup>39</sup> The same story has been reiterated in two other anti-Baha'i works, with the added dimension that the motivation for Tahirih to announce abrogation of the laws of Islam was her promiscuity and mentions her 'assertion' that 'it was permissible for every woman to marry nine men'.<sup>40</sup>

### ***Dolgoruki: the epitome of putative Baha'i connections with imperialism***

The most well-known anti-Baha'i polemic and perhaps the most influential one is a forged 'memoir' or 'confessions' ascribed to the one-time ambassador of Russia to Iran, Dimitri Ivanovich Dolgoruki.<sup>41</sup> According to these 'memoirs', Dolgoruki came to Persia in the 1830s, converted to Islam, learned Persian and Arabic, and even studied at Karbila; he then instigated the Bab to put forward his claims, and subsequently supported Baha'u'llah in Baghdad and later in Edirne and Akka. His motivation for all these is said to cause schism in Shi'a Islam, which was the cause of national solidarity among Iranians.<sup>42</sup>

Dolgoruki's 'memoirs' appeared first in the form of handwritten chain letters in the late 1930s. It was published in 1942 for the first time. Since then it has seen the light of day through numerous printings, with considerable redactions having been made over the years to the earliest editions. The most recent re-publications appeared with a high volume of printings in Iran in 2004 and 2006. No original manuscript has ever been produced, and the work is riddled with errors and contradictions showing that its author was poorly informed about Babi and Baha'i history. Before long, a number of prominent Iranian scholars, some of whom were quite inimical to the Baha'i religion, declared these purported 'memoirs' to be a forgery.<sup>43</sup>

The well-known fact that Dolgoruki's 'memoirs' were a forgery did not prevent its influential reception. Once this document propagated the image that Baha'is are foreign dependent, other narratives detailing clandestine relations also emerged. The knighting of 'Abdu'l-Baha, for instance, was interpreted and profoundly utilized as evidence of British collaboration with the Baha'is.<sup>44</sup>

As just mentioned, the falsified memoirs of Dolgoruki heralded tracts that were disguised as historical. The well-known historian Adamiyat crafted a narrative on the British origins of the Babi religion.<sup>45</sup> Later, perhaps inspired by Ayatollah Khomeini's references to 'Baha'i Jews',<sup>46</sup> 'Abdullah Shahbazi came up with a tripartite Jewish-British-Parsi genealogy that traces the development of the Babi-Baha'i religions.<sup>47</sup> As the first head of the Islamic Republic's 'Political Studies and Research Institute', and one of the main figures behind the 'Institute for Contemporary Iranian Historical Studies',<sup>48</sup> Shahbazi was free to promote and supervise the forging and publication of narratives that, in a 'scholarly' fashion, 'proved' the 'foreign origins' thesis in connection to Baha'is. For example, focusing in on the backgrounds of Reza Shah, the first Pahlavi monarch, one article claimed – based on unpublished memoirs of an old Iranian statesman – that years before Reza Khan's 1921 *coup d'état*, the British, through an Indian Zoroastrian agent of theirs, asked the 'Assembly of Baha'is' to find and introduce to them a 'tall and handsome' 'Cossack officer'. It was then 'an influential Baha'i' who introduced Reza Khan to the British through their Parsi agent!<sup>49</sup> This curious

narrative gathers together the myth of espionage and the connections with the Pahlavi regime, which we will now address.

### ***Hoveyda: epitome of putative Baha'i connections with the Pahlavi monarchy***

Anti-Baha'i polemics in the post-revolutionary period invariably write on how well connected Baha'is were to the Pahlavi regime.<sup>50</sup> The fact that Hoveyda,<sup>51</sup> the prime minister of Iran for 13 years under Muhammad Reza Shah had a Baha'i grandfather was used to connect Baha'is to the Pahlavi court. Although Hoveyda is described by his close friends to have been 'a militant atheist' in private, and feigning 'some measures of Islamic piety' in public, and 'there is little evidence that he was a practicing Bahai for any part of his adult life',<sup>52</sup> still *all* anti-Baha'i polemics write of him as a Baha'i.

Hoveyda's case and the presence of no more than five Baha'is in influential posts, like Dr 'Abdu'l-Karim Ayadi (d. 1980), the personal physician of the Shah, have been used to create the impression of a self-evident truth: that all Baha'is were supported by the Pahlavi regime and were living in considerable prosperity during that era.<sup>53</sup> This theme is particularly emphasized in the polemicist Shahbazi's '*Justārhā*'. He adds figures such as General Qulam Reza Azhari (2001), the much-hated head of the short pre-revolutionary military reign, to the list, claiming he was a Baha'i, as usual without presenting any evidence for that claim.<sup>54</sup>

### **III. The influence of anti-Baha'i polemics on the elite and non-elite**

The portrayal of Tahirih as a licentious and promiscuous woman and the extension of that image to all Baha'i women in anti-Baha'i polemical works continue to have a far-reaching impact on how most Iranians view Baha'i females. The personal experiences of the present author – a Baha'i woman – attest to the fact that most of her friends – who would identify themselves as Muslims – had held similar stereotypes vis-à-vis Baha'i women before becoming friends with her.

The influence exerted by Dolgorouki's 'memoirs' and other similar polemics written to establish a connection between Russia and the genesis of the Baha'i religion, is profound. If today one were to poll Iranians of different socio-political backgrounds as to why Baha'is are being persecuted in their country, the most frequent response one would receive is that Baha'is are not followers of a religion, but rather the agents of a political movement.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, Dolgorouki's 'memoirs', its numerous reprintings, and easy availability have been used as the primary source for Baha'i 'history' – not only for most anti-Baha'i polemicists, but, surprisingly enough, also for many of the general public.

As an example of how the version of contemporary Baha'i history presented in anti-Baha'i polemical works has penetrated Iranian public culture, the case of a historical fiction written in 2000 is particularly instructive. The work, *Sipahbud Bakhtiyār: Sāyih-yi Sangīn-i Shāh* [General Bakhtiyār: The Heavy Shadow of the King], was written by Khusraw Mu'tadid – the writer of many historical fictions, and not particularly known as an anti-Baha'i polemicist.<sup>56</sup> In this novel, Baha'is are depicted as having

been extremely powerful and well connected to the Pahlavi monarchy – in parallel with their representation in anti-Baha'i polemical works. The story is about Taymūr Bakhtiyār, who was once one of the Shah's most powerful military generals. At one point, Bakhtiyar realizes that the Shah had become displeased with him. A friend 'explains' to him that the Shah's dissatisfaction with Bakhtiyar had to do with Baha'is who were unhappy with him because of his role in the destruction of the Baha'i headquarters in Tehran.<sup>57</sup> The friend is of course insinuating that Baha'is are now so powerful within the Shah's inner circle that they are able to clandestinely bring about Bakhtiyar's demise.<sup>58</sup> Other works by famous modern Iranian writers, such as Jalal Al-e Ahmad (d. 1969),<sup>59</sup> portray a similar image of all Baha'is as corrupt and closely allied with the Pahlavi regime.

Our final example of the use of anti-Baha'i polemics is particularly interesting. On the morning of 21 April 2006, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, one of the most renowned Iranian academics in the world,<sup>60</sup> was interviewed live on the *Diane Rehm Show*, a National Public Radio (NPR) programme broadcast daily throughout the United States. When asked about the human rights violations committed against the Baha'is by the Iranian government, Nasr justified the persecution by averring that during the time of the Shah, 'many people in power belonged to Baha'i persuasion'. This in turn led to a 'sense of revenge turned against Baha'is'<sup>61</sup> following the fall of the Pahlavi monarchy.<sup>62</sup> His response is a clear demonstration of the ways in which a myth created and propagated by the polemics has been exploited to serve an anti-Baha'i agenda. Nasr's response echo the lines that anti-Baha'i polemicists have been repeating in their works for more than thirty years. It, moreover, epitomizes the extent to which such polemics serve to validate and rationalize the persecution of Iran's largest religious minority.

## Conclusion

This paper has illustrated how the depiction of three figures – Tahirih, Dolgoruki, and Hoveyda – in scholarly and Baha'i narratives differs vastly from their portrayal in anti-Baha'i polemical works. The latter have long portrayed Tahirih as the epitome of what can be tentatively called the promiscuity narrative. In such works, Tahirih – and by extension all Baha'i women – become symbols for impurity, moral abasement, and all manner of promiscuity and sexual vices. It is not difficult to accept the notion that the patriarchal orientation of the writers of anti-Baha'i polemics (i.e. a blend of gender and religious prejudice) is what has made such an image of Tahirih possible. As a result, not only was her call for the emancipation of women<sup>63</sup> violently suppressed, but thereafter, anybody attracted to her ideas was immediately accused of licentiousness and having lax morals. With regard to the second figure, Dimitri Ivanovich Dolgorouki, a forged document propagated as his 'memoirs' served as the most seminal factor in ascribing political connections to Baha'is – first to Russia and from there to the Ottoman Empire, Britain, Israel, and the United States. The portrayal of the third figure, Amir Abbas Hoveyda, is the epitome of the myth of Baha'is being agents of the Pahlavi monarchy, an accusation that has long justified the persecution of Iranian Baha'is in their native land. Examples from interviews, novels, and book chapters served to supplement our study

by demonstrating how, on the one hand, the elite have uncritically accepted the version of Baha'i history found in anti-Baha'i polemics and, on the other hand, how this acceptance has been placed in the service of validating the oppression of Baha'is. The version of Baha'i history found in anti-Baha'i narratives has been accepted without question, an act which has only reinforced and further consolidated the image.

The extensive use of 'historiography' in anti-Baha'i polemics and the dominance therein of the two themes of clandestine collaboration with external powers and connection with the Pahlavi regime has to be understood in the context of the history of Iran in the past two centuries. As stated earlier,<sup>64</sup> it is a known fact that each society defines its Other according to its concerns and preoccupations. Iranian society in the early decades of the 20th century was already sorely inflicted with the bitter memory of more than a century of encroachments by the British and the Russians. The CIA-backed 1953 *coup d'état* only reinforced those painful collective memories. With this background, the Iranian nationalist spirit became at its core deeply anti-colonial. Such a society was positioned to constitute itself in accordance with its wildest fears and concerns: foreign encroachments. Accusations surrounding the foreign connections of Baha'is emerged in the early decades of the 20th century and were intensified with mid-century developments. With the downfall of the Pahlavi regime another source of anguish and dislike was there to connect the nations' internal Other with – the *ancien régime*. All these concerns, however, are fleeting. Soon there will be other preoccupations and fears, and along with them will come new ways of depicting Baha'is. Soon all these will be memories. In the words of 'Abdu'l-Baha, in a tablet regarding anti-Baha'i polemics:

How varied and diverse the reports and accounts that were written in the early days of God's Prophets! How many the books that were written against Them! [At the time of Christ], some of the Greek and Roman philosophers wrote polemics against the Spirit of God (Jesus) and spread them far and wide and it is well-known that for the people of that time, the words of the philosophers were like divine revelation. In the end, all of their books became obsolete and were abandoned. In the libraries of Europe, some of those same books are now the daily bread of termites, whereas the Holy Bible has reached the horizon of heaven! Its flood tides have swept away all those [decaying] chips of wood. The same will happen in this age. Of this, be sure!<sup>65</sup>

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## Endnotes

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the annual conference of the Association for Bahá'í Studies, Mississauga, Canada, August 2007. The author wishes to thank: the Association for Bahá'í Studies and conference attendees who provided feedback; two anonymous peer-reviewers; and Omid Ghaemmaghami for his comments on an earlier draft.
2. Harvey Cox, 'Deep Structures in the Study of New Religions', in *Understanding New Religions*, ed. Jacob Needleman, New York, 1978, 122–30, quote from pages 126–27.
3. In recent years, Cox's last two myths can be discerned in the anti-Bahá'í rhetoric of the Islamic Republic of Iran, accusing Bahá'ís of forming a 'cult'. For an excellent discussion of the topic see the talk by Erfan Sabeti, 'Globalization, Reverse Orientalism, and the Emergence of the New Anti-Bahá'í Discourse', paper presented at the conference 'Intellectual Othering and the Bahá'í Question in Iran', Toronto, 1–3 July 2011. Available at <http://www.sitenama.net/>.
4. For a detailed discussion see, Mina Yazdani, 'Religious Contentions in Modern Iran, 1881–1941', PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2011. For a discussion of how the definition of the Other in every culture is a function of its own preoccupations and concerns, see Nader Saiedi, 'Baha'isitizi va ittiham-i Bahá'íyan bi jasusi(1): tarfand-i digarpardazi', *Iran-i Imruz* (07/12/2008), available at <http://www.iran-emrooz.net/index.php?/politic/more/17102/> (accessed 5 March 2012).
5. See Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987.
6. On Karim Khan's anti-Babi polemics see Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: the Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844–1850*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989, 291–94; Armin Eschraghi, 'Irtibāt-i Karīm Khān Kirmānī, pīshvā-yi firqah-yi Shaykhīyah-i Kerman bā diyānat-hā-yi Bābī va Bahā'ī', in *Safīnah-yi 'Irfān*, vol. 9, 163BE/2006, 46–74; Denis Martin MacEoin, *The Messiah of Shiraz: Studies in Early and Middle Babism*, Leiden: Brill, 2009, 155, 219–21, 294. Karim Khan had written and widely distributed 'five or six books' against the Bab. He records the name of these works in his *Risālih-yi sī faṣl* (1269/1853), 34–35. See Denis Martin MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Bābī Doctrine and History: A Survey*, Leiden: Brill, 1992, 123–24.
7. Muhammad Karīm Khan Kirmānī, *Risālih-i Izhāq'l-bāṭil fi'l-Radd'l-Babīyyah*, n.p.: Sa'ādat, 1351/1972, 111–12.
8. See Zaynū'l-Abidin Khan Kirmani, *ṣawā'iqu'l-Burhān fī radd-i dalā'ilu'l-Irfān*, available at <http://www.alabrar.com/>.
9. Abbas Amanat, 'Historiography viii. Qajar Period', in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online edition, 15 December 2004, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/historiography-viii>.
10. *ibid.*
11. Alīqulī Mīrzā l'tidād as-Saltanah, *al-Mutanabbi'īn*, section on the Bābīs ed. Abd al-Husayn Navāī as *Fitnāh-yi Bāb*, 2nd ed., Tehran, 1351/1972.
12. 'Izzīyyih khanum Nūrī, *Tanbīh an-Nā'imīn*, n.d., n.p. Iranian scholar Muḥīt Tabāṭabā'ī, himself the author of many anti-Bahá'í articles, and reportedly from an Azālī background has indicated that some 'have considered' the author of *Tanbīh an-Nā'imīn* to be 'Hajj Mirza Ahmad Mushrif or Sharif Kermani'. See Siyyid Muḥammad Muḥīt Tabāṭabā'ī,

*Siyyid Jamal ad-Din Asadabadi va bidari-yi mashriq zamin* (Tehran: Daftar-i Nashr-i Farhang-i Islami, 1370/1991), 324. On Muhiṭ Ṭabāṭā'i's Azali background, see: Saleh Molavi-nejad, ed. *Ishraq-khāvarī: Zindigī, Athār va Khaṭirāt*, with an introduction by Vahid Ra'fati (Madrid, Spain: Nehal, 2009), 225–226.

13. See Ayatollah Kāshānī's introduction in Anvar Wadūd, *Sākhtih'hā-yi Bahā'īyat dar ṣaḥīnah-yi dīn va siyāsat*, Tehran: Chāpkhānah-i Shirkat-i Maṭbū'āt, 1326.
14. 'A. Āyatī, *Kashfū'l-ḥiyāl*, 3 vols. in one, 6th ed. of vol. 1, 3rd ed. of vols. 2 and 3, Tehran: 1326/1947.
15. H. Nīkū, *Falsafah-i Nīkū dar paydāyish-i rahzanān va bad-kīshān*, 4 vols. in 2, n.p.: n.d.
16. Subhi has written two anti-Bahā'i polemics: Faḍlu'llah ṣubḥī Muhtadī, *Khaṭirāt-i zindigī-i subḥī va tārīkh-i Bābīgarī va Bāhā'īgarī*, with an introduction by Sayyid Hādī Khusrawshāhī, 5th ed., Qum: Markaz-i Intishārāt-i Dār al-Tablīgh-i Islāmī, 1354/1976. First published in 1312/1933, under the title *Kitāb-i subḥī* in Tehran, *maṭba'iḥ-yi Dānish*. It has seen the light of the day several times, including: Alī Amīr Mustawfī ed. *Khaṭirāt-i inḥīṭāt wa suqūt-i Fazl Allāh Ṣubḥī, kātib-i 'Abdu'l-Bahā'*, Tehran: Nashr-i 'Ilm, 2005; *idem*, *Payām-i Pidar*, 4th ed., Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1356 [2536]/1977. This book has been reprinted numerous times. Subhi's two books have also been published in one volume: Faḍlu'llah Ṣubḥī and Hādī Khusrawshāhī, *Khaṭirāt-i zindigī-i Ṣubḥī : tārīkh-i Bābīgarī va Bāhā'īgarī*, Tehran: Markaz-i Asnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī, 2007.
17. She is the author of several anti-Bahā'i works, including Mahnaz Ra'ufī, *Chirā Musalmān shudam: sukhanī ba Bahā'iyyān* [Why I became a Muslim: A Discussion with Bahā'īs]; *idem*, *Nāmīh-i bi barādaram* [A Letter to My Brother], 1382/2003; *idem*, *Maslakh-i ishq* [The Abattoir of Love] 1385/2006; *idem*, *Sāyīh-yi shūm, khāṭirāt-i yik nījāt-yāftih az Bahā'iyyāt* [The Ominous Shadow, the Memoirs of a Soul Saved from Bahā'īsm], 1386/2007.
18. Zaīmud-Dawlih al-ducktur Mīrzā Muḥammad Mahdī Khān Ra'īs al-Ḥukamā' al-Īrāī al-ādhārbāyjānī al-Tabrīzī, *Miftāḥ-i bāb al-abwāb*, 1st ed., Cairo: al-Manār, 1903.
19. An example is Sa'id Zahed Zahedani, *Bahā'iyyāt dar Iran* [Bahā'īsm in Iran], Tehran: Markaz-i Asnād-i Inqilāb-i Islāmī, 1380. Zahedani is a university professor.
20. See for example, Mahmud Sadri, 'Bahā'iyyāt', *Dānishnāmah-yi Jahān-i Islām*, ed. Ghulam-Ali Haddad-'Adil, Tehran: Bunyad-i Da'irat al-Ma'arif-i Islāmī, 1377AS/1999, 4, 733–44. Also available at <http://www.encyclopaediaislamica.com/madkhal2.php?sid=2206>. The editor of the encyclopaedia volume in which this article appears, Ghulam-Ali Haddad-'Adil, is a particularly anti-Bahā'i figure of the Islamic Republic. The encyclopaedia is produced by a foundation that is under the direct patronage of Iran's Supreme Leader, Khamenei. It is being translated into Arabic as well.
21. An example is Yusuf Faza'i, *Tahqīq dar Tārīkh va Falsafah-i Bābīgarī, Bāhā'īgarī, va Kasravīgarāt* [Research in the History and Philosophy of Babism, Bahā'īsm, and Kasravism], Tehran: Farrukhi, 1354/1975.
22. See for example, Abūturab Huda'i, *Bahā'iyyāt Din Nist* [Bahā'īsm Is Not a Religion], 3rd ed., Tehran: Intishārat Farahani, 1971.
23. Hadi Khusrawshahi (Siyyid), *Du Madhab* [Two Religions], 5th reprint, Tehran: Intishār, 1342/1963.
24. Muhammad Mahdi Murtadāvi, (Sayyid), *Imshī bi Ḥasharāt-i Bahā'ī* [Insecticide for the Bahā'i Insects], Qum, Iran: 'Allāmīh, 1343 /1964, 11.
25. Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Najafī, *Bahā'iyyān*, Tehran: Tahūrī, 1979. The number of copies published is not specified.
26. *ibid*, v.
27. An example is the CD titled '*Bi sū-yi haqīqat: radd-i firqih-yi ḍallih-i Bahā'iyyāt*', Isfahan: Markaz-i Tahqīqāt-i Rāyānīh-i Hawzih 'ilmīyyih, 1388/2009. It contains 313 anti-Bahā'i books and articles.
28. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, Wilmette, IL: Bahā'i Publishing Trust, 1944, 34.
29. For academic works on Tahirih see Abbas Armanat's *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844–1850*, 2nd ed., Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2005; and Farzaneh Milani's *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voice of Iranian Woman Writers*, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1992; *idem*, *Words, Not Swords: Iranian Women Writers and the Freedom of Movement*, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2011; Sabir Afaqi, *Tahirih in*

30. Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal* 325.
31. It must be mentioned here that such strong reactions had their roots in the importance of the *hijab* (the head and body covering of Muslim women) for those orthodox believers.
32. 'Traditions' are oral reports narrating the putative words and deeds of the Prophet and (for the Shi'a), the twelve Imams.
33. Qa'im: Lit. 'the one who arises (from the family of the Prophet Muhammad)' or 'the resurrector'.
34. It must be added that the account in the Baha'i authoritative source, *God Passes By*, on Badasht, differs from the account given here in giving a more prominent role to Bahá'u'lláh in Badasht (See Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 31–34). That point, however, is not the focus of this paper in investigating the narratives of Badasht.
35. Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal* 324–28.
36. As examples of the references made to sexual promiscuity of Baha'i women see Āyatī, *Kashfū'l-hiyāl*, 3: 66.
37. Najaftī, *Bahā'īyān* 545–47.
38. Yusuf Fazā'ī, *Tahqīq dar Tārīkh*, 113.
39. ibid.
40. See: Bahram Afrasiyabi, *Tārīkh-i jāmi'-i Bahā'īyyat* (Neo-Masonry) [The Comprehensive History of Baha'ism (Neo-Masonry)], Tehran: Sukhan, 1370/1991, 241–44; and pages 179–88 of the long articles added to I'tidād as-Saltanih's book published under the title *Fitnīh-yi Bāb* by its editor Nava'i.
41. For a detailed study of this work, see Mina Yazdani, 'The Confessions of Dolgoruki: Fiction and Masternarrative in Twentieth-Century Iran', *Iranian Studies*, 44(1), January 2011, 25–47. For the first historiographical study of *The Confessions of Dolgoruki* in Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi, 'Anti-Baha'ism and Islamism in Iran', trans. Omid Ghaemmaghami, in *The Baha'is of Iran: Socio-historical Studies*, ed. Dominic Parviz Brookshaw and Seena B. Fazel, London: Routledge, 2008, 200–31. For a discussion of *The Confessions of Dolgoruki* within the context of conspiracy theories, see Ahmad Ashraf, 'The Appeal of Conspiracy Theories to Persians', *Princeton Papers*, Winter 1997, 55–88; and Houchang E. Chehabi, 'The Paranoid Style in Iranian Historiography', in *Iran in the 20th Century: Historiography and Political Culture*, ed. Touraj Atabaki, London: I. B. Tauris, 2009, 155–76. For a study of *The Confessions* in relation to the persecution of the Baha'is of Iran, see Moojan Momen, 'Conspiracy Theories and Forgeries: The Baha'i Community of Iran and the Construction of an Internal Enemy', unpublished paper. For responses to this forgery and its deployment, in English, see: [Moojan Momen], *Conspiracies and Forgeries: The Attack upon the Bahá'í Community in Iran: A Response to Dr. David Yazdani's Article, Muslim Brotherhood – Part VIII*', *Persian Heritage*, 9(35), Fall 2004, 27–29; Adib Masumian, *Debunking the Myths: Conspiracy Theories on the Genesis and Mission of the Baha'i Faith*, n.p.: Lulu, 2009.
42. Zahedani, *Bahā'īyyat dar Iran* 83.
43. Writers such as Ahmad Kasravi, Mujtaba Minavi, Abbas Iqbal Ashtiyani, and Fereydun Adamiyyat. For details, see sources in note 42 above.
44. For a discussion of this issue see Masumian, *Debunking the Myths* 37–42.
45. Fereydun Adamiyyat, *Amir Kabir va Iran*, 1st edition, Tehran, 1323–24/1944–45.
46. On Khomeini's statements concerning the amalgamation of Baha'is and Jews, see this author's article, 'The Islamic Revolution's Internal Other: The Case of Ayatollah Khomeini and the Baha'is of Iran', *Journal of Religious History*, forthcoming.
47. Abdullah Shahbazi, 'Justārhā'ī az tarīkh-i Bahā'īgarī dar Iran', *Tarīkh-i Mu'asir-i Iran*, 7(27), 1382/2003. For a brilliant analysis of the conspiratorial thinking in contemporary Iran, of which such conspiracy theories regarding Baha'is is a salient example, see Aram Anahid, 'Baha'is, the Sole Targets of Conspiracism?' *Iran Press Watch*, 22 February 2009, available at <http://wwwiranpresswatch.org/post/1407> (accessed 13 March 2012).

48. This institute was originally founded under the title of 'the Institute of Cultural Research and Studies' in 1365/1986.

49. Muhammad Rida Ashtianizadah, 'Savābiq-i Rida Khān va kuditā-yi sivvum-i hut 1299', in *Tarīkh-i mu'asir-i Iran*, book 3, Tehran: Mu'assisih-yi Pajūhishī va Muṭāli'at-i Farhangī, 1370, 103–23, esp. 107.

50. This is despite the fact that Baha'i's themselves consider the Pahlavi era as just another phase in their persecutions. See, for example, phase three out of the four phases in the persecutions of Baha'i's described by Moojan Momen in 'The Babi and Baha'i Community of Iran: a case of "Suspended Genocide"?' *Journal of Genocide Research*, 7(2), 2005, 223–24.

51. For more on Hoveyda, see Abbas Milani, *The Persian Sphinx: Amir Abbas Hoveyda and the Riddle of the Iranian Revolution*, Washington DC: Mage Publications Inc., 2000.

52. Abbas Milani, 'HOVEYDA, AMIR-ABBAS', *Encyclopedia Iranica*, online edition, 15 December 2004, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/hoveyda-amir-abbas> (accessed 13 March 2012).

53. See Afrasiyabi, *Tarīkh-i Jami'* 720; Zahedani, *Bahā'īyyat dar Iran* 240–48. This theme and the fallacy of foreign collusion have been transmitted to Western academia by Hamid Algar, Professor Emeritus of Persian studies at UC, Berkeley, who confidently echoes the Islamic Republic's Baha'i narrative: "The Shah's collaboration with Israel did not always go through the Jewish community. It also went through the Baha'i community. If one is speaking of minorities the most important one with respect to staffing the Shah's regime, staffing the bureaucracy and the security police, is the Baha'i's, many of whom in any case are of Jewish origin." Hamid Algar, *Roots of the Islamic Revolution in Iran: Four Lectures*, Oneonta, NY: Islamic Publication International, 2002, 70.

54. Shahbazi, 'Justārhā'ī', 5.

55. See Denis MacEoin, 'The Baha'i's of Iran: The Roots of Controversy', *Bulletin (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)*, 14(1), 1987, 76. MacEoin quotes Cooper who has conducted research on this subject (R. Cooper, *The Baha'i's of Iran*, Minority Rights Group Report, no. 5, London, 1982), and writes that the idea of Baha'i's being foreign spies and political agents is shared 'by young militants serving as Revolutionary Guards, by conservative bazaar merchants and by many who are disillusioned with or even opposed to the present regime' (76). Such ideas are expressed on bulletin boards and chat rooms across a wide range of Islamic websites where people have a chance to comment on the Baha'i religion.

56. Tehran: 'Ilmi, 1379/2000.

57. For details of this event, see Tavakoli-Targhi, 'Anti-Baha'iism and Islamism in Iran'.

58. Mu'tadid, *Sipahbud Bakhtīyār* 30–34. Recently, in an interview dated 2 Feb. 2012, Mu'tadid has expressed his particular hatred of Baha'i's because of their roots being 'outside Iran'. See <http://www.sharghnewspaper.ir/News/90/11/13/23639.html> (accessed 6 February 2012).

59. Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Dar khidmat va khīyānat-i rawshanfikrān* [On the Service and Disservice of the Intellectuals], Tehran: Ravaq, n.d., 412; *idem*, *Nifrīn-i zamīn* [The Curse of the Earth], Tehran: Nīl, 1967, 199, 254, 261, as observed by Huchang Chehabi in 'Anatomy of Prejudice: Reflections on Secular Anti-Baha'iism in Iran', in *The Baha'i's of Iran: Socio-Historical Studies*, ed. Dominic Brookshaw and Seena Fazel, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2007, 193.

For Jalal Al-e Ahmad, the theoretician of 'westoxication' (gharbzadegi), Baha'i's embodied that affliction: 'Their westoxication and the services they render to the oppression and injustice (zolm) of the current government are so obvious that no further comment is needed'. He admits that Baha'i's were oppressed for years and that their house of worship was destroyed, but adds that in the years since the nationalization of oil 'since our governments repress religion and need more westoxication, [the Baha'i's] have become more active, and like any other *parvenu* minority have so lost themselves that I fear for their well being'. He then recounts how, when the flood gates of the Dez dam stopped working on a 15th of Sha'ban (the birthday of the Twelfth Imam) and as a result electricity went out in some cities with a mixed Sunni and Shi'ite population in Khuzistan, Shi'ites, who were more assertive in such a setting, blamed the engine trouble on Baha'i's (*Dar khidmat* 412). In Al-e Ahmad's novel 'The Curse of the Earth', a 'Jew who has become a Baha'i' (254) sets up a chicken farm near a village and is rumoured to want to import one-day-old chicks, artificially inseminate cows, and plant

Dutch alfalfa. While the novel's narrator pokes fun at the old land-owner who sees a British conspiracy behind this, he does liken the chicken farm to a 'parasite that attaches to the bottom of a tree and derives nourishment from its water, soil, and fertilizer' (261) combining the old antisemitic *topos* of the greedy Jew who enriches himself *at the expense* of others with criticism of innovation as a sign of westoxication.

60. A prolific scholar, Seyyed Hossein Nasr is one of the world's leading authorities in the fields of Islamic philosophy and mysticism and among the most prominent Iranian academics residing outside of Iran. During the latter years of the Pahlavi monarchy (i.e. before the Islamic Revolution of 1979), he was appointed by Empress Farah Pahlavi to lead the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy. Soon after the Islamic Revolution, he immigrated to the United States, and is currently a professor of Islamic Studies at George Washington University in Washington DC.
61. The full interview can be listened to online at: <http://www.wamu.org/programs/dr/o6/o4/21.php#10246> (accessed 20 April 2007). The question about the Baha'is of Iran is posed to Dr Nasr at approximately the 6:45 mark.
62. Nasr went on to assert that whereas some Baha'is were killed in the early years of the Islamic Revolution, there is today a very large Baha'i community in Iran. He added – in an apparent defence of the present Iranian government – that the official government policy is to leave the Baha'is alone so as long as they do not proselytize – implying thereby that the restriction on proselytization is the only one of its kind on a community otherwise 'left alone'.
63. See Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 76.
64. See the introduction and note 4.
65. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Ma'idih-yi āsmānī*, vol. 9, Tehran: Mu'assisih-yi Matbū'at-i Amrī, 122 BE/1965, 180. I am grateful to Omid Ghaemmaghami who made this provisional translation at my request.

