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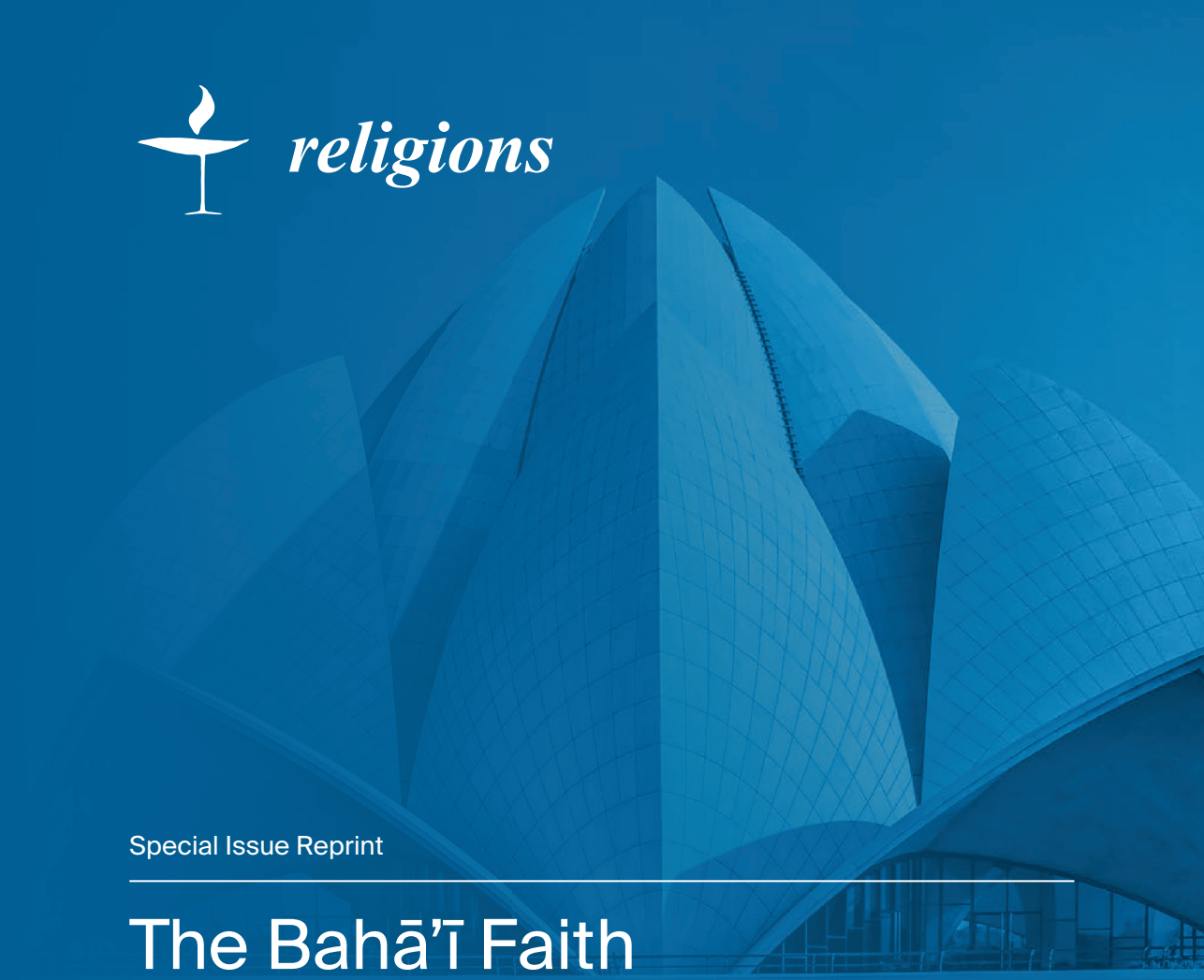

Special Issue Reprint

The Bahā'ī Faith

Doctrinal and Historical Explorations

Edited by
Moojan Momen and Zackery Mirza Heern

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Editors

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Preface

The Bahā'ī Faith began in 1844 in Iran as the Bābī movement, which itself had emerged from the Shaykhī movement that had preceded it. The founder of the Bābī movement was the Bāb (Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī 1819–1850), who claimed to be the recipient of Divine revelation and the founder of a religion that superseded Islam. The founder of the Bahā'ī Faith, Bahā'u'llāh (Mīrzā Ḥusayn 'Alī Nūrī, 1817-1892), was at first a leading follower of the Bāb, but, privately in 1863 and gradually more openly over the next few years, he claimed to be the messianic figure foretold by the Bāb and by the scriptures of all the major religions of the world. Bahā'u'llāh authorized his son, 'Abdu'l-Bahā ('Abbās Effendi, 1844–1921), to be his successor as head of the Bahā'ī Faith, as well as the authorized interpreter of the Bahā'ī scriptures. In turn, 'Abdu'l-Bahā appointed his grandson, Shoghi Effendi (1893–1957), to lead the Bahā'ī Faith, with the title of the Guardian. The Universal House of Justice, the international leadership of the Bahā'ī Faith ordained by Bahā'u'llāh, was established in 1963. The last 100 years has seen a great expansion in the geographical spread of the Bahā'ī community, as well as in its development of administrative institutions and its capacity for social action.

The teachings of the Bahā'ī Faith centre, in religious terms, on the concept of the Manifestation of God, who is the intermediary between an unknowable God and humanity. These Manifestations of God are the founders of the religions of the world and each successive Manifestation builds on the teachings of the previous ones, being the main source for the advancement of human civilization. The social teachings of the Baha'i Faith focus on the oneness of humankind. Bahā'u'llāh states that the present age is the age of the uniting of humanity in one global family of nations and the dawning of an age of global peace. He claims that the teachings and institutions that he has brought are the main vehicles for achieving this.

Although the Bahā'ī Faith has escaped the gravitational pull of Islam, establishing itself as an independent religious tradition and now being one of the most widely distributed religions in the world (Gina A. Zurlo, ed., *World Religion Database*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010), it has received disproportionately little attention in the academic world. There are only a handful of scholars in the world whose research focuses on this religion and there are comparatively few academic publications each year. This Special Issue of *Religions* is a small step in redressing this imbalance. The papers in this volume reflect the broad range of subjects and approaches that can be considered to fall under the purview of "Bahā'ī Studies". These papers vary from history and sociology to doctrinal analyses and textual studies, and range from the earliest Bābī phase to recent times.

Moojan Momen and Zackery Mirza Heern
Editors

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Article

The Bāb and ʿAlī Muḥammad, Islamic and Post-Islamic: Multiple Meanings in the Writings of Sayyid ʿAlī Muḥammad Shīrāzī (1819–1850)

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Abstract: Instead of arguing whether or not Sayyid ʿAlī Muḥammad Shīrāzī (the Bāb, 1819–1850) and his writings are Islamic, this paper suggests that they are simultaneously Islamic and post-Islamic. The Bāb's *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ*, written at the outset of the Bābī movement in 1844, can be understood as a commentary on the Quran, the original Quran, and divine revelation. Although the Bāb gradually disclosed his identity to the public, his status (associated with the Imām, Muḥammad, and a manifestation of God) is present in the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ*, in which he refers to himself as the Gate (*Bāb*), Remembrance (*Dhikr*), Point (*Nuqṭah*), ʿAlī, and Muḥammad. The Bāb participates in the long tradition of Islamic literary culture by creating meaning through metaphorical, symbolic, and paradoxical language, which for the Bāb ultimately point to post-Islamic revelation. The simultaneous absence and presence of Islam in the Bāb's writings created a real-world division between the Bāb's followers and his critics, many of whom were Muslim scholars. By focusing on multiple meanings in the Bāb's texts, this paper analyzes the interplay between the Bāb's identity and his writings as they relate to Islam.

Keywords: the Bāb; *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ*; Islam; Shiʿism; Bābī; Bahāʾī; Mahdī; Hidden Imām

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1. Introduction

The writings of Sayyid ʿAlī Muḥammad Shīrāzī (1819–1850), commonly known as the Bāb, are central to the Bābī religion that began in Iran in 1844. Islam, which is associated with one of the most beautiful, influential, and profound literary traditions in the world, is ubiquitous in the Bāb's writings. The Bāb's texts are the defining feature of the Bābī movement, and they remain integral to the Bahāʾī faith. These writings attracted followers to the Bāb's cause and were instrumental in giving their lives meaning. In fact, Bābīs referred to themselves as the people of the *Bayān* (*ahl al-bayān*), after the Bāb's principal book (Browne 1889, p. 907). Since the Bāb refers to his writings collectively as *bayān*, the Bāb's followers can also be understood as "the people of the Bāb's writings". In the *Persian Bayān* (Bāb n.d.a, 2:1), the Bāb told his adherents that "your glory lieth in your belief in these holy verses", which will lead to "true knowledge" and "humankind's highest station" (Bāb 1978, p. 88). The Bābī religion, therefore, is a movement rooted in the Bāb's texts. Iran's Qajar government and many Shīʿī clerics used the Bāb's writings as evidence for apostasy, which led to his execution and the persecution of his Bābī followers. These same writings have enthralled and mystified scholars in the West. The British orientalist E. G. Browne (1862–1926), who was engrossed with the Bābī movement and attracted to the Bāb's "gentle spirit", states that "the style of the Bāb's writings is too remarkable to be easily mistaken" (Browne 1889, pp. 897, 993). Browne also refers to one of the Bāb's works as a "mystical and often unintelligible rhapsody", which indicates that he did not always find meaning in the Bāb's writings (Browne 1892a, p. 261). Indeed, Bābīs, Shīʿī clerics, Qajar government officials, and Western scholars have derived different meaning from the Bāb's words, and they have disagreed about the station or identity of the Bāb. In addition to the

complexity of his writings, the Bāb claimed a station, or multiple stations, which are also complex and have led to confusion about his identity and his authorial voice(s).

The Bāb's writings intentionally include multiple meanings, metaphors, and metonymy to (re)interpret or (re)define Islamic concepts, to move beyond Islam, or to appeal to many audiences at once. The Bāb advises seekers of knowledge to understand complex realities in the following manner: "Beseech thou God to open, through His grace, the gate (*bāb*) of the heart unto thee, inasmuch as, without the light of that sanctuary, man is unable to conceive of contrary attributes within one and the same thing" (Saiedi 2008, p. 177). For the Bāb, therefore, the heart is capable of understanding dynamic realities through the grace of God. Stephen Lambden has explained that the Bāb's writings are both crystal clear (*bayān*, *mubīn*) and bewilderingly abstruse (*ṣaʿb*, *mustaṣaʿb*), and that they often contain syzygies or seek to unify opposites (Lambden 2020, p. 157). Todd Lawson suggests that the Bāb's early writings are metaleptic and apocalyptic in their relation to Islam (Lawson 2012b, pp. 4–5). He further explains that the motif of "coincidence of opposites" is evident in the Bāb's *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* in a distinctly Shīʿī form as the Bāb invokes opposing elements (such as fire and water) to refer to himself as the Imām (Lawson 2001, pp. 1, 8). Vahid Behmardi maintains that the eloquence of the Bāb's writings is in their uniqueness, which is not measured by the standards of the past, and although the Bāb's writings are comprehensible to everyone, the uninitiated may find them difficult because they are unfamiliar with the style, context, and terminology of the Bāb's texts (Behmardi and McCants 2007, pp. 118, 135). While the Bāb's writings are certainly unique, much of the context and terminology is Islamic, which makes them more comprehensible to those familiar with Islam. Additionally, Nader Saiedi rightly states that "the most important reason for the complexity and difficulty of His [the Bāb's] writings is the intense creativity and symbolic nature of the Bāb's thought" (Saiedi 2008, p. 27). A critical aspect of the Bāb's creativity is his symbolic use of Islamic terminology to point in multiple directions simultaneously.

Decoding symbolisms in the Bāb's writings, therefore, is a key to understanding his words or assigning meaning to them, which has resulted in a variety of different interpretations of the Bāb's many works. Through the creative use of rich symbolism, it appears that the Bāb's very intention was to inspire readers to unravel the many layers, meanings, riddles, paradoxes, and mysteries of his words. The Bāb states in his *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* (chp. 57) that "the Mystery of this Gate (Bāb) is shrouded in the mystic utterances of His Writ and hath been written beyond the impenetrable veil of concealment by the hand of God, the Lord of the visible and the invisible (Bāb 1978, p. 57)". The Bāb's identity, therefore, is a mystery that is interconnected with his writings, which he associates with "the hand of God", described here paradoxically as the visible *and* the invisible. Reality, according to the Bāb, is fundamentally spiritual and created by God. Although the inmost reality of God's essence is "beyond human conception", truths and attributes related to God are made known to humans through the word of God, which is divinely revealed to prophets and manifestations (Bāb 1978, p. 203). The Bāb clearly indicates that his *Persian Bayān* (Bāb n.d.a, 2:1) and other writings are revelations from God, which are the first to appear since the Quran. According to the Bābī tradition, then, the Bāb's writings are a new chapter in the book of divine revelation. This idea permeates the Bābī understanding of religion, which is progressive, dialectical, and rooted in history. The Bāb refers to himself in an epistle to Muḥammad Shāh (r. 1834–1848) as a "sustaining pillar" of the "word of God" (Bāb 1978, p. 9). Therefore, the Bāb and his words are reflections of God in this world.

The Bāb's writings are multifaceted and dynamic in the sense that he often refers to himself as multiple figures or personages synchronously, and he metaphysically merges what are often perceived as different realities into one. Put differently, the Bāb seeks to unify diverse realities through his self and his writings. Reality in the Bāb's writings, therefore, is multidimensional and complex, yet singular and simple. This requires readers of the Bāb's works to see multiple meanings as part of a holistic system, instead of confused, divergent truths. As Nader Saiedi has pointed out, the principle of unity in diversity is central to the Bāb's message and theology (Saiedi 2008, p. 19). Unity and diversity are

also central to the Islamic tradition. In addition to the Báb's writings and his multiple stations, this principle of unity and diversity also applies to the Báb's relationship with Islam. Rather than assuming that at the heart of Islam is a kernel that can be essentialized as a legal system, a set of values, a particular Quranic exegesis, a biography of Muḥammad, or even a civilization or culture, I follow the lead of scholars who define Islam in the broadest of terms. In his quest to answer the question of *What is Islam?*, Shahab Ahmed has articulated that Islam is as vast as the people interpreting and living it, and that Muslims are simultaneously contradictory and coherent in their hermeneutical engagement with Islam and the revelation associated with it, which often embraces metaphor, paradox, and ambiguity (Ahmed 2016, chp. 5). The Báb's writings engage and reflect this tradition of finding meaning in metaphor, paradox, and ambiguity through revelation.

To say whether or not the Bábī movement is Islamic would require us to first define Islam and the Bábī religion, which has proven to be an elusive undertaking. Generally speaking, religions are too complex to neatly classify or essentialize and should not be restricted by pithy definitions. Scholars have certainly debated whether or not the term religion is useful, given the vast diversity of what might be characterized as religion. Therefore, instead of arguing whether or not the Báb's writings and his personage are Islamic or not, I conclude that the Báb and his writings are simultaneously Islamic *and* post-Islamic. Ahmed suggests that "Islam is a shared language", the "means by which an experience is given meaning, as well as the meaning which the experience is given by that means". And Islam is the "end-product of meaning" (Ahmed 2016, p. 323). For the Báb, Islam is often the means, sometimes the meaning, and the end-product is simultaneously Islamic *and* post-Islamic. Therefore, Islam makes up more than the context for the development of the Bábī movement, especially because much of what might be considered Islamic remains part of the Bábī religion. In other words, the Báb separated his religion from many practices, beliefs, ideas, laws that might be considered Islamic, while he continued other Islamic markers, including specific concepts related to language, revelation, and monotheism. Although the Báb's writings criticize or disagree with interpretations of Islam, the Quran, and Muḥammad, he does not criticize Islam, the Quran, or Muḥammad. Instead, the Báb's writings hold Islam, the Quran, Muḥammad, (and the Imāms) in the highest regard.

The remainder of this paper is composed of three sections, each of which analyzes the Báb's writings in Islamic contexts. The aim here is that this method of reading the Báb's writings metaphorically, symbolically, and from multiple perspectives, will add to a clearer understanding of the relationship between the Bábī religion and Islam. The first section is an analysis of the Báb's writings as post-Islamic *and* purely Islamic. The second section focuses on the Báb's *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ*, which is an inexhaustible source for understanding the Báb's relationship with Islam. This text can be understood as a commentary on the Quran, the original Quran, *and* post-Quranic divine revelation. In this text, the Báb identifies himself as the Gate, the Imām, Muḥammad, *and* a manifestation of God. To illustrate how the Báb identifies himself with these figures, the third section analyzes the titles of the Báb found in his writings ("the Gate" (*Báb*), "the Remembrance" (*Dhikr*), "the Point" (*Nuqṭah*), "ʿAlī", and "Muḥammad") by placing these titles in Islamic contexts, especially with reference to Quranic verses. Although perceptions of the Báb evolved as his claims became more explicit over time, these multiple meanings and stations are present in his *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ*, which represents the beginning of the Báb's manifestation (*ẓuhur*) in 1844. This book, also entitled *Tafsīr sūrat Yūsuf* (*Commentary on the Surah of Joseph*), is the most influential of the Báb's early writings. Bahāʾu'llāh, who was an early follower of the Báb and his successor, refers to the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* as "the first, the greatest and mightiest of all books" (Bahāʾu'llāh 1983, p. 231).[1] Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahāʾī faith, writes that "the Bábīs universally regarded" this book "during almost the entire ministry of the Báb, as the Quran of the People of the Bayān" (Shoghi Effendi 1995, p. 23). In the *Persian Bayān* (Báb n.d.a, 4:18), the Báb notes that the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* "had, in the first year of this Revelation, been widely distributed" (Báb 1978, p. 90). For his early followers and antagonists, this book

was their introduction to the Báb and his cause. It is the trumpet blast through which the Báb announced his revelation, which is intimately associated with Islam and was meant to appeal to Muslims. In addition to this source, the following is based on the Báb's additional writings, including the *Persian Bayān*, which is the most influential of the Báb's writings and is characterized by its explicit discussion of laws and norms, which differ drastically from Islamic laws and norms.

2. Purely Islamic *and* Post-Islamic

There has been a scholarly emphasis on the Bábī movement's incongruence with Islam, no doubt resulting from historical tensions between Bábīs and Muslims in Iran. Abbas Amanat states that Bábīs hoped "to initiate a new prophetic cycle that aimed to bring to an end the Islamic epoch" (Amanat 2005, p. xii). While this statement is true, it should be pointed out that although the Báb claimed to represent a post-Islamic era defined by new laws and norms, he never claimed to put an end to Islam itself. Additionally, Nader Saiedi has argued that the Báb criticized Islamic traditionalism by reexamining "traditional concepts of religion and religious identity", which are based on the "belief in the finality of the Islamic revelation" and allowed "no change in the religious law" (Saiedi 2020). Indeed, already in the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* (1:37), we find the following statement, which indicates the Báb's claim on laws: "Be obedient to that which God hath revealed unto us from the laws of the Báb in this Book, submissive (*muslim*) to God and to His cause in truth, content".[2] The Báb's later writings, especially the *Persian Bayān*, explicitly detail new laws that differ drastically from any conception of Islamic law. Although Islamic traditionalism and Islamic legalism are not the same thing as Islam, the Báb's change of laws associated with Islam created a distinction between Bábīs and Muslims. According to Meir Litvak, the Bábī movement "posed the most serious ideological and social threat to the Shīʿī ʿulamāʾ in Iran and the shrine cities [in Iraq] during the nineteenth century by offering a messianic alternative to the orthodoxy at a time of growing socio-economic difficulties" (Litvak 1998, p. 144). This is partially because Uṣūlī Shīʿī clerics, who were the dominant representatives of Shiʿism in nineteenth-century Iran and Iraq, primarily interpreted Islam in legalistic terms. Additionally, their authority as interpreters of the law was rooted in their assumed status as deputies of the Imāms.[3]

As will be discussed in further detail below, the Báb also associated himself with the authority of the Imāms, which meant that the Báb and Uṣūlī Shīʿī clerics had competing visions for representing the authority of the Imām. Browne has noted that the Báb's *Ziyārat-nāmah* is particularly striking because of "the utter humility" and "diffidence with which he addresses himself to the Imāms" (Browne 1889, p. 900). In his analysis of the Báb's *Tafsīr sūrat al-baqarah* (*Commentary on the Surah of the Cow*), Todd Lawson concludes that the Báb "makes his love of the Imāms demonstrably reasonable and understandable largely as a result of the apotheosis in the tradition of the intellect" (Lawson 2018, pp. 176–77). Henry Corbin argues that Bábism "can only appear as the negation of" Shiʿism (particularly the Shaykhī school) because "Whoever proclaims himself publicly to be the báb of the Imām, has automatically put himself outside Shīʿī Islam" (Corbin 1972, p. 283; Lawson 2012b, p. 80; 2005). More precisely, Shīʿī Muslims who recognized the Báb as the Mahdī saw him as the negation of the Imām's hiddenness. The implication, then, is that the negation of the Imām's hiddenness results in the negation of Shiʿism. For Bábīs who believed that the Báb fulfilled prophecies associated with the Mahdī, the era of waiting was over and they had arrived at the era of fulfillment. Belief or disbelief in the Báb as a manifestation of the Imām, therefore, is the point of divergence between Shīʿīs and Bábīs. Because the Báb aligned his authority with the Imāms, Browne explains that the Bábī movement was "wholly Muḥammadan in outward origin, and ultra-Shiʿite in their earlier stages of development" (Browne 1919, p. 100). Like Browne, Hamid Algar suggests that Bábism took "its starting point within Islam and then swiftly [went] beyond its bounds" (Algar 1973, p. 59). These statements are not particularly accurate, partially because the Báb's earliest writings were already outside of Islam. This idea that the Bábī movement evolved from Islam to post-Islam is a prevalent

perspective which is partially based on the Bāb's statements in his later writings that point to distinctions between Bābīs and Muslims. However, these distinctions are already evident in the Bāb's earliest writings, and Islam is never fully absent from the Bāb's writings.

Therefore, the absence *and* presence of Islam in the Bāb's writings are constant *and* simultaneous. Despite the very real division that emerged between Bābīs and Muslims along the lines of norms and practices, Islamic language, metaphors, and symbols are constants in the Bāb's oeuvre. In fact, without knowledge of Islam, the Bāb's writings could prove exceedingly difficult to comprehend or find meaningful. After all, many of the Bāb's followers were Muslim scholars who found the Bāb's writings profoundly meaningful precisely because they had been trained in Islamic studies.[4] Todd Lawson, who has particularly focused his attention on the continuity of Islam in the Bāb's writings, points out that the Bāb's Quran "commentary is distinguished by the frequent use of such terminology from the lexicon of classical Sufism". At the same time, Lawson continues, "the mystical experience of the word as theophany represents a highly personal process of revelation" for the Bāb (Lawson 2018, p. 5). Abbas Amanat argues that the most vivid part of the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* is the Bāb's "attempt to initiate a new prophetic system modeled on Islamic religion but deliberately independent from it" (Amanat 2005, p. 205). The Bāb's earliest writings, therefore, are both Islamic in terminology and post-Islamic (or purely Islamic) as revelations from God associated with the personage of the Bāb.

From a Bābī perspective, the Bāb's Quran commentaries express a deep love and respect for the Quran. In the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* (chaps. 81, 48), the Bāb states "I swear by your Lord, this Book is verily the same Quran which was sent down in the past", and this religion "is indeed, in the sight of God, the essence of the Faith of Muḥammad [Islam]" (Bāb 1978, pp. 67, 71). Because of the centrality of the Quran and Muḥammad to Islam, these statements suggest that the Bāb's writings are Islamic, or at least that the Bāb viewed his writings as directly associated or aligned with Islam. However, the Bāb's later writings are explicitly critical of Muslims (but not Islam, the Quran, Muḥammad, or the Imāms). For example, the *Persian Bayān* (Bāb n.d.a, 2:7) states that not "one of the followers of Shīʿī Islam hath understood the meaning of the Day of Resurrection" (Bāb 1978, p. 106). Additionally, in his *Kitāb al-asmāʾ* (17:2, Bāb n.d.b), written a year or so before he was executed, the Bāb criticizes those who have "debarred themselves from his revelation" by saying that "they have indeed failed to understand the significance of a single letter of the Quran, nor have they obtained the slightest notion of the Faith of Islam" (Bāb 1978, p. 140). Such statements might be interpreted to indicate that the Bāb's views are not aligned with Islam. However, these assessments assume that the Bāb and his writings are either Islamic or not Islamic, which is a binary that is not useful in assessing the Bāb's relationship with Islam.

A more nuanced reading of the Bāb's writings suggests that the Bāb aligns himself with what he interprets as pure Islam or pure religion, and that he disagrees with what he suggests are misinterpretations of the Quran or are simply not Islamic (even if many Muslims might think that his interpretations of Islam are not Islamic). The Bāb's use of the Quranic phrase "pure religion" (*al-dīn al-khāliṣ*) is a good example of the way in which he engages with Islam and pure religion simultaneously. In the first chapter of the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ*, the phrase "*al-dīn al-khāliṣ*" is used four times to announce that the book makes significant claims on religion. The Bāb states (1:12) "The Pure Religion (*al-dīn al-khāliṣ*) of this Remembrance (*Dhikr*) is well preserved (*sālim*). Whomsoever desireth Islam, let him submit to his Cause (*al-amr*) so that God will inscribe him in the book of the righteous as a Muslim and of the pure religion (*al-dīn al-khāliṣ*), which God in truth hath praised".[5] Utilizing a whole repertoire of Quranic vocabulary in this verse, the Bāb explains that he is articulating the pure religion of God, which is both Islam *and* the Cause (*al-amr*) associated with him, both of which are God's pure religion. The Bāb clearly references a religion associated with himself here twice. First, he refers to "the pure religion of this Remembrance (*Dhikr*)". As will be discussed in more detail below, *Dhikr* is one of the most prominent titles that the Bāb uses to refer to himself (Lawson 1988, p. 11). Second, the Bāb uses the phrase "his Cause", which is both the same as *and* different from Islam.[6] For the Bāb, his Cause is

the same as pure Islam, but different from how many people have interpreted Islam. This concept is also prevalent in the Quran as the term *islām* (literally submission to God) is universalized to refer to the religion of Muḥammad and past religions; *muslim* refers to those who submit to God, including Muḥammad and previous prophets (Abraham, Moses, Jesus, etc.). Therefore, the Bāb's writings are Islamic and post-Islamic in the same way that the Quran is Christian and post-Christian, and Jewish and post-Jewish. In fact, the Bāb's writings are also Christian and post-Christian, and Jewish and post-Jewish, a topic that is simply beyond the scope of this paper.

This simultaneous unity and diversity of the Bābī religion and previous religions is a prominent theme in the writings of the Bāb and is associated with his concept of progressive revelation in which prophets or manifestations were representatives of divine truth in their different historical contexts. Referring to the prophets Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muḥammad, himself, and the future manifestation, the Bāb in his *Dalāʾil al-sabʿah* says "what shineth resplendent in each one of Them hath been and will ever remain the one and the same sun" (Browne 1889, p. 914). In this way, each prophet or manifestation of God is a multidimensional figure, characterized by their individuality and their oneness, like the sun, which is at once singular and different as it (re)appears each day as a new and old sun.[7] The Bāb suggests that each of these prophets or messengers are the same in the sense that they are manifestations of God, but that they are also different as a result of the distinctions of their personality. Their message is also the same divine call, but differs relative to the time, place, and culture of the people to whom they deliver their message. The Bāb appears to be saying the same thing about the relationship between each of the religions represented by these divine figures. That is, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Bābism are pure religions of God, yet they differ in time, place, laws, norms, and culture. Therefore, the Bāb views his religion as the "essence" of Islam because it is the same sun associated with Muḥammad. Similarly, the Bāb views his writings as the same as the Quran, like a new chapter of God's book.

The *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ*, therefore, intentionally delivers a pure Islamic and post-Islamic message in a package familiar, yet new, to Muslims. At the same time, the Bāb appeals to a broader audience beyond Muslims to encompass all of humanity. The Bāb's intended audiences become explicit as he specifically addresses Muslims and Iranians in the following ways: "O people of the Quran", "O concourse of Shiʿa", "O concourse of divines", and "O people of Persia". The Bāb directly refers (chp. 27) to the founders of the Shaykhī school, with which many of his followers were associated, by addressing Shaykh Ahmad and Sayyid Kazim, whom only the "pure in heart" have followed (Bāb 1978, p. 51). The Bāb also globalizes his audience as he addresses humankind many times throughout the text in the following terms: "O people(s) of the earth" and "O peoples of the East and West". He calls for his verses to be spread to Turkey, India, and to the East and West. Further, he refers to himself in the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* as the secret of the Bible, Torah, and Quran.[8] Therefore, although Muslims (especially Shaykhīs) are the Bāb's immediate audience, his message is ultimately universal.

The *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* was partially responsible for convincing the Bāb's early followers (many of whom were Muslim clerics) of his identity and developing the terminology associated with this station (Zarandī 1996, p. 61; Browne 1892b, p. 499). This book also prompted Muslim clerics to condemn the Bāb and his followers. Therefore, as Lawson has described it, the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* can be "thought of as an apocalypse of separation and reunion" (Lawson 2012b, pp. 3–4, 21). In his *Kitāb al-asmāʾ* (18:13), the Bāb explains this apocalypse of revelation by saying that there are two groups of people in the world who "sail upon two seas: the sea of affirmation and the sea of negation". The first group chooses to believe in "God and in His signs" and "in every Dispensation faithfully obey that which hath been revealed in the Book". The second group chooses not to recognize the divine messenger "at the time of His manifestation", and God will transform their light into fire (Bāb 1978, p. 147). In the *Persian Bayān* (Bāb n.d.a, 2:1), the Bāb writes that "no fire hath been or will be fiercer for them than to be veiled from the Manifestation of My Self

and to disbelieve in My Words" (Bāb 1978, p. 87). Additionally, he states (5:4) that "true knowledge" is "the knowledge of God", which is "the recognition of [God's] manifestation in each Dispensation" (Bāb 1978, p. 89). For the Bāb, therefore, the Day of Resurrection is not the end of history, but the transition to a new stage of history, which is defined by a new revelation from God. In practice, the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* (and the rest of the Bāb's writings) created a division between those who recognized the Bāb's manifestation and those who did not. The Bāb's revelation also caused a division between the previous and current stages of history. The Bāb's followers would be led to God's knowledge by the light of his revelation, and those who rejected the Bāb would suffer from hellish fire as a result of not following his divinely revealed words. As light and fire are meant to be interpreted symbolically here, the apocalypse for the Bāb is a spiritual matter, which separates those who believe in his revelation and those who do not. This recalls the Surah of Hūd in the Quran, which recounts Muḥammad's call to idolaters to believe in God, and it describes the stories of prophets prior to Muḥammad (Noah, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Lot, Abraham, and Moses) who called their people to follow God's will.

As with Islam, belief and disbelief are integral to Bābī theology. In the *Persian Bayān* (Bāb n.d.a, 2:7), the Bāb fixes the date of his manifestation (*maẓhar*) on 22 May 1844—when Mullā Ḥusayn Bushrūʾī (1813–1849) recognized the Bāb's station (Bāb 1978, p. 107). The Bāb, therefore, gave Mullā Ḥusayn the title "Bāb al-Bāb" (Gate of the Gate). Prior to this moment of belief, the Bāb shared the first chapter of his *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* with Mullā Ḥusayn. About this occasion, Mullā Ḥusayn is reported to have stated the following: "Not for one moment did He [the Bāb] interrupt the flow of the verses that streamed from His pen". Mullā Ḥusayn was "enraptured by the magic" of the Bāb's voice, and he states that the "sweeping force of His revelation" "came as a thunderbolt which, for a time, seemed to have benumbed my faculties . . . the knowledge of His Revelation had galvanized my being" (Zarandī 1996, pp. 61–65; Amanat 2005, p. 172). Mullā Ḥusayn was eventually killed by Qajar government forces. Like Mullā Ḥusayn's experience, the Bāb's writings convinced many Shīʿī clerics and laypeople that the Bāb was the promised one, and many of these Bābīs also engaged in revolutionary activities.

The Bāb's words had the opposite effect on the Bāb's detractors who rejected his book and his claims, which led to the persecution of the Bāb and his followers.[9] The first major example of Bābī suppression is illustrated by another Shīʿī scholar who became a Bābī, namely Mullā ʿAlī Basṭāmī (d. 1846), to whom the Bāb gave the title "the second who believed". Sunni and Shīʿī clerics in Baghdad issued a rare, jointly authored fatwa against the Bāb after Basṭāmī's trial (Momen 1982, p. 113; Amanat 2005, pp. 211–38).[10] Basṭāmī had traveled to the Shīʿī shrine cities of Najaf and Karbalāʾ in southern Iraq to deliver the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* to Shīʿī scholars living in these centers of Shīʿī learning, which he did at public gatherings. The assembly of clerics in Najaf included Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Najafī (d. 1850), one of the most prominent Shīʿī scholars of the nineteenth century. According to the Iraqi historian ʿAlī al-Wardī, Basṭāmī stated the following at this meeting: the Bāb is the Promised One, whose "proof is his verses, his miracle is the same miracle by which Islam is recognized as being the truth", namely the revelation of divine verses in the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ*. Al-Wardī concludes that "These words were like a cannon-ball exploding that assembly and all those present rose up against Basṭāmī" (al-Wardī 1978; Momen 1982, p. 116). As a result of this proclamation and similar pronouncements in Karbalāʾ, Basṭāmī was taken to Baghdad for trial. These events resulted in calls for the death penalty for those who believed in the Bāb's writings, and many Bābīs were killed as a result. However, it appears that Basṭāmī was sentenced to hard labor by Ottoman officials. The inter-sectarian fatwa signed by Shīʿī and Sunni clerics on this occasion condemns the Bāb on account of his elevated claims in the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ*. The fatwa concludes that the Bāb was "making a mockery of religion", which is the point of contention between the Bāb's followers and his critics, as his followers concluded that the Bāb was (re)establishing or (re)affirming true religion. Additionally, the fatwa denounces the Bāb for referring to himself as the Gate (*Bāb*) and the Remembrance (*al-Dhikr*), for composing the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* in the same style

as the Quran, and for claiming to receive divine revelation (Momen 1982, p. 119). Indeed, these points accurately represent the Bāb's claims, which were embraced by his adherents. It is to these questions that we now turn.

3. *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* as Commentary, Quran, *and* Revelation

Through the Bāb's unique style, the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* can be understood as a meditation on multiple meanings. In terms of its relationship with Islam, the title of the book suggests that it maintains *and* transcends (*qayyūm*) the divine names (*al-asmāʾ*) of God as found in the Quran. The *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* is simultaneously written as a commentary on the twelfth chapter of the Quran, the original Quran, *and* a newly disclosed divine revelation. Therefore, the Bāb presents us with what may appear as a paradox. These different interpretations of the book are also equivalent to the Bāb's claims of being the Imām (who provides commentary), Muḥammad (who receives revelation), *and* a new manifestation (who discloses a new revelation), which will be discussed in more detail below. E. G. Browne states that the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* was not a commentary "in the strict sense of the word" (Browne 1892a, p. 261). Lawson goes further by saying that it "bears virtually no resemblance" to any work in the Islamic *tafsīr* tradition, and is thus completely unique (Lawson 2012b, pp. 3–4, 21). The Bāb states that the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* is "the commentary (*tafsīr*) of everything (*kull al-shayʾ*)" (Lambden 2020, p. 182). This book is a commentary in the sense that it fully engages with the Quran and seeks to unlock or elucidate its meanings. In other words, the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* is a commentary on the Quran that is radically different from the Islamic tradition of Quran commentaries.

At the same time, the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* is written in a style and structure that resembles the Quran, and it consistently interprets the Quran to unveil the Bāb as the mystery of God now made manifest in this new (and old) revelation. As noted already, the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* (chp. 71) states that it is "verily the same Quran which was sent down in the past" (Bāb 1978, p. 67). It is the original "uncorrupted Quran", which had been safeguarded by the Hidden Imām (Lawson 2012b, p. 4; Amanat 2005, p. 173). Lawson sums up the relationship of this book to Shiʿism when he says that "The message to the Shiʿa was: this is the true Quran that has been in hiding with the 12th Imām until now and its appearance also entails the appearance of the hidden Imām" (Lawson 2018, p. 1). In his *Dalāʾil al-sabʿah*, the Bāb states that some of his Quran commentaries are written in the mode of divine verses, of which the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* stands out as the prime example (Behmardi and McCants 2007, p. 123). Browne, therefore, concludes that in the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* "a distinct claim to a divine mission is put forward" (Browne 1889, p. 906). Stephen Lambden states that the Bāb's writings "initiated a new eschatological age of inner (*taʾwīl*, *ʿirfān*), deep-level (*baṭinī*) revelation from God (*waḥy*), intended to herald a new era of inclusive, yet post-Islamic, religious evolution" (Lambden 2020, p. 153). There are many explicit and implicit textual references in the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* indicating that the book itself is a divine revelation from God. Indeed, the whole book is written in a mode, language, and style of divine verses modeled after the Quran, which itself is entirely written in the mode of divine revelation. This imagery of revelation gets to the heart of how multiple meanings and symbolism are used in the Bāb's writings, which are achieved through the creative use of Quranic language. These references connect revelation back to the Quran by commenting on it.

An analysis of several examples will illustrate how revelation, the Quran, and commentary are interconnected in the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ*. One emphatic statement in the first chapter is as follows: "This is indeed the eternal Truth which God, the Ancient of Days, hath revealed unto His omnipotent Word—He Who hath been raised up from the midst of the Burning Bush. This is the Mystery which hath been hidden from all that are in heaven and on earth, and in this wondrous Revelation it hath, in very truth, been set forth in the Mother Book by the hand of God, the Exalted" (Bāb 1978, p. 41). The Bāb references Islamic imagery of the Burning Bush, Hidden Mystery, and the Mother Book, which are associated with divine revelation and God's knowledge. The Burning Bush, which is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) as the medium through which God addressed Moses, is

shorthand for revelation in the Bāb's writings. In his *Tafsīr kull al-ṭaʿām*, the Bāb states that whereas Moses encountered the Burning Bush several times, the presence of the Burning Bush was a constant and eternal experience for him (Saiedi 2008, p. 77). As with the Burning Bush, the symbol of fire is commonly used by the Bāb as "the ultimate symbol of the Primal Will", which is pure light, and is the opposite of hell-fire, which is manifest darkness (Saiedi 2008, pp. 75–78). The Quran (3:7, 13:39, 43:4, 85:22) explains that with God is the Source of Revelation, which is referred to as the "Preserved Tablet", the "Mother of All Books", and the "Hidden Book" (Rahman 1988, p. 29). The Mother Book or Preserved Tablet, therefore, is the source of all holy books and revealed verses. The Quran, Torah, Gospel, and other prophetic books are reflections of this archetypal revelation. Therefore, the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* can be understood to suggest that it comes from the Mother Book or that it is the Mother Book from which the Quran and other books were derived.

An additional statement in the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* (chp. 79) related to divine revelation is as follows: "God, of a truth, revealed unto Me in the sacred house of the Kaʿbah, 'Verily, I am God, no God is there but Me'" (Bāb 1978, p. 73). The Bāb, therefore, situates the location of his revelation in the most sacred place in the Islamic world, known as the House of God, the sanctuary built by Abraham and Ishmael, the center of pilgrimage (*hajj*), and the place to which Muslims around the world direct their prayers (*qiblah*). The final part of the Bāb's statement, quoted from Quran 20:14, is also a reference to the Islamic profession of faith (*shahādah*), which many Muslims consider to be one of the five pillars of faith (in addition to pilgrimage). In the *shahādah*, Muslims declare "There is no god but God and Muḥammad is the messenger of God". The above-mentioned verse in the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* states that there is "no god but Me". The singleness of God (*tawḥīd*) is a fundamental belief in Islam, and the Bāb does not challenge this doctrine of God's oneness. Monotheism is likewise foundational in the Bābī religion. Instead, in the verse above, God is speaking to him in the first person. In other words, God says "there is no god but Me" to the Bāb in the Kaʿbah. Therefore, employing the word "me" instead of "God" (as the Quran does originally) is an indication that the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* is a revelation from God.

This mode of divine verses is characterized by direct revelation from God, which allows God to address his creation in his own voice. This type of verse is also common in the Quran. The mirror opposite of this mode is found in prayers in which the recipient of the revelation or the prophet addresses God, normally in the second person. Whereas a divine verse would say "I am God", a prayer would say "Thou art God". Third person statements ("He is God") are characterized as the mode of commentaries, which generally affirm the words of God (Saiedi 2008, pp. 41–43). The Bāb summarizes these modes of revelation in the *Persian Bayān* (Bāb n.d.a, 3:17) as follows: "However, this name referreth in its primary reality to the divine verses, and in its secondary reality to prayers, third to commentaries, fourth to educational forms (or scientific treatises), and fifth to the Persian words" (Saiedi 2008, p. 45; Browne 1889, p. 893). The Bāb outlines these five modes in more detail in his *Panj shaʾn* (Bāb n.d.c).[11] These modes can also be thought of as the multiple voices that are present in the Bāb's writings.

In several additional statements in the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ*, the Bāb refers to himself as the infallible bearer of God's revelation. He states (chp. 9) "I have been made the Bearer of irrefutable proofs from the presence of Him Who is the long-expected Remnant of God" (Bāb 1978, p. 47). The Bāb further clarifies (chp. 17) "O peoples of the earth! Bear ye allegiance unto this resplendent light wherewith God hath graciously invested Me through the power of infallible Truth" (Bāb 1978, p. 48). In the Shīʿī tradition, infallibility is closely associated with the Fourteen Infallibles (Muḥammad, Fāṭima, and the twelve Imāms), and the infallible knowledge of the Imāms is a defining feature of Shiʿism. In the Shīʿī tradition, the infallibility of these holy souls is the result of God's grace, which ensures divine order. According to the Shīʿī scholar al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī (d. 1067), it is human fallibility that necessitates the infallible Imām (Arjomand 1996).

4. Gate, Imām, Muḥammad, *and* Manifestation of God

In his writings, the Bāb refers to himself with a wide range of images and titles associated with the Imāmate, Muḥammad, *and* divine manifestation. Nader Saiedi explains that the Bāb relates his claims to different parts of human reality associated with his body, soul, spirit, and heart. The Bāb's "body represents the station of the Gate to the Imām, His soul represents the station of the Imām, His spirit reflects the station of the Prophet (servitude), and His heart represents the station of the unity (divinity) of the Prophet, that is, the station of the Point" (Saiedi 2008, p. 102). Therefore, instead of a disjointed reality, the Bāb claims an ontology that is at once singular and multiple, like the unity and diversity of a human being with sense perception, thoughts, feelings, and spiritual qualities. Among the Bāb's most prominent titles or names are "the Gate" (*Bāb*), "the Remembrance" (*Dhikr*) of God, "the Point" (*Nuqṭah*), "ʿAlī", and "Muḥammad", which will be the focus here to illustrate how these titles relate to the Bāb's identity and his relationship to Islam. These titles represent important concepts that are rooted in the Quran and hadith, and are directly related to conceptions of Islamic authority and knowledge.

In the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ*, the Bāb makes a whole host of claims through explicit and immediately recognizable Quranic language, and his later works continue to be explicit about his identity.[12] The Bāb, therefore, announced his station at the inception of his manifestation (*ẓuhūr*) in 1844. As Lawson has already established, the Bāb's "assumption of the titles of Bāb and *dhikr* did, in fact, put forth his real claims right from the beginning" (Lawson 1988, p. 42). Saiedi argues that the Bāb's message is "coherent from beginning to end" and that it is gradually disclosed. He further states that "In the Bāb's early writings, the exalted nature of the station He claimed is unmistakably evident, but . . . His writings appear to convey the impression that He is only the Gate of the Hidden Imām", which "He is defining in an unprecedented way" (Saiedi 2008, p. 19). At the same time, the Bāb's more exalted claims can be directly understood from the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ*.

In public, the Bāb announced his claims gradually, first as an intermediary to the Hidden Imām, second as the Mahdī, and finally as a divine manifestation (*maẓhar ilahī*). Scholars have especially focused on the timing of these claims, and several have suggested that the Bāb's status evolved over time. According to Browne, "The Bāb's original claim was...that he was the "Gate" whereby men could communicate with the Ka'im [sic], Imām-Mahdī, or Twelfth Imām. At a later period of his mission, however, he declared himself to be none other than the Imām himself" (Browne 1891, p. 290). Like Browne, Denis MacEoin suggests that the Bāb's career included different charismatic frameworks: 1. Agent of the Hidden Imām; 2. Imām; 3. Manifestation (MacEoin 2009, p. 200). Hamid Dabashi suggests that the Bāb declared himself the Gate "between the Hidden Imām and the world", then he declared himself the Hidden Imām himself in 1844. Later in Mākū, "he completely abandoned the notion of being the Hidden Shīʿī Imām and proclaimed himself a whole new prophet, whose book Bayān superseded the Quran, just as the Quran had superseded the Bible" (Dabashi 2011, p. 182). From a Bābī perspective, this idea that the Bāb changed his claims is not accurate. According to the Bāb, the public perceived his identity during the first four years after his declaration (1844–1848) as the Gate (Bāb) of the Hidden Imām. At his trial in Tabrīz in 1848, he publicly announced that he was the Qāʾim and a manifestation of God (Saiedi 2008, p. 170). Therefore, according to the Bāb, it was public perception that changed, not necessarily his status as the Gate or manifestation. He explains his wisdom of gradually revealing his identity in public and affirms the validity of the Quran in the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* "in order to prevent people from being agitated by the coming of the new book" (Amanat 2005, pp. 199–200).

Depending on one's reading of the Bāb's early works, the Bāb's identity may be perceived differently. While some perceived the Bāb in 1844 as the Gate of the Imām, others perceived him as a revealer of divine verses. Moojan Momen rightly argues that "there were at least two levels of understanding of the Bāb's claim at this early period": 1. Bābīs thought the Bāb was an intermediary to the Hidden Imām; 2. Muslim scholars who read the Bāb's writings were aware of his claims to divine revelation (Momen 1982, p. 142). Therefore,

we can conclude that there was a multidimensional understanding of the Bāb's assumed identity during his lifetime, and that some of his early follows were aware of the extent of his claims from the beginning. As indicated already, it was the Bāb's early writings that initially made people aware of his elevated claims, which may not have been as apparent to those who did not read them. Additionally, Muslim scholars may have interpreted his writings differently from lay people. An analysis of the multiple meanings of the Bāb's titles may help us understand how his claims could have been read or interpreted.

The Gate (*al-Bāb*) is one of the many titles by which the Bāb referred to himself. In Islamic contexts, the term *bāb* has different meanings that were employed by the Bāb in a variety of ways, which may, in part, explain why he associated himself with this title. The elasticity of the word *bāb* can be stretched between the different stations that the Bāb claimed to represent or supersede, including being the representative of the Imām, the Imām, and the Prophet. The *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* (chp. 23) refers to the Bāb's title on multiple occasions, including the following: "We have, verily, dilated Thine heart in this Revelation, which stands truly unique from all created things, and have exalted Thy name through the manifestation of the Bāb, so that men may become aware of Our transcendent power, and recognize that God is immeasurably sanctified above the praise of all men" (Bāb 1978, p. 49). This verse is particularly important because it is spoken in a Godly tone. It also refers to the Bāb's revelation, which is meant to make people aware of God's transcendence and sanctity. In other words, the title of Bāb is directly associated with divine revelation that has the power to transform and reaffirm humankind's (re)cognition of God.

An additional verse in the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* (chp. 24) that refers to the Bāb is as follows: "Verily I am the 'Gate of God' and I give you to drink, by the leave of God, the sovereign Truth, of the crystal-pure waters of His Revelation which are gushing out from the incorruptible Fountain situate upon the Holy Mount. And those who earnestly strive after the One True God, let them then strive to attain this Gate" (Bāb 1978, p. 50). Here, the Bāb establishes his station not simply as an intermediary between the Hidden Imām and the world, but as an intermediary or gate between God and the world. In this way, he expands the meaning of the word *bāb* to include divine authority. Holy Mount in this verse is shorthand for revelation. In the Quran, mount often refers to Mount Sinai (2:83–4, 7:142–5), where God revealed the Ten Commandments to Moses. Muḥammad received his first revelation on Mount Ḥirāʾ. In the passage above, revelation is also analogous to crystal-pure waters that are gushing out of the Holy Mount. The Quran references heavenly water several times, and in one verse there is a connection between the concepts of heavenly water and gate. In the Moon Surah, which references the Resurrection, the Quran (54:11) states "So we opened the gates of the sky with pouring water". An additional verse (8:11) states "he caused rain to descend on you from heaven, to clean you therewith, to remove from you the stain of Satan, to strengthen your hearts, and to plant your feet firmly therewith". The verb "to descend" (*nazala*) here is also understood in the Quran as revelation. For Quran scholars, the Day on which "the sky is opened as if it were gates" (78:19) is often interpreted as a sign of the Day of Judgment (Nasr et al. 2015, p. 2580). This verse is preceded by the following statement in the Quran (78:17–18): "the Day of Division is a Moment Appointed, a day when the trumpet is blown". Heavenly rain, therefore, is associated with the Day of Judgment in the Quran, and the Bāb uses this imagery as a synonym for divine revelation.

An additional title found in the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* to refer to the Bāb is "the Remembrance (*Dhikr*) of God", which is found in the following verse (chp. 3): "Praise be to God, Who hath revealed this Utterance (*Dhikr*), in truth, unto the Remembrance (*Dhikr*), that the people may be mentioned in the Mother Book by virtue of the Most Great Remembrance (*Dhikr*)" (Saiedi 2008, p. 140). Simultaneously, the Bāb claims to be the recipient of the revelation as well as the revelation itself. As Nader Saiedi rightly puts it, "the interpreter, the object of interpretation, and the interpretation are all one and the same", each associated with the Bāb's multidimensional being (Saiedi 2008, p. 144). For the Bāb, therefore, *Dhikr* refers to "the Word and the Will through which God calls reality into being" (Saiedi 2008,

p. 95). In another reference to *Dhikr*, the Bāb suggests that Islam (which literally means submission to God) is synonymous with submission to the Bāb's revelation. The *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* (chp. 3) states"Verily, the essence of religion is none other than submission unto This Remembrance (*Dhikr*). Thus, whoso seeketh Islam (submission to God), let him submit unto this Remembrance (*Dhikr*)" (Saiedi 2008, p. 142). It follows then that Muslims and everyone else seeking submission to God (*islam*) must submit themselves to the remembrance of God in accordance with the Bāb's writings.

Dhikr is a central concept in the Quran which appears in a variety of forms in more than two hundred verses. Quranic words with the same root as *dhikr* have a variety of meanings which have been variously translated into English as the following terms: remember, invocation, admonition, heed, mention, and exhort. "*Dhikr*" is also one of the titles of the Quran itself. Toward the end of the Surah of Joseph (12:104), which has been interpreted by some Muslims as an account of the separation and return of the divine, the Quran refers to itself as "a reminder (*dhikr*) for the worlds" (Nasr et al. 2015, p. 1071). As a commentary on this surah, the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* asserts that the Bāb and his writings are also a "reminder". Quran 16:45 describes *dhikr* in the following terms: "We sent Our Messengers with clear Signs and Scriptures. And We have sent down to thee the Reminder (*al-dhikr*) that thou mayest explain to mankind that which has been sent down to them, and that they may reflect". In this verse, *dhikr* is associated with divine revelation and its messengers, and the Quran again is referred to as "the Reminder" (*dhikr*). As the Quran was revealed in parts over time, each new revelation was known as a reminder (*dhikr*) (26:5). Another Quranic verse (20:124) makes a connection between remembrance and the Day of Resurrection in the following way: "But whosoever turns away from the remembrance of Me, truly his shall be a miserable life, and We shall raise him blind on the Day of Resurrection". Blindness here is often interpreted as spiritual blindness or the inability to see spiritual realities. The importance of *dhikr* is summed up in the following Quranic verse (29:45): "the remembrance of God is surely greater" than anything else. Several hadiths reiterate this concept as well. According to a hadith attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad, "All that is on the earth is accursed save the remembrance of God" (Nasr et al. 2015, p. 866). An additional hadith states that the remembrance of God is more virtuous than spending money in the service of God, participating in jihad, and martyrdom (Nasr et al. 2015, p. 1135).

Dhikr is also an important concept in Shiʿism and Sufism. Shīʿī scholars associate *dhikr* with Muḥammad and the Imāms, and *dhikr* is related to the authority of the silent book (Quran) and the speaking book (Muḥammad and Imāms) (Lawson 2012b, pp. 54–55). "*Dhikr*" is one of the titles of the Prophet Muḥammad, who referred to the invocation or remembrance (*dhikr*) of God as "the polish of the heart" (Lings 1975, p. 59; Nasr et al. 2015, pp. 1067, 1135). In Sufism, *dhikr* is associated with the devotional tradition in which Sufis rhythmically invoke the names of God in prayer and music. According to Martin Lings, "the invocation of the Supreme Name Allāh takes precedence over all the other practices in Sufism" (Lings 1975, p. 60). In this tradition, *dhikr* is partially defined by its focus on the active participation in remembrance, which may involve repetitive singing, dancing, and respiration (During 2010). Alluding to this type of *dhikr* practice, Lambden points out that the poetic rhyming style of the Bāb's writings often have a "hypnotic depth of rhythmic, *dhikr*-like intensity" (Lambden 2020, p. 167). A goal of Sufi devotional *dhikr* is to have an ecstatic experience which results from concentrating on the remembrance of God. This mystical experience has been described in the multidimensional terms of absence and presence. Absence refers to the absence of self, and presence is the presence of God or self-consciousness. This experience can result in a mystical revelation in which the performer reaches the apex of Sufism—the annihilation of the self and the subsistence in God (Stern 2012).

An additional title of the Bāb is "the Point" (*Nuqṭah*), which also has a variety of meanings. Saiedi suggests that *nuqṭah* in the Bāb's writings refers to the Primal Will of God, which is "manifested in this world by the Prophet or divine Messenger, Who is the nexus between the Divinity and the created world" (Saiedi 2020, p. 45). In the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ*

(chp. 24), the Bāb sates that "The angels and the spirits, arrayed rank upon rank, descend, by the leave of God, upon this Gate and circle round this Focal Point in a far-stretching line" (Bāb 1978, p. 50). This verse references the following Quranic statement (78:38): "That Day the Spirit and the angels stand in rows, none speaking, save one whom the Compassionate permits and who speaks aright". In the *Persian Bayān* (Bāb n.d.a, 4:1), the Bāb explains the connection in this verse between the Point and speaking: "Verily the Point possesseth two stations. One is the station that speaketh from God. The other is the station that speaketh from that which is other than God, a station whereby He expresseth His servitude for the former station" (Saiedi 2020, p. 46). *Nuqṭah*, therefore, is a reference to the speech of God and his manifestation. Lawson has made the additional point that the Bāb employs the term *nuqṭah* (as well as the terms "pole" (*quṭb*) and "center" (*markaz*)) to indicate that he also occupies the position of the Imām from whom "acts of being acquire reality" and choice becomes evident as a result of their proximity to the point or center in which the Imām is the source of divine names (Lawson 2001, p. 16).

Nuqṭah in Islam refers to the point or dot beneath the letter B (*bāʾ*, ب), which is the first letter of *basmalah* ("in the name of God"), the opening phrase of each chapter of the Quran except one. Muslims often recite the *basmalah* (*bismallah*) as a prayer before undertaking an activity, including giving a speech, and it appears at the beginning of books, letters, and other writings.[13] The sixth Shīʿī Imām, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 765), explains the first three letters of the *basmalah* in the following way: "The *bāʾ* ("b") is the glory of God (*bahāʾ Allāh*), the *sīn* ("s") is the splendor of God (*sanāʾ Allāh*), and the *mīm* ("m") is the dominion of God (*mulk Allāh*)". Imām ʿAlī associated the point with himself by saying, "I am the point under the *bāʾ*" of *basmalah*. According to a hadith attributed to Imām ʿAlī, all the holy books are contained in the Quran, and the Quran is contained in the opening surah (*al-fātiḥa*), which is contained in the opening phrase of *basmalah*, which is contained in the letter *bāʾ*, which is contained in the dot (*nuqṭah*) under the *bāʾ*. *Basmalah* is thought to contain all knowledge of the Quran and previous scriptures, and it is associated with the Greatest Name (*al-ism al-aʿẓam*) (Lawson 2012b, pp. 101–2). The *nuqṭah*, then, signifies the beginning of all knowledge and is shorthand for knowledge itself, which begins with the point or dot that is required to formulate the letters, words, and ideas of divine revelation.

The final two titles to be discussed here relate to the Bāb's given name, ʿAlī Muḥammad, which is significant to the Bāb as he simultaneously claims to be God's vicegerent (ʿAlī) and a revealer of verses (Muḥammad). The name "ʿAlī Muḥammad" also signifies his status of unifying the stations of divinity and servitude. Like Muḥammad and other prophets, he is a mirrored reflection of God. The Bāb refers to ʿAlī and Muḥammad as his "Twin Names" as well as the Sun and the Moon. The Sun represents Muḥammad and prophethood, and the Moon represents ʿAlī and vicegerency (Saiedi 2020, pp. 107–8). The Bāb interprets the Quranic statement which says that on the Day of Resurrection "the sun and moon are joined together (75:9)" to mean that he is both ʿAlī (the Moon and vicegerent) and Muḥammad (the Sun and prophet). Therefore, the Bāb interprets his given name as the trumpet call for the Day of Resurrection. In his analysis of the disconnected letters in chapters 108 and 109 of the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* which spell the names "ʿAlī" and "Muḥammad", Lawson argues that these letters assert the Bāb's authorship of the text, provide references to Imām ʿAlī and the Prophet Muḥammad, and "complicate and challenge a traditional understanding of divine revelation" (Lawson 2015, pp. 114–15).

The letters that make up the name "ʿAlī" refer to Imām ʿAlī and "the Exalted", which is one of the ninety-nine names of God in the Quran. In the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* (chp. 3), we find the following reference to the Bāb as ʿAlī: "Verily, this is the straight Path ascribed to ʿAlī before Thy Lord, as laid out in the Mother Book. And He is that ʿAlī (Exalted One), Who is praised before Us as the Wise (*Ḥakīm*) in the Mother Book. Verily, He is the Truth from God, registered in the Mother Book as endued with the uncorrupted Religion in the midst of Sinai" (Saiedi 2008, p. 101). In his signature form, the Bāb multiplies the meaning of a single word to make a larger point. He uses the word ʿAlī to connect himself to the Imāmate and as an attribute of or a name for God, while also associating himself with

imagery of revelation (Mother Book and Mount Sinai). Again, the Báb indicates here that he is a reflection of God by joining together the stations of divinity and servitude.

Muḥammad is the second part of the Báb's given name. The Báb associates himself with the Prophet Muḥammad many times in the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* and elsewhere. The *Qayyūm* (chp. 48) states "This Religion is indeed, in the sight of God, the essence of the Faith of Muḥammad" (Báb 1978, p. 71). Additionally (chp. 66), "the conclusive Proof of God in favour of His Remembrance is similar to the one wherewith Muḥammad, the Seal of the Prophets, was invested, and verily great is the Cause as ordained in the Mother Book" (Báb 1978, p. 71). The point here is that the Báb, already in 1844, clearly states that his religion and his conclusive proof (the revealed word) are similar to that of Muḥammad. He also associates his life with that of Muḥammad, as the Báb was an orphan, merchant, and an unlettered revealer of verses.[14] The fact that the Báb and Muḥammad were both orphans and merchants is apparent. In terms of Muḥammad's lack of education, The Quran (7:156–8) refers to Muḥammad as the "illiterate prophet" (*al-nabī al-ummī*) with the implication that the Quran is the divine word of God, not the man-made words of a poet, scholar, or even a literate person.[15] Referring to himself as "devoid of sciences" and "untutored", the Báb appeals to this same logic to prove his status as the recipient of revelation from God (Browne 1889, p. 917). Comparing himself to Muḥammad, who was on the receiving end of "outrageous insults" after he revealed the Quran, the Báb states in the *Persian Bayān* (Báb n.d.a, 6:11, 2:1) that after he had "revealed no less than five hundred thousand verses on different subjects, behold what calumnies are uttered, so unseemly that the pen is stricken with shame at the mention of them" (Báb 1978, pp. 82, 96–97). The Báb then cites the following Quranic verse (29:51) as proof of the previous statement: "Is it not enough for them that We have sent down unto Thee the Book to be recited to them?". The point here is that divine verses (*āyāt*) are the most evident of God's signs (*āyāt*) to man and that the Báb has revealed numerous of these verses. The Báb, therefore, establishes a relationship between himself and Muḥammad which is similar to the relationship between Muḥammad and Abraham in the Quran.[16]

The Báb further emphasizes his similarity to Muḥammad by challenging the idea that divine revelation ended with the Quran. In a letter to a Muslim cleric, the Báb claims that he received revelation from God, like Muḥammad did, in the following terms: "Thy vision is obscured by the belief that divine revelation ended with the coming of Muḥammad, and unto this We have borne witness in Our first epistle. Indeed, He Who hath revealed verses unto Muḥammad, the Apostle of God, hath likewise revealed verses unto ʿAlī Muḥammad [the Báb]" (Báb 1978, p. 31). Here, the Báb references the Quranic verse (33:40) which states "Muḥammad is not the father of any one of your men, but he is the Messenger of Allah and seal of the prophets (*khaṭam al-nabīyyīn*)". Muslim scholars commonly interpret this verse to mean that Muḥammad is the last prophet and therefore revelation ended with him, which the Báb clearly challenges. For many Muslims, therefore, the Báb's claim to revelation is perhaps the most problematic of his claims. Interestingly, the Báb does not refer to himself with reference to the title of "*nabī*" (prophet), one of the most prevalent titles associated with Muḥammad. In the *Persian Bayān* (Báb n.d.a, 9:10), the Báb states that God's "revelations of glory never end", which is related to the Báb's concept of progressive revelation discussed above (Báb 1978, p. 99). In addition to claiming that revelation continues in his own writings after Muḥammad, the Báb emphatically states numerous times that revelation will continue after him. Although post-Bábi revelation is beyond the scope of this paper, it should be pointed out here that this theme is central to the Báb's writings. The Báb foretells of a figure that he calls "Him Whom God shall make manifest", who will appear after him. Bahāʾu'llāh, who founded the Bahāʾī faith, declared in 1863 that he was "Him Whom God shall make manifest". Therefore, the Báb positioned himself as the gateway connecting Muḥammad (and past prophets) with Him Whom God shall make manifest (Bahāʾu'llāh). Bahāʾīs, then, understand the Báb to be the Gate connecting Islam and the Bahāʾī faith.

5. Conclusions

The Bāb's identity and his writings are interconnected, mysterious, and multidimensional. In his *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ*, the Bāb continues the Islamic tradition of making meaning through metaphors, paradox, creative language, and symbolism. His writings invite readers to see multiple meanings at once, which, in practice, has resulted in multiple understandings of the Bāb's writings. Fully engaging with the Quran and Islamic terminology, his writings are unique and differ drastically from any school of Islamic thought. As Islam is simultaneously and consistently present in and absent from his writings, the Bāb's words are both Islamic and post-Islamic. Therefore, instead of arguing that the Bāb's writings are either Islamic *or* un-Islamic, it might be more informative to understand them as intentionally Islamic *and* post-Islamic. From the outset of his manifestation in 1844, the Bāb articulated a vision of pure religion, which is the same sun as pure Islam, and he presented himself as the same sun as previous and future prophets and manifestations. Although in public he gradually disclosed his identity as the Bāb, the Imām, and a manifestation of God, his complex identity is present in his *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ*, which created a real division between his followers and detractors, many of whom were Muslim scholars. The *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* foreshadows this division as an apocalypse of revelation in which people either believed or disbelieved in his words. Through the use of titles found in the Quran and hadith ("*Bāb*", "*Dhikr*", "*Nuqṭah*", "ʿAlī", and "Muḥammad"), the Bāb identifies himself as "the Gate", "Imām", "Muḥammad", and "manifestation of God" in the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ*. As a reflection of the Bāb's identity, this book identifies itself as a commentary on the Quran, the original Quran, and a unique divine revelation.

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Notes

1 Browne notes that the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* "was the first, and, for a long while, the chief sacred book of the Bābīs, and in it the earliest form of the Bābī doctrine must be sought" (Edward G. Browne 1892a, p. 268).

2 See also Stephen Lambden, "The Surah of the Dominion", https://hurqalya.ucmerced.edu/node/105/ accessed on 3 March 2022.

3 On the development of Uṣūlī Shiʿism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see (Heern 2015).

4 For an analysis of the social makeup of the early Bābī community, including Muslim clerics, see (Amanat 2005; Momen 1983).

5 See note 2.

6 For a discussion of the term cause (*amr*), see Omid Ghaemmaghami (2020, p. 26), who argues that "In hadiths about the Qāʾim, amr [cause] has eschatological and apocalyptic connotations".

7 This imagery continues in the writings of Bahāʾuʾllāh. See, for example, (Bahāʾuʾllāh 1983, p. 21).

8 The Bāb specifically refers to himself as the secret of the Syrian Gospel, the Rabbinic Torah, and the Aḥmadī Furqān (Quran). See *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ*, (Bāb n.d.d, chp. 109); See also, (Lawson 2012a, p. 128).

9 On the refutation of the Bab's claims by a Kirmānī Shaykhī leader, see (McCants 2003).

10 Moojan Momen suggests that this is the first time that "Ottoman authorities officially recognized the Shīʿī sect" (Momen 1982).

11 On the modes of revelation, see also (Lambden 2020; Behmardi and McCants 2007).

12 The following verse gives a taste of the breadth of the Bāb's titles: "This same youth who is called by the People of the Cloud the mystic secret and by the People of the veil, the Flashing Mysterious symbol and by the People of the pavilion, the Western Divine Attribute and by the People of the throne, the Divine Eastern Name and by the People of the Footstool, the Exalted/ʿAlīd Image and by the People of the Empyrean, an Arab truth and by the People of the gardens, a Fatimid spirit and by the People of the earth, a servant of the kingdom and by the People of the Water, the fish of Timelessness" (*Qayyūm al-asmāʾ*, Bāb n.d.d, chp. 109; Lawson 2012a, p. 128).

13 For further discussion on *basmalah*, see (Haider 2011, pp. 57–94).

14 For a discussion on the innate knowledge of the Báb and a comparison of the childhoods of the Báb and Jesus, see (Lambden 1986).

15 For more on Muḥammad's illiteracy, see (Günther 2002).

16 See, for example, Quran 3:67, which states "Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian; he was a true Muslim, and he was not a polytheist".

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The Bāb on the Rights of Women

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Abstract: In his writings, the Bāb (1819–1850), the founder of the Bābī religion, introduced laws and pronounced ethical injunctions pertaining to women that marked a significant departure from Muslim legal norms and social customs prevailing in Iran and the wider Islamic world. His statements signal a deliberate attempt to improve the status of women, including in marital relations. They addressed issues such as *mut'ah* and *taḥlīl* marriages, polygyny, bridal consent, divorce and spousal relations. This article examines the Bāb's statements on these issues and reflects on their significance for the rights of women in the context of Muslim juridical opinions and social customs, focusing mainly on the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Keywords: the Bāb; Bābī laws; women's rights; marital relations; Iran; Islamic world; Islamic jurisprudence; Muslim social customs

1. Introduction

It is generally acknowledged that the religion of the Bāb (1819–1850) accorded women greater rights than they possessed in the nineteenth century in Iran and the wider Middle Eastern and North African region. In a milieu in which legal norms and cultural traditions asserted men's superiority and maintained their dominance over women, the Bāb introduced laws and pronounced ethical injunctions that afforded women greater privileges and freedoms and addressed specific practices that negatively affected their position in the family and society.

In addition to his legal and ethical statements, the Bāb's more egalitarian view of women is evident in his deep affection, care and respect for his wife, mother and grandmother (Afnan 1995, pp. 211–13), and in his support and defence of Ṭāhirih, his foremost female disciple, who was censured and attacked by some of her male coreligionists for claims and behaviour that they found troubling and contrary to the teachings of the Bāb (Mohammadhosseini 2018, pp. 247–48; Momen 2011). Ṭāhirih later played a central role in proclaiming the break with Islamic *shari'a*, entailed in the message of the Bāb; she flagrantly transgressed the rules of veiling of women considered inviolable by Muslim jurists (Afaqi 2004; Mohammadhosseini 2018).

Although some important aspects of the Bāb's teachings and laws pertaining to women have been discussed previously, there is ample room for further research (Afnan 1995; Lawson 2001; Saiedi 2008, pp. 322, 329–30; Momen 2011). This brief study focuses on specific statements of the Bāb related to marriage, divorce and spousal relations and attempts to explain and tease out their implications and significance in the context of Islamic legal norms and social and cultural practices among Muslim populations. In particular, it seeks to shed light on aspects of his teachings and expositions that have not been examined previously.

The Bāb aimed to improve the status of women and in particular the position of the wife within the marriage through various measures. He banned and nullified the degrading practices of *mut'ah* (literally, "pleasure", "enjoyment" or "gratification") and *taḥlīl* (literally, "to sanction" or "to make lawful") marriages, made bridal consent to marriage a general requirement without exceptions, impeded husbands' access to divorce, restricted polygyny

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and made statements concerning relations between marriage partners that emphasized the rights of wives in ways that contrasted sharply with prevailing norms and customs.

A note of caution is due here. The writings of the Báb are highly complex and pose particular challenges to scholars (Lawson 2012, 2018; Saiedi 2008; Lambden 2020). In the case of some of his precepts and injunctions, the reader can readily see that they directly address specific Muslim laws and practices prevalent in his time. His laws of inheritance are one such example. In a departure from the general Qur'anic rule regarding the children of the deceased that entitled a male to the share of two females (Q. 4:11), the Báb ruled in the Arabic Bayān (Exposition, see below), *vāḥid* 10, *báb* 3 (unity 10, chapter 3; hereafter 10:3) that the share of the children be divided equally between them regardless of their sex (The Báb n.d.a). Other laws and ethical directives of his, however, seem to be tacit responses to certain unspecified norms that cannot be easily identified from the context. Moreover, the Báb's legal statements are very brief and short on details. These are but some aspects of the complexity of his writings. Pending further research, some of the inferences presented in this study must be considered tentative.

Islamic law in this article refers to classical Islamic law as formulated and developed by Muslim jurists over the course of more than a millennium prior to the mid-nineteenth century. It comprises a vast corpus of disparate rules, a small fraction of which is derived from the Qur'an—the principal source of Islamic law. The Báb articulated his teachings and legal precepts in a context and region in which Islamic law was dominant and in which Muslims constituted most of the inhabitants. For this reason, the present study focuses on norms of Islamic jurisprudence and customs and mores of Iranians and other Muslim populations. There were differences among and within Sunni and Shi'i legal schools. Moreover, Muslim social customs did not always fully conform to Islamic legal norms. In addition, not all the social and cultural practices discussed in this article were (or are) confined to the Muslim populations of Iran and the wider region. Some cultural practices are more prevalent among non-Muslim peoples than Muslims. For example, in our time, polygamous marriages are less common in Muslim countries than in parts of Africa, and this would also have been the case in the time of the Báb.

The Báb put forth his ideas before Muslim scholars and intellectuals began to critically examine the status of women in Muslim societies and identify areas in which social customs diverged from Islamic principles and teachings. In recent decades, with the rise of Islamic feminism, progressive Muslim scholars have offered fresh interpretations of Islam's most sacred text consonant with the principle of gender equality. Furthermore, gender-discriminatory rules and opinions in classical works of Islamic jurisprudence have come under careful scrutiny. Emphasizing the trajectory toward gender justice that is discernible in the Qur'an, feminist-minded Muslim scholars have argued that these rules and opinions reflect the patriarchal context in which they were formulated rather than the core message of the Qur'an (Wadud 1999; Mir-Hosseini 2003, 2015; al-Hibri and El Habti 2006; Hidayatullah 2014). A discussion of their views and arguments, however, goes beyond the scope of this study.

2. Some Preliminary Observations on Bábī Law

Although the Báb's prophetic career was brief and spanned only six years, a deliberate graduality in the unfoldment and disclosure of his claims and laws is discernible. The Báb himself has commented on this important theme in the Dalā'il-i Sab'ih (Seven Proofs), his most important polemical work, written in Persian in 1847:

> Consider the manifold favors vouchsafed by the Promised One, and the effusions of His bounty which have pervaded the concourse of the followers of Islám to enable them to attain unto salvation. Indeed observe how He Who representeth the origin of creation, He Who is the Exponent of the verse, "I, in very truth, am God," identified Himself as the Gate [Báb] for the advent of the promised Qá'im, a descendant of Muḥammad, and in His first Book enjoined the observance of the laws of the Qur'án, so that the people might not be seized with perturbation by

> reason of a new Book and a new Revelation and might regard His Faith as similar to their own, perchance they would not turn away from the Truth and ignore the thing for which they had been called into being (The Bāb 2006, pp. 152–53)

The later works of the Bāb contain laws and ordinances that supersede those in his earlier works. The laws related to women and marriage in the Qayyūm al-Asmā' (Self-Subsisting Lord of All Names, a commentary on the Qur'anic *surah* of Joseph), the Bāb's first work written upon the declaration of his mission in 1844 and referred to in the passage quoted above, were basically a reiteration of corresponding Qur'anic laws (The Bāb n.d.e). Most notably, consonant with the Qur'anic precedent (Q. 4:3) that allowed a man to have up to four wives at any one time on the condition that he treated them equitably, the Qayyūm al-Asmā' (*surah* [chapter] 106) allowed the same number of wives. Similarly, with regard to inheritance, the Qayyūm al-Asmā' (ch. 106) upheld the distinction made in Qur'anic law between male and female inheritors, including the stipulation regarding the share of male offspring being twice that of females (Q. 4:11). These laws were later superseded. Another precept in the Qayyūm al-Asmā' (ch. 107) made marriage to "chaste virgins" (*al-muḥṣināt al-bākirāt*) conditional on their consent and the consent of their family. As will be explained below, the requirement of a virgin female's consent to marriage marked an expansion of her rights in comparison with certain Muslim legal opinions and cultural practices.

Most of the legal statements of the Bāb concerning women occur in the Persian Bayān (The Bāb n.d.b). Composed in 1847, this work is the chief repository of the laws of the Bābī religion. Unlike the Qayyūm al-Asmā', whose legal precepts mirror Qur'anic law, the Persian Bayān contains distinctive laws and injunctions that were intended to supersede Islamic laws. There is a parallel but far shorter text written in the same year called the Arabic Bayān. The Bāb did not complete either work. The Bayāns are organized according to the number 19—the numerical value of the name of God *Vāḥid* (unity). If completed, the Bayāns would have had 19 *vāḥid*s (unities) of 19 *bāb*s (chapters) each. The Persian Bayān contains up to chapter 10 of the ninth *vāḥid*. The Arabic Bayān contains 11 complete *vāḥid*s. With the exception of the extra chapters in the Arabic Bayān, almost all its contents are found in the Persian Bayān.

The Persian Bayān is not solely or even primarily a legal document. It contains a large volume of doctrinal materials of a non-legal nature. Most notably, it is filled with references to, and anticipates the coming of, a future divine figure called *man yuẓhiruhu Allāh* (he whom God shall make manifest).[1] Thus, the primary objective of the Persian Bayān was to focus the attention of the Bābīs on the coming of *man yuẓhiruhu Allāh*. Hence, in one way or another, the Bāb links the laws of the Persian Bayān to the promised figure of his religion.

Legal statements in the Bayān are brief, leaving important aspects and details of the laws unexplained. It is clear that the Bāb's intention was not to devise an elaborate legal system. Rather, he seems more concerned with expounding on the spiritual, mystical and ethical dimensions of his laws. The Persian Bayān is also rich in the symbolism that characterizes so many of the Bāb's other texts. Many of its laws contain a symbolic dimension, including in their use of the number 19.

In addition to the Persian Bayān, several other works of the Bāb contain laws and injunctions regarding women and gender relations. None of his other works, however, gained as wide a circulation as the Persian Bayān. Due to its language, the latter work was more accessible to the rank-and-file Bābīs than those written in Arabic.

3. Marriage, Spousal Relations and Divorce

3.1. Prohibition of Mutʿah *Marriage*

In the context of the prevailing social practices in Iran and the wider Shiʿi world, the most significant precept of the Bayān relevant to the status of women was the abolition of *mutʿah*, a temporary form of marriage only allowed in Twelver Shiʿi Islam (Haeri 2006, 2014; Floor 2008, ch. 2; Madelung 1979; Tucker 2008, pp. 57–58).[2] In the section on marriage in the Persian Bayān (6:7), the Bāb briefly states that God, through his grace and favour, has abolished *inqiṭāʿ* (*mutʿah* marriage), so that no one would be subjected to abasement. *Mutʿah*

marriage was very common in Iran and Iraq in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly in the Shi ʿi shrine cities of Najaf, Karbala, Mashhad, and Qum as well as major stations along caravan routes. In Iran, *mutʿah* is also called *ṣīghih*, a term which is also used in reference to the woman entering *mutʿah* marriage. Shi ʿi jurists maintain the purpose of *mutʿah* to be sexual gratification. They thus distinguish it from permanent marriage, the objective of which is procreation.

In *mutʿah* marriage, the bride and groom agree to marry for a specified period of time, after which the marriage is automatically dissolved. The parties can renew the marriage. The groom also has the right to terminate it before the end of the term. The period may vary from as little as one hour to as long as 99 years. The fact that the term of the marriage can be very long provides a means to bypass the limit of four simultaneous wives set in Islamic law. Indeed, in addition to monarchs of the Qajar dynasty (1794–1925), who had many consorts, some Twelver Shi ʿi men used the provision of *mutʿah* marriage to marry wives in excess of the four allowed in Islamic law.

The groom contracting *mutʿah* is required to pay a dowry to the bride, but she is generally not entitled to maintenance and will not inherit from her temporary husband if he dies before the end of the term of the marriage. In theory, a child born out of a *mutʿah* marriage is entitled to inheritance from the father—a feature that distinguishes *mutʿah* from legalized prostitution. In practice, however, it was often easy for fathers to deny paternity. In the case of thousands of *mutʿah* marriages that were contracted annually by men who were on pilgrimage to Shi ʿi shrine cities or travelling by caravan, *ṣīghih*s who became pregnant had no option but to terminate their pregnancy.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, poverty was the main factor responsible for the high prevalence of *mutʿah* marriage. Moreover, it served as an important source of income for the minor clergy, who charged a fee for officiating the marriage. Iranian households from upper social classes encouraged their sons to have *ṣīghih*s in order to gain sexual experience before they married their future wives. The practice of *mutʿah* marriage must have been the main cause of the widespread prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Iran (Floor 2008, pp. 373–75, 405–6).