# Authoritarianism, Totalitarianism and the Bahā'ī Faith

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## Abstract

*As the Baha'i religion has become better known, it has been the target of numerous attacks as well as rational criticisms by non-Baha'is, former Baha'is and by Baha'is who remain in the community but feel that their religion is becoming more authoritarian or even totalitarian. These criticisms need to be addressed as they are quite valid to those who accept the ideas and institutions of the European Enlightenment. The disparagement tends to fall into three general categories: personal, political and academic.*

*This paper presents a discussion of the meaning of the terms 'authoritarianism' and 'totalitarianism' from the point of view of political theory, then lays out arguments that the Baha'i Faith does not fit either of those classifications but rather that the Baha'i Faith in every way conforms to the Weberian concept of voluntarism. Further, the relation of the individual Baha'i with his community is a form of social contract predicated on freedom of choice with the responsibility to abide by the conditions of that contract as they are expressed by the institutions of that Faith. Only those who have freely chosen to enter that community by way of the contract are subject to the laws and ordinances of that community; there is no intention of imposing them on humanity at large.*

## Keywords

authoritarianism  
Baha'i  
covenant  
Enlightenment  
totalitarianism  
voluntarism

A member of a Baha'i community, knowing that ordinances of the Baha'i Faith state that in order to maintain harmony within families parental consent is required before a Baha'i marriage can be performed and that Baha'is are obliged to have Baha'i marriage ceremonies, cannot obtain the consent of one or both parents. The individual, while still believing in the Baha'i revelation, proceeds to marry in a civil ceremony. This individual's national spiritual assembly (NSA) (the national administrative body governing the Baha'i communities within the nation) removes the rights of that person to attend the nineteen-day feast (a Baha'i community gathering that combines both worship and administrative issues for the community), to contribute to the fund, to vote in Baha'i elections and to be elected to any administrative institution. Is that action by the NSA a violation of the right to marry the person of one's choice?<sup>1</sup> Another Baha'i disagrees with a decision of their NSA. They decide to disobey it as an act of civil disobedience and encourage other Baha'is to do the same. Again, that believer loses their right to participate in the administration of the Baha'i community. Is that a violation of the believer's right to free expression? If, in fact, these and similar actions by the governing institutions of the Baha'i Faith are

violations of the human rights and personal freedoms of individuals, then the Baha'i Faith is certainly authoritarian.

'Authoritarianism' is actually a political term. In the political sense it means that the authority or control of the state is to be obeyed without question. It can also mean that those in power are not responsible to the people whom they govern.<sup>2</sup> In this work the term will mean that the rulings and decisions of the institutions of the Baha'i Faith must be unquestioningly obeyed and that there is no recourse for the individual who disagrees with those decisions. A similar term with which it should not be confused is 'totalitarianism'. This is another political expression and means that the control of the state reaches into every aspect of life. That is, there is no sphere of life that is completely private into which the governing authorities have no right to intrude. One aspect of democratic republics that came out of the ideas of the Enlightenment in Europe is that there is a separation between the private and the public spheres of life and that there are individual rights that the state or government cannot infringe.<sup>3</sup> Some of those who claim that the Baha'i Faith is authoritarian confuse that concept with totalitarianism. So clarification needs to be made. There is, in fact, a clear distinction between individual rights and obligations to the community in the Baha'i Faith although the demarcation between the private and the public areas of life, while it occurs in the Baha'i community, is not nearly so clear as it is in the western republican tradition.<sup>4</sup>

A number of countries in the world today are considered to be authoritarian. One example is Singapore. This is because the government tends to punish those who speak out against its authority or those who encourage the questioning of its decisions. However, authoritarianism is never absolute. Generally, there are only certain aspects of law, policy or official behaviour that cannot be criticized. Other countries are considered to be totalitarian. China is a prime example. This is because the state claims the right to regulate some elements of life that are considered entirely private matters in the West, such as the number of children a family can have or the religions that can be joined. Religions can also be authoritarian. Historically, the Catholic Church has been very much so and a number of people have been made to deny their beliefs or be burned as a punishment for disagreement. Galileo is an example of the former; Savonarola is an example of the latter. Some religions are, or have been, totalitarian. One example was a sect in England and America in the 18th and 19th centuries called the Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearance, popularly called 'Shakers'. This sect required members to abstain from marriage, sexual intercourse and liquor and forbade private ownership of property.<sup>5</sup>

Recent Internet postings and academic writings demonstrate a need to examine the level of authoritarianism and totalitarianism within the Baha'i community. As the Baha'i Faith gained ever greater recognition in the West a growing number of liberal critics of that Faith emerged. These critics include non-Baha'is, ex-Baha'is, confirmed Baha'is and Baha'is struggling to understand the consequences of the commitment they have made. The criticisms, for the most part, took one of three forms: personal, political or academic. A number of ex-Baha'is and believers who have had their administrative privileges removed by the elected Baha'i institutions often criticize the Faith as being anachronistic in its laws, tyrannical in their enforcement

and totalitarian in its interest in the personal lives of its members.<sup>6</sup> Among the most censorious of the academics in this group, Hutan Hejazi Martinez, in his PhD dissertation takes Baha'i's to task for a number of their positions and their adherence to the laws of their Faith.<sup>7</sup> Bei Dawei of Hsuan Chuang University in Taiwan also takes the Baha'i's to task for their treatment of 'dissidents', that is, those Baha'i's who reject, in some form, Baha'i laws and ordinances.<sup>8</sup>

Another group feels moved to condemn the tendency of Baha'i individuals and institutions to take so seriously the commands of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha to avoid political involvement. Baha'i's, these critics claim, often find themselves defending very oppressive, autocratic and abusive regimes. Some of these detractors even claim that Baha'i's are hypocritical in denouncing the government of Iran for its persecution of Baha'i's while avoiding condemnation of such regimes as that of Burma (Myanmar) or Saudi Arabia, both of which also have some serious human rights violations.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, many academics, intellectuals, artists and others responsible for educating the public have perceived in the Baha'i Faith an archaic, conservative denial of academic freedom, free expression and a constraint on the development of the critical and rational faculties of humankind.<sup>10</sup> So serious was the censure, that in the last decades of the 20th century, certain Baha'i administrative bodies found it necessary to explain the official position of the Faith on these issues.<sup>11</sup>

In 1988, the Universal House of Justice as the highest institution and supreme authority of the Baha'i Faith issued a brief statement in the form of a letter but published as a pamphlet, spelling out the rights and freedoms in the 'World Order of Bahā'u'llāh'. That statement was a long argument that individual rights are protected by Baha'i law and that freedom has been guaranteed but that those rights and that freedom are not the same as those that are advocated by Enlightenment liberalism.<sup>12</sup> The rights of individuals and the freedoms that they entail are, according to this pamphlet, rights that promote the harmony of the community while condemning any form of tyranny that oppresses individuals.<sup>13</sup> If I understand this correctly, the Enlightenment dichotomy between private and public spheres would end in a Baha'i order while both those spheres would, themselves, be protected. Utilizing authoritative Baha'i scriptures in addition to this pamphlet, one can conceive how this comes about in the Baha'i community and an answer can be given to those who claim that Baha'i institutions are authoritarian and/or totalitarian.

Before doing this, however, it is important to emphasize that Baha'i law applies only to Baha'i's and that only Baha'i's are under the jurisdiction of those administrative institutions that function to enforce that law and sanction those who break their contract<sup>14</sup> by flagrantly disobeying and/or opposing that body of law or by challenging the right of the institution to enforce it. Unlike many other religions or religious persons who insist on imposing or who attempt to inflict their laws and ordinances on those who have not freely chosen to join the community of believers and do not wish to abide by the standards of that community, the Baha'i world has no intention of forcing its beliefs or standards of conduct on those outside the Faith. In fact, the Baha'i international community is a strong advocate of religious freedom at the UN.<sup>15</sup> So, we conclude that Baha'i law, by design of

the founder of the Faith, applies only to Baha'is. Only those who have, by a conscious act, chosen to join the community can be Baha'is.<sup>16</sup>

For this reason alone, I believe we can reject, at least partially, the claim that the Baha'i Faith is authoritarian. Like most religions, it does claim authority and has ordinances that must be obeyed. However, a better term to describe the Baha'i concept of authority would be 'voluntarism'.<sup>17</sup> This Weberian notion is comparable to a social contract in which members freely choose (volunteer) to enter the Baha'i community by declaring their belief in Baha'u'llah as a divinely guided manifestation of the Word of God, his Faith as the latest Revelation from God and the structures he established as the guides in all matters not specifically revealed by himself or his appointed successors. This social contract is not merely an agreement for benefits in this plane of existence. Rather it is believed to be divinely revealed and eternal. For Baha'is, even those who have officially withdrawn from the religion, to claim that the Faith is authoritarian, then, is tantamount to denying their own free-will decision to enter into this contract. Those who have not chosen to enter into that covenant, it should be repeated, are in no way obliged to obey Baha'i laws and ordinances, respect Baha'i institutions or accept the teachings of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdul' Baha.<sup>18</sup> In fact, it would be contrary to one of the purposes of those laws and ordinances if they were forced on the unwilling. Acceptance of those laws and ordinances is one of the tests of the believer and, as Baha'u'llah has taught, tests are the only way to distinguish the 'assured from the doubters among Thy servants'.<sup>19</sup> Obviously an omniscient God would not need such tests to make that distinction. So, willing observance of Baha'i law distinguishes the believers from humanity at large. Enforced observance would not allow for that distinction to be made. Therefore, not only do Baha'is not wish to impose laws and ordinances on those who are not believers, it would be contrary to the purpose of such edicts to do so.

Even for those Baha'is who remain in the community of believers, there are far fewer demands for unconditional obedience than is the case in the more authoritarian religions. This simply means that Baha'u'llah has left much to the 'individual interpretation of truth'. This concept is unique to the Baha'i Faith although liberal interpretations of other religions or sects have moved them toward this idea.<sup>20</sup> For example, within Christianity there is a division between Protestants who accept the authority only of the scriptures (*sola scriptura*) and the Catholics who accept the dual authority of scripture and the church (in the person of the Pope).<sup>21</sup> Both of which, however, leave little opportunity for individuals to interpret truth for themselves. In Islam there is a similar dichotomy between those who accept only the Quran and those who accept the dual authority of the Quran and the Hadith.<sup>22</sup> But again, the idea of individuals interpreting truth for themselves does not occur. In both Christianity and Islam such a teaching would leave the clergy without the authority they require. In the Baha'i Faith there is no clergy between the ultimate authority and the believers.

The effect of this on the members of the Baha'i community is that there are a number of obligations for the individual, the fulfilment of which is so left to personal interpretation that the community can neither require their adherence nor sanction their violation. A few examples will help to demonstrate the absence of authoritarianism within this community. Baha'is

are obliged to pray every day. Each person is free to choose among three obligatory prayers to say. No Baha'i institution or individual, however, can demand that this be done and there will be no negative reaction from the community for those who do not do so. The same sort of individual interpretation applies to the Baha'i Fast. During a nineteen-day period in March each year, Baha'is are obligated to refrain from food and drink between sunrise and sunset. However, again, unlike in some religious groups, there is no community enforcement of this and no sanction for those who choose to not fast. Likewise the community and its institutions leave it to individuals whether or not they will attend the regular service called the 'feast' or contribute to Baha'i funds. These examples are sufficient to demonstrate that the Baha'i community is free from tyranny or oppression when it comes to carrying out the commitments that come with the covenant. This is not because they are considered private matters but rather because they are responsibilities that aid the individual in spiritual development so that if they were forced or controlled by the community, that development would not occur.

Baha'u'llah had made it clear in his revelation that he was not creating an Enlightenment-type liberal religion, although such charges have been made by some Islamic scholars. He said, 'I approve of liberty in some respects and shun it in others.'<sup>23</sup> He also rejected the demarcation of private and public areas of life with his insistence on obedience to the 'Centre of the Covenant' and his successors as well as to the institutions he created for the administration of his Faith.<sup>24</sup> These structures have authority in such matters as marriage, burial and abstaining from partisan politics. This has been the primary source of charges that the Baha'i Faith is totalitarian. Yet even in those areas in which the institutions appear to intrude into the affairs that western peoples have been taught to consider as private, there is room for individual interpretation. In one of his prayers, the Tablet of Ahmad, Baha'u'llah said, 'Whosoever desireth let him turn aside from this counsel and whosoever desireth let him choose the path to his Lord.'<sup>25</sup> There can be no clearer demonstration of voluntarism than that. Yet there are still complaints from those who have chosen to join this community. Some of those who complain find certain Baha'i ordinances not to their liking.

One of these ordinances is, as given in the example above, the requirement to have parental consent before a Baha'i can marry. A Baha'i who violates this ordinance is subject to having all administrative privileges, including the privilege of attending feasts, revoked. However, no one is actually removed from the rolls of the Faith for this violation and there is a process by which the violator can have full and complete privileges reinstated. The removal of administrative privileges is neither revenge nor punishment. It is rather a mechanism to protect the community from the direct influence of a person who regards Baha'i laws to be of secondary importance to other matters. Such a removal of privileges is the only sanction that will occur. If this is totalitarianism, then that term loses its politically pejorative meaning.

The Baha'i institutions, then, do not intrude into those matters that are purely spiritual and in which the individual believer must interpret his responsibilities to the community and to God for himself. There is intervention only

in those matters that affect the community at large. Baha'is who choose to marry outside the process decreed by Baha'u'llah, for example, threaten the confidence and trust of the believers in the covenant and in the structures created to administer that covenant. For this reason, and only for this reason, those structures that hold jurisdiction in the Baha'i Faith reserve to themselves the right to intervene and remove those individuals from participation in the association because they have disregarded the contract by which that association is solidified. In other words, by removing themselves from portions of that contract, individuals remove themselves from the privileges granted by that contract. Yet membership in the community remains and cannot be challenged by any individual believer.

All this demonstrates that what authoritarianism and totalitarianism there is in the Baha'i Faith is minimal and only that level required for the proper functioning of the administration. It is in no way the sort of required obedience found in oppressive or tyrannical governments in the political sphere or religions and cults that exercise complete control over their adherents. The Baha'i Faith in no way fits the pattern of either an authoritarian or a totalitarian institution.

Authoritarianism, however, should not be construed to be the opposite of liberty. That is, while an authoritarian society greatly limits or even prevents liberty, liberty does not necessarily emerge from the absence of authoritarian controls. As quoted above, Baha'u'llah said, 'I approve of liberty in some respects and shun it in others.' Baha'is tend to refer to this statement as a decree to practise moderation in matters of authority and liberty. The problem is, however, that is more like mediocrity than moderation. One does not, for example, avoid the extremes between justice and injustice or truth and falsehood. What is meant by this quote of Baha'u'llah, I suggest, is rather more like the Hegelian notion of a synthesis that includes both extremes rather than avoids them. Thus, true liberty is not a mere middle way or golden mean between excessive liberty (licentiousness) on the one hand and total submission to authority (tyranny) on the other. It must include both sides of the contradiction in a higher unity to truly appropriate and overcome either. In the Hegelian sense it would work this way: licentiousness directly contradicts tyranny. The extreme liberty of licentiousness, in which any person can do anything they want, contradicts the liberty of another person to do what they want. The liberty of one would cause tyranny over others. Authority is needed to limit liberty. But too much authority would become tyranny as those with power would be able to do whatever they want (licentiousness). So, excessive liberty and excessive authority become synthesized in autonomy. Individuals voluntarily place themselves under authority in order to preserve their own liberty and that of others. With autonomy, each person recognizes that unlimited liberty results in a lack of liberty for all, while unlimited authority would lead to a tyranny that also abolishes all liberty. So each person chooses to allow limits to be placed on their behaviour. Autonomy, then, is voluntary. This, I suggest, is what Baha'u'llah means by 'true liberty'.<sup>26</sup>

Probably the most serious charge and the one most difficult to answer, however, is the charge that Baha'i institutions do not permit Baha'i scholars to do serious critical studies of issues in Baha'i administration or history. That they, in fact, stand opposed to academic freedom. It is true that Baha'i

scholars are, at this time in the development of the Faith, obliged to have their works reviewed before publication.<sup>27</sup> It should be noted that this is a temporary measure until the Baha'i teachings are more familiar to the public in general. Obviously, then, the Baha'i Faith does not adhere to the liberal standards of academic freedom and unimpeded scholarly criticism that is advocated and generally accepted by those who teach and do research in western educational institutions. It is not the case, however, that scholarly pursuits are discouraged and that there is no place for critical analysis within the field of Baha'i studies. A number of academic journals are being published currently dealing with virtually the entire area of Baha'i studies and many of these are published by members of that community. A large percentage of the critical articles that fill their pages are written by Baha'is. There are two possible responses, then, to the charge that the Baha'i Faith does not allow for academic freedom in the pursuit of Baha'i studies. The first is that the institutions only reject a scholarly article if it would disseminate wrong information or if it would damage the stability or safety of a Baha'i community. The second is that there is an uneven level of involvement by the various institutions, which reflect the general culture in which those communities are situated.

A statement from the Baha'i administrative institutions dealt with the concerns of Baha'i scholarship and academic freedom in the Faith in a similar way they had dealt with the issues of individual rights and freedoms. This statement, published by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Australia, contains excerpts from the writings of Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice; in other words the central figures and authoritative interpreters of the revelation. According to that statement, the Universal House of Justice called on believers to establish 'a new model of scholarly activity'.<sup>28</sup> In order to provide a rational discussion of the issues involved, I will utilize that document and other Baha'i writings as well as critics of Baha'i scholarship in my evaluation of the situation.

Baha'u'llah has praised, many times over, the acquisition of knowledge and wisdom.<sup>29</sup> Understanding is also of utmost importance.<sup>30</sup> Both knowledge and understanding are impossible without education, which depends on scholarship. This point is made throughout the writings of the Faith.<sup>31</sup> For many Baha'i scholars, then, the problem is this: if scholarship is so highly prized in the Baha'i Faith and if all the central figures and present institutions of the revelation have such high regard for it, why are there restrictions placed on scholarship and why do Baha'i scholars tend to have some difficulties when doing Baha'i studies. One reason, of course, is similar to the problem of liberty and authority already discussed. There is a standard and a method of scholarship accepted in the academic environment that derives from Enlightenment values and which is not necessarily reflective of the values of Baha'is.<sup>32</sup>

Among the key aspects of the standards applied to academic research and publication in western liberal societies is the principle that scholarly submissions for publication should be reviewed only by the peers of the author. The peers are other academicians who work in the same field, usually even in the same area of speciality. The institution of higher education itself, any organization with which that institution is affiliated,

such as a religion or sect, a corporation or any government or governmental agency is required to respect this principle and allow for academic freedom limited only by peer review. This condition is, in itself, deserving of criticism but that is not within the scope of the present work. Another related principle of academic freedom accepted in western liberal tertiary institutions of learning is that no faculty member of a college or university is to be sanctioned for anything they publish except, again, by their peers or by faculty review committees, which amount to the same thing. Since Baha'i institutions insist on a review of any article on the Baha'i Faith authored by Baha'i scholars, they are considered by liberal academicians to be authoritarian.<sup>33</sup>

There are, of course, different levels of authoritarian control over scholarly writings by the various Baha'i institutions. Some scholars, for example, have noticed that the British National Spiritual Assembly will allow more freedom of academic expression than will the National Assembly of the United States.<sup>34</sup> This may be because of the more conservative social values in the United States and the fact that it is not desirable to provide fundamentalists of other religions with more means by which to oppose the Baha'i revelation. However that may be, there is also the fact that the Baha'i institutions that administer scholarly writings are less concerned with preventing criticism of themselves than with preventing the exposure of Baha'i's to danger from those who oppose the Faith or with preventing the dissemination of false information. There is also the danger of Baha'i's publishing materials that would be damaging to the reputation or person of other Baha'i's if they were allowed full freedom of expression.<sup>35</sup>

More importantly, as Paul Lample has argued, Baha'i values differ from current academic values. He said,

The culture of learning that is emerging is characterized by dialogue rather than debate, by constructive experience at the grassroots level rather than elaborate planning from the top, by systematization rather than freneticism, by reflective refinement rather than derogatory criticism. It has proven effective in resolving longstanding challenges that paralyzed the progress of the community.<sup>36</sup>

There is, then, a new model of education that Baha'i's are encouraged to establish over time. This model would not include, for example, classes in comparative religion as are conducted in universities as this would lead to the establishment of a class of scholars who might claim some sort of authority based on some scholarly qualification.<sup>37</sup> This demonstrates another reason for academic review. It also indicates that current standards of critical analysis are inappropriate to the Baha'i revelation.

As indicated by Lample's statement quoted above, among other dangers are those of involving the Baha'i community in partisan politics which might be detrimental to its freedom to organize, propagate and expand the Faith in some countries as well as endangering the lives, liberty and property of individual believers from hostile governments.<sup>38</sup> This may be another reason for the requirement of Baha'i scholars to have their works reviewed by institutions of the Faith but it does not vindicate the claim of the Universal House of Justice that the Baha'i Faith offers a higher standard for scholarship. That vindication must be sought elsewhere. The present standards of

peer review alone as the basis of quality and the use of argumentation as the accepted method are not standards that are difficult to surpass. With its emphasis on publishing regardless of quality and its atmosphere of conflict and competition for the promotion of ideas, academia, especially western academia, has already degraded the quality of scholarly work, turning it into a mere commodity. The Baha'i virtues of intellectual honesty and a sincere search for better understanding of phenomena are the bases of a higher standard.<sup>39</sup> To have a work reviewed by peers who have a proprietary interest in the subject, who share a concern with the author in maintaining that interest and keeping the knowledge from the general public in order to maintain their elitist position and who retain that interest and that concern by utilizing a specialized terminology designed to perpetuate the appearance rather than the substance of knowledge, often results neither in intellectual honesty nor a humble search for understanding but rather the opposite.<sup>40</sup> Further, it may lead to a breakdown in understanding which follows from the Baha'i teaching that 'The knowledge of such sciences ... should be acquired as can profit the peoples of the earth, and not those which begin with words and end with words.'<sup>41</sup> (A good example, in my view, of this sort of 'science' is found in the work of Jacques Derrida as well as other 'post-structuralist' and 'postmodernist' scholarship.)

There are, then, good reasons for Baha'i institutions involving themselves in the three areas of life: marriage and sexuality, political participation and academic work, those that have been evaluated here. The most adequate description of the role of the individual believer within the Baha'i community is the Weberian notion of voluntarism. That is, it is by a conscious act of will that one becomes a Baha'i. By exercising that act of will, the believer accepts the consequences of that act. If, however, they choose to not accept those consequences, they have denied their own freedom. This is a better explanation of the authority that the community and its institutions have over the individual than any idea of authoritarian control or totalitarian dominance. Individuals have placed themselves under that authority of Baha'i institutions. The authority has not been forced on any individual.

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## Endnotes

1. This example was chosen by way of introduction because of the number of Baha'is who have lost their administrative rights or chosen to leave the community because of this marriage issue. This is also mentioned by Moojan Momen, 'Marginality and Apostasy in the Baha'i Community', *Religion*, 37, 2007, 191.
2. See, for example, Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology*, New York: Bedmeister Press, 1968, 112–16.
3. For example, Locke. See John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and a Letter Concerning Toleration*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.
4. The Baha'i administrative institutions will not intrude into violations of Baha'i laws that are kept private. Baha'is who choose to drink alcoholic beverages alone in the privacy of their homes are not to be admonished. Only if they publicly do so and damage the image of the Faith or the community will action be taken. Universal House of Justice, *Messages: 1968–1973*, Wilmette, IL, Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1998, 6; See also Compilations, NSA USA, *Developing Distinctive Baha'i Communities*, 23, Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated May 19, 1994, to a National Spiritual Assembly; and Momen, Marginality 189.
5. For a good, concise history of the Shakers, see Stephen J. Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America: A History of the United Society of Believers*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.
6. A few examples are found on the Internet, some instances are: Larry Rowe, 'The liberal-conservative dynamic within the Baha'i Faith', at <http://newsgroups.derkeiler.com/Archive/Talk/talk.religion.bahai/2005-08/msg01342.html> (accessed 1 October 2010); Frederick Glaysher, 'The Baha'i Faith and Religious Freedom of Conscience', at [http://www.fglaysher.com/bahai censorship/apostates\\_takfir.htm](http://www.fglaysher.com/bahai censorship/apostates_takfir.htm) (accessed 2 October 2011); and M. Alan Kazlev, 'Baha'i Authoritarianism', at <http://www.kheper.net/topics/religion/Bahai.htm> (accessed 5 October 2011). An excellent letter, very well argued, has been written by ex-Baha'i Mr Dann May (an adjunct professor. It was published on the Internet at [http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Baha%27i\\_Faith](http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Baha%27i_Faith) (accessed 27 January 2011). According to Momen, (Marginality 196) it was the Internet which was most responsible for disseminating the criticisms of the liberal opponents. One of Momen's examples, Eric Stetson, actually accuses the Baha'i administration of being 'authoritarian'. His example of Juan Cole's accusation that the Baha'i administration is 'dictatorial and controlling' is more of a claim that it is 'totalitarian' (Marginality 196–7).
7. Hutan Hejazi Martinez, 'Baha'ism: History, Transfiguration, Doxa', PhD thesis, Rice University, 2011 available at <http://scholarship.rice.edu/handle/1911/61990> (accessed 4 November 2011), 100–21. Proquest publication No. 3421441.
8. Bei Dawei, 'Baha'i and Subud dissent: Developments in the 2000's', paper presented at the 2011 CESNUR Conference 'New Religion in a Globalized East: Taiwan, Southeast Asia, the World', co-organized by Aletheia University, ISAR (Institute for the Study of American Religion), and the International Association for the Study of New Religions, Aletheia University, Danshui (Taipei), Taiwan, 21–23 June 2011. <http://www.cesnur.org/2011/dan-dawei.doc> (accessed 4 November 2011).
9. I have been among this group and presented a paper on it at the first Baha'i Studies Conference at Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 2000. I did not publish that paper because of the criticism it drew from some Baha'is. However, the abstract was published in the proceedings. See 'Liberation Ethics and the Baha'i Faith', in *Proceedings of First International Conference on Bahá'í Studies*, Jerusalem: Hebrew University and Landegg Academy, 2000.
10. These criticisms are usually much more articulate and academically oriented than those cited above. One of the best of these critics is Juan Cole. A good example of his critical writing is 'Fundamentalism in the U.S. Baha'i Community', *Religious Studies Review*, 43(3) (March 2002), 195–217. Cole is also a critic of the Baha'i position of non-involvement in politics. (See his autobiographical notes, <http://www.juancole.com/toward-an-authorized-biography>). The letter by Professor May cited above also makes these charges.
11. Universal House of Justice, *Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1989.
12. *ibid* 3–4, 11.

13. *ibid* 8.
14. I am not referring here to what Baha'i's call 'covenant breakers'; that is an official designation and no individual has the right to declare a person a 'covenant breaker'. I refer only to those who knowingly and willingly disregard Baha'i laws or institutions.
15. See <http://bic.org/search?SearchableText=religious+freedom> and <http://bic.org/resources/documents/global-dialogue-for-the-promotion-of-a-culture-of> for statements on the Baha'i position on religious freedom and tolerance. (accessed 3 January 2012).
16. This is what the Universal House of Justice means by 'spirit of the Baha'i order'. Baha'i's are to see acceptance of the institutions and adherence to Baha'i law as a privilege for believers, not as an imposition.
17. The idea is derived from Weber's works. He gives various aspects of it in different works. For the most complete idea of voluntarism see Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. T. Parsons, New York: Scribners, 1958, 17, 26; "Objectivity" in Social Science and Social Policy', in E. Shills and H. Finch (eds), *The Methodology of Social Sciences*, New York: Free Press, 1949, 57, 84.
18. As to what will happen if or when the Baha'i Faith becomes the official world religion, as Baha'i's believe will happen in the future, I cannot predict. However, there are protections against tyranny or forced conversion while there are provisions for the protection of the community extended to Baha'i's and non-Baha'i's alike.
19. Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974, 9.
20. Moojan Momen, 'Fundamentalism and Liberalism: towards an understanding of the dichotomy', *Bahá'í Studies Review*, 2(1), 1992, also available online at [http://bahai-library.com/bsr/bsr02/22\\_momen\\_fundamentalism.htm](http://bahai-library.com/bsr/bsr02/22_momen_fundamentalism.htm) (accessed 3 December 2010).
21. *ibid*.
22. *ibid*.
23. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976, 36.
24. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-I-Aqdas*, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992, 63. Also see in same work the explanation by Shoghi Effendi, 13.
25. Bahá'u'lláh, 'Tablet of Ahmad', *Bahá'í Prayers*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2002, 309.
26. This seems to be indicated in *Individual Rights*, 8.
27. Barney Leith, 'Bahá'í Review: Should the "Red Flag" Law be Repealed', *Bahá'í Studies Review*, 5(1), 1995, 27–35. Also, Momen, Marginality, 203.
28. Universal House of Justice, *Scholarship*, Mona Vale, NSW: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1995, back cover.
29. See, for example. *Aqdas*, 51–52, 171–73.
30. For example, Shoghi Effendi, in a letter to an individual believer, quoted in *Scholarship*, 14.
31. This is demonstrated throughout all the quoted writings in *Scholarship*.
32. Paul Lample, *Revelation and Social Reality: Learning to Translate What is Written into Reality*, West Palm Beach, FL: Palabra, 2009, 125.
33. See Momen, Marginality 203 for a discussion of this. Again, it must be noted that this is a temporary measure.
34. Juan Cole noticed this, see his work cited above, 199–201. Compare also a publication like *Dialogue* (an American published journal) with one like *Bahá'í Studies Review* (a British published journal).
35. This is extremely important as the Baha'i teachings forbid any sort of calumny or character assassination. See for example Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970, 10.
36. Paul Lample, 'Learning and the Evolution of the Bahá'í Community', plenary talk given to the 32nd annual conference of the Association of Bahá'í Studies-North America, 29 August to 1 September 2008, 2, at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/11057068/Learning-and-the-Evolution-of-the-Bahai-Community-Paul-Lample> (accessed 5 January 2012).

37. Universal House of Justice, Letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia, dated 4 January 2009, at <http://messagesbahaiworldcentre.blogspot.com/2009/12/4-january-2009-universal-house-of.html> (accessed 5 January 2012).
38. Universal House of Justice, 'Ridvan Message to the Bahá'ís of the World', in *Scholarship*, 40. See also Lample, *Evolution* 16–17.
39. Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976, 87–88.
40. This is similar to the groups of scholars who claim special authority that the Universal House of Justice (fn. 37 above) warns against.
41. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982, 51–52.

# Translations

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## The Brutal Slashing to Death of Dr Berjis

By Nasser Mohajer Translated by Ahang Rabbani<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

*A wealth of literature has attested to the recrudescence of state- and clerical-sponsored religious intolerance and persecution of the Iranian Baha'i religious minority since the more than three decades of the Iranian Islamic revolution in 1979. Persecution during the Pahlavi regime is more sparsely documented. The following is an annotated translation of an article by Nasser Mohajer of the grim circumstances surrounding the brutal killing of Baha'i physician Sulayman Berjis (1897–1950) by a gang of religious fanatics and the uncivil indifference and abortive trial of justice that followed.*

### Keywords

Sulayman Berjis  
Ayatollah Burujirdi  
Kashan  
'Abdu'l-Karim Turbati  
Fada'iyan-i Islam  
Navvab Safavi

### Translator's foreword

### Historical background

Throughout its history, the Baha'i community of Iran has undergone repeated cycles of persecution of varying intensity.<sup>2</sup> The Baha'is of Iran have never enjoyed full liberty to practise their religion, and have suffered concentrated and widespread economic and social exclusion. Countless Baha'is have been executed, thousands have suffered arbitrary imprisonment, and many smaller Baha'i communities in Iran have experienced pogroms. Another recurring aspect of anti-Baha'i campaigns has been the confiscation and destruction of Baha'i property, including holy sites, cemeteries, personal property, and community institutions. In Shiraz, the house occupied by the Bab, one of the Baha'i community's most sacred religious icons, and a site of obligatory pilgrimage for future Baha'is, has been demolished on several occasions, and was finally erased from existence in 1979 by agents of the country's Islamic Republic. All of these waves of persecution have been carried out with the support of national judicial, administrative, and law enforcement structures.

The Baha'i community has suffered most severely when clerical influence in national affairs has been strongest. The 1950s witnessed organized anti-Baha'i campaigns resulting in mob violence, the destruction of religious sites, and the formation of secretive anti-Baha'i organizations, approved and assisted by the senior clerical leadership of Iran.<sup>3</sup> The propaganda used to cultivate and justify social persecution created negative stereotypes that continue to have repercussions to the present day. Many clerics who gained an influential public voice during these campaigns later obtained powerful positions in the post-1979 Islamic Republic.

### ***The Babi-Baha'i community of Kashan***

The Babi movement was first brought to Kashan in the summer of 1844 by Mulla Husayn Bushru'i, the first disciple of the Bab. Three years later, the Bab passed through the town on the way to exile in Azerbaijan and stayed for three days, 20–23 March 1847, as the guest of a Babi merchant, Haji Mirza Jani.<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, a robust Babi community was established in Kashan. When important Babi leaders were living in Baghdad in the 1850s, a number of the Babis of Kashan went there, either for visits or to join Baha'u'llah's growing party.

Moojan Momen notes:

The Baha'i community in the Kashan area grew gradually with a number of conversions from among the people of the town and also in such villages as Naraq, Jushqan, Nushabad, Qamsar and Mazgan during the time of Baha'u'llah and in Aran and Yazdil during the time of 'Abdu'l-Baha. ... A large number of the Jews of Kashan also became Baha'is; among them several notable families, the Mithaqiyih, Rayhani, Yusifiyan and Mutahhidih families ... Mirza 'Abdu'r-Rahim Khan, a Baha'i of Kashan, was Kalantar of Tehran for a time.

Kashan was also an important center [sic] for the diffusion of the Baha'i Faith. It was from Kashan that Aqa Muhammad-Javad and Aqa Muhammad-Baqir moved to Hamadan and thus established the Baha'i community there. In addition, they began the conversions of Jews in Hamadan. It was also in Kashan that the first Zoroastrian to become a Baha'i converted. The first Zoroastrian convert has been variously named as Mihraban Bahman and Kaykhusraw Khudadad. It is agreed however that he became a believer in Kashan. He was instrumental in the conversion of another Zoroastrian, Mulla Bahram, who went on to Yazd and began the large number of conversions that occurred in that town.<sup>5</sup> (There had also been a conversion of a Zoroastrian in Kashan in the time of the Bab ...).

There were a number of persecutions of the Baha'i community in Kashan. In 1282 AH/1865, Shaykh Abu'l-Qasim Mazgani was executed by the governor. In 1290 AH/1873, there was a general uprising against the Baha'is of Naraq. But in general, some of the leading 'ulama of this area were inclined to protect the Baha'is; in particular, Mulla Muhammad Mujtahid Naraqi, who was the uncle of Mirza Kamalu'd-Din Naraqi and had met Mulla Husayn Bushru'i. ...<sup>6</sup>

### ***Nasser Mohajer's article***

Mohajer is a renowned scholar, researcher and intellectual, and presently lives in Europe (he has no affiliation with the Baha'i community).<sup>7</sup> His enlightening research article appeared in the journal *Baran*, no. 19 and 20, Spring and Summer 1387 [2008], pp. 10–24, under the title, 'Kard-Ajin Kardan Doctor Berjis', and is offered below in translation with the kind permission of the author. In this article, the erudite author has placed the events surrounding the brutal killing of Dr Berjis in the broader perspective of prevailing anti-Baha'i proclivities in 20th-century Iran.

All endnotes are by the author, unless otherwise noted. Sub-headings and comments in parentheses ( ) are by the author, while clarifying remarks in square brackets [ ] are by the translator. Most names and Persian

terms have been transliterated in accordance with academic standards, except for some commonly recognized names, such as Ayatollah Khomeini, which have been given in their popular rendering. All dates are in Iranian solar reckoning, and the Gregorian equivalents are provided in the format consistent with the other articles in this edition of *Baha'i Studies Review*.

## Translation

### Abstract

*I had seen the name of Dr Berjis previously and had read that he had been a victim of fanatical Shi'ite orthodoxy in Iran prior to the coup d'état of 28 Murdad 1332 [19 August 1953].<sup>8</sup> However, I did not know anything about his personal background, or the manner of his killing, or the identity of those who caused the death of this Baha'i physician of Jewish descent. I only knew that Dr Berjis was one of the leading figures of the Baha'i community of Kashan who was killed in the same town.*

*In reading Jamih-yi Aludih dar Aftab, the memoirs of Muhammad-Taqi Damghani, who was a member of the board of directors of Iran's bar association prior to the Bahman 1357 [February 1979] revolution,<sup>9</sup> I came across several pages on this heinous crime, which caused me to become even more curious about this issue. This interest stemmed particularly from the following remark in that book:*

*Tehran's Criminal Court, which was composed of five high-ranking judges, voted to dismiss charges against the four individuals who had unequivocally confessed to committing the murder [of Dr Berjis] – a confession that was written and signed in their own hand and offered freely and without any pressure.<sup>10</sup>*

*I sensed that this event, which remains most disturbing from every perspective, and which according to the late Damghani marked 'a shameful page in Iran's (modern) judiciary', was a clear and indisputable case of anti-Baha'i tendencies in our land, and an instance of how the Baha'is were denied civil rights, under both the monarchy and the Islamic Republic.<sup>11</sup>*

*These thoughts compelled me to start researching this incident and to scrutinize and complete the valuable report of the late Damghani, who at the time of this occurrence was the chief prosecutor in Kashan's judiciary.*

*What is presented below is the result of this study and research.*

### Part 1

Sulayman Berjis's ancestry was rooted in Hamadan. His forefather, Hakim ['physician'] Ya'qub, the Shamsu'l-Hukama, was a well-known Jew of that city who had migrated to Kashan, though the date of this move is not known. However, we know that medicine was the ancestral profession of this family and Musa, Yaqub's son and Sulayman's father, was engaged in this occupation as well.<sup>12</sup> We also know that Hakim Ya'qub was 'among the renowned Jewish families of Kashan who became Baha'i and established an affluent and large family'.<sup>13</sup>

The Baha'i faith had developed roots and foundations in Kashan and villages surrounding it, particularly in Aran, Jushqan and Qamsar.<sup>14</sup> This was because Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad the Bab came to this town [Kashan] in 1262 AH [1846] and stayed for two nights in the home of Haji Mirza

Jani Kashi,<sup>15</sup> who later sacrificed his life in the path of the Babi movement and composed the *Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*, which remains to this day one of the finest sources for learning about the wellspring of this movement. ‘Later, divisions and differences appeared among the followers of the Bab. The Baha’i creed selected Kashan and Qamsar as the center of their teaching efforts, and established a school named Vahdat-Bashar.’<sup>16 17</sup> In 1300 [1921], they also established a school named Ma’rafat, exclusively for the Baha’is.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, it appears that in that region, particularly in villages, the Baha’i faith gained adherents mostly among the Jews and Zoroastrians.<sup>19</sup>

After the passage of the Birth Registration Law (Khurdad 1304 [June 1925]) by the fifth Parliament, requiring each Iranian to have a surname, the family of Hakim Ya’qub adopted the last name Berjis. This family had a role in spreading knowledge of the Baha’i teachings, and Muzaffar Berjis established children’s classes in Kashan at which ‘he would teach the *Kitab Durusu'l-Diyanih* from memory’.<sup>20</sup>

Sulayman Berjis was born to this family in 1276 [1897]. In his childhood he was immersed in the Baha’i moral code, and was educated at the Vahdat-Bashar School. Afterwards, he went to Tehran, where he enrolled as a medical student.<sup>21</sup> His devotion to the Baha’i faith and his efforts to improve the condition of his co-religionists led in 1307 [1928] to him being elected to the Spiritual Assembly of Kashan. He often served as chairman of this local assembly, and it is said that ‘in most years he was a delegate from Kashan to the National Convention of the Baha’is of Iran. Among the faithful and wronged believers of that region, none exerted greater efforts in the teaching and promulgation work than he [Dr Berjis].’<sup>22</sup> To meet the needs of the beneficial teaching work of the Baha’i faith in Iran, he had deeply studied Islamic theology and ‘had memorized a number of Traditions and verses of the Qur’an’.<sup>23</sup>

Until 16 Dey 1328 [6 January 1950], that is, a month before his death, he worked for the Ministry of Health and was considered ‘one of the most competent physicians in Kashan’.<sup>24</sup> ‘However, due to administrative reasons, he resigned his post on that date and commenced private practice.’<sup>25</sup> The ‘administrative reasons’ could not have been reaching retirement age, since at that time he was only 54 years old. Regarding this, *Ahang Badi*, the journal of the Baha’i youth of Tehran, has an insightful comment:

Towards the end of his life, his deep devotion to the teaching work seriously interfered with his work and practice; in truth, other than those who sought medical service for free, very few others came to his office.<sup>26</sup>

Dr Berjis also had a pharmacy at which ‘most of the patients who could not afford payment were seen for free, and also their medication was given to them at no cost ... He would even go so far to give money to poor patients, and for this reason he was esteemed and famed throughout that town.’<sup>27</sup> Other than the prejudiced Shi’ites, everyone has testified to the abundance of his good deeds and the lustre of his good name, including Muhammad-Taqi Damghani:

Dr Berjis was a distinguished and beloved physician who was universally admired. When he learned that his skills were needed, without regard for

distance he would grab his physician's bag and go visit the patients, and would not ask for payment.<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, we can picture him on the morning of Friday 14 Bahman 1328 [3 February 1950], 'with his kind smile, loving countenance ... and wearing his white garment',<sup>29</sup> he could not refuse the request and the plea of 'Abbas Tavasuli and 'Ali Naqipur, who implored him, 'Doctor, we earnestly entreat you to come and see our sick one. He is very ill. Please trouble yourself and come to see him.'<sup>30</sup>

'His kind and compassionate heart, with refined emotions that was profoundly grieved by every negative incident, and which would be deeply moved over every suffering human being'<sup>31</sup> could not decline the plea of these two youths who appeared helpless, and he was compelled to prefer attending to this imaginary patient to seeing the seven, eight or ten patients who were awaiting him in his office.<sup>32</sup>

## Part 2

At the time of this murder, Muhammad-Taqi Damghani (1304–77 [1925–98]) was on a hunting trip in the fields surrounding Kashan. Forty-five years after this heinous event, he wrote:

I do not remember the exact date of that occurrence ... suffice it to say that it was in the autumn of 1329 [1951]. It was a pleasant and vivifying Friday ... near noon. At some distance, I saw two policemen coming ... and by moving their heads and waving their hands and shouting and screaming they wanted to attract my attention ...

[They said,] 'Your honour judge, they have killed Dr Berjis. There is no inspector or prosecutor in town. His honour the chief of the judiciary has said that in their absence, the only trustworthy judge for adjudicating on this matter is you.'

[I asked,] 'Who are his murderers? Have any of the killers been apprehended?'

[The policemen responded,] 'Yes, indeed your honour judge. The killers belong to the Fada'iyan-i Islam [Devotees of Islam] Society.<sup>33</sup> There are four of them. They have presented themselves and are currently sitting in the police station waiting for you to come and commence the investigation. Dr Berjis's corpse is presently at the location where he was killed. The medical examiner is waiting on your instructions so that the burial certificate can be issued.'

... The distance was short. Within half an hour we reached the police station. The leader of the murderous gang was known as Rasuli. He was a dye and silk salesman in the bazaar, and had a narrow chin and henna-dyed beard. His accomplices were three others who had only recently come of age, and they had a shadow of soft down on their cheeks. They were all sitting quietly in the office of the station chief, murmuring prayers and occasionally uttering a blessing on the Prophet.

The station chief, his deputy, police officers and several officers from the Intelligence [Ministry] were all puzzled and perplexed. Some were visibly shaken and were soundless sitting here and there. The entire police station was enveloped in a state of gloom and despair ...

I commenced the interrogation of the [four] accused ... Without the least hesitation or threat, they readily and openly confessed to the killing. Each of them claimed that he had not inflicted the first cut, but rather the four of them had attacked concurrently, and while uttering 'Allah-u-Akbar' they had meted out blows upon their victim.

It was clear that they were careful to portray this killing as a *lawth*.<sup>34</sup> In this regard, they had received detailed instructions ...

I asked them, 'Why did you kill Dr Berjis?' In one voice they said, 'He was an infidel and made efforts to derail Muslims from the straight path.'

I said, 'He was a kind and charitable man. He was a competent physician and protector of the weak.'

They responded, 'He did all of this to cause waywardness in Muslims. He wanted to plant the seeds of hypocrisy and division in Muslim society. He would teach people how to enter the Baha'i sect.' They added, 'In accordance with the *fatwa* [religious ruling] of the most learned 'ulama of this age, we had a religious duty to murder this person, and have only carried out our religious duty.'

However, they would not say specifically who had issued such a religious ruling.<sup>35</sup>

Two points should be corrected in the testimony/memoirs of the late Muhammad-Taqi Damghani, and two points should be further investigated. First, the killing of Dr Sulayman Berjis took place on 14 Bahman 1328 [3 February 1950], and not on an autumn day in 1329 [1951]. Second, the murderous ringleader, who along with others had been awaiting the arrival of 'Abbas Tavasuli and 'Ali Naqipur so that they could carry out their preconceived plan by murdering Dr Berjis with daggers, was Muhammad Rasulzadih and not Rasuli. The *Kayhan* newspaper of Monday 17 Bahman 1328 [6 February 1950] states that he was 31 years old at the time of this crime and his accomplices were 16 to 20 years old.

Furthermore, the suggestion that Rasulzadih and his accomplices were members of the *Fada'iyan-i Islam* Society which Damghani inferred on the strength of comments by the police officers in Kashan, is a mistake, although there have been people who have deliberately tried to present this theory as a fact. One such person was 'Ali Davani who, based on a proclamation disseminated shortly after the 1357 [1979] Islamic Republic revolution, wrote:

After Shahrivar 1320,<sup>36</sup> when the religious group *Fada'iyan-i Islam* was formed, a number of brave youth and holy-warrior Muslims joined this society in Tehran and some other cities. A branch of this organization was also formed in the religious and knowledge-nurturing town of Kashan. The members of this group, who were led by Haji Muhammad Rasulzadih, relying on the religious edict of the late Ayatollah Gharavi, killed several members of the wayward Baha'i sect in Kashan on the charge of waging war against God and His Prophet and causing corruption on earth. These Baha'is were the Fifth Column of colonialism and Zionism, and through their open activities were making matters difficult for the Muslims.

Among those killed was the leader of the Baha'is, Sulayman Berjis, a Jew who had become Baha'i. This brave act of the Fada'iyan-i Islam, through the leadership of Ayatollah Gharavi, resulted in a strong response by the government of that time. That is, the instigators of the killing, who had identified themselves and had confessed to their deed as an Islamic revolutionary act, were seized and imprisoned, and Ayatollah Gharavi was banished from Kashan. At first, Ayatollah Gharavi was supposed to be exiled to a remote location in the country, but through the efforts of the late Ayatollah Siyyid Abu'l-Qasim Kashani, Ayatollah Gharavi was sent to Tehran and forced to stay there.<sup>37</sup>

The untruths and half-truths in this account regarding the murder and the murderers of Dr Berjis are also reflected in a reference in the *Islamic Encyclopedia*, and will be examined later in this study.

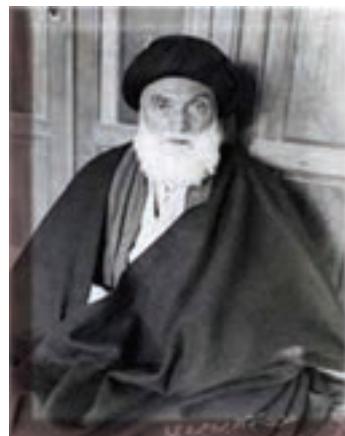
### Part 3

The four fanatical Shi'ites who had slain Dr Berjis had said to Muhammad-Taqi Damghani, 'In accordance with the *fatwa* [religious ruling] of the most learned 'ulama of this age, we were religiously bound to murder this person (Dr Sulayman Berjis), and have only carried out our religious duty.'

The foremost 'ulama and the object of emulation by the Shi'ites at that time was Ayatollah Haji Aqa Husayn Burujirdi (1254-1340 [1875-1961]), and not Ayatollah Gharavi (1275-1357 [1896-1978]), who did not enjoy an exalted rank in the Shi'ite clerical hierarchy of that time and was living in the desolate town of Kashan.

By contrast, Ayatollah Burujirdi ranked as the chief jurist of the Shi'ite world and was the most eminent religious scholar at the Qum seminary school, which during his tenure became the seat and focal point of the Shi'ite clerical establishment.<sup>38</sup>

It was he who designated anti-Baha'i activities as one of the ceaseless duties of Shi'ite jurists, and who sent young seminarians to all parts of the nation 'for the purpose of teaching the principles of the religion and Islamic culture and combating the enemies of Islamic beliefs, such as the wayward Baha'i sect'.



Ayatollah Haji Aqa Husayn Burujirdi

One of his students, Ayatollah Husayn-'Ali Montazari has written in this regard:<sup>39</sup>

The late Ayatollah Burujirdi was extremely anti-Baha'i ... I asked Ayatollah Burujirdi about social associations, trades, commerce and business dealings with Baha'is, and in response, he wrote:

In His Exalted Name. It is incumbent upon all Muslims to end associations, relationships and dealings with this sect [Baha'is]. ...

At that time, I gathered representatives from every class, creed and stratum of Najaf-Abad, and each proclaimed against the Baha'is. For instance, the bakers wrote, 'We will not sell bread to the Baha'is.' The taxi-drivers wrote, 'We will not permit Baha'is in our cabs.' ... In short, our work was so effective that a taxi ride between Najaf-Abad and Isfahan which had previously cost one tuman, could not be had for 50 tumans by a Baha'i no matter how much he pleaded.<sup>40</sup>

In 'combating' the Baha'is, Ayatollah Burujirdi considered killing and spilling their blood as being religiously sanctioned and permissible. Ayatollah Ahmad-'Ali Ahmadi-Shahrudi, who was also one of Burujirdi's students, has openly stated this point:

At that time (the years 1326-29 [1947-50]), the Baha'is had come to have enormous powers in Iran, to the point that they openly taught their religion ... Unlike others who were silent over this situation, Ayatollah Burujirdi was exerting efforts to destroy them ... He appointed me, Aqa (Husayn-'Ali) Montazeri, Aqa ('Ali) Mishkini and a few other friends to go to the region of Faridan [and] Khansar<sup>41</sup> and teach against the Baha'is. In this regard, he wrote a separate instruction for each of us ...

Together (with Montazeri), we went before Ayatollah Burujirdi, and found Shaykh Mustafa Khansari sitting before Burujirdi. Ayatollah Burujirdi said to us, 'Go and kill them (the Baha'is)! If you can, kill them. Kill them and be assured.'<sup>42</sup>

Prior to our mission to Faridan, for three years Ahmadi-Shahrudi had 'migrated' to Abadeh (near Shiraz), which is one of the towns in Fars with a Baha'i community. As the representative of Ayatollah Burujirdi in Abadeh, he had launched 'significant and sustained attacks against the wayward and the people of heresy' and it is said that 'he had achieved certain victories in this effort and succeeded in returning many of the wayward to the fold and to the bosom of Islam'.<sup>43</sup>

He himself describes it thus:

After returning (from Abadeh), his exalted person [Ayatollah Burujirdi] entrusted several more missions to me. On behalf of that source of emulation, I went and lived in such towns as Firuz-Kuh, Chahr-Mahal Bakhtiyari, Faridan and Daran in the province of Isfahan, and Vadghan, one of the villages of Kashan, where the Baha'i leaders had congregated and from where they would teach and diffuse [the Baha'i faith]. In Vadghan, I arranged for a discussion and question and answer meeting.

The result of these efforts was that many repented and returned to the bosom of Islam. Subsequently one of the Baha'i leaders by the name of Dr Berjis was slain by Muslim hands, whereupon that deceived, tiny group was weakened and destroyed.<sup>44</sup>

Vadghan is an ancient village situated 48 kilometres north-west of Kashan. 'Its people were either devoted mosque-goers or were anti-mosque-going. Everyone belonged to a group ... and would exert efforts to strengthen that group.'<sup>45</sup> Among these groups was the Baha'i community, of whom it was said that they had 'influence' in town as well.<sup>46</sup>

Considering the distance of Vadghan from Kashan, and the difficulties and problems that confronted fanatical Muslims in this non-fanatical village, it is unlikely that Ahmadi-Shahrudi would have had the means to plan the killing of Dr Berjis in such a location, and to organize and execute such a scheme. Moreover, he himself has spoken vaguely about this incident and has referred to this murder as the 'result' and 'subsequent' to a question and answer meeting he conducted to promote anti-Baha'i ideas among 'mosque-going elements' in the village.

The claim of this cleric and his supporters in the Islamic Republic party, especially some 30 years after Dr Berjis's death and during the rule of the Islamic Republic, must be seen as evidence of internal competition among the clerics and in the light of rivalries between various Shi'ite factions. That is, it is part of the post-revolutionary effort by each faction to manufacture and create evidence of bravery and foresight for their chosen leaders, so that their faction would gain in comparison to competing parties.

The true instigator of this heinous crime was 'Abdu'l-Karim Turbati, who was among the 'well-known pulpit preachers' and famed sermon-reciters of Qum. He was among the close companions and trusted friends of Ayatollah Burujirdi, and was the primary 'spokesperson and speaker' for the Shi'ite clerical establishment during that period, which had selected combating communism and giving expression to their deep-rooted hatred of the Baha'is as their two principal social and political goals.<sup>47</sup>

Prior to this bloody incident, Turbati journeyed to Kashan several times. Each time he spoke most abusively and slanderously about the Baha'is during meetings of the Anjuman Tablighat-i Islami.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, during his talks he fuelled enmity among various factions and incited the religious fanaticism and fervour of his Muslim audience.

He enrolled a number of members of the Anjuman into a new group called Haybat Du'at Islami [The Islamic Missionary Society],<sup>49</sup> aimed at combating 'wayward and polytheistic persons'.<sup>50</sup>

## Part 4

The schemes of Turbati the preacher were not hidden from the worried eyes of the Baha'is of Kashan. They knew him as a 'mischief-making and foul-mouthed akhund' who had a chequered career in 'inciting fires of sedition and enmity' and

... from pulpit-top would openly and explicitly ... provoke and deceive Muslims, and would refer to all the believers [i.e. Baha'is] as morally corrupt people,

whose blood could be shed with impunity. He would speak the most bewildering slanders against these wronged ones [i.e. Baha'is], and raise his cry through several public speakers installed so that his voice would reach far and near ... and he would exert all in his might and power in deceiving and inciting a closed-minded population steeped in ignorance and superstition.

This all stemmed from the people's belief that he had 'repeatedly promoted burning homes in Kashan and caused arson', and had 'provoked and incited some preachers of Kashan, and ... also had prepared the population for important undertakings'. On numerous occasions, the Local Spiritual Assembly [of the Baha'is of Kashan] had written to the police chief and warned of the unchecked and inflammatory activities of Turbati the preacher.<sup>51</sup>

Ruhu'llah Mehrabkhani, who was the conduit of 'friendship and cooperation' between the spiritual assembly of this town and Colonel Fatimi, the chief of police, has testified that shortly before that bloody incident,

... for the last time, ... I warned him (meaning, Colonel Fatimi) candidly and explicitly of the dire and severe consequences of such inattention and negligence by describing how such attacks start with words and end with a terrible ending. However, Fatimi's response was the same as always, 'Be assured that nothing will happen.'<sup>52</sup>

However, something did happen.

## Part 5

Thinking that he was going to visit and heal a patient, Dr Berjis joined 'Abbas Tavasuli and 'Ali Naqipur. They said to him that the patient was in the Kulhar district [of Kashan].<sup>53</sup> They stopped in front of a house which, according to Ruhu'llah Mehrabkhani, was used as a *rawdih-khani* and did not go further.<sup>54</sup> Instead of taking Dr Berjis inside the house, Muhammad Rasulzadih and several others emerged from the house and came into the street.<sup>55</sup>

Again, according to Mehrabkhani, they said to Dr Berjis, 'Either you must wash your hands of the Baha'i faith and recant your belief, or we will cut you into pieces on this very spot.'<sup>56</sup> Confronted with this most extraordinary situation, Dr Berjis began to turn around to leave. However, it was too late.

From several directions, they set upon him with fists, rocks, sticks, and knives.<sup>57</sup> Dr Berjis threw himself inside the house. The murderers followed him inside, and in the vestibule they set upon him once more. According to two accounts of this brutal murder that have reached us:

After many severe blows, and cutting off a portion of his scalp and hair, they threw him downstairs, a distance of three metres, where that pure being landed on his back and remained unmoving. However, they were not satisfied with this ... and Muhammad Rasulzadih came downstairs, cut the victim's arteries on both sides of his neck, then severed the main veins in both arms. With other blows of knives, which the medical examiner reckoned to be in excess of 80 cuts, they thoroughly dismembered that pure being ... and leaving behind the blood-soaked remains, they came out of the house.<sup>58</sup>

Once outside, Rasulzadih, who had severed the arteries in the doctor's neck, sat and paused on the sidewalk next to the house for a moment and washed the blood off his hands with the snow on the ground.<sup>59</sup> Thereupon, the entire group, raising the cry of 'There is no god but God,' left the scene.<sup>60</sup>

They proceeded towards the bazaar. Along the way they invited the people to join them on their march. 'People having nothing to do and being curious, joined and followed the procession en masse ... and raising the cry of "Allah-u-Akbar", they traversed the entire length of the bazaar in Kashan.'<sup>61</sup>

Pausing at every junction in the bazaar, the murderers cried out, 'We have slain a murderer.'<sup>62</sup> A number of 'shopkeepers and merchants ... as a sign of support for those who had committed this act,' closed their shops and joined the march.

The congregation soon left the bazaar and proceeded towards the police station.<sup>63</sup>

When they reached the station, the murderers separated from the accompanying mob and went inside. They confessed to the ranking policeman, 'We have fulfilled our religious duty and have sent the chief of the wayward sect of Baha'is of Kashan to the nether world.'

Thoroughly perplexed and frightened, the officers and policemen stood there staring at the murderers, who were still holding their knives with blood covering their hands and clothes. After a while, they conducted the men to the office of Colonel Fatimi, and he sent several of his officers to the chief of the town's judiciary, while several more were sent to the scene of the crime, where several thousand onlookers had gathered and had made coming and going well nigh impossible.<sup>64</sup>

## Part 6

When Muhammad-Taqi Damghani, the town's young prosecutor, arrived at the police station, there were still a number of 'curious men' pacing in front of the building. He immediately commenced to interrogate the accused, and without any hesitation issued the order for the arrest of the four fanatical Shi'ites, 'who were sitting calmly and peacefully in the office of the chief of police, whispering prayers and occasionally offering a salutation for the Prophet.' 'The unambiguous confession of the accused, the assessment of the remains, the report of the medical examiner, and the presence of the blood-soaked knives, left no room for hesitation ... I issued instructions for the four to be arrested.'<sup>65</sup>

When the news of the arrest of the four men was noised about in the city, 'a large multitude gathered around the police station and the prison, resolved to rescue the four imprisoned men ...'<sup>66</sup> The confrontation between the police officers and the mob supporting the four murderers continued well into the night, but eventually the 'officers in charge of security' were able to disperse the crowd and send them home.<sup>67</sup>

From another direction, the station also sent a number of police officers to the home of Dr Berjis, which was filled to capacity with the friends and relatives of the fallen physician. These officers were charged with assisting the family of Dr Berjis and transporting the remains from Kulhar district to Gulistan Javid, the Baha'i cemetery.

Ruhu'llah Mehrabkhani testifies:

... Several officers, policemen and guardsmen came to the place where the friends had gathered and expressed their deep sympathies and readiness to provide whatever assistance was required. Eventually, at ten at night, when all eyes were filled with slumber and streets were emptied of any coming and going, a number of the Baha'i men went to the scene of the incident, and, with utmost honour, carried the remains to Gulistan Javid [the Baha'i cemetery], which was a relatively distant location, while a large number of officers, policemen and guards surrounded the cemetery. That night, all the friends remained in the cemetery and, at the side of that sacred being, all were overwhelmed with the deepest emotions ...

On Saturday morning, when the esteemed brothers and wonderful children of that esteemed martyr arrived (three daughters and three sons),<sup>68</sup> the remains were interred in their permanent resting place around noon.<sup>69</sup>

However, about this time news reached us that people had closed the bazaar and were planning an uprising and attack on the police station.<sup>70</sup>

The city had fallen into chaos, and any semblance of order had disappeared.<sup>71</sup> 'People were profoundly worried and unsure about what to do next.'<sup>72</sup> The fanatical Shi'ites, 'wishing massive public unrest, were forcing people to close and shut their businesses and offices.'<sup>73</sup> They talked of a general strike and flooded the streets. The security forces and extra policemen who had been dispatched to Kashan to assist the local police 'fired shots into the air' in the hope of subduing and dispersing the public.<sup>74</sup>

Damghani was sitting in his office in the judiciary staring into the yard when it was reported to him, 'Some people want to attack the judiciary building and frighten the independent-minded prosecutor who has imprisoned these four devoted Muslims who carried out the divine mandate.' However, he was 'brave and not so easily given to fear'. Suddenly he saw the attorney who was the brother-in-law of Ayatollah Gharavi, the town's prominent clerical figure. Damghani remembered him and came out of his office and called him, 'You go and see the illustrious Ayatollah Gharavi and on my behalf say to him, "If the city should become disturbed and the judiciary building is attacked, I will hold you personally responsible, and will arrest you." I am not afraid of that illustrious personage, nor of men greater than him, and not even God. The most that can happen is that they will transfer me from this dim-witted town, this useless town, this unfriendly town ... I am not married, nor have I any children, nor furniture nor any other attachment to this place ... Wherever they transfer me will be better than this miserable town – this place that I am eager to leave behind. However, a week of imprisonment is a high price for the Ayatollah's pride to pay. You go now and convey this message to him.'

That wretched man immediately and obediently left. He returned an hour later ... and brought with him the greetings and prayers of the illustrious Ayatollah as a souvenir, saying that the Ayatollah was in no wise involved with these occurrences, and that Rasuli (Rasulzadih) and his companions were being supported through other means, and that the fatwa for Dr Berjis's killing was issued by someone else. He further conveyed, 'If he

(that is, Muhammad-Taqi Damghami) deems it advisable, I prefer to quit the city for a few days.<sup>75</sup>

Damghami responded positively to this request by the Ayatollah. However, a few hours were needed for this news to come directly from the house of Aqa Gharavi and to be conveyed to the people through religious channels.

Meanwhile, the fanatical Shi'ites had reached the Baha'i cemetery and were seeking a propitious time to carry out their destructive plans. At that time:

... The fear of people attacking the Gulistan Javid [Baha'i cemetery] had entered all hearts, and several officers' admission ... that they could not prevent such an attack had terrified the [Baha'i] women and children. Soon it became known that after the bazaar was shut and a multitude had gathered to free the prisoners, the chief of police had also expressed helplessness and had said, 'I am unable to prevent the mob attack.' However, on hearing this, the esteemed prosecutor had admonished him and had stated his readiness to silence the mob with the help of the security officers.

Eventually, the police officers intervened, and with the aid of other security personnel and police, by firing a few shots were able to disperse the people. The Baha'is also came out of the garden [i.e. Baha'i cemetery] and returned to their homes.<sup>76</sup>

The next day, Ayatollah Gharavi left the city and calm returned to the region. The *Kayhan* newspaper of Monday 17 Bahman [6 February 1950] writes:

... Today news was received that the town's condition has returned to normal and complete security has been re-established. All shops have been opened and merchants have resumed their work.

## Part 7

The news of Friday's crime and the unrest on Saturday were reflected in the nation's two major newspapers on Saturday and Sunday, 16 and 17 Bahman 1328 [5 and 6 February 1950]. However, this news did not appear on the front page in large letters, but rather in the back pages under the column for accidents!

*Ittila'at* reported on the arrest of eight individuals in a 'murder incident', and *Kayhan* remained silent regarding the number of 'arrested murderers'. However, neither of the two newspapers referred to the anti-Baha'i persecution aspect of this killing, and more or less pretended that it was an ordinary crime. *Ittila'at* did not even mention that Dr Berjis was a Baha'i; although it insisted that the murderers belonged to Anjuman Tablighat-i Islami, and that the 'incident had assumed religious dimensions'. Although *Kayhan* did not hide the fact that the 'slain' was the chairman of the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Kashan, it offered nothing that would suggest that the murder was based on sectarian animosity and was a religious killing; its report erased every trace of Muslim fanaticism from this murder.<sup>77</sup>

The newspapers and the weeklies of various political parties, whether leftists or nationalists, also glossed over this crime with considerable disinterest. Everyone seemed preoccupied with the election of the 16th Parliament, and so did not deem it advisable to annoy their 'religious brothers' and orthodox Muslims, and deprive themselves of their vote.