The position of the *ṣīghih*s was very precarious. The majority effectively became prostitutes. In spite of the legality of *mutʿah* marriage, being a *ṣīghih* or a child of a *ṣīghih* marriage carried a stigma, even for the privileged ones who had kin that provided for them. The easy availability of *ṣīghih*s also posed a threat to the status of wives and the institution of marriage. Husbands who were unhappy with their wives could be tempted to marry *ṣīghih*s. For some men, it provided a way to satisfy sexual desires without care and commitment. The Bāb's stated reason for forbidding *mutʿah*, namely, that no one would be subjected to abasement, seems to be an allusion to these conditions.

Occasionally, *mutʿah* marriages were arranged for practical reasons as, for example, when a married woman wished to go on pilgrimage, but it was not possible for her husband or a male relative to accompany her. She would be divorced by her husband and become the *ṣīghih* of another man, who would accompany her on her pilgrimage. After her return, the intermediate husband would divorce her, and she would remarry her original husband (Floor 2008, p. 162).

The majority of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Muslim religious scholars and intellectuals who advocated for a reform of the status of women in Islamic societies hailed from Sunni Islam and were therefore not concerned about the issue of *mutʿah* marriage. In Iran, the modernizing state under the Pahlavis (1925–1979) introduced various reforms aimed at improving the position of women, but it took no measures to ban or curtail the practice of *mutʿah* marriage when it codified Shi ʿi laws of marriage and divorce. Nonetheless, over the course of the twentieth century, the prevalence of *mutʿah* marriages declined, mostly because of a change in the attitude of the Iranian public. After the Islamic Revolution of 1979, however, *mutʿah* marriages became widespread again, with poverty and destitution being the main driving force. The authorities in the Islamic Republic of Iran have also promoted the practice, arguing that it is sanctioned by religion and serves as

a bulwark against illicit sexual relations. For traditional families, *mutʿah* serves as a means to control the sexual behaviour of their sons and daughters at a young age (Ahmady 2021).

3.2. Bigamy: Limiting the Plurality of Wives

The Bayān's prohibition of *mutʿah* marriages, which contributed significantly to the incidence of polygyny in Iran, was important for limiting the latter practice. Polygyny, however, is not discussed explicitly in either the Persian or the Arabic Bayān. Certain references and passages indicate, however, that a man might have more than one wife according to Bābī law. In the discussion of the division of inheritance in the Arabic Bayān (10:3), for example, the Báb stipulates that the share of the wives of the deceased be divided equally between them. Similarly, the penalty prescribed in certain instances that make a man's wives unlawful to him—as, for example, in the Arabic Bayān, 7:18 and 10:18—points to the possibility of plurality of wives. As mentioned earlier, the Qayyūm al-Asmā' reiterated the Qur'anic sanction of a man having up to four wives on the condition that he treated them equitably. In his later writings, including a work called Ṣaḥīfat al-Aḥkām (Book of Ordinances), however, the Báb expressly limited the maximum number of wives that a man might simultaneously have to two (F[arahvashī] n.d., p. 94). In connection with these other statements, a passage in the Persian Bayān (8:15) suggests the circumstances under which bigamy may occur: the couple's inability to produce offspring. It is not explicit, however, as to whether this is a requirement for the permissibility of bigamy. The passage in question identifies procreation as the purpose of marriage and notes that if a condition in either party prevents the couple from having a child, with that party's permission, the other may remarry in order to produce offspring. In the case of a man married to a barren wife, the text seems to imply that he may wed a second wife with her permission. In the case of an impotent husband, presumably the wife is permitted, with his approval, to divorce him and marry another man.

It was not before the latter part of the nineteenth century that Muslim intellectuals and others concerned about the rights of women in the Middle East and North Africa began to address the issue of polygyny. The Egyptian judge Qasim Amin (1863–1908), whose *Taḥrīr al-Marʿa* (Liberation of Women, published in 1899) represented what was by then arguably the most multifaceted approach to reforming the status of Muslim women in the region, called for a restriction of the practice of polygyny. He considered the barrenness of the wife, however, as legitimate grounds for a husband to marry a second wife (ʿImārah 1989, pp. 325–26, 395; Amin 2004, pp. 8, 85). Similar views were expressed by Shaykh Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905), the Grand Mufti of Egypt and a major figure of Islamic modernism (ʿImārah 1993, vol. 2, p. 92). Neither of them, however, made the permissibility of a husband marrying a second wife conditional on the consent of the first wife.

Over the course of the twentieth century, most Muslim countries codified and promulgated Islamic laws of personal status governing marriage, divorce, custody of children, and inheritance. Turkey, however, adopted secular laws (the Swiss Civil Code of 1907 with minor alterations) and became the first Muslim country to ban polygamy (1926). Three decades later, as the first Arab country, Tunisia introduced a similar ban (1956). No other Muslim country in the Middle East and North Africa has to date abolished polygyny, but in the second half of the twentieth century, most attempted to restrict it by way of procedural devices, for example, by making a husband's second marriage conditional on the first wife's consent (Mallat 2007, ch. 10). It may be noted that polygyny, despite its criminalization in Turkish law, has continued to occur among certain segments of the population; the tension between secular state law and Islamic law has meant that the ban has not been fully enforced. In Iran, polygamy remains legal, but reliable statistics are not available not the least because many *mutʿah* marriages are not registered.

3.3. Bridal Consent

As was noted earlier, in the Qayyūm al-Asmā', the Báb specifically mentioned that the consent of chaste virgin females was required for their marriage. In the Bayān, he

made marriage conditioned upon the consent of both spouses. In addition, the Bayān (6:7) required the payment of a dowry (by the groom to the bride) and the recitation of a specific verse indicating the couple's contentment with the will of God.[3] The requirement of consent had implications for the practice of forced marriages involving girls. Muslim legal schools, both Sunni and Shi ʿi, unanimously gave the father the right to marry off his minor daughter to whomsoever he wished, even against her wish. Girls in their pre-puberty or below the age of nine were defined as minors.[4]

According to Twelver Shi ʿi and Shāfi ʿī jurists, in addition to the father, the paternal grandfather had authority to contract marriage on behalf of a minor ward. Jurists from the Ḥanafī school went even further and allowed other relatives of a minor girl to marry her off. Sexual relations, however, were not to begin until the bride had reached the age of majority. If the girl was married off by someone other than her father or paternal grandfather, she had the so-called "option of puberty" (*khiyār al-bulūgh*), that is, the option of having her marriage annulled upon pubescence (Yazbak 2002; Tucker 2008, p. 43; Baugh 2017, pp. 70–71, 199, 220–21). Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Najafī (d. 1850), the prominent Shi ʿi legal scholar and contemporary of the Bāb, was explicit that a minor girl whose marriage was arranged by her father or paternal grandfather did not have the option of puberty (al-Najafī 1981, vol. 29, pp. 172–73).

According to Shāfi ʿī jurists, even a virgin in her legal majority could be married off without her consent (Tucker 2008, pp. 42–43; Spectorsky 2010, pp. 67–69); in the case of a woman who had been married before, however, her consent was required for remarriage. Unlike the Shāfi ʿīs, jurists from other Sunni schools ruled that a virgin in her legal majority could not be married without her consent. This was also the dominant opinion among Shi ʿi jurists (al-Najafī 1981, vol. 29, pp. 174–75).

Minor sons could also be married off, but in practice, girls comprised the large majority of minors whose marriages were arranged. For Iran in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, we have reports of families arranging marriage for minor children, including daughters as young as four or five (Hejazi 2010, p. 176; Afary 2009, pp. 23–24), but we do not have an accurate picture of its prevalence.

Today, a minor is not considered capable of giving consent, and many countries, including Muslim-majority nations, have laws against marriage of minors. Moreover, there are generally provisions in national codes in Muslim countries that make the legality of marriage conditional on the consent of both spouses.[5] Patriarchal cultural norms, economic issues and other factors, however, often interfere with and disrupt the implementation of laws dictating a minimum marriageable age and marital consent for girls. In Iran in the 1930s, laws were introduced that set a minimum marriage age for boys and girls, identified conditions for exemptions from the age restriction and prescribed penalties for the violators, but three decades later many females and males were still marrying before reaching the legal age, with girls outnumbering boys by about four to one according to some statistics (Momeni 1972, p. 546). In today's Iran, forced marriages are known to occur, though official statistics are not available (Moghadasi and Ameri 2017, pp. 189–91). Obviously, this is not unique to Iran. A national survey carried out in Pakistan in the 1990s found that 75 percent of the women respondents "had either not been consulted [about their marriage] or their opinion given no weightage at all" (Shaheed 1998, p. 71). Similarly, in India, "the consent of a girl to marriage is rarely sought" (Hussain 2005, p. 756). In Iraq, a 2005 report indicated that despite the legal ban on forced marriages and criminal penalties prescribed for violators, forced marriages of females occurred. The report also maintained that social mores, lack of easy access to and expense of courts and cumbersome procedures prevented women who were forced into marriage from having their marriages annulled (Welchman 2007, p. 69).

The adverse effects of forced marriages are greater on females than males (Women Living Under Muslim Laws 2006, p. 77). The practice also undermines the stability of marriage. In Saudi Arabia, in the mid-2000s, it was reported that about half of all marriages in the kingdom ended in divorce, and forced marriages were believed to be the main contributing

factor (Agencies 2005). Saudi Arabia has not codified Islamic laws of personal status; however, dominant opinion in classical Ḥanbalī law prevalent in the country permitted a female virgin to be married off without her consent (Almihdar 2008, p. 3). In April 2005, however, the Council of Senior Ulema (religious scholars), the country's highest religious authority, ruled that forcing a woman to marry against her will contravened Islamic law (Agencies 2005).

In view of the foregoing, the requirement of bridal consent stipulated by the Báb in the Qayyúm al-Asmá' and later in the Bayán represented a significant departure from legal norms and social customs that were prevalent in parts of the Muslim world and have lingered to the present day.

3.4. Nullification of Taḥlīl *Marriage*

The Persian Bayán (6:12) allowed a couple to remarry up to nineteen times after divorcing each other; once that number was reached, however, remarriage between the parties was no longer permissible. This rule addressed the Muslim practice of *taḥlīl* marriage (also called *ḥalāla*), common to Sunnis and Shi'is alike, which seems to have occurred fairly frequently (Stowasser and Abul-Magd 2008, p. 38).[6] *Taḥlīl* refers to the practice of a man temporarily marrying a woman who has been thrice divorced by her former husband in order to render her lawful for remarriage to the first husband. *Taḥlīl* also applies to a marriage between a man and a thrice-divorced woman which is not intended to be temporary, but which, in the event of divorce or the death of the second husband, would make the woman lawful to her original husband. According to both Sunni and Shi'i jurists, for *taḥlīl* to be effective, that is, render the thrice-divorced woman licit for remarriage to her first husband, the marriage to the intermediary husband, the *muḥallil*, had to be consummated (Stowasser and Abul-Magd 2008; Spectorsky 2010, pp. 105–6; al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1997, vol. 2, pp. 258–59).

Taḥlīl is based on Qur'an 2:229–30. In order to discourage the pre-Islamic practice of husbands using divorce "to toy with their wives" (Tucker 2008, p. 112), the Qur'an made it unlawful for a man to remarry his wife once he had divorced her three times unless she was first married to another man and then divorced. Disregarding the original intention of the Qur'anic precept, many Muslim legal scholars considered a temporary *taḥlīl* marriage valid, while a minority disapproved of it. Despite the differences in the positions of Muslim jurists, arranged *taḥlīl* marriages occurred across the Muslim world, particularly in Sunni lands, not in the least owing to the validity, according to most Sunni jurists, of triple divorce—a form of divorce in which the husband pronounced the *ṭalāq* (divorce) formula thrice in a single session (Munir 2013; Tucker 2008, pp. 87–88; Spectorsky 2010, p. 107). The problem was to a great extent caused by the Sunni jurists' insistence that the divorce was effective and became irrevocable once the husband had uttered the formula of divorce thrice; most maintained that it did not matter if he had expressed this in a fit of rage and regretted his act afterwards. According to dominant opinion among Shi'i jurists, triple divorce pronounced on one and the same occasion was illegal.

Muslim reformist thinkers were critical of *taḥlīl* marriages. Writing in the late 1920s, al-Ṭāhir al-Ḥaddād (d. 1935), the Tunisian reformer and pioneering advocate for the liberation of women in his country, observed about "certain *muftīs* in Tunisia" and "the general population in Muslim countries" that they "regard it as a minor matter that a woman marries a new husband for a night or an hour and then divorces him in order to return to her original husband". Marital altercations, he lamented, led husbands to pronounce the divorce formula repeatedly "in a sudden flurry of anger", only to regret it later, but because the divorce was valid and irrevocable, they had to resort to "choosing a 'one-night or two-night husband'", so that their divorced wives could return to them (al-Ḥaddād et al. 2007, pp. 70, 71).

Today, modern personal status codes in Muslim countries generally do not discuss the issue of *taḥlīl* in classical Islamic law, while traditional religious authorities emphasize the permanence of marriage and reject *taḥlīl* as illegal. Nevertheless, *taḥlīl* marriages continue to

occur and are even prevalent in parts of the Muslim world, indicating its tenacity (Stowasser and Abul-Magd 2008, p. 43; Tahsin Raha 2021). The Bāb, by permitting a couple to divorce and remarry up to nineteen times instead of the three marriages allowed under Islamic law, effectively nullified *taḥlīl* marriages—a practice that objectified women and was most humiliating to them.

3.5. Divorce

While some Muslim religious scholars considered divorce as an option to be used only out of necessity, classical Islamic law allowed a husband to divorce his wife at will by repudiation. Called *ṭalāq*, this was the most common form of divorce in Muslim lands. According to the Bayān (6:12), however, there had to be a compelling reason for divorce to be lawful.[7] Moreover, the Persian Bayān prescribed for the husband and wife a waiting period of one year before divorce could be finalized, the intention being to give the parties a chance to reconcile. Islamic law also prescribed a waiting period called *ʿiddah*, but it was much shorter and in practice applied almost exclusively to the wife. A main purpose of the *ʿiddah* was to establish whether a woman was pregnant because of the marriage. Muslim jurists set the period of the *ʿiddah* at three menstrual cycles for a menstruating woman and at three months for a woman who had passed through menopause. Should the woman be pregnant, the *ʿiddah* was extended until the birth of the child.

A woman in her *ʿiddah* was neither married nor free to remarry; she was entitled to maintenance but was not permitted to leave her husband's house, unless she waived her rights to maintenance. A woman who left the house in defiance of these rules or changed residence without permission lost her rights to housing and any maintenance she might have (Tucker 2008, pp. 86–92, 100–3; Spectorsky 2010, pp. 105–22).

The fact that Muslim jurists allowed husbands to divorce their wives at whim did not encourage them to be invested in the marital relationship. This also had a major impact on the prevalence of divorce. Although no statistics on divorce exist for the majority of the countries in the Middle East and North Africa in the nineteenth century, available evidence suggests that it was quite common (Fargues 2003, pp. 249, 256–57). Moreover, data for Iran from a later period suggest that men's unrestricted access to divorce was the most important single factor responsible for its prevalence (Vatandoust 1985, p. 121; Aghajanian 1986, pp. 750–51; Zabihi-Moghaddam 2017, p. 139).

Divorce carried a stigma for the divorcee, but not for her husband. A Muslim man who divorced his wife was obligated to pay her the remainder of her dowry. In some cases, however, men shirked their obligation.[8] Moreover, for the large majority of divorcees, the amounts they received upon divorce did not provide for financial security. Overall, divorce entailed much hardship for most women, while for men, it was largely a trivial matter.

Muslim reform-minded thinkers and others concerned about the rights of women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were critical of men's frivolous attitude and abuse of their unfettered right to divorce (Tucker 2008, pp. 111–15; Amin 2004, pp. 95–98; al-Ḥaddād et al. 2007, pp. 72–76). Al-Ḥaddād, for example, denounced men who frequently married and divorced for sexual pleasure, "regarding women as dishes they [could] sample as they [wished]" (al-Ḥaddād et al. 2007, p. 76). He quoted an Islamic *ḥadīth* that condemned such behaviour but noted that nonetheless religious scholars and Muslim society condoned it.

Today, divorce is regulated in Muslim countries' legal codes. While *ṭalāq* (divorce initiated by the husband) in classical Islamic law is an extra-judicial procedure, the codes in many countries require the involvement of courts in the process of *ṭalāq*. The provisions regarding the length of the waiting period for women who are being divorced generally follow the rules of *ʿiddah* in classical Islamic jurisprudence (Tucker 2008, pp. 115–17; Welchman 2007, pp. 107–9, 122–25; Women Living Under Muslim Laws 2006, pp. 255–56, 301).

The Bayān does not comment on the financial obligations of the husband during the waiting period. As in other instances in the Bayān, the statements regarding divorce and the required waiting period are very brief and do not clarify the details of the law. By

making divorce conditional on the presence of a compelling reason and by extending the waiting period to one year, however, the Bayān placed important restrictions on men's access to divorce in comparison with rules in classical Islamic law.

3.6. Prohibition of Confining Wives

Various statements in the writings of the Báb expressly deal with the ideal nature of the relationship between marriage partners. In the Ṣaḥīfih-yi ʿAdlīyyih (Book on Justice), written in Persian in 1846, the Báb advised the addressee to treat his wives (*nisā'*) in the most loving manner and not to hurt them even with an unfriendly look, indicating that even such a small act would be a deviation from God's command (The Báb n.d.f, p. 38). In the Persian Bayān (6:12), the Báb noted that once two people had been united in marriage, their relationship was to be characterized by mutual affection (*maḥabbat*). Although the Qur'an (30:21) spoke of tranquillity, affection and mercy between marriage partners, Muslim juridical texts placed emphasis on purely legal and sexual aspects of the relationship. The husband, according to the jurists, through payment of dowry and provision of maintenance to his wife, had gained the right to exclusive and unrestricted access to her body, and the wife could not deny him that right. The view of early jurists that "the husband's dominion over his wife, or rather over her sexuality" was "the crucial defining characteristic of Islamic marriage" (Ali 2010, p. 184) had hardly changed by the time of the Báb.

The statements by the Báb cited above, emphasizing the importance of love in marriage, addressed the juristic conception that stressed a husband's dominance over his wife. In addition, certain precepts and injunctions in the Persian and Arabic Bayān seem to be tacit responses to misogynist rulings and opinions found in Muslim jurisprudential texts. Some of the statements in *vāḥid* 7, chapter 18, constitute one such example. They prohibit an individual from confining another. It is stated in regard to one who confines another that his wives would become unlawful to him, that he would incur a penalty if he approached his wives, and that he would not be counted as a believer. The Persian Bayān (7:18) further states that a child conceived under such circumstances would be illegitimate, while the Arabic Bayān (7:18) prescribes the banishment of the person in question if a child is conceived.[9] The same section of the Persian Bayān also deals with the issue of causing sadness to another. The Báb writes the following:

> . . . in the Bayán there is no act of obedience that ensureth greater nearness to God than bringing joy to the hearts of the faithful, even as naught yieldeth more remoteness than causing them grief. This law is doubly binding in dealing with the possessors of circles (women), whether in causing them joy or grief (Saiedi 2008, p. 322).[10]

The Bayān does not expressly state that the prohibition on an individual confining another applies to a husband and wife. Considering the above statements in connection with legal opinions in Islamic jurisprudential texts that allowed a man to confine his wife at home, however, leads one to infer that the Báb was at least partly, if not primarily, addressing those misogynist opinions.

As noted above, Muslim jurists maintained that once the marriage had been contracted and the wife had received the prompt portion of her dowry, she was obligated to remain sexually available to her husband. To ensure a husband's unrestricted access to his wife, the jurists ruled that she could not leave the marital domicile without his permission. This action would constitute an instance of wifely *nushūz* (rebellion or disobedience), which entitled the husband to impose certain sanctions against her, including physical chastisement (Chaudhry 2015). A husband, it was openly acknowledged, was allowed to confine his wife to the marital home. As explained by al-Marghīnānī (d. 1197), the author of al-Hidāya (The Guide), one of the most authoritative jurisprudential texts of the Ḥanafī school, the official legal school of the Ottoman empire, "a husband's right to confine his wife at home is solely for the sake of securing to himself the enjoyment of her person" (al-Marghīnānī 1870, p. 54; Tucker 2008, p. 53). Legal scholars of later ages expressed

similar opinions. In his book Radd al-muḥtār ʿalā al-durr al-mukhtār (Guiding the Baffled to The Exquisite Pearl), Ibn-i ʿĀbidīn (d. 1836), another prominent Ḥanafī jurist and a contemporary of the Báb, confirmed a husband's right and authority to confine his wife at home (Cuno 2015, pp. 87, 240). In the passage in the Bayān cited above, the Báb indicated that if a person confined another, his wives would become unlawful to him. Muslim jurists had ruled that a husband had a right to confine his wife at home to ensure sexual access to her. According to the law in the Bayān, however, such an act would render his wife unlawful to him, thus negating the very rationale for Muslim jurists' ruling.

3.7. Prohibition of Marital Rape

In the Kitāb al-Jazā' written in the last years of his life (between 1847 and 1850), the Báb made a comment concerning husbands' treatment of their wives that stood in sharp contrast to opinions advanced in Islamic juridical texts. Addressing his male followers, he wrote that it would never ever be lawful for them to approach their wives (i.e., have intercourse with them) except by their permission (The Báb n.d.c).[11] Ḥanafī jurists expressly stated that a husband had a right to force his wife to have sex with him (Chaudhry 2015, pp. 79, 104–5; Ali 2010, p. 120). Jurists from other schools did not explicitly authorize husbands to have intercourse with their wives without their consent. All of them, however, considered marital rape "an oxymoron"; to them, "rape (*ightiṣāb*) [was] a property crime that by definition [could] not be committed by the husband" (Ali 2010, p. 120).

It must be noted that the classical Islamic view expressed most explicitly by Ḥanafī jurists was by no means unique to the Muslim world. While Jewish authorities since the time of the Talmud had ruled that a husband could not coerce his wife to have sex with him (Biale 1995, pp. 142, 252–54), the legal approach to marital rape in English common law was similar to the position of Muslim jurists. The prominent English legal scholar Sir Matthew Hale (d. 1676), in his best-known work that was published sixty years after his death, had made the following argument: "But the husband cannot be guilty of a rape committed by himself upon his lawful wife, for by their mutual matrimonial consent and contract the wife hath given up herself in this kind unto her husband, which she cannot retract" (Hale 1736, vol. 1, p. 629). Western legal thought on this subject changed only slowly. The Báb's statement cited above was an ethical injunction. He did not specify any legal consequences for husbands who disregarded that injunction. His position, however, was a strong rejection of the Islamic juridical opinion that asserted a husband's conjugal rights above the rights of his wife and permitted spousal rape.

4. Concluding Remarks

The Báb's statements briefly reviewed in this study reveal a deliberate attempt to reform certain aspects of the prevailing legal and ethical norms affecting the status of women in Iran and the wider Muslim world. His laws and injunctions clearly pointed to a new vision of gender relations. The challenge that that vision posed to existing norms was most forcefully thrust at the community of his followers and the wider public in 1848, when Ṭāhirih appeared unveiled before a group of Bābī men assembled at the hamlet of Badasht in northern Iran. While her bold act caused an uproar that reverberated across Iran, the Báb's statements discussed above and similar others that may exist in his vast body of works remained largely unnoticed. Recently, however, we have begun to discern their significance, in the historical context in which they were put forth, for the rights of women, including in marital relations—an issue that not only had tangible consequences for the wellbeing of wives, but had broader implications, affecting women's position in society. The process that the Báb began was continued in the Bahá'í Faith, with its founder Bahá'u'lláh proclaiming the equality of women and men as a fundamental teaching of his religion.

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Notes

1 Bahā'īs consider Bahā'u'llāh to be the promised *man yuẓhiruhu Allāh*.

2 Twelver Shi ʿi law also allows for a form of *mutʿah* marriage that in theory does not involve sexual relations between the partners.

3 The Persian Bayān also refers to the presence of witnesses from among the relatives of the parties if there be any. There is no mention of witnesses in the Arabic Bayān.

4 Nine lunar years, corresponding to about eight years and nine months on the solar calendar.

5 In some cases, the relevant laws were introduced fairly recently. While Malaysia's Islamic Family Law (Federal Territories) Act 1984 required the consent of both parties to the marriage, the states of Kelantan, Kedah and Malacca, in accordance with the opinion in the Shāfi ʿī school, had until the 2000s laws that allowed a virgin female to be married off by her father or paternal grandfather without her consent (Mohd and Kadir 2020, p. 54).

6 For a document regarding a *taḥlīl* marriage in nineteenth-century Iran, see Ittiḥādīyyih et al. (2006, vol. 2, pp. 396–97); Afary (2009, pp. 39–40).

7 The Báb uses the word *iḍṭirār* ("imperative necessity" or "compulsion") and its derivatives in the Persian and Arabic Bayān.

8 According to al-Ḥaddād, in rural areas of Tunisia, men even demanded the reimbursement of the dowry that they had paid to their ex-wives (al-Ḥaddād et al. 2007, p. 69).

9 See also the Báb's Lawḥ-i Haykal al-Dīn (Tablet of the Temple of the Faith) (The Báb n.d.d).

10 Provisional translation.

11 The double emphasis is in the original and is conveyed by *lan* ("never") and *abad*^{an} ("ever").

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Article

A Bābī Theology in Poetry: The Creative Imagination of Tāhirih, Qurratu'l-ʿAyn

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Abstract: Tāhirih, also known as Qurratu'l-'Ayn (1814–1852), was one of the leading disciples of the Bāb (1819–1844), Sayyid 'Alī-Muhammad of Shiraz, the founder of Babism. She was formally educated in Islamic learning and theology, but relied heavily on inspiration for some of her most radical doctrines. Her poems contain radical theological pronouncements that would propel the Bābī movement beyond Islam. By no means typical or representative of other Bābī scholars, her theology seems to be filled with a woman's sensibility, with its inclination towards peace, justice, and reconciliation. At certain moments, Tāhirih anticipates developments in Bābī /Bahā'ī teachings that would not take place until decades later. Tāhirih's poetic voice offers a unique Bābī theology understood, perhaps, only by her few (women?) followers at the time.

Keywords: Bahai; Babi; Qurratu'l-'Ayn; Tahirih; Persian poetry; Iranian history; women's history; gender studies; women's theology

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In his recent book, Hossein Kamaly chooses 21 Muslim women in history to narrate a history of Islam (Kamaly 2019). He titles his chapter on Qurratu'l-ʿAyn Tāhirih (1814–1852) with a question: "Heroine or Heretic?" It is a question that he seems unable to answer. Recognizing that she lived in Iran, at the heartland of Shiʿih Islam, at a time when it faced the complex challenges of emerging modernity, a modernity that demanded change, the author cannot answer his own question. For him, Tāhirih remains an enigma. She was a woman, she demanded radical change in a society that could not tolerate change, making her a heroine of modernity and a heretic to orthodoxy. Perhaps, it seems that the author may regard the other Bābīs as heretics. But when it comes to Tāhirih, he is not so sure.

Tāhirih was given the name Fātimih at birth. She is also known as Umm Salamih, Zarrīn-Tāj (Crown of Gold), and most commonly as Qurratu'l-ʿAyn (Solace of the Eyes). Among Bahā'īs, she is universally known as Tāhirih (The Pure One) and regarded as a saint. She is certainly the most well-known woman in Bābī/Bahā'ī history, and the most controversial. It is Bahā'īs who have written the most about her (Root [1938] 1981; Edge 1964; Johnson 1982; Demas 1983; Lloyd 1999; Banani et al. 2005; Afaqi 2004; Nakhjavani 2015).

ʿAbdu'l-Bahā (1844–1921) recognizes her as a holy woman and paragon of virtue (ʿAbdu'l-Bahā 1971, p. 190). However, Tāhirih stands in stark contrast in Bahā'ī history and Bahā'ī imagination to the other women who are thought of as holy figures in Bahā'ī history. Perhaps, the premier woman in Bahā'ī theology would be Bahīyyih Khānum (1846–1932), the daughter of Bahā'u'llāh (1817–1892), known as the Greatest Holy Leaf. She played a crucial role in the Bahā'ī community after the passing of ʿAbdu'l-Bahā (d. 1921). But she remained, for most of her life, in traditional, gendered roles, overshadowed by her brother, ʿAbdu'l-Bahā, and by the Guardian of the Faith, Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957), her grandnephew. Similarly, Khadijih Bagum (d. 1882), the wife of the Bāb; Āsiyyih Khānum, Navvāb (1820–1886), the wife of Baha'u'llah; and Munīrih Khānum (1847–1938), wife of ʿAbdu'l-Bahā—all regarded as holy women—are revered, but remain confined to traditional roles in Bahā'ī history and in Bahā'ī imagination.

Tāhirih stands apart from these other holy women, since she discarded her traditional roles as daughter, wife, and mother, invaded male space, and became an actor and a leader of the Bābī community in her own right. As Susan Maneck has noted, she presents the Bahā'īs with a paradigm of the ideal woman who is "assertive, intelligent, eloquent, passionately devoted to causes, and yet, still beautiful." (Maneck 2004, p. 197) But even this paradigm is problematic because Tāhirih was also rebellious, transgressive, liberated from husband and children, deliberately outrageous, and confrontational. As a result, Tāhirih remains something of a contradiction. Her public actions, radical as they were, are celebrated by Bahā'īs. But her family life and personal choices are usually ignored. Her radical theology remains unexplored.

1. Tahirih's Corpus

The volume entitled *Tahirih: A Portrait in Poetry*, translated and edited by Banani, Kessler, and Lee, is Banani's selection of the poems of Qurratu'l-ʿAyn. This compilation includes the poems that Banani regarded as most likely to be authentic, most poetic from the perspective of literature, and most representative of Tāhirih's spirit. He viewed other collections of poems attributed to Tāhirih with suspicion, yet confessed that we are very far from a critical *divan* of Tāhirih that can stand up to academic scrutiny (Banani et al. 2005, pp. 4–5). For some of these collected poems, Banani insisted that they were not intended as poetry at all. They were only rhymed letters of correspondence with fellow Bābīs. I was able at one point, and with some difficulty, to obtain a manuscript of Tāhirih's unpublished poems in the original language. This manuscript was sometime later translated by John S. Hatcher and Amrollah Hemmat (and published in facsimile) as *Adam's Wish: Unknown Poetry of Tahirih*. After studying the manuscript, Banani insisted that there was nothing of literary value there. He refused to translate the verses, despite my repeated pleas to reconsider, because he did not feel that the work represented Tāhirih as a poet. He regarded the verses as prose (to my utter despair).

As for the poems that Banani did choose for translation, many of them had already been translated in an earlier volume, *Poetry of Tahirih*, also by Hatcher and Hemmat (2002). Banani's collection was more selective. He declined to translate a number of poems he felt were probably not by Tāhirih. His judgments were based in part on the scant manuscript record that we have of the poems. But all the poems attributed to Tāhirih are of doubtful provenance. Mostly, he relied on the internal evidence of the poems themselves: the vocabulary, the words, tone, and style of each poem.

2. Scholarship vs. Poetry

Tāhirih was born into a prominent clerical family in Qazvin, in Iran. Her father was the head of a religious college in that city. Her mother taught women and girls in the same institution. As a result, Tāhirih was formally and highly educated, as was her mother, and her grandmother. She obtained a considerable reputation for learning and scholarship, even as a young student. Married to her cousin at the age of 14, Tāhirih continued her studies after their move to Karbalā. She pursued and obtained a full education in higher Islamic studies, though she was unable to receive the customary certificates of completion (*ijāzih*) that a man of her level of learning would have received (Momen 2003).

As a Bābī,[1] Tāhirih wrote many learned treatises in defense of the Báb and Bābī doctrines. In these, she makes use of the traditional conventions of Islamic jurisprudence and theology. Amin Banani, in the preface to his translation of a selection of Tāhirih's poems, makes a distinction between Tāhirih's learned dissertations and her poetic voice. He writes:

> Táhirih was—insofar as her family, her education, her social networks, and her social position defined her—a scholar of religion. A full account of her philosophical, doctrinal, and intellectual positions must include a painstaking and judicious examination and analysis of all her prose writings. But it is her poet's voice that provides us with a portrait of her person and her passion. Of her

> extant works, the prose writings in Arabic and Persian are works of nineteenth-century religious scholarship that are too arcane and abstruse for the general public. A handful of poems, however, reveal her tempestuous temperament and make her accessible to all people at all times. (Banani et al. 2005, p. 3)

This distinction between Tāhirih's *words* and Tāhirih's *voice* is useful and instructive. An examination of her poems will reveal the structure of a mystical theology that is both startling in its modernity and astonishing in its radical implications. Her poems inhabit a structure that does not rely upon Islamic scholarship for its arguments or for its genius. Rather, it insists on the inspiration of the spirit for its power and legitimacy.

Tāhirih did not understand her own knowledge to be dependent on academic learning alone. Though she made use of academic arguments extensively, she also understood her own mystical experiences to be a source of truth. She relied on inspiration alone to justify some of her boldest acts and most radical breaks with Islamic tradition. Abbas Amanat observes and quotes Tāhirih:

> Passionately, Qurrat al-ʿAyn argues that she herself came to recognize the Bāb when, in a moment of intuitive insight, she grasped the unceasing necessity for divine revelation:
>
> With insight free of intruders, I observed God's power and omnipotence [and realized] that this great cause most definitely needs a focus of manifestation, for after God made His Fourth Pillar and His encompassing sign and His manifested locality known to people, and [thus] brought them close to His presence and showered them from His high exalted Heaven with His [spiritual] nourishment, then by proof of wisdom it is incumbent upon Him, whose status is high, not to leave the people to themselves . . . (Amanat 1989, p. 302)

Bearing this in mind, the poetry of Qurratu'l-ʿAyn may take on an unexpected significance. It might be argued seriously that these poems represent Tāhirih's mystic theology more clearly than does her prose. Her poems are the product of her inspiration, uncluttered by academic conventions, and "free of intruders." These poems, after all, require no proof or justification. They are simply the promptings of her inner spirit. Those promptings guided her own theological universe.

At the same time, this makes the theology found articulated in the poems of Tāhirih idiosyncratic and unique. It should not be imagined that her theological positions were commonplace among Bābīs, or even shared by any other Bābī leaders. Of course, her followers would accept her teachings. But they were not ordinary Bābī doctrines or ideas. Nor did they imitate the writings of the Bāb. The radical thought found in many of her poems is, however, progressive in its social implications and almost prophetic in its universal sentiments and its anticipation of some later Bahā'ī themes.

3. A Woman's Voice

Nor should the dimension of gender be ignored. Tāhirih was, after all, a woman and the only female Bābī leader. Her theology was necessarily a feminine theology, the product of a woman's mind. In part, the audience for these ideas was a feminine audience, since Tāhirih attracted many women as followers. The gentleness, the peacefulness, the calls for reconciliation and friendship found in her poems are not found in the writings of other Bābī leaders. Perhaps here we find the Bābī doctrines reflected through the unique lens of its only woman leader.

4. Beyond Islam

In a celebrated episode, Tāhirih relied on her personal inspiration to come to conclusions and to take actions of tremendous import, in the face of fierce opposition from the Islamic clerical establishment and from leading Bābī clerics, as well. In Karbala, without any explicit instructions from the Bāb (though she may have interpreted some of his verses very expansively, even esoterically), Tāhirih decided to cast off the pretense of dissimula-

tion (*taqiyyih*) and openly proclaim the abrogation of the Islamic law (that is, the sharia). As shocking, as radical, and as dangerous as such a move was, Tāhirih felt confident that she could ground such a theological stance on pure inspiration. She would not be dissuaded. Even other prominent Bābīs in Karbala were shocked. One of them, Mullā Ahmad Khurāsānī, argued with her vigorously. Denis MacEoin describes the dispute:

> In an account of a visit made to Qurrat al-'Ayn, apparently at this period, Mullā Aḥmad Khurāsānī gives, in her own words as he remembered them, an unequivocal statement of her intentions at this point, although even he does not seem to have realized how critical for the future development of Bābism these intentions were to be:
>
> She asked me "Do you know why I summoned you?".
>
> I replied "No".
>
> She said, "I was previously given the responsibility for the authority (*wilāya*) of Mullā Bāqir, and I made it incumbent on all of you to accept it. Yet no one accepted it from me, with the exception of fourteen individuals, seven men and seven women. Now I shall present you with something else."
>
> I said, "What is that?"
>
> She replied "It has come to me, through the tongue of my inner mystic state (*bi-lisān al-ḥāl*), not through physical speech, that I wish to remove all concealment (*taqiyya*) and to establish the proof of the remembrance [the Bāb] and go to Baghdad. An argument ensued, at the end of which Mullā Aḥmad left, maintaining that he had himself received no fewer than seven letters from the Bāb, all commanding observance of *taqiyya.* (MacEoin 2009, p. 244)

Of course, we might reasonably have argued at the time that Mullā Ahmad was correct, from a purely literal and academic perspective of Bābī theology. The Bāb had repeatedly admonished the Bābīs to strictly observe the Shiʿih convention of *taqiyyih.* Tāhirih's theology rejected those commands, however, or at least found that they were no longer binding. She would go on to make these same arguments at the Conference of Badasht (1848), a gathering of Bābī leaders. There, she removed her veil (*chādur*) and stepped into a company of Bābī men without it to demonstrate her categorical rejection of the sharia (and now with the added astounding announcement that the entire dispensation of Islam had been abrogated). In fact, her radical, mystic theology was successful and soon became the normative Bābī position. Her theological position quickly propelled the Bābīs and the Bābī religion beyond the boundaries of Islam. This was a unique event in Islamic history, a history which witnesses endless Islamic heterodoxies and reform movements. But none of these ever consciously intended to discard the religion itself in favor of a new divine dispensation. All heretics, for a thousand years, remained Muslims, if only in their own minds. Tāhirih marks the break with this model, as she makes no appeal to Muhammad or the Imams (Afaqi 2004, pp. 106–7) in her poems, declares the sharia null and void, and embraces a new revelation and a new Manifestation of God. She writes in one poem about the new Prophet:

> The arches of his eyes will make the feuds
>
> Of warring faiths and creeds to disappear.
>
> Moses and Jesus in heaven are stunned,
>
> And all the holy ones are lost down here.
>
> Two thousand Muhammads hear thunderbolts,
>
> They wrap themselves in cloaks, tremble in fear.
>
> (Banani et al. 2005)

5. Universality and Justice

The most startling theological principle that emerges from Banani's selection of Tāhirih's poems is that of universal love and her call for equality, social justice, and world peace. Since these are not common themes found in the writings of the Bāb or of other Bābī leaders, these poems stand out as prescient, prophetic, and almost miraculous. The first poem in Banani's compilation reads:

Look Up!
Look up! Our dawning day draws its first breath!
The world grows light! Our souls begin to glow
No ranting shaykh rules from his pulpit throne
No mosque hawks holiness it does not know
No sham, no pious fraud, no priest commands!
The turban's knot cut to its root below!
No more conjurations! No spells! No ghosts!
Good riddance! We are done with folly's show!
The search for Truth shall drive out ignorance
Equality shall strike the despots low
Let warring ways be banished from the world
Let Justice everywhere its carpet throw
May Friendship ancient hatreds reconcile
May love grow from the seed of love we sow!

(Banani et al. 2005, p. 47)

When I first read this poem, it seemed to me to be so filled with Bahā'ī ideas that I refused to believe it had been written by Tāhirih. Surely, this was a later Bahā'ī invention. The independent investigation of truth, equality of all people, justice, world peace, universal love and friendship—this seemed to me to be the work of some Bahā'ī poet. Banani assured me, however, that the work can safely be attributed to Tāhirih.[2]

After brilliant opening lines testifying to the coming of a new era in human history, Tāhirih goes on to denounce the ulama with vehemence that is not unexpected for a Bābī leader. But when she turns to her vision of a new world coming, we are suddenly in new territory. It is a vision that was unheard of in Iran in the 1850s, including among her fellow Bābīs, and would remain unknown until Baha'u'llah articulated a similar program in his Tablets revealed after the Kitāb-i Aqdas (1873). A world without despotism, where the search for truth would destroy despots, where equality and justice are central principles, where ancient hatreds would be forgotten, and peace and universal love would replace them. Iranian literature would not produce any poems like that until the Constitutional Revolution, after the turn of the century.

Despite my skepticism, often expressed to Banani, that this poem could not possibly have been written by Tāhirih, we can find similar sentiments in other poems. Her poem "Lovers!" ends with the lines:

. . . The day of truth is here! Lies have turned to dust!
Order, justice, law are now possible.
Smashed, the despot's fist! God's hand opens:
grace pours down—not sorrow, pain, and trouble
Minds in darkness now burn light with knowledge
Tell the priest: Shut your book! Lock the temple!
Hatred and doubt once poisoned all the world.
The bloodied cup holds milk now—pure, ample!

Let nations hear who's come to set them free:
Broken the chain, and smashed the manacle!

(Banani et al. 2005, p. 79)

Here, the same themes are present. The first poem is not unique. Both poems illustrate a kind of proto-Bahā'ī ideal of the coming of a new age that will realize the unity of humanity. Likewise, the poem "No One Else," although it is a classic Sufi love poem, ends with the lines:

Kindness blossoms as a gentle flower
Harmony stands on the carpet of power

(Banani et al. 2005, p. 97)

6. Antinomian Sentiments

Another striking motif that is found in the poems of Tāhirih is her repeated reference to the removal of veils, as well as to nudity as a symbol of spiritual purity, to exposure, and to clothing of light. In some ways, these may be thought of as well-known and well-used metaphors found in the works of all Sufi poets. But in the poems of Tāhirih, who actually removed her veil, they certainly take on a new significance and concrete social meaning. She was willing to take these symbols from the world of mystic reverie into the world of reality and action.

Sufi metaphor or not, her poem "Proclamation" must have seemed shocking in the time and place that it was written:

Hear this! My one and only Cause is true.
The words I speak mean victory for you.
Off with rags of law and pious fashion!
Swim naked in the sea of compassion!
How long will you drift through this world of war,
far from the safety of your native shore?
Sing, *Be!* Our Cause stands strong, both clear and plain:
"What comes from God returns to God again!"

(Banani et al. 2005, p. 53)[3]

Such references can be found in most of her mystic poems. In "He Has Come":

Its fire burns our world with wild delight
Stripped bare we stand: we're made of purest light!
Lift the veil, Tāhirih! He's now exposed!
His hidden mystery has been disclosed!
And say: The Lord in glowing clothes is dressed!
Praised be his beauty, and forever blessed!

(Banani et al. 2005, p. 51)

In "Morning Breezes":

You Bābīs from the province of pure Light!
Strip off your splendid veils, just look and see.
Believers, he has thrown away his veil,
so forget the verse "You will never behold me."

(Banani et al. 2005, p. 61)

From "His Drunken Eyes":

The goldsmith's tent glows bright from his fire-brand
All veils now burn away at his demand

(Banani et al. 2005, p. 77)

In "Friends Are Knocking at the Door," in an appeal to God, Tāhirih says:

At least, why don't you raise the window curtain?
Just peek out for once to show your face.
They want nothing from you, except yourself.
The only thing they beg for is your grace.
Outside, they got drunk on love—then sober.
They didn't care. They're longing for your place.
They dropped their veils, forgot their desires,
gave up their search, and stripped to nudity.
Burn off the clouds now and show us the sun.
Pull off the veil. Let us see your beauty: . . .

Near the end of her long poem "From These Locks," Tāhirih goes beyond discarding the *chādur*:

I'll drop my robe, my prayer mat I'll discard,
drink till I'm drunk, and none of them regard . . .

(Banani et al. 2005, p. 104)

This theme in many poems argues for the necessity of transgressing the boundaries of convention and Islamic decency in order to realize an encounter with the divine. Husam Nuqaba'i recounts an event at the Conference of Badasht: While Quddūs was saying his prayers (presumably, *salāt*, the Islamic obligatory prayer, which Tāhirih opposed as having been abrogated), Tāhirih rushed from her tent with a sword in her hand. "Now is not the time for prayers and prostrations," she challenged him. "Rather, on to the field of love and sacrifice" (Nuqaba'i 1981, p. 60). Tāhirih's poems may give some theological shape to the antinomian aspects of Bābī history noted by so many chroniclers, both friends and enemies. Writing many years after the event, even Nabīl-i Aʿzam complains about Bābī excesses in the wake of the events at Badasht (Nabíl-i-A'zam (Mullá Muhammad-i- Zarandí) 1970, p. 298).

Tāhirih's theology apparently maintained that with the announcement of the appearance of the Qā'im (the Promised One), all of the laws of Islam, the entire body of the sharia, had been abrogated. Therefore, until the universal proclamation of a new holy law, humanity existed in a sort of limbo, an interregnum, a time in which no religious law was applicable (Amanat 1989, pp. 310–11). Presumably, true believers were free to follow the promptings of their own inner spirit. Quddūs and Tāhirih both defied Islamic norms flagrantly, and in the most public way, by climbing into the same howdah when leaving the Conference of Badasht, traveling together, with Tāhirih loudly reciting poems during the rest of the journey (Nabíl-i-A'zam (Mullá Muhammad-i- Zarandí) 1970, p. 298).

7. The Manifestation of God

All of Tāhirih's poetry is written in the Sufi tradition, in the same genre as the great Persian Sufi poets Rūmī, Saʿadī, and Hāfiz. Naturally, she makes use of the standard poetic metaphors of the tradition including wine, fire, light, madness, sexuality, and love—all as metaphors for the spirit (Banani et al. 2005, pp. xii–xv).

One of the motifs found throughout her poems is the strong identification of her beloved as God himself. The Manifestation of God is strongly identified with the godhead. This identification is not explicit, but it is virtually omnipresent in her poems. One is never sure to whom the identification of godhead specifically refers: the Bāb, Bahā'u'llāh perhaps,[4] God, or spirit (Banani et al. 2005, p. 61). In any case, this godhead she takes as her lover and anticipates the end of separation in a kind of Sufi longing for *fanā'*, or union with God. This is sometimes expressed metaphorically as sexual union:

Look at these tear-filled eyes, this pallid face—

Can you refuse them? Whom would it disgrace?
Will you not come at daybreak to my bed,
with kindness ravish me, and end my dread?
Lift me, love, on the wings of my desire
Lift me to you, to safety in your fire
Only take me up, away from this place
Set me down in the place that is no place

(Banani et al. 2005, pp. 92–93)

Or sometimes as full union with the Sublime:
I am the slave on your roof keeping time,
I am the frightened bird snared by your lime,
the nightingale silent in your night-time,
the axis that stands for your name, Sublime
Not I, not we—That agony's erased!

(Banani et al. 2005, p. 105)

8. The Day of *Alast*

Repeatedly, Tāhirih appeals to the Islamic tradition of the Day of *alast*, the time before time. It is a vision of pre-existence referred to in Qur'an (7:172). According to this tradition, all the souls who were ever to be born were assembled in the presence of God before the creation of the world. He spoke the words, "Am I not your Lord?" (*alastu bi-rabbikum*). And every soul replied, "Thou art." Baha'u'llah refers to this narrative explicitly in the Hidden Words:

O MY FRIENDS!

Have ye forgotten that true and radiant morn, when in those hallowed and blessed surroundings ye were all gathered in My presence beneath the shade of the tree of life, which is planted in the all-glorious paradise? Awe-struck ye listened as I gave utterance to these three most holy words: O friends! Prefer not your will to Mine, never desire that which I have not desired for you, and approach Me not with lifeless hearts, defiled with worldly desires and cravings. Would ye but sanctify your souls, ye would at this present hour recall that place and those surroundings, and the truth of My utterance should be made evident unto all of you. (Bahā'u'llāh 1975, Persian, No. 19)

In her poems, Tāhirih repeatedly invokes the Day of *alast*. In these passages, she calls the mythological past into the concrete present. Identifying the Manifestation with God himself, she asks him to speak the primal words:

Fars is set aflame, and Tehran's burning.
Pure spirit rises from his place. Start dancing!
At daybreak nightingales don't sing. The cock
struts out and birds of Glory start praising.
When my lover asks, *Am I not your Lord?*
even the gods reply in awe, *Thou art*.

(Banani et al. 2005, p. 58)

And:

When the brilliant sun of your face first dawned,
you dazed me by your light at my day's start.
So speak the words: *"Am I not your Lord?"*
My heartbeat will reply: *"Thou art. Thou art."*
You asked: *"Am I not?"* I said: *"Yes, Thou art."*

Then disaster set up camp inside my heart.

(Banani et al. 2005, p. 62)

From the days of pre-existence Tāhirih has identified herself with the godhead:

When the divine hand molded Adam's clay,
your love sowed its seed in my breast that day . . .
Since that day my heart cried out, *Behold me!*
and I stepped in that street for all to see,
gadding about, a shameless debauchee,
He was all myself, all myself was he—
His jewel set in my heart's palace

(Banani et al. 2005, p. 103)

As Abbas Amanat observed, the theology of the Bāb captured the eschatological future, the Day of Judgment, and yanked it into the present in order to overturn the established religious order and proclaim a new Dispensation of divine will. In Tāhirih's theology, the Day of *alast*, that is, the Day of Pre-existence, is also dragged to the present and put at the service of the new faith. It is a theology that Baha'u'llah would validate some years later in his own poem, Mathnavīy-i Mubārak:

Once someone posed this question to a gnostic [a mystic]:	147
O you, who've grasped the mysteries of God O you, by bounty's wine intoxicate,	
do you recall the day of "Am I not?" [i.e., the day of *alast*]	148
He said: I do recall that sound, those words, as if it were but yesterday, no less!	149
It lingers ever in my ears, His call, that sweet, soul-vivifying voice of His.	150
Another gnostic, who had climbed beyond, had bored the mystic pearls divine, replied:	151
That day of God has never ended nor has fallen short, we're living in that day!	152
His day's unending, not pursued by night– That we're alive on such a day's not strange	153
Had Time's Soul ceased its yearning for this day, then Heaven's court and throne would fall to dust	154
For through God's power this eternal day was made unending by His Majesty.	155

(Bahā'u'llāh 1999, pp. 147–55)

The theological position is that the Day of *alast* is not a myth of pre-existence, but is an existential reality. The drama of that mystical day is played out again with the appearance of the Manifestation of God, who stands before humanity symbolically to declare his mission. Every soul, having already declared his allegiance to his Lord before birth, is called upon to do so again. This affirmation represents the fundamental relationship between God and humanity.

9. Feminine Power

Far from understanding her gender as a weakness or as a disability, Tāhirih repeatedly invokes her femininity and beauty as a source of power. As such, she suggests a sort of feminist theology that should be explored. MacEoin has argued that Tāhirih never wrote

or preached in favor of the social equality of women in Iranian society and should not be regarded as a "feminist" in any European sense of the word. This is true enough, as no such concept existed in nineteenth-century Iran. But in her poetry, she is clearly and explicitly aware of her gender, her femininity, and her sexuality. In her poems, these are great strengths that can be used to subdue the world. Her poem "Just Let the Wind . . . " is filled with power and confidence:

> Just let the wind untie my perfumed hair,
> my net would capture every wild gazelle.
> Just let me paint my flashing eyes with black,
> and I would make the world as dark as hell.
> Yearning, each dawn, to see my dazzling face,
> the heaven lifts its golden looking-glass.
> If I should pass a church by chance today,
> Christ's own virgins would rush to my gospel.

(Banani et al. 2005, p. 49)

As referred to earlier, Tāhirih's long poem "From Those Locks" makes frequent and effective use of references to feminine power:

> I'll drop my robe, my prayer mat I'll discard,
> drink till I'm drunk, and none of them regard
> My passion will fill their house, roof to yard
> Mt. Sinai's flame grows bright, for I'm its bard
> By the tavern gate, there's my place!

(Banani et al. 2005, p. 104)

For Tāhirih, her femininity was a strength—not a disability or a weakness. She is aware that she can make use of her beauty and her passion to overcome enemies and shape the world around her. As a learned woman, she felt free to invade male space and dispute with men, without ever sacrificing her gender or her awareness of herself as a woman. In her poems, Tāhirih presents us with a transgressive femininity that can break free of the limits of gender to conquer and dominate the world.

10. Conclusions

Certainly, there is more to say. It is far too early to draw any conclusions from this preliminary survey. But even a brief examination of a few of the poems of Tāhirih that have been translated into English reveals that she has made some of her most radical theological statements in the form of poetry.

Perhaps this is appropriate for a feminine theology. While Tāhirih's ideas cannot be regarded as feminism in any contemporary sense of the word, her theology seems to be filled with a woman's sensibility. This inclination towards peace, truth, justice, and reconciliation—the end of war—nevertheless does not soften her triumphant proclamation of victory.

At certain moments, Tāhirih anticipates developments in Bābī/Bahā'ī teachings that would not take place until decades later. At least not explicitly. But the theology that can be discerned in her poems demonstrates that such universal themes and global visions were present in Babism, even if they could only be seen by its most radical exponents. Tāhirih's poetic voice offers a unique Bābī theology understood, perhaps only by her few (women?) followers at the time. But the beauty, the expansiveness, the universality, and the gentleness of her poems formed a legacy that can now be deeply appreciated by all progressive readers.

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Notes

1 There is a considerable body of academic literature on the Bābīs and the Bābī movement. Some of the most important full volumes of history include [ᶜAbdu'l-Bahā] Edward G. Browne, ed. and trans., *A Traveller's Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bab* (ᶜAbdu'l-Bahā [1891] 2004); Moojan Momen, ed., *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981); Moojan Momen, ed., *Studies in Bābī and Bahā'ī History*, Volume One (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1982); Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Bābī Movement in Iran, 1844-1850* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989); Nader Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart: Understanding the Writings of the Bab* (Wilfrid Laurier Press, 2008); Denis MacEoin, *The Messiah of Shiraz: Studies in Early and Middle Babism* (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Fereydun Vahman, ed., *The Bab and the Babi Community of Iran* (London: Oneworld, 2020).

2 If so, it seems to me that this poem alone is sufficient grounds for historians to re-evaluate the entire Bābī movement. Tahirih, it appears, was able to discern themes in the movement that have escaped the notice of most historians.

3 Alternately, the opening lines of the poem can be translated, and perhaps more clearly, as: Now hear me!/Since I proclaim what's manifest and true.I speak the word of victory to you.Strip off your rags of law and pious fashion.Leap naked into the sea of compassion!

4 See, for example, "Morning Breezes" in Banani, *Tahirih: A Portrait in Poetry*, 61.

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Article

The *mi'rāj* in Select Shaykhī, Bābī, and Bahā'ī Texts

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Abstract: The mi'raj, or ascension of the Prophet Muhammad to heaven, has received a great deal of attention on the part of Islamic scholars and writers, who expanded upon a short Qur'anic passage and communicated their understanding of this episode. Nineteenth century religious leaders associated with the the Shaykhī, Bābī, and Bahā'ī movements continued the practice of commenting on the *mi'rāj*. Rather than communicating fixed ideas about the meaning of the mi'raj, their writings reflect the contexts in which they were composed.

Keywords: mi'rāj; Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī; Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī; the Bāb; Bahā'u'llāh; Karīm Khān Kirmānī

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In the 19th century, Persian religious leaders associated with the Shaykhī, Bābī, and Bahā'ī movements commented on the *mi'rāj*, or the ascension of the Prophet Muhammad to heaven, placing particular attention to the question of whether or not the ascension was a spiritual or physical event, adding their understandings to an already diverse landscape of interpretation. The purpose of this paper is to examine several texts from the Shaykhī, Bābī and Bāhā'i religious traditions in order to gain a better understanding of the similarities, differences, and inter-connectedness of attitudes reflected in these religious texts regarding the *mi'rāj*. In order to establish the relationship between these connected writings, the paper employs a methodology of close and careful textual analysis of specific works. While considerable scholarship exists on the *mi'rāj* throughout the Islamic centuries, very little research exists on this topic within a Shaykhī, Bābī and Bāhā'i studies context. What does exist is referenced throughout this essay. The paper will demonstrate that founders and leaders of these traditions, rather than adhering to a fixed and unchanging perspective regarding the Prophet's bodily ascension in the *mi'rāj*, held nuanced positions that reflected the context in which they wrote.

The episode of the *mi'rāj* and the *isrā'*, or night journey, that preceded it, are associated with certain Qur'anic verses, in particular, 17:1: "Glory be to Him who transported His servant by night from the sacred place of prayer (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*) to the furthest place of prayer (*al-masjid al-aqṣá*) upon which We have sent down our blessing, that we might show him some of our signs" (Sells 2012). Although the term *mi'rāj* does not appear in the Qur'an, legends surrounding the episode quickly developed in the first two centuries after the establishment of Islam and found their way into a number of different genres of Islamicate literatures, including *ḥadīth*, "stories of the prophets" (*qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*), general histories, and biographies of the Prophet. Over time, the account expanded greatly to include an elaborate description of Muḥammad's journey, in which he rode into heaven upon the mythical creature Burāq, and there he encountered numerous religious and historical figures. As theologians, neoplatonic Islamic philosophers, Sufis, poets, and others interpreted and commented upon the story, lively and robust debate surrounded a number of its elements (Schrieke). Indeed, the *mi'rāj* has captured the imagination of Muslims for centuries, and manifested itself in diverse times and places–from the exquisite illustrations in the famous fifteenth century *Mi'rājnāmih* produced in late Timurid Herat with text in Uighur script and marginal notes in Arabic, Turkish, and Persian—to the fanciful 20th

century painted wooden *burāq* figures, used on the island of Lombok, Indonesia as seats of honor in village wedding and circumcision processions accompanied with gamelan orchestras (Séguy 1977; Cooper 2001).

Scripture from both the Bābī and Bahā'ī religions make frequent reference to the Shī'ī Shaykhī movement. In a number of treatises, Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī (d. 1826), the eponymous founder of what came to be known as al-shaykhiyya (Shaykhism) put forth his philosophical-theological ideas emphasizing the unveiling of truth from the occulted Imams, with whom he claimed a special relationship. Much research remains to be done in order to understand his views of the *mi'rāj*, which may explain at least in part why later writers and interpreters reached such disparate conclusions about them. In a *risālah* (treatise) within the *Jawāmi' al-kalīm*, a compendium of al-Aḥsā'ī's writings, he seems to imply that when the Prophet went on the *mi'rāj*, it was a bodily ascent, but he also defines "body" in a complex fashion, stating that when the Prophet's body went to heaven, it transformed into a "subtle (*laṭīf*)" body (*jism*), suitable for the spiritual ascent (al-Aḥsā'ī [1273] 1856, pp. 127–28).

Al-Aḥsā'ī's perspectives on the *mi'rāj* became a matter of controversy, not necessarily because of his actual views on the matter, but as a result of clerical opposition. Despite his erudition and status, while staying in the Iranian town of Qazvin in 1238/1822, the cleric Muḥammad Taqī Baraghānī, uncle of the famous Bābī disciple Qurrat al-'Ayn (Ṭāhirih), issued a *fatwa* of *takfīr* (heresy) against al-Aḥsā'ī. The primary accusations in the *takfīr* included (1) his opinion that the resurrection (*ma'ād*) could be more than simply a bodily event, (2) his views that the Imams occupied a very elevated spiritual and cosmological position, and (3) his belief that the *mi'rāj* was a spiritual ascension, not a bodily one (MacEoin 2009, pp. 99–100). Baraghānī convinced a number of other more prominent clerics to support the fatwa and over time, the accusations against the Shaykh increased. As Denis MacEoin notes, though, none of the allegedly heretical views that Shaykh Aḥmad held were particularly unorthodox, for example, in comparison with those of the Shi'i philosophers of the Safavid period (MacEoin 2009, pp. 99–100). The specific accusations in the *takfīr* did, however, ensure that Shaykhī interpretations of the *mi'rāj* would appear in theological disputes associated not only with the Shaykhī movement but also the Bābī and Bahā'ī religions.

The accusations against Shaykh Aḥmad and his specific views on the *mi'rāj* are referenced in a number of places, including the Arabic *Dalīl al-mutaḥayyirīn* of Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī (d. 1843). Rashtī had met Shaykh Aḥmad when the latter was in Yazd. There, he became a prominent follower of Shaykh Aḥmad. He accompanied Shaykh Aḥmad to Karbala, and when the Shaykh died, he became his successor and head of the Shaykhīs in Karbala (MacEoin, "Rashtī, Sayyid Kāẓim"). The Báb attended his classes in Karbala for several months before he began to disclose his own messianic claims. Rashtī completed the *Dalīl al-mutaḥayyirīn* near Kufa in 1258/1842. MacEoin suggests that Rashtī, from the time he composed the *Dalīl al-mutaḥayyirīn* until his death in 1844, was writing in a state of dissimulation (*taqiyyah*) (MacEoin 2009, p. 124).[1] Essentially, a defense of Shaykh Aḥmad and his doctrinal perspectives, the *Dalīl al-mutaḥayyirīn* presents the Shaykh as a relatively orthodox Shi'i thinker, thereby rendering Shaykhism an acceptable phenomenon. In the *Dalīl al-mutaḥayyirīn*, Sayyid Kāẓim summarizes and then refutes the accusations against Shaykh Aḥmad, indicating that such accusations were still alive even some twenty years after the pronouncement of the original *takfīr*. One such accusation had to do with the Shaykh's position on the *mi'rāj*: "They say that the Shaykh [Aḥmad] says that the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) did not ascend with his body to heaven on the night of the *mi'rāj*, but he ascended with his spirit." (Rashtī n.d., p. 67; MacEoin 2009, p. 100).[2] Sayyid Kāẓim then quotes a speech that Shaykh Aḥmad purportedly made in which he refuted the various accusations that had been leveled against him. In regard to the *mi'rāj*, he maintained that the Prophet "ascended to heaven with his body (*bashariyatihi*), his clothes (*thiyābihi*), and his sandal[s] (*na'lihi*)." (MacEoin 2009, p. 124; Rashtī n.d., p. 69). The fact that the *Dalīl al-mutaḥayyirīn* was written in defense of Shaykh Aḥmad helps explain why

Sayyid Kāẓim emphasizes al-Aḥsā'ī's belief in a literal bodily ascension rather than the more nuanced perspectives he expressed in his writings.

In 1844, Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī, "the Bāb" (1819–1850), put forth the first of several messianic claims that expanded considerably over time: that he was the representative of the Hidden Imam. In 1846, he wrote his *Ṣaḥīfih-yi 'adliyyih*, a relatively straightforward Persian text and the first that he composed in that language. MacEoin states that this was an early attempt on the part of the Bāb to reach a broader non-Shaykhī audience. He also suggests that, like Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī in his *Dalīl al-mutaḥayyirīn*, the Bāb wrote this *fiqh* text on *uṣūl* (fundamentals [of religion]), in dissimulation (*taqiyyah*) mode, perhaps because the text was in Persian and would have been more easily understood by more people (MacEoin 2009, pp. 186–87). In this way, the Bāb could distance himself from Shaykhī thought and protect himself and his followers against intellectual and possibly physical attacks. Furthermore, since the text shows the Bāb as learned within Shi'ism, once his followers respected that, they presumably would then be in a position to pay attention to his later and more challenging pronouncements.

The *Ṣaḥīfih-yi 'adliyyih* consists of five chapters devoted to (1) the mention of God, (2) an explanation of the Balance, (3) the knowledge of God and his saints, (4) the return to God, and (5) the prayer of devotion to God (MacEoin 2009, p. 186; MacEoin 1992, pp. 69–70).[3] In chapter four, the Bāb reiterates the same perspectives on the *mi'rāj* that Sayyid Kāẓim presented in the *Dalīl al-mutaḥayyirīn*, and writes emphatically about the need to believe that the *mi'rāj* was a literal event: "Additionally, believing in the ascension of that eminent one (Muḥammad) with his body (*jism*) and his clothing (*libās*) and his two sandals (*na'layn*) is firmly required." (The Bāb n.d., p. 34). He further states that "Belief in the ḥadīth transmitted from Ḥumayrā ('Ā'ishah) in this situation is also necessary: at the hour of the ascension, the eminent one was at the house, but at the same hour, he ascended with his body (*jismihi*) to the kingdom of the heavens and the two earths, even though he was in the house with his body." (The Bāb n.d., p. 34).

Scholarship on the *mi'rāj* has shown that the nature of the Prophet's ascent was a contested issue in some of the earliest texts in Islamic history. Both recensions of Ibn Isḥāq's biography of the Prophet, one by Yūnus ibn Bukayr (d. 199/814) and the other by Ibn Hishām (d. 833), include in their *mi'rāj* accounts a ḥadīth on the authority of 'Ā'ishah, the Prophet's wife. In this ḥadīth, she reports that only the Prophet's spirit (*rūḥ*) ascended to heaven, while his body remained at home. The ḥadīth appears in Ibn Isḥāq's recension as follows: "One of Abū Bakr's family told me that 'Ā'ishah the Prophet's wife used to say, 'the Apostle's body remained where it was but God removed his spirit by night." (Ibn Hishām 2004, p. 288; Guillame 1995, p. 183). While 'Ā'ishah's ḥadīth emphasizes the spiritual ascension, other ḥadīth seem to imply that the ascension was a bodily experience for the Prophet, and this view of the *mi'rāj* came to be accepted as standard Sunni belief in later centuries. (Vuckovic 2005, pp. 78–80; Colby 2008, pp. 59–61). Nevertheless, the inclusion of this ḥadīth in Ibn Isḥāq reflects an early understanding of a spiritual ascension that must have enjoyed some acceptance before the consensus changed. (Colby 2008, p. 52, 251 n. 5).

While 'Ā'ishah's ḥadīth as it appears in Ibn Isḥāq's account clearly states the mi'raj was a spiritual event, other versions of the ḥadīth in Shi'i sources indicate the ascension was both a spiritual and bodily event. Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (d. 1699), author of the late Safavid era compilation of Shi'i ḥadīth and related sources, the *Biḥār al-anwār*, states on the authority of Muhammad bin Jarīr al-Ṭabarī's commentary (*tafsīr*) that Ḥadẖīfah, 'Ā'ishah and Mu'āwiyah relate the *mi'rāj* as a dream or vision and it was not the body of the Prophet [that ascended] (Majlisī [1403] 1983, p. 284). Other commentators, Majlisī later says, noted that the traditions from 'Ā'ishah and Mu'āwiyah differed: 'Ā'ishah said that it was not the body [that ascended] and Mu'āwiyah stated that it was a dream (Majlisī [1403] 1983, p. 291). Later in the text, Majlisī cites Ibn Shahrāshūb's *Manāqib Āl 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib* as asserting that 'Ā'ishah said it was both a spiritual and a bodily ascension (Majlisī [1403] 1983, pp. 284, 291, 293, 350, 364, 380). Given these many traditions on the subject of the Prophet's

ascension, the Báb appears to base his comments on a version of the ḥadīth stating that, according to ʻĀʼishah, the ascension was a physical event. In doing so, however, he does not preclude the possibility of the Prophet ascending to heaven with both his body and his spirit.

One year later, in 1846, the Báb composed a short Arabic treatise entitled the *Risālah fī jasad al-nabī* ("The Treatise on the Body of the Prophet"), also known as the *Sharḥ kayfiyyat al- miʻrāj (*"Treatise on the Circumstances of the Miʻrāj) (The Báb 1970, pp. 416–18; Lambden 2007). Historical context helps explain the difference in style and possibly content between this text and the *Ṣaḥīfih-yi ʻadliyyih*. The Bab addressed the *Risāla fī jasad al-nabī* to a certain Mīrzā Ḥasan Nūrī, an Ishrāqī thinker of the Mullā Ṣadrā school of philosophy. In this text, the Báb limits his discussion of the *miʻrāj* to explaining how the body of the Prophet could have been in more than one place at the same time (MacEoin 1992, p. 80). Expressing himself in language that would have been familiar to those versed in the philosophical/theological perspectives associated with the so-called school of Isfahan of the Safavid era, the Báb defines three modes of time: *sarmad* (transcendental time), *dahr* (eternal time), and *zamān* (temporal time) (Aminrazavi 2007, p. 161).[4] He points out that the only way to understand this matter is through the knowledge of "the matter that is betwixt two matters (*al-amr bayn al-amrayn*), which is the "very secret of destiny." (The Báb 1970, pp. 416–18; Lambden 2007). He then says that if one takes into account these three different notions of time, and the "regulating force of *sarmad*," then it is possible for the prophet to have been (simultaneously) in the house of Ḥumayrā (ʻĀʼishah) and at the same time travel "in Heaven, in the various paradises and the two luminous orbs." (The Báb 1970, pp. 416–18; Lambden 2007). Explaining that there are two levels of divine theophany, which can presuppose that the Prophet may be manifest in two places at once, he states that "it is clear that any given reality can be allotted all manner of secondary [space-time] levels and similar theophanological actualizations." (The Báb 1970, pp. 416–18; Lambden 2007). Thus, the Prophet could be veiled at one point on the spatio-temporal continuum–presumably while in the heavens during the *miʻrāj*–while at the same time unveiled (*la yahtajib*) at another, in the house of ʻĀʼishah. While the Báb seems to accept a literal *miʻrāj* in this text, he nevertheless creates space for other understandings. In expanding the orthodox position by bringing into play the different notions of time, he proposes a nuanced and multi-faceted understanding of the essence of the Prophet.

Some four years after the Báb wrote the *Risālah fī jasad al-nabī*, a contemporary religious claimant and rival to the Báb, Muḥammad Karīm Khān Kirmānī (1810–1871), also commented on the *miʻrāj*. Karīm Khān was the son of a Qajar prince, Ibrāhīm Khān ẓāhir al-Dawlah. When he went to Karbala soon after his father's death, he met Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī, successor to Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsāʼī and leader of the Shaykhī movement at the time, and became one of his fervent disciples (Bayat 1982, p. 86; MacEoin, "Shaykhiyya"). Karīm Khān was extremely learned and highly prolific, and perhaps best known for his elaborations on the "fourth pillar," or the "*rukn-i rābiʻ*." When Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī died in 1843, Karīm Khān proclaimed himself the new leader of the Shaykhī school, and continued to spread the teachings of Shaykh Aḥmad and Sayyid Kāẓim. In addition to experiencing clashes with the religious orthodoxy and other Shaykhīs, Karīm Khān also vehemently denounced the Báb, and attacked him and his claims in at least eight essays and books.[5]

Karīm Khān Kirmānī outlines his perspective on the *miʻrāj* in a lengthy discourse within a work entitled the *Irshād al-ʻavāmm* ("Guidance for the Masses"), written in 1267/1850-51 (Quinn 2004). Kirmani wrote this treatise in a simple and straightforward Persian that his intended audience of common people (*al-ʻavāmm*) would understand. While he accepts a bodily ascension later in his detailed and rather extensive discussion of the *miʻrāj*, his introductory comments on the subject have the most significant bearing on a later Bahāʼī text. Here, he states that understanding the *miʻrāj* required knowledge of some twenty five sciences, including geometry, astronomy, geography, talismanic magic, grammar, addition and subtraction, mechanics and Ptolemaic studies (Kirmānī n.d., pp. 396–97). Karīm Khān presents himself as the only individual sufficiently knowledgeable in these sciences to be

able to expound the realities of the *miʿrāj*. In listing these sciences, Karīm Khān indirectly acknowledges the level of learning attained by Shaykh Aḥmad, thereby implying that it was the Shaykhī leaders–with their polymathic learning understood to be derived from the imams—who possessed the intellectual and religious authority to understand and explain the *miʿrāj*. Indeed, in the *Dalīl al-mutaḥayyirīn*, Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī states that Shaykh Aḥmad was well versed in some thirty sciences. While Rashtī does not link these to understanding the *miʿrāj* as does Kirmānī, several appear in Kirmānī's list, such as geometry (*handasah*), medicine (*ṭibb*), Kabbalistic magic (*sīmiyā*), divinity (*ilāhiyyah*), meanings (*maʿnī*) and explications (*bayān*) (Rashtī n.d., pp. 13–16; MacEoin 2009, p. 72).

A discussion of Karīm Khān's list of sciences required to understand the *mʿirāj* appears in the *Kitāb-i īqān* ("Book of Certitiude") by Mīrzā Ḥusayn Nūrī, "Bahā'u'llāh" (1817–1892), prophet-founder of the Bahā'ī religion. Bahā'u'llāh composed this text in Baghdad in 1861, approximately one to two years before he made something of his theophanological claims known, from 1863 onwards. Written in reply to certain questions posted by Ḥājjī Mīrzā Sayyid Muḥammad, one of the maternal uncles of the Bāb, the *Kitāb-i īqān* covers themes including the Day of Resurrection, the twelfth imam, Qur'anic interpretation, and the messianic Qa'im.

Karīm Khān Kirmānī's name appears in the *Kitāb-i īqān* because, as Bahā'u'llāh explains, many people had asked him about Kirmānī. However, he did not have access to his writings until eventually someone was able to locate in the city of Baghdad a copy of a book entitled the *Irshād al-ʿavāmm* and brought it to him (Bahā'u'llāh n.d., pp. 142–43; Shoghi Effendi 1983, p. 118). While the book was in his possession, he continues, he noticed Kirmānī's list of sciences necessary for understanding the *miʿrāj*, and specifically names and then rejects several of those sciences:

> Among the specified sciences were the science of metaphysical abstractions (*falsafa*), of alchemy (*kīmiyā*), and natural magic (*sīmiyā*). Such vain and discarded learnings, this man hath regarded as the pre-requisites of the understanding of the sacred and abiding mysteries of divine Knowledge.
>
> (Bahā'u'llāh n.d., p. 144; Shoghi Effendi 1983, p. 119)

Then, in a rejection of the kind of polymathic knowledge favored by Kirmānī and the Shaykhīs, Bahā'u'llāh asks:

> "How can the knowledge of these sciences, which are so contemptible in the eyes of the truly learned, be regarded as essential to the apprehension of the mysteries of the 'Mi'ráj,' whilst the Lord of the 'Mi'ráj' Himself [Muḥammad] was never burdened with a single letter of these limited and obscure learnings, and never defiled His radiant heart with any of these fanciful illusions?".
>
> (Bahā'u'llāh n.d., pp. 144–45; Shoghi Effendi 1983, pp. 119–20)

Accusing Karīm Khān of arrogance and ignorance, Bahā'u'llāh expresses surprise that people were actually listening to him and following him and insinuates that whereas Kirmānī's alleged abilities in the science of alchemy were "fancy" and "pretension," he could, were it not for the persecution he was enduring, himself perform the alchemical task in order to distinguish truth from falsehood. (Bahā'u'llāh n.d., pp. 146–47; Shoghi Effendi 1983, p. 121).

In this portion of the *Kitāb-i īqān*, Bahā'u'llāh links true understanding not to the religious classes represented by people like Karīm Khān or expertise in sciences such as alchemy, but to divine assistance, and calls on his reader to "seek enlightenment from the illumined in heart." (*ṣāḥibān-i afʿidah*). (Bahā'u'llāh n.d., p. 148; Shoghi Effendi 1983, p. 122). He lists several qualities that a "true seeker," (*mujāhid*) needs in order to gain knowledge of the "ancient of days." These include patience and resignation, trust in God, regarding backbiting as grievous error, detachment from this world, commune with God at the dawn of every day, and not wish for others that which he would not wish for himself (Bahā'u'llāh n.d., pp. 148–51; Shoghi Effendi 1983, pp. 123–25). In doing this, Bahā'u'llāh indirectly juxtaposes Karīm Khān's list of twenty five "sciences" with his own list of approximately

the same number of qualities necessary for understanding the divine mysteries. For those readers who were familiar with the *Irshād al-ʿavāmm* and Kirmānī's list of twenty five sciences, reading this portion of the *Kitāb-i īqān* certainly would have provided a significant contrast.

Although Bahā'u'llāh does not directly offer a spiritual interpretation of the *miʿrāj*, in stressing the spiritual qualities necessary for its proper understanding, he presumes a non-literal dimension to it. We know that such a non-literal understanding was accepted by at least some of his followers during his own lifetime, because Mullā Jamāl Burūjirdī, an early Bahā'ī, had sent to Karīm Khān a list of questions clearly based on the ideas in the *Kitāb-i īqān*. One of these questions presupposes a spiritual *miʿrāj* and asks Karīm Khān to explain the bodily *miʿrāj* and the sciences required to understand it. In his disdainful response to Burūjirdī, published as *Risālah dar javāb-i suʾālāt-i Mullā Jamāl-i Bābī* (1866), Kirmānī defends his earlier position as outlined in the *Irshād al-ʿavāmm*. He also addresses what he perceives to be the grammatical errors in Burujirdī's questions. Learning of the contents of this later treatise of Kirmānī led Bahā'u'llāh to compose his *Lawḥ-i qinā'* ("Tablet of the Veil") (some time between 1868–1871), in which he sets aside the question of the *miʿrāj* and instead focuses largely on grammar, another highly contested issue in anti-Bābī and anti-Bahā'ī polemic (Quinn 2010).

This paper has demonstrated, by way of analyzing several texts, that the *miʿrāj* was a topic of theological discussion and sometimes of dispute within the Shaykhī, Bābī, and Bahā'ī movements. Al-Aḥsā'ī's views on the *miʿrāj* are difficult to ascertain, but in one of his writings he seems to imply that the *miʿrāj* was a bodily ascent, although his understanding of "body" was complex. Al-Aḥsā'ī's successor, Rashtī, defended his teacher's perspective and maintained the position that the *miʿrāj* was a bodily ascension in his *Dalīl al-mutaḥayyirīn*. The Bāb initially, in his *Ṣaḥīfih-yi ʿadliyyih,* advocated a bodily ascension. Soon thereafter, however, in his *Risālah fī jasad al-nabī,* he admitted the possibility of a less literal interpretation, when he employed a philosophically oriented language for a more specific audience. In the *Irshād al-ʿavāmm*, Kirmānī rejected a spiritual interpretation of the *miʿrāj*, and asserted his own authority in engaging in such interpretation due to his knowledge of numerous sciences. That position was in turn challenged by Bahā'u'llāh, who, in the *Kitāb-i īqān*, maintained that understanding of the *miʿrāj* was not reserved for clerics, but rather required spiritual insight.

The analyses presented in this paper of the highlight the different philosophical and hermeneutical stances on the topic of the *miʿrāj* adopted by 19th century Iranian religious thinkers. Some of them inclined to a literalist level of understanding, while others were open to a more nuanced deeper level of comprehension. Their discourse was determined to a considerable extent by historical context and consonant polemical considerations which gravitated between the desire to appear orthodox and the desire to take on board a deeper level of meaning. These conclusions should be seen as preliminary, as a great deal of work remains to be done in reaching a more comprehensive understanding of the positions held by the Shaykhī, Bābī, and Bahā'ī leaders, particularly given the extensive writings associated with these movements. A useful next step would be to identify all of the texts in which al-Aḥsā'ī, Rashtī, the Bāb, and Bahā'u'llāh discussed the *miʿrāj.*

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Notes

1 "The summary of this sermon, which he himself gives in *Dalīl al-mutaḥayyirīn*, is valuable evidence as to the four main points of doctrine then at issue, as well as to the Sayyid's use of subterfuge (*taqiyyah*), which becomes a marked feature of Shaykhi writing from this time on."

2 Shaykh Aḥmad was also accused of believing that 'Alī, not God, was the creator; that all references to God in the Qur'an really referred to 'Alī, and that the Imām Ḥusayn was not killed. See (MacEoin 2009, p. 100).

3 These are the sections as outlined in (MacEoin 2009, p. 186).

4 I am using Aminrazavi's translations of *sarmad*, *dahr*, and *zamān*.

5 Kirmānī's earliest work against the Bāb was the *Izhāq al-bāṭil*, which he composed approximately a year or so after the Bāb made his claims to Mullā Ḥusayn, and in it he not only divined the fact that the Bab was making a great claim, but thought fit to reject it and condemn it through a close analysis of the *Qayyūm al-asmā*. Elsewhere, he claimed the *Bayān* was blasphemous, attacked the notion of a "new prophet," and vowed that he would destroy the Bāb (Bayat 1982, p. 80).

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Article

The Role of Wonder in Creating Identity ‡

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‡ *For Frank and Foruzan with love.*

Abstract: Although the Bahāʾī Faith was born in a Shīʿī Islamic cultural milieu it has clearly gone beyond the "gravitational pull" of Islām and assumed a distinctive social, scriptural, and religious identity. Bahāʾīs revere Islām as "the source and background of their Faith" and consider the Qurʾān the only authentic, uncorrupted scripture apart from their own. However, Bahāʾī teachings insist that this new religious movement is more than a sectarian development. It represents a distinctive—if you will "autonomous"—religious dispensation along the lines of the development of Christianity out of its original Jewish setting. This assertion and trajectory is clear in the very earliest scriptures of the new religion revealed by the Bāb and runs through subsequent Bahāʾī writings. A key term, *badīʿ*, used dozens of times by the Bāb in his annunciatory composition, the *Qayyūm al-Asmāʾ*, denotes this sense of the "wondrously new", something that is simultaneously ancient and unprecedented. It is suggested here that this term is a central and pivotal idea in the Bāb's vision and that it had a major role in generating the imaginative and kerygmatic cultural energy that would eventually result in the above-mentioned escape from an Islamic orbit. The word *badīʿ* eventually acquires a life of its own in Bahāʾī thought and practice. It is the word used to designate the new calendar whose current year is 180 B.E., "Bahāʾī Era" or "Badīʿ Era". It is used in the title of one of Bahāʾuʾllāh's major books, the *Kitāb-i Badīʿ*. It is given as a name for one of the young heroes of the Bahāʾī Faith who was tortured and killed because he dared to attempt to communicate directly with the Shah of Iran to testify to the truth of Bahāʾuʾllāh's mission. It is a word encountered frequently throughout the Bahāʾī writings and translated various ways. It functions as an emblem and symbol of the Bahāʾī ethos and message. The main focus here is the *Qayyūm al-Asmāʾ*, the Bāb's proclamatory summons, disguised as a Qurʾān commentary, in which he claimed to be in immediate and intimate contact with the hidden Imām and, therefore, the centre of all authority (*walāya*) whether political or spiritual. The clarion message of the *Qayyūm al-Asmāʾ*, in which the much repeated Arabic word *badīʿ* is a powerful and vibrant symbol of "the new", is that a profound and radical covenantal renewal—as distinct from "revivification/*tajdīd*"—is at hand, a renewal that would evolve into a distinctive Bahāʾī communal identity that is simultaneously—and therefore wondrously—new and primordial.

Keywords: identity; revelation; interpretation; Qurʾān; covenant renewal; *tafsīr*; Joseph; apocalypse; Bahāʾī; Shīʿism

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1. Introduction

> *It is through wonder that human beings now begin and originally began to philosophize* (Aristotle 1933, p. 13).

The Bahāʾī Faith dates its inception to the evening of 22 May 1844/5 Jumādā I, 1260, when the young merchant, Sayyid ʿAlī Muḥammad Shīrāzī (1819–1850/1235–1266) proclaimed himself to be the Gate (Ar. *al-bāb*) for the long-awaited hidden 12th Imām of the Ithnā ʿAsharī (Twelver) Shiʿa, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, the expected messiah-saviour, the Mahdi, "Rightly Guided One" and Qāʾim, "The One Who Rises Up [to restore justice]". According to Shīʿī doctrine, the 12th or hidden Imām had, because of persecution, been in hiding since he was a small child. This occultation, according to Shīʿī doctrine, is in

two stages, the first, the Minor Occultation (*al-ghaybat al-ṣughrā*) lasted from the time of his original disappearance in 874 at the young age of four until shortly before the death of his fourth deputy (*nā'ib*, sometimes *bāb*) in 941 when the second stage began. This is known in the literature as the Greater Occultation (*al-ghaybat al-kubrā*) and, according to Ithnā ʿAsharī Shiʿism (also known as Jaʿfarī, Imāmī or, least attractively, "Twelver", Shiʿism), continues to the present moment. Bahāīs believe that this Greater Occultation ended 22 May 1844 when Sayyid ʿAlī Muḥammad Shīrāzī (hereafter, the Bāb), claimed that he was in direct contact with the hidden Imām and thus the centre of all authority and the harbinger of those dire and earth-shaking events that enliven the books of Shīʿī Ḥadīth. This claim was first made to a young seminarian, Mullā Ḥusayn Bushrūī (1813–1849), who was a prominent senior student in the influential intellectual movement devoted to Shīʿī philosophical theology that would eventually come to be known as the Shaykhī school of Imāmī Shiʿism, founded by Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsāī (d. 1826) whose successor was Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī (d. 1843 or 4). This circle had grown up as something of a compromise in the frequently intense theological battles between the Uṣūlī "rationalists" and the Akhbārī "scripturalists" of Imāmī Shīʿism (Momen 1985, pp. 117–18, 222–25).

One of the areas in which the Shaykhiyya distinguished itself was precisely in the interpretation of the eschatological-cum-apocalyptic passages and themes in the Qurʾān and the Ḥadīth. Shoghi Effendi Rabbání (1897–1957), the first and only Guardian of the Bahāī Faith (*walī amrullāh*) stated in his major historical work, *God Passes By*, that the Bahāī worldwide community traces its historical development, and therefore the process by which it acquired its special identity, through a series of events "which have insensibly, relentlessly, and under the very eyes of successive generations, perverse, indifferent or hostile, transformed a heterodox and seemingly negligible offshoot of the Shaykhī school of the Ithnā-ʿAsharīyyih sect of Shiʿah Islām into a world religion whose unnumbered followers are organically and indissolubly united; whose independent status, its enemies from the ranks of its parent religion have proclaimed and demonstrated" (Shoghi Effendi 1970, pp. xii–xiii).

Thus, the Bahāī Faith, on its own reckoning, sees itself as having developed its distinctive identity directly out of the eschatological expectations of Shīʿī Islām as, however creatively, interpreted by the Shaykhī school's first two masters, al-Aḥsāī and Rashtī. As one scholarly observer noted some years ago, of all the various Muslim sectarian and communalist movements, whether or not they arose in direct response or reaction to 18th and 19th century European encroachment on Islamic lands, the Bahāī Faith is the only one to have moved beyond the "gravitational pull" of Islām (Moayyad 1990, p. 47 citing Amin Banani). At the same time, the Bahāī faith honors Islām, the Qurʾān, the prophet Muḥammad, his Family, and the inexhaustible spiritual truths they symbolize and teach.[1]

Such a move "out of Islām" brought with it a new and distinct identity in much the same way a new identity was acquired by the early Christians and ensuing Christianity which may be thought, likewise, to have escaped the gravitational pull of Judaism. While many features of Judaism remain in Christianity, they are enlivened and interpreted in new ways which therefore put them beyond a Jewish identity. The same process may be seen at work in the history and development of the Bahāī Faith.

2. The Great Announcement

Mullā Ḥusayn Bushrūī was one of the more learned and talented younger adherents of the "Shaykhī" circle. "Shaykhī" here is in quotation marks because it seems indisputable that this was a term their detractors used to suggest that they propounded an unacceptable veneration of their teachers, their Shaykhs, and not one by which they recognized themselves. They themselves seem to have preferred the designation *Kashfiyya*, a word standing for mystical disclosure and revelation (cf. Rafati 1979, pp. 47–48), and a term which would have particular salience with regard to the Bāb's revelation, shortly to occur. Mullā Ḥusayn had set off from Karbalāʾ, headquarters of the second Shaykhī master, Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī, some weeks before his meeting with the Bāb. This journey was in obedience to the final instructions of Rashtī who had not appointed a successor but had

indicated in terms allusive yet unmistakable to his students that they should now expect the appearance (*ẓuhūr*) of the hidden Imām. Thus, it was in search of the hidden Imām, in accordance with the final instructions of the school's second leader, that Mullā Ḥusayn encountered the Bāb in Shiraz and was warmly welcomed by him. At the Bāb's insistent invitation, Mullā Ḥusayn accompanied him to his home. It was now during a conversation about Mullā Ḥusayn's travels that the Bāb, who was also an admirer of Shaykhī ideas and interpretations of the eschatological teachings of Shīʿism, voiced his claim to be the focus and centre of all authority, spiritual or worldly—essentially claiming to be the very hidden Imām for whom his guest was searching. The young, pious seminarian was initially most sceptical. However, when the Bāb started to compose the opening chapter of his proclamatory book, the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*, the subject of this article, Mullā Ḥusayn's scepticism began to dissolve and he eventually devoted himself to the Bāb and his distinctive, innovative call for a renewal of the covenant (*Dawnbreakers* 52–62). The *Qayyūm al-Asmā* is structurally based on the Qurʾān's 12th chapter, the Sura of Joseph (*Sūrat Yūsuf*). A brief word about the covenant, first in Islām generally, then specifically in the Sura of Joseph is necessary before proceeding.

3. The Covenant in the Qurʾān, Islām and the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*

Covenant is a major theme in the Qurʾān, a book which may certainly be read as a summons to a renewal of the so-called Abrahamic covenant. There is no space here to treat the topic at anything near the length it deserves. For its importance in Sunni Islām there is a growing library of specialized studies (al-Qadī 2006; Lumbard 2015; Jaffer 2021). Its importance in Sufism has long been an object of excellent scholarship (Ritter 2003; Böwering 1980). However, the literature on the covenant in Shīʿism is rather under-developed. This is ironic, because it may be in Shīʿism that the divine institution of the covenant is most emphasized. According to Shīʿism, it was precisely a violation of the renewed ancient covenant, through Muḥammad, that caused the division of the early Muslim community into competing, sometimes fractious and definitely fissiparous Islamicate sub-identities. It was a breaking of the covenant, in the first place, that cruelly violated the divine message of unity which Muḥammad had been sent to proclaim and about which the Qurʾān is so eloquent and insistent.

The *Qayyūm al-Asmā* is much preoccupied with the divine covenant and its healing and renewal in the message of the Bāb. One of the messianic hopes which had functioned as a prayer of the Imāmī Shīʿa was that God might hasten the glad advent of the promised one, the Mahdi or the Qāʾim, so that justice be restored and the rift in the covenant be healed. Then, the Muslim community might be reunited in relative harmony as it was during the lifetime of the prophet Muḥammad. To anticipate here the next section on the Sura of Joseph, such a dream of reunion is addressed in the final scene at Q12:100 when Joseph's family is reunited, after long, nearly fratricidal and heart-breaking separation. The *locus classicus* for the Qurʾān's covenant doctrine is Q7:172. Because of its importance, it is quoted here together with Q7:173.

"And remember when thy Lord brought forth from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify of themselves, (saying): Am I not your Lord? They said: Yea, verily. We testify. (That was) lest ye should say at the Day of Resurrection: Lo! of this we were unaware;

Or lest ye should say: (It is) only (that) our fathers ascribed partners to God of old and we were (their) seed after them. Wilt Thou destroy us on account of that which those who follow falsehood did?" (Pickthall slightly adjusted).

According to a prominent theme of Qurʾānic exegesis, this scenario happened in a time before creation of even time and space. God, in the persona of "your Lord", desired to be known and so gathered all humanity to his presence, before they were created, and presented them with the primordial question "Am I not your Lord" to which the unanimous and instantaneous response was "Yes indeed!". This Qurʾānic verbal "icon" has been deeply contemplated by all Islamic intellectual and religious traditions. For the present discussion,

it is sufficient to know that the covenant here, according to Islām, is the same one about which the Hebrew Bible speaks with regard to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and further, it is the same covenant that Jesus claimed to renew. The words for covenant in the Qurʾān are *ʿahd* and *mīthāq*. These words occur throughout the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* in numerous contexts, most prominently with the sense of renewal. The following examples are characteristic. The first one combines the important word *badīʿ* with covenant.

"Verily we have taken with you in the station of pre-existence (*mashhad al-dharr*) a mighty covenant (*mīthāq ghalīẓ*)" (QA6:35).

"This is a covenant of love for our followers (*ḥubb*^{an} *li-shīʿatinā*) from the presence of one who is wondrously innovative in the act of divinely creative speech (*min ladun badīʿ*) [namely, the Bāb]. Indeed the Cause in the estimation of God is Sublime (*al-ʿAlī*) and Mighty" (QA6, *Sūrat al-Shahāda*, vv. 35–36; SM75).[2]

This is a reference, in the first place, to the primordial covenant in which God lovingly summoned all future human beings to his presence and posed his (rhetorical) question, at Q7:172 "Am I not your Lord". All humanity answered "Yes indeed! To this we testify" (*balā shahidnā*). Apart from answering the question about why this sura was entitled, Sura of the Witnessing (or Martyrdom) *Sūrat al-Shahāda,* the Bāb's language joins pre-existence, the primordial day of the covenant, to the actual present. We see here also a frequent instance of paronomasia in the Bāb's use of "the Exalted" (*al-ʿAlī*) to refer to both God and himself— ʿAlī (Muḥammad Shīrāzī)—at the same time. This is discussed more fully below.

The clear message here is that this is in fact a new Day of the Covenant, joined wondrously to the Day of Judgment, which represents the starting point for a totally new world—covenantal renewal. The prepositional phrase, "from the presence of one… /*min ladun badīʿ*" indicates that the Bāb himself is a wondrously new creative being and is repeated in the text at *Sūrat al-Musaṭṭar* (*The Writing*) (QA11:14) and frequently elsewhere.

Another example is:

> "Fear ye God and breathe not a word concerning His Most Great Remembrance other than what hath been ordained by God, inasmuch as We have established a separate covenant (*al-ʿahd al-qayyim*) regarding Him with every Prophet and His followers. Indeed, We have not sent any Messenger without this binding covenant and We do not, of a truth, pass judgment upon anything except according to the covenant of Him Who is the Supreme Gate (*dhālika al-bāb*) that hath been established. Erelong the veil shall be lifted from your eyes at the appointed time. Ye shall then behold the sublime (*al-ʿalī*) Remembrance of God, unclouded and vivid" (QA5, *Sūrat Yūsuf*, v. 33; SM70, SWB 46).

Note here again the repeated use of the divine name, the Exalted – *al-ʿAlī* as a simultaneous reference to both God and the Bāb.

4. The Story of Joseph and the Renewal of the Covenant

In the Qurʾān, the story of Joseph may be read as a renewal of the Abrahamic covenant which occurs in a frankly scandalous or shocking manner, one that could not have been predicted based only on tradition and social expectation. Such revolutionary change is symbolized in the Hebrew Bible with the heretical dream of the young Joseph in which he sees the sun, the moon and stars bow down to him as if he were a god or worse, God (Genesis 34:9). He recounts his dream to his father Jacob who warns him not to tell anyone about it. This feature of the story challenges tradition and "theology" which hold that only God himself is worthy of being bowed down to. As is well known, from this point forward, Joseph's vision or dream calls down upon him the ill-will, jealousy and hatred of his brothers. Both in the Hebrew Bible and in the Qurʾān's 12th sura, this theological scandal, and the jealousy and hatred it provoked, is ultimately understood as having been necessary for the salvation of the "divine remnant", Jacob and his tribe and, by association, the rest of humanity, symbolized by the Egyptians. It represents the preservation of religion as such and the renewal of the covenant (Genesis 50:15–21; Q12:91–92).

In the Qurān, the denouement of this forgiveness is celebrated in the final scene of the Sura of Joseph when his entire family come to Egypt after having recognized the truth of his original dream and actually bow down to him in reality (Q12:100). Thus is Joseph's shocking dream "made sense of" as promised in the beginning of the sura at Q12:6 where the Qurān says that this sura will fully explain otherwise puzzling events, *taʾwīl al-aḥādīth*. This second bowing may also be seen as a performance of the original gesture of assent on the Day of the Covenant mentioned at Q7:172 (Lawson 2024). Such a narrative bespeaks a prevailing valorisation of change and renewal as sacrament, that in which God's presence or wisdom may be detected. With the Bāb's work, studied here, we will come to understand a similar valorisation of creativity and originality as an essential dimension of the divine and its relation to (perpetual) origination, humanity and "religion". Joseph and his story figure in Shīʿī sources as a symbol for the return of the hidden Imām (e.g., al-Ḥuwayzī 1963–1965/1383–1385, III:333–412). In addition, the story of Joseph is a favourite among Sufi mystics whether Sunni or Shīʿī. Muslims of all confessions and identities regard it as the most beautiful sura in the Qurʾān (Firestone n.d., EI2). Such universal and universalizing symbolism will be elaborated and emphasized both in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* by the Bāb, discussed here, and in later Bahāī scriptures.

5. The *Qayyūm al-Asmā*

In the context of Islamic religious culture, whether Sunni or Shīʿī, the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* is, like Joseph's dream, also most shocking and scandalous, whether from the point of view of contents or form. With the rise of the Bābī religion and its attraction of thousands of supporters and followers, it becomes clear that what is shocking and scandalous for some is wondrous, highly creative and inspiring for others, a sign of hope. This work is ostensibly a Qurʾān commentary (*tafsīr*) on the Chapter of Joseph (*sūrat Yūsuf*), the 12th sura of the Qurʾān. It is known by several titles in Arabic: (1) *Tafsīr sūrat Yūsuf*, "The Commentary on the Sura of Joseph"; (2) *Aḥsan al-Qaṣaṣ*, "The Best of Stories"; and (3) *Qayyūm al-Asmā* (see below for translation). This third title most perfectly captures the all-important feature of innovation and newness which the work represents in both form and content because it alludes to categories and realities yet unknown or experienced. The word *Qayyūm* ("self-subsisting"), originates in the Qurʾān where it occurs three times and always in tandem with another essential divine attribute, the Ever-Living (*al-ḥayy*) (Q2:255 (the seminal Throne Verse), Q3:2; and Q20:111).

The divine attribute *al-Ḥayy* "The Ever-Living" will, as it happens, also feature prominently in Bābī identity, especially in the designation the Bāb eventually gave to the first group of Muslims to recognize him. Collectively, these eighteen persons are eventually called by the Bāb "Letters of the Living/*ḥurūf al-ḥayy*", the first of whom was Mullā Ḥusayn. This title was chosen, at least superficially, because of the numerical (*abjad*) value of the word *ḥayy* (18), but this was obviously not the only reason given the strong connection in the Qurʾān between *al-Qayyūm* and *al-Ḥayy*. According to the Bāb, the designation "Letters of the Living" may apply, in turn, to his first 361 converts and, ultimately, to the entire body of his followers (Amanat 2005, pp. 190–93).

The title, *Qayyūm al-Asmā*, may be literally translated as "the self-subsisting of the [divine] names" with the sense that it is this very self-subsisting that places *qayyūm* "self-subsisting" beyond all other divine names by virtue of it originally having given rise to them in all their multiplicity and variation. Bausani's translation of this challenging title remains the best one, *Colui s'erge su gli attributi* "He who rises beyond the [divine] attributes" (Bausani 1959, p. 460).[3]

For all its connotation of utter transcendence, this title, which was given to the work by the Bāb himself, is meant also to evoke the figure of the decidedly not transcendent Joseph, and his highly fraught very earth-bound epic, because its numerical, *abjad* value is the same as Yūsuf: 156 (N.B., 1 + 5 + 6 = 12, symbol of the 12th or hidden Imām). Thus the title indicates a metaphysical or spiritual truth: the divine cannot be encountered except through created reality. *Qayyūm* as *Qayyūm* is beyond thought, experience and

being. However, *Qayyūm* as Joseph (and his story), is its spiritual metaphor, symbol or manifestation (*maẓhar*), and also part of the world. The title *Qayyūm al-Asmā* implies, then, that the more we can understand Joseph, the more we can understand the otherwise unknowable divine, hidden, self-subsisting, ever-living reality which is the source of all creation and existence.

In the Qurān, one important name for this source of all creation and existence, as we will explore more fully below, is precisely *al-Badīʿ*, the Absolute Originator (i.e., from nothing, *ex nihilo*) whose act of Origination, the non-Qurʾānic *al-ibdāʿ*, is also referred to numerous times in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*. Unlike in the Qurān where there are only four instances of this term, *badīʿ* occurs dozens of times in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*. It is also significant that this word hardly appears at all in the Bāb's earlier major work, the *Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara,* which was completed just a few months prior to his meeting with Mullā Ḥusayn when he began to write the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*. Nor does this word appear in what is generally regarded as the Bāb's oldest surviving work, the *Risāla al-sulūk* whose exact date of composition is unknown but which can be dated from internal evidence to within the lifetime of Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī, probably during the last year of his life (MacEoin 1992, pp. 44–45).

The prolific use of the Arabic word *badīʿ* in this text is a major stylistic innovation, among many others, from the Bāb's pre-manifestation writing and marks, perhaps, a profound change in the way he saw himself, or at least a change in the way he wished to present himself to others. This change is no doubt connected with those mystic and spiritual encounters the Bāb says he had with the Imām, encounters which likely took place between the time of the death of Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī in late December 1843 or early January 1844 and the meeting with Mullā Ḥusayn, nearly five months later (*Dawnbreakers* 253). Several of the changes in style between the pre-manifestation and post-manifestation writings have been noted elsewhere (Lawson 2012). However, the distinctive use of this word *badīʿ* has not been treated previously.

Equally important for the study of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*, is the fact that the Arabic word *qayyūm*, discussed above, is a derivation of the Arabic tri-literal consonantal root, Q W M, from which the related words *qāim* "messiah", *qiyāma* "resurrection", *mustaqīm* "straight" (path), and *qayyim* "true" (religion), are derived. Because of the structure of the Arabic language and especially word formation from common roots, those who first read the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* would immediately see reference to the return of the hidden Imām, the Qāʾim and his identification with Joseph, in the title alone. At the time and place of the composition of this *tafsīr* by the Bāb, there was probably no more urgent or powerful symbol than *al-qāim*, the messianic figure expected by Islām and more specifically Imāmī Shīʿī Islām, who, it was firmly believed would appear from occultation to restore justice and usher in a new cycle of history (Amanat 2005). At the time of the Bāb's writing this work, 1000 or so years since the disappearance of the hidden Imām, expectation of his appearance was running very high. In addition to allusions to the Qāʾim and *Qiyāma* "Resurrection/Judgment Day" the title also alludes to one of the major concerns of the Qurān and Islamic religion, "the path of righteousness" or "the straight path", *al-ṣirāt al-mustaqīm,* mentioned 33 times in the Qurān, and its near synonym, *al-dīn al-qayyim*, "the true faith" mentioned five times. These words are repeated dozens of times in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* in quite multifarious contexts. In return, of course, these words are understood as standing for the Qāʾim and his nearness. Such is the distinctively dynamic hermeneutic circuitry at work in this text.

6. A New Music and the Grammar of Spiritual Revolution

> *Regard thou the one true God as One Who is apart from, and immeasurably exalted above, all created things. The whole universe reflecteth His glory, while He is Himself independent of, and transcendeth His creatures. This is the true meaning of Divine unity. He Who is the Eternal Truth is the one Power Who exerciseth undisputed sovereignty over the world of being, Whose image is reflected in the mirror of the entire creation. All*

> *existence is dependent upon Him, and from Him is derived the source of the sustenance of all things*. Bahá'u'lláh (1971, p. 166)

To return to the word *badīʿ*, and the various derivations of the key triliteral consonantal root, B-D-ʿAyn, the last consonant, the Arabic letter *ʿayn*, has no direct equivalent in English. It is pronounced with an initial deep, swallowed, pharyngal stop. This word occurs dozens of times throughout the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* as an emblem of newness, originality, and, perhaps, what will come to be called "modernity" and even "the avant-garde" in analogous social and artistic developments in contemporary "Western" society (Lawson 2017; cf. Martin 1996). Such, however, would not be the first time in the history of Islamic culture that the term *badīʿ* became a symbol for what we call modernity. The "*badīʿ* movement" among the so-called literary "moderns" (*muḥdathūn*) of the Abbasid period brought profound and long-lasting changes in poetics, changes reflecting the social, political and religious transformations that had developed by this time since the founding of Islām, two and a half centuries earlier (van Gelder n.d., EI2; Heinrichs n.d., EI2). This particular cultural transformation has recently been linked to developments in scriptural exegesis (Stetkevych 1981, 1991, esp. 5–37) and thus is not irrelevant as background for the present discussion, even though the Bāb's main concerns were far from literary, as commonly understood. Because of the foundational theory of the Arabic language as holy, it is accurate to say that on some level all of the Bāb's concerns were literary. Certainly he uses the word *badīʿ* to refer to his remarkable literary abilities and authorial role in producing what is also called revelation, in addition to its meaning as an attribute of the transcendent God. Such can give rise to what might be thought of as a "theophanic confusion" which is the subject of the following section.

7. Paronomasia and Anagram: *ibdāʿ* (Divine Creation) and *ʿibāda* (Servitude)

Such confusion may be further intensified as a result of the quite natural and much esteemed "paronomastic" genius of the Arabic language.[4] One of the results of the classical *badīʿ* modernism was the efflorescence of a new and daring use of paronomasia, the technical term for punning or wordplay. In Arabic, punning does not have the same low status it does in English. Quite the contrary. In the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* it is dizzyingly frequent and must be understood as one of the chief factors in the Bāb's writing being seen as divine revelation. The degree and mastery of such wordplay by the Bāb is utterly breath-taking. Indeed, it is such wordplay that contributes in large measure to the phenomenon of identity melding mentioned above.

For example, it would not have been lost on the Bāb's readers that the word *badīʿ* is also an anagrammatic evocation of the spiritual value of servitude, *ʿibāda*. Seen as an anagram of the important Qurʾānic religious term *ʿabd*/*ʿibāda*—for which the root is ʿAyn-B-D—"servant", "slave", "worshipper" and even "lover", *badīʿ*/*ibdāʿ* incorporates its meaning. In such a way, the universally esteemed virtue of servitude, *ʿubūdiyya*, a term which lends itself as the name for the 35th sura of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* (see below), may be understood to be in semantic harmony with an admittedly quite theoretical *budūʿiyya* "wonderment", a word not found in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* (or perhaps elsewhere), but is silently suggested through the poetics and verbal storm of the text. A word that does occur, however, is *ibdāʿ*. Fortunately, these two words, *ibdāʿ* and *ʿibāda*, and their mutually referential dynamics have been explicated by Henry Corbin in his ground-breaking study of Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240). Here, Corbin refers to Ibn ʿArabī's profound discussion of prayer. While divine manifestation began, not necessarily temporally but ontologically, with the process called Origination (*ibdāʿ*), prayer (*ṣalāt*), also known as divine service or worship (*ʿibāda*), and its three movements of the body: (1) standing (verticality, a symbol of the human aspiration, growth), (2) bowing (horizontality, a symbol of animal growth) and (3) prostration (descending, a symbol of vegetal growth, root-sinking) is actually a performance or recital of divine Origination. *Ibdāʿ* (divine origination) and *ʿIbāda* (divine service or servitude) are, in some sense, spiritually equivalent.

"Thus, Prayer is a recurrence of creative Creation. *Ibdāʿ* (Origination) and *ʿibāda* (worship) are homologous; both proceed from the same theophanic aspiration and intention. The Prayer of God is His aspiration to manifest Himself, to see Himself in a mirror, but in a mirror which itself sees Him (namely, the faithful whose Lord He is, whom He invests with one or another of His Names). The Prayer of man fulfils this aspiration; by becoming the mirror of this Form, the orant sees this 'Form of God' in the most secret sanctuary of himself" (Corbin 1981, pp. 261–62).

Corbin observes here a salient and important truth about the way in which Arabic generates meaning. The resonances and connections between such otherwise vastly different words as *ibdāʿ* and *ʿibāda*, thought in the same mental "breath", cause the mind to construct analogies and mutually enhancing meanings or intensification of meaning that unaided "rational dialectics would never have been able to discover" (Corbin 1981, p. 265). In the *Qayyūm al-Asmāʾ* there are innumerable instances of just such divine "punning" (more properly, *jināṣ*) with these two words and countless others. We have encountered some of these above and will encounter more below, especially those involving the tri-literal consonantal root patterns B-D-ʿAyn and ʿAyn-B-D. As we have seen, the Bāb's name, ʿAlī (lofty, exalted, sublime, also a divine attribute) is used in such a way.

8. Verily I Am God, Authorial Presence and the Melding of Identity

In the *Qayyūm al-Asmāʾ*, there is a deliberate blurring, or better, melding of authorial identity. This is such a pervasive feature of the text that it is important to discuss it at least in broad outline with one or two textual examples in order to better understand our key word, *badīʿ*. The topic or problem of confusion or reversal of identity, especially in Islamic mysticism, is certainly not new with this composition by the Bāb. One might consider the basic and characteristic Sufi preoccupation with annihilation, *fanāʾ*, of the self and the perduration, *baqāʾ* of God (or at least the divine attributes) in its place as an earlier instance. However, here in the *Qayyūm al-Asmāʾ* it is articulated with such thoroughgoing consistency in numerous different combinations of terms, and in such a wide variety of contexts that it must be accounted as one of several "wondrously new", *badīʿ* features of the text. The ultimate focus of the *Qayyūm al-Asmāʾ* is the renewal of the pre-eternal covenant mentioned at Q7:172. Just as that covenant may be seen as the prelude to a new world, this covenantal renewal proclaimed by the Bāb is understood as the starting point for the next new historico-spiritual cycle or world this text is presented as inaugurating.

Shīʿī spirituality and religion rely on a melding of the identity of God with the Fourteen Infallibles, those immune (*maʿṣūm*) from error. They are: Muḥammad the Prophet, Fāṭima, ʿAlī and the remaining eleven Imāms including the last, the hidden 12th Imām, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan, the Qāʾim or Mahdi. This is a major theme of Shīʿism and much scholarly discourse is devoted to making clear that even though there seems to be such a divine confusion in the various statements of the Imāms, as a matter of fact God is still quite transcendent above them (Amir-Moezzi 1994; Cole 1982; Bausani 1972). This theological and philosophical problem represents a continuing source of what might be thought a noetic tension of ambiguity that has been a productive generator of meaning, including prayers and commentaries, from the earliest days of Shīʿī scholarship. Indeed, such theophanic ambiguity is intimately combined in what has been described as an essential and enshrined cultural ambiguity in Iran in general (Mottahedeh 1985). Such ambiguity or, to use Corbin's preferred term "amphiboly", has created throughout Islamic history a highly appreciative audience from within Sufism, from Ḥallāj (d. 922) to Niffarī (d. 965) to the Ghazālī brothers (d. 1111 & 1123), to Rūzbehān Baqlī (d. 1209), to Ibn ʿArabī and beyond to the Ḥikmatī school and the elaboration of what must be seen as neo-Twelver Shīʿī philosophy in the Safavid period (1501–1736), and finally the writings of the first two Shaykhī masters.

The basic structure of this melding of identity is based on classical Aristotelian hylomorphism which is then reconstrued according to the specific concerns of a specific mystic, philosopher or theologian. This theory says every existent is a combination of two elements, matter and form. Form here is understood as an unseen emanative element that both causes

matter to exist and enlivens it. The understanding of form in Islamic thought has relied on various metaphors, from Avicenna's "being (*wujūd*)", to Suhrawardī's "light (*nūr*)", to Ibn ʿArabī's "mercy (*raḥma*)" to Ḥaydar Amulī's "divine friendship (*walāya*)" to Mullā Ṣadrā's "essential motion (*ḥaraka jawhariyya*)". By whatever name the form is known, it is understood as a metaphor for the divine creative energy without which nothing would exist. Thus, every existent (Aristotle's *ousia*) is a marriage or amalgam of comparatively "dead" matter and this divine energy. We say comparatively dead because in later Islamic thought even this deadness was understood as simply a less intense instance of the divinely originated form. In the writings of Shaykh Aḥmad and Sayyid Kāẓim these various notions of divine energy or "form" are combined and used in innovative ways, even if these authors from time to time express disagreement with this or that philosopher, such as Shaykh Aḥmad's condemnation of certain of the philosophical doctrines of Mullā Ṣadrā or his son-in-law, Muḥsin *Fayḍ* Kāshānī. Ultimately, matter is a veil for the sacred form which simultaneously reveals and conceals spiritual reality. (Rashtī in Lawson 2012, p. 69).

The confusion about knowing the divine from the not-divine was expressed by Ruzbehan Baqli (d. 1209) with the word *iltibās* "disguise". Divinity disguises itself in this or that existential instance consisting of a combination or melding of Matter and Form. This is one of the ways in which the cloak of Joseph (on whose Qurʾānic sura, #12, the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* is a commentary) is understood: that which disguises the divine beauty of Joseph. Thus Ḥallāj's scandalous "I am the Truth", or the countless theopathic expressions in the Sufi tradition and the Imamology of later 12er Shīʿism, are more immediately pertinent. As Bausani and Corbin and many others have emphasized, the nature of the Imām is not divine incarnation but rather manifestation: *maẓhar*. This Arabic noun of place, not agency, means location where appearance occurs, not the cause of the appearance, which would be *muẓhir* (Cole 1982). The Imāms, according to Shaykh Aḥmad are, precisely, such divine manifestations Whom it is sometimes impossible not to think of as God; but, because God as divine essence is totally and forever protected and inviolable beyond thought or even being and non-being, then it is permissible, or rather unavoidable, to experience such divine confusion or amphiboly. It is part of being human. The Imāms, in short, represent the most that human intellectual and spiritual effort (*himma*) can ever know about divinity.

This divine confusion is very much at work in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*. One might with profit employ a musical metaphor to describe the extraordinary degree to which the Bāb's writing evokes this sacramental tension in every verse of the composition. The effect is nothing short of symphonic, especially if we think in terms of a music of ideas or "pure thought" (Scholem 1961). The same may be said of the Qurʾān, a work which also raises important questions about authorship and the nature of divine revelation, and which is also ever present in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*. One could choose any verse as an example, but there is a type of verse in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* which shows this phenomenon most directly, the "I am God" verse.

In the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* and throughout his writings to the very end, such as the *Arabic Bayān*, the Bāb frequently quotes, either in whole or in part, the distinctive Qurʾānic verse at Q20:14, part of the story of Moses at Mt. Sinai. Here, God says: "Verily verily I am God: there is no god except Me so worship Me and establish prayer for My Remembrance".

Innanī anā l-lāhu lā ilāha illā anā fa-uʿbudnī wa-aqimi ṣ-ṣalāta li-dhikrī

There is, of course, wide variation among the various English translations of this verse. The most important is the two ways in which *lā ilāha illā anā* is translated, either as "There is no god but Me" or, as in Yusuf Ali, "there is no God but I". Such a choice raises numerous grammatical questions, of course. However, the most important question has to do with the "I am" motif in Abrahamic monotheism, as in the famous, grammatically disconcerting, statement by Jesus "Before creation I am" (not "I was") (John 8:58 cf. Exodus 3:14). The above Qurʾān verse also disturbs the simultaneous extreme or stark apophaticism of Islām (and Judaism) while at the same time emphasizing the absolute power of God. In uttering "I am God" the person who is saying it, originally the prophet Muḥammad, is tinged by the divinity of the statement and his voice is blended with (or "disguises") the voice of God.

It is important, also, to point out that the following Qurʾānic verse, Q20:15, speaks of the Day of Judgment, here referred to as "the Hour, *al-sāʿa*" which God "has willed to keep hidden". While not quoted explicitly at every instance of the "I am God" verses by the Bāb, his audience would certainly have been aware of the inference and no doubt actually heard the following verse in their minds, having more than likely memorized the Qurʾān. The point in discussing the "I am" motif here is to draw attention to its ubiquity throughout the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*, a ubiquity which in the music and poetics of the composition causes an important and obviously intentional blurring of identity between the author(s) of this text (God, the hidden Imām and the Bāb) and the author(s) of the Qurʾān (God, the angel of revelation and Muḥammad).

One instance of this first-person usage is in "The Chapter of the Yearning Perceptive Hearts ". The Bāb, in the mode of revelation, writes:

> "Say: Verily verily I am the wondrously new creative law from the wondrously ever new (and simultaneously ever ancient) creative God. Indeed God is Mighty All-Wise" (QA59, *Sūrat al-Afida*, v.15; cf SM476).

Qul innanī āna al-farḍu al-badīʿ min allāhi al-badīʿ wa kāna allahu ʿazīza^{n} ḥakīma^{n}

Visually, rhythmically, and "theologically" there is a perfect parallel here with the Bāb's writing and the Qurʾān verse quoted above. Notably, in the Qurʾān, the verse ends with a mention of "My remembrance, *dhikrī*" which is, of course, one of the more important and frequent titles assumed by the Bāb and used by his followers (In fact, it may be more frequent in the *Qayyúm al-Asmā* as one of his titles than the current most popular one, the Bāb. See Lawson 2012, pp. 46–74). To the extent that the Remembrance of God may be thought to communicate something of God's otherwise unknowable reality, here at QA59:1, the same communication of "divine substance" is echoed in the repetition of the word *badīʿ*. The Bāb is commanded to say, "I am the wondrously new creative law" and this on the authority of God whose attribute, *al-Badīʿ*, is precisely the same: wondrous, new (and simultaneously ancient) and creative. He is the one who creates from absolute nothingness, *creatio ex nihilo*: the Absolute Originator. Here, the discourse is complicated in a Socratic way because the context of the Bāb's composition, a pious fiction that the hidden Imām is transmitting the text to him, raises the attendant question: Who is saying "Say!"? This word is not used in Q20:14 as it happens, though as is well known the "Say" verses are a distinctive and frequent feature of the Qurʾān, a feature that emphasizes the revelational status of the Qurʾān. In these verses, God is explicitly telling Muḥammad to "Say" something so that there can be no question of the identity of the real author.

A response to this question returns us to a remarkable feature of the composition. Much of its textual charisma resides in the fact that its four separate voices, (1) God, (2) the Imām, (3) the Bāb, (4) Sayyid ʿAlī Muḥammad, are frequently presented in a kind of noetic confusion or harmony which may first appear as dissonance. Here, it could be God or the hidden Imām commanding the Bāb to say that the hidden Imām and/or the Bāb is the "wondrously new creative divine law". This confusion or, better theophanic (viz., symphonic) harmony is similar to that expressed in the potentially confusing image in the Qurʾān with the Light verse (Q24:35) and the image of divine complexity and confusion in the phrase "light upon light". Such conditions the entire *Qayyūm al-Asmā* but comes to a kind of apogee in a verse such as the one quoted above. There are many instances throughout the text that use precisely the same Qurʾānic "trope": "verily verily I am" followed by either an exact quotation of the original Qurʾānic verse or some other combination of sacred themes and symbols. It is indeed overwhelming. Additionally, here it is no less overwhelming and inspiring because of the special word that is used to end the verse, *badīʿ*, whose main semantic valence is newness, unprecedentedness, creativity, imaginative power and even beauty.

Another instance of this usage occurs as follows:

> "O People of the Divine Cloud! Hearken to my call: Verily I am the servant of God and his most great remembrance, is there any summons apart from God your

> Lord, the Truth, that can attract you? Indeed, he is the possessor of tenderness for his servants and what is in your souls ye women of the most great swooning (*al-ṣaʿ al-akbar*). Return to your chambers and abide in the wondrously new creative cause from God, the Truth and await my cause coming from the upright alif (*al-alif al-qāim*) with the Truth. Verily, the victorious help of God and his days are, according to the Mother Book, close at hand" (QA91, *Sūrat al-Rabīʿ*, v.22; SM749).

The first-person phrase at the beginning of this passage is *innīʿabduʿllāh wa dhikruhu*. It would not have been possible for his earliest readership, highly educated in the scriptures of Islām, to read or hear this without thinking of the verse at Q20:14 and all of the theophanic implications it communicates. The Bāb deploys this spiritual energy in connection with the word *badīʿ* as if to suggest that one of the wondrous features of God's creation is the way in which the words or verses of God, when channelled through the human soul, actually "dye" (cf. *ṣibgha*, Q2:138) that soul with divinity. So, in our sample of verses concerning *badīʿ* there are a few uses of the first person in which the identities of God, Muḥammad, the hidden Imām and the Bāb are blended in a single locution in ways that cannot be sharply distinguished. It is one of the many distinctive revelatory features or "literary events" in the *Qayyúm al-Asmā*, it is suggested, that thrilled and enthused the early readership and presented them with an evidentiary miracle of the first order. Additionally, this occurred on a number of counts. First is the fact that this text was revealed with great rapidity, without lucubration or study, in the presence of witnesses; second, it was composed by one who was not a professional religious scholar, poet or litterateur but a young man of the merchant class comparatively uneducated; three, and perhaps most importantly, it demonstrates that the author had a truly awe-inspiring control over the entire Qurʾān whose verses, partial verses, words and references here are just so many keys of a textual piano played by a master—if self-taught—musician, extempore.

This happens quite frequently so that, for example, in the following passage when the third person pronoun is used and modified as *badīʿ* it is impossible not to think of God, the Imām and the Bāb as being indicated simultaneously. Closely following Qurʾānic diction here (as throughout the text) the Bāb, incorporating two Qurʾānic verses which describe God as being the most truthful (*aṣdaq*) of speakers (Q4:87 and 122), writes:

> "God, beside Whom there is no god! He, *huwa*, (TL: or he, the Imām and by association the Bāb) is the most truthful of speakers according to the truth with the truth most newly creative, wondrously new" (QA5, *Sūrat Yusuf*, v.11; SM70; in other MSS. this sura is entitled *al-Ḥusayn*).

The third person singular pronoun, *huwa*, indicates one who is absent. In Shīʿism absence (*ghayb* < *al-ghayba*) is sacred as the abode of the hidden Imām, who in Shīʿī theology, as a result of the distinctive apophaticism it has cultivated from earliest times, is functionally equivalent to God. Messianic Shi'ism venerates an absence that is paradoxically, full of presence (Amir-Moezzi 2001) especially with regard to the teachings of the Shaykhis. As Corbin and others have demonstrated, in Imāmī Shīʿism absence is just as sacred and holy as the Imām himself (Corbin 1971–1972, i 285–329). Since the Bāb is speaking on behalf of the hidden Imām it is then not only possible but in the fervent intensity of the composition, quite natural to understand this singular pronoun as referring simultaneously to all three: God, the Imām, and the Bāb. Such a highly charged reading would be quite in line with the spirit of Akhbārī scriptural hermeneutics (Lawson 2006) and quite familiar to the Bāb's earliest readers. The hidden Imām functions for the Bāb as the angel of revelation functioned for the prophet Muḥammad. This verse represents a frequent pattern occurring throughout the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*. In this instance it is clear that the use of the adverbial *badīʿa* is meant as a reflexive adjective for the text itself. As is the case with the Qurʾān, the subject of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* is frequently the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* itself, including its ultimate unknowable source (God), its secondary source, the hidden Imām and the Bāb, Sayyid ʿAlī Muḥammad. All these actors are blended in apposition to the third person singular pronoun *huwa* (he, him, it). Note that the subject pronoun *huwa* functions also as an object

simultaneously; thus, through a single, quite innovative and no doubt to some, scandalous "grammatical gesture", likely to be deemed a mistake by unsympathetic readers, the Báb also closes the gap between subject and object. A rather magisterial and, as it happens, wondrously innovative "literary" feat.

Above, we introduced the translation of this key word or "technical term", *badīʿ*, as that which takes into account the most ancient remote "past"—the time in pre-eternity (*azal*) when, or even before, the original Day of the Covenant took place, and the most recent present, with an eye on the future. Not only does the word speak of wonder but it is itself, as a concept, wondrous in its meaning and operation through which worldly time is collapsed. It is not merely new; it is both new and old. The *qāʾim* is equally unimaginably ancient since he was among those created even before the Day of the Covenant (Kazemi 2009) and new because of his reappearance. Time is, in a spiritual sense, vanquished, neutralized, annihilated and somehow enchanted. It is such a perspective which makes it difficult to use a term like "Eschaton/Last Things" in discussing the Bahāʾī and Bābī phenomena because here, as has recently been convincingly argued for the Qurʾān, there is no lastness (El Masri 2020, pp. 93–131). Life goes on, it does not end. *Al-ākhira* has more of a sense of "next" than finality. The term *badīʿ* captures this meaning and, if you will, "litanises" it. Its formidable energy suffuses the *Qayyūm al-Asmāʾ* and all subsequent Bahāʾī revelations whether by the Báb or Bahāʾuʾlláh. A final example of an "I am God" passage is in explanation of Q12:82 and thus locutions such as "blessed community" and "caravan" are metaphorized accordingly by way of commentary.

"Say: Verily God hath inspired me [to write] this (*dhālika*) most great *tafsīr*, in this verse flaming with the fire of the perceptive yearning hearts (*nār al-afida*) by his command. And He is God, ever knowing all things.

Verily verily I am God! He who there is no God but Him! So ask the blessed community (*qarya*) in which we were living. Verily, this divine Word is the caravan in which we arrived. Verily we are being directly addressed (*manṭūq*^{an}) by God, the Exalted, upon the Truth" (QA82, *Sūrat al-Aʿẓam*, vv. 43 and 44; SM675).

This blending of identity carries on in many other instances, too numerous to recount here, in the very frequent phrasal construction which ends with "God, the Wondrously New Originator: *allāh al-badīʿ*". This formula is repeated with a number of different nouns, Cause, Remembrance, Báb, and Verses, among others. Thus, *amr allāh al-badīʿ* in the first instance means: the Cause of God, the Wondrously New Originator. However, as a result of the poetics of the text, which depends upon the underlying theory of manifestation (theophanology) it is also impossible not to read it as "the Wondrously New Originating Cause of God". This textual amphiboly in which it is very difficult to draw a line between God and his cause, or even more to the point, between God and his Gate, the Báb, suffuses the text from beginning to end.

9. Distribution and Frequency of *badīʿ* and Derivatives in the *Qayyūm al-Asmāʾ*

The frequent instances of the term *badīʿ* and its derivatives (including homonyms and anagrams (as seen earlier) such as words construed on the Arabic root B-D-ʾ, in which the Arabic letter *hamza* –ʾ– replaces the *ʿayn* –ʿ–, and means "to begin (again)", or B-D-W "to appear" or "change of mind", as in the Shīʿī doctrine of divine change of mind (Ayoub 1986) and synonyms, such as ʿAyn-J-B "wondrous, strange" represent a sustained theme of wonder and innovation/newness throughout the *Qayyūm al-Asmāʾ*. One might say that the *Qayyūm al-Asmāʾ* enshrines wonder as a sacramental element of the covenant and its renewal (cf. Faber 2022, pp. 381–410, esp. 389 and 411 n.1). To give some idea of the way in which this highly charged word circulates through the *Qayyūm al-Asmāʾ* the following breakdown is offered.

By far, the most frequent occurrence of *badīʿ* is in the adverbial form, *badīʿa*^{n}. There are around 60 instances of this and because there are so many and in so many separate contexts it is not easy to generalize. It can occur at the end of a verse, in line with normal Arabic and Qurʾānic rhymed prose, *sajʿ*. However, it can occur in the middle of a verse to indicate

a pause. Wherever it occurs it indicates that the entire gist or meaning of the verse, and not just this or that word, such as Remembrance (*dhikr*), Cause (*amr*), or Truth/Reality (*ḥaqq*) are qualified by divine newness, change, and originality. The first instance of this is in the sixth verse of the third sura, *al-Īmān* "Faith" or "Security". This verse may be considered a re-revelation and explanation of Q12:6 where the phrase mentioned earlier, "[this sura is an] explanation of the meaning of events/*ta'wīl al-aḥādīth*" is the main purpose for the revelation of the Sura of Joseph. In addition, the verse offers a general elucidation of Q12:2, the verse-lemma under which this sura is composed as its *tafsīr.*

> "That he (the Bāb) might show you some of his verses and explain to you the meaning of events in accordance with the straight path, in truth straight in a wondrously new and original manner (*badīʿa*)" (QA3 *Sūrat al-Imān*, v. 6; SM51).

li-yuriyakum min āyātihi wa min ta'wīl al-aḥādīth ʿalā'·s- ṣirāṭ al-qayyim bi'l-ḥaqq al-mustaqīm badīʿa

Another example of this is as follows:

> "Verily, We have sent down this Book to every community in their own language and we have truly sent this (*hādhā*) Book in the wondrously new language of the Remembrance according to the Truth, with the Truth" (QA4, *Sūrat al-Madīna*, v. 6; SM59).

Innā naḥnu nazzalnā al-kitāb ʿalā kulli ummata bilisānihim qad nazzalnā hādhā al-kitāb bi-lisān al-dhikr ʿalā al-ḥaqq bi'l-ḥaqq badīʿa.

Although the word occurs at the end of the verse, its adverbial force applies not only to the obvious possibilities "the tongue of the Remembrance" but it also suffuses the entire verse with the meaning of wondrous, new, and creative, both in a primal originary sense and in the sense of current actuality. This verse also incorporates and thus comments in a "wondrously new way" on Qurān 14:4:

"We sent not a messenger except (to teach) in the language of his (own) people, in order to make (things) clear to them. Now God leaves straying those whom He pleases and guides whom He pleases: and He is Exalted in power, full of Wisdom" (Yusuf Ali, slightly adjusted).

In its next most frequent occurrence, the adjectival/descriptive element is melded with the nominal/participial/verbal "energy" of the word *badīʿ*. For example, *al-amr al-badīʿ*, "this wondrous Revelation" or "new divine Cause" in "*Sūrat al-Mulk*" (Divine Dominion), v.9 (QA1:9).

Inna hādhā la-huwa al-sirr fī al-samawāt wa'l-arḍ ʿalā al-amr al-badīʿ bi-aydi (bi-idhni) Allāh al-ʿAlī kāna bi'l-ḥaqq fī umm al-kitāb maktūba.

> "This is the Mystery which hath been hidden from all that are in heaven and on earth, and in this wondrous Revelation it hath, in very truth, been set forth in the Mother Book by the hand of God, the Exalted" (QA1, *Sūrat al-Mulk*, v. 9; SM33; SWB p. 41).

In this verse, *badīʿ* modifies the important Qurānic covenant word *amr*, "divine Cause", as in *al-amr al-badīʿ* (translated as "wondrous Revelation" in SWB). Thus, it provides commentary, *tafsīr*, on the Qurān in a "wondrously new" way through allusion, paraphrase, word association, metaphor, imitation and rhyme. It is really unprecedented or, in Arabic, *badīʿ*. The word *badīʿ*, as mentioned, is also connected to the most primal act of divine creation or "origination": *ibdāʿ*. Here, the Bāb invokes this meaning when he says that this new Cause, which he declaims in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*—a new textual "mixture" or "reunion" of Text (Qurān) and Commentary (QA)—was decreed in the pre-eternal Mother Book by the very hand of God. Note again the use of the divine attribute "the Exalted" a translation of the Qurānic Arabic word *al-ʿAlī*. It is clearly no accident that this word refers simultaneously to God and to the Bāb, ʿAlī Muḥammad, in the same spiritual thought:

another "divine pun". In addition to the Mother Book (*umm al-kitāb*, Q3:7; 13:39; 43:4), there are several other Qurʾānic referents, such as "heavens and earth" (Q *al-samawāt wa'l-arḍ*, *passim*). As a matter of fact, in many verses, such as this one, every word is Qurʾānic. The originality and creativity, the *badīʿ* quality, resides in the way the Bāb so masterfully rearranges the language to apply to his own message. From one perspective, the *Qayyūm al-Asmāʾ* is ancient and more familiar than anything else in the culture; from another perspective, it is startlingly, even scandalously new. This is also another example of the coincidence of the opposites so pervasive as a symbol of covenant renewal in the *Qayyūm al-*Asmāʾ (Lawson 2012, pp. 75–92). The fluidity of the text and mastery of the Qurʾān that it demonstrates redounded powerfully to the claims implied in the repeated and emphatic use of the word *badīʿ*.

Other adjectival definite nominal uses of *badīʿ* occur throughout the *Qayyūm al-Asmāʾ*. Their function is to focus on specific sacred or spiritual ideas in Islām and especially in Shīʿism. One might consider the sura titles themselves as familiar things now to be recreated for the new age the Bāb was heralding. As such, the "table of contents" of the *Qayyūm al-Asmāʾ* functions as a divine to-do list or catalogue of features of culture, religion and society to be renewed, reborn, re-originated, revolutionized (see below). These are words standing for important religious or spiritual principles and/or persons which the Bāb casts in the form where the adjectival/descriptive element is melded with the nominal/participial/verbal "charisma" of the word *badīʿ*, from the most frequent to the least frequent. It should be noted that all of the words thus modified by *badīʿ* are, again, Qurʾānic, giving the sense of a profoundly new way of reading the ancient holy book:

Remembrance
al-dhikr al-badīʿ, x12
"the wondrously new and creative Remembrance (of God)" Note this is one of the Bāb's titles, along with Gate (*al-bāb*), Point (*al-nuqṭa*), and Mystery (*al-sirr*) among many others (Lawson 1988; see now Heern 2023). QA4:6;QA14:10; QA17:37; QA41:39; QA51:22; 55.28; QA56:21; QA60:42; QA61:30; QA63:29; QA63:36; QA89:11

Verses/Signs
al-āyāt al-badīʿa, x11
"the wondrously new and creative divine verses" QA17:30; QA26:17; QA48:37; QA51:22; QA61:20; QA65:12; QA65:35; QA92:8; QA92:13; QA98:23; QA110:34

Words
al-kalimat al-badīʿa, x11
"the creative, wondrous divine Word". Though this seems to occur only once in this precise form there are numerous related expression conjoining words construed on the tri-literal consonantal root K-L-M, such as the nominal plural *kalimāt*, the verbal/participial *kalām* and so on, including the frequent *kalām Allāh al-badīʿ* (see above the section on Identity Melding) QA11:37; QA32:24; QA48:37; QA49:11; QA61:20; QA63:36(x2); QA65:38; QA71:16; QA87:23; QA111:24

Truth/Reality
al-ḥaqq al-badīʿ, x11
"the wondrously new Absolute and unchangeable divine Truth" QA3:7; QA4:6; QA5:11; QA6:36; QA25:30; QA26:22; QA32:24; QA41:39; QA37:6; QA92:28; QA92:40

Cause/Command
al-amr al-badīʿ, x8
"the wondorusly new divine eternal Cause" QA1:9; QA10:38; QA20:19; QA57:39; QA60:7; QA87:23; QA88:7; QA91:22

Permission
al-idhn al-badīʿ, x4
"the wondrously new divine Permission" QA25:35; QA28:37; QA61:31; QA110:7

Fire
al-nār al-badīʿ x5
"the wondrously new divine Fire" this is used two ways, (1) in reference to the source of inspiration, along the lines of divine presence and (2) as punishment, Hell QA1:14; QA18:22; QA99:35(x3)

True Meaning
al-taʾwīl al-badīʿ, x5
"the wondrously new Interpretation" QA3:2; QA7:17; QA18:29; QA38:41 (x2)

Summons
al-nidāʾ al-badīʿ, x3
"the wondrously new divine Call or Summons" QA29:13; QA75:6; QA85:25

Speaker
al-nāṭiq al-badīʿ, x2
"the wondrously new Speaker of the divine" QA11:37; QA91:6

1 each:

Bayān
al-bayān al-badīʿ
"the wondrously new divine Revelation or Apocalypse" The Arabic word *bayān* will become most important as the title of the Bāb's last major work in which foretells the coming of "He whom God will make manifest". The Qurʾānic word is one of several meaning revelation or apocalypse (Lawson 2017, pp. 27–56) QA17:28

Law
al-farḍ al-badīʿ
"the wondrously new Law" QA59:15

Origination
al-ibdāʿ al-badīʿ
"the wondrously new origination from nothing, *ex nihilo*) QA25:21

Composition
al-inshāʾ al-badīʿ
"the wondrously new Production or Life" QA87:23

Scroll
al-saṭr al-badīʿ
"the wondrously new Scroll" QA76:35

Exegesis
al-tafsīr al-badīʿ
"this (*dhālika*) wondrously new Tafsīr/Explanation (of the Qurʾān)" QA110:41

In addition to these definite nouns in combination with a corresponding nominal adjective, there are several instances of the word *badīʿ* in clear reference to the Bāb but also grammatically indefinite. This occurs in the Bāb's paraphrase or imitation of the Qurʾānic phrase "from One All-wise, All-aware/*min ladun ḥakīmin khabīrin*" at the end of Q11:1:

Alif Lam Ra. A Book whose verses are set clear, and then distinguished, from One All-wise, All-aware (Arberry).

This phrase is re-cast at least four times in the *Qayyūm al-Asmāʾ* as *min ladun badīʿin* "from one, or from the presence of one, who is a wondrously new originator" (QA6:36, QA11:14, QA81:22, and QA84:4). It seems clear that this phrase is a direct reference to the Bāb's distinctive and prodigious literary creativity in addition to the wondrous newness of more strictly religious themes and topics as listed in the titles of the suras below. Of course, it also refers to God, and is therefore another instance of identity melding.

In addition to such nominal instances of the ideas in the root B-D-ʿAyn, there are also several verbal and related participial usages such as the third person perfect verb, *badaʿa* "he originated" or in a different form *abdaʿa* "he created", *badaʿnā* "we created" (QA55:22, QA60:14), *badʿ*, creation or beginning "in the beginning of the Cause" (QA29:13), "in the creation of the heavens and the earth" (QA56:21), *abdaʿa al-ibdāʿ* "He who originated Origination" (QA65:31, (QA25:21), *abḥur al-ibdāʿ* "the seas of origination" (QA65:38, QA71:16), *al-amr al-badīʿ fī mubtadiʾ ʿalā al-nuqṭat al-nār* "the wondrously new Cause was in the [first] origination at the very beginning of the creation of fire" (QA87:23; SM713). This striking and quite apposite verse, is quoted here in full:

"Indeed, this is a Goodly Word, its root is firmly established upon the divine throne and its branches are spread and abide throughout heaven by the permission of the Bāb. We bestow its fruit, the divine verses, at all times by the permission of God, when He wants to renew creation through the most wondrous creative divine Cause in the recreation of true justice *(al-ʿadl al-mubtadaʾ)* at the time when primordial fire itself was originated (*ʿalā al-nuqṭat al-nār*) concealed in the precincts of the divine primordial (cosmogonic) water" (QA87, *Sūrat al-Nabāʾ*, v. 23; SM713).

The translation "the precincts of . . . (cosmogonic) water" is of *ḥawl al-māʾ*" and conditioned by the Qurʾānic presupposition, at Q21:30, that God created all things from water:

> "Do not the Unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together (as one unit of creation), before we clove them asunder? *We made from water every living thing.* Will they not then believe?" (Yusuf Ali).

The operative phrase italicised in the verse is *wa jaʿalnā min al-mā kulla shay*. In the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*, then, elements such as water become poetic figures for the otherwise scientistic and technical term, *ibdāʿ*. The by now familiar original (*badīʿ*) water imagery flows through the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* with deep and interconnected poeticism, both intertextual, with regard to the Qurʾān, and intratextual, with regard to the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* itself. This deserves a separate study.

The word *al-mubtadiʿ* means creator, originator and also heretic. Vowelled slightly differently, *al-mubtadaʿ*, means created, originated. The "Goodly Word" in the above passage of QA is a reference to the "Goodly Word" which is likened to a "Goodly tree" in Q14:24. The Bāb simply carries on with the simile without actually mentioning the tree. However, his audience would have understood the reference completely. The tree is a well-attested metaphor for the covenant in the Qurʾān and continues here in the Bāb's writings and will continue throughout the Bahāī writings (Lawson 2003, 50-3). So when the Bāb says that the Tree has its roots in the divine Throne and its branches fill the sky, which is then a "new sky", he is anticipating such later Bahāī usages as when Bahāʾuʾllāh refers to his son ʿAbduʾl-Bahā, his appointed successor, as the Most Mighty Branch (*al-ghuṣn al-aʿẓam*). Finally, this verse emphasizes that even though the Bāb's contemporary writing and covenant appear highly innovative and possibly even heretical, it has all been preordained before time began, precisely at the time of the primordial covenant described at Q7:172.

A final example of the deverbal occurrences of B-D-ʿAyn is the non-Qurʾānic word *al-mubdiʿ*, the originator. In Ismaili thought it designates the demiurge in charge of Origination, *al-ibdāʿ*, which the absolutely transcendent and utterly unknowable God "beyond being and non-being" somehow "created" to carry on the act of immediate creation (Walker 1993, pp. 53, 76, 82–85). Here, and throughout his writings, the Bāb's basic philosophy seems quite similar to classical Ismaili philosophical theology and its uncompromising, some might even say, stark apophaticism, though we just saw how the starkness of the basic apophaticism is lent colour and intimacy by the use of such cosmogonic metaphors as "water". The juxtaposition of simultaneous divine remoteness with intimacy would have been familiar to the Bāb's readership whose faith was already based on such Qurʾānic "contradictions" as the insistence that God is remote in the sense that "no created things is even like His likeness", *laysa kamithlihi shay* (Q42:11) coupled with God's insistence that "We are closer to the human being than his own jugular vein" *naḥnu aqrab ilayhi min ḥabli al-warīd* (Q50:16). Rather than being contradictory, however, such usages are indicative of the deep structure of the text grammar of the Qurʾān in which the *coincidentia oppositorum* is a permanent and pervasive element (Lawson 2017).

Relentless apophatic philosophical theology also has a strong presence in Shaykhī thought (Corbin 1971–1972, iv:205–300; Hamid 1998; Lawson 2005). In any case, the Bāb uses the word *al-mubdiʿ* in QA75:4, QA80:24 and QA109:8. All three instances seem clearly to refer to the infinitely and frankly unimaginably transcendent God's original creative process, a standard meaning for the term, especially in classical Ismaili philosophy (Kāshānī 2014; Walker 1993, pp. 72–80; Landolt 2001, p. 87, Sijistānī, Peerwani (tr), *passim*). However, in the context of the pervasive *badīʿ* motif present from beginning to end of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* and evoked in so many related words and textual interrelationships, the word acquires a special status as yet another reference to the Bāb's artistic and literary creativity.

This survey of the *badīʿ* vocabulary is incomplete and makes no claim to thoroughness. A more complete study is at least partly dependent upon the eventual publication of a critical edition of the text and while progress has been made here, especially in the very impressive work by Ṭālibī (referred to in this article as "SM") many questions regarding minor variants, versification, vocabulary, grammar and other issues remain. Nonetheless, enough has been translated and analysed to make it possible to say without hesitation that a major theme of the Bāb's *Qayyūm al-Asmā* is the renewal of the ancient so-called Abrahamic covenant and this in a highly creative and original, even heretical, manner.

10. Chapter Titles of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* and the Spirit of *badīʿ*

The subtle and nuanced, yet powerful and uncompromising manner in which the Bāb is calling for a universal change, renewal of life, time and history may be thought symbolized in the 111 titles of the suras of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*. This "Table of Contents" functions as a catalogue of things to be renewed, miraculously recreated, "re"-originated and revolutionized. These titles are words that represent the most sacred elements of Islām and especially Ithnaʿ Ashari Shiʿism. Thus, the Bāb thinks not only in terms of renewal with regard to the covenant, though this is obviously a major part of the plan and the source of all other renewals. He also thinks of enchantment and vivification as these are connotations of the word *badīʿ*. The following table of titles gives an idea of the cornucopian intention of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*: each of the items represent a feature of life, religion and creation that is being, or is destined shortly to be, re-created through the power of *badīʿ*, personified in the return of the hidden Imām. Each of the following titles is preceded by the word *sūra*, and so carries the definite article *al-* (even for Fāṭima and Muḥammad) except suras 5, *Yūsuf*, "Joseph" and 45, *Huwa*, "He/Him". For formatting purposes, some of the titles have been abbreviated and may appear misspelled in English.

1 Dominion (*al-mulk*)
2 Clergy (*al-ʿulamā*)
3 Security (*al-īmān*)
4 The City (*al-madīna*)
5 Joseph (*Yūsuf*)
6 Martydom (*al-shahāda*)
7 Visitation (*al-ziyāra*)
8 Oneness (*al-tawḥīd*)
9 Mystery (*al-sirr*)
10 Cloud (*al-ʿamā*)
11 The Writing (*al-musaṭṭar*)
12 Atonement (*al-ʿāshūrā*)
13 Paradise (*al-firdaws*)
14 Holy (*al-quds*)
15 Will (*al-mashiyya*)
16 Throne (*al-ʿarsh*)
17 Gate (*al-bāb*)
18 Path (*al-ṣirāṭ*)
19 Sinai (*al-sīnā*)
20 Light (*al-nūr*)
21 Trees (*al-shajar*)
22 Water (*al-mā*)
23 Afternoon (*al-ʿaṣr*)
24 Value (*al-qadr*)
25 Seal (*al-khātam*)
26 Lawful (*al-ḥill*)
27 Lights (*al-anwār*)
28 Kinship (*al-qarāba*)
29 Houri (*al-ḥūriyya*)
30 Teaching (*al-tablīgh*)
31 Honor (*al-ʿizz*)
32 Living (*al-ḥayy*)
33 Victory (*al-naṣr*)
34 Hint (*al-ishāra*)
35 Servitude (*al-ʿubūdiyya*)
36 Justice (*al-ʿadl*)
37 Interpretation (*al-taʿbīr*)
38 Faṭima (*al-fāṭima*)
39 Thanks (*al-shukr*)
40 Human i (*al-insān*)
41 Book (*al-kitāb*)
42 Covenant (*al-ʿahd*)
43 Unique (*al-waḥīd*)
44 Dream (*al-ruʾyā*)
45 He (*huwa*)
46 Mirror (*al-mirʾāt*)
47 Proof (*al-ḥujja*)
48 Summons (*al-nidā*)
49 Principles i (*al-aḥkām*)
50 Principles ii (*al-aḥkām*)
51 Glory (*al-majd*)
52 Wisdom (*al-faḍl*)
53 Patience (*al-ṣabr*)
54 Youth (*al-ghulām*)
55 Pillar (*al-rukn*)
56 Cause (*al-amr*)
57 Elixir (*al-iksīr*)
58 Sadness (*al-ḥuzn*)
59 Perceptive Hearts (*al-afʿida*)
60 Remembrance i (*al-dhikr*)
61 Ḥusayn (*al-ḥusayn*)
62 Friends (*al-awliyā*)
63 Mercy (*al-raḥma*)
64 Muḥammad (*al-muḥammad*)
65 The Unseen (*al-ghayb*)
66 ExclusUnity (*al-aḥadiyya*)
67 Origination (*al-inshā*)
68 Promise (*al-waʿd*)
69 Return (*al-rajʿa*)
70 Justice (*al-qisṭ*)
71 Pen (*al-qalam*)
72 Camel (*al-baʿīr*)
73 Cave (*al-kahf*)
74 Friend (*al-khalīl*)
75 Sun (*al-shams*)
76 Leaf (*al-waraqa*)
77 Peace (*al-salām*)
78 Appearance (*al-ẓuhūr*)
79 Word (*al-kalima*)
80 Noon (*al-zawāl*)
81 Kāf (*al-kāf*)
82 Most Great (*al-aʿẓam*)
83 B (*al-bāʾ the letter "b"*)
84 Name (*al-ism*)
85 Truth (*al-ḥaqq*)
86 Bird (*al-ṭayr*)
87 Announcement (*al-nabā*)
88 Sending (*al-iblāgh*)
89 Human ii (*al-insān*)
90 Triplicity (*al-tathlīth*)
91 Quaternity (*al-tarbīʿ*)
92 Glorified (*al-mujallal*)
93 Bees (*al-naḥl*)
94 Testimony (*al-ishhād*)
95 Knowing (*al-ʿilm*)
96 Battle i (*al-qitāl*)
97 Battle ii (*al-qitāl*)
98 Struggle i (*al-jihād*)
99 Struggle ii (*al-jihād*)
100 Struggle iii (*al-jihād*)
101 Battle iii (*al-qitāl*)
102 Battle iv (*al-qitāl*)
103 Pilgrimage (*al-ḥajj*)
104 Laws (*al-ḥudūd*)
105 Princples iii (*al-aḥkām*)
106 Friday (*al-jumʿa*)
107 Marriage (*al-nikāḥ*)
108 Remembr. ii (*al-dhikr*)
109 Servant (*al-ʿabd*)
110 Avant-garde (*al-sābiqīn*)
111 Believers (*al-muʾminīn*)

This list then is a catalogue of things to be "re"-originated: "*badīʿ*-ified". It may not include everything but what it does include certainly goes to the heart and soul of historical and cultural Islām as believed and practiced in the Bāb's milieu. Each of these titles could be the subject of a separate article or even book, so rich is their meaning and history as background for the rise of the Bābī religion. Each and all of these various topics, ideas, things, rituals, obligations, virtues and even persons are envisioned in this text as being re-created, re-originated, re-thought, re-conceived, re-imagined, and reborn.

11. Conclusions

In the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* the Bāb—and by extension his followers, the Bābīs—is remarkably uninterested in Tradition, *Sunna,* unlike most Islamic groups, even in the 19th century. This text is, instead, concerned with change, creativity, and originality—which bespeaks concern for a future. Such ideas are firmly part of the semantic make-up of the Arabic word *badīʿ*, which happens to be a perfect antonym for *sunna* (tradition). As it happens, the word in Islamic theology (*ʿilm al-kalām*) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*) for heresy is *bidʿa* (pl. *bidaʿ*) construed on the same tri-literal consonantal root B-D-ʿAyn. Such gives some idea, then, of the doctrinal tensions generated by the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* whether with regard to its contents or form.

Whereas Ibn ʿArabī spoke of the "mercification" of existence as the ontological and cosmogonic process par excellence (Beneito 1998), the Bāb seems to opt for something like the "wondrification" of existence for the same phenomenon and process. As mentioned, throughout the history of Islamic thought there have been various metaphorizations for the discussion of cosmogony and ontology. For Avicenna the term was, in fact, being (*wujūd*), for Suhrawardi, the central cosmogonic and ontic principle was light (*nūr*), for Ibn ʿArabī it was, as mentioned, mercy (*raḥma*), and for Mullā Ṣadrā it was motion (*ḥaraka jawhariyya*). For the Bāb the ontic principle emerges as wonder: wonder is created through the wondrous, original and innovative creative power of God, *al-Badīʿ*, The Originator, *par excellence* (as in Q2:117 and 6:101) and the result of this creative power, what the uninitiated might call "mere" creation is also wonder and wondrousness (*al-inshā al-badīʿ*, as in QA104:5). The source of this wonder is, again, the apophatic divinity who simply cannot be known, but somehow is. Both form and contents, subject and object are saturated in wonder, originality and the new. The related word *bidʿa* "heresy" which also means novelty, is thus addressed by virtue of etymological contiguity. The Bāb seems to be saying, among many other things, that just because something was not found in the Sunna (which word, as we saw, is a perfect antonym for *badīʿ*) does not mean that it is de facto heretical. Thus, in some sense, the whole notion of heresy is neutralized or at least recreated, reconstrued.

The cosmos, its source, the method by which it comes to be and everything in it is electric with a wondrous, creative ever-renewing, ever-changing energy. This truth is asserted by the verbal noun *badīʿ* and its numerous adverbial deployments in the Bāb's composition. Such calls to mind Ibn ʿArabī's *sarayān*, the cosmic "circulation" and "interpenetration" of the divine form or substance, Life, *al-Ḥayāt*, derived from the Qurʾānic divine attribute mentioned earlier, The Living, *al-Ḥayy*, a companion word with *al-Qayyūm*. This substance came to be understood as "guardianship" *walāya*, and as such a symbol of the covenant, in the works of such Imāmī Shīʿī scholars as Ḥaydar Amuli (d. 1411) and Rajab Bursi (d. 1388) where Ibn ʿArabī's ideas of the Perfect Man were applied to an understanding of the Imām. Although the Bāb does not use this term *sarayān* in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*, there may be a somewhat veiled reference to it in his identification of himself as the "*suryānī/sarayānī* mystery" (QA109:8) in addition to the explicit reference to Bursī's "Imāmization" of Ibn ʿArabī's *sarayān* in the previous verse where he refers to the "letter B which circulates in the water of the letters/*al-bā al-sāira fī l-mā al-ḥurūf*" (QA109:7). Browne's original intuition, so many years ago, that the Bāb's ideas had a connection with the mystical philosophy of Ibn ʿArabī, seems to have been a valid one (Browne 1889, p. 909; see now Rafati (1992) for an extended study of Ibn ʿArabī's ideas in Bahāī writings).

If the Akhbārī (not to be confused with *Akbarī*) *tafsīr* project issued in a thorough-going "Imāmization" or "Imāmification" of the Qurān (Lawson 2006) the Bāb's hermeneutical method results in what might be even more awkwardly referred to as a *badīʿfication* of the Qurān, Islām, the world of the unseen and revelation and, most importantly, perspective. Interestingly, this cosmogonic metaphor does not appear emphasized in the writings of the first two Shaykhī masters, Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsāī and Sayid Kāẓim Rashtī. So, when their students, the eventual Letters of the Living, encountered it in the Bāb's writing they would have experienced a freshness in the discourse adding to the experience of the new they felt in encountering this unusual text.

This then gives some idea of the semantic, ideational and poetic range of meanings and effects his early followers would have read, heard or felt in the writings of the Bāb. In a sense, the word *badīʿ* energizes and provides movement and continuity throughout the composition. This movement was infectious and important because it represents a blessed relief from the stasis and paralysis which seemed to his young followers—all professional scholars at the rank of what we might term junior professor or senior graduate students—the very opposite of life. Judgment Day became Covenantal Renewal, with no end of the world in sight. This meant hope for the future for these young people, their families and, ultimately, all humanity.

Islām, as historically understood and presented with its doctrine of the finality of prophethood in Muḥammad, conflated this finality with a finality of covenantal renewal, even if there had been a "covenantal extension" put in play through the line of Imāms and, to some extent, in the Sufi orders. The covenant was always central to Islamic religious culture. In this work by the Bāb, the covenant is revivified, re-enacted, and redeployed. In the above discussion, the term *badīʿ* was singled out for a close study because in the text grammar or literary flow of the work it is clear that this word symbolized for the Bāb and his audience the powerful forces of change they felt. There are other key words in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* a focused study of which is likely to reveal the same profound concern or sacralization of the new, of change, of wonderment, of beauty and artistry. The first of these which comes to mind is the word "point", *al-nuqṭa*, a word repeated perhaps hundreds of times in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* and one of the Bāb's best known titles, the Primal Point (*al-nuqṭat al-ūlā)*. The word has a deep sense of "new beginning", as in the dot of ink that generates script/language, or the point which generates a line, then a field, then a cube (Schimmel 1987). Unfortunately, space does not permit further exploration of this term here (See Lawson 2021).

Prior to the Bāb's proclamation in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā,* the followers of Shaykh Aḥmad and Sayyid Kāẓim had felt a certain newness astir in the teachings of their masters. However, for many, especially those who would eventually come to be known as the Letters of the Living (*ḥurūf al-hayy*), the Bāb's *Qayyūm al-Asmā* manifested a newness that was much more radical than anything written by either of the two Shaykhī masters. It had been possible, heretofore, for their followers to consider Muḥammad's as the last covenant in line with the doctrine of finality mentioned above. Such finality is patently rejected in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*. However, with the rejection of finality does not come the rejection of sacredness because this newer covenant is utterly dependent upon the older covenant, just as that covenant should be seen as a renewal of the original covenant told in the Hebrew Bible, and most explicitly in the Qurʾān as the *Day of Alast* (Q7:172). It is the idea and excitement of covenantal renewal proclaimed in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* and the fresh performance of that pre-eternal scenario it calls for that is most fervently felt in the history of the early Bābī movement.

Henry Corbin sensed this quite accurately if somewhat vaguely derisively. He insisted that the Bahāī Faith, beginning with the Bābī period, had put itself quite outside the concerns of Shīʿism by virtue of it having violated the "secret of occultation" in claiming that an actual messianic figure had appeared on the historical plane rather than remain hidden in the spiritual world of images or the imaginal realm, the *ʿālam al-mithāl* (Corbin 1971–1972, iv:332). This of course is precisely the point the Bāb was making in the

Qayyūm al-Asmā. Additionally, it is a point which indicates a truism about Imāmī Shīʿism: without an Imām that is hidden, it ceases to exist. Not only does the Bāb insist that the sacramental waiting (*intiẓār*) is over, he radically challenges the idea of revelation itself by surreptitiously claiming authorship for the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*, a rather disturbing idea in the context of his insistence in many passages that the book is from God, or the hidden Imām. This authorial claim, strongly hinted throughout the text in the incessant use of the word *badīʿ*, occurs in two sets of disconnected letters he uses to begin two sequential suras toward the end of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā*. There, it appears he wishes to take credit and responsibility for the composition of this avant-garde revelation by signing his name ʿAlī Muḥammad in the disguise of disconnected letters for suras 108 and 109 (Lawson 2017, pp. 157–59). This is an extremely bold gesture but one that ensures that it is not wrong to classify the claim that he received the text from the hidden Imām in QA1:10 as pious fiction. That is, pious fiction if we are to consider the hidden Imām as a miraculously long-lived human whom the Bāb "met" in the same way he met Mullā Ḥusayn. However, if we are to consider the hidden Imām as symbolic of the principle of imagination and revelation, and thus always hidden, then the claim is certainly anything but fraudulent. It is a bit puzzling why Corbin could not see this. While Corbin's scholarship is important for a study of the ideas in the Bābī and Bahāī writings (Velasco 2004) this does not mean that he had a deep interest in them, or even knew them. There is no evidence of his ever having actually read them (Lawson 2005, p. 153).