Perhaps the fear of the terrorist and murderous tactics of the Fada'iyan-i Islam was also a consideration, particularly since only recently they had committed several political murders involving such figures as the Court Minister 'Abdu'l-Husayn Hazhir<sup>78</sup> (on 13 Aban 1328 [4 November 1949]) – an assassination that occurred as the consequence of a charge that he was a Baha'i, which of course he was not.<sup>79</sup>

Whatever the reason, not only the politicians but also the nation's intellectuals showed no interest in this murder, which stemmed from Shi'ite Muslims' prejudicial attitudes, sectarian enmities, and religious intolerance.

In much the same way that the murder of Ahmad Kasravi, the 'blasphemer', on 20 Isfand 1324 [11 March 1946] was overlooked,<sup>80</sup> the killing of Dr Berjis did not cause a reaction in society, and did not provoke a response in those with awakened consciences.

Only two weeklies cared, and stood firmly against this murder and the murderers: *Millat Iran* and *Naysan*, the latter being a Jewish publication in Iran. The essence of both articles is shared below. *Millat Iran* wrote:

The incident of Kashan is indeed a source of much regret. In a country whose people claim three thousand years of civilization, might, understanding, culture, sympathies towards humanity and love for humankind; in a nation where every fibre of its people's lives is intertwined with the firm, explicit and clear laws and order of Islam; in a realm, the great prophetic figure of whose religion, 1300 years ago, invited people to fraternity, equality and equity and launched the mightiest war against terror, killing, murder and pillage, people are found who are willing to soil their hands with the blood of an innocent man.

It is indeed greatly to be regretted that such people do not feel the least shame or humiliation over the deed which they have committed, and exhibit the delusion that their conduct is in accordance with the principles of religion and citizenship.<sup>81</sup>

*Naysan*, however, had a broader and more secularist view:

The occurrence of such an incident, which echoed the brutal conflicts of the medieval period, is deeply troubling and profoundly reprehensible. We live in the world of the 20th century, where the principle of religious liberty and freedom of belief is a recognized and indisputable fact for all the peoples of the planet. Such incidents which result in killing people solely on the grounds of religious convictions find a parallel only in the shameful pages of the barbaric ages or the dark middle ages; and present-day humanity finds such deeds repulsive and abhorrent.

Our countrymen, of whatever persuasion, order or religious background, must recognize the unimpeachable right of other citizens of this nation to hold whatever religious belief they wish, and never consciously take a step against this indisputable principle.

In today's world, precipitating conflicts or causing death over religion in colonized or near-colonized countries only serves to show their inferiority, and will enhance the grip of the colonial powers over them ...

In our view, the central government is responsible for bringing to justice and punishing the instigators of this violent and heinous crime in Kashan,

and to make the nation understand that no one is permitted to murder other citizens based on vain imaginings stemming from religious differences, or to demonstrate personal animosity in such a way ...<sup>82</sup>

## Part 8

When the fanatical Shi'ites learned that by provoking public uproar and causing upheaval they could not force the government to yield and free their 'imprisoned brethren', they started exerting pressure through 'administrative means'. An example of their activities is reported thus:

Today (27/11/28 [16 February, 1950]), at 5 o'clock in the afternoon, Hujjatu'l-Islam Aqa Abu'l-Qasim Muhammadi, the Imam-Jum'i of Gulpaygan, along with 24 others, came to the telegraph office to cable high-ranking officials in the capital [i.e. Tehran] and the source of emulation in Qum<sup>83</sup> requesting that they prevent teaching efforts by the Baha'i's and that the prisoners in Kashan be freed. They were contemplating a sit-in.

The situation was immediately conveyed by telephone to the governor, who quickly arrived at the telegraph office and personally assured the gathered gentlemen of the sympathies of the government's highest-ranking officials.

This resulted in the group abandoning their sit-in and leaving the building.<sup>84</sup>

Concurrent with the aforesaid gathering in Gulpaygan, Ayatollah Fayd, the eminent cleric in Qum, telegraphed the Shah, requesting 'from his majesty's blessed threshold ... support for the Muslims'.<sup>85</sup> Likewise, Ayatollah Burujirdi, Ayatollah Bihbahani and Ayatollah Kashani wrote to Tehran.<sup>86</sup>

Waves of pressure were unleashed and the Interior Ministry was overcome by trepidation and hesitation. This indecisiveness is easily evident in a confidential letter of the Interior Minister Ibrahim Zand to the Prime Minister Muhammad Sa'ed:

Subsequent to the letter of 1929/4, dated 28/11/29 [18 February 1950], details of the murder of Dr Berjis were submitted in [the report of] 17164/11995/m – 28122.

In accordance with reports received from the police national headquarters, sufficient manpower by the police and security have been provided to the local police to reinforce the local forces. The city of Kashan has regained calm, and the accused are being prosecuted by the judiciary.

It is also submitted that each day cables are received from clerical figures and residents of various towns requesting the release of the accused and aversion towards the Baha'i sect. It is humbly requested that your instructions in this regard and the missive of 17163/11995/m be made known to this Ministry.<sup>87</sup>

Three days after receiving this letter, [the prime minister] Sa'ed discussed the issue with the Shah; the next day he provided the following instruction:

Your cable of 28/11/14 [3 February 1950] regarding the murder of Dr Berjis was submitted to the blessed threshold of his Majesty, who concurred that if spilling blood was to gain currency and everyone was to shed other people's blood as they wished, then the thread of order would be severed – and

this would be neither pleasing to the reformists nor would it serve the best interest of the nation and the people. Since investigating the murder incident is confirmed and insisted upon by the luminous religious law, therefore it is necessary that instructions be given consistent with the provisions of the law to adequately investigate and pursue this matter.

It is obvious that after the details became known, final results should be shared with his Majesty.<sup>88</sup>

The attachment of the constitutionalist monarch to the ‘luminous religious law’ and the sympathy of governmental authorities towards the ‘Aqayan’,<sup>89</sup> became more formal with the dismissal of Sa’ed from the premiership and the installation of ‘Ali Mansur (the Mansur’l-Mulk) as the prime minister.<sup>90</sup>

Only two days after introducing the members of his cabinet, Mansur wrote to his interior minister, who was the same person who had held the post in the Sa’ed government:

Regarding the murder of Dr Berjis and the attendant uproar and recourse to irregular means that is taking place by certain elements, the following is proclaimed:

No attention should be paid to letters from the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is that have reached governmental offices, and no response to them is necessary. Demonstrations and provocations taking place by such elements, either in the capital or in various towns, must be prevented with utmost seriousness, and instigators must be punished in accordance with the law. In this regard, appropriate instructions should be issued to relevant governors and military commanders.<sup>91</sup>

What ‘uproar and recourse to irregular means’? Who, where, how? No sign or evidence of any of this can be found. The Baha’i community of Iran has never openly complained about government discrimination or limitations imposed on their civil community, nor has it ever raised the issue in the wider non-Baha’i society, or taken any action to gain rightful legal recognition.

The method employed [by the Baha’i community] has always been limited to writing a letter of grievance and appealing to governmental authorities. At that historic moment and in response to that ‘religious persecution’, they did not go beyond this limit.<sup>92</sup>

We can discern the Baha’i ‘protest’ and the government’s response through the pages of *Khatirati Haji ‘Izu’l-Mamalik Ardinani*, written by the governor of Fars during the premiership of ‘Ali Mansur:

In Fars, and especially in Sarvestan, the issue of Baha’is had caused complications. Cables were sent against the Baha’is and copies were given to the ‘ulama and newspapers. A Baha’i who was a senior military officer with the rank of brigadier-general had come from Tehran to help the Baha’is, and secretly met with me as well ...

Firstly, I said to that senior officer ... ‘I do not heed the words of any Baha’i. I also do not recognize any paper or complaint received in the name of the Baha’is. However, I will prevent individuals from being persecuted or wronged ... But if the person speaks in the name of the Baha’i spiritual

assembly, then I will not recognize it, and I will tear up such a complaint and discard it.'

On the other hand, I counselled and admonished the distinguished 'ulama and other individuals who complained of the doings of the Baha'is: 'By your persistence in sending cables and publishing them in newspapers you are bound to give recognition to Baha'is. It is not in the best interest of Islam and our nation to make them appear large, contrary to the truth. If you have something to say or have a complaint, state it using the name and specifics of individuals and do not mention that they are Baha'is. Be assured that I will not let any Baha'i gain fame in this area or in this province, and with utmost seriousness will prevent such an occurrence ...'

With these admonitions, the dispute subsided ... I asked the newspapers to remain silent over the incident ...<sup>93</sup>

The government policy of showing sympathy to Shi'ite clerics, exerting efforts to remove any doubt that the government was interested in pursuing those who had inflicted harm on an 'unrecognized religious minority', blocking efforts by the Baha'i faith to gain official recognition and for its members to enjoy civil rights and the right to live under the protection of the law, was giving much hope to fanatical Shi'ites, and was most satisfactory to them.

## Part 9

The late Damghani recalls that 'the case-file of Rasuli and his accomplices was completed very quickly'.<sup>94</sup> In those early phases of the investigation, four more individuals were arrested on charges of involvement in the murder. Of these, only one is known by name: Rida Gulsurkhi. He is the one who testified that the 'instigator' of himself and the seven other individuals 'who killed Dr Berjis, and after chanting "There is no god but God", left the scene ... was mostly the late Turbati, the preacher'.<sup>95</sup>

After completing the initial steps of judicial investigation, these eight men were sent to Tehran. This is because Kashan did not have a criminal court, and those accused of crimes had to be sent to the provincial capital for trial and adjudication.

However, no evidence or record exists of the seven months of incarceration of Gulsurkhi and Rasulzadih, who have left notable footsteps in the formation of the Islamic Republic, nor do we know anything about 'Abbas Tavasuli, 'Ali Naqipur, or the other four accused whose identities have never been disclosed. We do not know what comforts and advantages they enjoyed during those days when the prisons were open, or whether any limitation or restriction was imposed on them, or what it could have been like.

Nevertheless, we do know that before the trial had started the principal backers of

... the nation's Shi'ite clerical establishment arrived at the scene to prevent the execution of these young Muslims, who had committed this act solely for the purpose of fulfilling a divine mandate. The late Ayatollah Burujirdi, the late Ayatollah Kashani, and ... all were mobilized to avert the execution of these brethren. Special boards were assembled in Qum's seminary school and sent forth to various provinces, so they could brief the local clerics about

the exact nature of the incident. After that, a flood of cables from the various corners of the nation ... proclaiming support for the accused streamed [to Tehran] ...<sup>96</sup>

This method had proven its effectiveness earlier. 'Abdu'r-Rahim Rabbani-Shirazi<sup>97</sup> (1301–60 [1922–81]), who was a companion of Ayatollah Khomeini, and who was first a member of the Assembly of Experts and later of the Guardianship Council during the Islamic Republic, had been sentenced in his youth to execution (Azar 1327 [November 1948]) for brutally murdering Habibu'llah Hushmand, a Baha'i leader in Sarvestan, Fars province. Not only was he not executed, but he was freed from prison.<sup>98</sup>

There is no doubt that Rasulzadah and his accomplices were very familiar with this previous incident, and knew the effectiveness and efficacy of such mobilization of clerical elements in providing suitable support for their fanatical and orthodox agenda. Nonetheless, it is known that from prison Muhammad Rasulzadah wrote a letter to Siyyid Mojtaba Mirlawhi, known as Navvab Safavi<sup>99</sup> (1303–33 [1924–55]), the leader of the Fada'iyan-i Islam, in which he described his own situation and that of his associates and sought the help of the Siyyid.<sup>100</sup> We also know that the Navvab had sent him a message, stating, 'I will personally attend the court hearing and will prevent the sentence of execution.'<sup>101</sup>

## Part 10

There is room to doubt that prior to being arrested, Rasulzadah and his accomplices knew and were associated with Navvab Safavi and the Fada'iyan-i Islam. Similarly, there is doubt about the existence of a branch of the Fada'iyan-i Islam in Kashan. This terror-mongering and murderous society not only did not have a widespread organization, it did not even resemble an organized body in the true sense of that word, nor did it have any branch or section at any location.

Fada'iyan-i Islam was a decentralized society formed around the person of Navvab Safavi. Particularly after the assassination of [the court minister] 'Abdu'l-Husayn Hazhir by Siyyid Husayn Imami on 13 Aban 1328 [4 November 1949], this group succeeded in instilling fear in modern Iranian society and emerged as a centre of attraction for young Muslims disillusioned with modernism. The most energetic of these youth 'voluntarily formed the society of the Fada'iyan-i Islam'.<sup>102</sup>

Husayn Imami is the same person who fatally shot the renowned Iranian historian, Ahmad Kasravi (1269–1324 [1890–1945]), and after a 'flood of cables, letters, fatwas and petitions from Najaf and various towns', and the interventions and appeals of Ayatollah Khu'i, Ayatollah Siyyid Javad Tabrizi, and Ayatollah Qummi to the Appellate Court, was acquitted and freed from prison with much pomp and ceremony.<sup>103</sup>

It is noteworthy that in consonance with the wishes of the honoured 'ulama who had requested the prime minister to pardon Imami, Hazhir had said to the prime minister Qavamu's-Saltanih in the ministerial cabinet meeting, 'We must consent [to the request of the distinguished 'ulama] and release Imami from prison ... Spilling the blood of this man [Kasravi] was religiously sanctioned and permissible. If they killed him, then they have done a correct thing ...'<sup>104</sup>

What is even more noteworthy is that this harmony and accord with Shi'ite clerics had no effect on that closed-minded and hard-hearted fanatical faction. Even after the ill-fated prime minister [Hazhir] prohibited the sales of alcoholic beverages in Qum, Mashhad, and Shahr Ray, initiated diplomatic relations with Saudi [Arabia] and paved the way for pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, the same Shi'ite clerics and their spiritual leader, Ayatollah Kashani, widely circulated the false rumour that Hazhir was a Baha'i and his murder a religious obligation.

Other than that murder, Navvab Safavi also had a hand in the murder of the Baha'i engineer, Shahidzadih – in much the same way that the preacher Turbati instigated the murder of Dr Berjis. It is reported that during the course of a journey to Sari in 1326 [1947] for the purpose of closing a girls' school, which prior to the reign of Reza Shah had been a religious seminary, and converting it to a school for 'seminarians in Mazandaran',<sup>105</sup> he also commenced propaganda against the Baha'is. Soon he had provoked the orthodox, and in an 'attack' that took place, 'a Baha'i was killed'.<sup>106</sup>

Once again, Navvab Safavi was lucky to escape punishment for this incident. Through this display of power he was able to further consolidate the influence of the Fada'yan-i Islam. This charismatic and rabble-rousing seminarian was closely associated with Ayatollah Kashani – particularly after this political ayatollah was banished (1327–29 [1948–50]) from the country, and propaganda for his return to Iran was launched. The efforts of Kashani's supporters in presenting themselves as nationalist candidates during the election of the 16th Parliament eventually succeeded, and this was closely followed by the return of Kashani and the nationalists to Iran (20 Khurdad 1329 [10 June 1950]). All of this transformed Navvab Safavi into one of the power brokers on the nation's unsteady political scene.

Rasulzadih's letter to him, and the response of Navvab Safavi, is an occasion for much reflection in the light of this growing influence.

## Part 11

On Sunday 5 Shahrivar 1329 [27 August 1950], the *Ittila'at* newspaper reported:

The trial of eight individuals who have been accused of the murder of Dr Berjis in Kashan and are charged by the judiciary will commence tomorrow at Branch 2 of the criminal court. The accused and their 12 lawyers will be present.<sup>107</sup>

The *Kayhan* newspaper also wrote:

The trial of those accused of the murder of Dr Berjis will commence tomorrow. They are eight individuals, all residents of Kashan. Dr Berjis was a Jewish physician, who later converted to the Baha'i religion, and last year was killed by a number of men. The accused have selected 12 lawyers, including Mr Arsalan Khal'atbari and Sadiq Sarmad.<sup>108</sup>

Arsalan Khal'atbari was among the most distinguished attorneys of that time in Iran. He had shone brilliantly in the long and important trial (Murdad and Shahrivar 1321 [July–August 1942]) of Sarpas Mukhtari, who

was the minister of police during the reign of Reza Shah, and who had gained renown for being on the side of freedom and of the nation.

Sadiq Sarmad (1339–80 [1960–2001])<sup>109</sup> was an able journalist, a gifted poet and the ranking attorney in the judiciary. He was a member of the board of directors of Kanun Vukala-yi Dadgustari [Iran's bar association], and had worked extensively and importantly in establishing that association.<sup>110</sup> The presence of these two attorneys among the legal counsellors of the killers indicated the all-inclusive and careful preparations of the intellectual and political factions who were determined to wash the blood off the hands of the killers and cover up the truth.

From yet another perspective, it appears that General Razmara, who had only recently been appointed premier (5 Tir 1329 [26 June 1950]), had successfully compelled the newspapers to withhold reporting about the trial proceedings. And indeed it is amazing that from Monday<sup>111</sup> 5 Shahrivar [27 August 1950], when the trial commenced, until Wednesday 22 Shahrivar [13 September 1950], when the tribunal proceedings were concluded, we do not see a single word – I repeat, not a single word – about what was said at the trial or what evidence was submitted in any of the newspapers.

The policy of *Kayhan* until the day that the verdict was handed down was complete silence. However, every few days, *Ittila'at* wrote a few words about the trial, which are cited below:

#### 7 Shahrivar [29 August 1950]

Yesterday morning, Branch 2 of the Criminal High Court was formed and presided over by Mr Ahmad Jidi with the participation of [the following associate judges:] Javad Harifurush, Muhammad-Hasan Khatunabadi, 'Abdu'l-Husayn Taliqani and Lutf-'Ali Bigdili. Also in attendance were the prosecutor and the lawyers representing the defendants.

The case of the eight individuals accused of murdering Dr Sulayman Berjis was initiated, and proceedings of the court got underway.

After the identity of the accused men was established, the prosecutor read the charges and a summary of the investigation, which included an outline of the indictment and a summary of the evidence.

At that point, Mr Sarmad, who is one of the defendants' lawyers, asked the court to invite the medical examiner to clearly establish the age of each accused, as it appeared that some of them were under age. On hearing this request by Mr Sarmad, the court right away invited the medical examiner to testify. Immediately, Dr Tabataba'i appeared at the court to establish the age of six of the accused. His testimony was that the age of five of them was more than 18 years of age and one of them was about 18.

Yesterday's proceedings saw the questioning of four of the defendants; the remainder were postponed to the next session, which will be held tomorrow early in the morning.

#### 9 Shahrivar [31 August 1950]

Since in the recent session of Branch 2 of the Criminal High Court, conducted to prosecute the eight individuals accused of the murder of Dr Sulayman Berjis in Kashan, the attorney of the defendants, Mr Asadu'llahi, arrived late at the session, another of the attorneys, Mr Arsalan Khal'atbari, continued the defence. The rest of inquiry was postponed until next Saturday.

17 Shahrivar [8 September 1950]

The session of Branch 2 of the Criminal High Court under the judgeship of Ahmad Jidi was conducted to prosecute the eight individuals accused of the murder of Dr Sulayman Berjis in Kashan. The legal team of the defendants, namely, Arsalan Khal'atbari, Asadu'llahi, Razavi, Girami, Mahdavi, Faqih-Shirazi, and Du'l-Mujd Tabataba'i presented their defence. Also in today's proceeding, another member of the defence counsel, Mr Shari'atmadar, presented a portion of his defence and the remaining arguments were postponed to tomorrow morning's session.

18 Shahrivar [9 September 1950]

The trial of the eight men accused of the murder of Dr Sulayman Berjis continued today at Branch 2 of the Criminal High Court. In Thursday's session, as well as today's, Mr Shari'atmadar and Mr Rida Maliki presented their defence, and all the legal counsellors concluded their defence presentation on behalf of their clients, who are accused of murdering Dr Berjis in Kashan. The closing arguments for each defendant will commence in tomorrow's session.

However, since Mr Razi, a special litigator collaborating with the prosecution, brought forth certain facts about the killing of Dr Berjis, and Mr Aminpur, the prosecutor's representative, dismissed the defence claim that their clients are innocent, and according to article 175 once more requested the court to render a verdict against the accused, therefore it was decided that in tomorrow's session the defence attorneys will respond to Mr Razi and the prosecutor's charges.

20 Shahrivar [11 September 1950]

The lawyers representing the defendants in the case of the murder of Dr Sulyaman Berjis of Kashan presented their arguments regarding previous statements of Mr Aminpur, the prosecutor, Mr Razi, the special litigator, and today's testimony. The final defence of each defendant may commence in tomorrow's session.

21 Shahrivar [12 September 1950]

Today, after 5 hours of deliberation from 11 in the morning until 4 p.m., Branch 2 of the Criminal Court, dismissed the charges against the 8 men accused of the killing of Dr Berjis in Kashan on the basis of insufficient evidence.

On this day [12 September], *Kayhan* also broke its 16-day silence, and under the heading, 'Those accused of the murder of Dr Berjis have been found innocent and freed', wrote:

At 11 this morning, the trial of those accused of the murder of Dr Berjis concluded. This trial, which commenced some time ago, was presided over by Judge Jidi. Thereupon the court undertook its deliberation. After 5 hours of discussion, at four o'clock in the afternoon, the court issued its verdict, announcing the innocence of the accused. Due to lack of evidence, the court did not find that the murder at the hands of the accused was proven as charged.

On Wednesday 22 Shahrivar [13 September], *Kayhan* published a picture of a court session which is most telling. The caption beneath the picture stated, 'Yesterday we reported that Branch 2 of the Criminal Court, under the presidency of Mr Ahmad Jidi, ruled in favour of defendants in the case of Dr Berjis's killing due to lack of sufficient evidence. The top picture shows the reading of the verdict in the court, the middle picture shows the congregation of clerics in attendance; the one at the bottom shows the accused.'

The late Muhammad-Taqi Damghani testifies:

During the trial, the courthouse was always filled with people. The followers of Ayatollah Kashani, who were mostly the bazaar shopkeepers, along with many who opposed Razmara or supported Musaddiq were there to cause constant havoc. Each day a large demonstration by the opponents of Razmara would take place within the courthouse. The trial had been transformed into demonstrations against the British and the oil company ...

After the murder of Kasravi, this was the second blow by the Fada'iyan-i Islam. And dismissing the charges against the accused was a powerful blow by Ayatollah Kashani against Razmara – even though it was said that Razmara had personally asked the justice minister to let the accused go in order to subdue the public outcry.

One must say that this verdict was a stain on Iran's judiciary. Tehran's criminal court, with the participation of five high-level judges and through their ruling ... had freed those who had openly confessed to the murder, and who with their own hands and in complete freedom, had signed this confession.<sup>112</sup>

## Part 12

There were no protests of any kind among Iranians over the dismissal of charges against the eight fanatical Shi'ites, who on their own and with no hesitation had readily admitted that they had conspired in killing a Baha'i physician. Nor did the decision of Tehran's criminal court, which assessed no penalty against the accused, provoke any objection: not by the liberals, not by intellectuals, not by newspapers or weeklies, and not by progressive or reformist political factions.

It did not even raise a protest within the Iranian Baha'i community, which had always refused to engage in public protests, and had rejected collaboration and association with liberal-minded and democratic entities, and did not pay attention to public opinion.

As far as we know, *Jahan-e Ma* was the only newspaper that displayed an appropriate reaction to this shameful performance of our nation's judiciary, and referred to it as manifest ethnic and religious discrimination, and a violation of the rights of minority citizens:

[We are] committed to the principles of equity and justice, equality and oneness of all people before the law, and the existence of an unprejudiced and consistent judiciary, which is able to win people's confidence and esteem for its judgments while preserving its own independence in the face of inappropriate pressure, by rendering unbiased verdicts. These are attributes of a progressive and free society, which regrettably are utterly missing in our nation ...

A judiciary that convicts the innocent, exonerates the guilty ... [and] fails to carry out its duties ... a judiciary that allows in its courtyard, and in bright daylight, one of the most distinguished of its judges and attorneys to be slashed into pieces, and in response frees the villains who committed this crime ... no wonder that every day a new scandal takes place within such a corrupt and unjust system and a new tale of shame is added to its previous chapters.

The tale of the trial of the killers of Dr Berjis is the latest page written in this book of disgrace. Everyone remembers the tragic story of the slashing to death of one of the citizens of this country – someone who had every right to live in this nation – a story that has been covered in great detail in the newspapers of the governing body. Everyone also has seen or heard about the verdict and demonstrations over the past few days.

Undoubtedly, on hearing what has transpired, every observer in possession of a conscience cannot have any other feeling but disgust for this system of justice. Every man of conscience would discern that only two possibilities could have governed these events:

- (1) One possibility is that we assume the present accused men were innocent, and that therefore the court's verdict was just, in which case the question would be raised: What sort of justice system is this that without cause throws innocent people into prison and subjects them to trial, causing them financial loss and destitution. Even more importantly, the question would be raised: Where are the true perpetrators of this crime, because no one can deny that a physician was murdered by being slashed to death. Is it sufficient to just dismiss the accused, or is the justice system established so that it would bring to justice the real offenders?
- (2) The second possibility is that the justice system has once again, as in so many previous instances, fallen prey to influence, and issued a verdict accordingly, finding innocent those who perpetrated this crime. Particularly when a person takes into account the demonstrations and animal sacrifices<sup>113</sup> of the first days, and continual cow-sacrifices, parades and festivities after the verdict, this possibility gains further strength. This is because one cannot imagine that all these animal sacrifices and demonstrations were merely to celebrate the discovery that the accused were innocent. This is because this justice system has witnessed many innocent defendants who have gone to the gallows; yet in no instance except the present trial and that of the killers of the late [Ahmad] Kasravi, have we observed such demonstrations and festivities.

In addition to the criminal aspect of Dr Berjis's murder, there are two important social issues to be considered. First, this incident is related to the rights of minorities in our nation ... At a time when foremost in the charter of the United Nations is ethnic and religious liberty and equality and protection of the rights of minorities, it is a source of much regret for every honourable Iranian who wishes to see his country exalted among the nations of the world, to instead witness that the lives and rights of minorities are violated in our country in such ways.

When every humanitarian Iranian sees that the Culture Ministry has issued instructions for a list of minority employees to be prepared in order to impose more limitations on them, when he sees that some newspapers have reported

that schools have received instructions to shun accepting minority students, when he sees encouragement and provocation for racial animosity among certain political factions, then he has every right to dread and feel his heart filled with revulsion over the recent reprehensible verdict of this court.

The other issue is related to the spread of superstitious practices. We are under the impression that no honourable Iranian would consent to the spilling and spoliation of the blood of a citizen of this country – whoever he may be or whatever he may believe – and barter this blood for the demonstrations of vulgar mobs, animal sacrifices and self-stabbings.<sup>114</sup>

If it were the norm that a bunch of hoodlums, under some name or pretext, was allowed to attack and slash to death others; and judicial institutions, either out of fear or because of threats, intervention or playing politics, accepted that that blood had been lawfully spilled, then no one in this country would have safety or protection! Of what possible use then would be this enormous and expensive police and judiciary?

At any rate, this incident is most alarming for all progressive-minded countrymen, and no honourable Iranian should remain silent in the face of such injustice. In particular, the forward-looking publications of this nation should never consent to silence over this fundamental issue.<sup>115</sup>

### Part 13

The backing down of the government and the widespread public silence in face of this heinous crime had serious consequences for the nation. The warm reception that fanatical Shi'ites gave to those who had killed Dr Berjis, in which people came out of Kashan for some 30 kilometres, 'either on foot or by vehicles, and sacrificed hundreds of lambs and cows in the path of the freed men', placed Rasulzadih and his religious brethren, according to the late Damghani, at 'the same rank as the military commanders of Kashan ...', 'whom everyone regarded with considerable deference'.<sup>116</sup>

From then on, the aggressive and ferocious proclivities of fanatical Shi'ites were constantly increasing. The first person that the Fada'iyan-i Islam killed after this victory was Brigadier General Razmara (16 Esfand 1329 [7 March 1951]). The silence – if not tacit approval – of various personalities, publications, and democratic processes in response to this murder led to the dismissal of charges against Khalil Tahmassebi – this time not by a verdict issued by a judge, but by a vote of the people's representatives in the 17th Parliament (16 Murdad 1331 [7 August 1952]).

However, even this goodwill did not reduce the enmity of the fanatical Shi'ites towards the nationalists. From moderates to extremists, when they saw themselves faced with the 'threat of communism', they joined hands with the royal court and its imperialist supporters and precipitated the victory of the 28 Murdad [19 August 1953] *coup d'état* against the government of Dr Musaddiq – a *coup* that completely altered the destiny of Iran. Until the decline of the National Front and destruction of the Tudeh party [Iran's communist party], the *coup d'état* government and religious institutions worked shoulder to shoulder.

With the re-establishment of the throne [in 1953], there was no tangible reason for the Shah and his court to accommodate the rabble-rousing fanatical Shi'ites any longer. However, to honour the Shi'ite clerical leadership and please fanatical Muslims, the Shah instructed Tehran's military

commander, Brigadier General Taymur Bakhtiyar, and the nation's military chief of staff, Major General Nader Batmanghelich, to consent to the wishes of the Shi'ite clerics, and in the company of the leading representative of Ayatollah Burujirdi in Tehran – namely, Hujjatu'l-Islam Nasru'llah Falsafi – to destroy the principal place of worship of Iranian Baha'is, that is, Tehran's Hadiratu'l-Quds, on 16 Urdibihisht 1334 [7 May 1955].

The Baha'is not only continued to be deprived of the rights accorded to religious minority groups, they were forced into a more or less inconsequential existence under the gaze and watchful eyes of a society known as the Hujjatih, which was charged with channelling the zeal of fanatical Shi'ite youth into anti-Baha'i activities. This was the only society that remained in existence until the end of the Shah's regime; immediately upon the accession of the Islamic Republic, it became the leading element in various branches of Hezbollah in anti-Baha'ism and the slaying of Baha'is.

## Part 14

At any rate, the story of the brutal slashing of Dr Berjis and the widespread silence about it is one of the causes of the establishment of a republic whose foundation men such as Haji Muhammad Rasulzadih had an undeniable role in laying. This fanatical Shi'ite died on 9 Khurdad 1367 [30 May 1988]. On the occasion 'of the fortieth day of his passing and as means of recalling his bravery and self-sacrifice', the *Kayhan* newspaper provided a biography of him, the essence of which is provided below. It includes lies and truths, woven together in the manner and style of the akhunds reporting in *Kayhan*:

The political life of Rasulzadih commenced in 1320 [1941]. In 1328 [1950], it entered a new phase with the assassination of a Zionist element. Together with seven of his friends, he girded up the loins of endeavour to slay the leader of Zionists in Kashan [Dr Berjis] and the surrounding regions, who as a prominent Zionist, had violated the life and sanctity of Muslims under the cover and mask of a physician (though he had never studied medicine), and who had openly set the Qur'an on fire ...

The child of this slain Zionist, who himself was one of the influential Zionist faces in the nation and the Shah's special physician, commenced his efforts with considerable backing and created a case [against the murderers]. He formed a kangaroo court and issued death sentences for Haji Rasulzadih and his companions, who had been incarcerated for eight months.

The clerics of the nation entered the scene ... At any rate, after a most difficult period, when Haji Rasulzadih and his companions were freed from prison, they were welcomed in Tehran with a tremendous reception ...

When the Fada'iyan-i Islam movement increased its activities, starting in 1332 [1953], the martyr Navvab Safavi ... introduced and installed him [i.e. Rasulzadih] as his personal representative and the leader of the Fada'iyan-i Islam in Kashan.

In 1341 [1962], when the cry of Islamic authority and resistance to infidels of the leader of the Islamic Revolution, the illustrious Imam Khomeini, was raised from the seat of Shi'ite jurists in Qum, Rasulzadih was among the first to wholeheartedly welcome and embrace the call of the illustrious imam. From that beginning he demonstrated his active engagement in all instances ...