The uniqueness of the Bāb's understanding and his interpretation of the Qurʾān and especially the sura of Joseph, may be appreciated further if we consider the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* as a literary actualization of the reunion of Jacob with his beloved son Joseph. *Tafsīr*, exegesis of the Qurʾān, consists of two parts: (1) Text; and (2) Commentary. This is true in all cases of Qurʾān commentary, from the very earliest to the present, whether the commentary is doctrinal, historical, mystical, philosophical or social. In light of this, and notwithstanding appearances to the contrary, the Bāb's *Tafsīr sūrat Yūsuf* may be considered a standard example because it is composed of two parts, Text and Commentary. However, the relationship between these two parts in the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* is quite different to standard Qurʾān commentaries. There the all-important Commentary following the Text is generally signalled by some connective language, such as "this means that" (*yaʿnī*) or "the intention here is" (*al-murād*). Such connectives were in fact quite present in the Bāb's earlier *Tafsīr sūrat al-baqara.*

With the *Qayyūm al-Asmā* there is no marked exegetic or hermeneutic transition. Thus, the relation between text and commentary is presented as being much more "intimate" than it is in exegeses which use such standard connective terms as *al-murād* "the intention of the text here is", *yaʿnī* or *āy*, "that is:". Or those works that arrange the text so that there is a clear typographical separation, through paragraphing or some other device, between the text and the commentary. The words of our commentator, the Bāb, are immediately and intimately entwined and braided with the words of the Text, the Qurʾān, as we have seen above in a few examples. Such, quite apart from being very difficult to translate and make clear in English, goes to the very centre of the spirituality of the text, thus seen as a loving literary embrace of the old with the new, of Jacob with Joseph, both of whom are esteemed in Islamic theological philosophy as Words of God and whose identities are thus blurred to some extent: together they represent the ceaselessness of divine communication. This textual structure represents a revelation of the divine presence through the powerful story of the reunion of the broken hearted Jacob with his beloved son Joseph and the simultaneous renewal of the eternal covenant and future such renewal symbolizes. Such also resonates quite powerfully with the idea of the return of the hidden Imām and, in the process, generates a new—*badīʿ*—sacred music of apocalypse.

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Abbreviations

Dawnbreakers	(see Zarandī (1974) below)
EI2	*The Encyclopaedia of Islām*, 2nd edition, online at Brill Online.
QA	*Qayyūm al-Asmā*
SM	P. Ṭālibī. *Sirr-i Masṭūr*

Verse numbers and sura chapter titles are taken from this. Versification here is sometimes at variance with with that in QA. SM is an excellent source proposing vowellings for the entire text, Persian translation, and discussion of Qurʾānic verses.

SWB	*Selections from the Writings of the Báb*

Notes

1 "[The Bahá'ís] *must* strive to obtain, from sources that are authoritative and unbiased, a sound knowledge of the history and tenets of Islám—the source and background of their Faith—*and approach reverently and with a mind purged from preconceived ideas the study of the Qur'án which*, apart from the sacred scriptures of the Bábí and Bahá'í Revelations, *constitutes the only Book which can be regarded as an absolutely authenticated Repository of the Word of God*." (Shoghi Effendi 1939, p. 49).

2 All translations from QA, except where otherwise indicated, are by the author and quite provisional.

3 Bausani (2000), p. 381, has a slightly different translation. My thanks to Mr. Iscander Micael Tinto (2022) for his kind advice about the English translation suggested here.

4 On the vexed issue of using English rhetorical and grammatical terminology when speaking about Arabic literature, see the thoughtful and illuminating article by Rashwan (2020).

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A Translation of the Arabic Duʿāʾ al-Saḥar (The Dawn Supplication) or Duʿāʾ al-Bahāʾ (The Supplication of Splendour) with Select Expository Scriptural Writings of the Bāb and Bahāʾu'llāh

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Abstract: This article provides a full English translation of the *Du'ā' al-saḥar* or Dawn Supplication for the Islamic month of Ramaḍān. Attributed to certain Imams whom Twelver Shī'ī Muslims regard as the successors of the Prophet Muhammad, it is an Arabic invocatory devotional also known from around the 13th century CE after its opening words, as the *Du'ā al-Bahā* (Supplication of Splendour–Glory–Light). It is commonly ascribed to the fifth Imam Muhammad al-Bāqir (d. c. 126/743) or as transmitted through his son, the sixth Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. c. 138/765). The former version or recension has around 22 invocations, while the sixth Imam's recension is known as the *Du'ā' al-mubāhalah* (The Supplication for Mutual Imprecation) and is considerably longer, consisting of over 30 supplicatory lines. This latter recension had its origin at a time when Muhammad was challenged near Medina by certain Yemenite Christians of Najrān about his messianic status as a Prophet in the light of theological and Christological issues. Both Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad Shīrāzī, "the Bāb" (1819–1850), and Mīrzā Ḥusayn 'Alī Nūrī, "Bahā'u'llāh" (1817–1892) gave great importance to this supplication (or these two related supplications) and were much influenced by its vocabulary and rhythmic, cascading content relating the Names of God. The Bāb interpreted it on Islamic and imamological lines in his Persian *Dalā'il-i sabaʿ* (The Seven Proofs). He cited it often, both in early texts and within numerous later major writings, including the *Kitāb al-asmā'* (The Book of Names) and the *Kitāb-i panj shaʿn* (The Book of the Seven Modes [of Revelation]). In his Persian *Bayān* and other writings, he used nineteen of its invocatory divine Names to frame the structure and names of his annual calendar of nineteen months: his new, wondrous or Badī' calendar ("The New/Regenerative Calendar"). This calendar was furthermore adopted by Baha'u'llah in his *Kitāb-i aqdas* (The Most Holy Book). His own theophanic title, evolving from "Jināb-i Bahā'" (His eminence the Glory) to "Bahā'u'llāh" (the Glory of God) is closely related and is rooted in this and certain similar texts. Baha'u'llah referred to the *Du'ā' al-saḥar* as the *Lawḥ-i baqā'* (The Scriptural Tablet of Eternity) and understood its opening lines as an allusion to his person as the embodiment of the Supreme or Greatest Name of God (*al-ism al-aʿẓam*). Several of the Arabic and Persian writings in which the founder of the Baha'i religion interprets the *Du'ā' al-saḥar* are translated in this current paper. Their content demonstrates the extent to which he elevated this powerful Islamic text.

Keywords: Bab; Baha; Baha'i; Baha'u'llah; du'a; dawn; Greatest Name of God; Imam; Shi'i; supplication

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The opening Bahāʾ- ("Glory") centered invocation of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* (Dawn Prayer), the Duʿāʾ al-Bahāʾ.

أَللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ مِنْ بَهائِكَ بِأَبْهاهُ وَكُلُّ بَهائِكَ بَهِيٌّ ٱللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ بِبَهائِكَ كُلِّهِ

1

I beseech Thee, O my God!
by Thy Splendour (*Bahāʾ*) at its most Splendid (*Abhāʾ*)
for all Thy Splendour (*Bahāʾ*) is truly resplendent (*Bahiyy*).
I, verily, O my God! beseech Thee by the fullness of Thy Splendour (Bahāʾ).[2]

The Shīʿī devotional supplication known as the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* (The Dawn Prayer) for the ninth Islamic month of fasting, named Ramaḍān, was transmitted by the eighth Imam ʿAlī al-Riḍā (d. c. 203/818). He stated that it was recited by the fifth Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. c. 126/743) at dawn times during the month of Ramaḍān. As we shall see, its attribution to the fifth Imam is specifically mentioned by the Bāb in his Persian *Dalāʾil-i sabʿah* (The Seven Proofs). From before the Safavid period (1501–1736), in at least the time of Ibn Ṭawūs (d. c. 664/1266; see his Iqbal, p. 345f and 868) if not earlier, this powerful and rhythmic devotional work came to be known as the *Duʿāʾ al-Bahāʾ* (The Supplication of Glory–Splendour–Light). This was obviously based on its opening line, containing several Arabic words closely related to the thrice repeated primary Divine Name *Bahāʾ*.

The *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* and closely related supplications such as the *Duʿāʾ yawm al-mubāhalah* (The Supplication of Mutual Imprecation) was fully embraced by the Bāb (executed, Tabriz, 1850) and Bahāʾu'llāh (d. Bahji near Acre, 1892), the founders of the intimately related and successive Bābī and Bahāʾī religions. They both gave the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* the utmost importance. The Bāb was greatly influenced by the rhythmic dynamism and cascading, theologically profound succession of Divine Names within this seminal text. The first of these, centered on the word Bahāʾ, came to be identified by Bahāʾu'llāh as the quintessence of the *al-ism al-aʿẓam*, the mightiest or "Greatest Name of God" as Bahāʾīs often render this phrase from the Arabic or Persian (*ism-i aʿẓam*). As we shall see, the founder of the Bahāʾī religion came to refer to this majestic supplication as the *Lawḥ-i Baqāʾ* (The Tablet of Eternity).

The *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* exists in several recensions deriving from the fifth and sixth Imams. One of them has the alternative title or designation *Duʿāʾ yawm al-mubāhalah*, and exists in a longer, sometimes variant recension with added theological details and devotional directives. It was relayed from the sixth Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. c. 148/765).[3] Certain of these variant Arabic texts were transmitted from the aforementioned Imams through the Shaykh al-Ṭāʿifa, Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (b. 385/995—d. Najaf, 460/1067),[4] and the Sayyid, Raḍī al-Dīn Ibn Tāwūs al-Ḥasanī al-ʿAlawī al-Hillī (d. Hillah, c. 664/1266).[5]

As we shall see, the dawn-time recitation of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* came to be mentioned by Bahāʾu'llāh himself. He also frequently cited it and occasionally commented upon its opening line in several Persian and Arabic *alwāḥ* (scriptural Tablets). Its recitation during the Ramaḍān period continues to this day in numerous Twelver Shīʿī and related

communities in Iran, Iraq, parts of India, Europe, and elsewhere where pious Shīʿī Muslims reside.

Fully translated below, the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* is introduced in the following manner by the erudite and polymathic Twelver Shīʿī authority Muḥammad Baqir Majlisī (d. Isfahan, 1110/1699) in his *Kitāb zād al-maʿād* (The Book of the Provisions for the Eschaton). Loosely translated, the paragraph in question reads as follows:

> As for the worthy, greatly respected supplication (*duʿāʾ*) [the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar*], it has been related that his highness [the eighth] Imam [ʿAlī al-] Riḍā stated that this is a supplication that his eminence [the fifth] Imam Muḥammad Bāqir would recite in the mornings. He would say that if people knew the greatness (*ʿaẓamat*) of this supplication before God, the speed with which it would [enable the devotee to] be answered [by God], they would certainly fight each other with swords in order to obtain it. And if I swore an oath that the *ism Allāh al-aʿẓam*, the Mightiest Name of God is within this prayer, I would be stating the truth. Thus, when you recite this supplication, recite it with all concentration and humility and keep it hidden from other than His people (Majlisī n.d., folio 63b; Majlisī 1423/2003, pp. 90–91. Cf. also pp. 220–21).[6]

The Arabic text of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* supplication can be found in numerous Twelver Shīʿī devotional compilations, often in sections dedicated to the sacred Ramaḍān period (see bibliography below). Perhaps its most famous modern printed edition is in the *Mafatīḥ al-jinān* (Keys of the Paradise), a very large (795 pages + indexes in one printing) devotional compilation by the Shīʿī scholar Shaykh ʿAbbās ibn Muḥammad Riḍā al-Qummī (b. 1294/1877—d. Najaf, 1359/1941), often referred to as Shaykh ʿAbbās. In various of the numerous editions and printings of this book and some other texts, the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* is referred to and indexed as the *Duʿāʾ al-Bahāʾ* (The Supplication of Splendour–Glory–Beauty). Introducing it, al-Qummī (among others like Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī in his *Zād al-maʿād*) writes, on the basis of statements from Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq and others, that the pious actions to be carried out during the dawn-time of the month of Ramaḍān are that:

> One should supplicate by means of the mighty, substantial devotional (*al-Duʿāʾ al-ʿaẓīm al-shaʿn*) [the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar*] which has been transmitted by [the eighth Imam ʿAlī] al-Riḍā. He stated … "It is the supplication (*al-Duʿāʾ*) of [the fifth Imam Muḥammad] al-Bāqir for the dawn-times (*asḥār*) of the month of Ramaḍān". (al-Qummī 1422/2001, p. 221)

The Text and Translation of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* (Dawn Prayer) or *Duʿāʾ al-Bahāʾ* (The Supplication of Splendour–Glory)

When appropriate, the translation below retains the rendering of initial Divine Names (taken as months within the new calendar by the Bāb) as selected by Shoghi Effendi Rabbani (c. 1896–1957), the Guardian of the Bahāʾī religion (from 1921 until 1957). It further attempts to give some indication of the rhythmic nature of the original.[7]

The diverse manuscript texts and printings of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* supplication occasionally exhibit a few textual differences in the order of Divine Names or Attributes, a succession of which came to be taken as the names of months by the Bāb. In printed texts and manuscripts, the second and third Names or months (*Jalāl* (Glory) and *Jamāl* (Beauty) are sometimes reversed, as are the Names or months eight and nine (*Kamāl* (Perfection) and *Asmāʾ* (Names), and twelve and thirteen (*ʿIlm* (Knowledge) and *Qudrat* (Power). There are also slight variants in the positioning of certain Divine Names such as that given to the nineteenth Name (or month) *ʿAlā* (Exaltedness, Loftiness) in the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* as opposed to its primary position in the text of the Mubāhalah recension.

دعاء البهاء

Duʿāʾ al-Bahāʾ

[1]

اللَهمَ إِنِيْ أَسْأَلُكَ مِنْ بَهَائِكَ بِأَبْهَاهُ،

وَكُلُ بَهَائِكَ بَهِيٌ، اللَهمَ إِنِيْ أَسْأَلُكَ بِبَهَائِكَ كُلِه

O my God!

I beseech Thee by Thy Bahāʾ (Splendour) at its most Splendid (*abhāʾ*)

for all Thy Splendour (*Bahāʾ*) is truly Resplendent (*bahiyy*).

I, verily, O my God! Beseech Thee by the fullness of Thy Splendour (*Bahāʾ*).

[2 = 3]

اللَهمَ إِنِيْ أَسْأَلُكَ مِنْ جَلاَلِكَ بِأَجَلِه وَكُلِ جَلاَلِكَ جَلِيلٌ

اللَهمَ إِنِيْ أَسْأَلُكَ بِجَلاَلِكَ كُلِه

O my God!

I beseech Thee by Thy Jalāl (Glory) in its supreme Glory (*ajall*)

for all Thy Glory (*jalāl*) is truly Glorious (*jalīl*).

I, verily, O my God! Beseech Thee by the totality of Thy Glory (*jalāl*).

[3 = 2]

اللَهمَ إِنِيْ أَسْأَلُكَ مِنْ جَمَالِكَ بِأَجْمَلِهِ وَكُلُ جَمَالِكَ جَمِيلٌ

اللَهمَ إِنِيْ أَسْأَلُكَ بِجَمَالِكَ كُلِه

O my God!

I beseech Thee by Thy Jamāl (Beauty) at its most Beautiful (*ajmal*)

for all Thy Beauty (*jamāl*) is truly Beauteous (*jamīl*).

I, verily, O my God! Beseech Thee by the whole of Thy Beauty (*jamāl*).

[4]

اللَهمَ إِنِيْ أَسْأَلُكَ مِنْ عَظَمَتِكَ بِأَعْظَمِهَا وَكُلُ عَظَمَتِكَ عَظِيمَةٌ

اللَهمَ إِنِيْ إِسْأَلُكَ بِعَظَمَتِكَ كُلِها

O my God!

I beseech Thee by thy ʿAẓamat (Grandeur) at its supreme Grandness (*aʿẓam*)

for all Thy Grandeur (*ʿaẓamat*) is truly Grandiose (*ʿaẓīm*).

I, verily, O my God! Beseech Thee by the fullness of Thy Grandeur (*ʿaẓamat*).

[5]

اللَهمَ إِنِيْ أَسْأَلُكَ مِنْ نُورِكَ بِأَنْوَرِهِ، وَكُلُ نُورِكَ نَيِر

اللَهمَ إِنِيْ أَسْأَلُكَ بِنُورِكَ كُلِه

O my God!

I beseech Thee by Thy Nūr (Light) through all of its Lights (*anwār*)

for all Thy Light (*nūr*) is truly Luminous (*nayyir*).

I, verily, O my God! Beseech Thee by the whole of Thy Light (*nūr*).

[6]

اللَهمَ إِنِيْ أَسْأَلُكَ مِنْ رَحْمَتِكَ بِأَوْسَعِهَا وَكُلُ رَحْمَتِكَ وَاسِعَةٌ

اللَهمَ إِنِيْ أَسْأَلُكَ بِرَحْمَتِكَ كُلِها

O my God!

I beseech Thee by thy Raḥmat (Mercy) by virtue of its All-Encompassing nature (*awsaʿ*)

for all of Thy Mercy (*raḥmat*) is indeed All-Embracing (*wāsiʿa*).
I, verily, O my God! Beseech Thee by the whole of Thy Mercy (*raḥmat*).

[7]

اللَهمَ إِنِيْ أَسْأَلُكَ مِنْ كَلِمَاتِكَ بِأَتَمِها وَكُلِّ كَلِمَاتِكَ تَامَة

اللَهمَ إِنِيْ أَسْأَلُكَ بِكَلِمَاتِكَ كُلِها

O my God!
I beseech Thee by Thy Kalimāt (Words) at their most Perfect (*atamm*)
for all Thy Words (*kalimāt*) are truly Complete (*tāmmat*).
I, verily, O my God! Beseech Thee by the totality of Thy Words (*kalimāt*).

[8 = 9]

اللَهمَ اِنِّي اَسْاَلُكَ مِنْ كَمالِكَ بِاَكْمَلِهِ وَكُلِّ كَمالِكَ كامِلٌ

اَللّـهُمَ اِنِّي اَسْاَلُكَ بِكَمالِكَ كُلِه

O my God!
I beseech Thee by Thy Kamāl (Perfection) in its absolute Perfectness (*akmal*)
for Thy Perfection (*kamāl*) is truly Perfect (*kāmil*).
I, verily, O my God! Beseech Thee by the completeness of Thy Perfection (*kamāl*).

[9 = 8]

اَللّـهُمَ اِنِّي اَسْاَلُكَ مِنْ اَسمائِكَ بِاَكْبَرِها وَكُلِّ اَسْمائِكَ كَبيرَةٌ

اَللّـهُمَ اِنِّي اَسْاَلُكَ بِاَسْمائِكَ كُلِها

O my God!
I beseech thee by thy Asmāʾ (Names) by virtue of their supreme Greatness (*akbar*)
for all Thy Names (*asmāʾ*) are truly Great (*kabīr*).
I, verily, O my God! Beseech Thee by the totality of Thy Names (*asmāʾ*).

[10]

اَللّـهُمَ اِنِّي اَسْاَلُكَ مِنْ عِزَتِكَ بِاَعَزِها وَكُلِّ عِزَتِكَ عَزيزَةٌ

اَللّـهُمَ اِنِّي اَسْاَلُكَ بِعِزَتِكَ كُلِها

O my God!
I beseech thee by Thy ʿIzzat (Might) at its utmost Mightiness (*aʿazza*)
for all Thy Might (*ʿizzat*) is truly Mighty (*ʿazīz*).
I, verily, O my God!
Beseech Thee by the fullness of Thy Might (*ʿizzat*).

[11]

اَللّـهُمَ اِنِّي اَسْاَلُكَ مِنْ مَشِيَتِكَ بِاَمْضاها وَكُلِّ مَشِيَتِكَ

ماضِيَةٌ

اَللّـهُمَ اِنِّي اَسْاَلُكَ بِمَشِيَتِكَ كُلِها

O my God!
I beseech thee by Thy Mashiyyat (Will) at its most Conclusive (*amḍā*)
for all of thy Will (*mashiyyat*) is truly conclusive (*māḍiyyat*).
I, verily, O my God! Beseech Thee by the totality of Thy Will (*mashiyyat*).

[12 = 13]

اَللّـهُمَ اِنِّي اَسْاَلُكَ

مِنْ قُدْرَتِكَ بِالْقُدْرَةِ الَتْي اسْتَطَلْتَ بِها عَلى كُلِ شَيْءٍ وَكُلِّ قُدْرَتِكَ مُسْتَطيلَةٌ

اَللّـهُمَ اِنِّي اَسْاَلُكَ بِقُدْرَتِكَ كُلِها

O my God!
I beseech thee by Thy Qudrat (Power) through the Power (*qudrat*) of which Thou overshadoweth all things for all of Thy Power (*qudrat*) is truly All-Subduing (*mustaṭīla*).

I, verily, O my God! Beseech Thee by the fullness of Power (*qudrat*).
[13 = 12]
اَللّـهُمَ اِنّي اَسْاَلُكَ مِنْ عِلْمِكَ بِاَنْفَذِهِ
وَكُلُ عِلْمِكَ نافِذٌ
اَللّـهُمَ اِنّي اَسْاَلُكَ بِعِلْمِكَ كُلِه
O my God!
I beseech Thee by Thy ʿIlm (Knowledge) at its most Acute (*anfadh*)
for all of Thy Knowledge (*ʿilm*) is truly Penetrating (*nāfidh*).
I, verily, O my God! Beseech Thee by the whole of Thy Knowledge (*ʿilm*).
[14]
اَللّـهُمَ اِنّي
اَسْاَلُكَ مِنْ قَوْلِكَ بِاَرْضاهُ وَكُلُ قَوْلِ كَرَضِيٌ
اَللّـهُمَ اِنّي اَسْاَلُكَ بِقَوْلِكَ كُلِه
O my God!
I beseech Thee by Thy Qawl (Speech) at its most Delightful (*ardā*)
for all Thy Speech (*qawl*) is especially Pleasing (*raḍiyy*).
I, verily, O my God! Beseech Thee by the whole of Thy Speech (*qawl*).
[15]
اَللّـهُمَ اِنّي اَسْاَلُكَ
مِنْ مَسائِلِكَ بِاَحَبِهَا اِلَيْكَ وَكُلُ مَسائِلِكَ اِلَيْكَ حَبيبَةٌ
اَللّـهُمَ اِنّي اَسْاَلُكَ بِمَسائِلِكَ كُلِهَا
O my God!
I beseech Thee by Thy Masāʾil (Questions) which are most Agreeable (*ahabb*) of Thee
for all of Thy Concerns (*masāʾil*) are truly beloved (*ḥabīb*).
I, verily, O my God! Beseech Thee by the whole of Thine Affairs (*masāʾil*).
[16]
اَللّـهُمَ اِنّي اَسْاَلُكَ
مِنْ شَرَفِكَ بِاَشْرَفِهِ وَكُلُ شَرَفِكَ شَريفٌ
اَللّـهُمَ اِنّي اَسْاَلُكَ بِشَرَفِكَ كُلِه
O my God!
I beseech thee by thy Sharaf (Honour) which is most Honourable (*sharaf*)
for all of Thine Honour (*sharaf*) is truly Honoured (*sharīf*).
I, verily, O my God! Beseech Thee by the whole of Thine Honour (*sharaf*).
[17]
اَللّـهُمَ اِنّي
اَسْاَلُكَ مِنْ سُلْطانِكَ
بِاَدْوَمِهِ وَكُلُ سُلطانِكَ دائِمٌ
اَللّـهُمَ اِنّي اَسْاَلُكَ بِسُلْطانِكَ كُلِه
O My God!
I beseech thee by thy Sulṭān (Sovereignty) at its most Permanent (*adwam*)
for the whole of Thy Rule (*sulṭān*) is truly Enduring (*dāʾim*).
I, verily, O my God! Beseech Thee by the absoluteness of Thy Sovereignty (*sulṭān*).
[18]
اَللّـهُمَ اِنّي اَسْاَلُكَ مِنْ مُلْكِكَ بِاَفْخَرِهِ وَكُلُ
مُلْكِكَ فاخِرٌ
اَللّـهُمَ اِنّي اَسْاَلُكَ بِمُلْكِكَ كُلِه

O my God!
I beseech Thee by Thy Mulk (Dominion) at its most Magnificent (*afkhar*)
for the whole of Thy Dominion (*mulk*) is truly Excellent (*fākhir*).
I, verily, O my God! Beseech Thee by the whole of Thy Dominion (*mulk*).

[19][8]

اَللّـهُمَ اِنّي اَسـاَلُكَ مِنْ عُلُوكِ بِاَعْلاهُ وَكُلِّ عُلُوكِ عال
اَللّـهُمَ اِنّي اَسـاَلُكَ بِعُلُوكِ كُلِه

O my God!
I beseech Thee by Thy *ʿUluww* (Sublimity) at its most Lofty (*aʿlā*)
for the whole of Thy Sublimity (*ʿuluww*) is truly Elevated (*ʿālⁱⁿ*).
I, verily, O my God! Beseech Thee by the fullness of Thy Sublimity (*ʿuluww*).

[20]

اَللّـهُمَ اِنّي اَسـاَلُكَ مِنْ مَنِك بِاَقْدَمِهِ وَكُلِّ مَنِك قَديمٌ
اَللّـهُمَ اِنّي اَسـاَلُكَ بِمَنِك كُلِه

O my God!
I beseech Thee by Thy *Mann* (Benevolence) at its most Immemorial (*aqdam*)
for the totality of Thy Benevolence (*mann*) is truly Pre-existent (*qadīm*).
I, verily, O my God! Beseech Thee by the whole of Thy Benevolence (*mann*).

[21]

اَللّـهُمَ اِنّي
اَسـاَلُكَ مِنْ اياتِكَ بِاَكْرَمِها وَكُلِّ آياتِكَ كَريمَةٌ
اَللّـهُمَ اِنّي اَسـاَلُكَ بِآياتِكَ كُلِها

O my God!
I beseech thee by thy *Āyāt* (Verses) at their most Distinguished (*akram*)
for all Thy Verses (*āyāt*) are truly Precious (*karīm*).
I, verily, O my God! Beseech Thee by the totality of Thy Verses (*āyāt*).

[22]

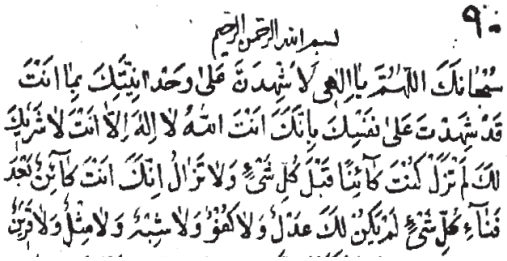
اَللّـهُمَ اِنّي اَسـاَلُكَ بِما اَنْتَ فيهِ مِنَ الشَّأْنِ وَالْجَبَرُوتِ، وَاَسـاَلُكَ بِكُلِ شَأْن وَحْدَهُ جَبَرُوت وَحْدَها
اَللّـهُمَ اِنّي اَسـاَلُكَ بِما تُجيبُني بِهِ حينَ اَسـاَلُكَ فَاَجِبْني يا اَلهُ

I, verily, beseech Thee, O my God!
By that whereby Thou hast Gravitas (*shaʾn*) and Omnipotence (*jabarūt*) and I supplicate Thee by virtue of every single quality (*shaʾn*) and dimension of Power (*jabarūt*) that Thou do indeed answer me by virtue of the foregoing at the very moment I request of Thee! Wherefore do Thou answer me, O my God!
[The suppliant may now ask their requirement for this is surely a thing decreed].

Some Notes on the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* and Its Bābī-Bahāʾī Citation and Exegesis

The central place of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* within the scriptural universe of the writings of the Bāb is unmistakable. The Bāb cited, rewrote, reconfigured, or re-revealed and commented upon this and related texts in whole or in part on numerous occasions. He did this hundreds if not thousands of times. Among a multitude of his books and scriptural Tablets (*alwāḥ*) only a few can be mentioned here. It is especially evident, for example, in his very lengthy (perhaps 3000 page) *Kitāb al-asmāʾ* (Book of Names, c. 1848–9) and the several hundred-page *Kitāb-i panj shaʿn* (The Book of the Five Modes of Revelation, 1266/March–April, 1850),[9] and so too in certain of his earlier devotional supplications, *khuṭbas* (literary orations), and other writings. It is astonishing that so little attention has been given to these texts in Bahāʾī circles in decades past and in recent times.

An Early Untitled Devotional Supplication of the Bāb, Re-Creating Sections of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar*

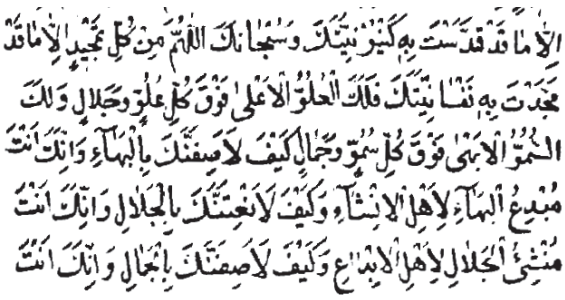


The opening lines of INBA Ms. 6006C, 90 (translated below).

There exists among the hundreds of manuscript compilations of the writings of the Bāb, an untitled, probably very early (1260–1/1843–4?) Arabic manuscript at one time catalogued as INBA 6006C (The Bāb n.d.j, pp. 90–95). It is a quite lengthy supplication of the Bāb, which draws heavily upon and several times creatively rewrites parts of versions of the Shīʿī Ramaḍan Dawn Prayer and/or the version entitled *Duʿāʾ yawm al-mubāhalah*. This devotional text of the Bāb contains interesting theological passages with definite apophatic dimensions. It declares the Ultimate Divinity utterly beyond positive description; beyond even such forms of worship as would befit the magnitude of the primary, pre-eternal Transcendence of God. Following the standard Muslim basmala, "In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate," this supplication begins:

> Glorified be Thou, O my God! O my God I assuredly testify unto Thy Divine Unicity [Oneness] (*waḥdāniyyat*) in that Thou didst testify unto Thine Own Logos-Self (*nafs*) to the effect that Thou indeed art God. No God is there except Thee. I do not associate others with Thee for Thou didst exist for evermore before all things and will everlastingly continue to exist after the annihilation (*fanāʾ*) of all things. For Thee there is indeed no equal (*ʿadl*), no like (*kufūʾ*), no resemblance (*lā shibh*), no likeness (*lā mithl*) and no close associate (*lā qarīn*). Thou did indeed so elevate Thy Camphorated Being *(kāfūriyyat kaynūniyyat*) beyond whatsoever ascended towards it of the most elevated essences of contingent realities (*jawhar al-mumkināt*), that they would readily come to sanctify the Essential Reality of Thine Own Abstractness (*taqadassat dhātiyyat sādhijiyyatika*)! If that is, they should prove capable of soaring up unto the firmament of the atmosphere of Thy sublime Holiness (*jaww hawāʾ qudsihā*) . . . (The Bāb n.d.j, p. 90).

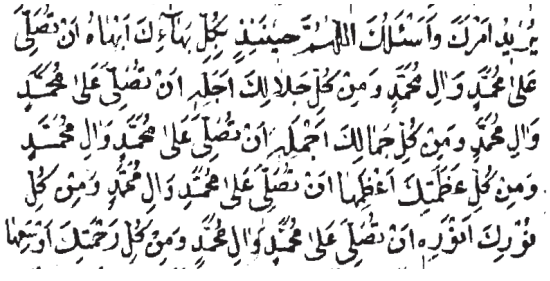
A few lines further on, the Bāb begins to re-create and reorder the text, drawing upon forms of the Ramaḍān Dawn Prayer:[10]



Another extract from INBA Ms. 6006C, 90 echoing the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar*

> … And praise be unto Thee, O my God! One above every form of glorification (*tamjīd*) save that whereby Thou did glorify Thine Own Self Identity (*nafsāniyyatika*). [19+] For Thine is the Most Transcendent Exaltedness (*ʿuluww al-āʿlā*) above every mode of **Elevated Sublimity (*ʿuluww*)** and **Glory (*Jalāl*)**. Unto Thee belongeth the Supreme level of All-Glorious Elevation (*al-sumūw al-abhāʾ*) above every mode of Exaltedness (*suluww*) and **Beauty (*Jamāl*)**.
>
> [1] How then can I befittingly attribute to Thee **Splendour (*Bahāʾ*)** when Thou art the very **Creator of Splendour (*Bahāʾ*) (*mubdiʿ al-Bahāʾ*)**; Thine indeed is the All-Glorious Eminence (*sumūw al-abhāʾ*) for such as are given to praise (*ahl al-inthāʾ*)? [2] How can I befittingly characterize Thee by Thy **Glory (*Jalāl*)** when Thou indeed art the **Architect of Glory (*Jalāl*) (*munshā al-Jalāl*)** for such as are possessed of creative power (*ahl al-ibdāʿ*)? [3] How can I befittingly attribute to Thee **Beauty (*Jamāl*)** when Thou art the Fashioner of All-Things (*musawwir kull shayʾ*) within the kingdom of the earth and of the heavens? [4] How can I befittingly eulogize Thee on account of Thy **Grandeur (*ʿAẓamat*)** when Thou art the One Who robed Thy chosen ones (*muqammīṣ awliyāʾ*) in the Garment of Grandeur and Magnificence (*qamīṣ al-ʿaẓamat wa'l-ijlāl*)? [5] How can I befittingly call Thee to Remembrance, O my God! On account of Thy **Light (*Nūr*)** when Thou art the very Creator of Light (*khāliq al-nūr*), the Illuminator of Light (*munawwir al-nūr*) as well as the Source of the Genesis of Light (*mubdiʿ al-Bahāʾ*)? … (The Bāb n.d.j, pp. 90–91).

The reinterpreted 19th calendrical Name having to do with the Divine transcendence (*ʿUluww, ʿAlā, Aʿlā*) here prefaces the re-creation of the use of the successive Divine Names found in the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* and certain of its parallel texts. Later in this same supplication, there is a rewritten version of the Ramaḍān Dawn Prayer, *Mubāhalah* supplication which again moves through the Divine Names Bahāʾ, Jalāl, Jamāl, ʿAẓamat, Nūr, etc. These invocations are closely related to the offering of blessings upon the fivefold "family of God" (āl Allāh = Muḥammad, ʿAli, Fāṭimah, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn). It should also be noted that they partly parallel a portion of a lengthy prayer in the second grade (= *Munājāt* (Devotionals) of the first section (I:2) of the *Kitāb-i-panj shaʾn* (*Book of the Five Grades* (parallel to The Bāb n.d.j, p. 90f). In this connection, the Bāb, a page or so further on, recreates the commencement of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* so as to confer supreme radiant splendour upon the Prophet Muḥammad and his Imam-related family; along with other potent Divine names which flow out from the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar*, including *Jalāl* (Glory), *Jamāl* (Beauty), *ʿAẓamat* (Grandeur) and *Nūr* (Light), *Raḥmat* (Mercy), *Kalimāt* (Words), etc.:



> … I implore Thee at this very moment O my God that Thou by Thy **[1] Bahāʾ (Splendour)** which is Abha (All-Glorious) confer blessing upon Muhammad and the family of Muhammad. And this through all of Thy **[2] Jalāl (Glory)** at its Most Glorious, to confer blessing upon Muhammad and the family of Muhammad. And this through all of Thy **[3] Jamāl (Beauty)** at its Most Beautiful to confer blessing upon Muhammad and the family of Muhammad. And this through all

> of Thy **[4] ʻAẓamat (Grandeur)** at its Most Grandiose to confer blessing upon Muhammad and the family of Muhammad. And this through all of Thy **[5] Nūr (Light)** which constitutes His Lights (anwār) to confer blessing upon Muhammad and the family of Muhammad . . . (the Bab n,d, j p.92f).

Written perhaps four or five years later, the Persian *Dalāʾil-i sabʿah* (The Seven Proofs, c.1849) of the Bāb, again understands the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* of Muḥammad al-Bāqir on similar lines to the devotional text commented upon above. Its first five lines are given an Islamic "family of God" (*āl Allāh*) or an imamocentric interpretation:

> Observe the *Duʿa al-saḥar* of Muḥammad al-Bāqir which opens as follows: "O my God! I beseech Thee by Thy Splendour (*Bahāʾ*) at its most Splendid (*Abhāʾ*) for all Thy Splendour (*Bahāʾ*) is truly Resplendent (*Bahiyy*). I, verily, O my God! Beseech Thee by the fullness of Thy Splendour (*Bahāʾ*)."

While this [first] portion (*fiqrat*) alludes to the Messenger of God (*rasūl Allāh* = the Prophet Muḥammad), the second points to the station of the Commander of the Faithful (*maqām-i Amīr al-Muʾminīn* = Imam ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib d. 40/661). Consider likewise, until one arrives at the fifth level which has mention of the Light (*Nūr*) and is a reference to the Prince of Martyrs (Sayyid al-Shuhadāʾ = Imām Ḥusayn, d. c. 61/680). This inasmuch as Light (*Nūr*) indicates a station (*maqām*) the likeness of which is a Lamp (*miṣbāḥ*) (cf. Qurʾan 24:35) that is self-illuminating (Per. *mīsūzānad*)" (The Bāb n.d.c, pp. 58–59).

The Bāb indicates here that the first five sections or invocations of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* allude to the Prophet Muḥammad and the other people of the cloak *(ahl al-kisāʾ*, see Qurʾán 33:32), namely [1] Muḥammad = *Bahāʾ* (Splendour–Glory) [2] ʿAlī = *Jalāl* (Glory–Majesty) [3] Fāṭima = *Jamāl* (Beauty) [4] [Imam] Ḥasan = *ʿAẓamat* (Grandeur) and [5] [Imam] Ḥusayn = *Nūr* (Light) (The Bāb n.d.c, pp. 58–59). This level of interpretation is in line with Shīʿī traditions detailing the Sitz im Leben of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar*-related *Duʿāʾ yawm al-mubāhalah* (Supplication of the Day of Mutual Imprecation), which is closely connected with an episode pertaining to the formation of the five "people of the cloak", the Shīʿī "family of God" (*āl Allāh*).

Another good example of the creative refashioning of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar*, or its parallel relating to the *Mubāhalah* episode, is found within a section of a manuscript of the *Kitāb al-asmāʾ* commencing with the Name of God *al-arshad* (the Most Guided/Utmost Guide/Most Guiding or Supreme Guide), which begins as follows:

بسم الله الارشد الارشد

In the Name of God, the Most Guided, the Supreme Guide

الله لا اله الا هو الارشد الارشد

God, no God is there except Him, the Most Guided, the Supreme Guide

Not very far into this section, following a few short verses commencing with the imperative *qul* = "Say:", we find around twenty-one short verses partially based upon and mirroring the succession of Divine Attributes spelled out in the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* and/or the related *Duʿāʾ yawm al-mubāhala*. At the commencement of this section we read, "Unto God belongeth what He created and will create and unto Him shall all return". Thereafter, we read:

ولله بهاءِ ما خلق ويخلق واليه كل يبعثون

[1] And unto God belongs the **[1] Bahāʾ (Splendour)** of what was created and what He will create, for unto Him will everything be raised up.
[2] And unto God belongs the **[2] Jalāl (Glory)** of what was created and what He will create, for through Him will everything be turned upside down.
[3] And unto God belongs the **[3] Jamāl (Beauty)** of what was created and what He will create, for unto Him will everything be raised up.
[4] And unto God belongs the **[4] ʿAzamat (Grandeur)** of what was created and what He will create, for through His Command will everything be upraised (*qāʾimūn*).

[5] And unto God belongs the **[5] Nūr (Light)** of what was created and what He will create, for through Him will everything be turned upside down.
[6] And unto God the **[6] Raḥmat (Mercy)** of what was created and what He will create, for all, through His Mercy, are judged mercifully.
[7] And unto God are the **[8] Asmāʾ (Names)** of what was created and what He will create, for all, through His Names (asmāʾ), are indeed named.
[8] And unto God belongs the **[10] ʿIzz (Might)** of what was created and what He will create, for all, through His Mightiness, are rendered mighty.
[9] And unto God belongs the **Majd (Majesty)** of what was created and what He will create, for all, through His Radiance, are rendered radiant.
[10] And unto God belongs the **[12] ʿIlm (Knowledge)** of what was created and what He will create, for all, through His Knowledge, are informed.
[11] And unto God belongs the **[13] Qudrat (Might)** of what was created and what He will create, for all, through His Might, are made mighty.
[12] And unto God belongs the **Quwwat (Power)** of what was created and what He will create, for all, through His Power, are empowered.
[13] And unto God belongs the **Riḍāʾ (Contentment)** of what was created and what He will create, for all, through His Contentment, will be made content.
[14] And unto God belongs the **[16] Sharaf (Nobility)** of what was created and what He will create, for all, through His Nobility, are made noble.
[15] And unto God belongs the **[17] Sulṭān (Sovereignty)** of what was created and what He will create, for all, through His Sovereignty, express sovereignty.
[16] And unto God belongs the **[18] Mulk (Dominion)** of what was created and what He will create, for all, through His Dominion, express dominance.
[17] And unto God belongs the **[19] ʿUluww (Sublimity)** of what was created and what He will create, for all, through His Sublimity, become sublime.
[18] And unto God belong the **[20] Āyāt (Verses)** of what was created and what He will create, for all, through His verses, are ennobled.
[19] And unto God belongs the **Ghināʾ (Independence)** of what was created and what He will create, for all, through His Independence, become independent.
[20] And unto God belongs the **[M 28] Faḍl (Gracious)** of what was created and what He will create, for all, through His Bounty, are made bountiful.
[21] And unto God belongs the **[M 19] ʿAdl (Justice)** of what was created and what He will create, for all, through His Justice, become just. (The Bāb n.d.f, X 1/1, pp. 4–5).[11]

***Duʿāʾ al-Saḥar* Parallels to the Badīʿ or "New" Calendar of the Bāb**

> "The third [Gate of the fifth Unity] is that We instituted the transformation of 19 months [constituting the year] perchance humanity (lit. thou) might dwell within the [annual] Waḥīd (Unity)" [abjad numerical value = 19 the number of days and months constituting one year] (The Bāb 1957, V. 3).

The basic setting forth of the new, post-Islamic calendar of the Bāb can be found, for example, in the third Bāb (gate, section) of the fifth *waḥīd* (unity) of the Arabic and Persian Bayāns (Exposition, c. 1848–9). While the Arabic section is very succinct (fully translated above), the Persian spans a few pages (The Bāb, n.d.a, pp. 152–53). It contains paragraphs in clarification of the gnosis (*ʿirfān*) of the years and of the months as they relate to the number of *kull shayʾ* (*abjad* numerical value 361 = 19 × 19) having the meaning "all things", "everything", the "pleroma" indicating the fullness of everything (The Bāb n.d.a, pp. 152–53). The Bāb explicitly states that the first month should be called Bahāʾ (Splendour, Glory) and the last or nineteenth the "Transcendent" or "Loftiness" (as translated by Shoghi Effendi). The Arabic verbal noun *ʿAlā* derives from the triliteral root ʿa-l-w having the basic meaning 'to be high, transcendent or elevated'.[12]

The new calendar of the Bāb is rooted in and very closely related to the text of the Shīʿī *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar*, as well as at times to the *Duʿāʾ yawm al-mubāhalah*. It is the case that relative to the names or schemata of its 19 months the Bābī-Bahāʾī calendar is very largely

modelled on the first 19 invocations of one of the recensions of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar/mubāhalah*. The Names or Attributes of God used at the commencement of most of the invocations (as listed above) are largely the same as the calendar referenced by the Báb in his Persian Bayán, as well as within his *Kitāb al-asmāʾ* and other writings.

In the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar*, the second divine Name is sometimes registered as Jamāl (Beauty) and the third Jalāl (Glory). These divine Names are inverted as far as the Bābī-Bahāʾī month ordering is concerned. So too are the names of the twelfth Name [or month] Qudrat (Power) and the thirteenth ʿIlm (Knowledge). Compared with the *Duʿāʾ yawm al-mubāhalah* version, the Divine Names (ultimately months) are often identical to those in the calendar of the Báb, though there are slight differences in the order set down in the Imam-generated texts. Some mss and printed texts invert the Divine Names or months [7] Kamāl (Perfection) and [8] Kalimāt (Words) as well as [12] Qudrat (Power) and [13] ʿIlm (Knowledge) (cf. the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar*).

It can be confidently stated that the Báb retained, though he appears to have slightly altered, the Twelver Shīʿī-transmitted order of divine Names as months as far as numbers two and three as well as twelve and thirteen are concerned. He designated the final month ʿAlā (Loftiness) as in the *Duʿāʾ yawm al-mubāhalah*, apparently bypassing the ʿUluww (Sublimity) which has the primary nineteenth place in the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar*.

The key opening words of the first five of nineteen (among twenty-one, thirty, or more in some recensions) successive devotional invocations include the following names (or attributes) of God: [1] Bahāʾ (Splendour), [2] Jalāl (Glory), [3] Jamāl (Beauty), [4] ʿAẓamat (Grandeur), and [5] Nūr (Light). This is within the context of a major recension of an Arabic text which appears to date back a millennium or more, related also to pre-Islamic prophetological tradition. For the Báb, a version of the opening nineteen Names of God came to form the basic template for his Badīʿ ("new", "regenerative" or "wondrous") calendar, which is in use today within the now globally diffused several million-strong international Bahāʾī community.[13]

The *Duʿāʾ al-Saḥar* and the Names of the Days of the Week

The names given by the Báb to the seven days of the week are also partly modelled on the Names of God in segments of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* and/or the *Duʿāʾ yawm al-mubāhalah*. This is how they were set down by Nabīl-i Zarandī (d.1892 CE) in an unpublished portion of his *Tārīkh* (late 1880s)—recreated and renamed by Shoghi Effendī as *The Dawn-Breakers* in 1932 (Zarandī 1974). An apostle of Bahāʾu'llāh, Zarandī—apparently drawing on sections of the abovementioned *Kitāb al-asmāʾ* of the Báb, and other writings—set down the names of the seven days from [1] Saturday until [7] Friday. They are indicated here with select new Badīʿ "month" correlations.

- Day 1 = **Saturday** = **Jalāl** (Glory) = month 2 or 3
- Day 2 = **Sunday** = **Jamāl** (Beauty) = month 2 or 3
- Day 3 = **Monday** = **Kamāl** (Perfection) = month 7
- Day 4 = **Tuesday** = **Fiḍāl** (Grace)[14]
- Day 5 = **Wednesday** = **ʿIdāl** [ʿAdāl] (Justice)
- Day 6 = **Thursday** = **Istijlāl** (Majesty)
- Day 7 = **Friday** = **Istiqlāl** (Independence)[15]

Note also that all of these days of the week end with a long ā vowel followed by the letter "l" (Ar. *lām*). The names of the first, second, third, and fourth are all found in the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* and/or the *Duʿāʾ yawm al-mubāhalah*. The last two days six (Thursday) and seven (Friday) are verbal nouns derived from the tenth (Xth) Arabic form of the roots **j-l-l** (to be great, exalted, illustrious, majestic; cf. month 2/3) and the tenth form of the root **q-l-l** (to be insignificant, meagre, etc); Xth form = independent, independence). This name of the last day, Friday, seems unique. It appears to be the opposite of the Islamic name for Friday, *yawm al-jumʿa*, indicative of a multiple, collective gathering together. The Istiqlāl of the Báb implies independence, possibly betokening an independent level of novel religiosity. It may be implied by this name that with the advent of the Báb as a

new *maẓhar-i ilāhī* (Manifestation of God), collective gathering at the mosque on Friday for *khuṭbah* (sermon)-type guidance from clerics is no longer necessary. God speaks again and merely human modes of guidance are limited.

Additionally, three of the names of the 19-year cycles into which the Bāb divided his calendrical schemata are derived from triliteral root letters making up the word Bahāʾ within the first verse of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* and *al-Mubāhalah*. They are the ninth 19-year cycle, named Bahāʾ (abjad numerical value 9), the 17th 19 year cycle named Bahiyy (abjad numerical value 17) "Luminous", "Glorious", etc.), and the 18th 19 year cycle named Abhāʾ, the superlative form of the word Bahāʾ.

Arabic and Persian Bayān V: 4. The Directive of the Bāb Regarding Personal Naming with the Names of God (*asmāʾ Allāh*)

> "The fourth [Gate of the fifth Unity] is that We direct that humanity should bestow names in line with My Names (*asmāʾī*). We indeed made persons to express My Glory (Bahāʾ). O my creatures! Strive ye then after My example, Thus might thou use the name(s) Muḥammad, ʿAlī and Fāṭimah; then Ḥusayn, then Mahdī or Hādī. We assuredly made from every letter of Thy Name (*ḥarf al-asmāʾ*) further Names (*asmāʾ*). Say: All belong to Me and I to God, My Lord! Nothing derives from God save God Himself for such is the Sovereign of all the worlds! Such is the Beloved of all the worlds! . . . " (The Bāb 1957, V.4).

Arabic and Persian Bayāns V.4 offer guidance on the bestowal of personal names, following the section devoted to the calendar (The Bāb 1957, V. 3; The Bāb n.d.b, V. 3). The influence of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* (or its parallels) is again especially evident in the longer Persian version (cf. the Arabic version translated above with its use of Bahāʾ). It is in P. Bayan V. 4 that the Bāb reckons that while the names of the five *ahl al-kisāʾ* (Muḥammad, ʿAlī, Fāṭimah, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn) are good possibilities for human naming, he goes on to state that God-related names like ʿAzīz (Mighty) and Jabbār (All-Compelling, Omnipotent) are also acceptable.

For the Bāb, however, the best of personal names are those which are linked (in pre-genitive relationship as X-Allāh) with God Himself (with the personal name of God Allāh). The first examples given by the Bāb are based upon the opening Divine Names in the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar*. Specifically mentioned are the names [1] Bahāʾ-Allāh ("The Glory-Splendour of God"); [2] Jalāl-Allāh ("The Glory of God"); [3] Jamāl-Allāh ("the Beauty of God") as well as [5] Nūr-Allāh ("The Light of God"), Faḍl-Allāh ("The Grace of God"), Jūd-Allāh" ("The Bounty of God"), ʿAbd-Allāh ("The Servant of God"), and Dhikr-Allāh ("The Remembrance of God" (The Bāb n.d.a, p. 154f). The ordering of the first five names is obviously related to the Dawn Prayer.

At the end of P. Bayān V.4., the Bāb indicates that should a person bear the name Bahāʾ-Allāh, their Bahāʾ (radiant glory or splendour) would be confirmed by a comparable faith in the first to believe (*awwal man amana*) in the Bābī messiah *Man yuẓhiru-hu Allah*, namely the Bāb himself.[16] In this way their Bahāʾ-generated identity or consequent "Glory-Splendour radiating" nature as a person of true faith, would be confirmed or truly actualized.

The Bābī Messiah *Man yuẓhiru-hu Allāh* (Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest), the *Duʿāʾ al-Saḥar*, and Parallel Versions

> "All of the Bahāʾ of the Bayān is *Man yuẓhiru-hu Allāh*, "Him whom God shall make manifest" (The Bāb n.d.a, III.14, p. 98).

In the writings of the Bāb there are certain passages in which the person of the future promised Messenger of God named "Him whom God shall make manifest" are closely related to the word Bahāʾ (as in The Bāb n.d.a, III.14 cited above), the first among the Divine Names in the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar.* The Bābī messiah figure is not only especially related to al-Bahāʾ, the radiant "Splendour", but to most of the 18 or more Divine Attributes mentioned in the Imam-generated devotional texts discussed here. A good example of such rhythmic *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar / Mubahālah*-related writing of the Bāb is the following:

وانّ بهاء من يظهره الله فوق كلّ بهاء وانّ جلاله فوق كلّ جلال وانّ جماله فوق كلّ جمال

وانّ عظمته فوق كلّ عظمة وانّ نوره فوق كلّ نور وانّ رحمته فوق كلّ رحمة وانّ كماله فوق كلّ كمال

وانّ عزّته فوق كلّ عزّة وانّ اسمائه فوق كلّ اسماء وانّ رضائه فوق كلّ رضاء وانّ علوّه فوق كلّ علوّ

وانّ ظهوره فوق كلّ ظهور وانّ بطونه فوق كلّ بطون وانّ علائه فوق كلّ علاء وانّ منّه فوق كلّ منّ

وانّ قوّته فوق كلّ قوّة وانّ سلطنته فوق كلّ سلطنة وانّ ملكه فوق كلّ ملك وانّ علمه نافذ في كلّ شيء

وانّ قدرته مستطيلة على كلّ شيء…

> The [1] Bahāʾ ("Splendour") of *Man yuẓhiru-hu Allāh* ("Him whom God shall make manifest") is above every other bahāʾ (splendour). His [2] Jalāl (Glory) is above every other jalāl (glory). His [3] Jamāl (Beauty) is above every other jamāl (beauty). His [4]ʿAẓamat ("Grandeur") is above every other ʿaẓamat (grandeur). His [5] Nūr ("Light") is above every other nūr (light). His [6] Raḥmat ("Mercy") is above every other raḥmat (mercy). His [8] Kamāl ("Perfection") is above every other kamāl (perfection). His [10] ʿIzzat (Might) is above every other expression of might (ʿizzat). His [9] Asmāʾ ("Names") are above all other asmāʾ (names). His Riḍāʾ ("Contentment") is above every other riḍāʾ (contentment). His [19] ʿUluww ("Sublimity") is above every other expression of ʿuluww (sublimity). His Ẓuhūr ("Manifestation") is above every other manifestation [theophany] (ẓuhūr). His Buṭūn ("Hiddenness") is beyond every other buṭūn (hiddenness). His [19] ʿAlā ("Loftiness") is above every other manner of ʿalā (exaltedness). His [20] Mann ("**Benevolence"**) is above every other example of mann (benevolence). His Quwwat ("Power") is above every other expression of of quwwat (strength). His [17] Sulṭānah ("**Sovereignty")** is above every other example of sulṭānah (sovereignty). His [18] Mulk ("Dominion") is above every other expression of mulk (rule). His [12 = 13] ʿIlm ("Knowledge") "is truly Penetrating (nāfidh) of all things". His [13 = 12] Qudrat ("Power") "is truly All-Subduing (mustatīlat) of all things" . . . [17]

The Word Bahāʾ in Islamic Literatures and the Writings of the Bāb

Not found in the Qurʾān or among the traditional ninety-nine Names of God spelled out and commented upon by Imam ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), Abū Hurayra (d.c. 58/678), Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) and many others, the word Bahāʾ occurs numerous times in Islamic literature. It is found in hundreds of texts composed throughout the more than a millennium of Islamic theological evolution. The words Bahāʾ and Bahiyy are occasionally found in book titles. An early (unfortunately now lost) example is the apparently philological, psychological *Kitāb al-bahā'* (or *bahiyy*), written by Abū Zakariyāʾ Yaḥyā ibn Ziyād al-Farrāʾ (d. c. 207/822) (Sezgin 1982, p. 123; Kinberg 1996). The epithets Bahāʾ al-Dawla ("Glory of the State") and Bahāʾ al-Dīn ("The Glory of Religion"), for example, gained widespread Islamic usage from around the 10th-11th centuries. CE (Kramers 1926). Bahāʾ occurs in several prophetic ḥadīth. It is found around nineteen times in the widely used Cairo 4 volume edition of the massive *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (*the Meccan Openings*) of the Great Shaykh Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. Damascus, 638/1240) (Ibn al-ʿArabī 1365/1911) and in a very large number of other mystical writings (Lambden 1988). It occurs more than 70 times in the multifarious, mostly Shīʿī texts making up the massive and composite (15 volumes in the late 1880s–1890s and 100 + volumes in the 1950s–1970s 2nd edition) encyclopedic *Biḥār al-anwār* (*Oceans of Lights*) of Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī.

Many uses of the word Bahāʾ in the writings of the Báb are rooted in the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* or the partly parallel and extended *Duʿāʾ al-mubāhalah*.[18] There yet remain hundreds of independent uses of the word Bahāʾ along with related neologisms that are not found or normally used in previous Arabic texts. An example of the independent use of the word Bahāʾ is present towards the beginning of the early *Khuṭba jalīliyya* (The Literary Oration of the Majestic One) of the Báb, which commences as follows:

> In the Name of God, the Exalted, the Mighty.
>
> Praised be to God who shed the radiance of His Ḍiyāʾ (Brightness) and revealed Himself (*tajallī*) before the Theophanic Cloud (*li'l-ʿamāʾ*) through the Bahāʾ (the radiant Glory–Splendour–Light). (The Báb n.d.e, p. 1).[19]

In the first major book of the Báb, the *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* or *Tafsīr Sūrat Yusuf* (Commentary on the Surah of Joseph, dating from mid-1844), the word Bahāʾ occurs about fifteen times.[20] There are occasional references to the *ahl al-Bahāʾ* (the people of Bahāʾ) as well as to other derivatives from the same triliteral root, such as *bahiyya* (glorious).[21] In later writings, neologisms from this root are not uncommon, especially within writings of the Báb dating to the late 1840s up till mid-1850.

Bahāʾ, (بهاء) Bahāʾu'llāh and the *Duʿāʾ al-Saḥar*

> "The Greatest Name [as Bahāʾ and related phrases] is a distinctive mark of the [Bahāʾī] Cause and a symbol of our Faith" (Shoghi Effendi 1988, p. 895)

The word Bahāʾ all but opens the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar*. It forms the essence of the eschatological title or sacred name of the person of Mīrzā Ḥusayn ʿAlī Nūrī (1817–1892). The title Bahāʾu'llah (=Bahāʾ + Allāh) can be viewed as a double greatest Name in the sense that for Bahāʾīs, Bahāʾ is the quintessence of the Greatest Name (Ar. *al-ism al-aʿẓam*) of God while the word Allāh is another form of the Greatest Name of God, according to Islamic and Bābī-Bahāʾī sources. In his *Tafsīr ḥurūfāt al-muqaṭṭaʿah* (Tablet of the Disconnected Letters, c. 1858) Bahāʾu'llāh explicitly refers to the personal Name of God Allāh as a form of the Greatest Name (Ar. *al-ism al-aʿẓam*) (see Bahāʾu'llāh 1971–1972, p. 67).

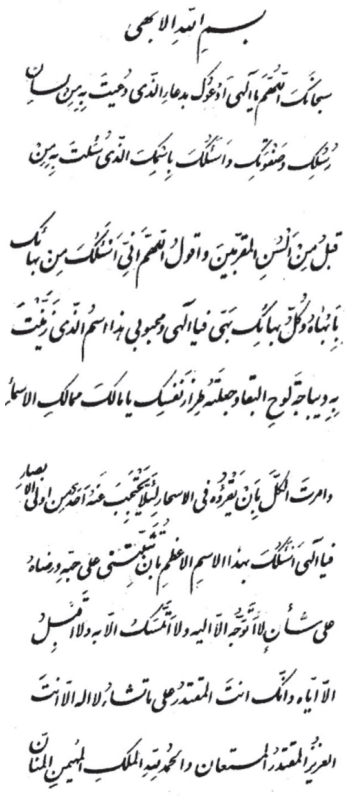
One can hardly overestimate the elevated status which Bahāʾu'llāh afforded to the *Duʿa al-saḥar*. Its all but prophetic opening words center upon three occurrences of the theologically weighty word Bahāʾ along with its superlative (*abhāʾ*) and the form *bahiyy*, meaning (among other things) "resplendent", "radiant", "glorious", "luminous", and "splendid". These related terms all derive from the three root letters of the verbal noun Bahāʾ ([1] b-[2] h-[3] a/w; note also the glottal stop *hamza*). The founder of the Bahāʾī religion considered this to be the *al-ism al-aʿẓam*, the "Greatest Name of God" indicative, as previously noted, of radiant Divine "Glory", "Splendour", or "Light".

This Imam-generated Dawn Supplication translated here is closely related to many neo-basmala formulas (= In the Name of God, the X, Y or X, Y, Z, etc.) introducing the scriptural writings of Bahāʾu'llāh, and to many of the blessings upon believers addressed within them. The three words—Bahāʾ, Abhāʾ, and Bahiyy—occur thousands of times in new Bābī-Bahāʾī basmala ("In the Name of the___, the __") scriptural commencements; such as, for example, "In the Name of God, al-Bahāʾ al-Abhāʾ (the Glorious, the All-Glorious)[22] (see Bahāʾu'llāh 1996, first line index). The title Bahāʾu'llāh, as he himself indicated, was foreshadowed in pre-Islamic sacred literature such as the Bible (Bahāʾ is often represented by the biblical Hebrew word כָּבוֹד (e.g., Ezekiel 1, 10, Isaiah 40:5), and the Greek word **Δόξα**, doxa, both of which may mean radiant "glory", as well as in many writings of the Báb, including his Qayyum al-asmāʾ and Persian and Arabic Bayans ("Expositions").

Three Tablets of Bahāʾu'llāh Citing the Opening of the *Duʿāʾ al-Saḥar*

Occasionally in his revelatory writings, Bahāʾu'llāh comments upon the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar*. A few examples within his Arabic and Persian writings can be referred to at this point.

(1) An Arabic Prayer of Bahāʾu'llāh Citing and Commenting upon the Opening Words of the Duʿāʾ al-saḥar[23]



In the Name of God, al-Abhāʾ (the All-Glorious).

Glorified art Thou, O My God!

O my God! I beseech Thee by means of a supplication (*duʿāʾ*) through which hath been ornamented the tongues of Thy Messengers (*rusul*) and Thine Elite (*ṣafwa*)! And I beseech Thee by Thy Name by means of which Thou hast been supplicated aforetime, through the tongues of such as are nigh unto God (*al-muqarrabīn*). And I thus implore Thee saying:

"I, verily, O my God, beseech Thee through Thy Bahāʾ (Splendour) at its Most Glorious (*bi-abhā-hu*) for all of Thy Bahāʾ (Splendour) is resplendent (*bahiyy*)".

So O my God! And My Beloved One,

This is indeed a Name through which Thou hast ornamented the exordium (*dībāja*) of the Tablet of Eternity (*lawḥ-i baqāʾ*). And Thou made it to be the Ornament of Thine Own Self (*tirāz nafsi-ka*), O Thou Monarch of the Kingdoms of Names (*malik al-mamālik al-asmāʾ*). Thou didst command all that they should recite it at dawn-times (*al-asḥār*) to the end that none possessed of insight should be veiled from Him.

Wherefore, O my God! I ask Thee by this Greatest Name (*al-ism al-aʿẓam*) that Thou make me to be one firm as accords with His love (*ḥubb*) and His contentment (*riḍā*). This to the degree that I might not be numbered among such as orient themselves save towards Him, may not take firm hold of anything except Him or

> speak out anything save what pertains to Him! Thou indeed art One Powerful regarding whatsoever Thou willeth. No God is there except Thee, the Mighty, the Powerful, the One Implored for Help. And praised be to God, the Help in Peril, the Beneficent.

The opening multiple Bahāʾ-related invocation in the above fairly brief Arabic prayer of Bahāʾu'llāh, is often cited and greatly lauded. This centrally important introductory verse, the opening line or proem of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar*, is referred to in very elevated terms. It is the exordium or "opening brocade" (*dībāja*) of the "Tablet of Eternity" (*lawḥ-i baqāʾ*) which most likely denotes the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar*, the Dawn Prayer itself.[24]

The Arabic loanword *dībāja* appears to derive from the Persian *dībācha* (Per. dībā = "brocade", etc + cha = the diminutive suffix). This word has multiple meanings including related to luxury, gilded or embroidered cloth or silk.[25] The classic Steingass Persian dictionary (1st ed. 1892) states that *dībāja* or *dībācha* is indicative of "The preface, exordium, or preamble to a book (as being generally written in an ornamental style, and adorned with gilding and other decorations)" (Steingass 1984, p. 551). In the chapter "Princesses, Patronage and the Production of Knowledge in Safavid Iran" by Yusuf Ünal in the volume edited by Stewart and Künkler entitled *Female Religious Authority in Shīʿī Islam: Past and Present* (see Stewart and Künkler 2021), we find the following lines under the heading ʿThe Anatomy of the Preface':

> "Persian *Dībācha*, or the Arabicised form *dībāja*, originally referred to the gold embroidered fringe on a luxurious robe and by extension the countenance of the beloved. It came to be used, however, as a technical term for the preface, preamble, or introduction to a work, which, in particularly valuable texts, was often gilded or embellished with painting or other materials"[26]

(2) An Extract from a Persian Tablet of Bahāʾu'llāh to Mīrzā ʿAbbās of Āstarābād about the Duʿāʾ al-Saḥar and the Greatest Name of God[27]

بنام خداوند یکتا
کتابت در سجن حاضر و توجه الیه طرف المظلوم
الّذی دعا الکل الی الله المهیمن القیّوم و صدر آن باین کلمهٔ
مبارکه مزین بود اللّهم انّی اسئلك من بهائك بابهاه
مشاهده در غفلت اهل فرقان نمائید مع آنکه از قبل فرمودهاند
که اسم اعظم الهی در این دعا مذکور است و نزد صاحبان بصر
بسی واضح و مشهود است که مقام ذکر اسم اعظم در اول و
ابتدا بوده چه که مقدم بر اسماء و مبداء و مطلع اذکار است
و در صدر دعای مذکور واقع شده با وجود این جمیع انکار نموده
و عارف بحق او نشدند بلکه فتوی بر قتلش دادند الّا من
حفظه الله بالحق و انقذه من بحر الاوهام انّه لهو المقتدر القدیر ...

In the Name of God, the One.

Thy letter arrived in the (Acre) Prison and the gaze of the Wronged One (*al-maẓlūm* = Bahāʾu'llāh) who summoneth all unto God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting, was directed unto it. The essence (*ṣadr*) of that communication was ornamented with this blessed phrase (*kalimat-i mubāraka*),

"I, verily, O my God, beseech Thee through Thy Bahāʾ (Splendour) at its Most Splendid (*bi-abhāʾ-hu*)".

Thou art aware of the perfidy of the people of the criterion (*ahl al-furqān*) [the Qurʾān], despite the fact that they [certain of the Imams] indicated that the Greatest Name of God (*ism-i aʿẓam-i ilāhī*) is mentioned in this [Ramaḍan fasting] supplication (*Duʿāʾ*) [of Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir]. And it is abundantly clear and evident on the part of the possessors of insight (*ṣāḥibān-i baṣar*) that the position (*maqām*) of the mention [of *Bahāʾ* as] the Greatest Name (*ism-i aʿẓam*) is at its very opening or commencement. This since it [*Bahāʾ*] has pre-eminence (*muqaddam*) over the [other Divine] Names (*asmāʾ*) and is the genesis (*mubdāʾ*) and dawning-point (*maṭlā*) of the [other] commemorative lines [within this dawn supplication] (*adhkar*) being mentioned and positioned at the very inception (*ṣadr*) of the supplication (*Duʿāʾ*). In spite then of this, it was the case that all repudiated it and remained unaware of its Truth. Nay indeed! They the [Shīʿī] ulamāʾ issued a fatwā for his [Bahāʾu'llah's] execution; save, that is, such as were, in very Truth, safeguarded by God and rescued from the ocean of idle fancies. He [God] indeed is assuredly the Powerful, the Potent.[28]

(3) Another Untitled Arabic and Persian Tablet of Bahāʾu'llah Identifying and Celebrating the Word Bahāʾ in the Duʿāʾ al-saḥar with Himself as the ism Allāh al-aʿẓam, the Greatest Name of God

[٩٠] **بسمي الّذي به أشرق نور البيان**
من أفق الإمكان

يا أَيُّها ٱلنَّاظِرُ إِلىٰ ٱلْوَجْهِ وَٱلْمَذْكُوْرُ لَدىٰ ٱلْعَرْشِ ،
امروز لسان برهان در ملكوت بيان باين كلمهٔ مباركهٔ
عليا متكلّم، ٱللّٰهُمَّ إِنِّيْ أَسْئَلُكَ مِنْ بَهائِكَ بِأَبْهاهُ وَكُلُّ
بَهائُكَ بَهِيٌّ، هٰذا ٱسْمُ ٱللهِ ٱلْأَعْظَمِ ٱلَّذِيْ أَخْبَرَ بِهِ حُجَّةُ
ٱللهِ وَبُرْهانُهُ، لَعَمْرِيْ مٰا ظَهَرَ ذِكْرٌ وَلاٰ بَيانٌ أَصْرَحُ مِنْ
ذٰلِكَ طُوْبىٰ لِلْمُنْصِفِيْنَ، هٰذا ٱسْمٌ ٱرْتَعَدَتْ مِنْهُ فَرائِصُ
ٱلْمُشْرِكِيْنَ وَٱطْمَئَنَّتْ بِهِ أَفْئِدَةُ ٱلْمُقَرَّبِيْنَ، أَقْبِلْ وَقُلِ
ٱلْمُلْكُ وَٱلْمَلَكُوْتُ فِيْ قَبْضَةِ قُدْرَةِ ٱللهِ رَبِّ ٱلْعالَمِيْنَ
ٱلَّذِيْ لَمْ تَمْنَعْهُ ٱلصُّفُوْفُ وَلاٰ أَقْوىٰ جُنُوْدِ ٱلْعالَمِ يَفْعَلُ
مٰا يَشاءُ وَيَحْكُمُ مٰا يُرِيْدُ وَهُوَ ٱلْعَزِيْزُ ٱلْحَمِيْدُ.

In My Name through which the Light of Exposition (*nūr al-bayān*) hath radiated forth from the Horizon of Possibility (*ufq al-imkān*)!

O Thou who gazest towards the Countenance and are one mentioned before the Throne! Today the Tongue of the Proof in the Kingdom of Exposition (*malakūt al-bayān*) giveth utterance to this Elevated, Blessed, Word (*kalimat-i mubāraka-i ʿulyāʾ*):

"O my God! I beseech Thee by Thy Bahāʾ (Splendour) at its most Splendid (*abhāʾ*) for all Thy Splendour (*Bahāʾ*) is truly resplendent (*bahiyy*) . . . "

This is the Greatest Name of God (*ism Allāh al-aʿẓam*) which was announced by the proof of God (*hujjat Allāh*) and His evidence[29] [the Imam and/or the Bāb]. By My Life! There hath not appeared either any mention (*dhikr*) nor any evidence

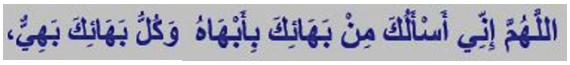
> (*bayān*) more lucid (*aṣraḥ*) than this. Blessed then be such as demand justice (*ṭubā li'l-munṣifiyyin*)! This [word Bahā'] is a Name through which the limbs of the unbelievers (*farā'iṣ al-mushrikīn*) hath been made to quake and whereby the hearts of those who are nigh unto God (*al-muqarrabīn*) hath been made tranquil. So draw ye nigh and say: The Kingdom and the Kingdom of God (*al-mulk wa'l-malakūt*) are in the grasp of the power of God, the Lord of all the worlds! He it is whom the [military] ranks (*al-ṣufūf*) cannot hold back nor the powers of the hosts of the world (*junūd al-ʿalam*) overpower him. He doeth whatsoever He willeth and ordaineth whatsoever He pleaseth for He is One Mighty, Praiseworthy (trans. Lambden from Bahāʾu'llāh 1990, p. 183).

The above cited and translated scriptural Tablet of Bahāʾu'llāh clearly identifies the words relating to the Arabic root of Bahāʾ in the Dawn Prayer, with the Mightiest or Greatest Name of God (*ism Allāh al-aʿẓam*). It also celebrates both the challenge it presents to those unable to assent to its greatness and the tranquil joy it imparts to the faithful. In this connection, see Bahā'u'llāh's statement in his *Kitāb-i aqdas*: "Let your joy be the joy born of My Most Great Name (*ismī al-aʿẓam*), a Name that bringeth rapture to the heart and filleth with ecstasy the minds of all who have drawn nigh unto God." (Bahāʾu'llāh 1992a, para. 51 p. 49; Bahāʾu'llāh1992b, trans. p. 38).

A Few Further Examples from the Writings of Bahāʾu'llāh Drawing upon the Opening Invocation of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar*

The opening line of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥār* was translated by Shoghi Effendi in an interesting way, as cited in the late book of Bahāʾu'llāh, his *Lawḥ-i Shaykh Muḥammad Taqī Najafī* (d. 1914), the Ibn-i Dhiʿb or "Son of the Wolf":[30]

> O Shaykh! Seek thou the shore of the Most Great Ocean, and enter, then, the Crimson Ark which God hath ordained in the Qayyúm-i-Asmá for the people of Bahá. Verily, it passeth over land and sea. He that entereth therein is saved, and he that turneth aside perisheth. Shouldst thou enter therein and attain unto it, set thy face towards the Kaaba of God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting, and say:



> "O my God!
> I beseech Thee by Thy most glorious light (*Bahāʾ*),
> and all Thy lights (*kull Bahāʾ*) are verily glorious (*bahiyy*)."

> Thereupon, will the doors of the Kingdom (*abwāb al-malakūt*) be flung wide before thy face, and thou wilt behold what eyes have never beheld, and hear what ears have never heard. This Wronged One (*al-maẓlūm*) exhorteth thee as He hath exhorted thee before, and hath never had any wish for thee save that thou shouldst enter the Ocean of Sanctified Unicity (*baḥr al-aḥadiyya Allāh*), the Lord of the worlds. This is the day whereon all created things cry out, and announce unto men this Revelation, through which hath appeared what was concealed and preserved in the knowledge of God, the Mighty, the All-Praised (Bahāʾu'llāh 1919–1920, p. 164; trans. as Bahāʾu'llāh 1976, p. 140).

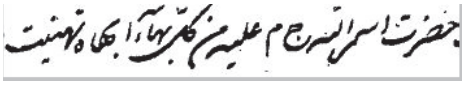
Here Bahāʾu'llāh promises Āqā Najafi (the "son of the wolf") that should he come to faith and turn towards Bahāʾu'llāh as the "Kaʿba of God" he would behold the open doors of the Bahāʾī-related Kingdom of God. The shining of the new and brilliant eschatological Bahāʾ-generated Nūr (Light) is seen by Shoghi Effendi in the above translation to be reflected in the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* of Imam Muḥammad Baqir.

Numerous passages within the scriptural Tablets of Bahāʾu'llāh cite in diverse ways the opening line of the *Duʿāʾ al-Bahā*. One of these, addressed to his apostle Muḥammad

Kazim Qazvīnī, Samandar (1844–1918 CE), quotes sections of the first line of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* as it is printed in *Āyāt-i bayyināt* (No. 152):

> If the substance of this letter were sent to the beloved of the inmost heart of his eminence Samandar, may the fire of divine love be upon him, through all of the Bahāʾ (Splendour) at its most Splendid (*abhāʾ-hu*) . . . (Bahāʾu'llāh 1999, No. 152 pp. 318–19).

Another slightly variant example is found within a section of text extant within a ms. Tablet of Bahāʾu'llāh to Haḍrat-i ism-i Zayn [al-Muqarrabīn] dated 18th Dhu'l-Ḥijjah 1300 (=18th October 1883 CE):



> . . . His eminence Ism-Allah jim-mim ["J"-"M" = Jamāal], upon him be of the fullness of Bahāʾ (Splendour) at its most Splendid (*abhāʾ-hu*) . . . " (Bahāʾu'llāh 1883, p. 4).

Concluding Note

From before the time of Christ, some Jews held the supreme name of God—YHWH, Yahweh, loosely and inaccurately, "Jehovah"—in such reverence that they came to forbid its being uttered save once a year in the "holy of holies" in Jerusalem, by the high priest on the "Day of Atonement". With the universalization of Islam, the supreme personal name of Allāh (God) as the mightiest Name became commonly recognized. Today the hiddenness of its new identification has again become universally realized and revered. Bahāʾu'llāh several times confirmed that the word Bahāʾ as the once all but "Hidden Name" is now the supreme or "Greatest Name". This is as Shīʿī traditions had indicated to some degree by virtue of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥār* and related texts which contain an intimation of the new *al-ism al-aʿẓam* (the Greatest Name of God).

For contemporary Bahāʾīs, Bahāʾ is the quintessence of the powerful, response-evoking mightiest or Greatest Name of God. Bahāʾīs identify the Greatest Name as the first major divine Name in the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar*. Al-Bahāʾ meaning radiant "Splendour", "Glory", and "Light" when invoked today may enable the suppliant to have their wishes granted by God. By means of its recitation, Bahāʾu'llāh taught, one might gain entrance into the eschatological "kingdom of God" by means of the power of his new Name.

Some Bibliographical Notes and References on the Shīʿī Duʿāʾ al-Saḥar (The Supplication for Dawn) and the Duʿāʾ Yawm al-Mubāhalah ("Supplication for the Day of Mutual Imprecation")

Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. c. 126/743).

> *Duʿāʾ al-Saḥar / Duʿāʾ al-Bahāʾ* (The Dawn Supplication) also known as the Duʿāʾ al-Bahāʾ (The Supplication of Splendour).

The *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* as transmitted from the fifth Imam seems not to be present in the major works of Shaykh Abu Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan al-Tūsī (d. 460/1067), such as his Miṣbāh al-Mutaḥajjid, although editions and printings of this work do contain the text of the Mubāhalah version. Ibn Tāwūs in fact refers to Abū Jaʿfar al-Tūsī in his Iqbāl al-aʾmāl (al-Tūsī 1996, p. 292) as transmitting the Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq or Mubāhalah version of this supplication (see also below and the shorter, alternative version on pp. 291–92).

Recitations, texts, and translations of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* can be found on various internet sites and on YouTube. An Arabic recitation of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* along with an Italian rendering based on my English translation was (until recently) available on YouTube.

- **An Islamic example:** https://www.imamalasr.org/dua-baha/ accessed on 19 January 2023

Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. c. 148/765) and the Duʿāʾ yawm al-mubāhalah

A closely related and somewhat longer version of the Arabic *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* Dawn Prayer was transmitted from the sixth Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq. Al-Tūsī states in his Miṣbāḥ (see below) that the Mubāhalah text was relayed from Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān al-Daylamī via Ḥusayn ibn Khālid from the sixth Imam Abī ʿAbduʾllāh or Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (al-Tusi 1998 p. 759; see also Ibn Tāwūs 1417/1996, p. 845). Opening exactly as the Duʿāʾ al-Saḥar, it is known as the *Duʿāʾ yawm al-mubāhalah* (The Supplication of the Day of the Mutual Imprecation).

This longer text is well known, much cited, and of great importance to the Bāb, and is not translated here or discussed in this brief paper. We should note that Shīʿī sources indicate that it has a close relationship with the emergence of Shīʿī Islam through what came to be the fivefold "family" (*āl*) of God or of the Prophet Muḥammad. These five *ahl al-kisāʾ* (people of the cloak) are [1] the Prophet himself, [2] Imam ʿAli ibn Abī Ṭālib, [3] his wife Fāṭimah (daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad), and their two sons the Imams [4] Hasan and [5] Husayn. They are all associated with the confrontation or mubāhalah episode allusively referred to in Qurʾān. 3:61. It is reckoned to have taken place in 10 AH/631CE, traditionally it has been dated to around the 24th of Dhu'l-Ḥijjah, the 9th–10th April 631.

The recitation of the ultra-powerful *Yawm al-mubāhalah* text was meant to settle the difficult debate between the Prophet and various Christians of the Yemenite city of Najrān, particularly with a learned leader sometimes identified as Balḥārith ibn Kaʿb. Yet it is generally conceded that the Mubāhalah text was not uttered following this at times of intense theological, Christological dialogue and debate (see Q. 3:61, Stewart 2001; Schmucker 2012). Much detail about the proposed Mubāhalah episode along with the text of the Duʿāʾ can be found in, for example, (as noted below) al-Tūsī, *Miṣbāḥ*, Ibn Tāwūs, *al-Iqbāl al-aʿmāl* (ed. 1417/1995, pp. 813–845f), al-Kafʿamī, *al-Balad al-Amīn* (1418/1997, pp. 372–79) as well as numerous other Sunnī and Shīʿī sources. What follows are a few select source references:

Ibn Tāwūs al-Ḥasani aI-ʿAlawī; Raḍī al-Dīn al-Hillī (d. 673/1274–5).

- *Iqbāl al-aʿmāl al-ḥasanat fī mā yuʿmal marrah fī'l-sana*h. 1417/1996.
- "Duʿāʾ al-Saḥar / Duʿāʾ al-Bahāʾ" see Iqbāl al-aʿmāl, Ramaḍān section pp. 292–93 and 293–95 where we find a shorter alternative version followed by what appears to be the "Duʿāʾ yawm al-mubāhalah" (a version of which is also in Iqbāl al-aʿmāl, pp. 846–48).

Khomeini, Ruhollah Musavi (1900–1989)

- *Sharh Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* (Commentary on *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar*), (written c. 1928), Beirut: Mu'assasat al-wafa', 1402/1982.

Kirmānī, Muḥammad Karīm Khān (d. 1871).

- Risālah fī sharḥ Duʿāʾ al-saḥar. Kirman: al-saʿāda, n.d.

Lambden, Stephen

- Relevant material can be found on this website: https://hurqalya.ucmerced.edu

Majlisī, Muḥammad Bāqir (d.1111/1699–1700)

- "Duʿāʾ al-Saḥar" in ***Kitāb Zād al-maʿād*** ("Provisions for the Eschaton"), Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Aʿlamī li'l-Maṭbūʿāt, 1423/2003, pp. 90–91.

al-Qummī, Shaykh ʿAbbās (b. Qum 1294/1877-d. Najaf, 1359/1941).

- "Duʿāʾ al-Saḥar" in *Mafātiḥ al-jinān* (Keys of Paradise). Beirut: Dār Iḥyā al-Turath al-ʿArabī, 1422/2001, pp. 221–22.
- "Duʿāʾ al-Saḥar" in *Mafatīḥ al-jinān*. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Aʿlamī wa'l-Maṭbūʿāt, 2006/1427, pp. 238–39.
- "Duʿāʾ al-Saḥar" in *Mafatīḥ al-jinān*. Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwā', 1435/2014.

Select Printings of the Duʿāʾ Yawm al-Mubāhalah ("Supplication for the Day of Mutual Imprecation")

Ibn Tāwūs al-Ḥasani al-ʿAlawī, Raḍī al-Dīn al-Hillī (d. 673/1274–5).

- *Iqbāl al-aʿmāl al-ḥasanat fī mā yuʿmal marrah fī'l-sanah*. 1417/1996. The Mubāhalah supplication is found on pages 846–8 (cf. also the notes above).

al-Kafʿamī, Taqī al-Dīn Ibrāhīm ibn ʿAlī al-ʿĀmilī (d. 900/1494–5).

- "Duʿāʾ yawm al-mubāhalah" in *al-Miṣbāḥ [= Jannat al-amān al-wāqiyya wa junnat al-īmān al-bāqiyya].* Beirut, 1414/1994, pp. 915–18.
- "Duʿāʾ yawm al-mubāhalah" in al-Miṣbāḥ, *Jannat al-amān al-wāqiyya wa junnat al-īmān al-bāqiyya*. Muʾassasat al-ʾAʿlamī li'l-Maṭbūʿāt, Beirut, 1425/2004, pp. 879–81.
- "Duʿāʾ yawm al-mubāhalah" in *al-Balad al-amīn waʾl-dirʿ al-ḥaṣīn* ("The Secure Land and the Protective Armor") ed. ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Aʿlamī. Beirut, 1418/1997, pp. 372–75.

The fifth Imam's *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* version seems not to be found in the *al-Miṣbāḥ* of al-Kafʿamī which extends the *al-Miṣbāḥ* of al-Tūsī, also named the *Jannat al-amān al-wāqiyya wa-jannat al-īmān al-bāqiyya*. This lengthy text does, however, contain a related, somewhat variant truncated version of sections of the Duʿāʾ al-saḥar, on pages 751–52, to be recited between devotional prostrations. On the Mubāhalah version within the *Miṣbāḥ* of al-Kafʿamī, see above.

Majlisī, Mu ḥammad Bāqir (d. 1111/1699–1700).

- "Duʿāʾ yawm al-mubāhalah" in *Kitāb Zād al-maʿād* ("Provisions for the Eschaton"), 1423/2003, pp. 220–23.

al-Qummī, Shaykh ʿAbbās (b. Qum 1294/1877-d. Najaf, 1359/1941).

- "Duʿāʾ yawm al-mubāhalah" in *Mafātiḥ al-jinān* (Keys of Paradise). 1422/2001, pp. 321–23.
- "Duʿāʾ yawm al-mubāhalah" in *Mafātiḥ al-jinān*, 2006/1427, pp. 349–53.
- Lambden partial trans. on H* website: "The Duʿāʾ yawm al-mubāhala ("Supplication for the Day of Mutual Execration"). https://hurqalya.ucmerced.edu/node/101

al-Tūsī, Shaykh Abu Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan (d. 460/1067)

- *Al-Misbāḥ al-mutahajjid, Junnat al-amān al-wāqiyya wa jannat al-īmān al-bāqiyya*. Beirut: Muʿassat al-Tārīkh al-ʿArabī, 1411/1991, pp. 760–63.
- *Miṣbāh al-mutaḥajjid* [Junnat al-amān al-wāqiyya wa jannat al-īmān al-bāqiyya]. Beirut: Muʿassasat al-Aʿlamī li'l-Maṭbūʿāt, 1418/1998. pp. 529–32.

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Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 The text cited here is taken from (al-Qummī 1435/2014, p. 209).

2 This first invocation of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* could be translated in numerous different ways. Its opening divine Name Bahāʾ (three times present in this opening invocation) and the other two related Arabic words, the superlative Abhāʾ ("All-Glorious") and the adjectival form Bahiyy ("Glorious", "Luminous", etc), can also have meanings expressive of radiant "Glory", "Brilliance", "Beauty", Splendour", and "Light". For further general details about the word Bahāʾ see (Lambden 1988, 2002), and the brief notes below.

3 See further the notes on this text in the bibliography below, by the sixth Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. c/148/765). Though it begins just like the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar*, this text is not fully translated in this paper. It also had a massive influence upon the Bāb. The word *mubāhalah* indicates a mutual calling down of the judgement of God to decide between the truthfulness of two individuals or

groups in theological debate or engaged in other forms of dispute. The episode of *mubāhalah* referred to here is that which took place near Medina involving Christians of Najrān, their leaders and the Prophet Muḥammad.

4 al-Ṭūsī was the author of two of the major (four "canonical"), largely legalistic books containing thousands of Twelver traditions. They are named *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām* (The Rectfication of the Judgments) and *al-Istibsār . . . al-akhbār* (The Examination of the Reports). His *Miṣbāḥ al-mutahajjid* appears only to contain the text of the *Duʿāʾ al-mubāhalah* version with a partial echo of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* elsewhere (see further the notes and the bibliography below).

5 On Ibn Ṭāwūs see, for example, (Kohlberg 1992). The al-Iqbal al-a'māl and other writings of Ibn Ṭāwūs contain echoes of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* and the variant *Duʿāʾ yawm al-mubāhalah* version.

6 See also the foundational texts and notes on these lines in (al-Ṭūsī 1418/1998, p. 529ff; Ibn Tāwūs 1417/1996, pp. 845–46; al-Kafʿamī 1418/1997, pp. 372–37 fn.2). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Islamic and Bābī and Bahāʾī sacred writings within this paper are my own. They are provisional attempts at accurate translation on academic lines.

7 The translation below was first completed in the 1980s in Newcastle upon Tyne (UK). In the 1990s and after the year 2000, it has been slightly revised several times (in the USA and elsewhere).

8 This first Divine Name and nineteenth and final Bāb-generated month name *ʿAlā* (Loftiness) is so named in the *Dūʿāʾ yawm al-mubāhalah* recension of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, though it is sometimes positioned slightly later (or first set down as *ʿUluww* (Sublimity) and a little later as Aʿlā in the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* of Imam Muḥammad al-Baqir.

9 Examples can be found in the *Kitāb al-asmāʾ*; See (The Bāb n.d.f, pp. 4f, 26, 31f, etc. and The Bāb, n.d.g, I,1 (p. 3f); III.4 (p. 89f); VI,3 (p. 188f); VII. 1 (pp. 216, 224); VII.5 (p. 245f), etc).

10 The square bracketed [-] numbers indicate positions in versions of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* and/or *Duʿāʾ . . . mubāhalah* (initial M within the square brackets indicates this latter version).

11 This ms. of the *Kitāb al-asmāʾ* is a partial, selective one and does not include its earliest sections.

12 In the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* ("Dawn Prayer") Bahāʾ ("Splendour") is the first Divine Name mentioned in the first, initial invocation. ʿAlā' ("Loftiness") is the nineteenth in some versions of it. In certain printings of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* (such as the al-Qummī, *Mafātīḥ al-Jinan*, p. 222; cf. p. 322) it follows the use of the nineteenth verbal noun ʿuluwwika, meaning "Thy Sublimity". In the version of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* relayed from Ibn Tāwūs as cited by al-Majlisī in his *Zād al-maʿād*, this verbal noun ʿAlā occurs at the outset in the initial (nineteenth phrase) ʿalā'ika meaning "Thy Loftiness" (see Majlisī 1423/2003, p. 114; cf. al-Qummī 1422/2001, p. 322). This nineteenth Attribute–month also occurs in the superlative form, i.e., "Most Transcendent", a few words later in the nineteenth [19b] invocatory section along with the word *ʿAlin* (Lofty; at [19c]). Mss and printed versions vary somewhat.

13 The new calendar of the Bāb was apparently first set forth in his *Kitāb al-asmāʾ* (Book of Names c.1848–9). Roughly 25 years later this calendar was ratified by Bahá'u'lláh in his semi-legalistic *Kitāb-i Aqdas* (Most Holy Book c. 1873).

14 This designation or Divine Name of the fourth day Tuesday is related to the attribute Faḍl ("Grace", "Excellence", or similar) and would also seem to echo invocation number 28 in the *Duʿāʾ yawm al-mubāhalah* (see al-Qummī 1422/2001, p. 322). The verbal noun Fiḍāl (apparently the 3rd form of the root f-ḍ-l) meaning something like "grace", "favor", or perhaps "most Excellent / Gracious / Beneficent". This unusual form may be a neologism of the Bāb.

15 The English translations here are those found in certain ʿBahāʾī World' volumes in the section 4, Additional Material gleaned from "Nabil's Narrative regarding the Bahāʾī Calendar". See, for example, (Zarandī 1976–1979, p. 381).

16 I am inclined to think that the naming Bahāʾ-Allāh is confirmed through belief in the Bāb as the *awwal man amana* (first to believe) in the Bābī messiah *Man yuẓhiru-hu Allāh*; this rather than having to do with the person of Mullā Ḥusayn Bushrū'ī (d. 1849), the first believer in the Bāb. (See for example The Bāb 1978, p. 30–31; The Bāb 1976, p. 9–10).

17 The Arabic cited and translated here is found in (The Bāb 1978, pp. 110–11). I have translated and transliterated it anew so as to make my points clear (cf. The Bāb 1976, trans. pp. 156–57). The square bracketed numbers indicate the order of the Names of God found in the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar* (see above).

18 For some further notes on the word Bahāʾ in the writings of the Bāb, refer to Lambden Hurqalya personal website.

19 The early *Khuṭbah jalīliyya* ("Oration of the Divine Majesty") is a text which in some manuscripts immediately precedes the Bāb's *Tafsīr sūrat al-ʿaṣr* in (The Bāb n.d.e, pp. 1–5; The Bāb n.d.d, p. 1f).

20 See for example, *Qayyūm al-asmāʾ* XX [20] Sūrat al-Nūr in (The Bāb n.d.i, p. 34); QA XXII [22] Sūrat al-Mā' (The Sūrah of the Watery Expanse") in (The Bāb n.d.i, p. 36); QA XXVIII [28] Surah al-Qarābah (The Sūrah of the Kinsfolk) in (The Bāb n.d.i, p. 50, etc).

21 It is of considerable interest that the phrase *ahl al-Bahāʾ wa al-Majd* (the people of splendour and glory) is found in a supplication included in the *Miṣbah al-mutahajjid* of al-Tusi (al-Tusi 1998, p. 327).

22 The Bābī-Bahāʾī *basmala* ("In the Name of . . .) commencements often contain more than two elevated names or attributes of God going beyond the two Islamic *al-raḥman al-raḥim* names within the standard Qurʾān-rooted basmala.

23 This Arabic prayer is printed in the compilation Athar-i Qalam-i Aʿla, Majmuʿa-yi Munajat, pp. 45–6. The opening Bahāʾ-centered invocation is exactly the same in the *Duʿāʾ yawm al-Mubāhalah* (see bib.).

[24] Note also the Báb's use of the term *dībāja* towards the beginning of his early *Khuṭba jalīliyya* (Oration of the Divine Majesty, cited above) where the phrase *dībāja al-inshā'* (brocade of origination) is found (see The Báb n.d.d, p. 1). For a somewhat esoteric use of (Per.) *dībāchah* (or its Arabic equivalent) as well as a possible allusion to the first invocation of the *Duʿāʾ al-saḥar*—through the use of the phrase *Bahāʾ kull bahiyy* (or *Bahāʾ kull shay'*)—see Mīr Dāmād Astarābādī (2001, p. 272).

[25] According to the Hans Wehr Arabic Dictionary the noun *dībāja* means "brocade, introductory verses or lines, proem, preamble, face, visage, style, elegance of style, renown, repute, standing, prestige" (Wehr 1984, p. 270). See further, among numerous other sources, the entry under "Dībācha" in the *Lugha Nāmah* of ʿAlī Akbar Dihkhudā (b. Tehran, 1879-d. Tehran, 1956) where interesting uses of this word are cited from various Persian poets including Abu Muḥammad Saʿdī (d.c. 690/1291) and others (see Dihkhudā 1999, vol. 8, p. 11353).

[26] There is reference here to (Üzgör 1994, vol. 9, pp. 277–78). I am especially grateful to Professor Sholeh Quinn of the University of California, Merced, for bringing aspects of this material to my attention (see further Quinn 1996; Quinn 2000; Roxburgh 2000).

[27] This Tablet of Bahāʾu'llāh is printed in (Bahāʾu'llāh 1971–1972, p. 23)—reformatted or duplicated here.

[28] Translated by the author of this article from the Persian text published in (Bahāʾu'llāh 1971–1972, p 23). One may note here that an early work of the late Iranian leader Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini (1900–1989) was a commentary upon the Duʿāʾ al-saḥar supplication. Despite this research he rejected the Bahāʾī religion and did little to prevent the continuing persecution of the Bahāʾī community (see Khomeini 1402/1982).

[29] The phrase here "the proof of God (*hujjat Allāh*) and His evidence" may indicate the Imam(s) and /or the Báb or even Bahāʾu'llāh himself.

[30] His father was the anti-Bahāʾī mujtahid Muḥammad Baqir Najafi (d. 1884), castigated as "the wolf" (Ar. al-dhi'b) by Bahāʾu'llāh.

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Article

Last Prophet and Last Day: Shaykhī, Bābī and Bahā'ī Exegesis of the "Seal of the Prophets" (Q. 33:40) †

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† Dedicated to the memory of Bahā'ī scholar and martyr, Mr. Kamālu'd-Dīn Bakhtāvar, who was executed by a firing squadron on 26 July 1981 in Kashmar, province of Khurasan, Iran (Vahman 2019, pp. 187, 189) for his faith. As a Bahā'ī scholar, Mr. Bakhtāvar was the author of *Risāla-yi Istimrār-i Ẓuhūrāt-i Ilāhiyya* [Treatise on the Continuity of the Manifestations of God], in which Bahā'u'llāh's *Lawḥ-i Ḥasan-i Shāhābadī* [Tablet to Ḥasan Shāhābadī]—which Stephen Lambden (2018, p. 80) calls the "*Lawḥ-i khātam al-Nabiyyīn*" ["Tablet of the Seal of the Prophets"]—was published for the first time (1974).

Abstract: The appearance of post-Islamic religions, the Bābī and Bahā'ī Faiths, is a theoretical impossibility from an orthodox Muslim perspective, since the Qur'ān designates the Prophet Muḥammad as the "Seal of the Prophets" (Q. 33:40), widely understood as meaning the "Last of the Prophets". To overcome this problem, the respective prophet-founders, the Báb (1819–1850) and Bahā'u'llāh (1817–1892), each presented novel approaches which this article will explore. In short, the Báb revealed a "new" Qur'ān, i.e., the *Qayyūm al-Asmā'* (1844), and Bahā'u'llāh wrote the *Kitāb-i Īqān* (Book of Certitude) in January 1861. While acknowledging Muḥammad as the last prophet in the "Prophetic Cycle", the Báb and Bahā'u'llāh inaugurated the advent of the "Cycle of Fulfillment". This new era was foretold in the Qur'ān by way of a symbolic code, understood metaphorically and spiritually. A key concept is that of the "divine presence" (*liqā' Allāh*), i.e., the encounter/"meeting" with God, whereby Q. 33:44, Q. 83:6, Q. 7:35 (and their respective parallels) effectively transcend Q. 33:40. Recognizing that the Báb and Bahā'u'llāh each manifests the "divine presence" thereby constitutes a "realized eschatology". This paper represents the first time that a wide-ranging survey and analysis of the Shaykhī, Bābī, and Bahā'ī viewpoints on the subject of the "Seal of the Prophets" has been made and is the result of a collaboration between two scholars working in the United States and Russia.

Keywords: Seal of the Prophets; divine presence; Qur'an; Islam; Shaykhism; the Bab; Babism; Baha'u'llah; Baha'i Faith

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New religions, independent and dependent, typically advance new doctrines as well as novel truth-claims. This holds true for three religious movements that arose in the nineteenth-century Middle East, i.e., the Shi'a Islamic Shaykhī school, and the Bābī and Bahā'ī religions. All three were widely regarded as heterodox movements from the orthodox Muslim perspective. Shaykhism was the immediate ideological precursor of the Bābī religion (which broke away from Islam), while the Bahā'ī Faith evolved, in due course, from its Bābī predecessor and emerged as an independent world religion (Buck 2021; Ioannesyan 2009). How was this possible? In an Islamic context, post-Islamic prophets and post-Qur'ānic revelations were a theoretical impossibility, since Islam was presented as the last of the world's religions (all the more so for the Abrahamic faiths)—primarily because of one central pillar of Islamic belief, i.e., that Muḥammad was the "Seal of the Prophets" (Q. 33:40) (Momen 2021; Fazel and Fananapazir 1993).

As a missionary faith (in the sense of attracting converts), Bahā'ī outreach to religious minorities did not, as a general rule, include much discussion of the Prophet Muḥammad,

with the logical result that the "Seal of the Prophets" a non-issue. (For a well-known instance involving Cambridge Orientalist Edward Granville Browne (Buck 2015a; Buck and Ioannesyan 2018) during his celebrated research travels throughout Persia in 1887–1888, see Buck 2019a.) However, for outreach to Muslims, the "Seal of the Prophets" issue was paramount as a topic of interfaith discourse and dialogue.

So, in order to attract adherents to the post-Islamic religions of Bābism and the Bahā'ī Faith, the Bāb and Bahā'u'llāh had to persuade their Muslim converts otherwise. How they did so was quite ingenious. Given this problem, the Bāb, expanding on the Shaykhī notion of the inception of a new prophetic cycle after Muḥammad (see "Shaykhī Exegesis of Q. 33:40", below), revealed a "new" Qur'ān, i.e., the *Qayyūm al-Asmā'* (Lawson 2011; Buck 2015b).

Since Shaykhī, Bābī and Bahā'ī doctrines are quite wide-ranging, the present study focuses narrowly on the fundamental Islamic doctrine of Muḥammad as the "Seal of the Prophets", based squarely on Q. 33:40. This article will further show that the Bāb and Bahā'u'llāh each added a new dimension to the interpretive discourse, i.e., the concept of the "divine presence" (*liqā' Allāh*), i.e., the encounter/meeting with God. Basically, the Bābī and Bahā'ī perspectives treat the quest for attaining the Qur'ānic presence of God with what the present authors would best describe as "realized eschatology".

This article will also contribute to academic discourse by including, within its scope, highlights of recent Russian academic studies on the Bahā'ī Faith—with some, or much, of the material being published in English for the first time. Russian scholarship in Shaykhī, Bābī and Bahā'ī studies is important, among other reasons, by virtue of the fact that Bahā'īs in the Russian Empire were the first organized community outside Iran. Bahā'īs who moved to the Ashkhabad ('Ishqābād) area from Persia, soon after that territory had been incorporated into the Russian Empire, formed a fully organized religious community there which was the first of its kind in the history of this religion (Rafati 2011). It reached a high level of development in a region which was then characterized by an almost absolute illiteracy of the local population. The community also went down in history as the site of the first Bahā'ī temple in the world (Ioannesyan 2015). The history of the Bahā'ī and Bābī Faiths has been closely related to Russia since their inception in Iran in the nineteenth century. This is also attested to by the attention these phenomena have received from Russian scholars and diplomats as well as from the general public (Ioannesyan 2014).

1. "Seal of the Prophets": Prefatory Remarks

The "Seal of the Prophets" (Q. 33:40) is typically understood by Muslims as the "Last of the Prophets" (i.e., the final, and therefore "first and foremost" in the superlative sense). But this nearly universal contemporary Muslim understanding has not always been so; see the important studies by Yohanan Friedmann (1986, 1989). As the noted Arab linguist Hartmut Bobzin (2010, pp. 565–66) stated:

> As is well known, Q 33:40 describes Muḥammad as "the messenger of God and the Seal of the Prophets (*khātam an-nabiyyīn*)", a statement which today is generally understood in the sense of finality—in other words, as claiming that there will be no prophet after Muḥammad. Yet the mere fact that "prophetic" movements within Islam have arisen again and again shows that the word "seal" (*khātam*) has also been understood differently, not just as indicating the finality of Muḥammad's prophethood, but also in the sense of confirmation, i.e., as a form of continuity with earlier prophets.

This is confirmed by an examination of as-Suyūṭī's (d. 1505) extensive commentary on the Qur'an *ad-Durr al-manthūr fī t-tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr*, which reveals a variety of interpretations of the term "seal". 'Ā'isha, for example, is reported to have said, "Say 'Seal of the Prophets' and not 'there will be no prophet after him'!" while another *ḥadīth* quoted by as-Suyūṭī states:

> A man once said in Mughīra (b. Shu'ba)'s presence: "God bless Muḥammad, the seal of the prophets, there will be no further prophet after him!" Mughīra replied: "Content yourself with saying 'seal of the prophets.' For we have been told that Jesus, blessings be upon him, will come again, and if he comes, he would be both before Muḥammad and after him (since he has already appeared earlier)!"

We now fast-forward to examine three heterodox Islamic movements in the 19th century CE that challenged, or at least nuanced, the notion of the finality of the Prophet Muḥammad: Shaykhism, Bābism, and Bahā'īsm.

2. Shaykhī Exegesis of Q. 33:40

The doctrinal foundation for the Bābī Faith (Bābism) as an independent religious system was laid by Shaykhism, an esoteric Shi'i school (Matthiesen 2014). Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī (1753–1826) was the founder of the Shaykhī School, whose teaching prepared nineteenth-century Iran for the advent of the Bābī movement. Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī (1793–1844), who was Shaykh Aḥmad's foremost disciple and designated successor, developed certain concepts that, apart from being revolutionary for Islam, paved the way for Bābism to some extent, while many of his disciples made up the ranks of the first disciples of the Bāb (the founder of Bābism), while others rejected the Bāb and stood in sharp opposition to him.

From that moment on, Shaykhism began to develop an acute controversy with Bābism and the Bahā'ī religions. At this stage, it is appropriate to call this subsequent, anti-Bābī/Bahā'ī movement "neo-Shaykhism". Western religious studies, represented by such an outstanding researcher as Henry Corbin, did not attach much importance to this turning-point in the history of Shaykhism and tried to consider it as an "isolated phenomenon", which is extremely controversial (Lawson 2005). In Russian religious and oriental studies, Shaykhism did not become an object of study until the appearance of Ioannesyan's 2011 translation and monograph, entirely devoted to this topic (Rashtī 2011).

On Shaykhism, a new monograph is now out (Ioannesyan 2021). This is the first major study on Shaykhism that systematically presents the teachings of this mystical school of Shi'ism (the second-largest sect of Islam, after Sunnī Islam) based on primary sources. Shaykhism, which originated in the Near and Middle East and developed rapidly at the end of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries, was a unique and extremely interesting phenomenon. On the one hand, as a mystical and even esoteric trend in Shi'ism, Shaykhism was an alternative "Shi'ite response" to the well-known and widespread phenomenon of mystical thought and practice in Islam—Sufism (generally speaking, since Sufism is not a monolithic phenomenon). On the other hand, historically and, in a certain sense, as previously stated, Shaykhism established an ideological context—including heightened eschatological expectations—for Bābism, an independent religious system—i.e., a creed that emerged from the depths of Islam and initially declared itself as an independent religious revelation after Islam. Bābism, moreover, heralded the imminent advent of an even greater future revelation from God, thereby augmenting popular expectation and, to a certain extent, receptivity for the more fully independent Bahā'ī religion (which also drew intense opposition and persecution at the hands of clergy and state). The specific aspects of the early Shaykhī teachings that paved the way for Bābism were also not studied in depth by Western scholars, and if they were considered by them their studies left many gaps and questions—a lacuna in the research tradition that this monograph addresses.

Shaykhī exegesis of Q. 33:40 must be seen within the broader context of the Shaykhī theory of cycles in the religious history of humanity (Ioannesyan 2020b, 2020c, 2022). One of the major works of Sayyid Kāẓim, which we will consider here, is a voluminous and complex (both in its style and discourse and subject matter) treatise, entitled, "*Sharḥ qaṣīda lāmiyya 'Abd al-Bāqī Āfandī*" ("Commentary on '*Qaṣīda* with rhyme with the letter *lām*' by 'Abd al-Bāqī Āfandī". This treatise—also known as *Sharḥ Qaṣīda* and *Sharḥ-i Qaṣīda*—was written in the time period 1257–1258 AH, which falls within 1841–1842 CE, which means that it originated just a year and a half before Sayyid Kāẓim's death, so chronologically it practically coincides with his *(al-)Khujja al-baligha*. Although this work is

called "Commentary on *Qaṣīda*" and contains some references to the specified poetic work by 'Abd al-Bāqī Afandi al-Musilī (1204/1789–1278/1861) from Mosul, dedicated to the ninth Imām, Muḥammad al-Javād, the work of Sayyid Kāẓim, as Armin Eschraghi (2013) rightly notes, has little to do with the analysis of the *qaṣīda*. Instead, it contains a detailed exposition of Shaykhī doctrines on a wide range of topics, including the theory of the "two cycles of divine revelation" and an indication of the eschatological figure who will initiate the second cycle.

The first in the West to pay due attention to the extremely significant passages of this work, shedding light not only on the Shaykhī "theory of cycles", but also on important related issues—possibly predetermining the further history of not only Shaykhism, but also Bābism—was the outstanding French researcher of Bābism and Shaykhism, and translator of many of the Bāb's writings, A. L. M. Nicolas (1910, vol. 2, pp. 42–55), whose great legacy, unfortunately, is often neglected by modern researchers. Nicolas was a pioneer of studies in the field and published high-quality translations of some major Bābī texts into French, which remain the first and unique complete translations of the Bāb's writings into European languages up to the present day. The work of Nicolas has continued relevance today, since he articulates certain ideas and principles that are essential for every scholar specializing in Bābī studies (Ioannesyan 2016).

Let us now consider the doctrine of two cycles of divine revelations in the spiritual history of humankind, as set forth in the Commentary, according to which, upon the completion of the "prophetic cycle of Muḥammad" (the first cycle), a "new era" begins, if not already begun (i.e., another, second cycle of divine revelations after Muḥammad). The founder of Shaykhism and the mentor of Sayyid Kāẓim, Shaykh Aḥmad Ahsā'ī, claimed that the Prophet Muḥammad had two names: "Muḥammad", by which he manifested himself and is known in the visible world, and "Aḥmad". The latter is his mystical name, by which until now he was known only in the invisible, spiritual worlds. Based on this provision about two (i.e., exoteric and esoteric) names of Muḥammad, Sayyid Kāẓim, in the said Commentary, draws a conclusion about the completion/finiteness of the "cycle of Muḥammad":

> Since the external body has two positions—one position refers to changes, the appearance of innumerable states and a change in the order of things, the other position does not allow this, and since every stage actually reaches perfection in six ways, as we explained earlier—the commands relating to the external, which require the manifestation of the name "Muḥammad", in reality end/come to an end in twelve hundred [years]. (*Sharḥ-i qaṣīda*, lithograph: 356, (manuscript: 202b). Translated from the original Arabic by Youli A. Ioannesyan.)

Thus, Sayyid Kāẓim defines a period of twelve centuries for the cycle of Muḥammad. Elaborating further on this novel doctrine, Sayyid Kāẓim goes on to say:

> When twelve centuries have ended and the first cycle has been completed, which referred to the external manifestations of the Sun of prophecy and the twelve cycles of the Moon of chosenness in a position of subordination [i.e., subordination to the Sun of prophecy], then the cycle has ended, and everything it needs has been completed. [There began] the second round, the next cycle for the clarification of the commandments [and] the manifestation of deep truths and secret mysteries... that [have lain hidden] under the cover of veils and shrouds. (*Sharḥ-i qaṣīda*, Lithograph: 357, manuscript 202b. Translated from the original Arabic by Youli A. Ioannesyan.)

The first cycle, as is evident from the passage cited, was necessary for the cultivation of creatures in relation to the external aspects of their development and life, that is, it was mainly aimed at physical realities. The second cycle is addressed to everything inner and deep, that is, spiritual. Nicolas sees similarities with Sufi ideas in Sayyid Kāẓim's reasoning. However, it is necessary to emphasize here the deep difference between the concepts of Sayyid Kāẓim and Sufi doctrines. For Sufis, "chosenness" should never end,

unless we consider that the Day of Judgment and everything connected with it should put an end to it. According to Sayyid Kāẓim, and in contrast to Sufi views, the "cycle of chosenness" is also coming to an end, or rather, has already ended after the twelve centuries allotted to the era of Muḥammad (cf. the quote above about the completion of twelve cycles, that is, centuries of the "Moon of chosenness"). But history does not end there. From this stage, another cycle begins. It is significant that Sayyid Kāẓim calls it "the second cycle of the Sun of prophecy" *(ad-dawra ath-thāniya li-shams an-nubuwwa)*, i.e., in fact, the second prophetic cycle, which "comes or even came" (اتت) (*Sharḥ-i qaṣīda*, Lithograph: 357, manuscript 202b–203a. Translated from the original Arabic by Youli A. Ioannesyan). In other words, both the *nubuwwa* and the *walāya* have ended and will be followed by a new cycle of revelation. With this provision as to the inception of a new prophetic cycle after Muḥammad, Shaykhism fundamentally differs not only from Sufism (i.e., in its general features, notwithstanding its diversity), but also from any other Islamic school, including Shi'ite ones. Let us also point out that Shaykh Aḥmad's viewpoint that Muḥammad was "the last prophet only within the Adamic cycle" is mentioned by Vahid Rafati (1990, p. 106).

In this respect, the Shaykhī exegesis of Q. 33:40 is seen within the broader discussion of the two revelatory cycles postulated by Sayyid Kāẓim in the *Sharḥ-i qaṣīda*.

3. Bābī Exegesis of Q. 33:40

The Bābī religion was an independent religious system (i.e., a distinct religious identity) founded in the first half of the 19th century by Sayyid 'Alī-Muḥammad Shīrāzī (1819–1850), known as the Bāb (Gate). The *Qayyūm al-Asmā'*, an early Bābī writing, proves that the Bāb proclaimed his teaching as an independent divine revelation, while his Faith, right from its inception, emerged as an independent religious system with regard to Islam (Ioannesyan 2011). The academic study of the Bābī religion is too extensive to summarize here in full. A Russian monograph reviews prior scholarship in the Russian academic world and contributes some original insights (Ioannesyan 2003, 2020a).

Bābism is inextricably linked to the Bahā'ī religion, for which it laid the foundation. In other words, the Bāb was not only the founder of an independent religious system, the Bābī Faith, but was also the precursor of another prophet coming after him, whom he considered greater than himself, that would be made manifest by God at a certain time in the future. In his texts, known under the general name the "*Bayān*" ("Exposition"), the Bāb attached great importance to preparing the Bābī community for the recognition of the new prophet and repeatedly warned it against causing him any distress or suffering by refusing to recognize him, similar to what the Bāb had experienced at the hands of those who rejected him (Ioannesyan 2018).

The Bāb's *Qayyūm al-Asmā'* exhibits a conscious effort to extend and amplify a Qur'ānic voice, a crucial warrant of revelation. In the first chapter of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā'*, the Bāb makes the stunning declaration that his religion is henceforth the "true Islam" to which all should turn: "Thus whoso seeketh Islam (submission to God), let him submit unto this Remembrance. . . . Whoso rejecteth this true Islam, God shall not accept, on the Day of Resurrection, any of his deeds" (trans. Saiedi 2008, p. 142). Arguably—and probably—the single most remarkable feature of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā'* (QA) is its claim to be the "new Qur'ān". Nader Saiedi, moreover, justifiably makes this sweeping generalization: "The *Qayyūm al-Asmā'* is also frequently called the 'Qur'ān' or the 'Inner Qur'ān'" (trans. Saiedi 2008, p. 140). Nosratollah Mohammadhosseini (2012, p. 8), confirming this same claim, explains that the Bāb, in QA 3, "mentions three times that the Qur'ān has been revealed to his heart". Similar claims are made in QA 7 and 26 (Mohammadhosseini 2012). To illustrate this extraordinary, ambitious and audacious claim, two exemplars may be cited: "And verily, had these two Furqans not been from God, they (i.e., people) would, verily, have found in them more disparities" (the Bab, Qayyūm al-Asmā', 99, trans. Ioannesyan 2011, p. 197), and "Verily, We have sent down this Book as the mystery of the Qur'ān. . . . And there is no one except for those who have renounced God, who would question even one of its letters as not being from God. And verily, God hath sent it (i.e., the Book) down by His

pre-existent might to His Remembrance (i.e., the Bāb) anew, with a new Truth, in a new way" (the Bab, Qayyūm al-Asmā', 41, trans. Ioannesyan 2011, p. 202).

The Bāb's claim to have revealed a "new" and "true" Qur'ān is probably the most audacious claim to a new revelation imaginable within the context of Islam. The revelation of the *Qayyūm al-Asmā'* was a remarkable literary event—not to mention dangerous and ultimately fatal, since the Bāb was executed on 9 July 1850. It is of profound, eschatological moment, of grand and huge importance in its own right, as the extensive work of Todd Lawson on this remarkable text has shown. The sheer audacity of this signal, revelatory event is mind-boggling. It is nothing short of thaumaturgic as a self-proclaimed revelatory phenomenon, in the received and perceived Islamic sense of the Qur'ān as a "miracle" (or "sign") from God.

In Bābism, many conceptual provisions, including eschatological ones, inherent in other religions, are understood allegorically. The same approach extends to such ideas as the "Resurrection", the "Judgment Day" and the "end of the world", which are interpreted as a change of eras, i.e., milestones in the history of humankind and the abolition of the existing order of things associated with the sending of the next divine revelation (approximately once every thousand years), and as the affirmation of a new religion. Nader Saiedi further states:

> The Bāb reinterprets the doctrine of resurrection not as the end of history but as the substance of history itself. Resurrection is described not as a single, final event but a recurring, cyclic, and progressive process linking all past, present, and future divine Revelations. Each resurrection is characterized by the abrogation of the former laws and ordinances and the inception of new ones, corresponding to the specific social needs of humanity in the emerging age.
>
> The concept of progressive revelation transforms all the traditional categories and confers upon them new meanings. Not only is the doctrine of finality replaced by the doctrine of infinite sequential divine Revelations, but the very idea of the Day of Resurrection, traditionally a static notion, itself becomes an affirmation of the dynamic nature of spiritual reality. (Saiedi 2008, p. 254.)

According to the Bāb's teaching, the "Day of Judgment" came for Muslims (and for representatives of other religions) with the appearance of the revelation of the Bāb. Belief—or disbelief—in the Bāb and his religion marks the boundary that now runs between people and divides them into righteous and sinful. Saiedi notes:

> More specifically, the Bāb explains that each spiritual Dispensation has its own life history, with a beginning and an end. The end of each Dispensation is its own Day of Resurrection. This end is a "resurrection" because it is also the inception of the next Dispensation, when the religion itself is recreated through the revelation dispensed by a new Manifestation of God. Thus the Day of Resurrection is the period when the new Manifestation of God is present on earth. (Saiedi 2008, p. 254.)

We find a detailed explanation of the "Resurrection" in the following lengthy passage from the Persian *Bayān*:

> THE substance of this chapter is this, that what is intended by the Day of Resurrection is the Day of the appearance of the Tree of divine Reality, but it is not seen that any one of the followers of Shī'ih Islām hath understood the meaning of the Day of Resurrection; rather have they fancifully imagined a thing which with God hath no reality. In the estimation of God and according to the usage of such as are initiated into divine mysteries, what is meant by the Day of Resurrection is this, that from the time of the appearance of Him Who is the Tree of divine Reality, at whatever period and under whatever name, until the moment of His disappearance, is the Day of Resurrection.

> For example, from the inception of the mission of Jesus—may peace be upon Him—till the day of His ascension was the Resurrection of Moses. For during that period the Revelation of God shone forth through the appearance of that divine Reality, Who rewarded by His Word everyone who believed in Moses, and punished by His Word everyone who did not believe; inasmuch as God's Testimony for that Day was that which He had solemnly affirmed in the Gospel. And from the inception of the Revelation of the Apostle of God—may the blessings of God be upon Him—till the day of His ascension was the Resurrection of Jesus—peace be upon Him—wherein the Tree of divine Reality appeared in the person of Muḥammad, rewarding by His Word everyone who was a believer in Jesus, and punishing by His Word everyone who was not a believer in Him. And from the moment when the Tree of the Bayān appeared until it disappeareth is the Resurrection of the Apostle of God, as is divinely foretold in the Qur'ān; the beginning of which was when two hours and eleven minutes had passed on the eve of the fifth of Jamādiyu'l-Avval, 1260 A.H. (22 May 1844), which is the year 1270 of the Declaration of the Mission of Muḥammad. This was the beginning of the Day of Resurrection of the Qur'ān, and until the disappearance of the Tree of divine Reality is the Resurrection of the Qur'ān. The stage of perfection of everything is reached when its resurrection occurreth. The perfection of the religion of Islām was consummated at the beginning of this Revelation; and from the rise of this Revelation until its setting, the fruits of the Tree of Islām, whatever they are, will become apparent. The Resurrection of the Bayān will occur at the time of the appearance of Him Whom God shall make manifest. For today the Bayān is in the stage of seed; at the beginning of the manifestation of Him Whom God shall make manifest its ultimate perfection will become apparent. He is made manifest in order to gather the fruits of the trees He hath planted. (Bāb 1982, Persian *Bayān* 2:7, pp. 106–108.)

It is noteworthy that the Bāb understands "Resurrection" as the eschatological "Day" on which the "Tree", planted during the previous Manifestation, reaches maturity (perfection), and its fruits are reaped. This metaphorical harvest occurs at the subsequent Manifestation (see above passage). The same applies to the period of the revelation of the Bāb himself, which should be replaced by the era of the next revelation.

To summarize: as is clear from the sources and, above all, from the key scripture of Bābism, the Persian *Bayān*, the terms "Resurrection", "Judgment Day" and related eschatological concepts, which are important components of this doctrine, do not mean catastrophic events in the literal sense, or an actual "end of the world", marking a final moment of history and human development. Instead of this gloomy perspective, Bābism puts forward the idea of "Resurrection" as a periodically repeating cyclical process of world history associated with the sending of the next bearer of divine revelation and giving rise to the maturation of a new civilization in each time circle under the influence of a new religious teaching. Thus, "Resurrection" and "Judgment Day", from the point of view of Bābism, are not the end of human existence, but a change of eras or milestones in its progressive development and ascent from a lower stage of collective maturity to a higher one, which also signifies a change in the existing order of things. This understanding, which is fully consistent with the doctrine of "Progressive Revelation", is based on the fact that, with each subsequent revelation, everything revives and resurrects, receiving a new impetus for development. According to Nader Saiedi (2008, p. 245): "The principle of progressive revelation is central to almost all the major later works of the Bāb". And, further:

> Yet another implication of the Bāb's focus on the coming Dispensation is the central importance of the doctrine of progressive revelation. The Bāb's later writings unfold a completely new sense of religious history, the relation of the religions to one another, and the dynamics of culture and society. This vision is further elucidated in the writings of Bahā'u'llāh, notably the Kitāb-i-Īqān (The

> Book of Certitude). For that reason, it is not surprising that the Kitāb-i-Īqān has been considered as the completion of the Persian Bayān. (Saiedi 2008, p. 241.)

In the Persian *Bayān* 3:7, the Bāb wrote a chapter devoted to explaining what the Qur'ān means by "meeting God" on the Last Day. The title of this chapter is: "*On this, that any reference, revealed by God, to meeting God or attaining the presence of the Lord intendeth naught but Him Whom God shall make manifest. For verily God, by virtue of His Essence, can never be seen*" (Saiedi 2008, p. 354). In the following passage (provisionally translated and summarized by Edward Granville Browne), the Bāb goes on to explain:

> The Eternal Essence cannot be comprehended or described, or qualified, or seen, though by It all things are comprehended, described, qualified, and seen; and therefore what is meant in the Heavenly Books by "Meeting with the Lord" is meeting with the Manifestation of the Point of Truth, which is the Primal Will. Thus in the Qur'ān by "Meeting with the Lord" is meant meeting the Apostle of God, even as it is said of the true believer, "To behold him is to behold the Prophet of God, and to behold the Prophet of God is to behold God". . . . He is as the Sun, and all else than Him is as mirror in which reflections of the sun appear. Whoever attains to the Meeting with Him whom God shall manifest, attains to the Meeting with God. (The Bāb, Persian *Bayān* 3:7, translated/summarized by Edward Granville Browne 1988, pp. 340–41.)

The Bāb's commentary on the purport and significance of the Qur'ān's passages promising, for faithful and righteous believers, an encounter with God on the Last Day is an important prelude to Bahā'u'llāh's expansion on this same theme in the Book of Certitude (*Kitāb-i Īqān*), discussed in the next section. In a nutshell, to "meet God" on the Last Day is to attain the presence of God's messenger, who is "God" by proxy—i.e., who represents God and conveys God's will to humanity for that day and age. In other words, Qur'ānic promises of "meeting God" in the eschaton are impossible in terms of literal fulfillment. Therefore, the Qur'ānic Arabic expression *liqā'*, in all its derivative/cognate forms, in the eschatological context, is metaphorical and symbolic, not literal. Although the Qur'ān always means what it says, it does not always say what it means, if interpreted literally. A certain degree of metaphorical competence is required. In that respect, one of the "prophetic credentials", as it were, of the Bāb and Bahā'u'llāh is to provide a true understanding of the Qur'ān—and, by extension, of the Bible and other holy books—according to Bahā'ī doctrine.

The "Seal of the Prophets" verse (Q. 33:40) refers to Muḥammad's own time (i.e., the historical present, contemporary with the Prophet), whereas the "meeting God" passages of the Qur'ān (i.e., such verses as: Q. 2:46; Q. 2:249; Q. 9:77; 10:7; 10:11; Q. 13:2; Q. 18:110; Q. 29:23; Q. 33:44; and parallels) refer to the eschatological time of the future.

4. Bahā'ī Exegesis of Q. 33:40

The Bahā'ī Faith was founded by Mīrzā Ḥusayn-'Alī Nūrī, known as Bahā'u'llāh (1817–1892). By virtue of its international audience, Bahā'u'llāh's Book of Certitude (*Kitāb-i Īqān*) may now be seen, among other things, as the world's most influential Qur'ān commentary outside the Muslim world (Buck 2007, pp. 369, 378). The claim may be justified by the simple fact that the Īqān is coextensive with the spread of the Bahā'ī religion, which has spun out of its Islamic orbit and radiated globally, while maintaining its Islamic roots. As the preeminent Bahā'ī doctrinal text, the Īqān, given the solid doctrinal logic that it presented, went far in shaping and crystallizing Bahā'ī identity, greatly augmenting and energizing Bahā'ī missionary expansion in the process.

Post-Islamic by dint of its extraordinary eschatological claims, the Īqān vindicates the theophanic credentials of the Bāb who, as previously mentioned, broke decisively from Islam in 1844 by declaring himself to be the inaugurator of a new prophetic cycle. On the historical horizon in advance of Bahā'u'llāh's imminent prophetic announcement (forthcoming on 22 April 1863), the Īqān subtly, yet unmistakably, pronounced itself to

be divinely inspired, i.e., a revelation from God (i.e., according to the Īqān's colophon, implying divine revelation):

> Thus hath it been revealed aforetime, were ye to comprehend.
>
> Revealed by the "Bā'" and the "Hā'".
>
> Peace be upon him that inclineth his ear unto the melody of the Mystic Bird calling from the Sadratu'l-Muntahā!
>
> Glorified be our Lord, the Most High!
>
> (Bahā'u'llāh 1989, p. 257, www.bahai.org/r/621971627 (accessed on 27 February 2023); Persian, 199; see also (Buck 2004), x, 4–7, 274, and 299, note 3.)

The date of the revelation of the *Kitāb-i Īqān* has been a topic of scholarly investigation. The late Ahang Rabbani (d. 2013) may be credited with having definitively and conclusively discovered the date of the revelation of the *Kitāb-i Īqān* in January 1861. (See Rabbani 1999, pp. 30–35.) The present writer (Buck), having been invited to read and comment on the prepublication manuscript, brought to Rabbani's attention that, by way of his translation, he had conclusively discovered the date of the revelation of the Īqān: in mid-January, 1861 (personal communication.) This was a significant finding. Dictated in the course of two days and two nights, the *Kitāb-i Īqān* set the stage for Bahā'u'llāh's imminent and impending claim to revelation in April 1863 in Baghdad.

The core claims advanced by the Īqān, in principle and in practice, have been adapted to other religious environments, including non-Abrahamic traditions, Zoroastrianism and the so-called Dharmic religions of Hinduism and Buddhism (but not as readily or successfully vis à vis Sikhism and Jainism), and Indigenous religious traditions as well, to a lesser extent.

From an orthodox Islamic point of view, the Īqān argued a doctrinally impossible scenario, i.e., a post-Islamic revelation. By advancing a heterodox Islamic argument to legitimate its post-Islamic claims, the Īqān's most original and dramatic act of Qur'ānic interpretation may well be its argument for how God could (and would) send another prophet after Muḥammad, notwithstanding the doctrinal impasse presented by the received understanding of the "Seal of the Prophets" verse (Q. 33:40), as discussed earlier in this paper. Bahā'u'llāh's exegetical strategy, therefore, is to employ an essentially Islamic argument to prove something ostensibly alien to orthodox Islam, both Sunnī and Shī'ī (Buck 2007). Bahā'u'llāh's discourse on realized eschatology became a self-fulfilling prophecy. More significant than its theological argument, however, is the Īqān's historical impact. The argument for a post-Islamic revelation was not academic in theory, but historical (and contemporary) in practice.

In what arguably and demonstrably is his most original and innovative exegetical argument, Bahā'u'llāh relativizes the claim that Muḥammad is the "Seal of the Prophets" (Q. 33:40) in order to supersede it, by refocusing the reader's attention a mere four verses later (Q. 33:44) on the eschatological attainment to the presence of God (*liqā' Allāh*) on the apocalyptic "Last Day". Here, Muḥammad is the "last Prophet", as it were, in the "Cycle of Prophecy", whereas the Bāb is the first prophet to appear on the eschatological "Last Day"—or, more properly speaking, the first "Manifestation of God" to inaugurate, on the historical horizon, the "Cycle of Fulfillment":

> Even as the Lord of being hath in His unerring Book (Qur'ān), after (*ba'd az*) speaking of the "Seal" in His exalted utterance: "Muḥammad is the Apostle of God and the Seal of the Prophets" (Q. 33:40), hath revealed unto all people the promise (*va'da*) of "attainment unto the divine Presence (*liqā'-yi khudā*)". To this attainment to the presence of the immortal King testify the verses of the Book, some of which We have already mentioned (*vide* par. 148, Q. 29:23; Q. 2:46; Q. 2:249; Q. 18:110; and Q. 13:2). The one true God is My witness! Nothing more exalted or more explicit than "attainment unto the divine Presence" hath been revealed in the Qur'ān. (*va khudā-yi vāḥid shāhid-i maqāl ast kih hīch amr-ī a'ẓam az*

> *liqā' va asraḥ-ī az ān dar furqān zikr nayāftih*.) Well is it with him that hath attained thereunto, in the day wherein most of the people, even as ye witness, have turned away therefrom.
>
> And yet, through the mystery of the former (*avval*) verse, they have turned away from the grace promised by the latter (*thānī*), despite the fact that "attainment unto the divine Presence" in the "Day of Resurrection" (*liqā' dar yawm-i qiyām*) is explicitly stated in the Book (Qur'ān). (Bahā'u'llāh 1989, pp. 169–70, pars. 181–182; parenthetical references added from the Persian text.)

In this remarkable and pivotal passage, Bahā'u'llāh harks back to "verses of the Book, some of which We have already mentioned". Here, a quick search of the Īqān shows that, in Paragraph 148, Bahā'u'llāh cites: Q. 29:23 (*wa liqāihi*, "and (the) meeting (with) Him"); Q. 2:46 (*mulāqū*, "will meet"); Q. 2:249 (*mulāqū*, "(would) meet"); Q. 18:110 (*liqāa*, "(for the) meeting)"; and Q. 13:2 (*bi liqāi*, "in the meeting"). Then, looking forward, Bahā'u'llāh also alludes to a Qur'ānic announcement of the "attainment unto the divine Presence" on the "Day of Resurrection" (*liqā' dar yawm-i qiyām*) that comes "after" (*ba'd az*) the "Seal" verse. In other words, Bahā'u'llāh, after explicitly citing Q. 33:40, implicitly cites verse 33:44 (*yalqawnahu*, "they will meet Him"). This conclusion is justified under the following analysis:

In his dual role as authorized translator and interpreter of Bahā'ī scriptures within his overarching mandate as the designated "Guardian" of the Bahā'ī Faith from 1921 to 1957, Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957) provides a word-for-word, literal translation in rendering the Persian/Arabic text of the Īqān, so: "And yet, through the mystery of the former". Then, Shoghi Effendi—in the process of translating from the source language to the target language, while preserving the meaning of the former—inserts one word for amplification: "verse". This word (Arabic: *āya*) is not found in the original Persian of the Īqān in this key passage. Shoghi Effendi's subtle, yet highly significant, one-word gloss disambiguates the text, narrowing the reading. The result is an episodic sequence of prophetic/eschatological events—i.e., the "Seal of the Prophets" followed by "Divine Presence"—to a textual, Qur'ānic sequence of verses in close proximity (Q. 33:40 and 33:44), descriptive of this same sequence of eschatological events. This makes perfect sense, since the preposition "after" (*ba'd az*) can also mean "next".

Bahā'u'llāh evidently intended this pair of verses, Q. 33:40 and Q. 33:44, to be read together. This is an attractive hypothesis, with strong evidence, yet shy of conclusive proof. Indeed, the very next verse after the "Seal" verse that refers to the eschatological encounter with God is Q. 33:44, to wit: "Their greeting the Day they meet Him will be, 'Peace.' And He has prepared for them a noble reward" (tr. Ṣaḥīḥ International). A Shī'ī rendering is: "On the day when they will be brought into the presence of their Lord, their greeting to each other will be, 'Peace be with you.' God has prepared an honorable reward them" (tr. Muḥammad Sarwar). In Q. 33:44, cognates of the Arabic words *liqā'* ("encounter", "meeting", "attaining the presence of") and *yawm* ("day", i.e., the eschatological "Last Day") are found. The Arabic word for "they will meet Him" is *yalqawnahu* (3rd person masculine plural imperfect verb, related to *liqā'*) and "Day" is *yawma* (accusative masculine noun). These verses are representative, not exhaustive. Other parallels may be cited, such as Q. 9:77 (*yalqawnahu*, "when they will meet Him"), 10:7 (*liqāanā*, "the meeting with Us"), 10:11 (*liqāanā*, "the meeting with Us") and other parallels. These terms correspond—conceptually as well as linguistically—to Bahā'u'llāh's reference to "'attainment unto the divine Presence' in the "Day of Resurrection"" (*liqā' dar yawm-i qiyām*).

Here, in the Īqān, Bahā'u'llāh places Q. 33:44 on a par with Q. 33:40. As signal an event and as paramount in prophetic history as the advent of Muḥammad as the "Seal of the Prophets" surely is, of even greater moment is the eschatological encounter with God, according to Bahā'u'llāh's novel exegesis and supporting argument. An analysis of how Bahā'u'llāh interprets Q. 33:44 and parallels (adduced, as mentioned, in par. 48, as Q. 29:23, 2:46, 2:249, 18:111 and 13:2) is needed. Arguing that direct beatific vision of God is impossible, Bahā'u'llāh reasons that Q. 33:44 anticipates a future theophany who, as *deus*

revelatus and divine vicegerent, is symbolically God by proxy. Similarly, Bahā'u'llāh, in an earlier Baghdad work, *Gems of Divine Mysteries* (*Jawāhir al-Asrār*), explains:

> Know then that the paradise (*hadhihi al-janna*, lit. "this Garden") that appeareth in the day of God (*yawm Allāh*) surpasseth every other paradise and excelleth the realities of Heaven (*ḥaqā'iq al-riḍwān*). For when (*ba'd alladhī*, lit. "after") God—blessed and glorified is He—sealed the station of prophethood (*maqām an-nubuwwa*) in the person of Him Who was His Friend (*ḥabībihi*), His Chosen One (*ṣafiyyihi*), and His Treasure (*khiyaratihi*) amongst His creatures, as hath been revealed from the Kingdom of glory: "but He is the Apostle of God and the Seal of the Prophets" (Q. 33:40), He promised all men that they shall attain unto His own presence in the Day of Resurrection (*wa'ada al-'ibād bi-liqā'ihi yawm al-qiyāma*). In this He meant to emphasize the greatness of the Revelation to come, as it hath indeed been manifested through the power of truth. (Bahā'u'llāh 2002a, pp. 42–43, par. 58.)

Revelation is a concept familiar to all Muslims. After all, the Qur'ān, which is the very first book in Arabic, is considered, as a matter of Muslim faith, to be a series of revelations, communicated directly from God through the prophet Muḥammad. In the Īqān, Bahā'u'llāh argues that the Qur'ān, in turn, presages the advent of the Bāb as the "Promised One" in what is tantamount to a post-Islamic revelation, which is a theoretical impossibility in orthodox Islam, as previously mentioned.

Both of the present writers—who have previously collaborated on three articles (Buck and Ioannesyan 2010, 2017, 2018), making this their fourth collaboration—have each published a monograph on the *Kitāb-i Īqān* (Buck 2004; Ioannesyan 2001). Christopher Buck's *Symbol and Secret: Qur'an Commentary in Bahā'u'llāh's Kitāb-i Īqān* (Buck 2004)—which "represents the first book-length attempt in the English language to analyse one of the major works of Bahā'u'llāh" (Momen 1997, p. 290)—was first published in 1995 by Kalimāt Press. Youli Ioannesyan's monograph features an academic translation of the Īqān into Russian. The principal thesis and argumentative thrust of *Symbol and Secret*, taken as a whole, is that the primary eschatological symbol in the Īqān is the Bāb, while at the same time, a messianic "secret" pervades the Īqān as a subtext, charging the work with heightened eschatological tension, auguring Bahā'u'llāh's imminent declaration of his mission to the discerning whether before or after Bahā'u'llāh's prophetic mission commenced. Bahā'u'llāh's explicit argument is original, and his implicit claim is challenging to Muslims. By force of explicative logic, the Īqān served as an advance prophetic warrant for Bahā'u'llāh's proclaimed mission to unify the world (Buck 2004, 2016).

An academic translation into Russian was published in a monograph by Ioannesyan (2001), who writes, in part:

> This commentary is on the following expressions/passages in the Kitāb-i-Īqān:
>
> "I am all the Prophets" (applied to Muḥammad),[1] "Muḥammad is the Apostle of God and the Seal of the Prophets"; "They (Prophets) are all manifestations of the beginning and the end"; "God will by no means raise a Messenger after Him". (Bahā'u'llāh 1989, pp. 162, 169, 179, 212–13.)
>
> The Bahā'ī creed in relation to the concept of "Seal of the Prophets" (prophecy), includes three aspects. One is global, as it is associated with the Divine, with the position and function of the Prophet in relation to God and with the relationship of the Prophets among themselves. Since God is the "First" and "Last", the "Beginning" and "End", and the "Alpha" and "Omega" of all things—and the great Prophets, the founders of religions, are manifestations of His qualities and names—then, in this aspect, they all equally manifest and reflect this Divine reality, "primacy" and "finitude" as an invariable attribute of the Divine.
>
> Consequently, the assertion of one Prophet that He is "the last" does not contradict the similar assertion of another, for in both, the same reality is manifested

according to the principle of reflection, as in mirrors. This Reality is God's property and not their property as individuals. Thus, this aspect is inextricably linked with the doctrine of "the unity of the prophets" in the light of which "primacy" and "finitude" imply the beginning and end, but not in a temporal dimension.

The two other aspects of the "Seal of prophethood" notion are narrower. They are considered in the context of the first one and, therefore, can be regarded as secondary. A quote from Ishrāq-Khāvarī's dictionary of the Kitāb-i Īqān is relevant in this regard:

> Prophethood and Messengerhood were terminated and consummated with His Holiness Muḥammad in the sense that during the millennial era which was [divinely] ordained for Muḥammad's Law there was no Prophet and Messenger, other than Muḥammad, who would be sent with a Book and the divinely ordained Law. When the millennial era of Muḥammad's Law was over, the Manifestation of the Divine Will [the Bāb] appeared, and new horizons were opened up by the Divine Will like a carpet being spread out. (Ishrāq-Khāvarī 1972, vol. 1, p. 304, translation by Ioannesyan.)

In other words, each Prophet who brings Revelation in the form of a new creed/teaching/law is limited by a certain time-frame, within which the world is under the shadow of this creed. During this period, He is the "last" Prophet, but only for the given time frame. This definition ("last Prophet") is no longer valid after the period expires. This is followed by the era of another Revelation and its Bearer (prophet-founder of a new religion), the next Prophet. Let us term this the "second" aspect.

The third aspect of the "Seal of prophethood" notion is related to the termination of Muḥammad's millennial prophetic era, which not only signifies the end of the era of his Revelation but also the consummation of the whole Cycle of the successive Revelations starting with Adam (Adamic Cycle). This Cycle could be more precisely defined as "the Cycle of prophecies" in the religious history of humankind where "prophecies" imply "predictions". The termination of the Adamic Cycle signifies the beginning of another Cycle, i.e., the Cycle of the fulfillment of the prophecies (predictions) of the past. This concept is also in conformance with the semantics and etymology of the Arabic word, *nabī* "prophet" (cf. its Hebrew equivalent with the same meaning) derived from the verb (*naba'a)* denoting "to proclaim, inform, foretell, predict, etc.".

It would be relevant to quote a highly remarkable statement by Shoghi Effendi here: "A Revelation [i.e., Bahā'u'llāh's revelation], hailed as the promise and crowning glory of past ages and centuries, as the consummation of all the Dispensations within the Adamic Cycle, inaugurating an era of at least a thousand years' duration, and a cycle destined to last no less than five thousand centuries, signalizing the end of the Prophetic Era and the beginning of the Era of Fulfillment…". (Ioannesyan 2001, pp. 203–205; quoting Shoghi 1979, p. 100.)

Prophecy foretells, as well as tells forth. In other words, prophecy is predicative, as well as predictive. In its predictive mode, prophecy, if true, foretells and then comes true in the future. When the future has come to pass, the past should not foreclose the present. In Bahā'ī belief, Bahā'u'llāh is symbolically foreshadowed in the Qur'ān as the "Great Announcement" (*an-nabā' al-'aẓīm*, Q. 78:2). Lest the "Seal of the Prophets" or any related doctrine prevent a truth-seeker from investigating a possible, if not actual, post-Islamic revelation, Bahā'u'llāh warns: "Take heed lest the word 'Prophet' (*an-nabī*) withhold you from this Most Great Announcement, or any reference to 'Vicegerency' (*al-walāya*) debar you from the sovereignty of Him Who is the Vicegerent of God, which overshadoweth all the worlds" (Bahā'u'llāh 1992, p. 80, par. 167).

In Bahā'ī doctrine, the "Cycle of Prophecy" (*kawr-i nubuvvat*) or "Adamic Cycle" (*kawr-i ādam*) prepared the world for the "Cycle of Fulfillment" (*kawr-i taḥaqquq va ikmāl*) or "Bahā'ī Cycle" (*kawr-i Bahā'ī*). This Cycle of Fulfillment was inaugurated by the Báb, who prophesied the imminent advent of "Him who God shall manifest" (*Man Yuẓhiru-hu Allāh*), whom the majority of Bābīs (followers of the Báb) came to recognize as Bahā'u'llāh. In the "Cycle of Prophecy", Muḥammad is indeed the last prophet for that time—but not for all time. That said, Bahā'īs believe in Muḥammad as the "Seal of the Prophets and of the Messengers" and hold him to be the final Messenger for the "Cycle of Prophecy"—going beyond the Qur'ān's honorific of Muḥammad as the "Seal of the Prophets" (*khātam an-nabiyīn*) in Q. 33:40. Thus, the new term for the locus of spiritual and revelational authority in the Bahā'ī lexicon is "Manifestation of God" (*ẓuhūr-i ilāhī* or *maẓhar-i ilāhī*). Therefore, Muḥammad was the last Prophet (*nabī*) and last Messenger (*rasūl*) of the "Cycle of Prophecy", but not the last "Manifestation of God" according to this understanding.

As previously stated, Bahā'u'llāh revealed the *Kitāb-i Īqān* in Baghdad in January 1861, in the course of two days and two nights. This was prior to the formal declaration by Bahā'u'llāh of his prophetic mission, which occurred on 22 April 1863, known and celebrated by Bahā'īs today as the "First Day of Riḍvān ("Paradise")" and observed worldwide as a Bahā'ī twelve-day festival, the first, ninth and twelfth day of which are regarded as Bahā'ī Holy Days, in observance of which work is to be suspended (Buck 2004; Ioannesyan 2007). That same day, Bahā'u'llāh wrote what has come to be known as the "Sura of Patience" (*Sūriy-i-ṣabr*), alternatively known as the Tablet of Job, part of which is provisionally translated as follows:

> Recite then unto them that which the celestial Dove of the Spirit hath warbled in the holy Riḍvān of the Beloved, that perchance they may examine that which hath been elucidated concerning "sealing" by the tongue of him he who is well-grounded in knowledge in the prayer of visitation for the name of God, 'Alī [Imām 'Alī]. He hath said—and his word is the truth!—:
>
> "[He (Muḥammad) is] the seal of what came before Him and the harbinger of what will appear after Him (*limā ya'tī mina'l-mursalīn min ba'du*)".
>
> In such wise hath the meaning of "sealing" been mentioned by the tongue of inaccessible holiness. Thus hath God designated His Friend [Muḥammad] to be a seal for the Prophets who preceded Him and a harbinger of the Messengers who will appear after Him".
>
> –Baha'u'llah, "Sura of Patience" (*Sūriy-i-ṣabr*). Provisional translation (and transliteration) by Omid Ghaemmaghami, personal communication, 3 April 2017, and posted on the Tarjuman listserve, 1 April 2017.

Here, Bahā'u'llāh cites a statement from a prayer for 'Alī, who was Muḥammad's first male follower. 'Alī later became the Prophet's son-in-law, after marrying Muḥammad's beloved daughter, Fatima. In Islamic history, 'Alī was the fourth "rightly guided" Caliph. In Shia Islam, 'Alī is considered to be the rightful successor to Muḥammad himself. Sunni Muslims, of course, disagree. But all Muslims agree that the Prophet Muḥammad dearly loved 'Alī, and that 'Alī was one of the greatest Muslims of all time.

In a monograph on Bahā'u'llāh's "Sura of Patience", *Sayrī dar Būstān-i Madīnatu'ṣ-sabr* (in Persian), Dr. Foad Seddigh (2017) has located the exact reference for the statement in the prayer from which Bahā'u'llāh has quoted: "[He (Muḥammad) is] the seal of what came before Him and the harbinger of what will appear after Him". Dr. Seddigh, in fact, has identified this prayer in several authoritative sources. One of its earliest publications is found in a book called *Kāmilu'z-Ziyārāt*. This is a well-known collection of prayers (of "visitation", or prayers to be read at the graves of the Prophet Muḥammad, the Shī'ī Imams, and other Shī'ī figures). The *Kāmilu'z-Ziyārāt* is said to have been compiled by the Shī'ī scholar Ibn Qūlūya (d. 978 or 979 CE), and is available online: http://ia800803.us.archive.org/14/items/736278932/kamil-zyarat.pdf (accessed 1 Mar. 2023). The eleventh chapter of Ibn Qūlūya's book of prayers, entitled "Visiting the grave of the Commander of the Faithful

[Imam ʻAlī], how the grave should be visited, and what to pray at the grave", begins on page 92. The statement that Bahāʼuʼllāh has quoted is found on p. 97, and is the second "*ḥadīth*" (tradition) cited. (Reference and translation from the Arabic courtesy of Omid Ghaemmaghami.)

This same statement— "[He (Muḥammad)] is the seal of what came before Him and the harbinger of what will appear after Him"—is also found in prayers of visitation for the shrine of Imam Ḥusayn and in a prayer to be said at the shrines of all of the Imams. These prayers are also found in the same book, mentioned above: the *Kāmiluʼz-Ziyārāt*. The visitation prayer for Imam ʻAlīʼs shrine has the exact words Bahāʼuʼllāh has revealed, verbatim. This prayer, universally recognized and used by Shia Muslims, is variously ascribed to the Sixth and Tenth Imams (references courtesy of Omid Ghaemmaghami and Dr. Foad Seddigh). It should be noted that Bahāʼuʼllāhʼs understanding of this tradition differs from the traditional understanding by Shīʻī scholars. Dr. Seddigh points out this fact. On page 97 of the *Kāmiluʼz-Ziyārāt*, one Shīʻī scholar (whom Dr. Seddigh quotes) glosses (paraphrases) the above tradition, as follows:

> That is to say, [Muḥammad] is the seal of the Prophets who appeared before Him or their religious communities, or the knowledge and mysteries that preceded Him, and the harbinger of the Proofs (i.e., the Shīʻī Imams) who will follow Him or the knowledge, sciences, and wisdom that will appear after Him. (Reference and translation from the original Arabic, courtesy of Omid Ghaemmaghami.)

The difference is that Shīʻī commentators understand this *ḥadīth* to be a prediction of the advent of the Twelve Imams—and not a prophecy of the appearance of a future Prophet of God. But this much is certain: Shīʻī scholars and Baha'i scholars agree that Muḥammad is "the harbinger of what will appear after Him".

This perspective finds confirmation in the following Tablet to Ḥasan Shāhābādī, revealed by Bahāʼuʼllāh (1995) in the late ʻAkkā period, first published by Kamāl ad-Dīn Bakhtāvar (Bahāʼuʼllāh 1974; Bakhtāvar 1974, pp. 104–105).[2] The Tablet of Bahāʼuʼllāh that Mr. Bakhtāvar published in 1974 was eventually republished (Bahāʼuʼllāh 1995, p. 3). According to Steven Phelps (2020, p. 109), the *Lawḥ-i Ḥasan-i Shāhābadī* (not named as such, however) is listed as Entry "BH03572" (reference courtesy of Adib Masumian, personal communication, 18 June 2022). Phelps notes that this Tablet is catalogued as British Library Oriental Manuscript 15715.035a, which is part of a series that Phelps describes as follows:

> BLIB. Manuscripts in the British Library, London, listed by Or number. . . . Regarding manuscripts in the series Or16590 through Or15740, which together comprise half of all known works of Bahāʼuʼllāh, including some 4000 items which are uniquely accessible in this series: These were the bequest of a descendent of the family of Bahāʼuʼllāh; were mostly transcribed by Mīrzā Muḥammad-ʻAlī, and are likely to have been derived in part from the two stolen satchels of Bahāʼuʼllāhʼs papers mentioned in GPB [*God Passes By*, by Shoghi Effendi] p. 249 . . . . While included here owing to their importance, their degree of fidelity to the originals has not yet been ascertained. (Phelps 2020, p. 175)

In 2002, this Tablet was provisionally translated by Khazeh Fananapazir (Bahāʼuʼllāh 2002b) and is presented here, slightly edited by Buck, and also incorporating some information from Stephen Lambden's translation of part of this same Tablet (Lambden 2018, p. 81), as follows:

> *He shineth from the Horizon of the Heaven of true Knowledge with Wisdom and Utterance!*
>
> O Ḥasan! Hearken unto the Call of Ḥusayn [Bahāʼuʼllāh], Who hath been incarcerated in the Prison-Fortress of ʻAkkā, by reason of that which the hands of the heedless hath wrought. If one were to question them, "By what reason hath ye imprisoned Him?", they would reply:

> "Verily, He hath come with a new Sharī'a and this new Sharī'a doth not accord with the Law which we have been under. To this matter testifieth our Book, which is called the Qur'ān, a Book that is from God, the Lord of all mankind. See that which the All-Merciful hath revealed therein: 'Verily, He [Muḥammad] is the Messenger of God, and the Seal of the Prophets'". [Q. 33:40b.]
>
> To this, We reply:
>
> "Indeed thou speakest the truth. We do testify that through Him [Muḥammad], Messengership and Prophethood (*al-risāla wa'n-nubuwwa*) have both been sealed; and any one, after Him, claiming this most exalted station (*al-maqām al-'a'lā*) is in manifest error".
>
> Nevertheless, O Questioner! Hearken unto My voice which sayeth:
>
> "Open thine eyes that thou mayest behold the Most Great Beauty, through Whom speaketh the Lord of divine decree. By God! Through Him the 'Hour' hath appeared, and the 'Resurrection' hath come to pass, and the 'Moon' hath been cleft asunder and thou wouldst behold all in an ongoing 'Regeneration,' if thou be of them that possess insight".
>
> "Verily, through His Advent hath come to be fulfilled the Advent about which glad-tidings hath been given by the Messengers of God, from all eternity, and there hath come to pass about which God hath revealed in the Qur'ān (*al-furqān*): 'On that Day they shall all rise before the Lord of mankind.' [Q. 83:6.] Truly the Cycle of Prophethood (lit., the "carpet of Prophethood", *bisāt an-nubuwwa*) hath been rolled up, and He Who hath sent down the Prophets hath come, arrayed with a manifest and perspicuous sovereignty (*bi-sulṭān mubīn*; = Bahā'u'llāh)".
>
> "He, verily, is the One at Whose Advent all created things have given this utterance: 'The Kingdom is God's, the Sovereign, the Almighty, the All-Praised.' He is the One for Whom the necks of God's chosen Saints have been outstretched in longing and ardent expectation, and every Prophet hath awaited His Presence in this wondrous Day. He is the One through Whom the 'One Unseen and Hidden' hath been made manifest, the One Whom no one hath known save He Himself, the one King over all mankind".
>
> "Peruse ye the Qur'ān—and all God's Books revealed in the past—that haply ye may recognize this Day, illumined by the Countenance of thy Lord, the Manifest, the Perspicuous One".
>
> Thus have We illumined the horizon of the firmaments of this Tablet with the Luminary of Our Word, a Word through which God hath brought into being all creation, from all eternity to all eternity. Praise be to God, the Lord of all the worlds!

Here, Bahā'u'llāh explicitly acknowledges and affirms the fundamental doctrine that the Prophet Muḥammad was indeed the "Seal" (i.e., the last) Prophet (*nabī*) and last Messenger (*rasūl*) of the "Cycle of Prophecy". However, then Bahā'u'llāh cites Q. 83:6 as an eschatological event that occurs after the Prophet Muḥammad's tenure, or dispensation, as the "Seal of the Prophets", as in this brief passage:

> In truth I say: On this day the blessed words "But He is the Apostle of God, and the Seal of the Prophets" have found their consummation in the verse "The day when mankind shall stand before the Lord of the worlds". Render thou thanksgiving unto God, for so great a bounty. (Bahā'u'llāh 1988, p. 114)

Here, the translator, Shoghi Effendi, follows Rodwell's translation of Q. 83:6: "The day when mankind shall stand before the Lord of the worlds". So Bahā'u'llāh declares that the Cycle of Prophecy has ended. This, however, does not mean that revelations from God would cease. It is simply that the nature of the revelations would be phenomenologically

similar, yet substantively distinct, in that these post-Islamic revelations are part and parcel of the new "Cycle of Fulfillment". Mr. Bakhtāvar (1974, p. 101), after quoting Q. 33:40, states that right "after" (*b'ad az*) the "Seal of the Prophets" verse comes the promise (i.e., a further prophecy) of the future eschatological encounter with God:

> On the day when they will be brought into the presence of their Lord, their greeting to each other will be, "Peace be with you". (Q. 33:44a. Translated by Muḥammad Sarwar, https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=33&verse=44, accessed on 27 February 2023)

Mr. Bakhtāvar (1974, p. 101) does not, however, attribute the idea that Q. 33:40 and Q. 33:44 should be read together, as Bahā'u'llāh indicates that they should, in this remarkable argument, worth citing again for emphasis:

> Even as the Lord of being hath in His unerring Book (Qur'ān), after (*ba'd az*) speaking of the "Seal" in His exalted utterance: "Muḥammad is the Apostle of God and the Seal of the Prophets" (Q. 33:40), hath revealed unto all people the promise (*va'da*) of "attainment unto the divine Presence (*liqā'-yi khudā*)". To this attainment to the presence of the immortal King testify the verses of the Book, some of which We have already mentioned (*vide* par. 148, Q. 29:23; Q. 2:46; Q. 2:249; Q. 18:110; and Q. 13:2). The one true God is My witness! Nothing more exalted or more explicit than "attainment unto the divine Presence" hath been revealed in the Qur'ān. (*va khudā-yi vāḥid shāhid-i maqāl ast kih hīch amr-ī a'ẓam az liqā' va asraḥ-ī az ān dar furqān zikr nayāftih*.) Well is it with him that hath attained thereunto, in the day wherein most of the people, even as ye witness, have turned away therefrom.
>
> And yet, through the mystery of the former (*avval*) verse, they have turned away from the grace promised by the latter (*thānī*), despite the fact that "attainment unto the divine Presence" in the "Day of Resurrection" (*liqā' dar yawm-i qiyām*) is explicitly stated in the Book (Qur'ān). (Bahā'u'llāh 1989, pp. 169–70, pars. 181–182; parenthetical references added from the Persian text.)

Stephen Lambden, in a section entitled "The *Lawḥ-i Ḥasan Shāhābadī/Lawḥ-i Khātam*" in his lengthy paper, "The Bābī-Bahā'ī transcendence of *khātam an-nabiyyīn* (Qur'ān 33:40) as the 'finality of prophethood'" (Lambden 2018, pp. 80–82), writes:

> The Lawḥ-i Ḥasan Shāhābadī/Lawḥ-i Khātam al-Nabiyyīn
>
> At this point it will be appropriate to mention an important, probably late Acre period (1880s–early 1890s), Arabic scriptural Tablet of Baha'u'llah to a Persian Bahā'ī named Ḥasan who was born in or lived at Shāhābad, a village in western Azerbayjan, not far from Mākū where the Bāb was imprisoned in the late 1840s. Responding to Muslim judgements about his bringing a new *sharī'a* (religious law), Bahā'u'llāh affirms the truth of Q. 33:40b which he explicitly cites. In so doing he even goes on to affirm that both *risālat* implying the "sent Messengership" of the *rasūl* (the Messenger of God) and *nubuwwat*, the Prophethood of the *nabī* (Prophet) were "sealed" or consummated by Muḥammad . . .
>
> This untitled, brief but important scriptural Tablet of Baha'u'llah was addressed to a certain Ḥasan-i Shāhabādī; I have called [i.e., this Tablet] the *Lawḥ-i khātam al-Nabiyyīn* since Qur'an 33:40 is cited and commented upon within it. I am especially grateful to the learned UK based Bahā'ī scholar Khazeh Fananapazir for making a photocopy of a ms. of this text available to me. . . " (Lambden 2018, p. 80 and n. 95.)

The present writer (Buck) has asked both Lambden and Fananapazir for a copy of this photocopy of the original Arabic manuscript (or a copy of the original text) for further study. Lambden's partial translation of what he calls the "*Lawḥ-i khātam al-Nabiyyīn*" follows (Lambden 2018, p. 81).

A very interesting and potentially significant statement by Shoghi Effendi—"Guardian" of the Bahā'ī Faith (1921–1957)—implicates a potential Bahā'ī "theology of pluralism", to wit: "Unequivocally and without the least reservation it proclaims all established religions to be divine in origin, identical in their aims, complementary in their functions, continuous in their purpose, indispensable in their value to mankind" (Shoghi 1991, p. 58). This may be applied to individual religions—here, with special reference to Islam. To paraphrase, Islam, from this Bahā'ī perspective, is divine in origin, identical in its aims, complementary in its functions, continuous in its purpose, and indispensable in its value to humankind. In an ever increasingly multi-religious social framework within a progressively globalizing world—and in an era of emerging and overarching "transreligious" identity, as recently theorized and forecast by Roland Faber 2019 (see review by Buck 2019b)—this incipient Bahā'ī theology of pluralism also applies as to other religions.

Having arisen out of Islamic historical context and milieu, the Bahā'ī religion, as part of its spiritual ancestry and present heritage, possesses certain Islamicate elements, yet exhibits other features that are *supra*-Islamicate and distinct in character. For instance, Islamic doctrine adheres to a belief in successive revelations, beginning with Adam and culminating with the Prophet Muḥammad as the "Seal of the Prophets", as previously said throughout this article. In Bahā'ī teachings, therefore, the idea of successive revelations is invested with a teleology that transforms it into "progressive revelation" (*tajdīd va takāmul-i adyān*), where the succession of Messengers throughout the history of religions is not only sequential but cumulative, coefficient with the social evolution of humanity (Ioannesyan 2012). Here, "progressive" conveys the notion of "superior" in respect of being "fuller" and "more advanced", without making a claim of intrinsic superiority.

5. Conclusions

This paper represents the first time that a wide-ranging survey and analysis of the Shaykhī, Bābī, and Bahā'ī viewpoints on the subject of the "Seal of the Prophets" has been made, and is the result of a collaboration between two scholars working in the United States and Russia.

In sum, as demonstrated in the passages cited above, the eschatological "meeting God" verses of Q. 33:44 (and parallels)—as well as such other passages as Q. 83:6 (and parallels) and Q. 7:35—effectively transcend the "Seal of the Prophets" verse at Q. 33:40.