After the victory of the Revolution ... he would always admonish the people not to be negligent, even for a moment, in their support of the imam. He was foremost in promoting revolutionary agencies and championing the imam's line ...<sup>117</sup>

At the beginning of the section that the late Muhammad-Taqi Damghani has devoted to telling his recollections of the events surrounding the brutal killing of Dr Berjis, there is a section that is well worth pondering:

The hero of this story is someone who was alive until very recently, and was among the activists and leaders of Hezbollah. On the occasion of his death, two entire columns of the newspaper *Kayhan* were devoted to praising his merits. At the time of the occurrence of this murder, hardly anyone in Kashan could have perceived that this incident was connected to a larger and history-making struggle that was taking shape across Iran. Even today, there are not many who understand this incident to be one of the wellsprings that precipitated the mighty river of the Islamic Republic.<sup>118</sup>

Nasser Mohajer  
Khurdad 1387 [June 2008]

## **Appendix 1**

### **A brief history of the Fada'iyan-i Islam (Devotees of Islam)**

Fada'iyan-i Islam (lit. Devotees of Islam) is an extremist group and perhaps the oldest active pressure faction in Iran. The group was formed in 1945 by Siyid Mujtaba Mirlawhi, a young Shi'ite seminarian, after he became deeply concerned with secularization programmes undertaken by Reza Shah.

Mirlawhi (1924–55, Tehran) was born into a fanatical Shi'ite family. Like many others in the orthodoxy, he was distressed by the influence of Ahmad Kasravi, a renowned historian and linguist who was writing books and articles that criticized the role of Shi'ism in Iranian history. These concerns grew into a fatwa by senior Shi'ite clerics, who condemned Kasravi to death – it is said that Ruhullah Khomeini approved this fatwa. In May 1945, Mirlawhi attempted to assassinate Kasravi, but he was only wounded. Mirlawhi was imprisoned for a short time, and from prison he organized the Fada'iyan-i Islam to fight Shi'ite causes. A year later, in May 1946, the Fada'iyan-i Islam succeeded in assassinating Kasravi. Its agents were acquitted shortly after their capture.

Over the next several years, Mirlawhi developed a close relationship with Ayatollah Abdu'l-Qasim Kashani; he also started the newspaper *Parcham-i Islam* [Flag of Islam] and adopted the *nom de guerre* of Navvab Safavi.

In early 1949, the Fada'iyan-i Islam commenced a wide-scale assassination campaign. The first target was the young Shah of Iran, but an attempt on his life at the University of Tehran in February 1949 was unsuccessful. Shortly thereafter, Husayn Imani, a member of the Fada'iyan, was able to assassinate Abdu'l-Husayn Hazhir, a former prime minister, in central Tehran. On 7 March 1951, Prime Minister 'Ali Razmara was assassinated in Tehran's Shah Mosque by the same extremist group. The assassin, Khalil Tahmasbi, however, won an acquittal. After Musaddiq's regime in 1952–53,

the Fada'iyan renewed their terrorist activities. An unsuccessful attempt on the life of Prime Minister Husayn 'Ala in November 1955, however, ended this phase. In retaliation, the government executed Mirlawhi and four of the Fada'iyan's leaders on 18 January 1956.

The loss of Mirlawhi was a serious blow to the organization, but the Fada'iyan continued to function underground. They reappeared in the early 1960s when Khomeini began his public opposition to the Shah. Operating under the name of the Islamic Coalition Association, operatives assassinated Prime Minister Hasan-'Ali Mansur in January 1965. Even after Khomeini's exile, the Fada'iyan continued close contacts with him. They distributed cassettes of Khomeini's sermons and writings, and thus endeared themselves to the future revolutionary figures.

In 1978, the Fada'iyan came out in the open as supporters of Khomeini. Ayatollah Sadiq Khalkhali, a close associate of Khomeini and a member of the group since his seminary days, became head of the Fada'iyan in May 1979. Under his leadership, the Fada'iyan launched a terrorist campaign against Khomeini's enemies. As soon as Khomeini consolidated power in Iran, Khalkhali became chairman of the Revolutionary Courts. However, his brutality earned him such a reputation that he alienated even his supporters, and he was deposed in December 1980. By then, Khomeini had gained complete ascendancy in Iran, and in 1981 the Fada'iyan was formally disbanded.

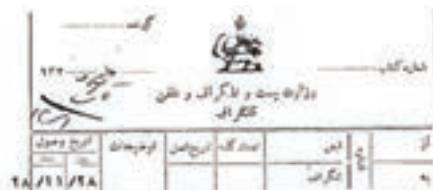
The group reappeared during the Khatami regime in the late 1990s. President Muhammad Khatami came to power as a moderate with the idea of reform. His initiatives to open dialogue with the West in 1998 caused the defunct Fada'iyan to revitalize. This time the driving force was anti-Americanism. Besides threatening and carrying out attacks on Americans, the leaders of the Fada'iyan turned their attention on moderates. Two victims, husband and wife Darius Furuhar and Parvanih Iskandari, were murdered in Tehran in November 1998. Other murders followed with the Fada'iyan trademark. Evidence exists that Iranian intelligence services had a hand in the resurrection of the Fada'iyan, but the suspected leader of the group, Sa'id Imami, allegedly committed suicide in prison on 19 June 1999. A subsequent investigation uncovered little information, but enough found its way to the media to discredit several of the top intelligence leaders, which led to several key resignations.

Sources: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Navvab\\_Safavi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Navvab_Safavi); Shahrough Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran: Clergy-State Relations in the Pahlavi Period* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1980); Fereydoun Hoveyda, *The Broken Crescent: The 'Threat' of Militant Islamic Fundamentalism* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998); Michael Rubin, *Into the Shadows: Radical Vigilantes in Khatami's Iran* (Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2001).

## Appendix 2

### Original text of selected documents

A number of documents were referenced by the author in this paper. The original texts of the ones available to the translator are presented below.

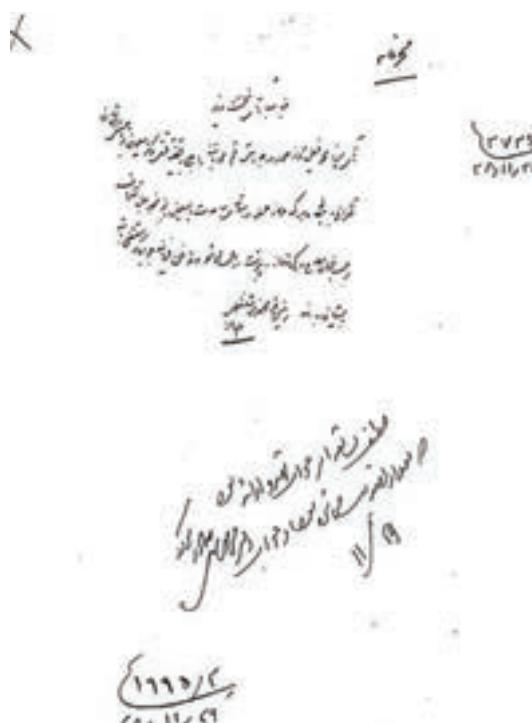


شیخ شیخ شیخ شیخ

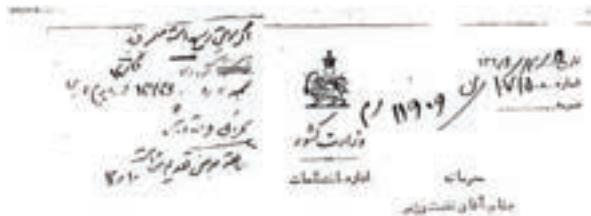
ساخته ۱۷ امیر حبیب الاسلام امای ابوالقاسم سعدی امیر حبیب  
کربلا کان پاچلخان ۲۴ تیر به تکلیف احمد احمد و پاچلخان تکلیف احمد  
ساخته امایه و مراجعت تکلیف هرگز واقع فناواری جمله گیری از تکلیف  
جهانی را مستخلاص زندگانیان کشان را فروخته و پایان یافته و داشته  
نهاده مراجعت را تکلیف امایه امیر احمد امیر احمد بودند همان ساخته  
در تکلیف احمد حسین پیغمبر امیره و مکلف امایه را به مراجعت اولیه "ساخته  
در پیش اینده روز تزویج هیئت انتیکوپیه از تکلیف احمد بودند پیغمبر

شیخ شیخ شیخ شیخ

Document A: Letter from the religious clerics of Gulpaygan to the Shah requesting that the killers be set free. 16 February 1950.



Document B: Letter from Ayatollah Fayzi to the Shah requesting freedom of the murderers.



اعلیٰ سرپرست اقتصادی - ۱۳۴۸/۹/۱۹  
وزیر امور اقتصادی - ۱۳۴۸/۹/۱۹  
وزیر امور اقتصادی که از این تاریخ تا مدت مقرر شده تا پایان تغییر نموده  
وزیر امور اقتصادی که از این تاریخ تا مدت مقرر شده و با این تغییر تاریخ تغییر می‌کند  
وزیر امور اقتصادی که از این تاریخ تا مدت مقرر شده - این تاریخ از این تاریخ  
تغییر نماید از این تاریخ و این تغییر تا پایان مدت مقرر شده مطابق با این تغییر  
و این تاریخ را تغییر نماید این تاریخ تغییر می‌کند است این می‌تواند مطابق با این تغییر  
با این تاریخ تغییر نماید - ۱۳۴۸/۹/۱۹ - ایجاد شد

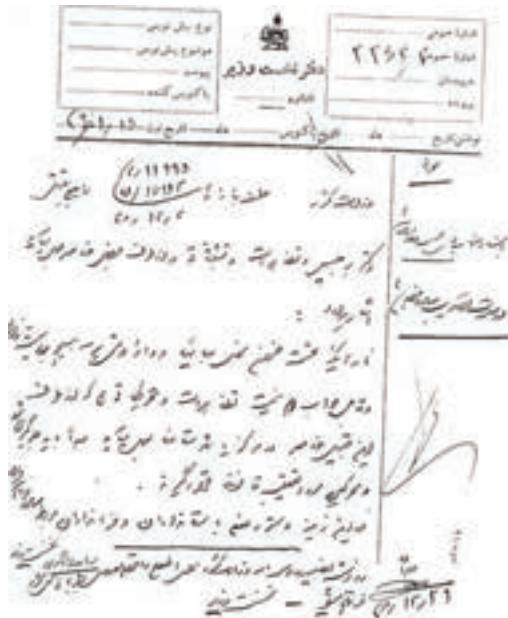
بهرمان  
وزیر امور اقتصادی  
وزیر امور اقتصادی  
۱۳۴۸/۹/۱۹



بهرمان میرزا

شماره مورخ ۱۳۴۸/۹/۱۹ و ارجح بختیه کشیده بود  
بهرمان پیشگاه مبارک ملوكانه رسیده است آن جهتی تصدی بوق  
در این دهکم اکرسانه ده ماه آزادی یا باید و در گسیده خواه خسرو  
دست بخواهند پیگران آزاده رئیس انتخاب امیرا زده کشیده شدند  
و این نه بزم اراده دل اصلاح اسلام است و نه برواق هماج گشته  
و هر ده چون مخصوص در رسیده کن گفته همهم کل از اعماق شرع امور مسورد  
تائید و تائید است شریزی بود و سر تحقیقات لازم و تعقیب  
مخصوص بر طبق موافقن کافیون رفته شدند تا پیش از  
روشن متن مطلب تشیعه باشد امیر طراحت رسیده  
ایام افاقت مسند ام

Documents C & D: The response of the Prime Minister is conclusive and aligned with law, but unfortunately the clerical elements swayed greater influence.



Document E: The Prime Minister instructs that no response should be given to the letters and appeals by the Baha'is. 20 March 1950.

### Suggested citation

Nasser Mohajer, 'Kard-Ajin Kardan Doctor Berjis' [Persian], Baran, No.'s 19–20, Spring & Summer 2008, 10–24; trans. Ahang Rabbani, The Brutal Slashing to Death of Dr Berjis, *Baha'i Studies Review*, 17, 2011, 133–167. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/bsr.17.133/1>.

### Contributor details

Dr Ahang Rabbani has published numerous scholarly articles, essays, books, and translations over the course of several decades including regular valued contributions for the *Baha'i Studies Review*. A recent book that he translated, *The Genesis of the Babi-Bahá'í Faiths in Shíráz and Fárs* was published by Brill in 2008.

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Ahang Rabbani has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author of this work in the format that was submitted to Intellect Ltd.

### Endnotes

1. Phillip Tussing and Sen McGinn are thanked for reading through the translation and suggesting a number of improvements. (translator)
2. See Mírzá Hábíbu'lláh Afnán, *The Genesis of the Babi-Bahá'í Faiths in Shíráz and Fárs*, trans. Ahang Rabbani, Leiden: Brill, 2008. (translator)
3. Bahram Choubine (2009), 'The Suppression of the Baha'is of Iran in 1955', trans. Ahang Rabbani, *Baha'i Studies Review*, 15, 2009, 83–95. (translator)
4. While living in Tehran prior to his martyrdom in 1852, Haji Mirza Jani wrote what is believed to be the first history of the Babi movement, the *Kitab Nuqtatu'l-Kaf*. His brother,

Muhammad-Isma'il (d. 1881), known as Dhabih, became a follower of Baha'u'llah, while another brother, Mirza Ahmad, followed Yahya Azal. (translator)

5. Many Zoroastrian converts in Yazd left that town and settled in Kashan, which was more hospitable to Baha'is. (translator)
6. Moojan Momen, 'Kashan and Central Provinces of Iran', posted at <http://www.northill.demon.co.uk/restud/kashan.htm>. (translator)
7. Mohajer's scholarly contributions include *The Book of Prison: An Anthology of Prison Life in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 2 vols, Berkeley: Noghteh Books, 1377 and 1380/1998 and 2001. (translator)
8. For details on this *coup d'état* see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammed\\_Mosaddeq](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammed_Mosaddeq) and sources cited in that article. (translator)
9. Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran on 11 February 1979, and that date generally marks the beginning of the Islamic Republic of Iran. (translator)
10. Muhammad-Taqi Damghani, *Jamih-yi Aludih dar Aftab* [Soiled Garment Under the Sun], Germany: Alburz Press, 1382/2003, 210.
11. Damghani, *Jamih-yi Aludih dar Aftab* 210.
12. Muhammad-Taqi Afnan, *Bigunahan* [The Guiltless], unpublished manuscript in private hands, 241, indicates that Sulayman Berjis was a son of Hakim Ya'qub.
13. Damghani, *Jamih-yi Aludih dar Aftab* 206–08.
14. 'Abdu'llah Shahbazi, *Jistarha'i az Tarikh Baha'igari dar Iran* [Glimpses of Baha'i History in Iran], Tehran, 1382/2003, 19.
15. Shoghi Effendi, *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*, Wilmette, 1932, 217, states, 'The night the Bab arrived at Kashan coincided with the eve preceding the third Naw-Ruz, after the declaration of His Mission, which fell on the second day of the month of Rabi'u'th-Thani, in the year 1263 AH [1847].' (translator)
16. In 1898, Khajih Rabi' (d. 1917) established the Vahdat-Bashar school in Kashan. It received official recognition in 1910. A Baha'i boys' school was also established in the village of Aran and a girls' school was added later. (translator)
17. Hasan Naraqi, *Tarikh Ijtima'i Kashan* [Social History of Kashan], Tehran: Mu'assisih Mutali'at va Tahqiqat Ijtima'i, 1342/1963, 263.
18. Naraqi, *Tarikh Ijtima'i Kashan* 263.
19. Naraqi, *Tarikh Ijtima'i Kashan* 263.
20. Siyavash Rastani, *Siyyid Hasan Mu'alim va Tarikhchih Dars Akhlaq* [Siyyid Hasan the Teacher, and the History of Children's Moral Training Classes], Germany: Baha'i Verlag, 2000, 80.
21. Ruhu'llah Mehrabkhani, 'Shahadat Dr Berjis' ['Martyrdom of Dr Berjis'], *Ahang Badi'*, yr. 4, no. 17, Isfand 1328/March 1950, 20.
22. Mehrabkhani, Shahadat Dr Berjis 6.
23. Mehrabkhani, Shahadat Dr Berjis 7.
24. *Ittila'at*, Monday 17 Bahman 1328/6 February 1950.
25. *Firdawsi*, 32, 7 Isfand 1328/26 February 1950.
26. Mehrabkhani, Shahadat Dr Berjis 7.
27. *Firdawsi*, 32, 7 Isfand 1328/26 February 1950.
28. Damghani, *Jamih-yi Aludih dar Aftab* 207.
29. Nahid Subhani (Berjis), *Payam Nur*, 16, 1386/2007.
30. *Firdawsi*, 32, 7 Isfand 1328/26 February 1950. A similar report appeared in *The Baha'i World*, vol. 12, 1950–54, 684. (translator)
31. Mehrabkhani, Shahadat Dr Berjis 7.
32. *Firdawsi* gives the number of patients in Dr Berjis's office as 'seven or eight'. However, *The Baha'i World* has given the figure of ten. A similar difference in the time of the visit of

Tavasuli and Taqipur to Dr Berjis's office appears, where the latter source states that they came at 8:30 in the morning, whereas *Ittila'at*, Sunday 16 Bahman 1328/5 February 1950, and also *Firdawsi*, 7 Isfand 1328/28 March 1950 have written that this crime took place at 11 in the morning on Friday. Ruhu'llah Mehrabkhani, in *Ahang Badi*, has written that the two murderers came to the office of Dr Berjis 'around 10 in the morning'.

33. For a brief description of the extremist and terrorist organization known as the Fada'iyan-i Islam, see Appendix 1 and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fadayyan-e\\_Islam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fadayyan-e_Islam). (translator)
34. The term *lawth* has acquired different legal meaning in different branches of Islamic jurisprudence. For a detailed discussion see, <http://hoghoogh-abadan.persianblog.ir/post/89/> and <http://www.mibosearch.com/search.aspx?page=1&search=%D9%84%D9%88%D8%AB&btnSearch.x=84&btnSearch.y=17>. It essentially means a case where the judge would find it impossible to pronounce judgment, or the judgment involves a group of individuals who committed the crime not for personal reasons. (translator; Mazda Karimi and Moojan Momen are thanked for providing references)
35. Damghani, *Jamih-yi Aludih dar Aftab* 206 and 208.
36. At the beginning of World War II, Iran remained a neutral country. However, on 23 August 1941 (3 Shahrivar 1320), during the heat of the war, Iranian neutrality was broken and Iran was attacked from the air and the sea: by the British from the south and the Russians from the north. (translator)
37. 'Ali Davani, *Nihzat Ruhaniyun Iran [Iran's Clerical Movement]*, Tehran: Markaz Asnad Inqilab Islami, 2nd printing, 1377/1998, 555–56.
38. For Ayatollah Burujirdi's biography see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seyyed\\_Husayn\\_Burujerdi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seyyed_Husayn_Burujerdi). (translator)
39. For Ayatollah Montazeri's biography see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand\\_Ayatollah\\_Hossein-Ali\\_Montazeri](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Ayatollah_Hossein-Ali_Montazeri). (translator)
40. Ayatollah Husayn-'Ali Montazeri, *Matn Kamil Khatirat bi Hamrah Payvastha [Complete Text of the Memoirs with Appendices]*, Europe: Ittihad Nashiran dar Urupa, 2nd printing, Dey 1379/December 2000, 94. [The Memoirs of Ayatollah Montazeri is online at <http://www.amontazeri.com/farsi/frame3.asp> and the above-cited passage appears on 132 – translator.]
41. Two towns in north-west of Isfahan. (translator).
42. Ghulam-Rida Karbaschi, *Tarikh Shafahi Inqilab Islami: Tarikh Hawzih 'Ilmiyah Qum [Oral History of the Islamic Revolution: History of Qum's Seminary School]*, Tehran: Markaz Asnad Inqilab Islami, 1st printing, 1380/2001, 161–62.
43. Ayatollah Ahmad-'Ali Ahmadi-Shahrudi, *Paygah Hawzih*, <http://new.hawzah.net/hawzah/>.
44. Ahmadi-Shahrudi, *Paygah Hawzih*.
45. See under Internet search for Vadghan.
46. <http://www.pedia.cloob.com>.
47. *Khatirat Ayatollah Muhammad Yazdi [Memoirs of Ayatollah Muhammad Yazdi]*, Tehran: Intisharat Markaz Asnad Inqilab Islami, 1380/2001, 131. Also, see Misbah-Yazdi, *Khatirih [Reminiscences]*, Tehran: Kanun Danish-Amukhtigan Tarh Valayat, <http://www.tamhid.com/prs/index.php?option=com>.
48. Society for the Promotion of Islam. No adequate history of this anti-Baha'i organization has been written, but see Bahram Choubine, 'Sacrificing the Innocent', *Iranian.com*, <http://wwwiranian.com/main/2008/sacrificing-innocent>. (translator)
49. The word *Haybat* appears to be a typographical error in the original Persian. The correct word is probably *hay'at*, meaning society, organization, body or association.
50. *Firdawsi*, 32, 7 Isfand 1328/26 February 1950. [The phrase 'wayward and polytheists' is standard language used by orthodox and fanatical Shi'ites to denigrate the Baha'i – translator.]
51. Mehrabkhani, Shahadat Dr Berjis 4.
52. Mehrabkhani, Shahadat Dr Berjis 4.
53. *Ittila'at*, Sunday 16 Bahman 1328/5 February 1950.
54. Mehrabkhani, Shahadat Dr Berjis 4.

55. Muhammad-Taqi Afnan, *Bigunahan* 241 indicates that six others joined the initial two men and attacked Dr Berjis. (translator)

56. Mehrabkhani, Shahadat Dr Berjis 4.

57. *Ittila'at*, Sunday 16 Bahman 1328/5 February 1950.

58. Mehrabkhani, Shahadat Dr Berjis 5.

59. *The Baha'i World*, vol. 12, 685. *Firdawsi*, 32, 7 Isfand 1328/26 February 1950.

60. Karbaschi, *Tarikh Shafahi Inqilab Islami* 296.

61. Damghani, *Jamih-yi Aludih dar Aftab* 207.

62. *Firdawsi*, 32, 7 Isfand 1328/26 February 1950.

63. Damghani, *Jamih-yi Aludih dar Aftab* 206–07.

64. Mehrabkhani, Shahadat Dr Berjis 5.

65. Damghani, *Jamih-yi Aludih dar Aftab* 206–07.

66. *Ittila'at*, Monday 17 Bahman 1328/6 February 1950.

67. *ibid.*

68. Dr Berjis's three sons were Hushang, Mansur and Nasir, and his three daughters were Rawhaniyah, Victoria and Hikmat. His sons followed the father's example and became healthcare professionals. (translator)

69. Muhammad-Taqi Afnan, *Bigunahan* 244 states that since the resting place of Dr Berjis was often attacked and desecrated by fanatical elements of Kashan, in 1977 Dr Berjis's sons arranged through the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Iran and Kashan's municipality, to transfer the remains of Dr Berjis and Shaykh Mazgani – a renowned Babi martyr – to the Baha'i cemetery in Mazgan, near Qamsar. Two years later, the Islamic Republic confiscated the Baha'i cemetery in Kashan, destroyed all graves and subdivided the land into many parcels which were sold to the public. (translator)

70. Mehrabkhani, Shahadat Dr Berjis 5.

71. *Ittila'at*, Monday 17 Bahman 1328/6 February 1950.

72. *ibid.*

73. *ibid.* and *Ittila'at*, Sunday 16 Bahman 1328/5 February 1950.

74. *Ittila'at*, Monday 17 Bahman 1328/6 February 1950.

75. Damghani, *Jamih-yi Aludih dar Aftab* 209.

76. Mehrabkhani, Shahadat Dr Berjis 5.

77. *Ittila'at* and *Kayhan*, Sunday and Monday 16 and 17 Bahman/5 and 6 February 1950.

78. Hazhir (1899–1949) served as minister on ten occasions and eventually served as the prime minister from 13 June 1948 to 9 November 1949. He was then appointed as the court minister. (translator)

79. Because of religious provisions, Baha'is are not allowed to accept political offices. (translator).

80. Ahmad Kasravi was a renowned Iranian intellectual and writer whose heterodox views resulted in his murder by Fada'iyan-i Islam. For a biography see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmad\\_Kasravi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmad_Kasravi). (translator)

81. *Millat Iran*, 90, Thursday 20 Bahman 1328/9 February 1950, quoted in Suhrab Nikusefat, *Kankashi dar Baha'i-setizi* [A Discussion of Anti-Baha'ism], n.p.: Payam Verlag, 1st printing, Khurdad 1385/May 2006.

82. *Naysan*, 20 Bahman 1328/9 February 1950.

83. Most likely a reference to Ayatollah Burujirdi, who was a determined enemy of the Baha'is and a source of emulation for the Shi'ites. (translator)

84. Suhrab Nikusefat, *Kankashi dar Baha'i-setizi* 16. [See Appendix 2, Document A – translator.]

85. Nikusefat, *Kankashi dar Baha'i-setizi* 17. [See Appendix 2, Document B – translator.]
86. Karbaschi, *Tarikh Shafahi Inqilab Islami* 296.
87. Nikusefat, *Kankashi dar Baha'i-setizi* 18. [See Appendix 2, Document C – translator.]
88. Nikusefat, *Kankashi dar Baha'i-setizi* 19. [See Appendix 2, Document D – translator.]
89. Literally, the Masters, a reference to the clerical leaders. (translator)
90. For a biography of 'Ali Mansur, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ali\\_Mansur](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ali_Mansur). (translator)
91. Nikusefat, *Kankashi dar Baha'i-setizi* 21. [See Appendix 2, Document E – translator.]
92. Muhammad-Taqi Afnan, *Bigunahan* 121–24, quotes a letter of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Iran dated 5 Bahman 1329/25 January 1951 in which the murder of Dr Berjis is raised with the prime minister. (translator)
93. *Khatirat Haji 'Azu'l-Mamalik Ardilani: Zindigi dar duran shish padishah* [Memoirs of Haji 'Izu'l-Mamalik of Ardilan: Life During the Reigns of Six Monarchs], Khurshid Press, 1372/1993, 315–16.
94. Damghani, *Jamih-yi Aludih dar Aftab* 209.
95. Karbaschi, *Tarikh Shafahi Inqilab Islami* 296. [In the original Persian, reference is incorrectly given to a publication by Rida Gulsurkhi – translator.]
96. *Kayhan*, 18 Khordad 1367/8 June 1988.
97. Rabbani-Shirazi was a student of Ayatollah Burujirdi and Ayatollah Khomeini. Besides marginal notes and annotations on the *Wasa'il al-Shi'ah*, he also wrote the introduction (in 242 pages) to the new edition of the *Biharu'l-Anvar*, the massive Shi'ite collection of traditions. (translator)
98. Rabbani-Shirazi, *Da'iratu'l-Ma'rif: 'Ulama-yi Mujahid* [Encyclopaedia Of Mujahid Clerics], <http://www.irdc.ir/personage.asp?id=325>.
99. For his biography, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Navvab\\_Safavi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Navvab_Safavi). (translator)
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# The Truth-seeking Traveller: A Dutch Zionist's Interview with 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Jelle de Vries

## Abstract

*It was recently discovered that the Dutch national newspaper "Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant" in 1921 published an anonymous interview with 'Abdu'l-Bahá taken at his home in Haifa as well as in Tiberias. The correspondent turned out to be Ms Jo Goudsmit, a Dutch Zionist who emigrated to Palestine in 1919.*

All those who have ever visited Haifa are familiar with the Bahá'í sanctuary on the slope of Mount Carmel. Some know that the tiles of its golden dome have been produced in Utrecht, in the Netherlands. Few are aware that one of the two persons laid to rest here was interviewed for a Dutch newspaper. But no one can tell you the identity of the reporter. Until recently that is.

Of course, there are many photographs and descriptions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. But as an historical source this particular interview is of special significance: it was taken at the home of the interviewee, was one of his very last public appearances, was done by an outsider, was published in a national newspaper, and is the only one in Dutch.

The interview was published in the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* of Saturday 2 April 1921 as part of a regular "private correspondence" from Palestine that started in January 1920 and continued for several years. The weekly articles covered a wide range of topics but were never signed.

So the question presented itself: who was the person that referred to one of the central figures of the Bahá'í Faith as "my friend Abas Effendi"?

## The correspondent

From his or her articles we did at least know that the unknown correspondent was a Zionist who visited Palestine in the spring of 1914, emigrated in 1919, travelled by way of Paris, Trieste and Cairo, settled in Jerusalem in January 1920, and visited the grave of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in December 1926. That information limited the scope of the investigation to the seven Dutch Zionists who left for Palestine in 1919: Ms. Lena Hoofiën, Ms. Betsy Davids, Ms. Jo Goudsmit, accountant Lazare Bawly, and the lawyers Menachem Dunkelblum, Siegfried van Vriesland, and Jacob Israël de Haan.<sup>1</sup>

Inquiries at the archives of the newspaper involved, the Dutch Press Museum (*Persmuseum*), the Jewish Historical Museum (*Joods Historisch Museum*), the New Israeli Weekly (*Nieuw Israelietisch Weekblad*) and the Dutch Literary Museum (*Letterkundig Museum*), did not result in a definite

## Keywords

Jo Goudsmit  
'Abdu'l-Bahá  
Nieuwe Rotterdamsche  
Courant  
Palestine  
Dutch Zionism

answer, but did exclude De Haan, Van Vriesland, Dunkelblum and Bawly as the possible correspondent.<sup>2</sup> Besides, it could be proved for only one candidate that she visited Palestine in 1914. And so it happened that two newspapers reported on Jo Goudsmit's journey that year.

"On Sunday the national meeting of the Dutch Zionists Union was held in Haarlem. One hundred delegates from all over the country attended. ... Ms. Goldschmidt presented a lecture on her journey to Palestine."<sup>3</sup>

And:

"The Haarlem branch of the Dutch Zionists Union has hosted the members of the Union converging for a national meeting, in the garden of the Society Club. Ms. J. Goudsmit held a lecture on her tour in Palestine and her experiences there in the fields of education, trade and industry."<sup>4</sup>

Confirmation of the identification of Goudsmit as the correspondent came with the discovery of a thank-you letter of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that was published in the *Nieuw Rotterdamsche Courant* of 13 August 1921. The original Persian text of this letter is preserved in the Bahá'í World Centre Archives. It turned out that the addressee was one "Mrs Gundschnidt in Jerusalem".<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately we have little information on Jo Goudsmit, but we do know that she lived in The Hague<sup>6</sup>, that she attended the Tenth Zionist Congress in Basel in 1911<sup>7</sup>, and that she was an ardent advocate of the Zionist cause. Not only in 1914 but also in 1916 two newspapers reported on her activities:

"The Rotterdam branch of the Dutch Zionist Union has held a well attended meeting yesterday evening, during which various topics were discussed. ... Ms. J. Goudsmit spoke about the arguments of our opponents. Based on experiences gained during a propaganda tour on Zionism, she divided the opponents in five categories: assimilators; the orthodox; those who prefer other means to solve the Jewish question; the anti-Zionists, who reject the actions of the Zionists; and the indifferent. She tried to refute the arguments of these opponents."<sup>8</sup>

And:

"Four young Zionists have been given the opportunity by the Rotterdam branch of the Dutch Zionist Union to express their opinions during a meeting in the upper hall of the Boneski<sup>9</sup> ... Ms. Goudsmit told ... about the arguments used by Jewish opponents of Zionism during a propaganda campaign for Zionism conducted this year. She broke down these opponents into five groups, of which she especially refuted the objections of the assimilators – those who wanted to blend in with the people whose hospitality they enjoyed – and of the indifferent, with vigour."<sup>10</sup>

In 1919 – Great Britain had meanwhile taken over control of Palestine from Turkey and appointed the territory to be "a national home for the Jewish people" – Goudsmit added deeds to words and emigrated to the Holy Land. On her departure from the Netherlands she wrote:

"It is a strange experience to leave the country where one was born, where one spent one's youth, shared life's joys and sorrows, where one felt at home

like nowhere else in the world, leaving the language which one speaks like no other language, to meet at a ripe age a new future in the far East. It had been really very mixed feelings that had taken possession of me at the moment that I said farewell to my old fatherland. And yet – as I already wrote on my short visit to Palestine in 1914 a few months before the outbreak of the war – the land, the beautiful, sunny land in the East attracts me like no other in the world and with an irresistible urge it attracts me to work there, to live together with and for my Jewish people that I love, although it is hard for me to leave all and everything in the Netherlands. ... And yet, we Zionists ... long for a country of our own, to live in our own culture, together with our less favoured brothers and sisters, and therefore it is the wish of many of us to witness in Palestine the start of the budding of our own nation.”<sup>11</sup>

By way of Paris, Trieste and Cairo Goudsmit arrived by train in Jerusalem in January 1920. It was cold and rainy that afternoon, but the sense of the significance of the moment was no less. “The promised land, the Erets Israël – to enter it is still only given to a few – it had been reached.”<sup>12</sup>

In the years to come she would report on the developments in this part of the world in a detailed and lively style. Her first weekly letters are not cheering, however. During the so called “Palestinian Troubles” between Jews and Arabs in April that year 10 were killed and hundreds wounded. Goudsmit is upset and speaks of “a pogrom”.<sup>13</sup>

## The interview

Fortunately the news is of a totally different nature the next year, when she writes from a sunny and peaceful Tiberias about her two meetings with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá<sup>14</sup>:

“Abdul Baha and his teachings – Of the many remarkable figures that one finds in Palestine, one of the most interesting and sympathetic is the well known, both here and elsewhere, Abdul Baha or Abas Effendi; the name by which everybody in Palestine knows him.