The foregoing analysis invites further investigation (for example, a thorough study of Shī'ī and especially Bābī exegesis of Q. 33:40–44, i.e., in Persian *Bayān* 3:7). In so saying, the present writers disclaim any pretense to authoritative pronouncements on these issues. The authors are simply "men at work", so to speak, performing ongoing research, and contributing to the cumulative and acquisitive research tradition—especially by creating a synergy between Russian academic Shaykhī, Bābī and Bahā'ī studies and the broader research tradition. By, respectively, connecting and interrelating Shaykhī, Bābī and Bahā'ī exegesis of the "Seal of the Prophets", a wider scope is obtained such that there is more of a sense of a developmental process in play. In other words, the present writers are looking at "the bigger picture", as it were, in the birth and early genesis of the Bābī and Bahā'ī religions, thereby attracting further analysis and discussion. Recognizing that the Báb and Bahā'u'llāh each represent the "divine presence" constitutes, in the words of the present writers, a "realized eschatology".

Realized eschatology transforms the idea that the "end of the world is near" (or "far off", as the case may be) into the resolute belief that the "end of the world is here". In other words, realized eschatology is a form of presentism, in which the present has caught up with the future, such that the future is here and now. For such sudden "faith" in the contemporaneous fulfillment of eschatological expectations to reasonably occur, without straining credulity too far, requires that popular notions—especially miraculous and therefore highly improbable events—must somehow give way to the firm conviction, or certitude, that prophetic narratives should be understood and appreciated primarily as figurative, metaphorical and symbolic discourses, hinting at a psychological or spiritual

reality that has been arcanely expressed in otherwise wildly imaginative apocalyptic scenarios. In this sense, the Qur'an's promise of "meeting" God—which is physically impossible to do, since the finite cannot attain to the infinite—must be understood as "experiencing" the presence of God in some other way. For many who have come to embrace the Bahā'ī Faith, the *Kitāb-i Īqān* (The Book of Certitude) provides assurance that eschatological discourse is primarily metaphysical (i.e., all about psychological and social transformation), rather than physical (i.e., concrete reality). To interpret eschatological discourse literally is a form of spiritual illiteracy, in which the reader simply lacks the cognitive skills to decode prophetic code, as it were. In the end, this is a test of faith, as Bahā'u'llāh has put it:

> Know verily that the purpose underlying all these symbolic terms and abstruse allusions, which emanate from the Revealers of God's holy Cause, hath been to test and prove the peoples of the world; that thereby the earth of the pure and illuminated hearts may be known from the perishable and barren soil. From time immemorial such hath been the way of God amidst His creatures, and to this testify the records of the sacred books. (Bahā'u'llāh 1989, p. 49, par. 53)

The *Kitāb-i Īqān* is a holy book about holy books. Not only that, but the Īqān claims to contain the essence of the wisdom enshrined in all of the holy books of the world's religions. "In fact, all the Scriptures and the mysteries thereof are condensed into this brief account", Bahā'u'llāh proclaimed. "So much so, that were a person to ponder it a while in his heart, he would discover from all that hath been said the mysteries of the Words of God, and would apprehend the meaning of whatever hath been manifested by that ideal King". (Bahā'u'llāh 1989, p. 237, par. 268). The *Kitāb-i Īqān* itself has been called, by Bahā'u'llāh himself, the "cynosure of all books", in this striking declaration revealed on 1 July 1882:

> Regarding their statement that "our faith and religion is superior to every other", by this is meant such Prophets as have appeared before them. Viewed from one perspective these holy Souls are one: the first among them is the same as the last, and the last is the same as the first. All have proceeded from God, unto Him have they summoned all men, and unto Him have they returned. This theme hath been set forth in the Book of Certitude, which is indeed the cynosure of all books (*sayyid-i-kutub*), and which streamed from the Pen of Glory in the early years of this Most Great Revelation. Blessed is he that hath beheld it and pondered its contents for the love of God, the Lord of creation. (Bahā'u'llāh 2006, p. 45, par. 2.45.)

In this passage, the Persian phrase *sayyid-i-kutub*, translated as the "cynosure of all books", can also be expressed as the "prince of (all) books". The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "cynosure", in part, as: "figurative. a. Something that serves for guidance or direction; a 'guiding star'. b. Something that attracts attention by its brilliancy or beauty; a centre of attraction, interest, or admiration". By this definition, a cynosure serves as a source of illumination and a singular object of beauty. A cynosure, then, is something that not only attracts attention, elicits admiration, and commands respect, but also serves as a source of enlightenment, guiding the way forward. With regard to the Īqān, one could well ask "Why?" and "How so?" In other words, what makes the *Kitāb-i Īqān* so special, and from what perspective? On this question as to the significance and wider implications of the doctrines taught in the *Kitāb-i Īqān*, Shoghi Effendi elaborates:

> A model of Persian prose, of a style at once original, chaste and vigorous, and remarkably lucid, both cogent in argument and matchless in its irresistible eloquence, this Book, setting forth in outline the Grand Redemptive Scheme of God, occupies a position unequalled by any work in the entire range of Bahā'ī literature, except the Kitāb-i-Aqdas, Bahā'u'llāh's Most Holy Book. Revealed on the eve of the declaration of His Mission, it proffered to mankind the "Choice Sealed Wine", whose seal is of "musk", and broke the "seals" of the "Book" referred to

> by Daniel, and disclosed the meaning of the "words" destined to remain "closed up" till the "time of the end".
>
> Within a compass of two hundred pages it proclaims unequivocally the existence and oneness of a personal God, unknowable, inaccessible, the source of all Revelation, eternal, omniscient, omnipresent and almighty; asserts the relativity of religious truth and the continuity of Divine Revelation; affirms the unity of the Prophets, the universality of their Message, the identity of their fundamental teachings, the sanctity of their scriptures, and the twofold character of their stations; denounces the blindness and perversity of the divines and doctors of every age; cites and elucidates the allegorical passages of the New Testament, the abstruse verses of the Qur'ān, and the cryptic Muḥammadan traditions which have bred those age-long misunderstandings, doubts and animosities that have sundered and kept apart the followers of the world's leading religious systems; enumerates the essential prerequisites for the attainment by every true seeker of the object of his quest; demonstrates the validity, the sublimity and significance of the Bāb's Revelation; acclaims the heroism and detachment of His disciples; foreshadows, and prophesies the world-wide triumph of the Revelation promised to the people of the Bayān; upholds the purity and innocence of the Virgin Mary; glorifies the Imāms of the Faith of Muḥammad; celebrates the martyrdom, and lauds the spiritual sovereignty, of the Imām Ḥusayn; unfolds the meaning of such symbolic terms as "Return", "Resurrection", "Seal of the Prophets" and "Day of Judgment"; adumbrates and distinguishes between the three stages of Divine Revelation; and expatiates, in glowing terms, upon the glories and wonders of the "City of God", renewed, at fixed intervals, by the dispensation of Providence, for the guidance, the benefit and salvation of all mankind. Well may it be claimed that of all the books revealed by the Author of the Bahā'ī Revelation, this Book alone, by sweeping away the age-long barriers that have so insurmountably separated the great religions of the world, has laid down a broad and unassailable foundation for the complete and permanent reconciliation of their followers. (Shoghi 1979, pp. 139–40.)

Although this statement "speaks for itself", as it were, the primary social implications of the *Kitāb-i Īqān* are as far-reaching, progressive and profound as they are ideologically edifying, at least from the perspective of Shoghi Effendi, who translated the Īqān into English. Indeed, there is something of a grand vision—even a prophecy—here, in that Shoghi Effendi claims that the overarching impact of the Īqān, over time, will lead to the "complete and permanent reconciliation" of the followers of all world religions, all for the greater good, i.e., "for the guidance, the benefit and salvation of all mankind". To be sure, this is a statement of faith. In and of itself, this does not render Shoghi Effendi's foregoing pronouncement and prediction true or untrue. That said, Shoghi Effendi's encomium of the Īqān invites serious reflection on the social implications of religious doctrines in general, as well as in particular with respect to the Īqān itself. By "sweeping away the age-long barriers that have so insurmountably separated the great religions of the world", the Īqān "has laid down a broad and unassailable foundation for the complete and permanent reconciliation of their followers" considering that Bahā'u'llāh's mission was to "unify the world" (Bahā'u'llāh 1988, p. 46, second epistle to Napoleon III), promoting interfaith accord and concord—in what Bahā'ī philosopher Roland Faber (2019) calls "transreligious identity" as part and parcel of the potential, if not actual, religious and other social implications of the religiously unifying ideology of *Kitāb-i Īqān*, the Book of Certitude.

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Notes

1 Bahā'u'llāh quotes this *ḥadīth*, in brief, so: *ammā an-nabiyyūna fa-anā*. (Arabic text, courtesy of Dergham Aqiqi, personal communication to Buck, 29 October 2021.) For the full version, see: al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* ("Sea of Lights"), vol. 25.

2 According to Fereydun Vahman (2019), Mr. Kamālu'd-Din Bakhtāvar, who lived in Tehran, was "a scholarly author and an eloquent speaker". Before the 1979 Islamic Revolution of Iran, "followers of the Hojjatieh and *Fada'iyan-e Islam* organizations, including Raja'i who later became president, created much trouble for him and disrupted meetings where he spoke about the Baha'i Faith". Eventually, Mr. Bakhtāvar was arrested in Mashhad, along with nine other Baha'is. Subsequently a trial was held which, at first, was public. "The Revolutionary Court in Mashhad", according to Vahman, "announced that Bakhtāvar's trial would be broadcast by loudspeaker in the city's main square". "Those who gathered to listen heard the prosecutor's accusations", Vahman notes, "but a few minutes after defense started, the judge ordered the loudspeakers turned off". On 26 July 1981, Mr. Bakhtāvar was executed by firing squad in Kashmar in Khurasan, Iran (Vahman 2019, pp. 187, 189). In a cable sent the very next day, 27 July 1981, addressed "To all National Spiritual Assemblies", the Universal House of Justice wrote, in part: Execution of Two Bahā'īs in Kashmar. GRIEVED ANNOUNCE TWO MORE ACTIVE DEDICATED SUPPORTERS FAITH BAHÁ'U'LLÁH IRAN KAMALI'D-DIN BAKHTAVAR AND NI'MATU'LLAH KATIBPUR-SHAHIDI MARTYRED BY FIRING SQUAD IN KASHMAR, KHURASAN PROVINCE CHARGED WITH TOTALLY FALSE ACCUSATIONS INVOLVEMENT POLITICAL ACTIVITIES. https://bahai.works/MUHJ63-86/290/Execution_of_Two_Bah%C3%A1%E2%80%99%C3%ADs_in_Kashmir (accessed on 27 February 2023).

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Article

Who Was a Bahā'ī in the Upper Echelons of Qājār Iran?

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Abstract: This paper addresses two questions: first, that of the nature of multiple religious identities in a traditional society; second, that of who can be identified as Bahā'īs in the upper echelons of Qājār Iran. The paper identifies five criteria by which individuals can be identified as having been Bahā'īs and suggests that, since none of these are usually conclusive by themselves, more than one of the criteria should be fulfilled before we label someone as a Bahā'ī. The various grades of being a Bahā'ī are also examined. The paper lists a number of examples of people from the Qājār royal family and from among the highest echelons of the Qājār administration who fulfill these criteria. It also looks at two individuals who have not been claimed to be Bahā'īs in the usual Iranian and Bahā'ī histories, and yet, if a close study of their lives is made, considerable evidence can be accumulated that they may have been crypto-Bahā'īs. In all, this paper indicates that there may have been many Bahā'īs in the upper strata of Qājār society, that this is a factor that has not previously been sufficiently recognized and needs to be examined for the light that it may shed on other matters.

Keywords: Baha'i; Bahai; Qajar; Iran; religious identity; crypto-believers; multiple religious identities; social elites

1. Introduction

The matter of multiple religious identities has been investigated by scholars for decades. Briefly, it can be said to occur in three distinct types. First, there are certain religious cultures where it is acceptable to practice multiple religious affiliations. A Chinese person may find no problem in marrying according to a Christian rite but being buried according to Traditional Chinese rituals. Japanese, African and Latin American cultures also appear to accept multiple religious identities readily (see for example, Hedges 2017). A related second type is the "New Age" type of pick-and-mix religiosity that may find someone practicing Buddhist meditation, dabbling in Kabbalah and participating in pagan rites (see, for example, Bellah et al. 1985). Third, there are groups of people who take on a religious identity in order to conceal another religious identity because that identity is being subjected to severe persecution. Examples of this include the Shi'i practice of *taqiyya* (religious dissimulation), which enabled that community to survive centuries of persecution (Momen 1985, p. 183), and Jews in Iran who, under threat of death, converted to Islam while secretly continuing to remain Jews as much as they were able (Amanat 2011, pp. 37–59; Tsadik 2007, pp. 36, 40). This paper examines this third category in relation to another religion that has been persecuted in Iran, the Bahā'ī community.

The claim of the central figure in the Bahā'ī religion, Bahā'u'llāh (1817–1892), which was fully developed by 1867, was to bring a new revelation from God, superseding Islam and more suited to the present time. The Bahā'ī community in Qājār Iran was subjected to intense persecution (Momen 2015; Momen 2021). Any person publicly identified as a Bahā'ī could expect, as a minimum, harassment from elements in the town stirred up by the local clerics. Loss of property, loss of livelihood, loss of family connection (if they were the only Bahā'ī in the family) and even loss of life were also a distinct likelihood and a frequent occurrence. Not surprisingly, therefore, most Bahā'īs took steps to conceal their religious affiliation to varying extents. This concealment was described even by Europeans. The

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British scholar, Edward G. Browne (1862–1896), even though he came to Iran specifically looking for Bahā'īs, was unable to find any in the first half of his journey (Browne 1926).

Concealment of one's true opinions and beliefs was, and continues to be, deeply imbedded in Iranian culture. This is largely because it is an important part of the practice of Shī'ī Islam. The practice of *taqiyya* (dissimulation of one's belief if in danger because of them) was not simply an option for Iranian Shī'īs—it was obligatory according to many transmitted Traditions of the Shī'ī Imams. Although this Shī'ī practice of *taqiyya* was not allowed in the Bahā'ī teachings, being prudent and not unnecessarily submitting oneself to danger (*ḥikmat*) was part of the instructions given out by the Bahā'ī leadership.[1] In practice, Bahā'īs would take whatever measures were needed in their daily lives to conceal their identity, although if challenged directly, they would not deny being Bahā'īs. Thus, the Bahā'ī practice of *ḥikmat* differed from the Shī'ī practicea of *taqiyya*, which allowed concealment of belief even to the point of denying being a Shī'ī. Of course, it took time for this change of culture to embed itself in the Bahā'ī community (see the example of Mīrzā Sa'īd Anṣārī below). Initially, this was not too much of a problem, since the general population persisted in calling them "Bābīs", followers of the Bāb (1819–1850) who preceded Bahā'u'llāh. Therefore, if they were asked whether they were Bābīs, they could truthfully deny this. After a decade or so (i.e., by the 1870s), the religious and civil leaders realized this, and so, in addition to asking whether a person was a Bābī or not, they would add a requirement for that person to curse both Bahā'u'llāh and the Bāb, which most Bahā'īs would not do. This led on to other stratagems developed by Bahā'īs, the description of which is outside the subject matter of this paper.

Questions of religious identity are complicated enough even under normal circumstances, but when it is a matter of a religion that is being persecuted, it becomes more complicated as followers of that religion try to conceal their identity to mitigate the persecution. It becomes even more complicated when one is considering a member of a persecuted religion that has penetrated all strata of society. Those in the lower levels of society can, if identified and subjected to persecution, move away to a different location where they are not known and rebuild their lives (as many Bahā'īs did; Momen 1991). However, this course is not open to those in the upper echelons of society since they would become known wherever they moved; hence, they needed to be doubly cautious and build up elaborate mechanisms of concealment. The Bahā'ī leadership instructed the Bahā'īs to keep the Bahā'ī identity of high-ranking individuals secret and ʿAbdu'l-Bahā would usually only communicate with such individuals through a single Bahā'ī intermediary, with no-one else in the community knowing.[2] An additional complication is that, in many parts of Iran, especially outside the large cities, the Bahā'īs were the only group advocating social reforms (such as democracy, modern education, advancement of the role of women, etc.), and so, some may have associated themselves with the Bahā'īs to advance such reforms rather than for religious reasons. There were also many Bahā'ī identities, both with regard to how various individuals viewed Bahā'u'llāh and also with regard to how the claims of Bahā'u'llāh evolved over time. A detailed look at this matter would extend this paper greatly and must await a further paper.

While much of this paper concerns the attempts by these notables to conceal their Bahā'ī identity, it should not be forgotten that some of these individuals were actively propagating the new religion; otherwise, it would not have spread through this layer of society (see the example of Āghā Jān Shāhanshāh Khānum and her family below) and some were quite open about their belief (see the example of Vazīr Humāyūn and Muʿayyir ul-Mamālik below).

The writing of the history of Qājār Iran has largely ignored the Bahā'ī presence. In the case of Iranian writers, this was partly in an attempt by some to erase the Bahā'ī presence and partly because the information that someone was a Bahā'ī may have been unknown. Western scholars have relied upon these Iranian sources and have therefore replicated this erasure of the Bahā'ī community in their work (Momen 2008, p. 362 and n.). When considering the actors in Qājār history, a person's religious beliefs are of importance in

assessing their life and actions, and so, this paper is one preliminary attempt to inject the Bahā'ī component back into Iranian history.

Some prominent Bahā'ī families went to great lengths to conceal their Bahā'ī identity. The Afnāns, who were relatives of the Báb and were a prominent Bahā'ī merchant family in Shiraz and Yazd, for example, used to sponsor Shī'ī rituals such as *rawḍih-khānīs* (recitals of the sufferings of the Imams) and a *dastih* (troupe of people chest-beating and self-flagellating in a ritual procession) during the Muharram commemorations (Afnan 2008, p. 81). In general, all converts from a Muslim background remained outwardly Muslims, while those from Zoroastrian and Jewish backgrounds retained an outward Zoroastrian and Jewish social identity, respectively. Children growing up in prominent families who were Bahā'īs sometimes never heard even the name Bahā'ī spoken at home in case one of the servants should hear and later make trouble for them.[3] Those prominent people who were the only Bahā'ī in their family were in an even more difficult position, often having to keep their affiliation secret from even their spouses and children. For example, Mīrzā Muḥammad Riḍā Kirmānī, a mujtahid of Yazd, had met the Báb and was a Bābī and later a Bahā'ī. He kept his belief so secret that neither the other Bahā'īs nor even his own family knew. Then, on his deathbed in 1885, he revealed this to his son, Shaykh Zaynu'l-'Abidīn Abrārī (1864–1936), and told him to go to Vakīl ud-Dawlih and investigate the Bahā'ī religion (Māzandarānī undated, vol. 6, pp. 798–806; Sulaymānī 1947–75, vol. 5, pp. 253–77). Similarly, the two sons of 'Abdu'l-Raḥīm Khān Kashānī Kalāntar of Tehran appear to have grown up unaware of the fact that their father was a Bahā'ī. It was only through their friendship with other Bahā'īs that they came to know of the new religion and became Bahā'īs (Gail 1987, pp. 1–67). This situation (of the children not knowing the father's affiliation with the Bahā'ī community) probably held true for many of those discussed in this paper.

With this degree of secrecy and concealment, it becomes extremely difficult to discern who was a Bahā'ī. It becomes necessary to try to lay down some criteria whereby someone can be considered a Bahā'ī. In this paper, we will consider the question of Bahā'ī identity in Qājār Iran, particularly as it relates to those in the upper echelons of society.[4] How can we know whether a person from that period was a Bahā'ī or not? Among those factors that would enable us to identify a person as possibly having been a Bahā'ī, we may list the following:

1. Those identified in Bahā'ī histories as a Bahā'ī. This is usually a good source of identification since it usually means that the individual identified mixed with the Bahā'ī community. There are, however, some whose identification by this means might be contested; for example, the leading Shī'ī cleric of the 1880s, Mīrzā-yi-Shīrāzī, has been identified in one Bahā'ī source as a secret Bahā'ī on the basis of one confidential interview he gave (Afnan 2008, pp. 324–50), but such an identification is open to challenge since he never openly declared himself to be a Bahā'ī. The Bahā'ī identity of a number of other clerics has also been challenged, for example Ḥājī Mullā Muḥammad Hamzih Sharī'atmadar of Barfurūsh (d. 1281/1864).[5]

2. Those identified in other sources as Bahā'īs. Other sources include Iranian Muslim, Zoroastrian, Jewish and European sources. Here again, such identifications are open to challenge since it was not uncommon for individuals to be identified as "Bābīs" (i.e., Bahā'īs) as a way of discrediting them. Indeed, as Nāẓim ul-Islām (Kirmānī) asserted, "It has become the norm in Iran that, whenever it is desired to overthrow someone and remove them from the political scene, they say that he is a Bābī" (Nāẓim ul-Islām 1967, p. 400). Hence, a simple identification of a person as a "Bābī" or Bahā'ī would not necessarily indicate that the person was a Bahā'ī, unless the context and source are carefully examined. For example, Sayyid Jamālu'd-Dīn Asadābādī "al-Afghānī" was often described as a "Bābī" in sources from the nineteenth century[6] and when Nāṣiru'd-Dīn Shāh was assassinated by one of his followers, a number of Bahā'īs were attacked and even killed on this account. In fact, Asadābādī was associated with Azalī Bābīs but was not himself a Bābī and was somewhat inimical to the Bahā'īs.

3. Having descendants who are Bahā'īs and who assert that their ancestor was a Bahā'ī. Again, although this is good evidence, it is not conclusive. There are some who have Bahā'ī descendants and are said to have been Bahā'īs, but were probably not; for example, Māstir Khudābakhsh (1865–1918), a leading Zoroastrian of Yazd.[7]

4. Supportive evidence from Bahā'ī sources. Apart from direct statements that a particular person was a Bahā'ī, some sources contain other supportive evidence for a person being a Bahā'ī, such as the writings of the person themselves (especially their poetry, which may hint at their religious affiliation), being a member of a local Bahā'ī council (local spiritual assembly) or being in correspondence with or visiting the Bahā'ī leaders. However, while being a member of a local spiritual assembly is probably conclusive even in the absence of other evidence, very few individuals from the highest echelons of Qājār society would fit this criterion (perhaps only Mīrzā ʿAlī Muḥammad Khān Muvaqqar ud-Dawlih (1865–1921), who was on the Shiraz Bahā'ī assembly and later governor of Bushihr (1911–1915)). Many individuals who wrote to Bahā'u'llāh and ʿAbdu'l-Bahā or even visited them were not Bahā'īs and some were even antagonistic to the Bahā'ī religion.

5. Supportive evidence from other sources. Such evidence includes a close examination of a person's writings (especially their poetry, as in the case of Shaykh ur-Ra'īs below) and accounts of how the individual treated Bahā'īs while holding official positions. But of course, good treatment of Bahā'īs may just indicate a person's humanitarianism or there may have been other factors involved.[8] Although it is not possible to prove conclusively that any such individuals were Bahā'īs, in all cases, it is necessary to ask the question: if this individual was not a crypto-Bahā'ī or close sympathizer, why would he or she have risked life and wealth by associating with or protecting Bahā'īs in such a manner that laid them open to the risk of being accused of being Bahā'īs?

As can be seen from the above, none of these pieces of evidence is conclusive and one should ideally have more than one piece of evidence from more than one of these criteria before suggesting that any individual may have been a Bahā'ī. The higher up the social scale one examines, the more that person might take steps to conceal their identity and so the more difficult it is to make a determination. As several Western observers noted, there were Bahā'īs in the highest echelons of the Qajar regime, including Qājār princes, highly placed officials and the immediate entourage of the Shah (see also below)[9]. Of course, one cannot know what was going on in the mind of a person, but one can assess their relationships and actions. Therefore, for many of these people, it is not possible to make a definitive determination of their religious beliefs and some of them may just have been close sympathizers of the religion rather than outright believers. In the rest of this paper, it is therefore understood that when an individual is designated a Bahā'ī, it indicates that there are sufficient grounds to think that the person may have been a Bahā'ī on account of satisfying more than one of the above five criteria, but that it is possible they may have just been a close sympathizer.

There are also examples of individuals who were not Bābīs or Bahā'īs but stood to be accused of being so, either because they had initially become believers in the new religion but later withdrew from it when persecutions arose, or because their father had been a Bābī or Bahā'ī. Such individuals sometimes acted vigorously to forestall such accusations, even to the extent of persecuting Bahā'īs. Examples of this include Mullā Ḥusayn ibn Mīrzā Sulaymān, a mujtahid, Ḥājī Rasūl Mihrīzī, Mullā Ḥusayn Ardakānī and Mullā Ḥasan Ardakānī, all from the Yazd area (Momen 2021, pp. 349–50, 365).

When one surveys the range of individuals who are in the upper echelons of Qājār society and for whom there is some evidence of their having been Bahā'īs, it is difficult to discern any pattern to this group. Given that the Bahā'ī social teachings advocate such reforms as the advancement of the role of women, modern education and democracy, one might think that there would be a predominance of those inclined towards supporting these reforms. In fact, however, one finds that they include both reformers and conservatives. It is possible to speculate that, while those who supported reforms were attracted to the social teachings of the Bahā'ī religion, those who were political conservatives may have been

attracted to the more mystical writings of the Bahā'ī leaders. Nor is there any geographical bias in the group. In this paper there is not any space to consider in detail the evidence for a large number of individuals. Instead, attention will be focused on the sort of evidence that exists by considering a small number of examples: individuals who were of national importance, leaving aside individuals who were only of local importance. It is also possible to identify a number of persons who are not stated to be Bahā'īs in either the standard Bahā'ī or Iranian sources, and yet, on a close examination of the events of their life, they can be demonstrated to have been, at the least, very sympathetic, but possibly even secret Bahā'īs. I will examine two of these in detail: one taken from the conservative end of the political spectrum and one who supported the reformers.

2. Some Prominent Individuals Who May Have Been Bahā'īs

2.1. Qājār Family

A number of princes and princesses of the Qājār family have been asserted to have been Bahā'īs. Apart from a few individuals, there are four main family clusters that can be identified. One of the earliest was Shams-i Jahan Khānum, who was known as Ḥājjiyyih Shāhzādih Khānum and used the pen name Fitnih. She was a daughter of Muḥammad Riḍā Mīrzā Iftikhār ul-Mulk, the fourteenth son of Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shah. She became a Bābī, met Qurrat ul-ʿAyn Ṭāhirih and visited Bahā'u'llāh in both Baghdad and Edirne. She wrote an autobiographical poem in which these events are related (Māzandarānī undated, vol. 6, p. 415; Dhukā'ī-Bayḍā'ī 1969, pp. 167–70, 177–82). She can be considered to have been a Bahā'ī on the basis of criteria 1 and 4 above. Her full brother Muḥammad Hāshim Mīrzā (Jināb) and a half-brother Akbar Mīrzā were also interested in the Bābī movement and attended Bābī meetings. It appears that Jināb later became a student of Mullā Hādī Sabzivārī and drifted away from the Bābī community (Māzandarānī undated, vol. 4, pp. 43–44; Māzandarānī 1971, p. 208).

Another family grouping of Bahā'īs were the descendants of Ḍiyā' us-Salṭanih (d. 1290/1873), the favorite daughter of Fatḥ-ʿAlī Shah. She married Mīrzā Masʿūd Anṣārī Garmrūdī (d. 1265/1848), who was foreign minister during the reign of Muḥammad Shah. Their daughter, Āghā Jān Shāhanshāh Khānum, married Mīrzā Muḥammad Qāsim Qāḍī Ṭabāṭabā'ī and from this marriage had two daughters, Āghā Shāhzādih (Badī'ih) and ʿUdhrā Khanum Ḍiyā ul-Ḥājiyyih. The first daughter became a Bahā'ī through her husband Intiẓām us-Salṭanih (see below), who was a Bahā'ī, sometime in the late 1870s and in turn converted, with the assistance of her husband and other Bahā'īs, her mother and sister. After the death of her first husband, Shāhanshāh Khānum married Mīrzā Ma'sūm Khān Anṣārī Muntakhab ud-Dawlih, who was a Muslim relative of her first husband, and she moved to Mashhad, where her new husband had a government position, sometime in about 1880. She was put in touch with the prominent Bahā'ī Ibn Aṣdaq in Mashhad and, after a time there, he married her daughter, Ḍiyā' ul-Ḥājiyyih. In about 1882, they moved to Tehran, where their house in Khiyābān-i Amīriyyih was a place where many of the royal family and the notables of the city were introduced to the Bahā'ī religion. There are several writings of the Bahā'ī leaders addressed to Āghā Jān Shāhanshāh Khanum and her two daughters.[10] Their descendants today claim them as Bahā'īs. Thus, they appear to have been Bahā'īs on the basis of criteria 1, 3 and 4.

A third family grouping revolved around Tahmasp (or Tahmasb) Mīrzā Mu'ayyad ud-Dawlih, second son of Muḥammad ʿAlī Mīrzā Dawlatshāh (1220–1296). He had been governor of Fars during the second Nayrīz upheaval and, thus, was at least partly responsible for the killings of the Bābīs in that episode. Later, however, when he was deputy governor of Khurāsān in about 1864, Ḥājī Ibrāhīm Tūnī gave him a copy of Bahā'u'llāh's Kitāb-i Īqān and he is reported to have declared that either one had to declare oneself without religion or one had to accept the truth of the author of this book (Māzandarānī undated, vol. 6, p. 74n). After this, he was in close contact with and protected Nabīl-i Akbar, a prominent Bahā'ī, for much of the rest of his stay in Khurāsān. His sister, who is also called Shams-I Jahan Khanum (but is different to the above person of the same name),

became a Bābī after meeting Qurratu'l-ʿAyn Ṭāhirih in Hamadan (Gulpāygānī n.d., p. 105). She took with her to this meeting her nephew, the son of Tahmasb Mīrzā, Muḥammad Mahdī Mīrzā, Mu'ayyad us-Salṭanih, who was years later converted in Hamadan by the learned Bahā'ī scholar Mīrzā Abul-Fadl Gulpaygani, along with his son, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Mīrzā Mu'ayyad us-Salṭanih (after 1916 Mu'ayyad ud-Dawlih, 1855–1920). The latter was in the telegraph department in Tehran, then head of that department in Isfahan until 1897 and then in Shiraz from 1897 to 1905. During the Constitutionalist revolt, he sided with Muḥammad ʿAlī Shah and was pressed into becoming the head of the royal cabinet. After the shah's defeat, he left Iran for Baghdad. At this time, he went to ʿAkkā and met ʿAbdu'l-Bahā. He returned to Iran and wrote a book of Bahā'ī proofs. He was in the court of Aḥmad Shah and was appointed governor of Kashan for a time, then of ʿArabistan (Khuzistan) and died in Muḥammarah in 1339/1920, shortly after his appointment to the latter post (Māzandarānī 1974–5, vol. 8a, pp. 426–27, vol. 8b, p. 832; Sulaymānī 1947–75, vol. 2, pp. 266–71; Mihrābkhānī 1988, pp. 136–41; Churchill 1906, pp. 45–46; Hafezi 2011, pp. 158–59). While the evidence for Tahmasp Mīrzā amounts to criteria 1 and 4, and that for Shams-i Jahan Khanum criteria 1 and 2 in the above classification, the two Mu'ayyad us-Salṭanihs, father and son, were in correspondence with the Bahā'ī leaders and had Bahā'ī descendants and so can be considered to have points 1, 3 and 4 in support of their being Bahā'īs.

A fourth family grouping is that of Ḥājī Abu'l-Hasan Mīrzā Shaykh ur-Ra'īs (1264/1848–1918), a Qājār prince who first undertook religious training and became a *mujtahid* and then was a prominent figure in the reform movement. Although most Iranian histories ignore all connections between him and the Bahā'ī religion, there is good evidence that he was a Bahā'ī. This evidence includes his two visits to ʿAbdu'l-Bahā, his poetry that alludes strongly to Bahā'ī themes and the fact that he was widely acknowledged to be a Bahā'ī by both his friends and enemies during his lifetime. It appears that his mother, Khurshīd Bīgum, was secretly a Bābī and raised him thus. Much of this evidence is collected in two articles by Juan Cole and therefore need not be detailed here.[11] In brief, Ḥājī Shaykh ur-Ra'is satisfies criteria 1, 2, 4 and 5.

2.2. High Government Officials

Here again, we can discern a number of family groups among whose members a few appear to have become Bahā'īs. One of these is the Ghaffārī family of Kashan, whose most famous member was Amīn ad-Dawlih Ghaffārī, who was Minister of court for most of Nāṣiru'd-Dīn Shah's reign. His son, Mahdī Khān Vazīr Humāyūn (Qā'im-Maqām, Vazīr Makhsūs, Ajudān Makhsūs, 1282/1865–1336/1917), was at first very opposed to the Bahā'īs, but while he was governor of Sulṭānābād in 1904, he was converted by Ḥājī Munis, Ḥājī Tavāngar and Mullā Mīrzā Āqā Ṭalqānī. Although he tended to be a conservative, he is credited with having persuaded Muẓaffaru'd-Dīn Shah to sign the Constitution when the latter was wavering. It is possible that the influence of the Bahā'ī teachings caused this. After the Constitutional Revolution, he retired to his estate at Vādgān near Kashan. Although advised by ʿAbdu'l-Bahā to be prudent, he came to Tehran and began to teach the Bahā'ī teachings openly. Then he left to visit ʿAbdu'l-Bahā in Egypt in 1910 and this fact was announced in the newspapers (Sulaymānī 1947–75, vol. 9, p. 315; Āvārih 1923, vol. 2, pp. 181–83; Khoshbin 2002, vol. 1, pp. 339–41). He satisfies criteria 1, 2, 4 and 5. When news that Vazīr Humāyūn had set off to visit ʿAbdu'l-Bahā reached his family, his mother sent his older brother, Abu'l-Qāsim Khān Mukhtār us-Salṭanih, in pursuit to prevent the visit and save the family's honour. Thus, Mukhtār us-Salṭanih met ʿAbdu'l-Bahā in Ramlah and became a Bahā'ī there. Mukhtār us-Salṭanih was killed by rebels near Khurramābād during World War I (before 1917; Khoshbin 2002, vol. 1, pp. 341–42). He satisfies criterion 1 only.

A cousin of these two brothers, Ghulām Ḥusayn Khān Ghaffārī Amīn Khalvat (Vazīr Makhṣūṣ, Ṣāḥib Ikhtiyār), was private secretary to Nāṣiru'd-Dīn and Muẓaffaru'd-Dīn Shāhs until 1896, then Minister of Court. He is reported to have accepted the new religion after being taught by Nabīl Zarandī in 1864. He was in friendly correspondence with Ṣadr

uṣ-Ṣudūr, a learned Bahā'ī of Tehran, and also closely associated with the Bahā'ī merchant, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Tabrīzī of Kashan (Sulaymānī 1947–75, vol. 10, p. 578; Rastigār 1951, pp. 30–31; Rayḥānī in Amanat 2006, p. 303). He satisfies criteria 1 and 4. His brother, Muḥammad Khān Iqbāl ud-Dawlih, was friendly towards the Bahā'īs while governor of Kirmanshah, and was closely associated with the Bahā'ī merchant, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Tabrīzī of Kashan, and with another Bahā'ī Āqā Muḥammad Karīm Mahūt-furūsh (velvet seller), Qavām Divān Iṣfahānī. He can only therefore be confidently said to have been a sympathizer (Rayḥānī in Amanat 2006, p. 303; 'Alāqiband Yazdī 1910, p. 230; Sulaymānī 1947–75, vol. 3, p. 147).

The Ghaffarī family was connected by marriage to the Intiẓām us-Salṭanih family. Mīr Sayyid ʿAbdullāh Tafrishī Intiẓām us-Salṭanih Tafrishī (d. 1892) was the son of Mīrzā Mūsā, *vazīr* of Tehran and brother of Mīrzā 'Īsā, *vazīr* of Tehran (*vazīr* was in effect deputy governor and in charge of finances). In 1309/1891, he succeeded Count De Monteforte as the head of the gendarmerie or police (*vazīr naẓmiyyih*). He had become a Bahā'ī through Munajjim-bāshī, who was also from Tafrish, and had converted his wife, Āghā Shāhzādih (Badī'ih), the above-mentioned Qājār princess. His son, Mīr Sayyid Muḥammad Intiẓām us-Salṭanih, was also a Bahā'ī (1870–1932) and was among the entourage of ʿAbduʾl-Bahā in Paris (Balyuzi 1987, p. 372; Rafati 2000). He was married to Khurshīd Liqā, daughter of Mīrzā Ibrāhīm Khan Mu'āvin ud-Dawlih Ghaffārī, and thus a cousin of the above-mentioned Mahdī Khan Vazīr Humāyūn Ghaffārī. Both father and son qualify as Bahā'īs on points 1 and 3 (and the father on point 5 also). However, the story of the Intiẓām us-Salṭanih family is complicated by the question of multiple religious identities, since both father and son were also Sufis. Thus, Mīr Sayyid Muḥammad Intiẓām us-Salṭanih both attained a high position in the Anjuman Ukhuvvat, a branch of the Niʿmatu'llāhī order, and at the same time was in the entourage of ʿAbdu'l-Bahā in Paris and there are pictures of him assuming a posture of deference to ʿAbdu'l-Bahā. It is difficult to assess whether the participation in a Sufi order was a cover for being a Bahā'ī or whether he was able to maintain dual religious beliefs.

Others who were among the entourage of ʿAbdu'l-Bahā in Europe were the above-mentioned Mīrzā Mahdī Khan Ghaffārī Vazīr Humāyūn as well as Dūst Muḥammad Khān Mu'ayyir ul-Mamālik (d. 1913), a son-in-law of Nāṣiru'd-Dīn Shāh, who accompanied ʿAbduʾl-Bahā from London to Bristol and to Paris, being frequently seen in his company, and is accounted a Bahā'ī in some sources.[12]

In eastern Māzandarān, and especially in the provincial capital Sārī, during the period leading up to and during the Constitutional Revolution, many of the leading figures in the area were Bahā'īs or close sympathizers; some of them had national importance, such as Luṭf-ʿAlī Khān Kulbādī (d. 1352/1933), who, at various times, held the titles Salār Mukarram, Salār Muhtasham, Muhtasham Niẓām and Sardār Jalīl, and Qāsim Khān Huzhabr Khāqān ʿAbduʾl-Malikī Zaghmarzī (later Huzhabr ud-Dawlih). The evidence for this is presented elsewhere (Momen 2008) and therefore need not be detailed here.

The Bahā'ī religion also penetrated a number of the most powerful tribal families of Iran. Ḥusayn Qulī Khān Māfī (1248/1832–1326/1908) had the title Saʿd ul-Mulk until 1305/1887 and then was Niẓām us-Salṭanih. He was from the Māfī tribe which had relocated from their original homeland in Luristān to Fārs and subsequently to Qazvin and is in some sources described as being from the Ahl-i Ḥaqq religious group. Niẓām us-Salṭanih was governor of Bushihr (1299/1881–1300/1882), Zanjan (1303/1885–1305/1887), Khuzistan (1305/1887–1308/1890, 1312/1894–1314/1897); Minister of Justice and Commerce (1315/1897–1316/1898); Minister of Finance (1316/1898–1317/1899); agent for the Crown Prince as governor of Ādharbāyjān (1317/1899–1325/1907); and Prime Minister (1325/1907–1326/1908). He protected the Bahā'īs whenever he was governor of a town, especially after his contact with Mullā Rajab ʿAlī Ardakanī in Yazd (where he was governor 1291/1874–1292/1875; at this time he held the title Saʿd ul-Mulk); his wife (the sister of Mīrzā Ḥusayn Khān 'Ahdiyyih, Māzandarānī 1974–5, vol. 8a, p. 442), his private secretary Mīrzā Ḥusayn Khān, his tailor Ustād Mīrzā Shīrāzī, his cook Mīrzā Jalāl and indeed most of

the people in his employ were Bahā'īs (Uskū'ī 1926, part 1, p. 83). His brother, Muḥammad Ḥasan Khan Saʿd ul-Mulk (d. 1900), was governor of Bushihr (1300/1882–1303/1885), of Bushihr and all of the Gulf ports (1305/1885–1308/1890, 1310/1892–1312/1894), and of Luristān and Burūjird (1312/1894–1314/1896) (Bāmdād 1968, vol. 1, pp. 448–56; Churchill 1906, pp. 70, 75; Varjāvand 1998, vol. 3, pp. 2046–47). He was given the title Saʿd ul-Mulk in 1305/1887 when his brother became Niẓām us-Salṭanih. Both Bahā'ī and European sources state that both brothers were Bahā'īs.[13] Thus, on criteria 1, 2 and 5, they can be accounted as having probably been Bahā'īs. The fact that their cousin Karīm Khān Māfī was recorded as a Bābī and later a Bahā'ī of Qazvin (Māzandarānī n.d., vol. 3, p. 385, vol. 6, p. 559) indicates a deeper Bahā'ī penetration into this family than just these two brothers.

There is also evidence of Bahā'ī penetration of the leadership of the Bakhtiyārī tribe. While ʿAlī Muḥammad Varqā, a prominent Bahā'ī, was in prison in Isfahan, he is reported to have converted to the Bahā'ī religion his fellow prisoner, Iskandar Khān Bakhtiyārī, a son of Ḥusayn-Qulī Khan Īlkhānī (chief) of the Bakhtiyārī tribe (Sulaymānī 1947–75, pp. 259–62; Malmīrī 1992, pp. 42–43; Varqā 1994, pp. 23–24; Balyuzi 1985, pp. 78–80). His brother, ʿAlī Qulī Khan Sardar As'ad, one of the foremost leaders of the Constitutionalist Revolution, had, while in France, taken on a Bahā'ī, Mīrzā Ḥabībullāh Shīrāzī (later ʿAyn ul-Mulk), as tutor to his children and on their return to Iran, collaborated with him in translating books from French into Persian (Milani 2000, p. 43). Later in 1913, he met ʿAbdu'l-Bahā in Paris and entertained him (Faizi 1986, p. 175). The Russian scholar and military official Alexander Tumanski, who was conducting research on the Bahā'ī community, reported in 1895 that he knew of two Bakhtiyārī Khans among the sons of Huseyn Qulī Khān who were Bahā'īs (Shahvar et al. 2011, vol. 1, p. 163, vol. 2, p. 81). If this statement refers to these two brothers, then Iskandar Khān satisfies criteria 1 and 2; while ʿAlī-Qulī Khān satisfies criteria 2, 4 and 5.

There are a few individuals who were higher placed in government but for whom the evidence is weaker (as mentioned above, this will generally be the case because they had a greater need to conceal their religious identity). For example, there are contradictory indications of the attitude towards the Bābī and Bahā'ī religions of Mīrzā Yūsuf Khān Ashtiyānī Mustawfī ul-Mamālik (1812–1886), who was in charge of the State Treasury from the time of his father's death in 1845 and also effectively the chief minister to Nāṣiru'd-Dīn Shah from 1867 to 1871 and from 1873 until 1884, when he was formally appointed Prime Minister and remained such until his death. In the time of the Bāb, he was presented with two of the books of the Bāb and is reported to have been won over by their contents (Nabīl 1970, p. 592). The government newspaper of the time reports that, at the time of the public execution of Bābīs in Tehran after the attempt of the life of the Shah in 1852, he personally fired the pistol shots that killed Mullā Zaynu'l-ʿAbidīn Yazdī, but he is reported to have later written to Bahā'u'llāh denying this (Balyuzi 1985, p. 446). His close companion Mullā Ḥasan of Sulṭanābād was an adherent of Bahā'u'llāh and it is reported that, when the latter was going to Baghdad to visit Bahā'u'llāh, Mustawfī asked him to ask Bahā'u'llāh for prayers that a son be born to him. Bahā'u'llāh is then reported to have given Mullā Ḥasan some sweetmeats with instructions that Mustawfī was to partake of these. Mustawfī then had a son whom he named Ḥasan and who inherited the title of Mustawfiyu'l-Mamalik (Māzandarānī undated, vol. 6, pp. 345–46). In 1868, he was instrumental in getting Bahā'u'llāh's half-brother Mīrzā Riḍā Qulī freed after he had been imprisoned in Tehran for being a "Bābī" (Māzandarānī undated, vol. 5, p. 487). He is also reported to have eventually come to believe in Bahā'u'llāh through Mīrzā Maḥmūd Khān Balūch ('Abdu'l-Bahā 1971, pp. 92–93; Fu'ādī Bushrū'ī 2007, pp. 400–1; Ishrāq-Khāvarī 2004, p. 242). He may thus be considered to have satisfied criteria 1, 4 and 5 for being a Bahā'ī.

Similarly, Mīrzā Saʿīd Anṣārī Mu'tamin ul-Mulk (1815–1884) was, for many years, the Foreign Minister of Iran (1852–1873, 1880–1884). Although Anṣārī carried out a number of actions against the Bābī and Bahā'ī movements, including taking part in the executions of Bābīs in 1852 and pressing for the exile of Bahā'u'llāh from Baghdad to Istanbul in 1862–3, he is also reported to have met Bahā'u'llāh in Tehran and to have been friendly towards the

Bābīs and Bahā'īs. When Mushīr ud-Dawlih was Prime Minister, Anṣārī was dismissed from his post as Foreign Minister and was appointed the chief custodian of the Shrine of Imam Riḍā in Mashhad (1873–1880). One source reports that during the interrogation of the Bahā'ī Ḥājī ʿAbdu'l-Majīd Nishāpūrī in Mashhad by the governor Rukn ud-Dawlih, Anṣārī urged Nishāpūrī to say some words of denial of his faith in order to save himself. Anṣārī is then reported to have said: "You know that Bahā'u'llāh mentioned my name in the Tablet to Nāṣiru'd-Dīn Shah and I also am a believer in this Cause. But it is necessary to preserve oneself. Come, the Prince [Rukn ud-Dawlih] does not want to spill your blood, so just say that I am not of this sect" (Fu'ādī Bushrū'ī 2007, p. 79; Ishrāq-Khāvarī 1987, pp. 687–99; see also Balyuzi 1980, p. 446; Māzandarānī undated, vol. 6, p. 39). Anṣārī's knowledge of the new religion may have come from his cousin's daughter, Āghā Jān Shāhanshāh Khānum (see above). This anecdote suggests that the Shī'ī culture of *taqiyya* (see above) may have lingered among some Bahā'īs in the higher echelons of Qājār society (such as Anṣārī), while it was disappearing among the generality of the Bahā'īs (exemplified by Nishāpūrī who refused to practice *taqiyya* and was executed). However, this is to be expected since these high-ranking individuals needed to keep themselves isolated from the Bahā'ī community for their own safety and so would also be less influenced by changes taking place in the culture of the community.

However, the situation is very complicated and not easy to unravel. For example, Mīrzā ʿAlī Asghar Khan Amīn us-Sulṭān, who was Prime Minister for most of the latter part of Nāṣiru'd-Dīn Shah's reign and also part of Muẓaffaru'd-Dīn Shah's reign, is said to have been a secret Bahā'ī in a report from Col. E.C. Ross, British Consul in Bushihr, in September 1888 (Momen 1980, p. 247). Although this statement is not corroborated in Bahā'ī sources, he was in correspondence with the Bahā'ī leadership and did act to protect the Bahā'īs on several occasions, most notably after the assassination of Nāṣiru'd-Dīn Shah when he acted energetically to suppress the initial rumour that this had been the work of "Bābīs", and to establish the fact that it was a follower of Sayyid Jamālu'd-Dīn Asadābādī who was responsible (Māzandarānī 1974–5, vol. 8a, pp. 534–35; Sulaymānī 1947–75, pp. 454–55). Thus interestingly, he is an individual who satisfies criteria 2, 4 and 5 and may have become close to being a Bahā'ī in the 1890s but then drifted away from the community and did not make any great effort as Prime Minister to contain the anti-Bahā'ī pogrom in Yazd in 1903.

3. Identity as a Bahā'ī Based on Patterns of Behavior

Finally, in this paper, I propose to examine the lives of two individuals who are not regarded as having been Bahā'īs in the standard Iranian or Bahā'ī histories,[14] and yet a close reading of the record of their lives yields several lines of evidence for both individuals indicating that they may indeed have been secret believers in the new religion or close sympathizers. These two are of interest in that they span the political spectrum, one being a staunch conservative and the other having eventually sided with the reformers.

ʿAbdu'l-Ḥusayn Mīrzā Farmānfarmā (1858–1939) was a Qājār grandee whose father, Fīrūz Mīrzā Nuṣrat ud-Dawlih, was a brother of Muḥammad Shah. Farmānfarmā was himself closely connected with Muẓaffaru'd-Dīn Shah. He was married to the Shah's daughter and his sister was the Shah's favorite wife. The starting point of our investigation is the fact that Nuṣrat ad-Dawlih appointed a Bābī, Mullā Ibrāhīm Mullā-bāshī, as the tutor to Farmānfarmā and his older brother, ʿAbdu'l-Ḥamīd Mīrzā Nāṣir ud-Dawlih, while he was governor of Sulṭānābād (in the late 1850s). This must of course raise questions about the religious allegiance of Nuṣrat ad-Dawlih himself. Later, during the governorship of both Farmānfarmā and his brother in Kirman in the 1880s and early 1890s, the Bahā'īs were free from harassment and this in a city that had several elements who were hostile to the Bahā'īs (Uṣūlīs, Shaykhīs and Azalīs). At this time, he employed a Bahā'ī, Muḥammad ʿAlī Khān, as his steward and the latter's son, 'Azīzu'llah Misbāḥ, as his secretary. Later his steward was another Bahā'ī, namely, Āqā Sayyid Naṣru'llāh Kashanī (Amānat 2012, p. 377). When he was governor of Fars in the late 1910s, Farmānfarmā again defended the Bahā'īs (Etemad 2012). Farmānfarmā attended a fête at the Bahā'ī Tarbiyat School in Tehran in

about 1910 (Thābit 1997, p. 55) and sent his children to the Tarbiyat schools.[15] A property that Farmānfarmā owned in Kirmānshāh was rented by a Bahā'ī, Mīrzā Muḥammad Ṣarrāf Iṣfahānī. The remains of the Bāb were placed there for one or two nights on their way from Iran to ʿAkkā in 1898. When the Bahā'īs approached Farmānfarmā in 1920 to purchase the property as it was regarded as a holy site, he gave it to them without any recompense.[16]

Farmānfarmā's sons, Firuz Mīrzā Nuṣrat ud-Dawlih and Muḥammad ʿAlī Mīrzā, were among the Qājār princes who met ʿAbduʾl-Bahā in Paris (Faizi 1986, p. 304; Jasion 2012, pp. 140, 319). In a telegram dated 15 January 1917, Col. Hugh Gough, the British Consul in Shiraz—who was well informed about the Bahā'ī community in Shiraz as his Persian secretary, Mīrzā Faḍluʾllah Banān, was a Bahā'ī—lists some of the prominent Bahā'īs in Shiraz, adding that "the Governor-General's son Fīrūz Mīrzā is also said to be one [a Bahā'ī]."[17] As mentioned above, Farmānfarmā's older brother, ʿAbduʾl-Ḥamīd Mīrzā Nāṣir ud-Dawlih, protected the Bahā'īs during the time he was governor of Kirman. He married the daughter of one of the most active Bahā'ī women of Rafsanjān. There are thus many indicators that Farmānfarmā and possibly his brother and son may have been crypto-Bahā'īs.

From the other end of the political spectrum was Muḥammad Valī Khān Tunukābunī, who held the titles Naṣr us-Salṭanih and Sipahsalār-i Aʿẓam, and who was governor of Rasht 1899–1903. At first, he supported Muḥammad ʿAlī Shah but then emerged in February 1909 as commander of the Constitutionalist forces, which, after taking Rasht, marched on Tehran and entered it in July 1909, forcing Muḥammad ʿAlī Shah's abdication. He was then Prime Minister several times and held some other important posts until his death in 1926. It is not possible to be certain what early connections he had with the Bahā'ī community, but it is possible this was through Sulaymān Khān Tunukābunī (Jamāl Effendi), a prominent Bahā'ī who was from the same Khal'atbarī family as Muḥammad Valī Khān (they were the largest land-owners in Tunukābun). In any case, in 1899, ʿAlī Qulī Khan, a Bahā'ī from a prominent family, stated that the Bahā'īs of Rasht knew him to be a Bahā'ī when he was governor there and ʿAlī Qulī Khan approached him as a Bahā'ī for help to obtain a passport to go to ʿAkkā to assist ʿAbdu'l-Bahā with translation work.[18] The British Consul at Rasht reported that the people of Rasht in 1903 also thought that he was a Bahā'ī (Momen 1980, p. 375). Finally, the French Oriental scholar Nicolas reports that when he was French Consul in Tabriz in 1912, Muḥammad Valī Khān (then Governor of Tabriz) called on him: "The conversation revolved entirely around the Bāb, with whose doctrines my guest seemed to agree" (Momen 1980, p. 515). Muḥammad Valī Khān was among those Iranian notables who met ʿAbduʾl-Bahā in Paris in 1913 and was in touch with the Bahā'īs there.[19] Hence, although he is not listed as a Bahā'ī in any of the standard Bahā'ī histories or in any Iranian histories, the facts of his life do provide some *prima facie* evidence that he may indeed have been a crypto-Bahā'ī. It is also possible to speculate that his Bahā'ī sympathies may have been an underlying cause for his switch from the Royalist to the Constitutionalist side.

4. Conclusions

This paper has addressed the question of the nature of religious identity and the possible presence of many Bahā'īs or Bahā'ī sympathizers in the upper echelons of Qājār Iran. It has identified five criteria by which individuals can be identified as having been Bahā'īs and has suggested that, since none of these are usually conclusive by themselves, there should be several lines of evidence across more than one of these criteria before we label someone as possibly having been a Bahā'ī or a close sympathizer. It has listed a number of examples of people from the Qājār royal family and from among the highest echelons of the Qājār administration who fulfill these criteria. It has noted that they were from all shades of opinion across the political spectrum (from reformists to conservatives). It has also looked at two individuals who have not been claimed to be Bahā'īs in the usual Iranian and Bahā'ī histories, and yet, if a close study of their lives is made, considerable evidence can be accumulated that they may have been crypto-Bahā'īs or close sympathizers. In all, this paper indicates that there may have been many Bahā'īs in the upper strata of

Qājār society, and that this is a factor that has not previously been sufficiently recognized and needs to be examined for the light that it may shed on other matters.

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Notes

1 For more about this complex issue, see (Lambden 2022; Maneck 1996). In his writings, MacEoin (see for example 1983, pp. 226–27) equates *ḥikmat* and *taqiyya*, which is incorrect, as I have indicated in the text. This matter is, however, more complex than can be dealt with in a footnote.

2 For example, Jamāl Effendi was sent to Iran to be ʿAbduʾl-Bahā's intermediary for a message sent privately to Amīn us-Sulṭān (ʻAbduʾl-Bahā 1971, pp. 137–38).

3 Information was given to the present writer by Mr Hasan Balyuzi whose father, Muvaqqar ud-Dawlih, was governor of the Gulf Ports at the beginning for the twentieth century and a Bahā'ī; his mother was also a Bahā'ī; notes of interview, 23 June 1977. Similar information was given to the present writer by Fereydoun Hoveyda, whose father, Mīrzā Ḥabību'llāh ʿAyn ul-Mulk, was an Iranian ambassador based in Beirut; personal communication, 25 April 2005. In this latter case, however, the mother was not a Bahā'ī.

4 There may of course be a great deal of relevant, perhaps even definitive, information in Iranian government archives and in the Bahā'ī World Centre archives, but these are at present inaccessible.

5 For Bahā'ī assertions that he was a Bābī and then a Bahā'ī, see (Māzandarānī n.d., vol. 3, pp. 437–41n). This is supported by a non-Bahā'ī Iranian historian (Bāmdād 1968, vol. 3, p. 452). For those asserting he was not a Bābī or Bahā'ī, see (Mudarrisī-Chahārdihī 1972, pp. 167–71; Kazembeyki 2003, pp. 272–3, n. 111). For more details of this controversy, see (Momen 2015, pp. 304–5n).

6 See for example the letter of Amin us-Sultan to Mīrzā-yi Shirazi in Rajab 1309 (Ṣafā'ī 1976, p. 318), and a similar letter in Jamadi II 1309 in which he accuses those stirring up agitation against the Tobacco Regie of being Bābīs (Najafī and Rasūl 1994, vol. 2, p. 183). See also the dispatch of Henry Longworth, the British Consul at Trebizond, who states that Asadābādī is the head of the "Bābīs" (Momen 1980, pp. 362–63).

7 (Sifīdvash 1999, pp. 88–9). Although he has Bahā'ī descendants and some have claimed him as a Bahā'ī, it is clear from ʿAbduʾl-Bahā's words (Sifīdvash 1999, p. 88; Māzandarānī undated, vol. 7, p. 316) that he regarded him as a sympathizer rather than a believer.

8 For example, Zill us-Sulṭān released the Bahā'ī ʿAlī Muḥammad Khān Varqā from prison in 1883 partly because he was hoping that the Bahā'īs would assist him in his bid for the throne and partly becasue Varqā had assisted Zill us-Sulṭān's confidant Ḥājī Sayyāḥ in Tabriz (Momen 2021, p. 24).

9 See for example (Feuvrier 1906, pp. 101–2), who makes this assertion. Doctor Feuvrier was Nasir al-Din Shah's personal physician in the early 1890s.

10 (Māzandarānī undated, vol. 6, pp. 36–37; Brookshaw 2008, pp. 50–52); see also memorandum by Malik-Khusravi in (Arbāb 1990, p. 507) which gives slightly different details.

11 (Sulaymānī 1947–75, vol. 7, pp. 420–47; Māzandarānī undated, vol. 6, pp. 37–47; Māzandarānī 1974–5, vol. 8a, pp. 208–18). See also (Fu'ādī Bushrū'ī 2007, pp. 88–9, 145; Ishrāq-Khāvarī 1987, p. 692; Afnān 1997, p. 39; Malikzādih 1949, vol. 1, p. 212; Cole 1998, pp. 93–116; Cole 2002). On his poetry, see Kazzāzī, *Shaykh ur-Ra'īs Qājār* 33–34; the phrase used "*inkishāfāt-i qalbiyyih va futūḥāt-i ghaybiyyih*" is probably a deliberate allusion to Ibn ul-'Arabī's *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyah* and an assertion that Shaykh ur-Ra'īs found in Palestine a parallel to the 'revelations' that Ibn ul-'Arabī had experienced in Mecca.

12 (Zarqānī 1982, vol. 2, pp. 85–86, 88, 101, 116; Balyuzi 1987, pp. 347, 369, 370, 372; Ishrāq-Khāvarī 1966, p. 209; Faizi 1986, p. 173); Dūst Muḥammad Khān's father, Dūst ʿAlī Khān Mu'ayyir ul-Mamālik, had been a friend of Bahā'u'llāh and even visited him in the Siyāh Chāl prison.

13 (Māzandarānī 1971, undated, vol. 6, p. 559, vol. 8a, p. 77) states that Niẓām al-Salṭanih was a close sympathizer and his brother Saʿd ul-Mulk was a Bahā'ī but a report from the British Consul in Bushihr, Col. E.C. Ross, in September 1888, states that both brothers were Bahā'īs (Momen 1980, p. 247). Hasan Balyuzi who was closely familiar with all aspects of the Gulf confirmed that both were Bahā'īs; (Momen 1980, p. 247) (my footnote on this page was on the basis of the information given to me by Mr Balyuzi). See also (Bāmdād 1968, vol. 1, pp. 448–56; Varjāvand 1998, vol. 3, pp. 2045–46).

14 By standard Bahā'ī historical sources, it is meant such works as (Māzandarānī 1971, undated, 9 vols; Āvārih 1923; Balyuzi 1980, 1985, 1987). By standard Iranian historical sources, it is meant such works as (Bāmdād 1968; Malikzādih 1949; Nāẓim ul-Islām 1967; Kazembeyki 2003).

15 His daughter, Sattareh Farman Farmaian (1992, p. 49), and his son, Khodadad Farmanfarmaian (1982), attended the Tarbiyat school (he was later director of the Shah's Plan Organization).

16 (Faizi 1986, pp. 303–4). There are other hints of Farmānfarmā's allegiance to the Bahā'ī religion. Thus, for example, he named his estate and gardens in Tajrīsh north of Tehran the Riḍvāniyyih (possibly after the Garden of Riḍvan associated with Bahā'u'llāh); (Farmanfarmaian 1982).

17 Telegram from Gough to Sir Charles Marling, British Envoy at Tehran, FO 248 1159, Public Record Office, London.

18 ʿAlī Qulī Khan needed a passport to get to ʿAkkā but his family had sent word to Muḥammad Valī Khān that he should be detained at Rasht. "Khan, however, approached him and whispered in his ear, 'The Bahā'ī Faith has reached America and they need translations of the sacred writings into English. I would therefore be useful to ʿAbduʾl-Bahā in ʿAkkā. It is urgent that I should go to Him.' The result was, the Governor issued one passport for Khan." (Gail 1987, p. 100).

19 Tunukābunī had been given a copy of ʿAbduʾl-Bahā's book *Mufawiḍāt* (*Some Answered Questions*, edited by Laura Clifford Barney). He had, as a young man, heard an eye-witness account of the execution of Badīʿ, Bahā'u'llāh's messenger to Nāṣiru'd-Dīn Shah, and has written a moving account of this on the margins of a page of this copy of *Mufawiḍāt*. See (Balyuzi 1980, pp. 300–9) (including photographic reproduction of one page of the account of the execution of Badi' in Tunukābunī's hand-writing).

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An Ante Litteram Critique of Orientalism: The Case of Abu'l-Faḍā'il-i-Gulpāyigānī and E.G. Browne

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Abstract: Since the late 1970s, the term Orientalism has been closely associated with Edward Said (d. 2003) and his influential monograph of the same name. First published in 1978, *Orientalism* advanced a number of critiques about the discipline of "Oriental Studies", its frequently condescending portrayal and depiction of the Eastern world, and the complex relationship between knowledge and power in the context of the Middle East. As revolutionary as a number of Said's theses have been, in his critique of Orientalism and in particular his penetrating analysis of the relationship between knowledge and power, Said was not breaking entirely new ground. In fact, seven decades earlier, a voice from the Orient itself, the Persian Bahā'ī scholar Mīrzā Abu'l-Faḍā'il-i Gulpāyigānī (d. 1914), expressed a similar, albeit embryonic, critique of Orientalism. Abu'l-Faḍā'il's analysis, presented in the opening chapters of his final book *Kashfu'l-Ghiṭā'*, focused on one of the foremost Orientalists of his time, the Cambridge scholar Edward Granville Browne (d. 1926). Rather than studying the extent to which Browne fits the paradigm of Orientalism (a topic some scholars have previously expressed views on), this article explores ways in which Abu'l-Faḍā'il's critique of Browne's study of the Orient can be viewed as a nascent prefiguration of some of the theses developed and advanced by Said decades later. Gulpāyigānī's precedence as a Bahā'ī scholar in discerning and addressing the link between Western scholars' knowledge production and the colonial power relations of their respective governments with the countries or areas they studied, helps correct a misconception forged about Bahā'īs. Historical narratives produced in anti-Bahā'ī polemics decades after Gulpāyigānī's death created a master-narrative that cast Bahā'īs as agents of colonial powers, sweeping under the rug counterarguments such as those posed by Gulpāyigānī's critique. The authors of this article have been motivated by this corrective goal.

Keywords: Abu'l-Faḍā'il-i-Gulpāyigānī; Abu'l-Fadl Gulpaygani; Edward Said; Orientalism; Edward Granville Browne

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1. Introduction

The politicization of Shī'ī Islam in Iran in the twentieth century weaponized anti-Bahā'ī polemics to depict Bahā'īs as "agents of imperialism" (Tavakoli-Targhi 2008). Building the master-narrative of Bahā'īs as tools of colonialism was accomplished by such activities as the widespread publication of the forged memoirs of a former ambassador of Russia in Persia, whom it was claimed had created the Bābī and Bahā'ī religions in order to divide and weaken the Muslim community (Yazdani 2011b) on the one hand, and deliberate amnesia of all counter-evidence on the other hand. An example of such counter-evidence can be seen in a book written by a well-known Bahā'ī scholar in the second decade of the twentieth century that highlights the connection between knowledge and power and the ways in which the knowledge of the scholars working on Persia can be used to serve the colonial ambitions of their respective governments. Seventy years later, a celebrated Palestinian-American cultural critic and scholar of Comparative Literature at Colombia University

published a groundbreaking book with a similar core message. In his *Orientalism*, Edward Said (d. 2003) set out to elucidate how "the western study of the so-called Orient, and specifically the Islamic world, constitutes a pervasive attempt to deprive it of its identity and sovereignty, and that the academic pursuit of 'Orientalism' . . . continues to be an extension or reflection of a fundamentally political will to power and domination" (Said 1979, p. 1). The chief catalysts of Said's paradigm were the Orientalists, predominantly nineteenth century European scholars who studied "the Orient" and often translated its writings into European languages, based in part on the assumption that a truly effective colonial conquest—the like of which the European powers had embarked on—required knowledge of the conquered peoples (Said 1979, p. 1).

This article proposes that Said's penetrating analysis regarding the relationship between knowledge and power was not breaking entirely new ground. Almost sixty-five years before the publication of *Orientalism*, a voice from within the Orient itself, the Persian Bahā'ī scholar Mīrzā Abu'l-Faḍā'il-i Gulpāygānī (d. 1914), expressed what in some ways is a similar—albeit far more embryonic—critique of Orientalism. Abu'l-Faḍā'il's critique was focused on one of the foremost Orientalists of his time, the eminent Cambridge scholar, Edward Granville Browne (d. 1926). In order to highlight historical evidence that problematizes the narrative of Bahā'īs as "agents of imperialism", this article suggests that Abu'l-Faḍā'il's general critique of Orientalism constitutes a nascent prefiguration of some of the theses developed by Said in greater detail decades later. As such, Abu'l-Faḍā'il was the forerunner of a debate that occupied Iranian intellectuals in the early to mid-twentieth century. While this article does not intend to evaluate whether or not E.G. Browne fits the Orientalist typology described and criticized by Said, it will provide a summary of the views of some contemporary scholars on that question.

2. Said and Orientalism

Before turning to Abu'l-Faḍā'il's critique of Orientalism, we must acquaint ourselves with those salient features of Said's project for which we find traces in Abu'l-Faḍā'il's writings, namely, Said's discourse on epistemology and the use of knowledge by Orientalists in the service of power.

Said defined Orientalism as a "system of knowledge about the Orient" (Said 1979, p. 6). Orientalism "presents itself as a form of knowledge that is both different from, and superior to, the knowledges that the Orientals have of themselves" (Inden 1990, p. 37). Said observed in the opening pages of his influential monograph that "the Orient was almost a European invention" (Said 1979, p. 1). After examining this "European invention" carried out under the guise of the academic discipline of Oriental Studies, Said argued that the distortions and misrepresentations of the Orient were systematic and part of a much larger structure of thought that was prevalent in the West's whole enterprise of dealing with the East: Orientalists presented information that they had gathered about the Orient based on the assumption that a successful conquest, the like of which European imperial powers had embarked throughout Asia, demanded knowledge of the conquered peoples. By acquiring and presenting information about the Orient, the West was able to demonstrate its intellectual superiority. By publishing their new-found knowledge of the Orient, Orientalists created "the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, teaching it, settling it, ruling over it". Therefore, Said argued that Orientalism was "a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient" (Said 1979, p. 3).

How was this knowledge procured? It was obtained as a result of the relationship between these same Orientalists and the Orient, a relationship that was skewed, for its terms were defined from the outset by the Orientalists. The input of the peoples and societies being studied was seldom solicited or welcomed. The Orient served to be observed and studied. As an object of study, Said argued that "the Oriental is given as fixed, stable, in need of investigation, and in need even of knowledge about himself . . . There is a source of information (the Oriental) and a source of knowledge (the Orientalist)" (Said 1979, p. 308).

Said accentuated the imbalance in this association when he argued that the "relationship between the Occident and the Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of complex hegemony" (Said 1979, p. 5).

According to Said, the manipulation of knowledge gave impetus to the exploitation of power, the most blatant manifestation of which lay in the policies of European colonialism. Knowledge about the Orient, therefore, came to constitute "the collusion of scholarship with the imperatives of colonial domination" (Dallmayr 2007, p. 49). Said maintained that "to reconstruct a dead or lost Oriental language meant ultimately to reconstruct a dead or neglected Orient; it also meant that reconstructive precision, science, even imagination could prepare the way for what armies, administrations, and bureaucracies would later do on the ground, in the Orient" (Said 1979, p. 123).

But what other implications does this manipulation of knowledge have for academics? Anticipating this question, Said affirmed that "after all, any system of ideas that can remain unchanged as teachable wisdom (in academies, books, congresses, universities, foreign-service institutes) from the period of . . . the late 1840s until the present . . . must be something more formidable than a mere collection of lies" (Said 1979, p. 5). Rather, Said averred that in order for Orientalism to prosper, it had to be institutionalized. He argued that "knowledge of the subject races is what makes their management easy and profitable; knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control" (Said 1979, p. 36). Thus, the knowledge being procured and presented about the Orient contributed to and validated the growing power disparity, which in turn led to additional knowledge about the Orient being developed and made available, creating a self-sustaining cycle called "Orientalism". As knowledge merged with power, the opportunities for the proliferation of Orientalism became endless, with durable implications well into the present time.

Said provided evidence from the works of several prominent Orientalists (mostly British and French) to support his thesis. He did not intend to analyze the work of every Orientalist. Rather, his goal was to present a model of Orientalism into which individuals identified as Orientalists could be placed. The name Edward Browne is mentioned only once in *Orientalism* (Said 1979, p. 224), with no specific information about him, besides the fact that he was numbered amongst those who exerted influence on future generations of Orientalists.

3. Abu'l-Faḍā'il and Orientalism

We are now ready to turn to Abu'l-Faḍā'il's critique of Orientalism. However, first, a few words by way of introduction about this individual are needed. Mīrzā Muḥammad-i Gulpāyigānī, who had adopted the epithet Abu'l-Faḍl, was perhaps the most prominent scholar of the first century of the Bahā'ī religion. Born in Persia to a Shī'ī Muslim family in 1844, he received training in the traditional Islamic sciences in Isfahan before his conversion to the Bahā'ī Faith at the age of thirty-two. His biographers have called attention to, among other things, his erudition—especially in philosophy and religious history; his mastery of the Persian language; and his remarkable oratory skills (Mihrābkhānī 1988; Iṣfahānī 166 BE/2009; Momen 1985, n.d.; Mihrābkhānī 1990, p. 56). He engaged in scholarly and intellectual debates with contemporary Persian thinkers (Amīnī 2015, pp. 16–19). Playing on the meaning of his adopted epithet, Abu'l-Faḍl (meaning "the father of erudition"), the Bahā'ī leader, 'Abdu'l-Bahā (d. 1921), designated him Abu'l-Faḍā'il (meaning "the father of [all] erudition") to recognize his encyclopedic knowledge and prodigious abilities.

Abu'l-Faḍā'il's critique of Orientalism occurs in the Persian-language treatise *Kashfu'l-Ghiṭā' 'an Ḥiyali'l-A'dā'* ("Exposing the Machinations of the Enemies"). In the introductory notes of this work, we learn that following Edward Browne's publication of the *Kitāb-i-Nuqṭatu'l-Kāf*—a history of the Bābī movement attributed to the early Bābī martyr Ḥājī Mīrzā Jānī (d. 1851)[1]—many questions about this chronicle were forwarded to Abu'l-Faḍā'il by students at the Syrian Protestant College (later renamed the American University of Beirut). At the time, Abu'l-Faḍā'il was recuperating from an illness. Upon receiving explicit

instructions from ‘Abdu’l-Bahā to respond to these queries, Abu’l-Faḍā’il commenced writing a treatise which was later titled *Kashfu’l-Ghiṭā’ ‘an Ḥiyali’l-A‘dā’* or, as it is more commonly known, simply *Kashfu’l-Ghiṭā’* (Gulpāyigānī and Gulpāyigānī n.d.; all page numbers in this article relate to this book unless otherwise attributed). As he passed away in 1914 before the book could be completed, it was finished and published posthumously by Abu’l-Faḍā’il’s nephew, Siyyid Mihdī Gulpāyigānī (d. 1928) (Mihrābkhānī 1988, pp. 422–31). The discussion of *Kashfu’l-Ghiṭā’* in this article is based on the first 132 pages, written by Abu’l-Faḍā’il-i-Gulpāyigānī himself.

Abu’l-Faḍā’il begins *Kashfu’l-Ghiṭā’* by observing that, since the founding of the Bābī and Bahā’ī religions, a number of both Eastern and Western scholars have written works either praising and supporting these movements or vilifying and rejecting them based on their own preconceived notions and beliefs. He defines an “Orientalist” (*mustashriq*) as a scholar who has mastered one of the Oriental languages (p. 7), yet he distinguishes between two groups of Orientalists. The first are scholars who truly seek to increase awareness and understanding of Eastern peoples and civilizations. These scholars study, edit and publish rare and valuable literary and historical works, neglected by native rulers and religious leaders, and make them available to other interested scholars. The second group of Orientalists are those who seek fame and fortune by exploiting the peoples and civilizations they seek to study.

Among the Orientalists discussed by Abu’l-Faḍā’il are the French aristocrat Joseph Arthur de Gobineau (d. 1882) and the diplomat and historian A.L.M. Nicolas (d. 1939). However, it is Edward Browne who receives the bulk of his attention. After providing an account of Browne’s trips to Persia, Cyprus and Palestine, Abu’l-Faḍā’il turns his attention to Browne’s literary contributions:

> Strangely, there were many contradictions in the writings of this author [Browne] that have puzzled experts. In certain places, his works reflect the beliefs of a devoted Bahā’ī. In others, they mirror the convictions of a zealous Azalī. In still others, he attempts to come across as an impartial and objective historian and an unbiased Orientalist. Such contradictions have not escaped the discerning eyes of intellectuals and scholars. Consequently, during the past quarter century, over and over, verbally and in writing, many friends have asked for my opinion of Mr. Browne’s works. (p. 7)

According to Abu’l-Faḍā’il, Browne built his reputation on being a historian of the Bābī and Bahā’ī religions. As the Bahā’ī religion grew and became more widespread, so did Browne’s reputation.

At first Abu’l-Faḍā’il questions Browne’s scholarship: “This professor’s efforts in editing and publishing certain oriental texts have often had an adverse effect. Some of the meanings of these texts have been altered and they have been rendered useless . . . ” (p. 8). One example cited by Abu’l-Faḍā’il is Niẓāmī-yi ‘Arūḍī-yi Samarqandī’s *Chahār Maqālih* (“Four Essays”), which Browne published using Gibb’s endowment. “Three renowned editors”, Abu’l-Faḍā’il writes, spent four years providing an introduction, annotations, indexes, etc., but, ignorant of the meaning of the passages in this text and the intentions of the original author, they redacted and made unnecessary changes to this book. He adds, “in other words, three Eastern scholars and the Orientalist [Browne] have taken great pains and collaborated to render an accurate and useful book incorrect and profitless”. Intent on warning his fellow countrymen of the harm Orientalists are capable of effecting, Abu’l-Faḍā’il proceeds to cite examples of improper “corrections” Browne and his coeditors have made to the published text of *Chahār Maqālih*. In a clear and provocative reference to these same Orientalists, Abu’l-Faḍā’il expresses hope that “perhaps the Persian people will come to understand [this] and while there is still yet time, arise to protect their language from plunderers bent on pillaging (them)” (pp. 9–11).[2] It is not difficult to see that through this critique, Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍá’il is implying and attracting his readers’ attention to the fact that Browne and his collaborators have similarly distorted the Nuqṭatu’l-Káf.

Abu'l-Faḍā'il then recounts the first time he learned of Browne. He records that in 1889 he received news from Bahā'īs living in Yazd that Browne had arrived in the city from England, introducing himself as a steadfast Bahā'ī—a claim whose veracity was immediately called into question by Abu'l-Faḍā'il. The next time Abu'l-Faḍā'il recalls hearing of Browne is when the Russian Orientalist Alexander Tumansky (d. 1920) showed him some of the essays Browne had published on the subject of Bābī history in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*. Gradually Abu'l-Faḍā'il discovered that Browne and Tumansky were privately corresponding with one another. He relates that a friend of his—a certain supporter of the Russian government who considered himself an impartial and fair-minded thinker—once said to him jokingly: "Naïve man! Don't be so pure-hearted and optimistic about the friendship between these two politically motivated individuals [that is, Browne and Tumansky]. One pretends to be siding with the Bahā'īs, and the other claims to be supporting the Azalīs so that through this stratagem they prevent the rapid spread of the new cause!" (p. 15).

Abu'l-Faḍā'il recalls that later, in 1903, while living in Egypt, he read a biographical article ('Awaḍ 1320/1903) about Browne written by Ḥāfiẓ 'Awaḍ (d. 1950), an Arab journalist and historian.[3] The information in this article appears to have been dictated by Browne himself. Abu'l-Faḍā'il includes the entire biography, and a summary of its Persian translation, in *Kashfu'l-Ghiṭā'*, because, in his words, "… it reveals to discerning minds the true nature of Edward Browne. After all, it was dictated by him directly and written by his close friend" (pp. 16–17).

The following five points made in *Kashfu'l-Ghiṭā'* can be considered a critique of Browne and his Orientalism:

(1) After incorporating Ḥāfiẓ 'Awaḍ's article, Abu'l-Faḍā'il highlights the Egyptian journalist's extreme admiration of Browne: "These passages clearly reveal how delighted, proud and pleased Ḥāfiẓ 'Awaḍ is of his friendship with this professor". Wanting to understand the adulation 'Awaḍ lavished upon Browne, Abu'l-Faḍā'il states: The excessive flattery and praise is due to Browne's skills in "… attracting peoples' hearts through glorifying their culture and ancestors" (p. 29). To prove this point, Abu'l-Faḍā'il writes:

> Ḥāfiẓ 'Awaḍ recounts his conversation with Mr. Browne regarding the manner in which certain British nationals have behaved towards Arabs in general and Egyptians in particular. He asked Browne: "Why have the British treated the Egyptians so harshly and why do they harbor such a sense of superiority toward them?" Browne apologetically replied that if the British people you are talking about had the least amount of knowledge concerning Arab culture and the Arabic language, or were even slightly aware of the contributions Arabs have made to civilization, they would certainly have acted differently. Here lies the reason for Mr. 'Awaḍ's affection for Edward Browne. It is not because he has received financial favors from Browne or shares his faith. Browne simply charms Ḥāfiẓ 'Awaḍ with his words. (p. 30)

An important point is being implied here by Abu'l-Faḍā'il. He is connecting Browne's popularity to the generalizations that the British scholar continues to make about an abstract "classical" Oriental history, thereby catering to a desire on the part of people to revel in their past glories. This is a point that Said underscored years later when he argued that for many Orientalists the essence of something Oriental lay in its pristine origins. The overwhelming majority of Orientalists advocated a careful study of the past. Said argued that abstractions about the Orient, particularly those based on texts representing a "classical" Oriental civilization, were always preferable to direct evidence drawn from modern Oriental realities. Those specializing in religious studies, for example, set out on quests to discover the historical Gautama Buddha or the historical Jesus of Nazareth. Richard King has called this desire a "nostalgia for origins", a longing for the past which soon became an important piece of the Orientalists' representations of the East, for it "provided, on the one hand, a much needed sense of continuity with archaic traditions and the natural world, and on the other a way of defining the West as quintessentially 'modern'

in contrast to the 'primitive' or 'traditional' cultures of the East" (King 1999, p. 147). Yet, concentrating on the past also provided Orientalists room to make necessary constructions about what they were studying. It allowed them to use this knowledge to demonstrate their authority over the subject.

(2) In the next section of *Kashfu'l-Ghiṭā'*, Abu'l-Faḍā'il turns directly to issues of power and politics and their connection to the field of Oriental Studies. He quotes Browne as saying the following in Ḥāfiẓ 'Awaḍ's article: "Many people ask me why I study Persian. This is an appropriate question to pose to an Englishman. However, the same question would be out of place if addressed to a French, German, or Russian, because these governments have political intentions in assisting their citizens to acquire oriental languages" (p. 30). Abu'l-Faḍā'il understands Browne to be saying that ***the only*** factor that motivated him to study Persian was his interest in the history and literature of Persia. Abu'l-Faḍā'il's criticism of this statement is particularly noteworthy:

> One could accept his statement had Browne not mentioned that the French, the German, and the Russians establish schools of Oriental Studies to train experts in Oriental languages and cultures so they will raise an ample force of capable and well paid agents to serve their interests in the East, their intentions are obvious, and it would be meaningless to ask citizens of the abovementioned countries why they are interested in pursuing Oriental Studies. But [Browne asserts that] the British government has no such policy, so it is surprising to find an Englishman eager to learn an Oriental language and therefore, seeking an explanation from him is more than acceptable. (p. 31)

Abu'l-Faḍā'il adds that he is not judging whether other governments have set up such schools to meet the goals mentioned by Browne, but he strongly rejects Browne's claim that the British government is an exception in this regard, for Abu'l-Faḍā'il sees with his own eyes that the British are more active in the region than any other European country: "In this regard, there are no differences between France, Germany, Russia and England. They all have established institutions for teaching Oriental languages. In fact, it is familiar to those knowledgeable about history that the British are much further ahead than the others in this effort" (p. 31).

(3) Browne's rapid "scholarly and political advancements" (*taraqqiyyāt-i-'ilmīyyih va sīyāsīyyih*) also capture Abu'l-Faḍā'il's attention. How did briefly studying Persian under a certain Muḥammad Bāqir Shīrāzī qualify Browne to travel to Persia, reside in the country for one year, and join the faculty of Cambridge University and become a member of the British Academy soon after his return? Here, Abu'l-Faḍā'il is keen to point out that, based on his autobiographical notes, Browne studied Persian and Arabic for a short period of time. He asserts: "This is adequate proof of the extent of his inadequacies in these languages. Is it possible that with such little instruction, one can become qualified to occupy high positions and publish credible works on the history and literature of Persia?" He follows this comment with a quote from a "competent writer", Ardishīr Zarkūb, speaking to stylistic weaknesses present in Browne's Persian writings (p. 37).

Moreover, according to Abu'l-Faḍā'il, Browne sought assistance from contemporary Persian scholars to edit classical Persian texts. He recalls the occasion when Browne needed Muḥammad Barakatu'llāh Hindī's help to translate a passage. Hindī in turn forwarded the question to Abu'l-Faḍā'il, who was visiting New York at the time. He adds that asking questions is a virtue only if the respondent's contribution is acknowledged and due credit is given—an indication that he was not credited.

(4) This next point is another illustration of Abu'l-Faḍā'il's critique of the political dimension of Orientalism. Abu'l-Faḍā'il notes that, when dictating his biography to Ḥāfiẓ 'Awaḍ, Browne recalls the extent to which he sympathized with the Ottoman Turks when they were defeated by the Russians. He was so moved by the Turks' defeat that he was ready to lay down his life in support of the Ottomans.[4] In an effort to explain what he may have felt to be an irrational comment not becoming of a professional English Orientalist, Browne quickly dismisses his words, attributing them to the naiveté of youth. Yet, Abu'l-

Faḍā'il hones in on Browne's words. He adduces a statement made by Browne seven years later and recorded in Persian newspapers. Browne was reported to have told a Persian journalist in 1910: "If Persia loses its independence, I would prefer to die rather than witness that day". Abu'l-Faḍā'il questions Browne's sincerity in his remarks: "Mr. Browne dismissed his own statement about wishing to be dead after the Russians defeated the Ottomans as the naive and innocent imaginings of a sixteen year old. How sincere can he be, when at the age of forty-eight, he states that he would rather die than see Persia subjugated to foreign powers?" (p. 33). Abu'l-Faḍā'il then quotes another person, who, upon reading the aforementioned statement from Browne, said, "I don't know who to be surprised at: a person who does not understand [what is going on] despite the obvious intentions of the foreign powers in Persia, or a person who intends to cover up his own intentions despite the plans revealed". Either Browne does not understand the obvious intentions of the colonial powers in Persia, or he is trying to conceal his own role with such statements" (p. 34). Then, Abu'l-Faḍā'il very suggestively adds that, while there may be plenty of benevolent individuals among the British who serve humanity through performing praiseworthy deeds, there are also those who disguise their unseemly deeds with deceptive words (p. 34).

(5) Finally, in writing about Shaykh Aḥmad Rūḥī (d. 1896) and Āghā Khān Kirmānī (d. 1896) (two intellectual reformers and followers and sons-in-law of Mīrzā Yaḥyā Nūrī (d. 1912)) in a different section of *Kashfu'l-Ghiṭā'*, Abu'l-Faḍā'il expresses another opinion that reveals a great deal concerning his views on Orientalists: "Another work attributed to Shaykh Aḥmad Rūḥī is the translation of Ḥājī Bābā which is a satirical piece about Persians written by someone similar to Mr. Browne. I don't think anyone has written anything more worthless than this [book] and [the book] *The History of Persia* by Sir John Malcolm". A few pages later, after quoting some of Āghā Khān's poems which Browne had published in his own book on the Constitutional Revolution, Abu'l-Faḍā'il voices how "cunning and deceitful" certain Orientalists can be, before adding: "Despite the afflictions that certain corrupt clerics (*ākhūnd*), a few spiteful pseudo-intellectuals, a handful of ignorant journalists, and certain deceitful Orientalists have brought upon this nation, the poor quality of such poetry will not go unnoticed by the people of Persia" (p. 128).

4. Before and after Abu'l-Faḍā'il

While a study of the history of critique of works of Orientalists in the Middle East is beyond the scope of this article, it is important to note that Abu'l-Faḍā'il's critique is likely the earliest such critique written in Persian. Nearly a decade before Abu'l-Faḍā'il wrote *Kashfu'l-Ghiṭā'*, Pirozeshah Kershasp, a Parsee and employee of the Indian Civil Service, had written a book criticizing the disregard of Western Orientalists (including Browne) for ancient Persia. In *Studies in Ancient Persian History* (published in 1905), Kershasp glorified Persia's pre-Islamic, Zoroastrian past, and denounced Western Orientalists for the "biased standpoint" from which they approached ancient Persian history. Kershasp sought to counter their biased narrative and to "lay down the foundation of a correct view" of history. He found it impossible to accept the "disparaging views" expressed in English books about the pre-Islamic civilization of ancient Persia (Kershasp 1905, pp. 1–4). Specifically, Kershasp criticized Gibbon, Malcolm and Rawlinson for betraying "consciously or unconsciously, too much partiality for Greek and Latin writers" vis-à-vis Persian history, while admitting that they "have rendered valuable aid" in elucidating Persian history (Kershasp 1905, pp. 1–2). While giving Malcolm credit for being "more sympathetic" than the other two, Kershasp argued that "[Malcolm] is not altogether free from the assumption of superiority which English and German savants affect in their treatment of Oriental history, and which is almost fatal to a scientific appreciation of historical facts" (Kershasp 1905, p. 2).

Abu'l-Faḍā'il's reference to the critique of another writer, Ardishīr Zarkūb (p. 37), apparently also of Zoroastrian background, leaves us with the possibility that Abu'l-Faḍā'il was familiar with a Parsee circle of scholars. We know that he was in touch with Mānikchī Limjī Hātariyā (d. 1890), also known as Mānikchī (Manekji) Ṣāḥib, who was appointed in

1854 as an emissary on behalf of the Parsees of India to assist their coreligionists in Persia. Abu'l-Faḍā'il was employed as the personal secretary of Mānikchī Ṣāḥib from 1876 to 1882 (Bahā'u'llāh 2006, p. ii; Amīnī 2015, p. 34). Therefore, he might have been familiar with Kershasp's ideas as well, but, importantly, the nature of Kershasp's critique was different than that of Abu'l-Faḍā'il: Kershasp made no mention whatsoever of the link between knowledge and power—the main focus of our attention in Abu'l-Faḍā'il's critique.

Following Abu'l-Faḍā'il's critique of Orientalism, several of his contemporaries dealt with the idea of Western scholars studying Eastern societies. Given the relatively limited number of texts published in Persian at the time, the publication of any book was a significant event, let alone one on a topic of interest or concern. It is, therefore, quite possible that these scholars had read *Kashfu'l-Ghiṭā'*. Eight years after Abu'l-Faḍā'il's death, Ḥusayn Kāẓimzādih Īrānshahr (d. 1962), a close associate of Browne and Muḥammad Qazvīnī[5] (see below) devoted a three-page article in his monthly journal *Īrānshahr* to the discussion of "*sharq-shināsī*" ("Orientalism") and "*gharb-shināsī*" ("Occidentalism"). While he acknowledged that the knowledge of the Orient became important to European governments after they began expanding their power and influence over the East, his tone was inert, and he leveled no criticism of this situation. He went so far as to state that Orientalists, in addition to serving the political interests of their own countries, had been quite beneficial to Eastern countries. He then suggested that, in order to benefit from Western civilization, the East also must develop groups of Occidentalists (Kāẓimzādih Īrānshahr 1301/1922, pp. 12–14). After Browne's death, Kāẓimzādih Īrānshahr eulogized him in his journal and indicated that he would publish an extensive article on Browne written by Qazvīnī in the next issue (Kāẓimzādih Īrānshahr 1305/1926, pp. 48–51).

In the decades that followed, criticism of Orientalism, or occasionally praise of the discipline, remained a subject of intellectual debate. While most agreed that Orientalism, as a discipline, was the child of the colonial goals of European states, there were some who saw merit in the kind of knowledge produced by it (Rāsikh 1351/1972, pp. 115–19). Among these scholars, one is of particular relevance here: Jalāl Āl-i Aḥmad made the following passing remark in his *Gharbzadigī* ("Westoxication"):

> I haven't the foggiest notion when Orientalism became a 'science.' If we say that some Westerner is a linguist, dialectologist, or musicologist specializing in Eastern questions, this is defensible. Or if we say he is an anthropologist or sociologist, that again is arguable to an extent. But what does it mean to be an Orientalist without further definition? Does it mean to know all the secrets of the Eastern world? Are we living in the age of Aristotle? This is why I speak of a parasite growing on the root of imperialism. (Āl-i Aḥmad 1984, p. 99)

Ironically, Āl-i Aḥmad, who elsewhere implicitly accused Bahā'īs of complicity with imperialism (Yazdani 2011a, pp. 21–23), perhaps had no idea that, in criticizing Orientalism in the service of European dominance, he was echoing a Bahā'ī scholar.

5. Views on Browne as an Orientalist

Although our aim in this article is not to discuss the extent to which Browne's scholarship and activities fit Edward Said's paradigm of Orientalism, a brief survey of how a number of other scholars have evaluated Browne in this regard is useful.

Following his criticism of Malcolm and Rawlinson discussed above, Kershasp relied on the credibility of Browne for rejecting Malcolm and added that "professor Browne, the author of 'A Literary History of Persia,' who makes excursions into political history, votes Malcolm down as already obsolete" (Kershasp 1905, p. 2). However, Kershasp then criticized Browne:

> He has, however, sworn fealty to Mahomedanism [sic] and Arab writers, and on that account is debarred from doing justice to the ancient Persians. Political history does not strictly fall within his domain, but he has chosen to dogmatise on it. (Kershasp 1905, p. 3)

As an example, Kershasp wrote that Browne had a "heavy score to settle with the Sassanian kings, and Nushirwan as well, on the account of the persecution of Christians". According to Kershasp, Browne's research on the issue is flawed because the sources he had tapped were "notably the Syrian writers" (Kershasp 1905, p. 160). Elsewhere in the book, he criticized Browne for "assimilating the superficial and commonplace ideas of some critics of Persian history", adding that Browne "avowedly regards the old Persian legends as entirely mythical" (Kershasp 1905, p. 76). Kershasp's later communications with Browne during the period of the Constitutional Revolution show that his criticism was not to a degree that it damaged their acquaintanceship (Bonakdarian 2006, p. 219).

Years after Abu'l-Faḍā'il, the prominent Persian scholar Muḥammad Qazvīnī (d. 1949) questioned the motives of Orientalists in their study of Persia. He recognized in the majority of them a feeling of contempt and enmity towards the country. Qazvīnī states that the enmity that he perceived in Orientalists regarding Persia originated in ancient Roman and Greek literature that demonized Persians as a result of the Greco-Persian and Roman-Persian wars. He further provided a list of other motives for various Orientalists. Some, he stated, studied Persia either for their pure love of knowledge; others did so for academic promotion; and still others had the goal of serving the history of the Aryan race, i.e., their own race. Since Persians were also of the same race, this latter group of Orientalists believed that by studying Persia they would manage to glorify the Aryan race vis-á-vis the Semites, particularly the Jews. Categorically, however, Qazvīnī excluded Browne from such negative attitudes and self-serving motivations. He emphasized that Browne had no political motives and did not study Persia to benefit his own country. Qazvīnī believed that Browne genuinely liked the world of Islam and, in particular, Persia, and considered him a "God-given bounty" for Persia (Qazvīnī 1305a/1926, pp. 75–77; Jurbuzihdār 1363/1984, pp. 829–33). This statement is not a surprise given Qazvīnī and Browne's years of close association, collaboration and cordial relations. Their partnership was so close that, as Qazvīnī himself confided to a likeminded friend, he was the real author of the Persian introduction to *Kitāb-i Nuqṭatu'l-Kāf*, published under Browne's name. This introduction offered an Azalī reading of Bābī history (Qazvīnī 1305b/1926, pp. 148–58; Balyuzi 1970, pp. 73–76; Yazdani 2013, pp. 153, 166–67 n.65). The long multi-section article which Qazvīnī wrote on Browne after the latter's death, emphasizing his lack of political motivations and pursuance of the colonial interests of his own government, one can even consider to be a tacit response to Abu'l-Faḍā'il's critique of Browne. This impression is reinforced when one reads Qazvīnī's praise of Browne's historiography of the Bābī religion and of the schism between the followers of Mīrzā Yaḥyā and Bahā'u'llāh as "complete and impartial" (Qazvīnī 1305a/1926, pp. 86–87). This was, of course, a historiography to which Qazvīnī himself had contributed, and for which he may well have been a source.

More recently, two prominent historians have explicitly separated Browne from the types of Orientalists Said criticized. Abbas Amanat wrote in his *Resurrection and Renewal*:

> Contrary to the prevailing Orientalism of his time, he [Browne] writes with great sympathy and understanding towards Persians in general and Babis in particular. Most of his writings, including *A Year among thee Persians* and the introductions to his translations of Babi works, bear witness to this attitude. (Amanat 1989, p. 439)

In 2006, at a time when Said's ideas had been embraced and the field of post-colonial studies was in full swing, Mansour Bonakdarian, in his magnum opus, *Britain and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906–1911*, called into question the "essentialist critiques of Western orientalism", and highlighted some convergence points in Western–Oriental encounters, among them "cooperation between groups of Western and Oriental thinkers and reformers" (Bonakdarian 2006, p. xxv). On account of Browne's championing the Constitutional Revolution, Bonakdarian counted Browne among those Orientalists who were influenced by the intellectual and cultural currents of the societies they studied (Bonakdarian 2006, p. xxvi). Bonakdarian's views on Browne are summed up in his referring to Browne as "an orientalist in the service of the Orient" (Bonakdarian 2006, p. 94).

These views of Bonakdarian are echoed in Amanat's comprehensive survey of the history of modern Iran. In highlighting Browne's support of the Constitutional Revolution, Amanat averred that Browne's account in *The Persian Revolution 1905–1909*—which Amanat described as a "remarkable work of contemporary history"—questioned "the validity of the all-embracing critiques of Orientalism and the common assumption that Orientalists invariably were pioneers of imperial hegemony" (Amanat 2017, p. 375).

A study by Marziyeh Ghoreishi focuses on Browne's travelogue, *A Year Amongst the Persians*. Ghoreishi argues that for the most part Browne maintained "a fair and just representation" of Persians, depicting them in ways more positive than some other travelers. However, she claims that there are "occasional instances" in which Browne seems to perpetuate an "Orientalist" portrayal of Persians. These occur, according to Ghoreishi, when Browne "glorifies the 'uncivilized' nature of Iranians and Easterners and puts Oriental versus civilized as two contradictory opposites". Ghoreishi makes the surprising remark that Browne's behavior is of the type criticized by Said as "Orientalist" when his "keen interest in the non-Muslim people of Iran" leads him to attempt "to justify some of their acts, which then leads him to express his dislike of Muslims" (Ghoreishi 2022, pp. 126, 129, 130).

6. Conclusions

We have sought in this article to demonstrate that Abu'l-Faḍā'il's critique of Orientalism in *Kashfu'l-Ghiṭā'* prefigures Edward Said's critique, albeit in a form and style that are markedly different. *Kashfu'l-Ghiṭā'* was of course not written with the objective of critiquing the academic discipline of Oriental Studies but rather to, in part, critique the scholarship of E.G. Browne. However, as we have seen, in the process of critiquing Browne, Abu'l-Faḍā'il offers a number of insights concerning the motivations, methods and agendas of Orientalists.

Although others before Abu'l-Faḍā'il had criticized Orientalism, the nature of their criticism was different, and, furthermore, Abu'l-Faḍā'il was likely the first person to make the connection between the knowledge of the Orientalists and the power of their respective governments. The subtle allusions Abu'l-Faḍā'il made about the complex relationship of knowledge and power would, more than sixty years later, serve as Edward Said's core thesis that Orientalists were inherently political actors advancing a discipline (Oriental Studies) that was inextricably tied to, and often served to legitimize, the practice of imperialism. Given the comments the intellectuals contemporary to Abu'l-Faḍā'il made on the topic after the publication of *Kashfu'l-Ghiṭā'*, Abu'l-Faḍā'il was likely the first in the network of intellectuals engaged in matters of their common concern.

As an ante litteram critique of Orientalism, Abu'l-Faḍā'il subverts the false "agents of imperialism" accusation that would later be leveled by Shī'ī Islamists against Bahā'īs. The manner in which his critique has been marginalized by the master narrative, which casts Bahā'īs as spies and the internal "Other", is further evidence of the historical amnesia that has ensued in modern Iran.

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Notes

1 On *Nuqṭatu'l-Kāf*, see Milani (2008).

2 MacEoin, not having noted Abu'l-Faḍā'il's statement that the editors of the book were three Eastern scholars, criticized him for attributing the editing to Browne (MacEoin 1992, p. 137).

3 Abu'l-Faḍā'il provides the publication details of the article: *Majjalatu'l-Majjalāti'l-'Arabīyyah*, nos. 2 & 3, vol. 2 (February and March 1903/Dhi'l- Qa'dah and Dhi'l-Ḥijjah 1320), pp. 159–62.

[4] Browne makes similar statements in his travelogue (Browne 1893, pp. 7–8). Siyyid Mihdī Gulpāyigānī, who, as mentioned, completed *Kashfu'l-Ghiṭā'* after Abu'l-Faḍā'il's death, states the following in a footnote added to Abu'l-Faḍā'il's quoting of Browne: "I do not know if Mr. Browne was equally sad when Basra fell into the hands of the British in 1914, or if his sadness for the Ottomans was because of the rivalry with the Russians and not love for the Turks" (p. 33)

[5] On the connections between these scholars, as well as the circle of Persian intellectuals formed in Berlin between the years 1915 and 1930, see Bihnām (1386/2007).

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Article

The Bahá'í Faith and the Equality, Rights, and Advancement of Women: A Survey of Principles, Praxis, and Discourse

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Abstract: This article examines the Bahá'í approach to the equality of women and men, the education, advancement, and rights of women and girls; their application within the Bahá'í community; and the efforts of the Bahá'ís to influence the international discourse on women. Focusing on significant and interrelated social issues—the education of girls; leadership and participation in decision-making, and violence against women and girls—the article explores these through Bahá'í texts, accounts, and examples of how these have been operationalized by Bahá'í institutions, communities, and individuals; and in public public statements made by Bahá'í institutions.

Keywords: Baha'i; Bahá'í International Community; equality; girl child; leadership; participation; rights; Universal House of Justice; violence against women and girls; women

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1. Introduction

The advancement of women and their possession of rights is, within the Bahá'í Faith, an essential aspect of the overall purpose of humanity: the recognition of the oneness of humanity and the responsibility of each individual to 'carry forward an ever-advancing civilization' (Bahá'u'lláh 1983, p. 215). Some of the preliminary elements required for such a civilization were beginning to be assembled in the 18th and 19th centuries, including increasing awareness and concern about social issues such as slavery, race, poverty, class, criminal justice, education, temperance, work and employment, moral reform, democracy, and the decline and revival of religion.[1]

The movements for greater social justice and women's rights coincided in part with the emergence of the Bahá'í Faith in Iran in the middle of the 19th century. The religion spoke directly to the social issues of the day, treating them not as separate concerns but as interwoven threads of the fabric of a society that needed to reform and evolve. It recognized that religion has a social responsibility ('divine religions were founded for the purpose of unifying humanity and establishing universal peace'. 'Abdu'l-Bahá 1982, no. 41.1) as well as well as a spiritual and moral one and that religion is 'capable of profoundly influencing the structure of social relationships' (Universal House of Justice 2002). A foundational concept of the Bahá'í teachings is the equality of women and men.

The Bahá'í teachings and experience of implementation cover a vast range of endeavours from the education of girls, family life, health, work and careers, women's participation in governance and decision-making, to their role in bringing about peace and dealing with climate change, to name a few. Space does not permit an examination of more than a handful and therefore this article limits itself to an examination of four themes that are high on the feminist agenda: equality of women and men; education of the girl child; leadership and participation; and violence against women and girls. They are illustrative of the wider effort of the Bahá'ís to reshape the whole of human society so as to carry out the social mission of Bahá'u'lláh for which humans were created: 'to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization' (Bahá'u'lláh 1983, p. 215).

With regard to each of these four themes, the present article examines three elements of the Bahá'í focus on women: the underlying principles of the religion as expressed in

its scriptures, the authoritative explanations and elucidations of these, as well as certain supplementary texts; the efforts to implement these principles and the experience of the worldwide Bahá'í community in doing so; and the discourse of the Bahá'ís in advocating the use of Bahá'í concepts in social spaces, based on both their principles and experience.

For clarity, the structure of the article, following the Introduction (1) is:

Section 2. Theme A: Equality of women and men; Section 2.1. Bahá'í texts; Section 2.2. Praxis; Section 2.3. Discourse.

Section 3. Theme B: Education of the girl child; Section 3.1. Bahá'í texts; Section 3.2. Praxis; Section 3.3. Discourse.

Section 4. Theme C: Leadership and Participation; Section 4.1. Bahá'í texts; Section 4.2. Praxis; Section 4.3. Discourse.

Section 5. Theme D: Violence against Women and Girls; Section 5.1. Bahá'í texts; Section 5.2. Praxis; Section 5.3. Discourse.

It is well to note that the Bahá'í Faith is not a development agency but a religion with many aspects and dimensions, only a few of which are touched on here. (For the Bahá'ís' own explanation of themselves, see Bahá'í Faith 2023), and for their literature, see Bahá'í Reference Library 2023).

1.1. Historical Context

The campaign for women's rights and equality was born at a time when many men did not have a full range of such rights, when the disparities of wealth, education, status, and power within a population were considered normal and appropriate by many and were driven by factors such as class, race, cast, and religion and depended largely where in the world a person was born.

The women's movement initially focused on the demand of women that they be able to exercise the same rights and privileges as men, notably the right to vote. This was primarily a Western phenomenon, although India also witnessed, among the many social reform movements in the 19th century, an uptick in efforts to promote the welfare and rights of women, some led by men (see e.g., Kumar 1993; Anagol 2006). Elsewhere, for example, in Japan, Argentina, and Ecuador, a few advocated for women's rights.

The leadership of the early women's movement in the West was dominated by Western, educated white women of some degree of personal or family wealth and social standing, while, 'thousands of working class women . . . formed the bedrock of the fight for women's suffrage in the United Kingdom. Indeed, the early unions and organizations of Suffragists were centred in working class areas' (Hicks 2017). Racial diversity in the early movement was limited, mirroring to some extent the lack of racial diversity in the general population. It was not an inclusive grouping of different economic or social classes, races, or religions.

1.2. Role of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Promoting the Equality, Rights, Participation, and Activism of Women

'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of Bahá'u'lláh and understood by Bahá'ís to be the 'perfect exemplar' of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and designated by Bahá'u'lláh as the interpreter of his writings, came to the United Kingdom twice, first from 4 September to 3 October 1911 and again from 13 December 1912 to 21 January 1913. During his first visit, he spoke to numerous people and groups, giving his first public address in the West in the City Temple in London on 10 September. On 30 September, he spoke at the new headquarters of the Theosophical Society. In this address, he listed nine of the Bahá'í social teachings. This appears to be the first time such a list had been made (Thorne et al. 2023). The first was the search for truth and second the oneness of humanity. In his brief comments on this latter topic, he said, 'Man and woman both should be educated equally and equally regarded' ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1987, p. 28).

In 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá travelled in North America, giving public lectures, private interviews, and newspaper interviews. In many such spaces, he discussed female suffrage, the equality of women and men, the advancement and rights of women, and the education

of women and girls. These travels are well documented (see ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1982; Maḥmúd-i-Zarqání 1998; Egea 2017, 2018; McNamara 2021). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s oral statements, which although not scripture and not ‘authoritative’, are accepted by Bahá’ís as interpretations of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings and to be important sources of guidance, greatly expanded knowledge of the Bahá’í Faith view of women and girls.

1.3. Some Basic Concepts in the Bahá’í Texts Regarding Women and Girls

The Bahá’í authoritative texts and the talks of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá contain many passages that relate directly to women and girls. These are understood by Bahá’ís in the context of the religion’s world view of the oneness of humanity; its vision of an ever-advancing, peaceful, united, and sustainable civilization that is at once material, spiritual, and intellectual (‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1967, no. 1; Universal House of Justice 1995b, 1996a); and its explanation that the nature of the human being is essentially spiritual and every individual is created noble. These concepts are interwoven in such a way that isolating them from one another seems to distort their meaning and application. In the present context, the establishment of world peace, justice, the education of girls, the importance of mothers, and the assertion of the equality of women and men appear to be essential elements of operationalizing the Bahá’í approach to humanity’s progress. For example, not only do women have a role in bringing about peace as individuals, the lack of women’s equality with men is considered to be a destabilizing influence on world politics.

> Equality between men and women is conducive to the abolition of warfare for the reason that women will never be willing to sanction it. Mothers will not give their sons as sacrifices upon the battlefield after twenty years of anxiety and loving devotion in rearing them from infancy, no matter what cause they are called upon to defend. There is no doubt that when women obtain equality of rights, war will entirely cease among mankind (‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1982, no. 62:7).

1.4. Basic Concepts

Thus in the survey below, the quotations cited as the possible inspiration of particular Bahá’í practices and discourses have been selected merely as examples of some key feminist issues addressed in Bahá’í texts, such as political participation and representation, the education of the girl child, and violence against women and girls. To frame these, some basic concepts about women are set out below.

1.4.1. Nature and Qualities of Women

Mental alertness, intuition, love, and service (Dodge 1912); ‘in some respects woman is superior to man, more tender-hearted, more receptive’ (‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1967, p. 161); ‘woman is indeed of the greater importance to the race. She has the greater burden and the greater work’ (‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1987, p. 102).

1.4.2. Equality of Women and Men

‘Bahá’u’lláh emphasized and established the equality of man and woman’ (‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1982, no. 63.20).

1.4.3. Rights of Women

Women will go ‘neck and neck with the men. In no movement will they be left behind. Their rights with men are equal in degree. They will enter all the administrative branches of politics. They will attain in all such a degree as will be considered the very highest station of the world of humanity and will take part in all affairs’ (‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1967, pp. 182–3).

1.4.4. Respect

The rights of both sexes are to equally respected (‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1967, p. 162).

1.4.5. Work

Work undertaken in the spirit of service is considered worship. It 'incumbent' on Bahá'ís to each 'engage in some occupation—such as a craft, a trade or the like' (Bahá'u'lláh 1992, para. 33), 'agriculture or other occupation' (Bahá'u'lláh 1978, p. 90) which will 'profit themselves and others', and which may be undertaken outside the home environment by both women and men. Homemaking is considered to 'highly honourable' and 'responsible work of fundamental importance to society' and may be undertaken by both women and men (Bahá'u'lláh 1992, n. 56).

1.4.6. Education of Women and Girls

Women are particularly encouraged to become 'proficient in the arts and sciences' and 'devote her energies and abilities toward the industrial and agricultural sciences, seeking to assist mankind in that which is most needful' ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1982, no. 95.11). Girls have priority of education over boys, as the 'girl-child is the transmitter of values to future generations. Indeed, educated women are one of the most important keys to world peace' (BIC 2000).

1.4.7. Peace

Women will prevent war when they 'participate fully and equally in the affairs of the world, when they enter confidently and capably the great arena of laws and politics' ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1982, no. 51.6). They have the dual responsibility of ushering in peace and maintaining it.

1.4.8. Harmful Traditional Practices

Female genital mutilation of girls (FGM, female circumcision, cutting) is 'contrary to the spirit of the Bahá'í Teachings'. (Universal House of Justice 1995a).

1.4.9. Marriage

The Bahá'í Faith does not permit forced or child marriage or the betrothal of a girl before maturity (Bahá'u'lláh 1992, pp. 120, 149–50; spiritual maturity is fixed at age 15 for both girls and boys). Arranged marriages are not permissible for Bahá'ís: 'the initial choice of marriage partner is made by the two individuals directly involved, and the consent of all living parents is then sought, and is required for the marriage to take place (Universal House of Justice 1988b; Bahá'u'lláh 1992, para. 65)

1.4.10. Inheritance

Bahá'ís are required to make a will and both women and girls can inherit. If the deceased has not left a will, the Bahá'í law of intestacy provides for the inheritance of female relatives (Bahá'u'lláh 1992, para. 109, question 69, and notes 38 and 39).

1.5. Bahá'í Contribution to the Discourses of Society: The Discourse on Women and Girls

Bahá'ís hold that participating in the prevalent global, national, and local conversations that take place in society on a number of topics concerned with the well-being of the planet and humanity—the 'discourses of society'—is a useful way to be an effective actor in an 'ever-advancing civilization', the participation in which process Bahá'u'lláh stated is the purpose of humanity's creation (Bahá'u'lláh 1983, p. 215). Of particular interest here is the discourse on women and girls, which has been a focus of Bahá'í endeavour for over a hundred years.

1.5.1. The Discourse in Iran

The discourse on women and girls at the inception of the Bábí religion in 1844 (Balyuzi 1973; Bahá'í Faith 2022a, 2023), the precursor of the Bahá'í Faith, centred on the figure of Ṭáhirih (Fátimah Baraghání/Umm-i Salmih, also titled Qurrat al-'Ayn), the influential poet and scholar who energetically and fearlessly taught the new religion, tore away her

veil at the gathering of male Bábís at the 1848 Conference of Badasht), and was killed by order of the religious clerics in 1852 (‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1971, pp. 201, 202–3; Nabíl-i-A’ẓam 1970, pp. 294–5, 625–7; Amanat 2004, pp. 139–40, 143; M. Momen 2005). She is reported to have said before being strangled with her own scarf, lowered into a well and covered with earth and stones, ‘You can kill me as soon as you like, but you cannot stop the emancipation of women’ (Shoghi Effendi 1995, p. 75). Her story became the subject of conversations in artistic circles and *salons* in Europe and America (see e.g., Weinberg 2019; Khademi 2022, pp. 49, 121–9, 152) and was the focus of Isabella Grinevskaya’s play *Bab* about the founder of the Bábí religion (Jasion 2004, pp. 231–8).

The discourse about the education of women and girls in Iran was a subset of the discourse on the modernization of the country, a project undertaken by Mirza Taqi Khan, Amir Kabir Nezam, Prime Minister to Naser al-Din Shah Qajar (Shah of Persia) between May 1848 and November 1851. A nemesis to the emerging Bábí community (he ordered the killing of the religion’s founder, the Báb, in 1850 and of thousands of Bábís, see Shoghi Effendi 1995, p. 82), history recalls him as ‘pioneer’ of modernization (Shahriari 2017, 7.269), a ‘celebrated minister’, later ‘elevated to the pantheon of Iranian national heroes’ (Amanat and Vejdani 2012, pp. 135–6). Among his efforts was the establishment of the Dar al-Fanun (Skills House), a modern, secular training centre for government administrators, aspects of which later became part of the University of Tehran. It was modelled after schools in Russia, which Amir Kabir saw in the 1820s (Menashri 2020) and underscored the importance of education in the modernization process.

An early contributor to this discourse was ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. In his political treatise written in 1875, addressed to Iran’s leaders, and published, anonymously, as *Risálih-yi madaniyyih* (Treatise on Civilization), initially published in English as *The Mysterious Forces of Civilization* (‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1910) and latterly as *The Secret of Divine Civilization* (‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1990), he discusses the value of modernization to the modern state and draws attention to the role of education in the process.

In response to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s encouragement of Bahá’í communities in Iran to establish the institutions of their religion, local administrative councils known as ‘local spiritual assemblies’ began to form at the end of the 19th century and early in the 20th. Among the first steps taken by these bodies was the creation of schools, initially for boys but soon for girls as well.

In the 20th and 21st centuries one of the main discourses in the Western media regarding Iran focused on the plight of the persecuted Bahá’í community. Persecution of the Bahá’í community was endemic in the country but became acute following the Islamic revolution in 1979, when large numbers of Bahá’ís were executed, imprisoned, beaten, dispossessed of their homes, stripped of their pensions, summarily dismissed from their jobs, and young people prevented from attending institutions of higher education (see e.g., Vahman 2019, pp. 160–270; BIC 2022b). The execution of over 200 Bahá’ís, particularly the hanging of 10 Bahá’í women—one a high school student—in 1983 highlighted to the world community the country’s human rights abuses against women and girls (Community under Siege 2007).

The Universal House of Justice has written to the Bahá’ís of Iran on several occasions in the four decades since on a range of topics relating to the resilience of the persecuted community. Its letter of 20 June 2008 focused on the equality of women and men, highlighting ‘the critical need to remove barriers hindering the progress of women in society’, noting: ‘For you, the equality of men and women is not a Western construct but a universal spiritual truth—a statement about human nature . . . That women should enjoy equal rights with men is a requirement of justice . . . For half a century now, Bahá’í women in Iran have worked shoulder to shoulder with men in administering the affairs of the community . . . And long ago you succeeded in eliminating in your community illiteracy among women under the age of forty’ (Universal House of Justice 2008).

The discourse in Iran took another negative turn in 2022, with a crackdown on Bahá’ís over several weeks starting in June with widespread arrests and the destruction of homes,

backed by a formal statement from the Ministry of Intelligence on 1 August claiming those targeted were 'core members' of the 'Baha'i espionage party', were 'infiltrating educational environments' including kindergartens, possibly an excuse for the persecution of teachers of preschoolers, and that they 'were also promoting a campaign of women's unveiling in Iran' (Reuters 2022). Among those arrested were Mahvash Sabet and Fariba Kamalabadi, two Bahá'í women formerly imprisoned for 10 years each and recently released (BIC 2022a). They were sentenced to a further 10 years of imprisonment on 21 November 2022. Ironically, the first Bahá'í to be appointed as Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief by the Human Rights Council, Ms Nazila Ghanea of the United Kingdom, took up her mandate on 1 August 2022 (United Nations 2022b).

The street demonstrations across Iran following the death in September 2022 of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, who was detained and beaten by the 'morality police' for not covering her hair sufficiently, recalled the protest of women in response to Khomeini's announcement in 1979 reintroducing the requirement for women to veil and could be said to have begun in earnest on 27 December 2017 when Vida Movahedi (Movahed), mother and women's rights activist, stood on a utility box in Enghelab Street, holding her white hijab on a stick in protest against wearing the hijab in Iran. This action was copied by numerous others, including men, and she was arrested and sentenced to one year in prison, though later pardoned (Radio Free Europe 2019; WLUML 2022).

Street demonstrations regarding women's rights continued across Iran into December, commentators stating that 'current protests are unique, as they involve people from across society and women are taking a lead role under the slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom"' (BBC News 2022). *Time* magazine named 'The Women of Iran' as 'Heroes of the Year' (Time 2022b) and the Irish magazine *The Journal* published Brendan McNamara's article 'Iran's nod to International Human Rights Day was more repression of its people', pointing out that two of those heroic women were Mahvash Sabet (69) and Fariba Kamalabadi (60), Bahá'í women 'who have consistently upheld and promoted the equality of women and men, called for justice and truth for all and have paid a heavy price for upholding these principles' (McNamara 2022).

International support for the women of Iran has been demonstrated by the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which voted to eject Iran from its membership in light of its efforts 'to continuously undermine and increasingly suppress the human rights of women and girls', and 'often with the use of excessive force' (UN News 2022; IranWire 2022b), thus extending the discourse on the rights of women to the global level.

1.5.2. The Discourse in Europe and North America

The early Bahá'í contribution to the discourse on women and girls in Europe and North America may be understood as a product of the guidance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to individuals and the emerging Bahá'í institutions during his travels between 1911 and 1913. I have discussed his contribution to these audiences elsewhere (W. Momen 1995) and described the role of Emmeline Pethick Lawrence (see Brittain 1963) in articulating a vision of the equality of women and men as the two wings of a bird, a metaphor frequently used by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and one widely adopted as the preeminent description of the concept (W. Momen 2018; see also Ford 1912). That article set out some of the themes he developed as he travelled: equality, women's suffrage, the advancement of women and peace, women as educators of the next generation, and the education of girls.

While he was still on the RMS *Cedric* before docking in New York on 11 April 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was interviewed by reporters, including the Bahá'í Wendell Phillips Dodge, whose interview was carried in numerous newspapers (see Egea 2017, p. 623). Dodge notes that one of the reporters asked 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 'What is your attitude toward woman suffrage?' 'Abdu'l-Bahá responded:

> The modern suffragette is fighting for what must be, and many of these are willing martyrs to imprisonment for their cause. One might not approve of the ways of some of the more militant suffragettes, but in the end it will adjust itself.

> If women were given the same advantages as men, their capacity being the same, the result would be the same. In fact, women have a superior disposition to men; they are more receptive, more sensitive, and their intuition is more intense. The only reason of their present backwardness in some directions is because they have not had the same educational advantages as men.
>
> All children should be educated, but if parents cannot educate both the boys and the girls, then it would be better to educate the girls, for they will be the mothers of the coming generation . . . The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the scales are already shifting—force is losing its weight and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendency. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine, and more permeated with the feminine ideals—or, to speak more exactly, will be an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more properly balanced. (Dodge 1912, p. 4)[2]

It is not known how many people 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke to on his journeys, but his first public address in the West (at London's City Temple on 10 September 1911) alone attracted over 2000 people (Egea 2017, p. 109). Thousands more would have read about the Bahá'í teachings in the newspapers and journals that carried news of his speeches. His participation in many of the discourses of the day was significant yet the ability of people to appreciate his contribution was perhaps limited:

> . . . only a small number of those who had accepted the Faith—and infinitely fewer among the public audiences who had thronged to hear His words—derived from these priceless opportunities more than a relatively dim understanding of the implications of His message (Century of Light 2001, p. 25).

1.5.3. Contributions to the Discourse on Women through Global Institutions

The League of Nations

Following World War I, the Paris Peace Conference that formally ended the war included negotiations for what became the Treaty of Versailles. The Covenant of the League of Nations formed part I of the Treaty. It was signed on 28 June 1919 and came into effect on 10 January 1920 (Treaty of Peace with Germany 1919, called Treaty of Versailles, Part I). Established 'In order to promote international co-operation and to achieve international peace and security' (Part 1), the League was described by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in his 'Tablet to the Hague' ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1919), a letter written to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace, as 'limited and restricted', whose 'purpose will not be realized as it ought and should' and which was therefore 'incapable of establishing Universal Peace'. Despite its shortcomings, the League of Nations was supported by the Bahá'ís as a stage in the development of their vision of a peaceful world civilization, Shoghi Effendi, the grandson of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and after him the head of the religion, apparently stating 'that the League is not on the foundation that it should be to be the ultimate league, but that it will develop into that. As far as possible, without becoming involved in politics Bahá'ís should support it' (Paine and Paine 1933, p. 145). It is perhaps worth noting that Article 7 of the Covenant of the League states: 'All positions under or in connection with the League, including the Secretariat, shall be open equally to men and women'—this at a time when most women in the world did not yet have voting rights on a par with men.

The relationship of the Bahá'ís with the League of Nations developed in two related directions: one was the work that Laura Dreyfus Barney undertook as an individual with the League, including through her membership of the International Council of Women. The other was the relationship developed between the International Bahá'í Bureau and the League at the institutional level. The work of Dreyfus Barney, a wealthy American Bahá'í

philanthropist and women's rights champion, is well documented in Mona Khademi's (2022) *The Life of Laura Barney*.

The International Bahá'í Bureau

The International Bahá'í Bureau was established in Geneva in 1925, primarily to assist the expansion of the Bahá'í Faith in Europe. It served as a secretariat to the Bahá'í communities around the world and was a distribution centre for information on the religion. The Bureau was begun by Mrs Jean Stannard as an 'auxiliary' to the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa (Hoagg 1933, pp. 257–61) and over the years was staffed by a number of Bahá'ís, mostly women (Warde 1952, pp. 507–9).

The Bureau's second responsibility was to contribute to the discourse on international themes and current issues, including those affecting women, through the development and maintenance of international contacts at the League and the provision of information. This involved both attendance at the public sessions of the League of Nations and cooperation with those international organizations that were not involved with partisan politics. A persistent effort was made to inform international workers about the Bahá'í social teachings, including the equality of women and men. It offered lectures on international subjects, sometimes with Bahá'í speakers, and side programmes of the Esperanto Congresses of 1925 and 1926, which were held in the Bureau's rooms. It was during these conferences that Lidia Zamenhof, daughter of the creator of Esperanto Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof, first heard of the Bahá'í Faith, which she later joined (see Heller 1985). The Bureau also produced *Messager Bahá'í*, begun by Stannard and printed in three languages—English, French, and German.

The Bureau maintained correspondence with a number of individuals, agencies, and organizations functioning as a centre of accurate information about the Bahá'í Faith. It translated Bahá'í literature into European languages, including Russian and Esperanto, and distributed it. Free literature was given away to inquirers, while Bahá'í books were sold and distributed. Much Bahá'í literature was given to journalists, internationalists, and diplomats. The Bureau also maintained a free reading and lending library, while hundreds of Bahá'í books were placed in libraries throughout Europe.

In 1925, the Bureau was recognized by the League of Nations and became a member of the Fédération des Mouvements Internationaux, on the strength of the international scope of its work. In 1930, the Bureau was registered as an international working unit governed by a committee under the direct supervision of Shoghi Effendi.

After the establishment of the Bahá'í International Community (see below) in 1948, much of the work of the International Bahá'í Bureau was taken over by it. The Bureau finally closed in 1957 (Bahá'í News 1966, p. 2). One of the offices of the Bahá'í International Community opened in Geneva in 1981.

The Bahá'í International Community (BIC)

The main Bahá'í participant in the international arena over the last seven decades has been the Bahá'í International Community (BIC 2023a), established in 1948 as an international non-governmental organization (NGO) with the United Nations, initially with observer status, achieving consultative status in July 1970, and representing all the Bahá'í National Spiritual Assemblies. It holds accredited consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and has offices in New York, Geneva, Brussels, Addis Ababa, and Jakarta.

For decades cited as a significant principle of the Bahá'í teachings, the equality of women and men, particularly the concept of privileging girls' education, took on greater importance in many national Bahá'í communities as second-wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s, the 'Women's Liberation Movement', spread and developed. The focus of the Movement on equality was of particular interest to Bahá'ís especially during International Women's Year (1975) and the International Year of the Child (1979). By the 1990s, the discourse was well-established in local Bahá'í communities. In the 21st century, individual

Bahá'ís incorporated the theme into their 'meaningful conversations' as encouraged to do so by the Universal House of Justice (see, for example, Universal House of Justice 2005).

An example of how the Bahá'ís influenced discourse about women and girls at the international level is provided by the development over several decades of the relationship of the Bahá'í community with the United Nations (Holley 1952, pp. 42–3).

Initially, the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada applied to the UN for recognition as a national non-governmental organization, and accredited observer status was obtained in spring 1947 in the name of 'The Bahá'í International Community'. At the same time, Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, received a letter on 9 July 1947 from the chairman of United Nations Special Committee on Palestine requesting a statement on the relationship the Bahá'í Faith had to Palestine and the Bahá'í attitude towards any future changes in the status of the country. Shoghi Effendi responded on 15 July 1947 setting out the Bahá'í teachings (Shoghi Effendi 1947a).

As an official UN observer, the BIC submitted two formal statements: 'A Bahá'í Declaration of Human Obligations and Rights' (BIC 1947a) and 'A Bahá'í Statement on the Rights of Women', submitted to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, August 1947 (BIC 1947b).

The BIC was first represented at an international UN conference in May 1948 at Geneva, where international non-governmental organizations gathered to discuss human rights. The Bahá'í delegates introduced two resolutions, which were accepted:

> RESOLVED: That the Non-Governmental Organizations endeavor through their local branches and with the permission of the governing authorities to educate and prepare the peoples of nonmember nations for their eventual entry into the United Nations.
>
> RESOLVED: That the Non-Governmental Organizations who here represent a good portion of the world's population can go far in the implementation of Article No. 1 of the Declaration of Human Rights by themselves setting the example within their own organization by eliminating within these organizations all sorts of prejudice whether it be that of race, creed or color. They would thus present a living example of the implementation of Article No. 1 (Holley 1952, p. 43; BIC 2023b).

The Bahá'í International Community applied for consultative status to the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on many occasions (see, for example, United Nations 1948a, p. 202) and was successful in 1970. It has held full consultative status with ECOSOC since 1996, when UN policy changed (Global Policy Forum 1996; Lempinen 1999) to enable international non-governmental organizations to do so. In 1974, the BIC established a relationship with the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and in 1976 it gained consultative status with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Its representation with the United Nations Center for Human Settlements (UNCHS) was formalized in 1985.

Over the years, the BIC has focused on a wide range of discourses within the United Nations system relating to women and the girl child, education, family life, and the role of men and boys, among many others, examples of which are discussed below.

There are several themes regarding women in the Bahá'í texts including peace, social and economic development, and the environment. Space restricts the number that can be explored here and I have therefore focused on those that represent perhaps the most well developed from the point of view of implementation and global discourse but which are also high on the feminist agenda: equality of women and men, the education of the girl child, women's leadership and political participation, and violence against women and girls. As mentioned above, these are set out to provide a few of the relevant Bahá'í texts, examples of the social application of the texts, and some of the Bahá'í contributions to the discourse on each theme.

2. Theme A: Equality of Women and Men

2.1. Bahá'í Texts

> And among the teachings of His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh is the equality of women and men. The world of humanity has two wings—one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly. Should one wing remain weak, flight is impossible ('Abdu'l-Bahá, in Bahá'í World Faith 1976, p. 288).

> Until the reality of equality between man and woman is fully established and attained, the highest social development of mankind is not possible . . . And let it be known once more that until woman and man recognize and realize equality, social and political progress here or anywhere will not be possible. For the world of humanity consists of two parts or members: one is woman; the other is man. Until these two members are equal in strength, the oneness of humanity cannot be established, and the happiness and felicity of mankind will not be a reality ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1982, no. 32.8).

2.2. Praxis

Michael Karlberg, professor of communication studies at Western Washington University, noted how Bahá'ís have implemented their teachings:

> Consider, for instance, the Bahá'í community's long-standing commitment to the advancement of women, and to the equality of women and men, in the context of deeply patriarchal forces that are still at play in many parts of the world. In such contexts, Bahá'ís have been among the first to reject the forced veiling of women, to declare the full equality of women and men, and to begin translating this principle into practice in every arena of family and community life by prioritizing the education of girls, fostering professional and administrative capacities in women, and empowering women to become protagonists of social change within their societies. Not surprisingly, this unwavering commitment to the equality of women and men has been used, in some countries, as a pretext for ongoing calumnies and assaults against Bahá'ís (Karlberg 2022).

Regarding the veiling of women, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said on 6 August 1912 at a talk in Dublin, New Hampshire:

> All women in Persia are enveloped in veils in public. So completely covered are they that even the hand is not visible. This rigid veiling is unspeakable ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1982, no. 88.13).

This was almost a quarter of a century before Reza Shah, king of Iran, issued a decree banning all forms of Islamic veils in public, on 8 January 1936 (Kashf-e hijab, which included the headscarf—hijab—and the cloth that covers the head, most of the face and the whole body—the chador, not to be confused with the burqa, which is an outer garment, covering the whole of the head and body). The chador is particularly disabling for women, as it has no fasteners and has to be held by hand under the chin, thus preventing women from undertaking many physical tasks. It seems it was the chador that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was particularly referring to, although in general Bahá'í women are not veiled in any way unless required to be so by the law of the land.

The law requiring veiling was reinstated during the Islamic revolution in Iran when on 7 March 1979, the day before International Women's Day, Ruhollah Khomeini, later to become the supreme ruler, announced that all women must wear the hijab in public. More than 40 years later, the women of Iran were still chaffing at the ruling, leading to months of street demonstrations by women and men following the death of Mahsa Amini at the hands of the 'morality police' for failing to comply with the law. The Bahá'ís were caught up in the government's backlash, as they were in 1979, with arbitrary arrests and imprisonment.

2.2.1. The Bahá'í Training Institute

Since 1996, the worldwide Bahá'í community has been embarked on a programme of training for all its adherents and others to build the capacity of individuals to apply the Bahá'í teachings to the development and transformation of society. Incorporated into the programme is training around social action at both a conceptual level and a practical one as people in a neighbourhood begin to apply Bahá'í concepts and practices, such as the moral and spiritual education of children and 'junior youth' (aged 12 through 14 years), in programmes run primarily by themselves. Included in these efforts is this guidance: 'the principle of equality between the sexes must inform social action in general—that is, every project must manifest this truth in every aspect of its operation' (Ruhi Institute 2020). It further notes that 'In the case of the widespread injustice being perpetrated against "one half of the world's population", the transformation that must occur in the structures sustaining human life on earth—social, economic, political, and cultural—as well as in collective consciousness, is so profound that the equality of women and men will surely need to remain an unremitting concern of every Bahá'í endeavour for the foreseeable future.'

2.2.2. Barli Development Institute for Rural Women, Indore, India

Established in 1985, the Barli Development Institute for Rural Women (formerly the Bahá'í Vocational Institute for Rural Women) was set up to provide rural and tribal women from villages around Indore with the skills and knowledge they needed to improve the quality of their lives, their families and communities. About 200 women a year attend a six-month programme of development activities focused on improving health and nutrition, raising household income, increasing literacy, and environmental protection and improvement. Over the years, Barli has extended its programme to include education in women's rights and conflict resolution skills, as well as solar cooking, organic farming, and tailoring. Barli graduates also undertake a service programme, some working at health centres, others teaching children's classes and planting trees to improve the environment. The programme enables women to earn a living and has thus raised their status in the eyes of their families and communities, which the Barli Institute notes has increased the general understanding of the equality of women and men locally. As of 2022, more than 8500 women from about 800 villages have attended Barli's training programme. (Barli Development Institute for Rural Women 2022; McGilligan 2012).

2.3. Discourse

In 1946, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was established by ECOSOC resolution 11(II) of 21 June 1946 (CSW 1946). This functional commission of ECOSOC, created to promote women's rights, now also oversees the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the leading document agreed by governments at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, September 1995 (United Nations 1995) and provides a gender perspective across the UN. A large number of the statements of the BIC regarding women and girls have been presented at the annual meetings of the CSW.

The first statement regarding women made by BIC to the CSW was in August 1947, 'A Bahá'í Statement on the Rights of Women', which set out some of the religion's teachings on the equality of women and men, including:

* 'Sex equality is a basic Bahá'í principle'
* 'The present imbalance in society, which results from the dominance of man over woman, is a dangerous phenomenon and may be considered as one cause of war.'
* 'Sex equality connotes an organic change in the social structure.'
* 'The Bahá'í teachings advocate for women an education equal to that received by men, since woman is the first educator of the child; and opportunity to pursue any career for which they are qualified, with special emphasis on their role as keepers of the peace' (BIC 1947b).

The statement draws on the Bahá'í texts and statements of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and links equality with other themes considered here, such as the education of the girl child. Recalling that the Second World War had ended only two years earlier on 2 September 1945, the statement about role of women in peacekeeping was not perhaps very unusual, but identifying male dominance of women as a cause of war seems prescient. The link between the two does not appear to be widely recognized. This same point was echoed by the Universal House of Justice in its 1985 statement on peace:

> The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged prerequisites of peace. The denial of such equality perpetrates an injustice against one half of the world's population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the workplace, to political life, and ultimately to international relations. There are no grounds, moral, practical, or biological, upon which such denial can be justified. Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavour will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge (Universal House of Justice 1985).

Another unusual concept in the BIC statement is 'Sex equality connotes an organic change in the social structure'. The scriptural basis for this may be these verses of Bahá'u'lláh, which echo the Hebrew Bible (Yeshayahu/Isaiah 2:4; Michah/Micah 4:3):

> We cherish the hope that through the earnest endeavours of such as are the exponents of the power of God—exalted be His glory—the weapons of war throughout the world may be converted into instruments of reconstruction and that strife and conflict may be removed from the midst of men (Bahá'u'lláh 1978, p. 23).

> Soon will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead (Bahá'u'lláh 1983, p. 7).

Shoghi Effendi, the head of the Bahá'í Faith at the time, wrote on 28 November 1931:

> The principle of the Oneness of Mankind—the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve . . . does not constitute merely the enunciation of an ideal . . . It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced (Shoghi Effendi 1991, pp. 42–3).

The BIC statement aligns with the preamble to the UN Charter, which came into force on 24 October 1945, which 'determined' 'to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women' (United Nations 1945), and predates the adoption by the UN General Assembly of Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10 December 1948 (United Nations 1948b).

Subsequent statements of the BIC have made similar statements linking equality to peace but also to a host of other themes. For example, in 2006, the BIC responded to the 2006 Commission on Social Development's review of the First United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, acknowledging the advances made in the context of the Millennium Development Goals, but also noting:

> Despite these advances . . . the underlying materialistic assumptions driving poverty eradication efforts remain virtually unchallenged: it is generally accepted that an increase in material resources will eradicate this condition from human life. . . . Yet the most persistent ills obstructing the peaceful development of peoples and nations—the marginalization of girls and women, failing states, the lack of political freedoms, the spread of HIV/AIDS, the proliferation of weapons and violent conflict, inter-ethnic and racial tensions, religious intolerance and extremism, lawlessness and growing unemployment—cannot be alleviated by material means alone. These social ills evidence a different kind of poverty—one rooted in the values and attitudes that shape relationships between individuals, communities, and nations as well as between the governors and the governed.

The BIC suggested ways forward, including establishing gender equality, for example, expanding development indicators to assess ethical and moral capacities as well as Gross National Product and the Human Development Index, on the grounds that 'progress of communities and nations requires not only material inputs and legal measures to secure order, but the development of moral capabilities to govern behaviour and decision-making by individuals and institutions' and proposed 'a set of principles as a basis for the construction of ethically-based development indicators', including gender equality, trustworthiness and freedom of thought, conscience and belief (BIC 2006a).

As a mechanism for influencing the discourse on social development, such a statement may not appear to be very useful. However, it is interesting to note that in the framing of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (called Agenda 2030), gender equality is not only an independent goal (no. 5) but made its way into most of the other 16 goals, either directly or by implication (i.e., by the use of 'all' or 'universal').

In 2007, the BIC made a similar intervention of principle in its comments on the UN's draft of 'Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights'. It suggested the inclusion of a new guiding principle, the equality of men and women:

> While guiding principle 'A. Participation by the poor', includes a section regarding women in poverty, the persistently disproportionate number of women among the world's poor, including elderly women, the systemic violation of girls' and women's rights, and the gross under-representation of women in governance at all levels, merits the creation of a separate principle termed, 'equality of men and women', to guide all poverty alleviation efforts. The aim of this principle is not only to call attention to the dire condition of women but also to remind states that the full and confident participation of women in legal, political, economic, academic, social and artistic arenas is a prerequisite for a more just and peaceful development pathway. Their participation, in turn, opens up opportunities for men and boys to excel as fathers, husbands, workers, community members and leaders in ways that do not exist today (BIC 2007).

The resulting document 'Final draft of the guiding principles on extreme poverty and human rights, submitted by the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona', 18 July 2012 (United Nations 2012a) was adopted by the Human Rights Council on 27 September 2012 by consensus, in resolution 21/11 and on 20 December 2012, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on human rights and extreme poverty(A/RES/67/164, para. 17) in which it 'Takes note with appreciation of the guiding principles on extreme poverty and human rights, adopted by the Human Rights Council in its resolution 21/11 as a useful tool for States in the formulation and implementation of poverty reduction and eradication policies, as appropriate' (United Nations 2012b). The adoption was the culmination of a consultative process over many years that included States Parties, UN agencies, treaty bodies, other intergovernmental organizations, national human rights institutions, and non-governmental organizations, such as the BIC. Perhaps unexpectedly, the final document included the new principle 'Equality between men and women' as the third of the 'Foundational principles' (United Nations 2012c).

The BIC submission to the Commission on the Status of Women in 2020, 'Developing New Dynamics of Power to Transform the Structures of Society' (BIC 2020), took the opportunity of the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 'to analyse social structures and power dynamics that are hindering the full expression of gender equality', noting that the implementation of equality 'in all facets of life is far from realized' and that 'a number of recent setbacks around the world with respect to securing previous gains demonstrate the vulnerability of efforts that employ the adversarial methods of the very structures that impede the advancement of women'. It called for a 'deep examination of the current ordering of society' to 'identify obstacles hindering equality and opportunities for its flourishing' and a 'restructuring society based on ideals of oneness, unity and justice'. It also reviewed the efforts towards advancing gender equality at the

United Nations since the 1995 world conference on women, remarking that the dialogue 'has centered largely on expanding access to power within current, imbalanced structures', a process that 'has failed to fully address inequalities that have been perpetuated and reinforced across generations'. The obstacle was identified as the reluctance of 'those who are most favoured by the current ordering of society' to effect the 'total transformation of a system they perceive to be of value'.

Using concepts identified in its first statement to CSW in 1947, the BIC described how the 'dynamics of domination and opposition have come to define many human relationships, including those between women and men'.

> Efforts to achieve gender equality are frequently framed as battles for power. In its contentious expression, power generates inequality, violence, and exploitation, and cannot easily be oriented to the common or interpersonal good. In a system that is set up like a zero-sum game, it may make sense to fight for access to limited resources and for positions of privilege. Yet, is a zero-sum paradigm the pinnacle of social organization?

Its recommended approaches similarly echoed earlier documents: 'tapping into the powers of the human spirit and of the collective', investing in 'educational processes that give attention to developing both the intellectual and spiritual powers of human beings' and that 'promote the oneness of humanity and the equality of women and men'. It advocated seeking 'moral solutions' and spiritual sources of power to address 'crises of corruption, greed and oppression' and to transform society to one focused on the 'betterment of humanity as a whole'.

There are many more examples of the contributions the BIC has made to the discourse on gender equality (BIC 2023c). Over a 75-year period, the BIC has remained true to its original advocacy of the equality of women and men but has become more sophisticated, and more nuanced, in its discourse, drawing not only on statements of principle found in the Bahá'í texts but also on experience from the grassroots through to the international arena to inform its argument. It appears to have been somewhat successful in influencing the international discourse, accepting that the universal application of the concepts has lagged behind the rhetoric at the UN.

3. Theme B: Education of the Girl Child

3.1. Bahá'í Texts

> Unto every father hath been enjoined the instruction of his son and daughter in the art of reading and writing and in all that hath been laid down in the Holy Tablet (Bahá'u'lláh 1992, para. 48).

> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in His Tablets, not only calls attention to the responsibility of parents to educate all their children, but He also clearly specifies that the 'training and culture of daughters is more necessary than that of sons', for girls will one day be mothers, and mothers are the first educators of the new generation. If it is not possible, therefore, for a family to educate all the children, preference is to be accorded to daughters since, through educated mothers, the benefits of knowledge can be most effectively and rapidly diffused throughout society (quoted in Bahá'u'lláh 1992, n76).

> Daughters and sons must follow the same curriculum of study, thereby promoting unity of the sexes ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1982, no. 62.7).

> She must become proficient in the arts and sciences and prove by her accomplishments that her abilities and powers have merely been latent . . . Woman must especially devote her energies and abilities toward the industrial and agricultural sciences, seeking to assist mankind in that which is most needful ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1982, no. 95.11).

3.2. Praxis

3.2.1. Education of Girls in Iran

Efforts to put the Bahá'í concepts regarding the equality of women and men and the advancement of women into practice began early in the lifetime of the religion. An early step was the education of girls as prescribed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. It appears that Bahá'ís make significant provision for the education of women and girls, and do not see women merely as victims or oppressed, needing the assistance of men. They are rather seen as active agents of change in their communities, promoters of the advancement of women, protagonists of education for women and girls, and engaged participants and leaders of Bahá'í communities and society, and as equal providers of information, skills, and leadership. This approach is likely based on the letters ('Tablets') sent by both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá to their followers. Momen notes:

> The Bahá'í World Centre has recorded some 20,000 items as works of Bahá'u'lláh and 30,000 as works of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the vast majority being letters to their followers in Iran. The Bahá'í leaders encouraged their followers to be less parochial and more global in their outlook, to seek education and to raise the position of women in their communities (M. Momen 2015, p. xxiii).

Examples of the implementation of this are seen across Iran in the founding of schools for girls. At first these were similar to the basic traditional primary schools (*maktábs*) common in Iran, where children would be taught elementary literacy and poetry, and would receive religious training.

As the Bahá'í Faith spread in Iran following the proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh of his mission in 1863, communities of Bahá'ís began to develop in cities, towns, and villages across the country (see M. Momen 2015, 2021). Shavar (2009, p. 5) puts the number of Bahá'ís at the end of the 19th century as around 100,000). These were loosely organized at first but starting around 1879 in Tehran (M. Momen 2015, pp. 24, 89–91) they gradually tried to implement the provisions of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh's book of laws, including the establishment of consultative councils in every city (Bahá'u'lláh 1992, para. 30). The council in Tehran was more formally established in 1897 as the Central Assembly of Tehran, a precursor of both the Local Spiritual Assembly of Tehran and the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran (M. Momen 2015, p. 92). Many such local assemblies were established in Iran in the early years of the 20th century and among the actions many took was the establishment of schools, initially for boys and later for girls. Shavar argues that so pervasive was the Bahá'í emphasis on 'kindness, education and science, just rule and protection of subjects from oppression and injustice, political quietism, loyalty to the state' that the Bahá'í Faith 'became a source of religious, moral and social modernism in Qajar Iran' (Shavar 2009, p. 5). Thus the discourse was on modernization and, necessarily, education, including the education of girls. The Bahá'ís published their own analysis in 1928, looking back over the preceding quarter of a century or so:

> It is the Persian Bahá'ís who have most ardently sought out and developed the advantages of modern education, including instruction in technical subjects; it is the Persian Bahá'ís who have psychologically overcome the traditional discrimination against women; and it is the Persian Bahá'ís finally, who, of all citizens, have cultivated the simple virtues of honesty, good-will and co-operation which are the vital elements in any democracy worthy the name (Holley 1928, p. 37).

Though possibly somewhat exaggerated, as it fails to take account of the Iranian reformist movement towards the modernization of schools from the early 1850s, including the 'controversial' question of the education of women (Shavar 2009, pp. 12–14), this narrative highlights the nature of the discourse on women and education in which the Bahá'ís participated, if not originated. The establishment of schools for girls was a significant aspect of the application of Bahá'í concepts to social life.

All Bahá'í schools in Iran were closed in 1934 on the orders of the government when the Bahá'ís refused to keep the schools open on Bahá'í holy days, as opening on holy days

is in contravention of Bahá'í law (Shoghi Effendi 1995, pp. 362–3; Shoghi Effendi 1970, pp. 51–2).

3.2.2. Education of Girls in the 21st Century

There are numerous examples of the Bahá'í effort to extend education to girls, particularly where access to education is limited, where cultural norms discourage girls going to school or continuing their education beyond puberty, and where families are unable or reluctant to pay for girls' education.

Remy Desai-Patel, blogging for the Borgen Project (2022), which fights extreme poverty, describes how the high rate of poverty affects school attendance in Central African Republic and describes various organizations that are working to improve the situation, including the Youth Education Pack, funded by Education Cannot Wait, and the Bahá'í community:

> After-school programs could be of great use and benefit as well, allowing children to have a safe space away from their home lives. Baha'i communities are an incredible example, where they have found multiple ways to prioritize and bring education to children who need it. There is a definitive aspiration by many to boost education in the Central African Republic and more success stories such as the one in Baha'i are inevitable (Desai-Patel 2020).

The BIC described the informal educational work being undertaken by women in Central African Republic, describing how women in rural villages have established informal classes for the moral and spiritual education of young people in their neighbourhoods and mentor others to become teachers. Over time community members gather to consult about their aspirations for the local young people and together establish a community-supported school (BIC 2018b).

In Uganda, a Bahá'í youth group convened a series of community discussions on the importance of educating the girl child and afterwards the village sent its first young woman to college (BIC 2018b).

The *Vanuatu Daily Post*'s article 'Teoumaville Peace Conference: Education of Girls as a Road to Peace' of 3 July 2018, highlighted the importance of girls' education, the challenges that the country faced in achieving this and how this could be addressed. The conference organizers were inspired by the Bahá'í quote: 'The world of humanity has two wings—one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly.' The conference opened with brief statements on peace, human rights and the education of girls, made by community leaders and voluntary organizations, including Peace Corps, Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition, Vanuatu Young Women for Change, and the Bahá'ís (Vanuatu Daily Post 2018).

The BIC document *For the Betterment of the World: The Worldwide Bahá'í Community's Approach to Social and Economic Development* (BIC 2018a) features a number of Bahá'í educational programmes focused on girls, such as one in Battambang, Cambodia, where usually only boys are offered formal education. The Bahá'ís' community-building efforts increased the 'consciousness of the equality of women and men' such that more girls were able 'to receive higher levels of education', such that one girl became the first girl in her village to attend high school. She in turn helped many younger girls 'to advance in their own education' and was later asked by the Bahá'ís to train youth in other villages. Because people now have a better understanding the importance of the education of girls, 'it is common practice for girls in her village to receive formal education' (BIC 2018a, p. 14).

3.3. Discourse

The UN Commission on the Status of Women introduced the theme of the education of girls in its second session (1948) and this has been a staple of its work agenda since. The Bahá'í International Community seems to have begun its particular focus on girls soon after its accreditation to ECOSOC. In its statement to the UN on 14 January 1974, it posited that prioritizing girls' education ahead of boys is important for developing the wider community:

> To place greater emphasis on the importance of the contribution of women as mothers and as educators of children . . . parents are urged to give preference to the education of girls if both boys and girls in the family cannot be given equal opportunity for education.
>
> It is not the Bahá'í view, however, that women are to be considered important only in relationship to the rearing of children and attending to the duties of the household. The importance placed on the education of women in the Bahá'í Faith is intended to bring about the equality of men and women (BIC 1974a).

The Bahá'í International Community has contributed numerous statements on this theme (e.g., BIC 1975) to the CSW and other UN agencies, often with further elaboration and details of how the basic principle is operationalized. The application of this principle by Bahá'ís at the grassroots has provided experience that the community draws on to go beyond the simple articulation of the idea but has also informed its evolving discourse.

The Bahá'í contribution to the discourse has also developed as the implications of what educated women offer to the ever-advancing civilization has become more apparent: a wider and deeper range of skills, concepts, and attitudes that girls need to acquire to become active agents of the development of their communities and families. Basic literacy skills are still required but a much more complex and sophisticated set of skills, knowledge acquisition and creation, and conceptual thinking are now necessary, not just for the advancement of individual women into the work force but as critical players and decision-makers in governance, legislation, business, environmental protection, social and economic development, and in creating new forms of education itself. A few examples suffice:

'Seizing the Opportunity: Redefining the challenge of climate change' (BIC 2008):

> A fundamental component of resolving the climate change challenge will be the cultivation of values, attitudes and skills that give rise to just and sustainable patterns of human interaction with the environment . . . In practical terms, this means that girls and boys must be afforded access to the same curricula, with priority given to the girl child who will one day assume the role of educating future generations. The curriculum itself must seek to develop in children the capacity to think in terms of systems, processes and relationships rather than in terms of isolated disciplines. Indeed, the problem of climate change has powerfully demonstrated the need for integrated and systemic approaches. Students must also be given the concrete skills to translate their awareness into action. This can be accomplished, in part, through incorporating an element of public service into curricula, thereby helping students to develop the ability to initiate projects, to inspire action, to engage in collective decision-making and to cultivate their sense of dignity and self-worth. Overall, the curriculum should strive to integrate theoretical and practical considerations as well as to link notions of individual progress with service to the broader community.

'Youth and Adolescents Education in Service of Community' (BIC 2012):

> In order for youth to play their important role, the inequities of girls' access to quality education must be addressed. As has been repeatedly affirmed, the education of girls has a 'multiplier effect'—it results in reduced chances of early marriage, greater likelihood of girls' informed and active role in family planning, reduced infant and maternal mortality, enhanced participation of girls in social, economic and political decision-making, and the promotion of economic prosperity. This is particularly urgent in parts of the world where adolescent girls are married and begin to bear children. The need to extend educational opportunities to girls rests on the understanding that the equality of men and women, boys and girls is a fundamental truth about human reality and not just a desirable condition to be achieved for the good of society. Their full participation in the arenas of law, politics, science and technology, commerce, and religion, to name but a few, are

> needed to forge a social order enlightened by the contributions and wisdom of fully half of the world's population . . . Governments, then, must follow through on their commitments to prohibit the unjust practices of infanticide, prenatal sex selection, female genital mutilation, trafficking of girl children and use of girls in prostitution and pornography, and to enforce laws to ensure that marriage is entered into only with the free and full consent of both spouses. The overarching objective must be to address the root causes of gender bias so that all people can play their rightful role in the transformation of society.
>
> 'Women's Health and Human Rights' (BIC 2011):
>
> Ultimately, it is imperative to address women's rights in a manner that recognizes the woman's full role in society and fosters her sense of self-worth as well as the intrinsic nobility of every woman, man and child . . . without a comprehensive approach to women's rights, their efforts may prove ineffective or unsustainable. A literate woman is more likely to make better health decisions. It has been shown that one to three years of a mothers' schooling can decrease children's mortality rate by 15 percent. An economically sustained woman will have a greater ability to avoid sex trafficking and slavery. Women in good health have the opportunity to pursue educational and economic opportunities and to contribute more fully to the betterment of society.
>
> Boys born into such environments are also the beneficiaries. With educated and healthy mothers comes a reduced risk of involvement in sexual crimes and other offenses as youth and adults. As women are the first educators of their children, young boys will be more likely to reap the benefits of literacy, economic opportunity, and good health as well. This cycle will be reinforcing, resulting in a tipping point at which the society will no longer tolerate the oppression of its girls and women.

4. Theme C: Leadership and Participation

4.1. Bahá'í Texts

They [women] will enter all the administrative branches of politics. They will attain in all such a degree as will be considered the very highest station of the world of humanity and will take part in all affairs . . . At the time of elections the right to vote is the inalienable right of women, and the entrance of women into all human departments is an irrefutable and incontrovertible question. No soul can retard or prevent it ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1967, pp. 182–3).

> The woman has greater moral courage than the man; she has also special gifts which enable her to govern in moments of danger and crisis ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1987, p. 103).
>
> . . . both women and men are eligible for election to Secondary and Local Houses of Justice (currently designated as National and Local Spiritual Assemblies; Bahá'u'lláh 1992, n80).

4.2. Praxis

4.2.1. Women's Participation in Bahá'í Elections and Membership of Bahá'í Institutions

One of the measures of women's advancement and equality is the participation of women in political processes and leadership (see e.g., World Economic Forum 2022, 'Global Gender Gap Report'). Tracking the number of national leaders who are women is common (e.g., Statista 2022a), including in popular media (e.g., Time 2022a), and the discourse around it in recent years has included the perception that many of them are much better leaders than are men (e.g., Pew Research Center 2018; and Mayer and May 2021). According to UN Women, 30 women were serving as Heads of State and/or Government in 28 countries as of 19 September 2022 (UN Women 2022a; World Population Review 2022; shortly after these statistics were published the woman who was British prime minister

resigned, the shortest serving PM ever). To put these numbers in context, there are 193 member States of the United Nations (United Nations 2022a).

A word about the Bahá'í system of administration and governance: There is no clergy or clerical structure within the Bahá'í Faith. The Bahá'í administrative order provides the framework for governance at all levels—local, regional, national, and international—and comprises two 'arms', elected and appointed (for details from a Bahá'í perspective, see Bahá'í Faith 2022b; and Mitchell 2009). For the purposes of this article, I have looked at two dimensions of women's participation in the system: the ability of women to vote and to be elected to office, and the frequency of their election to local and national Bahá'í institutions.

4.2.2. Women and the Establishment of Bahá'í Institutions

It was not until the late 19th century that there were sufficient numbers of Bahá'ís living in one area to merit the formation of local Bahá'í institutions, and then only in Iran. Another factor in the evolution of these institutions may have been the very concept of ordinary people, non-clerics, electing a religious body that had responsibility over others, as this was outside the experience of most people, particularly Middle Eastern women. In North America, businesses had boards and the earliest efforts to establish Bahá'í institutions there reflected both processes and structures from that sector as well as from the political realm. The Bahá'í system described above emerged over time, the earliest form being an appointed body of men established in Tehran in 1899, until 'Abdu'l-Bahá initiated the process in the early 1900s. In Iran and in the Middle East in general, women were excluded from participation until the 1950s, possibly on grounds of cultural norms, the breaking of which would have drawn further fire on an already persecuted religion.

Institutions emerged in North America and Europe as the number of Bahá'ís increased across each country and as larger numbers of Bahá'ís lived in the same geographic area, thereby increasing the number of communities where the election of the local spiritual assembly was feasible.

United States

In the early days of the Bahá'í Faith in the West, there were a number of issues with which the Bahá'ís grappled. One was the question of whether to organize the movement at all. The debate about this issue has been well rehearsed elsewhere (see, for example, Hollinger 1992, Introduction). In North America particularly there was a question about the role of women in the administration of the Bahá'í community, should it ever be organized. Because women made up such a large number of the early believers, they seem to have been influential in the discussions about these issues.

However, women were largely excluded from most of the earliest attempts at organization. For example, in Kenosha, Wisconsin, a seven-member all-male Board of Counsel was formed in 1899 or 1900 (Dahl 1992, p. 10; Shoghi Effendi 1995, p. 260; Stockman 1985, p. 112).When this lapsed circa 1902, the Bahá'ís made more informal arrangements for their administration, which included women. But when the Board was temporarily reconstituted in 1904, women were again excluded.[3]

Stockman notes that by the end of January 1898 the number of Bahá'ís in Chicago was over 155, the largest and most active of the Bahá'í communities of the time. The Chicago community re-organized itself in March 1900 and selected a ten-member Board of Council (Stockman 1985, pp. xxix, 93, 170). The next year, 15 May 1901, the Chicago Bahá'ís elected a nine-man Board of Council for a term of five years and on 24 May 1901 changed its name from the Chicago Board of Council to the House of Justice. Shortly afterward, on 29 May 1901, the Bahá'í women, led by Corinne True and Ella Nash, elected the 'Women's Auxiliary Board', which controlled the finances of the Chicago community. On 10 May 1902, at the request of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Chicago House of Justice changed its name to House of Spirituality but did not change its all-male composition. It was incorporated in 1907, the first Bahá'í community to acquire legal status. The Women's Auxiliary Board was

renamed the 'Assembly of Teaching' after 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed a letter to it with this designation (Stockman 1995, pp. xv, xxv, 44–50, 54, 278).

Several years later, in line with the emerging suffrage movement in the West, Corinne True forced the issue by writing to 'Abdu'l-Bahá about whether women could serve on Bahá'í institutions. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's replied in July 1909:

> In the law of God, men and women are equal in all rights *save* in the Universal House of Justice, for the Chairman and members of the House of Justice are men according to the Text of the Book. Aside from this, in all the rest of the Associations, like the Convention for building the Mashreq'Ul-Azkar, the Assembly of Teaching, the Spiritual Assembly, Philanthropic Association, Scientific Associations, men and women are co-partners in all the rights (Stockman 1995, p. 501 n606).[4]

Stockman notes that True shared the contents of this Tablet with the Chicago House of Spirituality but that it did not immediately act to include women, as the 'House of Spirituality was not sure whether it was a Spiritual Assembly. Indeed, it was not clear what the Universal House of Justice was' (Stockman 1995, p. 323). Chicago eventually concluded that while the boards were initially to be all-male, they should now include women, as time had moved on.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's correspondence with Corinne True was a clear signal that women could, and would, be members of decision-making bodies within the religion. True received more than 50 letters ('Tablets') from 'Abdu'l-Bahá (Whitmore 1984, p. 21), some about the position of women in the religion and calling her to action in its promotion. As a result she created and was the first president of the Women's Assembly of Teaching, a parallel organization to the House of Spirituality. On 19 June 1908, 'Abdu'l-Bahá responded positively to her suggestion that an organization be created to oversee the establishment of the first Bahá'í House of Worship in the West, to be located in the Chicago area. In his letter he affirmed, 'In this new meeting, especially for the establishment of the Temple, ladies are also to be members' ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1909, p. 100).

The national organization that resulted was the Bahai Temple Unity, the constitution of which did not mention that women could be members, but neither did it exclude them. Of the 39 delegates elected to represent their states at the convention establishing the organization, 16 were women, including Corinne True. The organization was created and its nine members—six men and three women—elected on 23 March 1909, including Anna Parmerton as vice-president and Corinne True as financial secretary (Whitmore 1984, pp. 260–1, 52).