I had heard of this prophet’s son for a long time. One had advised me urgently to visit him and had informed me about the work of the preachers of Bahaiism, who for over 70 years have preached world peace and have wanted to unite all different religions into a single one. When my journey took me to Haifa, I not surprisingly asked for an audience with Abas Effendi, which he granted me with the utmost willingness. An audience – this is what one really has to call a visit to this person, who is treated by his followers and many admirers with royal reverence. Abas Effendi lives in one of the most beautiful houses in Haifa, surrounded by a lovely garden full of roses and other flowering plants. We were shown into a spacious and luxurious room, where Abas Effendi soon joined us.

He is a respectable old man aged 76 with white hair and a long white beard. He wore a grey garment, a white girdle around the waist, a long brown coat and a white turban. In an eastern manner he squatted on a cushion in the windowsill while he talked with us.

He asked us with interest, what we wanted to know of him. When I told him that I would be glad to write about him and his teachings in a Dutch newspaper,



Figure 1. Jo Goudsmit 1911.

he was very pleased, for he said in Holland we do not have followers and we are not very well known there. Abas Effendi only speaks Eastern languages – Persian, Turkish and Arabic – however he has a secretary, who is always around him and close by, and translates his words into English.

It is very difficult to have Abas Effendi tell about himself, but when he speaks about the teachings of his father, the actual prophet and founder of Bahaism, whose faithful follower he is, his eyes shine, the old frame raises itself in youthful fire, words flow from his lips and one understands how this man brings enthusiasm and inspiration to thousands and thousands.  
I asked him about the new religion his father had founded.

He answered me that his father had not really founded a new religion, but a Bahauistic Organization (*Bahauïstische Organisatie*). This derives its name from the prophet Bahaula<sup>15</sup>, his father. For six thousand years, he continued, there has been intolerance and struggle among the various religions themselves, and also fanaticism, hate and political discord among the various peoples and countries.

Especially in the East the situation was and still is dark and confused. Bahaula appeared in the East, like the rising sun, and illumined with his rays the dark East. He preached that one should not blindly follow the doctrines of one's ancestors, but should look for truth in all matters for oneself.

Seventy years ago he started to preach a universal (*algemeenen*) religion in Teheran in Persia, a religion that unites in itself all fundamental concepts of the various religions. The fundamental principles (*grondbeginselen*) of this universal religion are:

- 1 – Independent investigation of the truth, which means that one has to refrain from blindly imitating others.
- 2 – The unity of mankind: all peoples are God's lambs and God is the loving Shepherd. He is kind to all His lambs, has created them all, fed and protected them; this is proof of His love. This is divine policy and we must follow God's policy, for, however perfect human policy might appear, it can never be compared to the work of God. Therefore one has to let go of one's racial, religious and political prejudices in order to follow God's policy. Prejudices destroy human happiness.
- 3 – Religion has to be a cause of harmony for mankind. When religion breeds enmity and hate, it is preferable that religion does not exist.
- 4 – Religion has to be in concord with science and reason. When religion is not in concord with reason, it does not satisfy our conscience.
- 5 – Equality of the sexes, for mankind has two wings, male and female. When one of them is weaker than the other, the bird cannot fly, and it is only when both wings have equal power that the bird can fly. Therefore when both do not have equal power, mankind can never prosper.
- 6 – Universal peace. A universal court of justice has to be established. Every country must elect 2 or 3 members depending on the size of the population, who are the best, both in competence as well as character. These persons will have to be elected by the country's parliaments and this choice must be ratified by the people, the ministers and the heads of state, so that these members will be the true representatives of the whole nation. Together they will constitute an international court of arbitration that will deal with all international discord. The decisions of this court shall be final. When a country does not subject itself to these decisions, the whole world will rise against that country and force it to comply.
- 7 – There has to be a universal language. One will be elected from among the existing languages or a new language has to be developed. This will be spoken everywhere and will become the universal language. We need diversity as well, which is why all the different languages also have to be preserved. But a universal language will improve the mutual relations.

There are still many other principles, but the ones mentioned here are the most important.

How will these principles be implemented, I asked him.

These principles will be implemented by the will of God. They have been spread all over the world, in Europe, America, Japan, Australia, India, Persia, and so on.

Are there any specific priests?

Every Bahaja<sup>16</sup> is a person who spreads these teachings, among other ways, by personal contact.

Do you have specific religious services?

No, we only have some prayers in various languages and sometimes we gather at the grave of my father in Haifa.

How many members does your organization have?

We have four to five million members the world over. Once in a while we have meetings; a congress, which we hope to convene soon, will decide whether we will adopt a world language from among the existing languages or make a new one.

When I asked whether the organization allowed its members to marry more than one woman, the answer was: No, only in exceptional cases, for instance in the case of insanity.

Is there a specific class of persons, for instance intellectuals, the working class or the more wealthy classes, more interested in your movement?

No, we have followers from among all classes of society. Everyone can still adhere to his own religion, but sympathize with our ideals and help to spread them.

After our conversation Abas Effendi requested us with an innate courtesy to stay and drink tea with him, and showed us, always accompanied by his secretary, into a big, simple room. The number of chairs caused me to assume that we were in some sort of meeting room. The delicate china, the tea, so rare in Palestine, the neat way in which pastry and tea were served by an Arab servant, presupposed a luxurious and sophisticated household.

After the tea I asked the secretary if the Master, as he is called, did not wish to share something about his personal life, since he had avoided with great modesty speaking about himself. The likable old man however appeared to be somewhat tired at the end of our conversation and so it did not surprise me when he said, he would prefer to postpone this to another time. After this we took leave of the Master in a friendly manner, after he had presented me, on my request, with a signed portrait.

I did not expect to see him again soon and would not easily have dared to take up the time of this interesting old man, if fate had not decided otherwise. On a beautiful spring morning we left Haifa to spend a week in Tiberias at the shore of the lovely lake of Kineret.

Already in the train we saw our old friend again. He was leaning back in the corner of a railway compartment and was accompanied by some servants and his secretary, who extended him the greatest care. We all together followed the road from the station of Samakh to the boat that would bring us across the lake to Tiberias. The splendors of nature caused us to forget the inconveniences of the boat, which was a mere freight vessel. Abas Effendi had a good time too, covered in his beautiful travel blankets enjoying the clear spring sun on the friendly blue lake. He at once recognized us and greeted us with a

friendly "Good morning", one of the few expressions he knows in English. We shared the same destination and arrived at the same time at the comfortable hotel in Tiberias, with its beautiful view of the lake and mountains. Like an old acquaintance he was welcomed there with cordiality and a certain respect.

I resolved to find out more about him in the days to come. That was not very difficult for soon he himself had invited me to have a chat with him. So, a few evenings ago, I found myself facing him in his quiet, simple hotel room. Now it was his turn to interview me on my plans and my expectations for the future of Palestine. This time he also wanted to share with me something about his past and especially that of his honored father.

The father of Abas Effendi, the prophet Behaula, started his career in Teheran, where the Persian government and the Muslim clergy did everything to counter him, since they considered his ideas to be revolutionary. Behaula was the son of a Persian minister and belonged to a very wealthy and noble family.

When he refused to stop spreading his principles, they threw him into a subterranean dungeon, and confiscated all his possessions, houses, land, country mansions and fortune. He was 32 years old at the time.

On this first occasion he spent four months in jail, accused of revolutionary action against the government. His friends did everything they could to have him released and this soon happened, but he was banned from Persia. He thereupon left for Bagdad. His teachings spread rapidly and the number of his followers increased as well. In Persia were the movement grew rapidly, they suffered a lot from persecution.

Very soon the Persian government asked the Turkish government to exile him from Bagdad, so that the Bahaists would be further separated from their leaders. And so he was sent to Constantinople, from there to Adrianople and finally to Akka in Palestine. In this way he was exiled four times, but he never thought about giving in.

His friends helped him to secretly send letters and tidings from jail in Akka to kings and other dignitaries. These urged them time and again to do everything within their power to help ensure world peace. This was fifty years ago; the letters have been published. In these letters he informs them that the policies they are pursuing are dangerous and advises them to establish a universal court of peace, in which all countries will be represented, to deal with international disputes.

He also predicted the future. For instance he addressed the German emperor in words like these: "Be not proud of your glories, do not forget that Napoleon was greater than you; and what has been his end? Learn from his example, assists in bringing about the everlasting peace. Berlin is at the peak of its glory now, but I already hear the lamentations of a moaning Berlin". He addressed the sultan of Turkey in the same spirit and predicted the return of the Jews to Palestine. After being kept a prisoner in Akka for twenty-five years, alternately as an exile and a prisoner locked up in the house of detention, he died at the age of seventy-five, and however great his suffering, his will-power was never broken.

After his death the son continued the work of his father. He had endured everything with him and had always followed him in exile and imprisonment.

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Kalenin was woedend en vertrok dadelijk naar St. Petersburg. De matrozen lieten hem gaan, maar beletten Koeschmin en Wasilijef Kroonstad te verlaten. Koeschmin trachtte den toestand nog te reden. Hij begaf zich aan boord van de „Petrovawlowsk“ om de mannen te overreden het hoofd in den schoot te leggen, maar hij werd van het schip gejaagd. Denzelfden dag zetten de matrozen de geheele sowjet van Kroonstad af.

Die alles gebeurde op 1 Maart.

## Palestina.

### Abdul Baha en zijn leer.

(Particuliere correspondentie.)

Tiberias, 14 Maart.

Van de vele merkwaardige figuren, die men in Palestina aantreft, is een der interessantste en sympathieke de hier en elders zeer bekende Abdul Baha of Abas Effendi, de naam waaronder iedereen in Palestina hem kent.

Reeds sedert lang had ik van dezen profetenzoon gehoord, men had mij aangeraden, hem toch vooral te bezoeken en mij gesproken van den arbeid der predikers van het Bahaisme, die sedert meer dan 70 jaren den wereldvrede prediken en de verschillende godsdiensten tot een enkelien willen verenigen. Toen mijn weg mij naar Haifa leidde, vroeg ik dan ook een audiëntie bij Abas Effendi aan, dat hij mij met de grootste bereidwilligheid toestond. Een audiëntie, zoo moet men werkelijk een bezoek bij dezen persoon betitelen, die met koninklijken eerbed door zijn volgelingen en zijn vele veredelaars behendeld wordt. Abas Effendi woont in een der mooiste huizen te Haifa, ongeven door een heerlijken tuin vol rozen en bloeiende planten. Wij werden in een ruim en weelderig vertrek gelaten, waar Abas Effendi spoedig bij ons kwam.

Wij is een eerwaardige grijzaard van 76 jaren met witte haren en lange witte baard. Hij droeg een grijs onderkleed, een witte gordel om het middel, een lange, bruine mantel en een witte tulband. Op Oosterscho wijze hukte hij op een kussen in de vensterbank, terwijl hij met ons sprak. Belangstellend vroeg hij ons, wat wij van hem wilden weten. Toen ik hem zeide, dat ik gaarne over hem en zijne leerstellingen in een Hollandse krant wilde schrijven, was hij zeer verheugd want, zeide hij, in Holland hebben wij nog geen volgelingen en zijn wij nog niet

Na de theo vroeg ik den secretař, of de secretar, zoals hij genoemd wordt, niet wat van zijn persoonlijk leven wilde vertellen, daar hij met grote bescheidenheid vermeend had van zichzelf te spreken. De sympathieke grijzaard scheen echter aan het einde van ons onderhoud eenigszins vermoed te zijn en zoo verwonderde het mij niet, dat hij zeide, dit liever tot een anderen keer te willen stellen. Hierna namen wij op vriendelijke wijze van den Meester afscheid, nadat hij me op mijn verzoek een portret met handtekening ten geschenke had gegeven.

Ik verwachtte niet, hem spoedig weer te zien en had het niet licht gewuigd nog eens deu tijd van dezen interessanten grisaard in beslag te nemen, indien het het niet anders besoekt had. Op een mooin lente-morgen verliet we Haifa, om den week in Tiberias aan den oever van het lieftelijke meer van Kineret door te brengen. Reeds in den troen zagen wij onzen ouden vriend weder, hij lag achterover gesleund in den hock van een spoorwegenouw en was vergezeld van enige bedienden en zijn secretař, die hem met den grootste zorg omringden. Allen te zamen volgden wij den weg van het station in Samakot tot aan de boot, die ons over het meer naar Tiberias zou brengen. De heerlijke natuur deed ons de ongemakken der boot, die niet meer dan een vrachtkoets was, vergaten. Ook Abas Effendi genoot, in zijn prachtige reislekens gehuld, van de heldere voorjaarszon op het vriendelijke, blauwe meer. Hij herkende ons dadelijk en begroette ons met een vriendelijk „Good morning“, een der weinige uitdrukkingen, die hij in het Engelsch kent. We hadden dezelfde bestemming en kwamen tegelijkertijd in het gerieflijke hotel in Tiberias, met het prachtige uitzicht op meer en bergen, aan. Als oude kennis werd hij daar met hartelijkheid en zeker een gebroot. Ik nam mij voor in de komende dagen wat meer van hem gewaar te worden. Heel moeilijk viel mij dit niet, want uit zichzelf liet hij mij reeds spoedig verzoeken, een praatje met hem te komen maken. Zoo zat ik enige avonden gelezen weer tegenover hem in de rustige, eenvoudige hotelkamer en onderviroeg hij mij op zijn beurt omtrent mijne plannen en naar mijn verwachtingen van de toekomst van Palestina. Nu wilde hij mij ook wel het een en ander omtrent zijn verleden en vooral dat van zijn vereerde vader vertellen.

De vader van Abas Effendi, de profeet Behaullah, begon zijn loopbaan in Teheran, waar de Perzische regering en de Mohammedaansche geestelijkheid alles deden, om hem tegen te werken, want zij beschouwden zijn beginnaden als revolutionair. Behaullah was de zoon van een Perzischen minister en van een zeer rijke en voorname familie. Toen hij niet

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Figure 2: Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant of Saturday 2 April 1921.

He always lived in foreign countries and spend forty years either in exile or in jail. Fifteen years after the death of his father, the revolution in Turkey started. When the constitution of the Young Turks was established, he was released at the age of 68. Abas Effendi travelled to Egypt, Europe and America and spent four years of his life on a journey to promulgate his teachings. When the Balkan war broke out, he returned to Palestine.

The movement at present numbers four to five million adherents. Unbroken in spirit after the long years of suffering, full of enthusiasm for his teachings, which he has very much at heart, honored and loved by followers and outsiders, Abas Effendi is spending the rest of his life spreading his teachings in word and writing. He works from the early morning to the evening, answers letters from all countries around the world, receives visitors, and gives audiences.

May this kind, idealistic old man, who suffered so much for his ideas and ideals, have a happy evening of his life (*levensavond*).

Were there more of these energetic figures in the world, like Abas Effendi and his father, then that might be possible, what at present is to be feared to

remain an illusion for many centuries and probably for ever: eternal peace on earth and love among all peoples.”<sup>17</sup>

## A thank-you letter

After her stay in Haifa, followed by a one week holiday in Tiberias, Goudsmit returned to Jerusalem. In a letter of 20 March she writes:

“We have returned from the warm, sunny Northern Palestine to the cooler South. We have enjoyed the flower splendor of Galilee, the peace of the nice, blue lake, the beautiful lovely nature – and now we try to adapt ourselves again to Jerusalem, which appears to us a metropolis compared to the places we visited in the North. It is possible to see a large part of Palestine in a few weeks. A good car brought us without unforeseen delays in one day from Tiberias, through Nazareth and Nablus back to Jerusalem. Life in Tiberias and surroundings, far away from the bustling world, so quiet, where no one seems to be in a hurry and no one understands that time is money, has, at least for the moment, a rare charm. Newspapers, even old ones, are to be found only in very exceptional cases and when one realizes how irregular and slow the delivery in the capital already is, one can imagine with what speed news reaches Tiberias. Everyone who comes from Jerusalem must tell everything about the outside world.”<sup>18</sup>

Connections with Europe are poor too.

“About every 10 days I receive one or sometimes several copies of the N.R.C. [Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant]. Many issues fail, they arrive in a most random order. The mail piles up in Egypt and one needs days to sort it out. Those waiting impatiently storm the post office and none of us knows how much is lost.”<sup>19</sup>

But, no matter how slow and irregular the post delivery might be, the NRC newspaper with the article on ‘Abdu'l-Bahá manages to reach Jerusalem. Goudsmit sends a copy to Haifa. That summer she receives a thank-you letter. She includes this – what she calls – “unusual letter” in her article of July, as an example of Eastern courtesy. After her report on the situation in Palestine she introduces the letter as follows:

“At the end of this article I include a small specimen of how differently Easterners think and feel, as compared to European customs, how they deal with one another in a totally different manner. So next is the translation of a letter which I received some time ago from my friend Abas Effendi (son of the prophet and founder of Bahaism), after I had sent him the article about him and his teachings that I had written earlier for the N.R.C.

“Greetings and praise be thou.

He is God (this in colored writing). O thou the truth-seeking traveller. God be praised, that thou has reached Palestine, the Holy Land, the place of the covenant of all holy prophets, and has been able to continue thy investigations, informing thyself, as is thy duty, about the relations and people in Palestine. Thou has looked for the truth, thou has met me and with the utmost frankness and honesty been with me. I therefore explained to thee some of the teachings of His Holiness Bahaullah. This is proof of my highest love.

Thou hast from Jerusalem sent an article to one of the Dutch papers. This article has been published and circulated; be assured that in the future this article will be of great importance. It will be printed and propagated repeatedly in the future. It will be the cause that thy name and reputation will be an ornament of meetings and gatherings.

I pray for thee, so that thou wilt be supported and blessed in every way by all. For the moment I express to thee my deepest respect.

(signed) ABDUL BAHÁ ABBAS" <sup>20</sup>

It must have been one of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's last letters, for we know that the Master passed away in the early morning of Monday 28 November that same year. His funeral a day later was attended by thousands, including Sir Herbert Samuel, the British High Commissioner of Palestine. We do not know if Goudsmit went to Haifa. But what we do know is that she is the only one reporting this event in the Dutch national press:

"We deeply regret to have to report this week the passing away of Sir Abas Effendi from Haifa, the well known prophet of the Bahá'ís, on whose life and teachings I had devoted an article some time ago. With him one of our most well known and unique personalities has passed away, he was loved and respected by all parts of the population in Palestine; his work for a universal peace, his great tolerance and his general love for humanity won esteem and admiration from every corner. This year the British government, recognizing his various merits, awarded him a knighthood. The Egyptian, Hebrew and Arabic press all published long biographies on him."<sup>21</sup>

Goudsmit too does not forget 'Abdu'l-Bahá. When she visits Haifa five years later, she does not refrain from visiting his grave on Mount Carmel. In her newspaper she writes:

"Haifa, where I never stayed so long before, is worth a visit especially because of the Carmel mountain. All over the foot of the Carmel, half way and on the top, houses have been built. Because of the bad times construction moves not as fast as one would wish, since on a large part of the Carmel the ground has already been bought by Jews.

On the first Christmas day it was a pleasure to take a mountain stroll. The road to the Carmel alongside the lovely blue sea with its view of the city, the budding green and the first flowers after the rain, made a walk worthwhile. We visited the grave of Abas Effendi, the prophet of the Bahá'ís, whom I knew during his life and about whose religion and followers I wrote you some years ago. The location and design of this grave is of a rare beauty. It is located halfway up the Carmel, surrounded by descending terraces, a Garden of Eden. All plants that can thrive in this country have been brought here by the self-less hands of friends. Not only flowers, but trees and orchards surround the grave of the leader who during his life was so amiable and beloved. One is not allowed to pick flowers or fruits, or to enter the grave proper, which is enclosed by walls forming a small chapel. The gardens around it are accessible for all. They have a Japanese design. The Bahá'ís are specialists in beautiful garden layout, for the Persian gardens in Akka where the father of Abas

Effendi, the prophet proper, has been buried, are of a rare beauty too. It is a pity that so few people visit these places, but always follow the same tracks paved by guides.”<sup>22</sup>

But that was then, and times have changed. The Bahá’í gardens on Mount Carmel are at present visited by half a million tourists and pilgrims each year. If you ever happen to be one of them, then do not forget to walk through *Haparsim* (Persian) Street, for there at number 7, the house of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, you can find the footsteps of Jo Goudsmit, “the truth-seeking traveller”.<sup>23</sup>

### **Suggested citation**

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### **Endnotes**

1. They are mentioned in a newspaper report on the 20th general meeting of the Dutch Zionist Union in Dordrecht – *Rotterdamsche Courant* – woensdag 24 dec 1919, avond
2. De Haan arrived in Palestine in January 1919 and was murdered in Jerusalem in 1924. Van Vriesland travelled by way of Marseille and arrived in June 1919 (Van Vriesland to brother – letter 26 May 1919 and letter 24 July 1919. Collection of the Letterkundig Museum). Bawly and Dunkelblum made the journey together with Van Vriesland (Jacob Israël de Haan: *Feuilletons in het Algemeen Handelsblad* 1919–1924 – 15 mei 1920, avond. – [www.dbln.org](http://www.dbln.org)).
3. *Het Nieuws van den Dag* – maandag 20 juli 1914, dag. Note that the name of the person involved is spelled “Goldschmidt” as well as “Goudsmit”, the second being the Dutch translation of the latter German word for “goldsmith”.
4. *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* – maandag 20 juli 1914, dag
5. Universal House of Justice to the author – letter 10 Oct 2010
6. Jacob Israël de Haan: *Feuilletons in het Algemeen Handelsblad* 1919–1924 – 6 dec 1920, avond. – [www.dbln.org](http://www.dbln.org)
7. Goudsmit is portrayed on a photograph that was taken in front of hotel *Drei Könige* in Basel in 1911 (Collectie Joods Historisch Museum). It is likely that she reported on the congress for the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*.
8. *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* – zondag 10 dec 1916, dag
9. “Boneski” was a café in the centre of Rotterdam
10. *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* – dinsdag 12 dec 1916, dag
11. *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* – dinsdag 10 febr 1920, avond

12. *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* – donderdag 26 febr 1920, avond
13. *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* – zondag 25 apr 1920, ochtend
14. 'Abdul-Bahá (1844–1921) arrived in 'Akká in 1868 as an exile and prisoner. He was released in 1908 and moved to Haifa in 1910.
15. Bahá'u'lláh is the spiritual name of Mírzá Husayn-‘Alí (Teheran 1817 – 'Akká 1892)
16. Followers of the Bahá'í Faith call themselves "Bahá'í" (plural: Bahá'ís).
17. *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* – zaterdag 2 apr 1921, avond. It is not known exactly when these two meetings took place. But it must have been between 23 February and 14 March 1921. On 19 February Goudsmit sent a letter from Jerusalem (*Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* – 4 maart 1921, avond). And on 22 February she attended a meeting of "all rabbis of Palestine" in Jerusalem. (*Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* – zaterdag 26 maart 1921, ochtend). The annual Bahá'í fast is from 2 to 21 March; between sunrise and sunset no food or drink are taken. Since tea and pastry were served during the meeting, it is likely that the interview in Haifa was conducted between 23 February and 1 March. The interview in Tiberias must have taken place not later than 14 March (*Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* – zaterdag 2 apr 1921, avond). This second meeting must have taken place during the fast and this might be the reason that it happened in the evening.
18. *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* – zondag 3 apr 1921, ochtend
19. *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* – dinsdag 2 maart 1920, avond
20. *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* – zaterdag 13 aug 1921, avond
21. *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* – zondag 18 dec 1921, ochtend
22. *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* – donderdag 20 jan 1927, ochtend
23. Many thanks to Ruth Borah for reviewing the text. Additional biographical information on Ms. Jo Goudsmit remains very welcome.

# The Ethiopian King

By Nader Saiedi Translated by Omid Ghaemmaghami<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

*This article brings to light a number of hitherto unknown passages from the writings of the Bāb about Hajji Mubārak, the Bāb's Ethiopian servant.*

‘... He bestoweth a luminous countenance upon the Ethiopian servant ...’<sup>2</sup>

The eve of 23 May marks the anniversary of the declaration of the Bab, the dawn of a new revelation and a turning point in the history of humankind. Accounts of this historic night customarily begin with Mullā Ḥusayn Bushrū’ī’s encounter with the Bab at his home and proceed to describe the revelation of the first chapter of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā’*<sup>3</sup> and Mullā Ḥusayn’s declaration of faith. Yet we also know that a third person was present on that fateful eve: Mubārak, the Bab’s Ethiopian servant. Until now, the significance of Mubārak has not been fully appreciated by scholars. Babi and Baha'i historians knew little about him and he has largely been ignored as a result.<sup>4</sup> A study of the Bab’s writings shows that this neglect is completely unwarranted. The Bab mentions Mubārak numerous times in his writings, where the person known as the Ethiopian servant is transformed into the Ethiopian king.

It is well-known that in the Persian *Bayān* and other works, the Bab adduces a sifter of wheat from Isfahan<sup>4</sup> to illustrate the great revolution that the appearance of the Promised One ushered in by declaring, ‘The abased amongst you, He shall exalt; and they that are exalted, He shall abase.’<sup>5</sup> According to the Bab, Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Najafī (d. 1849), the author of *Jawāhir al-kalām* and the greatest Shi'i divine of the age,<sup>6</sup> fell into the abyss of the most ignorant of men through rejecting the message of the Bab delivered to him by Mullā ‘Alī Bastāmī,<sup>7</sup> while a sifter of wheat from Isfahan who had no formal education or training attained the summit of glory through his faith in the Bab.<sup>8</sup> In these passages, in expounding on the concept and meaning of true knowledge, the Bab contrasts a sifter of wheat with al-Najafī to illustrate the all-encompassing spiritual revolution caused by his revelation; yet in a different work, he illustrates the same revolutionary ideas using the concept of sovereignty. Here, the Bab explains that upon rejecting him, the king of Iran, Muḥammad Shah (d. 1848),<sup>9</sup> and his prime minister, Hajji Mirza Āqāsī (d. 1849),<sup>10</sup> descended to the lowest abyss, while Mubārak, who to outward appearance, was bereft of any power or earthly rank, ascended to the heaven of glory for ‘having done good in the realm of faith’ (*bi-mā aḥsana fī al-dīn*).<sup>11</sup>

## Keywords

The Bāb  
Mubārak  
Ethiopian  
African  
slavery  
Iran

The other fact worthy of notice is that in most of the writings in which the Bab mentions his parents, he also remembers Mubārak. As an example, we will cite here from a hitherto unknown work of the Bab, composed of some 300–400 pages, and known as *Kitāb-i Sī Du‘ā* ('The Book of Thirty Prayers'). As the Bab approached the age of 30, he revealed 30 prayers in honour of his 30 years. These 30 prayers were revealed daily in Ṣafar (the second month of the Islamic calendar) and early Rabi‘ al-Awwal (the third month of the Islamic calendar) 1265 [December 1848 – January 1849]. The Bab dedicated each of these 30 prayers to one of the years of his life. The work can thus be considered a spiritual autobiography. While each prayer refers to a specific year, the overarching theme of the work is communion with God, embodying the themes of worship and devotion to the Creator that formed the essence of the Bab's life. Among these 30 prayers, prayer number 27 (apropos his 27th year) stands out. In this prayer, the Bab provides an almost complete account of his life in a section that has been cited in the published compilation, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, without the source being identified. Excerpts from this prayer follow:

Thou art aware, O My God, that since the day Thou didst call Me into being out of the water of Thy love till I reached fifteen years of age I lived in the land which witnessed My birth [Shíráz]. Then Thou didst enable Me to go to the seaport [Búshíhr] where for five years I was engaged in trading ... I proceeded therefrom to the Holy Land [Kárbilá] where I sojourned for one year. Then I returned to the place of My birth ... Then at the age of twenty-five I proceeded to thy sacred House [Mecca], and by the time I returned to the place where I was born, a year had elapsed ... Thus I departed therefrom by Thy leave, spending six months in the land of Ṣád [Isfáhán] and seven months in the First Mountain [Mákú], ... Now, in My thirtieth year, Thou beholdest Me, O My God, in this Grievous Mountain [Chihríq] where I have dwelt for one whole year.<sup>12</sup>

Here and elsewhere, the Bab notes that he remained in Mákú for less than eight months. As mentioned earlier, the *Kitāb-i Sī Du‘ā* was revealed near the end of Ṣafar. The Bab says that at the time in which he is writing, he has spent one year in Chihríq. It merits noting that elsewhere in this prayer, the Bab mentions that in a few days, he will turn 30. This may appear odd at first. After all, it is well-known that the Bab was born on the first day of the first month of the Islamic calendar, 1 Muḥarram 1235 (20 October 1819), meaning that by the end of Ṣafar or the beginning of Rabi‘ al-Awwal, two months had passed since his birthday. The solution to this seeming puzzle lies in the words, 'Thou art aware, O My God, that since the day Thou didst call Me into being out of the water of Thy love ...' In this and other passages, the Bab calculates the beginning of his life from the moment of conception rather than the day of his birth. In this prayer, he begins not from the year of his birth, 1235 (rather than 1234), but from the day of conception, i.e. nine months and nine days (according to the lunar calendar which is equal to nine months in the solar calendar) before the first day of Muḥarram. At times in his writings, the Bab calculates his age from 1 Muḥarram 1235; at other times from 21 Rabi‘ al-Awwal 1234; and still other times from

<sup>21</sup> Rabī‘ al-Awwal 1235. In these 30 prayers, each calculation begins from <sup>21</sup> Rabī‘ al-Awwal 1235 (7 January 1820). For this reason, at the end of Ṣafar when he is writing, there are still 3 weeks left before he reaches 30. This passage is in complete congruence with the Bab’s words in other tablets. Moreover, this method of calculation is discussed by him in other works that are beyond the scope of the present article.

Let us return to the subject at hand. One of the interesting points about these thirty prayers, as well as other prayers revealed by the Bab, is the fact that he repeatedly prays first for his mother and father and then for the one who has raised him ('he who raised me'), beseeching God to bestow upon them His loving-kindness and most sublime bounties. The same can be observed in other prayers of the Bab. Previously, it had been assumed that in these prayers, the Bab is expressing his appreciation to first his parents and then the Khāl-i A‘zām,<sup>13</sup> Hajji Mirza Sayyid ‘Alī, but such is not the case. The venerable person who raised and educated him is none other than Mubārak, his Ethiopian servant whose faith and devotion caused him to ascend to the summits of glory and might.<sup>14</sup> The special love and kindness of the Bab for Mubārak is entirely evident from prayer number 7 which is related to when he was seven years old. After praying for his mother and father, the Bab supplicates to God for Mubārak:

Send down, then, upon me, O my God, when I was seven years old and upon him who raised me on Thy behalf, whose name is Mubārak, that which beseemeth the splendours of the sanctity of Thy loftiness and the wonders of the might of Thy revelation.<sup>15</sup>

In this passage, the name of the person for whom the Bab repeatedly prays for and who, alongside his mother and father, is remembered and honoured as the one who raised and educated, is disclosed. The Bab in fact places Mubārak on the same plane as his father. The love and tenderness for Mubārak that runs throughout the Bab’s writings is the greatest manifestation of the message of peace, brotherhood, and unity that he has brought to humanity. Following this passage, the image of a moving and beautiful memory from the Bab’s life is conveyed: ‘... and for the bow and arrow he made for Me to play with at that age, [send him] what is in Thy knowledge of Thy grace and mercy.’<sup>16</sup>

The Bab’s affection for one who served him from childhood; his remembrance of Mubārak while imprisoned in the mountains of Ādharbāyjān; his prayers for him and his greetings to him in his letters to his mother, wife, and uncle;<sup>17</sup> his praise of Mubārak as one who was to all outward appearances a servant but, in reality, the king of the righteous; all beautifully serve to demonstrate that Mubārak truly loved the Bab and that the Bab in turn had special affection and love for Mubārak. It was this mutual love that made the Bab’s Ethiopian servant the pride of all the kings on earth.

### **Suggested citation**

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## Endnotes

1. This article is a translation of N. Saiedi, 'Sultān-i habashī', in *Payám-i Bahá'í*, 366 (May 2010/167BE), 10–13. The notes that follow have been provided by the translator.
2. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Makātib-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá', *jild-i hashtum* [vol. 8], [Tehran]: Mu'assasih-yi Milli-i Matbū'āt-i Amrī, 134BE/1977–78, 150.*
3. The exceptions being [N. Zarandi], *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*, trans. and ed. Shoghi Effendi, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1932 [1996], 53–54, 62, 66, 68, 96, 129, 132–33, 148; M. H. Afnán, *Genesis of the Bábí-Bahá'í Faiths in Shíráz and Fárs*, trans. A. Rabbani, Leiden: Brill, 2008, index, s.v. 'Mubárik, Hái'; A. Mázandarānī, *Kitáb-i zuhúr al-ḥaqq, bakhsh-i du* [vol. 2], digitally republished, East Lansing, Michigan: H-Bahái, 2000, 29, 37, 49; A. Mázandarānī, *Kitáb-i zuhúr al-ḥaqq, *jild-i sivvum** [vol. 3], Hofheim: Mu'assasih-yi Matbū'āt-i Bahá'í-Ālmān, 165BE/2008, 81, 193–4; A. Afnán, *Black Pearls*, Los Angeles, Kalimát Press, 1988, 3–18 = A. Afnán, *La'ālī-i siyāh*, Canada: n.p., 1992, 27–36; N. Muhammād-Husaynī, *Hadrat-i Báb*, Dundas, Ontario: Mu'assasih-yi Ma'ārif-i Bahá'í bih Lisáni Farsi, 152BE/1995, 701–02; N. Muhammād-Husaynī, *Hadrat-i Táhirih*, Dundas, Ontario: Mu'assasih-yi Ma'ārif-i Bahá'í, 157BE/2000, 13–4; A. Afnán, 'Ahd-i a'lá: *Zindigān-i hadrat-i Báb*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2000, 61, 64, 74, 76, 79, 130, 133, 567 (note 75), where the story of Mubárik accompanying the Báb to visit an early Arab Bábí (and later Bahá'í) Shaykh Sultán during his stay in Shiraz is recounted (the source for this account is Nabil Zarandi's history); A. Lee, 'Mubarak, Haji', *Encyclopedia of Africa*, eds. K. A. Appiah and H. L. Gates, Jr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, vol. 1, 197, where Mubárik's year of birth is mistakenly given as 1833; A. Lee, 'Haji Mubarak', *World Religions: Belief, Culture, and Controversy*, ABC-CLIO, 2011–, available online: <http://religion2.abc-clio.com/>; A. Lee, *The Bahá'í Faith in Africa: Establishing a New Religious Movement*, 1952–1962, Leiden: Brill, 2011, 21–41 *passim*; A. Lee, 'Enslaved African Women in Nineteenth-Century Iran: The Life of Fezzeh Khanom of Shiraz', *Iranian Studies*, 45(3), 2012, 417–437 (see 432–3); N. Cacchioli, 'The Pupil of the Eye: Abolitionism, Racial Unity, and the Iconography of Enslaved Africans in Bahá'í Tradition', in E. Toledano (ed.) *African Communities in Asia and the Mediterranean: Identities between Integration and Conflict*, Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2012, pp. 237–54, see 244–45 (my thanks to Steve Cooney for this reference). For general information about slaves and the practice of slavery in pre-modern and modern Iran, see W. Floor, 'Barda and Barda-dári iv. From the Mongols to the abolition of slavery', in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. E. Yarshater, available online: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/barda-iv>.
4. This is a reference to Mullá Muhammād Ja'far Gandum Pákkun, the first Bábí in Isfahān who had the distinction of being mentioned in both the Persian Bayān and the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, trans. Habib Taherzadeh with the assistance of a Committee at the Bahá'í World Centre, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1976, 83; Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, Haifa: The Universal House of Justice, 1992, 79 (par. 166), 243 (note 179). See also [N. Zarandi], *The Dawn-Breakers* 99.
5. Translated in Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983, 146. Cf. Matthew 5:10; Qur'an 28:5. The expression is a similar to the wording found in a number of hadiths attributed to the Shí'i Imams. See for example al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-kāfi*, ed. 'A. A. al-Ghaffārī, 8 vols., Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya, 1362AS/1983–84, 1:369 (no. 1); A. al-Aḥsā'ī, *Kitáb al-raj'a*, Beirut: al-Dār al-ālamiyya, 1414AH/1993, 131; 'A. H. Ishrāq-Khāvarī, *Qāmuṣ-i iqān*, 4 vols., [Tehran]: Mu'assasih-yi Milli-i Matbū'āt-i Amrī, 128BE/1971–72, 4:1827–29.
6. Muhammad Hasan al-Najafi's magnum opus, *Jawáhir al-kaláam fi sharḥ sharáyi' al-islám* (*The Jewels of Dialectic Theology in Explaining the Laws of Islam*), a work which took him 25 years to complete, is recognized as the most popular work of Shí'i jurisprudence in the 19th century. See Meir Litvak, 'Iraq XI. Shí'i Seminaries in Iraq', in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*,

available online: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/iraq-xi-shiite-seminaries>. Baha'u'llah reproaches him in numerous tablets for his opposition to the Cause of the Bab. See for example, Bahá'u'lláh, *Āyāt-i iláhí jild-i duvum: Gulchín az āthár-i hadrat-i Bahá'u'lláh, Langenhain: Mu'assasih-yi Matbú'át-i Amrí-i Álmān*, 1996, 156, where he is referred to as 'the first who opposed [God]' (*awwal man a'rāda*).

7. On him, see M. Momen, 'Alí Bastámí, Mullá (d. 1846)', in *The Bahá'í Encyclopedia Project*, available online: [http://www.bahai-encyclopedia-project.org/attachments/Ali\\_Bastami\\_Mulla.pdf](http://www.bahai-encyclopedia-project.org/attachments/Ali_Bastami_Mulla.pdf); M. 'A. Faydī, *Hadrat-i Nuqtih-yi Úlā*, Tehran: Mu'assasih-yi Millí-i Matbú'át-i Amrī, 132BE/1975-76, 248-49. On his trial in Iraq, see N. Alkan, *Dissent and Heterodoxy in the Late Ottoman Empire: Reformers, Babis, and Bahá'ís*, Istanbul: The Press ISIS, 2008, 43-50.
8. 'Likewise behold this Revelation. The essences of the people have, through divinely-conceived designs, been set in motion and until the present day three hundred and thirteen disciples have been chosen. In the land of Sád [Isfahán], which to outward seeming is a great city, in every corner of whose seminaries are vast numbers of people regarded as divines and doctors, yet when the time came for inmost essences to be drawn forth, only its sifter of wheat donned the robe of discipleship. This is the mystery of what was uttered by the kindred of the Prophet Muhammad – upon them be the peace of God – concerning this Revelation, saying that the abased shall be exalted and the exalted shall be abased' (The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb* 83). Similar statements are made by Baha'u'llah: 'Consider, how can he that faileth in the day of God's Revelation to attain unto the grace of the 'Divine Presence' and to recognize His Manifestation, be justly called learned, though he may have spent aeons in the pursuit of knowledge, and acquired all the limited and material learning of men? It is surely evident that he can in no wise be regarded as possessed of true knowledge. Whereas, the most unlettered of all men, if he be honoured with this supreme distinction, he verily is accounted as one of those divinely-learned men whose knowledge is of God; for such a man hath attained the acme of knowledge, and hath reached the furthermost summit of learning' (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* 144); 'Consider how Balal, the Ethiopian, unlettered though he was, ascended into the heaven of faith and certitude, whilst Abdu'llah Ubayy, a leader among the learned, maliciously strove to oppose Him' (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976, 82). Baha'u'llah also speaks of this theme in a tablet about the 'mystery of the Great Reversal in the Sign of the Sovereign', similarly contrasting the oppression of al-Najafi and other ulama in Iraq and Iran with the acceptance of many of the masses. The tablet is cited in 'A. H. Ishráq-Khávarí, *Rahiq-i makhtúm*, 2 vols., Hofheim: Mu'assasih-yi Matbú'át-i Bahá'í-i Álmān, 164BE/2007, 1:423; V. Ra'fatí, *Yádnámih-yi miṣbáḥ-i munír*, Hofheim: Mu'assasih-yi Matbú'át-i Bahá'í-i Álmān, 163BE/2006, 286.
9. On him, see J. Calmard, 'Mohammad Shah Qajári', in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, available online: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/mohammad-shah>.
10. On him, see S. Quinn, 'Aqasi, Haji Mirza ('Abbas Iravani) (c.1783-1849)', in *The Bahá'í Encyclopedia Project*, available online: [http://www.bahai-encyclopedia-project.org/attachments/Aqasi\\_Haji\\_Mirza.pdf](http://www.bahai-encyclopedia-project.org/attachments/Aqasi_Haji_Mirza.pdf).
11. Retranslated from the original Arabic following correspondence with the author. Personal communication, 11 December 2010. Cf. Qur'an 4:125.
12. The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb* 180-81.
13. Literally, 'The Greatest Uncle', the maternal uncle of the Bab and one of the Seven Martyrs of Tehran. On him, see [N. Zarandí], *The Dawn-Breakers* 446-49.
14. According to Abú al-Qásim Afnán, Mubárák was purchased by Hajji Mirza Abú al-Qásim, the brother-in-law of the Báb, when he was 5 years old. According to the bill of sale, the Bab acquired Mubárák from his brother-in-law in 1842 when Mubárák was 19 years of age, see Afnán, *La'ál-i siyáh* 27-28 = Afnán, *Black Pearls* 4-5. A Research Department memorandum dated 2 February 2000 states that this bill of sale is not held at the Bahá'í World Centre Archives (available online: [http://bahai-library.com/uhj\\_servants\\_household\\_bahaullah](http://bahai-library.com/uhj_servants_household_bahaullah)). Presumably a copy exists at the Afnán Library in the United Kingdom. Abú al-Qásim Afnán states that the Bab acquired Mubárák in Shiraz but according to both Mirza Ḥabíb Alláh Afnán and Asad Alláh Fáḍil-i Mázandaráni, the Bab purchased Mubárák in Bushíhr (M. H. Afnán, *Genesis of the Bábí-Bahá'í Faiths in Shiráz and Fárs* 20 (note 61), 30, 306 (my thanks to Ahang Rabbani for this reference); A. Mázandaráni, *Kitáb-i zuhúr al-ḥaqqa, bakhsh-i du*, [vol. 2] 49 (available online: <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/arabic/vol4/2tzh/2tzh049.gif>). If this information is correct, Mubárák was born circa 1823 making it impossible for him to have aided in raising the Bab (who was born in 1819). It is possible

that the Bab was raised by another servant of African descent also named Mubārak, a common name for household servants in Iran at that time (my thanks to Mina Yazdani for this clue) as affirmed by Dihkhudā in his *Lughatnāmih*, s.v. 'mubārak' (available online: <http://topurl.in/Mubarak>). A. Afnān, 'Ahd-i a'lā 31, includes an eyewitness account about the Bab's first day of school as a child that explicitly mentions that he was accompanied by a servant (*ghulām*). It is not clear however if this is a reference to Mubārak or someone else. New sources need to come to light before these questions can be answered.

15. *fa-anzil allāhumma 'alayya fi hīn alladhi kuntu 'indaka ḥarf al-wāw wa-man rabbānī yawma'idhin min 'indika alladhi kāna ismuhi mubārak mā yanbaghi li-jalāl quds irtifā'ika wa-badā'i' zuhūrātīka*. The original for '7 years old' is *ḥarf al-wāw* (lit., the letter *wāw*). The numerical value of the letter *wāw* is 6 but as the author has pointed out, in this tablet, the Bab gives the number 0 (represented in Persian and Arabic by a point) the numerical value of 1 and thus the letter *wāw* in this tablet has a numerical value of 7. This and the following passage can be found in a manuscript of the first section of the *Kitāb-i Si' Du'a* found in the William McElwee Miller Collection of Bābī Writings and Other Iranian Texts, Princeton University's Islamic Manuscripts, Third Series, no. 30, folio 23b (available online: [http://libweb5.princeton.edu/visual\\_materials/Babi/listing.html](http://libweb5.princeton.edu/visual_materials/Babi/listing.html)), with some minor differences (my thanks to Steven Phelps for pointing out this manuscript to me).
16. *wa-bimā qad sāra'a huṇālika lī al-sahm wa-l-qaws li-mā ashtaghilanna bihi mā anta ta'lam min faḍlika wa-raḥmatika*.
17. There are also indirect references to Mubārak in other letters. For example, in a letter from the Bab to his mother dated Thursday, 28 Sha'bān [1265 / 19 July 1849], cited in *Khūshih-hā-ī az kharman-i adab va hunar*, 6, *dawrih-yi bayān*, Darmstadt: Reyhani, 152BE/1995, 14, the Bab remembers those who have sought her presence (*mustadrikāt-i fayḍ-i ḥuḍūr*), which must certainly have included Mubārak. See also an earlier letter from the Bab to his wife in which he expresses concern for and sends greetings to all of the residents of his home (*sukkān-i bayt...hamigī*), INBA (Iran National Baha'i Archives), vol. 58, reprinted, East Lansing, MI.: H-Bahai, 2004, available online <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/bab/G-L/I/inba58/INBA58.pdf>, p. 183.

# Book Reviews

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## ***Transnational Transcendence: Essays on Religion and Globalization*, Thomas J. Csordas (ed.), (2009)**

Berkeley: University of California Press,

ix + 338 pp., ill., 23 cm.,

ISBN 9780520257429 (pbk), \$24.95;

ISBN 9780520257412 (hbk), \$60.00

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This insightful collection brings together thirteen established anthropologists to reflect on the little-examined intersection between religion and globalization. It opens with a thoughtful introduction from editor Thomas Csordas, who includes a useful and succinct literature review (pp. 11–12) and elaborates on the volume's title theme. The collection neither claims nor aims towards a single shared theory on the relationship between religion and globalization. Together, though, the contributors argue compellingly for the need to take religion seriously as a category of analysis (rather than reducing it to a foil for social, economic, or political concerns) and reveal what Csordas describes as the 'multi-dimensional' and 'multidirectional' nature of global religious exchange, praxis and politics (pp. 3–4). While the historical depth and perspective of some chapters is not entirely satisfying (see, for example, Otávio Velho's chapter on postcolonial missions and Janice Boddy's 'Veiled Missionaries and Embattled Christians in Colonial Sudan'), overall the volume convincingly overturns the entrenched teleological trajectory that casts globalization as the recent, exclusive and homogenizing product of western capitalist expansion. Chapters from Peter F. Cohen and J. Lorand Matory on Black Atlantic religion are especially effective here. Elaborating on a theme of globalization as religion, Matory's contribution also demonstrates how such narratives are themselves infused with spiritual undertones and goes on to posit a more expansive theory of transnationalism from the specific ontological, historical and cartographic perspective of Yoruba-Atlantic religions.

*Transnational Transcendence* does not engage the Baha'i Faith specifically, but it sparks suggestive questions for Baha'i scholars, who have recently and rightly identified this religion as a significant site of global theorizing and action (see, for example, the important 2005 volume, *Baha'i and Globalisation*, which is firmly informed by the sociological theories of Roland Robertson and Peter Beyer).<sup>1</sup> How did and do (or did not and do not), for example, the Baha'i teachings function as 'portable practices' and 'transposable messages' in the various and variant contexts where they

have been introduced (p. 4)? And how did and do Baha'i 'mechanisms of transmission' (p. 18) and processes of conversion compare, contrast or intersect with the recent explosive growth of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianities in the global south (considered in chapters by Joel Robbins and Thomas Csordas, respectively)? Or with the trajectory, traced by Alberto Groisman, of the Amazonian Santo Daime from the Brazilian margin to the northern European metropole?

The metaphors of flow, friction and landscape (the former two engaged by Kathinka Frøystad in her analysis of 'the return path' of an American yogi to India and the latter by Laurel Kendall in her discussion of Korean shamans gone global) are likewise potential frameworks for examining the global outlook and ambition, combined with the local application, of the Baha'i Faith. Esra Özyürek's chapter on the diasporic construction of Alevi Muslim identity, and the discursive transnational contexts in which it is 'continuously made and remade' (p. 124), further proposes a productive tack for exploring Iranian Baha'i subjectivity and politics in particular, and the negotiation and representation of 'other' religions beyond the liberal frameworks of integration and recognition more generally. As Peter van der Veer observes in his trenchant treatment of the globalization of Indian Yoga and Chinese Qigong, and their deep imbrication in imperial modernity and nationalism, 'the spiritual is political and the secular turns out to be spiritual' (p. 263).

In addition to highlighting the complex relations of power in which religion always inheres, the collection's ethnographic tone, texture and methods (see, in particular, Stefania Pandolfo's innovative analysis of 'the practice and the imaginary of migration' (p. 149) among Islamic street youth in Morocco) are relevant to Baha'i scholarship. Existing work in this field has traced the religion's origins and early expansion history, especially from Baha'i perspectives, and has examined theological teachings and theories, especially those of central Baha'i figures. Significantly less has been said about the lived religious experiences of Baha'is on the ground; about how, for example, core principles like 'world citizenship' and 'unity in diversity' have been interpreted, negotiated and applied in (often contested) practice. Engaging an anthropological or ethnohistorical perspective, and the other analytical opportunities that *Transnational Transcendence* yields, would simultaneously strengthen understanding of internal Baha'i complexities and contribute to the broader conversations at work in this critical collection.

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#### Endnote

1. Margit Warburg, Annika Hvithamar and Morten Warmind (eds), *Baha'i and Globalisation* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2005, Series: RENNER Studies on New Religions, Vol. 7)

***Commonalities: A Positive Look at Latter-day Saints from a Bahá'í Perspective, Serge van Neck, (2009)***

Oxford: George Ronald, xvii + 445 pp., 24 cm.,  
ISBN 9780853985372 (pbk), £19.95/\$38.95

*Reviewed by William P. Collins, Library of Congress*  
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Serge van Neck is a Bahá'í with intimate experience of the community of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormons). His wife is Mormon and he lives in an area of the United States with a significant Mormon presence. In this thorough and engaging book, van Neck succeeds admirably in exploring the shared values of the Bahá'í Faith and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, while accepting their inevitable differences on certain issues.

Mormonism and the Bahá'í Faith are contemporary religious movements. Both began in the middle of the 19th century, but in very different environments and with sufficiently different understandings of key concepts that it is sometimes difficult for members of each group to communicate effectively with the other. The book *Commonalities* is the best current resource to remedy this situation.

Van Neck wrote this book primarily for Bahá'ís, whom he believes will feel more comfortable in reaching out to Mormons if they understand what Bahá'ís and Mormons share. Bahá'ís who read this book will also learn how to translate Bahá'í concepts into terminology that Mormons can understand. The work can likewise serve as a way for Mormons to obtain an understanding of the Bahá'í Faith. It is an example of outstanding inter-faith comparison and, in this reviewer's estimation, the most balanced and thorough treatment of the Bahá'í Faith and another religion that has thus far been written.

Serge van Neck respectfully explains LDS origins and history in a manner neither excessively adulatory nor critical. He introduces the Mormon sacred texts; reviews the foundational doctrines of the Latter-day Saints known as the 'Articles of Faith'; and compares and contrasts the Mormon and Bahá'í understanding of God, revelation, the soul, family, devotional acts, sharing one's faith, science, humanity, prophecy, and community expansion and consolidation. The author's thoughtful selection and presentation of quotations from Bahá'í and Mormon scriptures and other authoritative works of both groups carefully illustrates similarities and dissimilarities of thought and purpose in the two worldviews in an organic and natural way. There is a chapter about distinctive Bahá'í teachings and how they can be compared to LDS teaching (ch. 11). Another examines aspects of Mormon culture from which Bahá'ís can learn (ch. 13), a particularly interesting example being the way Mormons conduct home visits, which are also being implemented in Bahá'í community life (pp. 307–9).

The author has included lengthy appendices dealing with the frequent questions about polygamy and racism in the Church (pp. 332–70). He addresses these issues in a sensitive way without dismissing the difficulties they pose for Mormons and for Bahá'í–Mormon dialogue. Additional appendices deal with religious tolerance in the Mormon

Church and a thoughtful analysis of certain Baha'i hearsays relating to the Church (pp. 371–82).

Because most Baha'i are only superficially familiar with the Mormons, van Neck goes to great lengths to offer clear, easily understood explanations, particularly of the more exotic LDS doctrines. For instance, Mormons believe God to be an exalted man, who has a body of 'flesh and bones' and can be in only one place at one time. The LDS Church teaches that faithful members can achieve exaltation, that is, they can likewise become gods and have the same honour, glory, wisdom and knowledge as God and Jesus Christ ('As man is, God was. As God is, man will be'). Throughout the book, van Neck connects this to other concepts of eternal marriage and 'sealing' of married couples, whose families continue eternally, bringing into being new 'spirit children' in the afterlife who will then be born into this world. These careful explanations help the reader to see the interconnection of these doctrines within the universe of Mormon thought.

Van Neck rightly did not base his book on polemical works against the Latter-day Saints. However, certain important issues go unreferenced in *Commonalities*. Students of Mormonism would likely have encountered problematical aspects of Joseph Smith's youth, such as his reputation as a treasure-digger and teller of tall tales, to which Smith himself alludes in some of his own writings. Other resources not referenced are the highly praised systematic studies of Mormon theology by such writers as B. H. Roberts<sup>1</sup> and Sterling McMurrin.<sup>2</sup> Finally, a key article by this reviewer from *The Journal of Baha'i Studies*<sup>3</sup> was unknown to van Neck. In that article I brought to light a 1938 statement on the Baha'i Faith from David O. McKay (second counsellor in the Church presidency) to Xorol Robinson Oliver (a Baha'i of Mormon background), who had asked to be allowed to present the Baha'i Faith at the annual Church General Conference. McKay's reply is the closest thing to an official Church pronouncement on the Baha'i Faith:

There will be no opportunity for such a message to be presented to the Church during the approaching General Conference nor, so far as I know, at any other time. All the truths contained in the Baha'i Message are fully incorporated in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which members, and particularly missionaries, are devoting their time, talents and means to promulgating.<sup>4</sup>

The author may wish to determine if these deserve some coverage should a second edition be published in the future. These omissions do not significantly detract from the book, however, given that *Commonalities* provides both a sympathetic and realistic look at Joseph Smith and deals with Mormon doctrine in sufficient depth to provide the reader with the necessary understanding to speak in terms that Mormons will understand. In an important discussion toward the beginning of the book, van Neck address two questions that frequently confuse Baha'i who converse with Mormons: how Joseph Smith is viewed in authoritative Baha'i texts; and how Mormons and Baha'i have different understandings of what the term 'Prophet' means (pp. 31–4).

Baha'i may see the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as being very 'conservative' or 'fundamentalist'. This kind of broad-brush characterization of a large and diverse community is addressed as van Neck reviews

LDS efforts to give their faith practical expression. The author describes how Mormons endeavour to live their faith through religious practices, attitudes to health and diet, and mutual support. In a moving passage, van Neck recounts a Mormon bishop's understanding of how Church tithing and Baha'i *Huqūqu'llāh* are equivalent gifts to God:

... When my wife expressed her desire to pay a regular tithe so that she might be permitted to visit the temple, we decided to consult the ward bishop. Since Sharla did not receive a paycheck, we sought the bishop's guidance on what constituted a proper tithe when the primary breadwinner of the family was not a member of the Church. I explained that the Bahá'í Faith has an institution comparable to the tithe, and if one of the spouses is not a Bahá'í the payments may be based on half of the family's assets. Was there a similar provision in the LDS Church? I must admit that I was not quite prepared for the bishop's answer. He replied that the tithe is how we show our obedience to the Lord, and that the act of paying the tithe is more important than where we send it, since it's all essentially going to the same place. Therefore, as long as I paid the full amount of *Huqūqu'llāh* according to the conditions set by the Bahá'í Faith, he would consider that as satisfying the requirement for my wife's temple worthiness. Needless to say, this show of respect for my Faith left me deeply moved.

(pp. 207–8)

This one passage took the reviewer's breath away and positively influenced my approach to the entire book. While the book is long, it is never dull or obscure. Where concepts are reiterated, they are not repetitive, but invigorating to the particular topic at hand. Those Baha'is who wish to increase their familiarity with Mormonism would do well to make this the one book to read.

This work is a sterling example of respectful dialogue with another faith, almost certainly the best in the George Ronald series that also covered Hinduism, Buddhism, Chinese religion, and Islam. It is also a thorough and helpful introduction to the Latter-day Saint beliefs for Baha'is and may serve thoughtful Mormons who want to understand how the Baha'i Faith compares to their own beliefs. *Commonalities* is highly recommended as a worthwhile read. Its style is also well worth emulating as future authors address the Baha'i relationship to other religions.

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## Endnotes

1. Brigham Henry Roberts, *The Mormon Doctrine of Deity: The Roberts-Van der Donckt Discussion, to which is added a discourse, Jesus Christ: The Revelation of God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1903). Brigham Henry Roberts, *Studies of the Book of Mormon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985).
2. Sterling M. McMurrin, *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1965).
3. William P. Collins, 'Mormonism and the Bahá'í Faith', *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 1990, 3 (2), 57–62.
4. *ibid.* 58.

***Lines that Connect: Rethinking Pattern and Mind in the Pacific, Graeme Were, (2010)***

Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, x + 204 pp., 44 ill., 24 cm., ISBN 9780824833848 (hbk), \$38.00

Reviewed by **Graham Hassall**, Victoria University of Wellington  
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*Lines that Connect* is based on fieldwork in Papua New Guinea (2000–1) and Tonga (2004) by Graeme Were, who lectures in Museum Studies at the University of Queensland. Were specializes in the study of material culture, and is principally interested in ‘... exploring pattern as a type of meta-media, an expressive form of thought that robustly moves across forms in time and space’ (p. 3). This is a sophisticated study, as much concerned with epistemology, or ‘ways of knowing’, as it is about cultural reproduction or ‘ritual economy’. Were’s argument is that ‘... any understanding of the processes of conversion to Christianity in the Pacific can be fully appreciated only through an analysis of pattern in the region’ (p. 64). Pattern can be found in cloth, carving, ornamentation, funerary rights and gravestones, feasting, and many other social practices in which shared meanings about the value of life and death are embedded.

Were identified in the Nalik people of New Ireland Province, Papua New Guinea, a cultural group ideally suited to such study, they being non-western assimilators / appropriators / resisters of western values, thought and material culture; and a society that actively transmitted and transmuted its own traditions during tense interaction with colonial and missionary forces. Moreover, he found in the Nalik experience an opportunity to study the transformation of pattern amongst a people whose traditional culture was suppressed by Methodist and Catholic missions before being treated more respectfully under Baha’i influence. Many Nalik families adopted Baha’i beliefs and practices from the late 1950s and Were’s fourth chapter is entitled ‘Symmetries: Pattern, Belief, and the Bahá’í Faith’. *Lines that Connect* is thus of double interest: for what it teaches about material culture in changing socio-politico-religious contexts, and for how it views an emergent Baha’i community in Pacific islands’ context.

Although Baha’i communities have emerged in all of Papua New Guinea’s 20 provinces in the past half-century, Were’s recent examination of Baha’i practice joins a very small body of academic literature on the topic, which has mostly focused on the life of the first Papuan Baha’i Tommy Kabu.<sup>1</sup> Were examines continuity and change principally through the *Malangan* (ceremonial carvings related to funeral rites) and the *kapkap* (an intricate necklace signifying its wearer’s knowledge, status and power), two principal aspects of *kastom* (tradition). In simplistic terms, those who most assimilated Christian practice – and their descendants – are least knowledgeable in cultural matters; just as those who had removed themselves from the churches are more likely to know about and show interest in Nalik tradition. However, this situation is rendered more complex by the fact that contemporary Christian groups on the island have re-accepted tradition in an effort to reclaim their former members and influence (it must be problematic to

contemporary Nalik to know that their own past constitutes one of the most divisive forces on their island, particularly given, for the Baha'i community at least, emphasis on the cultivation of unity).

For all its valuable insights, *Lines that Connect* very much presents a moment in time (2000–1) rather than a longer perspective on the Nalik Baha'i community, and the types of factual error in the work indicate that the author had little communication with it upon his departure. A reader would not have needed to be a scholar to point out the author's confusion between Baha'u'llah and his son 'Abdu'l-Baha, as it was not the former but the latter who made reference to the islands of the Pacific (p. 90) and whose photograph appears on the wall of the Nalik Baha'i Centre (p. 95). Perhaps this misidentification is also responsible for the incorrect statement (p. 93) that '... as a committed Bahá'í, each person must take individual responsibility to shape himself or herself in the image of Bahá'u'llah ...'. Other small errors include persistent misspelling of Hoehnke (p. 90 onwards), and the incorrect suggestion that Rod Hancock was deported from the colony for fraternizing with the local population (Vi Hoehnke was transferred from her nursing post on Manus Island for this reason but remained in the country for the remainder of her life; Hancock continued to live on New Britain for many decades).

Were's academic treatment of the Baha'i community on New Ireland is slightly puzzling in the way that it seeks to present a close understanding of the situation on the ground whilst retaining a detached tone. Whereas many informants are thanked by name in the preface and footnotes, the narration deploys language that Baha'is do not use. Hoehnke and Hancock, for example, are referred to as missionaries rather than pioneers, and the first indigenous believers are referred to throughout as 'converts'. Were quotes early work by the current reviewer to suggest that Mazakmat '... initially met resistance from the Catholic and Methodist missions and was branded a political agitator ...' (p. 90, quoting Hassall<sup>2</sup>) without clarifying that this was the view of a few colonial officials, and that it was in fact an incorrect assessment. The Baha'i Centre in Madina is described as 'a mixture of Middle Eastern, Nalik, and Christian ideas', with '... tangible evidence of Persian influence', the latter sentence accompanied by an incongruous footnote commencing 'Bahá'í Temples reflect the integration of religious symbolism with parochial conceptions of architectural form ...' (p. 183) – all of which creates an impression that the text is seeking to depict the Baha'i community in Papua New Guinea as an outpost of a syncretic eastern cult – a condition far removed from the self-perception of Papua New Guinean Baha'is as members of a modern religion with a global outlook and worldview.

Such matters aside, the most significant question the study raises is the extent to which religious belief can be reduced to cultural practice. To suggest that 'Officially declaring a commitment to the faith gives Naliks access to traditional knowledge, skills, and ritual images' (p. 93) is quite a strong statement to make about the relationship between Baha'i belief and Nalik culture – and arguably a stronger one than the evidence suggests. Clearly, for Were, visual and cultural enactment of Nalik culture is at the heart of the Baha'i community's success, as he subsequently asserts that

... the ability of the Bahá'ís to translate their religious beliefs into performances as a form of worship plays a vital role in convincing Naliks of the

Bahá'í ability to harness ancestral power at mortuary feasts, and this apparent ability persuades many to convert.

(p. 94)

This may be so. However, the testimony of early Nalik Bahá'ís such as Michael Homerang refer to the significance of race equality and of a global worldview as those features of Bahá'í belief that most attracted him. In 1994 he explained to Rodney Hancock:

I became a Bahá'í in 1958 because I saw the Bahá'í Faith was giving a new meaning and insight into the world. I saw a white man and woman come to my village and sit down to eat and talk with us. They even slept in our houses. Since then I have seen Bahá'ís all over the world and they practice the same thing. Only the Almighty can make this happen. That's why I became attracted to the Bahá'í Faith and learned that it has the same foundations as all the other religions.<sup>3</sup>

Homerang, as a *maimai* (chief) and *malanggan* carver, was free to express his faith through cultural practices at the same time that Nalik practice has been modified in some aspects in accordance with Bahá'í law. Many of the errors and distortions in this work are carried over from several earlier publications,<sup>4</sup> which have in turn been taken up by Strathern in a study of 'indigenous cosmopolitanisms'.<sup>5</sup> There is much to learn from Were's study, but its observations concerning the Bahá'ís of Nalik, New Ireland, will have to be re-examined in the ongoing process of clarifying how individuals and communities mediate their traditions, cultural practices and religious beliefs.

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#### Endnotes

1. Graham Hassall, 'The Failure of the Tommy Kabu Movement: A Reassessment of the Evidence', *Pacific Studies*, 1991, 14 (2), 29–51. Robert Maher, *New Men of Papua: A Study in Culture Change* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961). Robert Maher, 'The Purari River Delta Societies, Papua New Guinea, after the Tom Kabu Movement', *Ethnology*, 1984, 23 (3), 217–27. J. K. Parratt, 'Religious Change in Port Moresby', *Oceania*, 1970, 41 (2), 106–13.
2. Graham Hassall, *Religion and Nation-State Formation in Melanesia: 1945 to Independence* (Ph.D., Australian National University, 1990).
3. Rodney Hancock, *Longpela Bun Nating: My Life as a Bahá'í Pioneer in Papua New Guinea* (Boroko: NSA of the Bahá'ís of Papua New Guinea, 2002) 80.
4. Graeme Were, 'Thinking Through Images: Kastom and the Coming of the Bahá'ís to Northern New Ireland, Papua New Guinea', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 2005, 11 (4), 659–76, DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9655.2005.00256.x. Graeme Were, 'Fashioning Belief: The Case of the Bahá'í Faith in Northern New Ireland', *Anthropological Forum*, 2007, 17 (3), 239–53, DOI: 10.1080/00664670701637701.
5. Andrew Strathern and Pamela J. Stewart, 'Shifting Centres, Tense Peripheries: Indigenous Cosmopolitanisms', in Dimitrios Theodossopoulos and Elisabeth Kirtsoglou (eds.), *United in Discontent: Local Responses to Cosmopolitanism and Globalization* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010) 27–30.

***Religious Myths and Visions of America: How Minority Faiths Redefined America's World Role*, Christopher Buck, (2009)**  
Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, xii + 324 pp., 25 cm.,  
ISBN 9780313359590 (hbk), \$49.95

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The topic of America (i.e. the USA) and how it perceives itself is certainly of great current interest. In particular the rising awareness of the role played by religion, which makes this book an attractive read. The book is for the most part accessible for the non-specialist, with no background in Religious Studies, as well as specialists in fields such as American Studies or Political Science.

There can be no doubt that Buck's book takes a novel look at America through the lenses of these religious traditions in a way that has not been done before. It provides a fascinating catalogue of religious traditions for inspection, which will be of interest to students of Comparative Religion as well as specialists in other fields. Non-specialists interested in religious views of America will also benefit from reading this to appreciate the diversity of views that populate the religious scenery of America.

Within the field of Baha'i Studies Buck's effort to fill a niche with respect to the myth of America is most welcome. Reading for myths about America in the Baha'i writings yields some interesting fruits. Both 'Abdu'l-Baha's discussion of the Emancipation Proclamation and of Wilsonian internationalism show how these perspectives on the past provided a template for future American endeavours in the international arena.

For those who are familiar with some of Buck's previous works, particularly his *Paradise and Paradigm*, this book will have a remarkably different feel. It feels far more personal and much less tightly argued and theoretically heavy than what he presented for his doctoral thesis. His interest in this work is to look at how the myth of 'America' has been formulated in religious communities. As stated above, the book has the strength of being accessible.

This strength, however, has a back side. Buck does provide a brief discussion of his conceptual framework (e.g. what is a 'myth'), but he provides no method. Indeed we are told that there is no consensus about method, but that the topic itself may 'suggest an approach and method that intrinsically arise out of the very subject matter itself' (p. 6). This, in this reviewer's opinion, is by far the most significant weakness of this work. The conclusion alluded to in the subtitle, that minority religions have 'redefined' America's role, faces considerable difficulties because a method of analysis is lacking. The claim that the 'Protestant myth of America ... is arguably being reshaped by religious visions of America held by minority faiths,' (p. 9) seems central, yet provisions to present proof seem wanting. Instead the reader is taken by the hand as Buck acts as guide through the menagerie of fascinating and curious myths of America in various religious traditions. Truly there is much to see, right from the commonplace to the bizarre, and Buck provides a wealth of information on each of the ten selected religious traditions. For

those curious about these caged beasts, this book will suffice for most and provide an excellent starting point for others.

However, for those looking for clear and strong evidence that these beasts can displace the king of the hill (the Protestant/Puritan myth) or at least make it share the hill, there are substantial issues. One of these issues is how minority myths interact with the dominant myth, particularly when a hegemonic relationship exists. Such are particularly evident in the case of Native Americans and Tibetan Buddhism. When we are presented with myths of Native Americans we are presented with readings that are framed by the dominant culture. One cannot help but ask: is the Turtle Island myth anymore about America than the Genesis account of Paradise is about the Middle East? Is not the Mother Earth myth an environmentalist reading into the myth rather than a myth grounded in an environmentalist agenda? Why one should read the Iroquois Confederacy as a precursor to democracy any more than the confederacy between Israelite tribes prior to the monarchic era? Confederacy determines how groups operate together; democracy is about the governance of a group. As the dominant culture reads, it exercises its influence on the read. Richard A. Horsley states his case for the influence that western reading of Buddhism (benevolent and enthusiastic as it was) had on Tibetan Buddhism:

The Dalai Lama is thus offering to the West what it has long projected and coveted, hoping to get his country back in the bargain. ... Tibetan Buddhism thus appears to float free from the Tibetan people's history and culture in a process of spiritual globalization. ... As a product of empire, moreover, Tibetan Buddhism also adjusted to the shift from an empire of European colonialism to an empire of global capitalism that thrives on multiculturalism marketed as consumer commodities.<sup>1</sup>

Buck makes much of the Dalai Lama's approval of the principles underlying democracy, and yet in its many years as a Buddhist country Tibet has been a theocracy (or its Buddhist equivalent). What the rigorous application of method should have prevented was the dominant culture reading itself into the minority tradition.

Another issue is, in the final analysis, Buck's exclusion of 'negative' contributions. Buck discusses at length both white supremacists and the Nation of Islam, yet these racialist myths are not seen as helping to redefine America's world role. What methodological reasons are there for this exclusion? In chapter 9 we see how the Muslim myth of America as the Great Satan begat the myth of the Axis of Evil. Negative myths can and are influential and should not be discounted just because they are unpalatable. So, we end up with a list of contributions we would like minority religions to offer, more so than what they actually do.

In truth there can be no real analysis of the actual influence of these minority myths, because there is no theoretical framework for it and nowhere to place evidence for such influence. Some form of discourse analysis might have provided a useful way of gauging influences, or at least a means of analysing the interactions of myths.

Despite this, the book will be of value to anyone interested in the exploration of the myth of America. Provided that they are not specifically

interested in propositions about influence, the work places an encyclopaedic knowledge about the myth of America in the hands of the reader.

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#### Endnote

1. Richard A. Horsley, *Religion and Empire: People, Power, and the Life of the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003. Series: Facets) 19–20.

#### ***Revelation & Social Reality: Learning to Translate What is Written into Reality, Paul Lample (2009)***

West Palm Beach, FL: Palabra, vii + 293 pp., 23 cm.,

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*Revelation & Social Reality: Learning to Translate What is Written into Reality* by Paul Lample is an innovative and challenging book that appears on the horizon of Baha'i intellectual thought at a critical juncture, at a historical moment when the Baha'i community is going through a transition, or a reorientation, or as the author would suggest a 'change of culture', that seeks to introduce and apply the message and teachings contained in the new revelation to the masses of humanity and eventually to transform human life for the better. The book is a milestone in Baha'i intellectual activity and marks the emergence of Paul Lample as a new type of intellectual, one who is thinking in new and critical ways about the application of Baha'i teachings to social issues and the transformation of society. It also represents an evolution and further development of thoughts compared to his earlier work. In this review I will attempt to introduce the major arguments of the book, and to interrogate it critically as much as possible within the scope of a short review. This book is one of the most intriguing and innovative books that has appeared in years, and it is essential reading for Baha'is and others who seek to better understand the intellectual framework for the emerging new Baha'i culture.

I do feel that a note on method and methodology of my review is in order. This review attempts to introduce the book and its main arguments, and its place and position among contemporary writings to the readership. However, a review must also engage with the book, and interrogate it critically, and present a methodic critique. To attempt to do less would be a disservice to the book. The readers will note that the premises behind the arguments, the historical narrative, the logical flow of the arguments and the normative Baha'i understanding are all examined and the author's arguments are located in its historical, cultural and intellectual context. Also, when appropriate, counter-examples and counter-arguments are presented to allow for a better delineation of the book's arguments. Admittedly, the book is so rich that it proved impossible to engage with all the arguments with equal depth and only critical

arguments or those that are located in a long tradition of debates are opened up for further analysis.

Beginning in 1996, with the Four Year Plan and since then, the Baha'i community worldwide has been transitioning in a new capacity-building endeavour, and this reorientation has accelerated since 2005, with the current Five Year Plan, set to end by Ridvan 2011. This period of transition has seen the emergence of new material for 'training' (i.e. the Ruhi sequence of books), the institute process, the focus on a number of core activities (study circles, devotional gatherings, neighbourhood children's classes and junior youth activities), new institutions such as regional Baha'i councils, area teaching committees (ATCs), a complete redrawing of the Baha'i world's map in the form of clusters, the initiation of intensive programmes of growth, as well as a democratization of teaching (a transition from a limited number of learned Baha'i teachers to a more grassroots engagement of Baha'is in expansion and consolidation) activities, among others. All of the above as new emerging realities of Baha'i life and activity present a degree of change in terms of the administrative structure of the Baha'i Faith and represents a new nomenclature. During this period of transition and learning, often times activities do not appear to have adequate synergy or coherence, or certain errors or mistakes are tolerated as part of the learning process, which some Baha'is find disconcerting. In this sense Paul Lample's book is very timely as it grounds this transition and reorientation in a philosophical and theoretical framework that had been missing so far. Therefore, I think it would be required reading for those who want to better understand the theoretical and practical underpinnings of the current transformation and capacity-building taking place in the Baha'i community, institutions and individuals. However the book is much more ambitious in scope and deals with a whole set of complicated debates such as Baha'i approaches to foundationalism vs. relativism, postmodernism vs. modernism, including a treatment of Foucault, among others. Other issues such as the infallibility of the Universal House of Justice and the limits of hermeneutics are dealt with in new and innovative ways that adds much to the intellectual weight of the book.

Paul Lample's approach as enunciated in the preface is informed by an analysis of religion, in this case the Baha'i Faith, as a sociological entity. Generally speaking, he distinguishes two separate components to the revelation, the spiritual and the social. The two are interactive, and undoubtedly for Lample the social vector derives its energy and life from the spiritual; however, his analysis is focused on the horizontal application of spiritual teachings for betterment of the world as opposed to the vertical connection with the divine or purely spiritual matters. Restated, the Baha'i religion is examined as the social dimension of the revelation or spirituality. His analysis concerns itself with the social, rather than the spiritual or mystical dimensions of the divine revelation. He writes:

Because the primary focus of this book is the exploration of how the Baha'i world comes to understand Baha'u'llah's teachings and translate them into action, it does not explore in depth the nature of the spiritual forces released by the divine revelation and how they drive the community forward.

(p. vi)

Paul Lample understands that 'these spiritual forces operate in a real not a magical way' and 'that we cannot hold an overly simplistic view that spiritual forces will do all the work: that we pray and our wishes are granted; that we teach and "something happens" to create social change' (p. vii).

Having narrowed his analytical focus on the social dimension of the revelation he sets out to present his construction of social 'reality', and how it can be changed. He begins the first chapter of the book with the idea of changing social reality. In his derivation of the concept of social reality Lample draws heavily from John Searle, the contemporary philosopher, as outlined in his book *The Construction of Social Reality*.<sup>1</sup> Lample, following Searle, notes that 'most of what we perceive to be reality – the world with which we interact every day – is not physical reality at all. It is social reality.' Take everyday realities such as money, property, governments and marriages as examples of social reality. These may be 'real' and highly impactful on our daily life, 'but are all products of the human mind'. Social reality is essentially an expression of human agreement and in a sense they only exist because we participate in them or engage with them. In fact Searle argues that social reality, or institutions of social reality 'are not worn out by continued use, but each use of the institution is in a sense a renewal of that institution'.<sup>2</sup>

Having set up the theoretical framework, Paul Lample is then in a position to argue that the purpose of the appearance of the new revelation is to transform and change social reality, as expressed in the Baha'i writings. Lample is clear at the outset that 'social reality is not static; it is mutable. It forms us, but because it owes its existence to common human understanding, we have the power to contribute to reshaping it.' It almost follows that Baha'is, while shaped to some extent by social reality, have a responsibility to reshape it. Baha'u'llah writes that the '... object of every Revelation is to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself both outwardly and inwardly, that shall effect both its inner life and external conditions ...'.<sup>3</sup> This is achieved through various means according to the author. One is the direct influence of the Manifestation of God through his 'words', the 'Word of God that rends the fabric of social order by contradicting centuries-old agreements, while providing new standards and principles that yield new understandings with which to create a new social order' (p. 18). Another way in which social change is created is by the individual Baha'is and the Baha'i community that puts the insights and new attitudes gained from the study of the text into practice. Lample suggests that the mere reading of the text, while critical, is not sufficient in comparison to the active study of the text and the complementary action and reflection in order to put the teachings into effect, for the purpose of social change. He suggests a methodology consisting of study, consultation, action and reflection by the Baha'i community.

The discussion that ensues is highly illuminating. For one thing, Lample suggests that a diversity of opinion and plurality of approaches is a 'blessing of God to humanity', as 'the clash of differing opinions brings forth the spark of truth'. Lample also points out that 'the believers need to become comfortable with ambiguity', an unusual sentiment for a community of faith, but with highly liberating consequences in terms of the individual and

collective intellectual life of Baha'is. In the process, he argues brilliantly for the creation of a new social reality through insights provided by the new revelation by examining Baha'u'llah's discourse on the question of whether Isaac or Ishmael were to be sacrificed by Abraham, a point of contention between the Bible and the Qur'an. Lample's argument here presages his section later on relativism and postmodern approaches to knowledge and power.

Paul Lample's reliance on Searle and his (de)construction of social reality is critical to his overall argument and therefore merits closer interrogation. Searle's ontological critique of social reality is equivalent to its complete destruction, a point that Lample does not seriously engage with. Let us take Searle's analysis of individual rights, and human rights in particular:

Perhaps the most amazing form of status-function is in the creation of *human rights*. Prior to the European Enlightenment the concept of rights had application only within some institutional structure – property rights, marital rights, *droit de seigneur*, etc. But somehow the idea came to be that one might have a status-function solely by virtue of being a human being, that the X term was 'human' and the Y term was 'possessor of inalienable rights'. ... The idea of human rights has survived the decline of religious belief, and has even become internationalized. The Helsinki Declaration on Human Rights is frequently appealed to, with varying degrees of effectiveness, against dictatorial regimes.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly for Searle, human rights have no ontological reality and are human constructs that have become adopted by people but with no basis in reality. The tension between this view and the normative understanding of individual and human rights in the Baha'i framework should be fairly clear. In fact it is Searle's ontological denial of human rights that informs the East 'Asian values' counter-discourses on human rights, dismissing universal human rights as western hegemonic constructs brought to bear on the 'rest' by the West in an imperial mode, a line of reasoning not lost on totalitarian regimes including the Islamic Republic of Iran, as witnessed by statements by the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Searle's deconstruction of any ontological basis, or any sacred dimension whatsoever, of marriage is another example of the consequences of his thought where marriage is reduced to a convenient contract, imposed by 'a set of speech acts', with no prohibitions or checks on homosexual marriage, polygamy, companionate marriage or other imaginable forms of marriage.<sup>5</sup> One has to ask as to why do Baha'is have verses prescribed by Baha'u'llah to be recited during a marriage ceremony if there is no fundamental sacredness or spiritual dimension to marriage as Searle would suggest? Perhaps there is little or no tension between an informed Baha'i understanding of human rights or marriage and Searle's analysis but to this reader there was room for engaging with the possible limitations of Searle's framework.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to uncovering the dynamics of understanding and practice in the Baha'i community. This chapter sets out to resolve a simple tension, which has been relegated to the periphery of Baha'i discourses in recent years, i.e. what are the limits of hermeneutics among the Baha'is. It is a given that the Word of God is inexhaustible, but what are the limits of

individual interpretation? Are authoritative interpretations by 'Abdu'l-Baha or Shoghi Effendi exhaustive of the meaning of the text or is there room for individuals to engage in their private study of the text and to arrive at other, more open interpretations? What does it mean when Shoghi Effendi says that we cannot fully comprehend the meaning of the revelation, but can only struggle to attain more adequate insights? Paul Lample engages in a very lively and highly informed discussion of the above issues. He also has to navigate a very careful tension between the explicit meaning of the text and the veiled inner meaning of the text. He arrives at some very interesting conclusions that can be summarized as follows. The holy book (text) has intended and manifold meanings, meanings that cannot be exhausted, and that it is both explicitly stated and sometimes veiled, and that some of these meanings evolve organically and throughout the dispensation. Individual opinions and interpretations are valid as intersubjective views as part of a collective quest for truth, but cannot be imposed on others. Lample finds insights derived from academic disciplines such as history and philosophy valuable and beneficial for the study of the text but rejects the extreme position that the writings 'can only be understood in light of contemporary understanding derived from academic disciplines', a position that has rarely been advanced in serious discourse. The discussion above as it unfolds in the book is very insightful and engaging.

The other issue that Paul Lample has to contend with in chapter 2 is that of infallibility in general, as understood in Baha'i discourses and that of the Universal House of Justice in particular. The infallibility of Baha'u'llah is the most great infallibility, but Paul Lample does maintain that although 'the knowledge of the Manifestation encompasses reality, it is not His purpose to describe the world factually but to convey God's will and purpose'. The underlying purpose of divine revelation is to educate mankind and to create new social reality. Therefore it can be argued that Baha'u'llah speaks to humanity (and to individual recipients of tablets) in a manner conforming to their knowledge and spiritual state, and not statements of spiritual or physical fact. Here Lample methodically sidesteps potential issues of attribution or facts that do not conform to known history, or potential cases where Baha'u'llah's utterances may seem contradictory with implications for Baha'i apologetics. Regarding the infallibility of 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi, i.e. conferred infallibility, he argues that 'omniscience and infallibility are distinct concepts'. Following 'Abdu'l-Baha, he understands 'error as want of guidance'. In the above cases and in the case of the Universal House of Justice the infallibility is distinguished from omniscience and 'a capacity to describe the world as it is or to possess unfailing knowledge about reality'.

With regards to the Universal House of Justice, the author argues that the infallibility of the Universal House of Justice must be textually understood to include more than legislation, and he includes the protection of the Faith, questions that are obscure, problems that have caused difference, application of the revealed word, preserving the unity of the believers, and to ensure the integrity and inflexibility of the teachings. He does argue for a minimalist approach to infallibility, rejecting 'a power to possess absolute knowledge of reality, to control the conscience of the individuals, or to predict future events'. Given the areas of infallibility outlined by Lample

he engages with a theoretical point, and derives insights from his analysis. Theoretically, one may see a potential problem between an infallible institution guiding a community of believers and an attitude of learning. Infallibility would seem to imply an absence of error or mistakes, and an attitude of learning clearly allows for mistakes. In fact by increasingly adopting an attitude of learning at all levels of Baha'i administration, infallibility becomes more limited in scope and application.

Paul Lample's solution to the tension he proposes is that 'nothing in the Baha'i concept of infallibility implies that all outcomes will be painless or free of difficulties', and that even 'with divine guidance, human beings have to struggle, suffer and persevere'. He writes that the difficulty lies in the fact that 'they have to attempt to comprehend, however imprecisely, what is written and then to translate it, incrementally, into practice until social reality is reconstructed bit by bit to reflect the divine guidance. Infallibility offers no relief from this process.' He then concludes that 'there is no contradiction between an infallible source of guidance and the functioning of community in a learning mode'. The above is a partial answer to the problem he poses and two areas require further exploration: does the posture of learning apply to the Universal House of Justice itself, and if so, what does that mean, and what are its limitations, and if not, then how can a community be guided by an infallible head yet having any real learning?

Chapter 3 is entitled 'Learning and Growth'. It is an outline of the institute process and a review and apology for the developments within this context since 1996. This chapter sets out the justification and the historical necessity of the institute process, and its emergence as a universal method for the Baha'i community. The author begins by examining the history and development of teaching and issues related to the growth of the Faith. His analysis suggests that prior to the institute process, there was no method to balance the dynamics of large-scale growth, including expansion and consolidation. As such, the growth (entry by troops) on a large scale that had been achieved in India in the 1980s and in the United States in the 1970s had generally evaporated as there was no system in place to consolidate the new recruits. The successive Five Year Plans that will take the Baha'i community to 2021 are years in which the community will advance the process of entry by troops. Lample anticipates major changes coming in the future years, including changes in the administrative order of the Baha'i Faith:

During this period, the community will transform its understandings, its patterns of life, and many aspects of its institutional arrangements. The change of Baha'i culture is the fruit of change in the Baha'i approach to understanding and practice – how we understand what is written and translate it into reality and action – as it pertains to the growth of the Faith.

(p. 76)

Simultaneous with the emphasis on the institute process, the training institutes were asked to adopt curricula, to train additional human resources for the Faith. Gradually the material developed by the Ruhi Institute in Colombia emerged as a viable curriculum, offering a 'basic sequence of a few courses'. This sequence was seen as instrumental in taking a community of a few hundred in the 1970s to more than 50,000

by 1990 in Colombia. By December 2005, the Universal House of Justice announced that 'we have reached the conclusion that the books of the Ruhi Institute should constitute the main sequence of courses for institutes everywhere'. This is not to suggest that the Ruhi sequence of courses is perfect or that it meets all the needs of the community, but that 'for some years to come, training institutes should not attempt to meet all the needs and interests of the friends'. To this reviewer, this is not to say that other legitimate needs or interests such as interfaith dialogue, Baha'i mysticism or Islamic and Biblical studies do not exist, but that the training institutes cannot realistically design and implement courses to meet all genuine needs. Lample cautions, however, against any exaggeration or romanticizing of the Ruhi experience in Colombia. By 2006 Colombia had only a few clusters with intensive programmes of growth, which demonstrates that the adoption of a curriculum must be accompanied by the task of guiding a large percentage of the population through the sequence of courses to achieve results.

Chapter 3 is not as strong a chapter as the other ones in this book, and does not demonstrate the same intellectual rigour as his other chapters. This may be partially due to the narrative nature of this chapter, and that its narrative is still unfolding. It is also partially due to a lack of hard data and the use of qualitative, rather than quantitative, data that is in the form of anecdotes and surrogate benchmarks, when provided.

Chapter 4 concerns the Baha'i contribution to the advancement of society. In this chapter Lample engages in serious debates on the relation and complementarity of science and religion, and seeks to resolve and move beyond perceived tensions between the two modes of generation of knowledge. He rejects fundamentalism (religious belief superseding science), positivism (scientism), and relativism (denying the existence of any reality), in favour of the harmony of science and religion operating in two parallel and complementary systems, and recognizing that at any historical moment the perspectives and conclusion of these two systems may clash. Paul Lample argues that such moments of clash are actually welcome in that these prevent religion from degenerating into superstition, and science into instruments of materialism. He also distinguishes two communities of practice of science and practice of religion, and sees these two as engaging with each other and influencing each other and humanity as a whole, especially in areas of common concern such as ethics and morality, education, and social sciences. Here he comes close to the contemporary developments in the writings of Jurgen Habermas, as advanced in his theory of post-secularism, where he does invite religion to participate in social discourse, once it has shed its mythology and irrationalism.

One difference is that following 'Abdu'l-Baha, Lample does not see true religion as unscientific, whereas for Habermas rationalism is derived from the Judeo-Christian tradition but bereft of its irrationalism and myths. One similarity is that both authors suggest that religion has most to contribute in the area of ethics and morality, while admittedly Lample sees a wider area of application for religion than Habermas is willing to concede. One final note is that for Paul Lample, personal reasoning and rational interpretation should not distort, deny or contend with the Word of God, or attempt to direct Baha'i practice along lines that contradict the guidance of the

Universal House of Justice (p. 123). The above should be seen in the framework that Lample establishes earlier arguing for individual reasoning and rational interpretation of the Baha'i writings, with the only possible minimal limitations being speech that generates serious disunity or undermines the institutions of the Faith.

The author identifies three areas where Baha'i influence on social order can be seen. The creation and application of knowledge by Baha'is being engaged in their work and profession, social and economic development and participation in humanity's collective discourse. The section on development outlines the historical narrative of Baha'i socio-economic development and possible differences it exhibits from development as practised by international organizations or say, the United Nations. Here some focused attention is brought to FUNDAEC which 'emerged in response to the perceived limitations of the development discourse and practice of the day', as an example of a Baha'i-inspired sustained project in development that has gone through its own development and learning.

Paul Lample then turns to the third aspect of contributions to the civilization-building process, namely, participation in humanity's collective discourse, at all levels of society but more particularly through efforts to reach leaders of thought. One example is the global discourse on development with which Baha'is are involved. Another channel is the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity at the Baha'i World Centre, which has carried out important discourses on science, religion and development in India with great success and is now branching out in Africa and Latin America. The Offices of External Affairs have also been increasingly involved in discourses in areas of human rights, the status of women, and the environment, among others. From time to time statements such as 'The Prosperity of Humankind'<sup>6</sup> adds insights from the Baha'i revelation to such discourses, and at times the Universal House of Justice has written on such matters directly as in the case of the 'The Promise of World Peace', written in 1985.

As discourses are inherently intellectual and a form of scholarly activity, Lample takes some time here to expound on Baha'i scholarship, its relevance, nature, mandate and possible directions for its future development. He clearly establishes 'the essential value of Baha'i intellectual activity'. Moreover, he maintains that the believers and institutions should not 'succumb to a reactionary anti-intellectualism or superstitious spiritualism'. These insights are balanced by warnings about dangers in learning that leads to arrogance and separation from the divine purpose, and the spiritual fact that 'knowledge can be a veil'. The novelty of his analysis appears at this point onward. He suggests that those who engage in Baha'i scholarly activity explore new perspectives, examine the community's practices, and in turn contribute to the evolution of thought and action that leads to social transformation. In what follows, one finds strong evidence that Lample has deeply considered the issues of Baha'i scholarship with an awareness of past and present challenges, and anticipating future ones. He suggests that a learned Baha'i is not a 'gatekeeper' or 'priest', and that the believers are not dependent on a body of specialists to understand the meaning of the text, whose meaning will be revealed by practice and through the guidance of the Universal House of Justice. The learned Baha'i is not an 'anthropologist', called upon to describe the community at a moment in history, or an

'archaeologist' who should recapture the true meaning of the Faith, under layers of erroneous practice. He also dismisses the scholar as an 'artist' and 'impartial observer'. Paul Lample sees the Baha'i scholar as the 'scout who helps to guide an expedition on a journey into unexplored territory'. He further elaborates:

This role involves investigating the unknown and generating and applying knowledge to contribute to the success of the mission at hand. It is someone who participates actively in the journey, but whose specialized knowledge, skills, and experience informs various aspects of the struggle to make progress: constructive perspectives into the past, present, and future; insights and technical capacity for ongoing study of the Text; problem posing and problem solving; the defining of culture and intercultural relations. On this journey, the learned individual/scout does not have authority, and, while making a vital contribution, like any other participant is fallible and learns over time.

(p. 152)

Taken as a whole, Paul Lample's treatment of the issue of Baha'i scholarship presents a new attempt to reframe some of the issues and tensions that have proven problematic in the past. Examples include the effect of critical or revisionist internal scholarship on the body of believers, or historical criticisms of texts such as *God Passes By* or *The Dawn-Breakers*. He also acknowledges the tension between writings suitable for a community of academic peers, and writing for a community of believers, and the 'challenge for how to bridge the tensions that sometimes arise from participation in both communities'. His solution is that the 'scholarly activity carried out within the Baha'i community of practice requires consciousness of the difference between studying the Faith as an object, to collaborating in the movement toward its aims and purpose within the framework of the Covenant'. Methodologically, this approach is not without its particular set of challenges. He addresses the challenges in methodology earlier and raises valuable questions there recognizing the tension between a faith-centred methodology and external scholarship (pp. 125–7). Lample points out that while 'Revelation does not change, our understanding of the Revelation does change, and therefore the application of the knowledge, methods, and standards of Baha'i practice evolve throughout the dispensation', and he creates the space for the fermentation of Baha'i intellectuals by the methods, insights, creativity and imagination of 'members of other communities of practice – historians, sociologists, lawyers, biologists, political scientists, anthropologists, philosophers, educators and so on'.

The final two chapters of the book (which incidentally could have been the first two chapters of the book) are of tremendous interest and present a serious attempt to engage with postmodern thought, within a Baha'i framework. There are two other attempts to interrogate the foundationalist-relativist debate, both of which dismiss postmodernism and relativism as not compatible with Baha'i teachings. Paul Lample's reading of postmodern thought is both sympathetic and accurate, and he is careful in rejecting its most radical claims, and he avoids the trap of reducing knowledge to

'discourses upon discourses'. In chapter 5, he addresses the issue of 'knowledge' and in chapter 6 he examines 'power'. In both cases he presents a careful history of the claims and the scope of claims of postmodernism and the justifications behind its claims. He rejects both foundationalism (objectivism) and relativism as extremes and chooses a path in the middle, which is non-foundationalism. His approach, which is a moderate course, navigates between foundationalism and relativism and bears close similarity to pragmatism as enunciated by the school of American pragmatic philosophy to which the author does not refer. One important insight is his assertion that the collapse of the old world order is facilitated by the postmodern critique. 'The tension between the modern and postmodern ideas can be seen as part of what is more commonly understood by Baha'i as the breakdown of the old world order' (p. 163).

Chapter 6 continues the examination of postmodern thought in terms of a critique of power, and contains an intriguing and generally positive review of Foucault and the nuances of his critique which is a welcome development. Baha'i authors and intellectuals typically have not shown much interest in Foucault and have not adopted aspects of his critique. Lample plots a different course in embracing Foucault, albeit with some reservations. He writes that 'the Baha'i teachings are compatible with the postmodern consensus that power is ubiquitous and that human beings do not attain or aspire to a "power-free" state' (p. 208). For Lample, power is ubiquitous in the Baha'i community but it is diffused through the use of 'consultation' as 'a vital instrument for social criticism'. Taking the critique of power to the external relations of the Baha'i community he argues that the relationship is reciprocal, that the external world affects the Baha'i and vice versa. This is how the Baha'i can have a healthy and constructive relationship with the world at large. Hence the exercise of power is not unidirectional aiming to assimilate others into Baha'i belief and practice. He embraces discourses of power readily as he believes that 'if we cannot satisfactorily describe our approach to matters associated with power, others will do it for us, imposing a point of view alien to the nature of the Faith, or intentionally portraying it in a negative light' (p. 218). These last two chapters are very useful reading for an intellectual engagement on the under-explored issues of knowledge and power, and insights and implications of these debates for the Baha'i as they seek to translate what is written into reality. These two chapters deserve a close and careful reading as the scope of the material here is too wide to be seriously engaged with in a short review such as this one.

The book is carefully edited and richly annotated in end of chapter notes that contain a wealth of discussion and analysis. In short, this book marks a new intellectual landmark in the writings of Paul Lample, and it is highly recommended reading for anyone who seeks to better understand the dynamics of the rise of a new culture in the Baha'i world as well as its intellectual framework and underpinning theory.

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### Endnotes

1. John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1995).
2. Searle, *Construction* 57.

3. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude* (trans. Shoghi Effendi, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2003) 222, para. 270.
4. Searle, *Construction* 93.
5. *ibid.* 82–4.
6. Bahá'í International Community Office of Public Information, Haifa, 'The Prosperity of Humankind', United Nations World Summit on Social Development, Copenhagen, Denmark, 3 March 1995, BIC Document #95-0303.