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá was visiting the United States in 1912, he advised the Chicago House of Spirituality to reform as a 'Spiritual Meeting', onto which both women and men could be elected, and this was effected on 11 August 1912.

Ten years later, in 1922, at a time when American women had only recently obtained the right to vote in political elections, Shoghi Effendi sent a message to the North American Bahá'ís to transform the 'Executive Board' into a legislative institution (Rabbání 1969, p. 56). On 25 April 1922, a 'National Spiritual Assembly' was elected to replace the Executive Board of the Bahá'í Temple Unity. The election procedure followed the one common in political elections in the United States: candidates were nominated, with a straw poll taken to trim the number of eligible candidates, and electioneering. It appears that the difference between the new body and its forerunner was little more than a change in name (Rutstein 1987, p. 160; Whitmore 1984, p. 122) and Shoghi Effendi did not recognize it as having been properly formed. It took three more years for the transformation to take place. Shoghi Effendi wrote to 'the esteemed members of the American National Spiritual Assembly' on 29 January 1925 setting out the way the forthcoming national convention should be conducted and also the qualities of the members of a National Spiritual Assembly (Shoghi Effendi 1925). Following the election in April 1925, at which two women were elected (Baha'i News Letter 1925, p. 2), Shoghi Effendi recognized the American national body as

the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada (Shoghi Effendi 1995, p. 333) in a cable received on 25 July:

> Heartily endorse Convention's choice. May America's National representatives fulfill our fondest expectations . . . Shoghi (Shoghi Effendi, in Baha'i News Letter 1925, p. 7).

British Isles

In Britain, organization came later. The Bahá'í community was smaller and less well developed than that in North America. Phillip Smith suggests that in Britain the Bahá'í Faith began not as a religion but as a 'loose inclusive movement' (Phillip Smith 1992, p. 153), the adherents seeing the movement as a 'widening of the basis of (their) faith' (Rosenberg 1911a, p. 21).

As a result of this thinking, organization of the Bahá'í community of the British Isles was less well advanced than in North America in the first two decades of the 20th century. By the time the British Bahá'ís got around to organizing themselves formally, many of the battles about whether women were to serve in administrative capacities had already been fought and won in North America. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, to see that British Bahá'í women participated more or less equally with men on Britain's first Bahá'í institutions, which came into being more than decade after those in North America.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, while in Paris[5] in November 1911, discussed with Ethel Rosenberg the necessity of setting up a committee in London that would have 'absolute power to decide what is to be done' regarding the collection of moneys and Bahá'í publications (Rosenberg 1911b). 'Abdu'l-Bahá suggested a membership of six women and one man (Weinberg 1995, p. 142). This may point to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's wish to demonstrate the principle of the equality of women and men which he began to espouse most vigorously while in Paris and on his subsequent journey across North America. On the other hand, it may simply reflect the number of active and committed Bahá'ís in Britain at the time. In any case, this committee was never convened. Instead, shortly after the outbreak of World War I, on 16 November 1914, a 'Consultation Committee' was convened with eight members: six women and two men. (Weinberg 1995, pp. 155–6). This committee was not long-lived, however, possibly as a result of the rigours of the war. Dr Esslemont, a Bahá'í from Bournemouth who was on pilgrimage in 1919, was told by 'Abdu'l-Bahá that it should be re-established. After a preliminary meeting in October 1920, the re-grouped Council met for the first time in December 1920, with a membership of nine women and three men. The membership of this Council also was rather flexible, with members leaving to go abroad and replacement members being appointed by the Council itself. It appears that this committee was largely self-appointed, although it had the authority of 'Abdu'l-Bahá for its formation (Weinberg 1995, pp. 174–5).

In November 1921, Ethel Rosenberg returned to the Holy Land on pilgrimage to discover that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had just passed away and had appointed his grandson, Shoghi Effendi, to be the head of the religion, the Guardian. He emphasized to Rosenberg the need to elect a spiritual assembly in London (Weinberg 1995, p. 211). This was part of a wider plan to establish local spiritual assemblies throughout the Bahá'í world, as outlined by Shoghi Effendi in his letter to his 'fellow-workers in the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh' of 5 March 1922. He called for the establishment of local assemblies wherever nine or more believers lived, directing that all activities be placed under the authority of the local and national assemblies (Shoghi Effendi 1968, pp. 17–25). Shortly after, in April, he sent verbal messages to Germany through Consul Schwarz and to Britain through Ethel Rosenberg to form local spiritual assemblies and to arrange for the election of a national spiritual assembly in each country (Weinberg 1995, pp. 211–12; Rabbání 1969, p. 56).[6]

In Britain in late May 1922, the Bahá'í communities of London, Manchester, and Bournemouth collectively elected the Bahá'í Spiritual Assembly for England, also known as the Spiritual Assembly for London and the All-England Bahá'í Council (Weinberg 1995, p. 213). It met for the first time on June 17 of that year and was composed of seven women

and three men, plus two men representing communities outside London. In April 1923, this Council was disbanded and elections held for a London Spiritual Assembly. Ballots were sent to 77 people, 58 women (75%) and 19 men (25%) living in London and southern England who identified themselves with the Bahá'í religion. The resulting body consisted of three men and six women.

On 12 March 1923, Shoghi Effendi wrote to Bahá'ís in America, Great Britain, Germany, France, Switzerland, Italy, Japan, and Australasia about Bahá'í administration, outlining the process for the annual election of assemblies and calling for the establishment of local and national funds (Shoghi Effendi 1968, pp. 34–43; Rabbání 1969, p. 330). The British Assembly was concerned that an annual election would hinder the Bahá'í work, especially if new members were elected each time. Shoghi Effendi replied to their concerns, saying they should dissolve the current Assembly and hold an election for the new one, with exactly nine members. They immediately arranged for the election of the London Spiritual Assembly by postal ballot, the results of which included six women, four of whom had the highest number of votes (Weinberg 1995, pp. 223–4, 226). This body arranged a postal ballot for the National Spiritual Assembly, and five men and four women were elected, meeting for the first time on 13 October 1923. Mrs Thornburgh Cropper was elected treasurer and Ethel Rosenberg the secretary. This pattern of slightly more men than women serving on the national body was to continue until World War Two, when the numbers were reversed between 1943 and 1947, possibly a result of the recruitment of men into the war effort.

From these two early examples of women's participation on elected institutional bodies, it can be seen how instrumental women were in driving the creation of new institutions and in ensuring that women not only voted for their members but took on the responsibilities of membership themselves. As the Bahá'ís grew in number and the spread of the religion widened across the globe, women continued to feature significantly in this arena. It seems that in this period, when women in the West were struggling to obtain the vote, Bahá'í women were looking beyond the vote itself to being members of elected bodies of the religion. When the administrative institutions of the religion were first established, most women did not serve in governing roles in any sector. It was only in August 1920 that all women in the United States were granted the right to vote, while in the United Kingdom all women received the franchise in 1928, both well after the Bahá'ís had already established their elected administrative institutions at local, and even national, levels.

Other Countries

Two other National Spiritual Assemblies were elected at the same time as the British one, Germany (Austria was added to this assembly in 1934), and India and Burma (Pakistan was added in 1948). The National Spiritual Assembly of Egypt and Sudan was formed in 1924. In the 1930s, there were four women and five men on the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria. The first woman was elected to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma in 1936 (Shirin Fozdar). In common with other countries with a majority Muslim population, the National Spiritual Assembly of Egypt and Sudan had no women members. When in 1951 Bahá'í women in Egypt were extended the right of membership on local spiritual assemblies, Shoghi Effendi called it 'a notable step in the progress of Bahá'í women of the Middle East' (Shoghi Effendi 1971, p. 12). They were given the right to serve on the national assembly and to participate in the national convention in April 1956 (Shoghi Effendi 1971, pp. 96–7).

Iranian Bahá'í women were extended the right to serve on both local and national institutions in April 1954, Shoghi Effendi stating that the step removed the 'last remaining obstacle to the enjoyment of complete equality of rights in the conduct of the administrative affairs of the Persian Bahá'í Community' (Shoghi Effendi 1971, p. 65; Bahá'í World 1956).

This decision of Shoghi Effendi coincided with a period in Iran that saw more women taking part in political activism and when the status of women was part of public discourse in the country. Iranian women were given the right to vote and stand for parliament in 1963, a result of the White Revolution, a package of reforms that also saw the age of marriage for

girls raised from 9 to 15 (Tohidi 2016, pp. 75–89). The rapidity of the changes to the status of women in the White Revolution was a product of the modernization programme of Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi, which was itself an extension of the process begun by his father in the 1930s. Traditionalists saw these changes as pandering to American/Western secular interests and influence and were declared 'immoral' by religious leaders. Thus while Bahá'í women were applauded by their co-religionists for their participation in the electoral process and their complete equality with Bahá'í men in this arena of service, the perception of women by the wider population was not altered, despite the overwhelming popular vote in a referendum that secured the changes but which likely embedded the idea of the 'emancipation of women as immoral and dangerous' (Vogel 2018; see also Keddie 2006). The Islamic Revolution in 1979 retained the right of women to vote but reduced the legal age of marriage for girls to 9.[7]

The number of National Spiritual Assemblies increased by only three between 1926 and 1947, when the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria, disbanded during the Nazi regime, was reformed. One was the National Spiritual Assembly of Iraq, formed in 1931, with no women members. The National Spiritual Assembly of Iran formed in 1934, with no women members until Bahá'í women in Iran were accorded full rights in 1954 and Adelaide Sharp, an American Bahá'í who had moved to Iran in 1929 to assist with the education of girls, was duly elected to the National Assembly in that year (Shoghi Effendi 1971, p. 65). Today there are over 170 National Spiritual Assemblies.

4.2.3. Membership of Women on National Spiritual Assemblies

We now turn to women participating in the election of Bahá'í institutions and being elected to them.

In Western political elections, if one wished to increase the number of women elected to public office, the main way to achieve this would be to increase the number of women candidates by different strategies, for example by nominating or selecting only women candidates, restricting the number of male candidates, or having a 50/50 slate. This is not possible for Bahá'ís.

The participation of Bahá'ís in partisan politics is forbidden and they may not join or support political parties. They may vote in elections if they do not have to be a party member to do so (see an explanation for this in Universal House of Justice 2013). Similarly, election to their own governing councils must be free from partisanship, and is seen as a service, mostly volunteer and unremunerated. It is considered inappropriate to seek election. Bahá'í concepts of leadership, power, and authority are very different from current political concepts. Bahá'ís have no individual leaders but elect governing councils.

The process of election to Bahá'í institutions is also unusual compared to what is generally considered to be the democratic process, in which political parties nominate candidates for office, a campaign is launched, votes are canvassed and voters select from among the nominated candidates the ones for whom they will vote. The Bahá'í process has none of these elements. As there are no parties within the Bahá'í system, there is no manifesto, and no way to elicit the opinion of an individual on a topic dear to the heart of a voter, there is no ideological party platform around which people cluster and for which they seek support, nor is there a pathway to election, such as might be found in a party system. No one stands for office and no one campaigns. The governing councils elect their own officers, so no one stands for chair, secretary, or other position. Election is not considered a measure of the 'popularity' of an individual. The concept of leadership as often promoted in politics requires personal characteristics that are not the ones Bahá'ís are encouraged to seek in those to be elected. The method of voting in every election requires Bahá'ís write on their ballot (or record on a voting app) the names of the individuals they consider possess a number of spiritual qualities.

Shoghi Effendi advised electors

> . . . to consider without the least trace of passion and prejudice, and irrespective of any material consideration, the names of only those who can best combine the

> necessary qualities of unquestioned loyalty, of selfless devotion, of a well-trained mind, of recognized ability and mature experience.
>
> Those with the most votes, on the basis of plurality, are elected.

All members of the local Bahá'í community aged 18 and over are able to vote (the age was lowered from 21 in 2021; Universal House of Justice 2021a) and all those over the age of 21 are eligible for election. National Spiritual Assemblies (and, recently, some local spiritual assemblies of large Bahá'í communities) are elected by a two-stage process, whereby voters living in a designated geographic area (an electoral unit, not unlike a political electoral ward) vote at their 'unit convention' for a number of delegates who will vote at the 'national convention' for the National Spiritual Assembly. All the Bahá'ís of the country aged 21 and over are eligible for election to the National Spiritual Assembly, not just the delegates.

Bahá'ís are encouraged to think of their administrative institutions not as political bodies but rather as channels through which guidance and love flows to people in their communities. In this perspective, election to a Bahá'í administrative institution 'is regarded as a summons to service and not as an accession to power' (Universal House of Justice 2000b), and the authority is embedded within the institution itself, not in the individuals who compose it.

It appears that in the early years of the religion's development of it administrative institutions there was some difficulty around these concepts and thus quite a lot of guidance was provided by Shoghi Effendi, for example:

> I feel that reference to personalities before the election would give rise to misunderstanding and differences. What the friends should do is to get thoroughly acquainted with one another, to exchange views, to mix freely and discuss among themselves the requirements and qualifications for such a membership without reference or application, however indirect, to particular individuals. We should refrain from influencing the opinion of others, of canvassing for any particular individual, but should stress the necessity of getting fully acquainted with the qualifications of membership referred to in our Beloved's Tablets and of learning more about one another through direct, personal experience rather than through the reports and opinions of our friends (Shoghi Effendi 1927).

The reality, then, for voters is that they are completely free to vote for anyone they choose and who in their estimation has the combination of at least some of the requisite qualities. Women as well as men vote for these Bahá'í institutions and we may consider what this suggests, if anything, about the way the religion thinks about the nature, qualities, and roles of women and men.

It is in this light that we turn to statistics.

The tables below show the numbers of men and women serving on national (or nationally functioning) institutions in the British Isles and North America from their establishment. These two bodies have been chosen because of their early development, their long history and continuity, and the accessibility of information. Both were established at a time when the franchise and other political rights of women were being debated and were not yet fully realized. A more comprehensive study of National Spiritual Assemblies across other continents might well expose different patterns and shed more light on the application of the principle of the equality of women and men in this one aspect.

These show that in every year at least one woman was elected to these national bodies and in most years there was more than one. In Britain in the early years until 1933, women tended to outnumber men on the National Assembly, while from 1934 to 1943 the men outnumbered the women, with a reversal in the war years 1943 to 1946. From 1951 to 1964, the number of women dwindled significantly and from 1959 to 1972 generally only one or two women were elected. In the 21-year period 1973 to 1993, only two women were elected to the National Assembly in 12 of the years and three women in nine of those years. From 1994 to 2009, three women and six men were elected in almost every year, while in the 12 elections held between 2010 and 2021, the gender balance was more even, with 9 of

the years electing five men and four women. The election of 2022, however, saw only two women being elected.

In America, the gender balance changed significantly over time. From 1909 to 1945, only two or three women were elected each year, except for the years 1924 and 1925 when four women were elected. In the years 1946 to 2022, the genders were more balanced, with three women being elected in each of 26 years, four women in each of 41 years, and five women in 6 of the years between 2011 and 2022. (There are no statistics for the years 1922, 1933–1935, 1937–1938, 1940, and 1953).

Table 1 provides the numbers of women and men serving on the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles (comprising both the United Kingdom and Ireland until 1972, when Ireland formed its own National Spiritual Assembly and the mother National Spiritual Assembly became the United Kingdom) between 1922 and 2022 and the offices held. The electoral year for members of National Spiritual Assemblies runs from the date of their election at the national convention in April (or, since the election of the Universal House of Justice in 1963, late May for years in which there is an international convention; Universal House of Justice 1972). The members of the National Spiritual Assemblies elected in the year before the international convention (e.g., 2022 for the international convention 2023) are the electors of the Universal House of Justice at the international convention.

Table 1. Membership of the British National Spiritual Assembly.

Year	Men	Women	Notes
1922	3	7	London/All England
1922	3	6	London; 58 women, 19 men in London Bahá'í community
13 October 1923 to 10 May 1924	5 CV JS	4 JS T	First election NSA of the British Isles
1924	5 C V JS	4 JS T	The same man is C and JS; 2 × replacements W to M, M to W
1925	5 CV JS T	4 JS	The same man is C, T and JS
1926	4 C JS T	5 V JS	The same man was C, T and JS; in this year 9 'regular' members were elected and 10 'substitutes'. The figures are for the regulars.
1927	5 CST	5 VST	10—two had tied for 9th place and both served
1928	4 CTA	5 VS	2 × bi-elections M to M and M to M
1929	2	7 CVSTA	resignation of W, possible by-election, result unclear
1930	4	5 CVSTA	
1931	3 CT	6 VS	
1932	4 (3) VA	5 (6) CST	by-election M to W
1933	4	4 CVSA ?co-T	9th member thought to be a W; S and co-T the same woman
1934	5	4 CVSTA	S and T same woman
1935	4 V	5 CSTA	
1936	6 VSA	3 CT	
1937	6 VS	3 CT	by-election W to W
1938	5 VS	4 CT	
1939	5 VS	4 CT	by-election M to M
1940	5 CVST	4 A	C and T same man
1941	5 CVT	4 S	C and T same man 2 × by-elections M to M, M to M
1942	5 CTA	4 VS	
1943	4 CT	5 VS	
1944	3 CT	6 VS	
1945	2 (3) T	7 (6) CVS	by election W to M

Table 1. *Cont.*

Year	Men	Women	Notes
1946	4 CVST	5 A	by-election M to M; VC and T same man
1947	5 CVSA	4 T	by-election W to W
1948	5 CVSA	4 T	
1949	5 CVS	4 T	by-election W to W
1950	5 CVST	4 R	
1951	6 CST	3 VR	3 × by elections WtoM, MtoM, MtoW
1952	6 (5) CVST	3 (4)	2 × by elections W to W, M to W
1953	5 CVST	4	
1954	5 CVST	4	3 × by-elections MtoM, MtoM, WtoW
1955	5 (CS?)	4 (VTA?)	no officers' list
1956	6 CVTS	3	VT same man
1957	6 CVTS	3	VT same man
1958	6 CVTS	3	VT same man
1959	6 (7) CVSA	3 (2) T	3 x by-elections M to M, M to M, W to M
1960	7	2	no officers' list
1961	7	2	no officers' list by-election M to M
1962	7	2	no officers' list
1963	6	3	no officers' list
1964	6	3	no officers' list; by-election M to M
1965	7	2	no officers' list
1966	7 CVT	2 S	
1967	8 CVT	1 S	
1968	8 CVT	1 S	
1969	8 CVT	1 S	by-election M to M
1970	8	1	no officers' list
1971	8 CVS	1 T	
1972	8 CVS	1 T	first election NSA of the United Kingdom; by-election M to W
1973	7 CVS	2 T	
1974	7 CVS	2 T	
1975	6 CS	3 VT	
1976	6 CVS	3 T	
1977	6 CVS	3 T	by-election M to M
1978	6 CVS	3 T	
1979	7 CVS	2 T	by-election M to M
1980	7 CVS	2 T	
1981	7 CV	2 ST	by-election M to M
1982	6 CV	3 ST	
1983	6 CVT	3 S	
1984	6 CV	3 ST	
1985	6 CVS	3 T	
1986	6 CVS	3 T	
1987	7 CVS	2 T	
1988	7 CVS	2 T	by-election M to M
1989	7 CVS	2 T	

Table 1. *Cont.*

Year	Men	Women	Notes
1990	7 VS	2 C T?	
1991	7 VS	2 CT	by-election M to M
1992	7 VS	2 CT	
1993	7 VS	2 CT	
1994	6 VS	3 CT	
1995	6 VS	3 CT	
1996	6 VS	3 CT	
1997	6 VS	3 CT	
1998	6 VS	3 CT	by-election: M to M
1999	6 SV(T)	3 CT	by-election: W to W
2000	6 CVS	3 T	
2001	6 VSA	3 CT	
2002	6 VSA	3 CT	
2003	6 VSA	3 CT	
2004	6 VSA	3 CT	by-election W to W
2005	5 (6) VST	4 (3) C	Sec External Aff—M by-election W to M
2006	6 VST	3 C	by-election: M to M Sec External Aff—M
2007	6 VST	3 C	Sec External Aff—M
2008	6 VST	3 C	Sec External Aff—M
2009	6 VST	3 C	by-election: M to M
2010	5 VST	4 C	
2011	5 VST	4 C	
2012	5 VST	4 C	by-election: W to W
2013	5 VST	4 C	
2014	5 (4) ST	4 (5) CV	by-election: M to W
2015	5 CST	4 V	
2016	5 (6) CSTA	4 (3) V	By-elections ×2 WtoM C and A same person
2017	6 CST	3 V	
2018	6 VST	3 C	
2019	5 (6) CST	4 (3) V	by-election W to M
2020	6 CST	3 V	
2021	5 (6) CST	4 (3) V	by-election W to M
2022 *	7 CST	2 V	

* as at 6 January 2023; assumes people elected in April 2022 will continue to serve until May 2023. Legend: C = chairman; V = vice chairman; S = secretary; JS = joint secretary; T = treasurer; and A = assistant secretary. Note: The figures above are the result of the first election; numbers in brackets are changes as a result of a by-election, where known. In the elections from 1923 to 1926, 'substitute' members were elected as well as 'regular' members. Different sources record the membership and officer positions differently, particularly in the earlier years, when the processes for election were not well understood. Thus the statistics below may not be completely accurate for every year.

The numbers of women and men elected to this National Spiritual Assembly were fairly evenly balanced from 1922 until 1955, with the number of women only falling to three between 1936 and 1940, and in 1951. From 1956, the numbers of women fall to three and do not rise to four until 2005 (nearly half a century) and dropping to two in 17 of those years and to only one in five of those years. From 2006 until 2009, there were three women on the

National Spiritual Assembly and between 2010 and 2013, there were four. A by-election in 2014 brought a fifth woman onto the National Spiritual Assembly for the first time since 1946, although at the election in 2015 the number of women fell to four, and thereafter was between three and four until the 2022 election, where the number of women dropped to two for the first time since 1993.

There were approximately 100 different people serving on the National Spiritual Assembly during this 100-year period. Of these 39 were women, 11 of whom served for 13 years or longer (of these 6 served for 15 years or longer; and of these one served for 31 years). 16 different men each served for 13 years or longer (of these, 12 served for 15 years or longer, four of these serving for 25 years or longer, and one served for 32 years). The average length of service for women is 8.25 years and for men 9.5 years.

The statistics for officer holders on the National Spiritual Assembly are not available for every year. For years we do have statistics, the chairmanship was held by women for 38 years (34 of these by three women, two for 10 years each, and one for 14 years) and by men for 55 years (32 of these by two men, one for 17 years and one for 15 years). The vice chairmanship was held by women for 22 years and by men for 70 years. The secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly is its 'chief executive officer, and as such acts not only as liaison with the national committees, the Local Spiritual Assemblies and all the friends, but generally represents the National Spiritual Assembly and the Faith itself' to the wider community (Universal House of Justice 1981). This office was held by a woman 25 times and a man 67 times. The treasurer, who prepares and manages the budgets and heads the finance office, has been a woman 46 times and a man 45 times. For no year was a woman not elected to an office, whereas in four years it appears that no men were officers.

For the United States (Table 2), statistics begin with the precursor to the National Spiritual Assembly, the Bahá'í Temple Unity, which was the body created to oversee the early stages of the development of a Bahá'í house of worship (Mashriqu'l-Adhkár) in Wilmette, Illinois, near Chicago, the purchase of land, financing and contracts, and acting as a conduit for correspondence with 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Over time the organization took on other responsibilities related to this purpose, such as the dissemination of information, keeping track of membership and other administrative roles.

As with many other National Spiritual Assemblies, the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States emerged in 1948 from a geographically wider body, that of the United States and Canada, the latter having its own institution from that year.

While women were generally under-represented in North America across the whole period 1909–1975, and in Britain from 1936 to 1995 and in the 2020s (excepting the war years of 1943–1945), it is useful to note that they were usually at or near 'critical mass' (gendered critical mass, a percentage of a cohort, e.g., of legislators, is based on the idea that the number of women in the cohort makes a significant positive difference to the decision-making outcomes). Available statistics suggest this pattern has been replicated across much of the world since 1970s. Those statistics also suggest the percentage of women serving on local Bahá'í bodies has been higher throughout the Bahá'í history of each country.

When the Berlin wall fell in 1989, marking the end of the Cold War and the opening of the so-called eastern bloc to travel, trade, and previously proscribed activities, the Bahá'ís, who had been living in these countries, as well as visiting Bahá'ís, were able to spread the religion widely. Taking advantage of the new freedoms, the Universal House of Justice instituted a two year plan for Eastern Europe (1990–1992) and 10 new national assemblies were formed in the former Eastern Bloc in the period 1991–1994, bringing the European total to 30.

Table 3 (see Bahaipedia 2021) gives a flavour of the reach and institutional development in the last 40 years of the 20th century—across many continents and island groups—as well as the rate of growth and the participation of women. Almost all the National Spiritual Assemblies existing today were first elected by 1998. The number of women being elected to these institutions seems to reflect, to some extent, the cultural norms about women's role in society in each country.

Table 2. Membership of the American National Spiritual Assembly (Statistics of initial election; by-elections not recorded).

Year	Men	Women	Comments
1909	6	3	Bahai Temple Unity
1910	7	2	
1911	7	2	
1912	7	2	
1913	6	2	as reported
1914	7 PST	2 VF	
1915	7 PST	2 VF	
1916	7 PST	2 VF	
1917	6 C	3	
1918	6 PST	3 VF	
1919	7	2	
1920	6	3	
1921	7	2	
1922			no records
1923	6 PST	3 VF	
1924	5 CS At	4 T	
1925	5 CS At	4 T	First election NSA of US and Canada
1926	7 CS	2 T	
1927	6 CVST	3	
1928	6 CVST	3	
1929	7 CVST	2	
1930	7 CVST	2	
1931	7 CVST	2	
1932	7 S	2	other officers unknown
1933	ST		other records unknown
1934	CST		other records unknown
1935			no records
1936	8 CVST	1	
1937	S		other records unknown
1938	CS		other records unknown
1939	7 CSTR	2	
1940			records not found
1941	7 CSTR	2	
1942	7 CVSTR	2	
1943	7 CVSTR	2	
1944	7 CVSTR	2	
1945	7 CVST	2 R	
1946	5 VST	4 CR	
1947	5 VST	4 CR	

Table 2. *Cont.*

Year	Men	Women	Comments
1948	5 VST	4 CR	NSA of the United States
1949	5 VST	4 CR	
1950	5 CST	4 VR	
1951	5 CVST	4 R	
1952	5 CST	4 VR	
1953			In this year 2 M and 3 W 'pioneered'—no records found
1954	6 CVST	3 A	
1955	6 CVT	3 AR	
1956	5 CVST	4 AR	
1957	5 CVST	4 AR	
1958	5 CVST	4 AR	
1959	5 CVST	4 AR	
1960	6 CVST	3 AR	
1961	6 CVST	3 AR	
1962	5 CVST	4 AR	
1963	5 CVST	4 AR	
1964	6 CVST	3 AR	
1965	6 CVST	3 AR	
1966	6 CVST	3 AR	
1967	6 CVST	3 AR	
1968	6 CVST	3 AR	
1969	6 CVST	3	
1970	6 CVST	3	
1971	5 CVS	4 AT	
1972	5 CVS	4 TA	
1973	5 CVS	4 TA	
1974	6 CVS	3 TA	
1975	6 CVS	3 TA	
1976	6 CVS	3 T	
1977	6 CVS	3 TA	
1978	6 CSV	3 TA (admin) A(teaching)	
1979	6 CVS	3 TA	
1980	6 CVS	3 TA	
1981	5 CVS	4 TA	
1982	5 CVS	4 TA	
1983	5 CS	4 VT	
1984	5 CVS	4 T	
1985	5 CVS	4 T	
1986	7	2	

Table 2. *Cont.*

Year	Men	Women	Comments
1987	7	2	
1988	6	3	
1989	6	3	
1990	6	3	
1991	6	3	
1992	6	3	
1993	5	4	
1994	5	4	
1995	5	4	
1996	5	4	
1997	5	4	
1998	6	3	
1999	6	3	
2000	6	3	
2001	5	4	
2002	5	4	
2003	5	4	
2004	5	4	
2005	5	4	
2006	5	4	
2007	5 S	4	
2008	5 S	4	
2009	5 S	4	
2010	5 S	4	
2011	4 S	5	
2012	4 S	5	
2013	4 S	5	
2014	4 S	5	
2015	5 S	4	
2016	4 S	5	
2017	4 S	5	
2018	5 S	4	
2019	5 S	4	
2020	5 S	4	
2021	5 CS	4 T	
2022 *	5 S	4	

* as at 15 December 2022; assumes people elected in April 2022 will continue to serve until May 2023. Legend: C—chairman; V—vice chairman; S—secretary; T—treasurer; A—assistant secretary; R—recording secretary; P—president; F—finance officer; At—assistant treasurer. Note: The statistics for the United States are only for the 48 contiguous states; Alaska and Hawaii have their own National Spiritual Assemblies.

Table 3. National (or local) Spiritual Assembly throughout the World.

Name of National (or Local) Spiritual Assembly	Date First Formed	Number of Women Elected (out of 9) onto First NSA
Brazil	1961	4 (stats for 1962–1963)
Chile	1961	4
Gilbert and Ellice Islands (later Kiribati)	1967	3
Fiji	1970	2
Samoa	1970	5
Trinidad and Tobago	1971	4
First LSA in Greenland formed, in Nuuk	1979	3
Bermuda	1981	4
Cook Islands	1985	5
Guinea Bissau	1989	?3
LSA of Ishqabad (reformed after 60 years)	1989	3
Macau	1989	4
Czechoslovakia	1991	4
Romania	1991	3
Soviet Union	1991	2
West Leeward Islands	1991	6
Angola	1992	2
Azerbaijan	1992	2
Central Asia	1992	3
Greenland	1992	5
Hungary	1992	4
Niger	1992	1
Poland	1992	4
Kazakhstan	1994	6
Mongolia	1994	3
Tajikistan	1994	3
Belarus	1995	6
Georgia	1995	2
Sicily	1995	2

4.2.4. Statistics in Context

The statistics relating to women serving on National Spiritual Assemblies year on year indicate that they are at or near critical mass most of the time. For a comparison of sorts, the British House of Commons has 650 Members of Parliament (MPs), of which 224 are women (House of Commons Library 2022). The unelected House of Lords has 776 members (including Lord Bishops), 550 men, and 226 women (Statista 2022b). Thus 34 per cent of MPs and 29 per cent of members of the House of Lords are women. The first woman to be elected to the House of Commons was Constance Markievicz, in the general election of 1918, but she did not take her seat, a policy of her party, Sinn Fein. Nancy Astor (Viscountess Astor) was the first women to take her seat, after a by-election in December 1919. Women were not allowed to sit in the House of Lords until the passage of the Life Peerages Act 1958, and hereditary women peers were able to be seated only after the Peerage Act 1963 (UK Parliament 2022).

In the United States, there are a total of 100 senators and 435 members of the House of Representatives. 'Women in Congress: Statistics and Brief Overview' reported on 13 October 2022: 'As of 12 October 2022, 151 women are serving in the 117th Congress. There are 127 women serving in the House (including 3 Delegates and the Resident Commissioner), 93 Democrats and 34 Republicans. There are 24 women in the Senate, 16 Democrats and 8 Republicans' (Congressional Research Service 2022). A Pew Research report notes: 'Women make up just over a quarter of all members of the 117th Congress—the highest percentage in U.S. history and a considerable increase from where things stood even a decade ago' (Blazina and Desilver 2021). The first woman to be elected to the Senate was Hattie Caraway, in January 1932. The first woman to be elected to the House was Jeannette Rankin, in November 1916.

Another comparison of female participation can be made with the role of women in other religions. A cursory exploration—and direct experience gained over 30 years' involvement with the interfaith movement as a member of Bedford Council of Faiths—indicates that the picture across the religions varies depending on beliefs and practices of a particular branch or denomination within the wider community. For example, some of the Christian denominations in the late 18th and early 19th century United States seem to have accepted women preachers and some ordained women (see Billington 1985, pp. 369–94). The Roman Catholic tradition has no female clergy, although there is a movement for the ordination of women (see, for example, Women's Ordination Worldwide 2022 and its Timeline (Women's Ordination Worldwide 2020b)).[8] The Pope has expressed his wish to include more women in senior positions, naming in July 2022 three women to the committee that advises him in the selection of bishops (Pullella 2022). The Anglican Communion ordained its first woman priest in 1944, in Macau (Women's Ordination Worldwide 2020a), and there are now women Anglican bishops in 15 countries (Mueller 2022). The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) embedded the equality of women and men into their doctrine from their beginning in the mid-17th century England and women were able to enter Quaker ministry, although the ease with which they were able to practise it ebbed and flowed over time (O'Shea 2022, pp. 263–76). The Methodists ordained their first female deacon in 1866 in Indiana, USA (United Methodist Church 2022).

The first woman to become a rabbi was Regina Jonas, ordained in Berlin in 1935 by the leading liberal rabbi of the time. She died in Auschwitz in 1944. The first Reform Jewish rabbi and the first American woman rabbi, Sally J. Priesand, was ordained in 1972. In 1974, the first Reconstructionist woman rabbi, Sandy Sasso, was ordained. The first Conservative woman rabbi, Amy Eilberg, was ordained in 1985. Mimi Feigelson, the first woman Orthodox rabbi, was ordained in Jerusalem in 1994 (Jewish Women's Archive 2022).

The founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, established the principle of the equality of women and men at the beginning of the religion around the end of the 15th century, and this 'fundamental truth' has been upheld by those gurus who followed him. Women are 'allowed to participate in any and all religious activities including reading of the Guru Granth Sahib', their holy scripture (Sikhs.org 2011; Kaur 2022). As is the case with other faith communities, including the Bahá'ís, the practical application of the principle in everyday life can be challenging for some (Singh 2013).

Regarding Islam, the Quran does not forbid women from taking on clerical roles but the Traditions (hadith)[9] are opposed to it and cultural norms may prevent it. As with other religions, the discourse is generally theological and turns on interpretation. There are some instances where women do become prayer leaders (imams) or scholars (ulama), notably in Indonesia (see e.g., Gunia 2022; BBC News 2017; Borpujari 2017; Rinaldo 2017) and China (see e.g., Zacharias 2019; Erie 2016) but generally for women-only congregations. There appears to be widespread agreement that women cannot lead prayers for men or for mixed congregations. At the same time, there is a tendency to apply western liberal thinking and norms to practices about which there is a general misunderstanding and lack of knowledge among non-Muslims, and a significant amount of prejudice (see Nyhagen 2021; Soltani 2016), which is also the case for other religions and beliefs.

Religious belief and practice is complex and many issues are controversial, even within religious communities. This brief overview gives a glimpse of how the participation of women in religious leadership is perceived and operationalized among and within religious communities. Absent agreement on scriptural authority, as well as prevailing cultural norms and attitudes, many women have found the progress towards full participation very slow, whereas others do not consider such leadership to be relevant within their religious tradition. All faiths, however, seem to consider such roles to be positions of service rather than of power, although there are clearly some who abuse this.

Bahá'ís are realistic about the interpretation of statistics to gauge the participation of women in administrative and governance positions, and the Universal House of Justice cautions against their use to seek the goal sought by some feminists, gender parity (see WEDO Primer 50/50 Campaign n.d.; European Women's Lobby n.d.; 50:50 Parliament n.d.):

> Statistics on the participation of women on Bahá'í institutions are compiled from time to time by Bahá'í agencies, including the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office for the Advancement of Women, and have been published on occasion in the annual Bahá'í World year book. However, caution should be observed in their interpretation, because of the small size of the Bahá'í communities in most countries, and the differences in the traditional attitudes toward the participation of women in the various cultures represented in the worldwide community. It would also be improper to use these results in an attempt to ensure that the composition of institutions is evenly balanced between the sexes, since believers are enjoined to select those best qualified to serve, irrespective of their sex. The Faith does not seek to promote the advancement of women through an artificial endeavour to achieve parity, but rather through a fundamental transformation of values and understanding coupled with the creation of opportunities and encouragement for the development of talents and capabilities (Universal House of Justice 1999, no. 307).

Further, despite women reaching critical mass in many instances, there is no research into the effect in a Bahá'í setting of women's membership of an institution and whether the presence of women has any significant influence on decision-making. What can be noted is the operationalization of the principle of equality of participation as between men and women. From the examples provided, it seems the main conclusion that can be drawn is that women actually get elected, although in fewer numbers than men, and that they hold important positions on Bahá'í institutions.

4.2.5. Bahá'í Focus on the Advancement and Participation of Women

The United Nations Decade for Women, 1975 to 1985, was adopted on 15 December 1975 by General Assembly Resolution 31/136. It focused on the policies and issues that impact women, such as pay equity, gendered violence, land holding, and other human rights. The Universal House of Justice and the Bahá'í International Community responded to the recommendations for this decade by urging Bahá'í women around the world to arise and play an active role in the service of the Faith (Universal House of Justice 1977; Collins 1981, pp. 202–14). During this period a series of Bahá'í women's conferences were held, including in the Solomon Islands, 1975 (Bahá'í World 1978, p. 282); New Delhi, 1977 (Bahá'í World 1981, p. 180); Lima, Peru, 1977 (Bahá'í World 1981, p. 172); Niger, 1978 (Bahá'í World 1981, p. 154); and Monrovia, Liberia, 1978 (Bahá'í World 1981, p. 154). After the Decade for Women ended, the conferences of women continued, with Maori women holding the first National Women's Hui in the tribal area of Ngati Tuwaretoa, New Zealand, 1987 (BINS 1967, edition 163, p. 8); the first European Bahá'í Women's Conference, held in the Netherlands, 1989 (BINS 1967, edition 203, p. 2); the first meeting of Bahá'í women in Mauritius, 1989 (BINS 1967, edition 215, p. 6); and the Pacific Women's Conference, 1991 (Universal House of Justice 1991a, paras. 110.1–3).

There were also some milestones for the participation of indigenous women, often overlooked or excluded from the political arena owing to the intersectionality of prejudices, towards women, race/ethnicity, and social status. In 1990 Maureen Nakekea and Marao Teem were elected to the National Spiritual Assembly of Kiribati, the first indigenous women to be elected to that institution (BINS 1967, edition 224, p. 7), and in the same year, for the first time, two Saramaka (Maroon) women were elected delegates to the national convention of Suriname (BINS edition 226, p. 6).

In 1992, the Universal House of Justice announced it was establishing an Office for the Advancement of Women at the headquarters of the Bahá'í International Community in New York (Universal House of Justice 1992), to provide a 'visible instrument for the practical application of one of the cardinal principles of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh'. It officially opened on 26 May 1993 (Bahá'í World 1994, pp. 83–9; BINS 1967, edition 296, p. 2).

It seems clear that the Universal House of Justice writes encouragingly to the Bahá'ís about the successes they have made in 'closing the gender gap' within the Bahá'í community but is wholly realistic about great efforts that remain to be made. The steps taken are incremental, in keeping with the gradual unfolding and implementation of the Bahá'í teachings taken by Bahá'u'lláh himself and after him by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. That the implementation of the core teaching of the equality of women and men is foundational to the new kind of society the Bahá'ís are working towards is seen in the urging of the Universal House of Justice to Bahá'ís to increase their efforts year on year.

The commitment of the Universal House of Justice over the years to the advancement of women may be determined by its directives to National Spiritual Assemblies to broaden their work in this area. For example, to the Bahá'í International Women's Conference in Ile-Ife, Nigeria, held in October 1991, the Universal House of Justice wrote:

> The contribution of women to social, economic and cultural development is paramount. As the primary educators of children, women must themselves be educated and receive literacy training. As wives and mothers, as members of the professions, as farmers, as stewards of the health and well-being of families, and as members of Bahá'í administrative institutions, women must be welcomed into full partnership with men in consultative decision-making and in guiding the progress of their communities (Universal House of Justice 1991b, para. 116.1).

In 1996, the Universal House of Justice sent messages to different regions of the world asking the Bahá'ís in each to take particular steps to increase their efforts to advance the status, administrative participation and other activities of women. For example, the Bahá'ís of the Indian Subcontinent were called upon 'to give special attention to the advancement of women' as in that region 'women have traditionally played a secondary role in the life of society, a condition which is still reflected in many Bahá'í communities. Effective measures have to be adopted to help women take their rightful place in the teaching and administrative fields . . . ' (Universal House of Justice 1996b). Malaysian Bahá'ís were asked to take 'concrete measures to broaden the range of activities in areas such as the advancement of women, the spread of literacy, and the promotion of moral education' (Universal House of Justice 1996c) whereas the Africans were asked to 'multiply plans and programmes to raise the status of women and to encourage the active support of men in such endeavours' (Universal House of Justice 1996d). In Pakistan, Western and Central Asia needed to enable 'more and more women' 'to move to the forefront of Bahá'í activity', including in 'administrative fields' (Universal House of Justice 1996e).

By April 2000, there were 52 national offices for the advancement of women (Universal House of Justice 2000a).

The equality of women and men was again made a goal by the Universal House of Justice in 2021 in its letter launching a 25 year cycle of activity focusing on the building of 'vibrant communities' (Universal House of Justice 2021b).

My observation is that these efforts indicate the commitment of the Universal House of Justice to the advancement of women and to the creation of a culture within the global Bahá'í community that enables all Bahá'í women to participate in the election of its administrative

institutions and to become elected members, as well as to take on many other activities and roles. This has required a change in the mind set of all Bahá'ís, not only men, from many different national and cultural backgrounds, an accomplishment not easily achieved.

4.2.6. Persecution in Iran

At the same time that Bahá'ís were working towards the realization of a more just and equitable society, the Islamic Revolution occurred in Iran in 1979, restricting certain freedoms held by Iranian women but also seeing a dramatic uptick in the persecution of the Bahá'í community there. The persecution was widespread and included women and girls, some of whom were executed. As Iran is rarely out of the news for its persecution of women and girls, the effect on Bahá'í women and girls is important to record.

On 21 August 1980, all nine members of the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran, including one woman, Bahíyyih Nádirí, were kidnapped, never found, and are presumed dead (Bahá'í World 1986, p. 294). Eight of nine members of the Assembly elected to replace them, including one woman, Mrs Zhinus Mahmudi, were executed without trial on 27 December 1981 (Bahá'í World 1986, p. 293). The second woman, Giti Vahid, was ill and did not attend the meeting at which the others were arrested (Bahá'í Library on Line 1981). A third cohort of members was elected to replace them, seven of whom were arrested and eventually executed. The National Spiritual Assembly was officially disbanded on 23 August 1983 when the Attorney General of Iran made membership of Bahá'í administrative institutions illegal (see BIC 2013).

By 21 April 1983, about 20 Bahá'í women had been 'executed, mobbed, assassinated, or disappeared without a trace, including Iran's first woman physicist, a concert pianist, and the illiterate wife of a shepherd'. On the 'evening of 18 June ten Bahá'í women, ranging in age from 17 to 57, were hanged in Shiraz, after months of imprisonment and torture during which they refused to renounce their faith' (Bahá'í World 1994, pp. 180–8). Over 200 Bahá'ís are known to have been have been executed by the state or otherwise killed in Iran between 1978 and 2005, of which 21 are women, including a girl of 17 (Iran Press Watch 2016).

After the dissolution of the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran, an informal grouping of senior Bahá'í volunteers, known as 'Friends in Iran' (Yaran), was assembled to see to the pastoral and spiritual needs of the Bahá'í community. In 2008, this group included two women, Fariba Kamalabadi, who had become a member in 2006 (Taefi and Ghanea 2009, p. 96), and Mahvash Sabet. (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2017). The Yaran were arrested on March 2008, tried in January 2010, convicted and sentenced initially to 20 years' imprisonment, reduced to 10 years on appeal (Bahá'í World News Service 2008).

Sabet was released on 18 September 2017, Kamalabadi on 31 October 2017. Both were re-arrested in July 2022 and sentenced to a further 10 years' imprisonment (IranWire 2022a; Iran Press Watch 2022).

4.3. Discourse

A significant contribution to this discourse was the result of the surveys undertaken by the BIC about the participation of women in Bahá'í leadership institutions across the world. It conducted three surveys over 20 years from 1972 to 1993, a period when the number of National Spiritual Assemblies increased from 113 to 151 (there are today, 2022, more than 170), marking the growth of the Bahá'í populations in a number of countries, as well as the changing political environment.

The first survey was conducted in 1972 in preparation for International Women's Year (1975), the second in 1984 at the end of the Decade for Women (1976–1985) and the third in 1993–1994. All three surveys examined—in increasing detail—'critical factors affecting the status of women' (BIC 1995b):

* women's participation on the elected councils that govern Bahá'í community life;

- ways in which Bahá'í institutions encourage women to participate in Bahá'í community life; and
- strategies used by Bahá'í institutions to change attitudes toward women

The present article limits itself to the examination of the first of these elements.

On 21 July 1972, as part of its effort to promote the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in advance of UN International Women's Year (1975), the BIC sent copies of the document to 113 National Spiritual Assemblies as well as a detailed questionnaire designed to determine the degree of activity of Bahá'í women in each national community. Survey questions included 'changing attitudes of both men and women—the influence of traditions and customs, the participation of Bahá'í women in Bahá'í community life (administrative activity, elections, consultation, service on Bahá'í administrative bodies, teaching activity etc.), as well as whether women were 'assuming roles considered traditionally masculine' (BIC 1974b).

By 15 January 1974, 81 responses had been received: 20 from Africa, 22 from the Americas, 12 from Asia, 11 from Australasia (including the Pacific islands), and 16 from Europe. The BIC reported its analysis of the survey's findings: that in many instances progress was greater in the Bahá'í community than in the society; and in some places there was a 'perceptible but only very gradual change in attitudes', attributed to 'the small numbers of Bahá'ís' or to 'the strong influence of traditional patterns'.

Respondents listed participation in the Bahá'í administrative process as the most 'positive influence for the integration of women in community life', enabling them to vote and be voted for and to be elected to office. For example, the questionnaire replies indicated that it was not unusual for women to serve on National Bahá'í Assemblies as well as on Local Assemblies, 'often as officers', and that they were learning 'to take leadership roles' (Jamaica), participating 'without restriction in consultation and decision-making' (Paraguay) in the local and national administrative functions of the Bahá'í community.

Hawaii indicated that 'over one half of the present membership of local Bahá'í administrative bodies are women', with 'over thirty percent of the membership of the National Assembly being women'. El Salvador reported, 'one third of the National Bahá'í Assembly are women', and that 'the percentage is about one fourth women on the Local Assemblies, and most of these Bahá'í communities are in rural areas'.

Illiteracy was not a barrier to the election of women to Bahá'í institutions: in Benin in 1976, an illiterate villager and an illiterate housewife were elected to the National Spiritual Assembly; in 1977 an illiterate market woman was elected. In 1983, the first of these three women was re-elected.

In its final report, which included eight more respondents than did the intermediate report, all but one of the 89 national communities reported that Bahá'í women were actively participating in the voting. This was attributed to the principles of no electioneering or nominations, and the secret ballot. This included communities, some in remote villages, where other aspects of the principle of equal status for women were not yet observed, where the women 'are more reticent in other activities' and 'customs are more inhibiting' than elsewhere. Some responses noted that 'this participation' is women's 'first attempt at freedom of expression' or that voting has given women 'their first opportunity to take part in administrative affairs' in their village. In certain places, participation in Bahá'í elections is the only activity of Bahá'í women, particularly in countries where traditional views hinder women 'from taking as active a part in Bahá'í community life as men'. Much depended on the social culture of the host society and the age of the voters, with younger women and those from cultures where women are already involved in other Bahá'í processes feeling more comfortable voting.

The BIC's conclusion was that in large, well-established Bahá'í communities that have been developing for a long time, people feel more able to implement the Bahá'í principle of equality of women and men as they feel more secure and free to do so.

Even in places where 'by tradition, women seldom speak when men are present', and are discriminated against, women do get elected, including in places 'where only men serve

on village councils' and they are sometimes elected as officers of the assembly. The BIC notes, 'In many parts of Africa women are often elected Treasurers, as they are "considered good managers of money and are reliable".'

In October 1983, the Bahá'í International Community sent the 143 National Spiritual Assemblies then existing a questionnaire about activities organized during the United Nations Decade for Women to achieve equality for women and to report on obstacles faced. It reported its findings, based on reports of 77 National Assemblies, in July 1985 (BIC 1985).

Although providing no statistics for the participation of women in Bahá'í governing structures, the BIC noted: 'The most frequently mentioned positive influence for the integration of women in community life, according to the questionnaire replies, has been the Bahá'í administrative order. Responses from National Spiritual Assemblies included:

> Though traditionally women do not take a real role in decision-making, Bahá'í women are elected to local and national Bahá'í administrative posts. As they serve in these positions, they educate other women (Samoa).
>
> . . . the equality of women had been enhanced by wider administrative experience (and that women are both) included in most of the national and regional committees appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly and also serve on many Local assemblies (Nigeria).
>
> Women participate 'without restriction in consultation and decision-making' at both the local and national levels: 'Women both vote and are elected' (Paraguay).

In 1990, the BIC published its response to a questionnaire received from the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) that covered issues related to the status and advancement of women, including equal participation (BIC 1990b). The BIC had surveyed the 151 National Spiritual Assemblies then existing as well as those institutions appointed to support them.

> Recent statistics show substantial participation of women on Bahá'í administrative bodies. In 1988, 27% of those elected to serve on national governing councils were women. In 1989, 25% of the members of continental advisory boards and 29% of their auxiliary boards were women. At the 1988 International Convention, plenary sessions involving members of over 140 National Bahá'í Councils were chaired by women members of the advisory boards.

In 1994, the BIC undertook its third survey of National Spiritual Assemblies to measure the participation of women a hundred years after the religion had first been brought to the West. The findings were published in August 1995 as part of a larger document of several sections presented to the Fourth UN Conference on Women, titled 'The Greatness Which Might Be Theirs' (BIC 1995a).

The 1994 survey collected data on women's participation in the administrative activities of the Bahá'í community from two sources: the elected national institutions and the members of the appointed branch of the Bahá'í administrative order (Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members) whose functions—advising, protecting, and encouraging the community—complement those of the elected branch, which is charged with administering the affairs and activities of the Bahá'í community at the national or local level. The BIC commented that the 'information gathered sheds light on the transformation process itself and shows how these complementary institutions are promoting—each in its own way—the process of understanding and implementing the principle of equality of the sexes'.

Responses were received from 92 of the 165 National Spiritual Assemblies and 254 (65%) of the 389 Auxiliary Board members serving worldwide at the time. (Reliability of the survey sample was validated by comparing membership statistics on all 165 National Spiritual Assemblies, collected by the Bahá'í World Centre, to the same information reported by the National Assemblies responding to the survey.)

The proportion of women serving on the 92 responding National Spiritual Assemblies was 30% (that is, on average, three out of the nine members were women). BIC noted that the percentage had remained constant since its first survey in 1972 and 'is consistent

with the percentage for all 165 National Assemblies, according to statistics gathered by the Bahá'í World Centre'. 41% of the national secretaries were women. As noted above, this position is akin to that of the CEO of a company and is both 'highly responsible' and 'visible'. The BIC remarks that the results demonstrate 'the degree to which Bahá'ís . . . are attempting to overcome traditional prejudices'.

Survey data on 4680 local Bahá'í communities (approximately a quarter of the organized communities worldwide) indicated that an increasing number of women were being elected to serve at the grassroots. 40% of the members of local spiritual assemblies were women, as well as half the local secretaries, and a third of the local treasurers.

The BIC provided its own evaluation of these statistics in light of the principle of the equality of women and men.

Although these statistics put the Bahá'í community well ahead of the world at large in the participation of women in leadership, the Bahá'í community has yet to fulfil its own goal of full equality between women and men. For the vast majority of the Bahá'ís in the world today, many of whom are the first in their families to become Bahá'ís, the values and habits they have been brought up with are not easy to shake. But by becoming Bahá'ís they commit themselves to a process of individual and social transformation, based on the fundamental reality of this age: the oneness of humanity. The equality of men and women is one important aspect of this principle. Thus the entire Bahá'í community is engaged in a shared struggle to overcome a variety of traditional prejudices, and its members are assisted in this struggle by the Bahá'í administrative institutions.

Men Only on the Universal House of Justice

Even such a selective survey as this of the practice of the principle of the equality of women and men in Bahá'í communities would be incomplete and misleading if it failed to address the absence of women on the Universal House of Justice. The exclusion of women from election to the Universal House of Justice is perhaps the issue most often raised in feminist circles, and in many other discussions, about the application of the principle of the equality within their own Bahá'í community. As both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, especially in His talks in the West, emphasized this principle, it is not easy to understand exactly why women cannot serve on that one institution. It seems an anomaly to many people and appears to undermine the very principle itself. The concept is very challenging for Bahá'ís to explain, as there is no explanation other than 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that the wisdom of this would become clear in the future.

The scriptural basis for this exclusion of women is from the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh's book of laws:

> O ye Men of Justice! Be ye, in the realm of God, shepherds unto His sheep and guard them from the ravening wolves that have appeared in disguise, even as ye would guard your own sons. Thus exhorteth you the Counsellor, the Faithful (Bahá'u'lláh 1992, para. 52).

and also in his Bishárát (Glad-Tidings):

> The men of God's House of Justice have been charged with the affairs of the people. They, in truth, are the Trustees of God among His servants and the daysprings of authority in His countries (Bahá'u'lláh 1978, pp. 26–7).

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in answer to a question on this subject, wrote on 23 August 1913:

> As regards the constitution of the House of Justice, Bahá'u'lláh addresses the men. He says: 'O ye men of the House of Justice!' But when its members are to be elected, the right which belongs to women, so far as their voting and their voice is concerned, is indisputable ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1967, p. 183).

In answer to another question, 'Abdu'l-Bahá replied:

> Know thou, O handmaid,[10] that in the sight of Bahá, women are accounted the same as men, and God hath created all humankind in His own image, and after His own likeness. That is, men and women alike are the revealers of His names

> and attributes, and from the spiritual viewpoint there is no difference between them . . .
>
> The House of Justice, however, according to the explicit text of the Law of God, is confined to men; this for a wisdom of the Lord God's, which will erelong be made manifest as clearly as the sun at high noon ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1978, p. 80).

As the appellation 'House of Justice' was given both to the Universal House of Justice and local institutions, in the early years of the religion's establishment it was unclear as to whether women were excluded from them both. 'Abdu'l-Bahá then clarified:

> According to the ordinances of the Faith of God, women are the equals of men in all rights save only that of membership on the Universal House of Justice, for as hath been stated in the text of the Book, both the head and the members of the House of Justice are men. However, in all other bodies, such as the Temple Construction Committee, the Teaching Committee, the Spiritual Assembly, and in charitable and scientific associations, women share equally in all rights with men (quoted in Universal House of Justice 1988a).

This note was appended to the statement of Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas:

> It has been elucidated in the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi that, while the membership of the Universal House of Justice is confined to men, both women and men are eligible for election to Secondary and Local Houses of Justice (currently designated as National and Local Spiritual Assemblies) (Bahá'u'lláh 1992, n80).

The Universal House of Justice addressed the question in a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand in May 1988, pointing out that while Bahá'u'lláh deliberately left some matters open to the decision of the Universal House of Justice, others are part of the 'explicitly revealed' text and 'cannot be varied through legislation by the Universal House of Justice'. Shoghi Effendi had explained in a letter on 27 May 1940 that membership of the Universal House of Justice being 'confined to men' was part of the 'explicitly revealed' text. (Some question this reading of the text, see Cole 1996). The House of Justice went on to state:

> . . . in face of the categorical pronouncements in Bahá'í Scripture establishing the equality of men and women, the ineligibility of women for membership of the Universal House of Justice does not constitute evidence of the superiority of men over women. It must also be borne in mind that women are not excluded from any other international institution of the Faith. They are found among the ranks of the Hands of the Cause. They serve as members of the International Teaching Centre and as Continental Counsellors. And, there is nothing in the Text to preclude the participation of women in such future international bodies as the Supreme Tribunal (Universal House of Justice 1988a).

Sometimes Bahá'ís put forward possible reasons for Bahá'u'lláh's exclusion of women from this international institution but these are not part of the general body of Bahá'í discourse. Reading the Bahá'í texts may provide some insights—if not into the reason for this ruling, then perhaps into some of the elements of the Bahá'í teachings that make it more explicable.

One such element arises from Bahá'u'lláh's vision of the ever-advancing civilization. Another comes from the descriptions of state of the world in the transition from the 'present world order' to the new. A third rests on an understanding of the Bahá'í concepts of equality, power, authority and justice, and fourth on the nature and characteristics of women, which this article explores. This is not the arena in which to do more than make a few comments on each and how they impact on the concept of the equality of women with men.

Briefly, the Bahá'í vision of the ever-advancing civilization seems to include, as discussed above, a reorientation of the position of women into equal partners in a joint enterprise of development of a united, sustainable, peaceful and just global community

which depends on the education of girls and the work of women to usher in and protect. The transition from the current world order to the new one (see Bahá'u'lláh 1983) requires a universal recognition of the oneness of humanity, 'the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve', and 'implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced . . . It calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world—a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units' (Shoghi Effendi 1991, pp. 42–3). This requires 'that we should become a new kind of people, people who are upright, kind, intelligent, truthful, and honest and who live according to His [God's] great laws' (Shoghi Effendi 1944).

Our current understanding of equality seems much coloured by historical concepts of power and authority, rights, and privileges reflected even in the suffrage and feminist movements. These are ordered in a hierarchy of position, that is, the higher up the pyramid of power one ascends, the more 'important' that person is; the more important the person is, the more 'authority' that person has; the more authority, the more power, the greater the status and value of the person. Often this is attached to money and therefore the more status and value, the more the remuneration. At the base of the pyramid is a decision about who is able to ascend based on what the society values. What the Western society seems to value greatly is financial wealth, enabling a consumerist and entertainment-rich environment which we endeavour to maintain by promoting some kinds of work, e.g., sports players, influencers, and celebrities, up the pyramid while teachers, carers of children, the elderly, and the unwell fail to attract significant financial investment (see e.g., Garis 2007, pp. 16, 105). The Bahá'í teachings indicate that one of the most important social roles is the teacher and that the first teacher is the mother (see e.g., 'Abdu'l-Bahá 1978, pp. 133–4, 138), currently much undervalued.

As to the nature and characteristics of women, the Bahá'í teachings indicate that the future will have more feminine characteristics (Dodge 1912) and that women will enter all fields of endeavour ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1967, pp. 182–3).

Possibly as a result of our Western, liberal thinking, people are apt to equate roles of responsibility with power and authority; whereas the Bahá'í texts indicate that such roles are arenas of service to humanity (Universal House of Justice 2000b) and that there are many paths of service open to all. Membership on a Bahá'í institution brings no personal power or authority to the individual, no importance, no influence, no prestige, no wealth, no kudos, no privileges. As John Hatcher puts it, even 'if one aspired to election . . . and managed to become elected, his or her only reward would be to serve in virtual anonymity on a body whose decisions are the result of a collective process' (Hatcher 1994, p. 344). Thus when considering membership of the Universal House of Justice, it is useful to look at the actual job and not ascribe to it characteristics of spiritual or material status, such as a career might provide and which such membership does not. In this light, it is perhaps the case that we are not looking here at a question of whether women are *worthy* to serve on the House of Justice or whether men are *more* worthy; nor are we looking at whether women have the qualities to serve on the House or if men have more of them; nor are we looking at whether women, by virtue of biology, lack of education, or their nature, are fit to serve on this institution or whether men, by virtue of their biology, education, or nature are more fit to serve. We are clearly looking at some other dimension, something we cannot quite see yet. It may be that we need to change our concepts of what service on this institution means within the context of the Bahá'í teachings, rather than draw on current thinking about power and status.

Awkward as it appears to be, it seems Bahá'ís have to accept that they will probably not be able to give an adequate explanation of why women cannot serve on the House of Justice, as indicated in 1947 by Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written on his behalf:

> People must just accept the fact that women are not eligible to the International House of Justice. As the Master says the wisdom of this will be known in the

future, we can only accept, believing it is right, but not able to give an explanation calculated to silence an ardent feminist (Shoghi Effendi 1947b)!

5. Theme D: Violence against Women and Girls

Another way to measure the progress of Bahá'ís in implementing the principle of the equality of women and men is to consider how the religion has responded to social issues affecting women and girls. From among many issues, I have chosen to look at violence against women and girls (VAWG), as it a widespread phenomenon that affects women across the world regardless of age, financial or social status, culture, ethnicity, or religion.

The World Health Organization (WHO 2021) published its findings of the prevalence of violence against women and girls in March 2021, pointing out that 'violence against women—particularly intimate partner violence and sexual violence—is a major public health problem and a violation of women's human rights'. The WHO estimates that 30 per cent of women (about one in three women) 'worldwide have been subjected to either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime', while almost a third (27%) of 'women aged 15–49 years who have been in a relationship report that they have been subjected to some form of physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner'. To put this in context, it is estimated that on 2 January 2023 there were more than 3,987,000,000 women in the world. (Country Meters 2023—this site changes its figures second by second; this figure is rounded down). That is, about 1,196,100,000 women have experienced physical or sexual violence.

UN Women estimated that '81,100 women and girls were killed intentionally in 2021', a number that 'has remained largely unchanged over the past decade'. Around 45,000 women and girls were killed by intimate partners or other family members in 2021; that is 'on average, more than five women or girls are killed every hour by someone in their own family' (UN Women 2022b). While acknowledging that 'the overwhelming majority of homicides worldwide are committed against men and boys (81%)', most females (56% of all female homicides) are killed by intimate partners or other family members, while this is so for only 11% of male homicides.

5.1. Bahá'í Texts

> The light of men is Justice. Quench it not with the contrary winds of oppression and tyranny. The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men (Bahá'u'lláh 1978, p. 67).

> Ye have been forbidden in the Book of God to engage in contention and conflict, to strike another, or to commit similar acts whereby hearts and souls may be saddened (Bahá'u'lláh 1992, para.148).

> . . . in view of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's exhortation that each member of the family must uphold the rights of the others . . . it [is] clear that violence in the family is contrary to the spirit of the Faith and a practice to be condemned. It is clearly evident from the Bahá'í teachings that no husband should subject his wife to abuse of any kind, much less to violence; such a reprehensible action is the antithesis of the relationship of mutual respect and equality enjoined by the Bahá'í Writings—a relationship governed by the principles of Bahá'í consultation and totally devoid of the use of force to compel obedience to one's will. Of course, the prohibition against subjecting one's marriage partner to physical force applies to women, as well (Universal House of Justice 1987).

> Among the signs of moral downfall in the declining moral order are the high incidence of violence within the family, the increase of degrading and cruel treatment of spouses and children, and the spread of sexual abuse. It is essential that the members of the community of the Greatest Name take the utmost care not to be drawn into acceptance of such practices because of their prevalence. They must be ever mindful of their obligations to exemplify a new way of life

> distinguished by its respect for the dignity and rights of all people, by its exalted moral tone, and by its freedom from oppression and from all forms of abuse (Universal House of Justice 1993).
>
> The use of force by the physically strong against the weak, as a means of imposing one's will and fulfilling one's desires, is a flagrant transgression of the Bahá'í teachings. There can be no justification for anyone compelling another, through the use of force or through the threat of violence, to do that to which the other person is not inclined. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written, 'O ye lovers of God! In this, the cycle of Almighty God, violence and force, constraint and oppression, are one and all condemned.' Let those who, driven by their passions or by their inability to exercise discipline in the control of their anger, might be tempted to inflict violence on another human being, be mindful of the condemnation of such disgraceful behaviour by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh (Universal House of Justice 1993).
>
> True equality between men and women will not be established unless prevailing conceptions of power that dominate contemporary thought are seriously questioned and fundamentally redefined . . . current conceptions of power tend to focus on the capacity to pursue one's self-interests, to compete effectively, to get others to act according to one's will, to dominate, to manipulate and to prevail over or against others . . . Understood and enacted in these terms, abuses of power and the unequal distribution of material sources and instruments of power have resulted in innumerable hardships and great suffering for women historically and into the present day . . . A reconceptualization of power in this sense requires a broadened appreciation of the sources of power available to humanity, which include the limitless and generative powers of unity, love, justice and equity, knowledge, humility, integrity and truthfulness—powers humanity has been learning to draw upon over the centuries. Expressions of power emanating from these sources can be seen in the capacity to work creatively and constructively with others in the pursuit of common goals, the capacity to cooperate, and the capacity to transform social reality to reflect spiritual truths such as the equality of women and men. As we move beyond the material struggle to exercise power over or against others, and we develop the capacity to draw on these other sources of power accessible to every human being, we activate greater forms of individual and collective agency and create new possibilities for the well-being of women and men (Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity 2009).

5.2. Praxis

It appears from the Bahá'í texts on the subject of eradicating violence against women and girls that the issue is taken seriously by the religion and that all forms of violence are prohibited including physical domestic abuse, sexual abuse, controlling and coercive behaviour, the abuse of children, and harmful traditional practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation of girls.

It is acknowledged by the Bahá'ís that violence is one manifestation of deep-rooted ideas about men and women that conflict with Bahá'í teachings and that the process of altering these concepts may well take generations of work, particularly as these beliefs are built into the very structures of social institutions. This may look like complacence but it fits into the general understanding of the Bahá'ís that for social change to become permanent in a community at any level requires continuous small-step efforts by individuals, communities, and their institutions. The consciousness of the moral wrongness of violence against women and girls is being raised at every level and there is evidence that practical steps have been taken to eliminate it from Bahá'í family and community life. Just bringing the issue into the open has enabled discussion and in some places an educational process has been put in place that has extended beyond the Bahá'ís themselves in local and national

arenas. The Bahá'í International Community has engaged with UN processes on this area of concern over several decades.

A Bahá'í International Community communication project, 'Traditional Media As Change Agent', funded by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) promoted change in attitudes towards women in three countries: Bolivia, Cameroon, and Malaysia (BIC 1994b). The project tested the validity of using traditional media (e.g., music, dance, story-telling) to educate the community about the need to improve the status of women and to help establish priorities for community action with a view to reducing violence against women, especially within families, and including reducing harmful traditional practices, particularly the practice of female genital mutilation. FGM is deemed 'contrary to the spirit of the Bahá'í Teachings' and owing to the 'dire consequences' of the practice, 'the Bahá'í institutions have the duty of weaning the friends from it through an ongoing programme of education based on spiritual principles and sound scientific information' (Universal House of Justice 1995a).

To mark the International Year of the Family, the BIC's Office for the Advancement of Women in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) brought together in May 1994 grassroots practitioners, academics, mental health professionals, and representatives from more than 30 non-governmental organizations and two UN agencies for a two-day symposium to explore how to tackle domestic violence (BIC 1994a).

Among the conclusions that emerged in consensus from the symposium were: Family violence must be publicly acknowledged as a problem, as denial is the greatest obstacle to eradicating family violence. People must be helped to recognize violence when it occurs and be provided with the necessary legal and emotional support. Family violence is a human rights issue and effective use of a human rights framework to create violence-free families requires enforcement of international conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as measures to protect women and children from perpetrators.

Participants proposed a set of recommendations, including: consolidate and disseminate information on successful intervention models and preventive programmes; provide support and training for front-line child-care givers—families, social workers, and traditional birth attendants—in the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of family violence; sensitize police, judiciary, policy makers, and religious leaders regarding the mental health, economic, and social consequences of family violence and train them in preventive strategies; create public awareness through all forms of media and existing community networks, presenting family violence as a serious problem with serious consequences; organize classes for boys and girls to develop an egalitarian approach to parenting and other roles—i.e., sharing of chores and resources; providing opportunities for girls outside the home, including education and job training; educate women and children about their rights and facilitate the development of strategies to protect themselves; provide intervention and support for victims of family violence, including counselling, shelters, crisis centres, and financial and legal support.

A number of Bahá'í communities held seminars and conferences on eradicating family violence. The Bahá'ís of Antigua held a symposium from 24 May to 26 May 1995 to consult on strategies to eliminate family violence, which was attended by representatives from 11 Caribbean nations, UNICEF, and the Caribbean Community Secretariat. The Bahá'ís of Yokohama, Japan held a similar symposium on 5 November 1995. A conference on the same theme was held in Gaborone, Botswana, arranged by the Bahá'í National Women and Child Education Committee (Bahá'í World 1997, pp. 84–5).

The Bahá'í community of Tonga offered a seminar on education at the NGO Forum at the Fourth United Nations Conference on Women in August and September 1995, the only Tongan NGO represented there. As a result, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Women's Affairs Division, invited the Bahá'ís to participate in a national campaign to prevent domestic violence. In conjunction with this efforts, a seminar on the 'Violence-Free Family'

was held on 15 April 1996 in Nuku'alofa, Tonga, attended by the Honorable Prince Ma'atu and his wife the Honorable Alaileula, the granddaughter of the Malietoa, the Head of State of Western Samoa; the speaker of the Legislative Assembly; the High Commissioner of Tonga to the United Kingdom; and the Head of the United States Peace Corps. Two Bahá'ís from the United Kingdom spoke about the causes of violence in the family and creating peaceful families. The seminar marked the first time the issue of family violence had been addressed in that manner in Tonga. In the following years the Tongan Bahá'ís continued to be part of a national effort to educate families across the country in eliminating violence in families and domestic violence (Bahá'í World 1997, vol. 24, p. 84; see also Ma'a Fafine mo e Famili 2012; and Emberson-Bain 1998).

A mapping of faith-based responses to violence against women and girls in the Asia-Pacific region was undertaken in 2012 by consultants to the AsiaPacific Women, Faith and Development Alliance (AP-WFDA) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The purpose was 'to identify and document the efforts of selected faith-based organizations to address violence against women and girls in the Pacific, South Asia and South-East Asia sub-regions' (p. 7). Organizations were chosen from those working within the framework of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (United Nations 1979), although this is misnamed in the document itself ('Violence' is substituted for 'Discrimination'). The Bahá'ís were included in the mapping exercise, giving examples of the educational efforts undertaken by the Bahá'í community of India to address the issue (Kaybryn and Nidadavolu 2012).

A primary objective of the Bahá'ís is to use their religion's teachings to improve their lives, their homes, and their communities (Bahá'u'lláh 1983, p. 184). Over the years a number of local, national, and international organizations based on Bahá'í teachings and values have been developed by individuals (see e.g., Universal House of Justice 2012, 2021b). Those unconnected to formal Bahá'í institutions are considered to be 'Bahá'í-inspired'. Many are schools, some are foundations providing grants to development projects of different kinds, and some are based on social issues such as the environment (e.g., the International Environment Forum 2022) and business ethics (Ethical Business Building the Future 2022).

A significant Bahá'í-inspired organization working in the area of violence against women and girls is the Tahirih Justice Center (Tahirih Justice Center 2023), founded in 1997 by Layli Miller-Muro. A Bahá'í who as a law student helped a young Togolese asylum seeker fleeing a forced marriage and FGM, she won a landmark case that established gender-based persecution as grounds for granting asylum in the United States. Based on the Bahá'í values of the oneness of humanity, equity, and justice, the Tahirih Justice Center specializes in working with survivors of gender-based violence by providing free legal and social services, advocacy, and training, and has so far served over 30,000 people. Miller-Muro was CEO for 20 years and continues as a permanent member of the organization (November 2022).

There are no statistics published about the number of Bahá'í women subjected to domestic abuse. However, there is some evidence to suggest that National Spiritual Assemblies have responded to the abuse of women (and men) by creating and promulgating policies and guidelines to the local spiritual assemblies within their jurisdiction for implementation throughout their communities. Again, it has not been possible to identify many of these, as they may be documents circulated only within the Bahá'í community itself. However, the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom have developed such policies and guidelines (NSA of the United States 2002). The United States also provided workshops on domestic violence (see NSA of the United States 2003).

Anecdotally, the Bahá'í Training Institute programme has been effective in enabling both men and women to address and reduce violence in their homes in three ways: implementing family consultation to discuss issues but also concepts of kindness, truthfulness, and trustworthiness that come from the first book in the programme; by building a friendship group of women who have studied together who then address these ideas among

themselves; and also being good examples to their children (Discussion at Bahá'í Training Centre, Bicester, England, 11 December 2022; the women were not Bahá'ís).

5.3. Discourse

The Bahá'ís have long been advocates of stopping violence in all its forms and particularly against women and girls. Examples of its contribution to the discourse on this subject come from the Bahá'í International Community and demonstrate some of the values of the Bahá'ís in this area.

The Fourth United Nations Conference on Women and the 51st session of the UN Commission on the Human Rights, took place in Beijing in August and September 1995. The BIC launched a series of statements with the overall title 'The Greatness Which Might Be Theirs' with chapters on difference themes, including one on 'Ending Violence against Women' (BIC 1995b). The statement identified violence against women as 'an issue of basic human rights', 'a distortion of power', and 'a yardstick by which one can measure the violation of all human rights. It can be used to gauge the degree to which a society is governed by aggressivity, dominated by competition and ruled by force.' It noted that 'Abusive practices against women have frequently been and are still being justified in the context of cultural norms, religious beliefs and unfounded "scientific theories" and assumptions.' It was noted that when 'families educate their daughters, and if the community systematically encourages the education of girl children, both the family and the community benefit'. However, 'Any effort to protect women against male aggression which does not involve the early training of boys will necessarily be short-lived. Likewise, all attempts to understand the causes and consequences of violence against women which do not involve men are bound to fail.'

A major issue addressed by the UN has been the spread of HIV/AIDS, which was perceived primarily as a health issue. The 2000 UN General Assembly adopted a resolution, The Millennium Declaration, incorporating goals to be achieved by 2015 (United Nations 2000) including to 'halt and begin to reverse' the spread of HIV/AIDS (Article 19) and to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women (Article 20). What became known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set out eight goals, comprising 21 targets (Asia Development Bank 2009): Goal 6 included combating HIV/AIDS and Goal 3 was to promote gender equality and the empowerment women through access to education for girls, increasing the proportion of women wage earners in the non-agricultural sector, and increasing the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments. A major effort was made to educate young people about it (see, e.g., UNAIDS 2008).

The connection that seems not to have been made by the UN and its agencies was the relationship between the spread of HIV/AIDS and the prevalence of gender inequality and disregard for women and girls, the same values that underpin violence against women and girls. It was the BIC that made that connection: 'In order to curtail the spread of HIV/AIDS among women, concrete changes need to occur in the sexual attitudes and behaviour of both men and women, but especially men'.

> Educating women and girls is critically important, but the current power imbalance between men and women can prevent a woman from acting in her own interest. Indeed, experience has shown that educating women without educating the men in their lives may put the women at greater risk of violence. Efforts are needed, therefore, to educate both boys and girls to respect themselves and one another. A culture of mutual respect will improve not only the self-esteem of women and girls, but the self-esteem of men and boys as well, which will lead toward more responsible sexual behaviour' (BIC 2001).

Apparently frustrated at the inability of the world to reduce violence against women and girls, the BIC in 2006 issued a very strong statement to the UN, looking at the reality of the situation at every level of society, from the individual to the international, noting successes but also pointing to the failures and obstacles put in the way of eradicating

violence against women and girls. A few of its points serve as examples of the general approach of the religion to this matter (BIC 2006b).

The BIC called out the failure of governments to provide 'enlightened and responsible leadership', of adults to maintain the 'protective web of community life', of families to meet the fundamental moral needs of children, and religion for being the 'most formidable obstacle to eradicating violent and exploitative behaviours'. The BIC saw these failures as 'the shortcomings of a primarily reactive approach' by the international community and set out its reading of what had to happen:

> . . . the challenge now before the international community is how to create the social, material and structural conditions in which women and girls can develop to their full potential. The creation of such conditions will involve not only deliberate attempts to change the legal, political and economic structures of society, but, equally importantly, will require the transformation of individuals, men and women, boys and girls, whose values, in different ways, sustain exploitative patterns of behaviour.

Overall, the inability to make the required social change was framed by BIC as a failure to understand 'that the individual has a spiritual or moral dimension' that 'shapes their understanding of their life's purpose, their responsibilities towards the family, the community and the world'. To prevent violence from developing, it stated that we must 'develop the moral capabilities required to function ethically in the age in which we live'. Thus its proposal, which it acknowledged as 'controversial', was to add to the needed changes in the 'legal, political and economic architecture', programmes that address the 'moral and spiritual capabilities' of the individual, as 'an essential element in the as yet elusive quest to prevent the abuse of women and girls around the world'.

The BIC hosted panels on violence against women at the UN in September 2006 (Bahá'í World News Service 2006) and December 2007 (Bahá'í World News Service 2007), the latter in collaboration with the Christian Children's Fund and in cooperation with the UN missions of France and the Netherlands. These looked at ways that national and local communities around the world could intensify efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women. It proposed the development of strategies aimed at changing old patterns of thinking in men, boys, and communities, and 'to fight practices and attitudes that lead to violence against women', for example, pornography being 'accepted as a legitimate form of entertainment', which 'socializes men into relations with women and girls that are dangerous for their psychological, social, physical, and moral health'.

The BIC called on the international community to 'dramatically increase the power, authority and resources dedicated to women's human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment'. It was part of a discussion suggesting the creation an autonomous United Nations agency with a comprehensive mandate dedicated to the full range of women's rights and concerns; this was accomplished in 2011 with the creation of UN Women (UN Women 2023).

National Bahá'í communities have also contributed to the discourse on gender-based violence. For example, the National Spiritual Assembly of Papua New Guinea issued a statement on the equality of women and men in light of the uptick in violence against women during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was published in a national newspaper and on social media. It called gender-based violence a 'chronic disease affecting our society', which has 'severely crippled' the country's 'progress and prosperity' and attributing it 'in part . . . to the failure to recognize the equality of men and women'.

The Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly reflected, 'This is a moment when our society is thinking deeply about how its culture and traditions affect women. Religious communities have a responsibility to be a source of guidance and to help dispel superstitions that harm women.' A representative of the country's Bahá'í Office of External Affairs, asserted, 'Aspects of our culture can change, particularly when we teach new values to our children from a young age. We see firsthand how girls and boys learn to interact with

unity and collaboration, and then bring these lessons home to their families.' (Bahá'í World News Service 2020).

5.4. What Do We Take from This?

Although the Bahá'ís have been active promoters of violence-free families and decry violence against women and girls, gender-based violence does occur and they accept that awareness and education need to increase across the global community, particularly the education of men and boys and of the members of Bahá'í institutions. Bahá'ís look to their three-stage education programme for children, junior youth, and youth and adults to provide the moral and spiritual insights that will challenge and transform embedded behaviours that perpetrate violence against women and girls (Ruhi Institute 2023).

6. A Brief Summary

This survey is by necessity limited to only a few arenas in which the Bahá'í teachings and values regarding the equality of women and men, the advancement of women and their rights have been implemented. Other areas such as the role of women in peace-making, in social and economic development, and in the environment I have reluctantly omitted. The ones I have examined—the education of the girl child, the participation in the Bahá'í administrative processes, and violence against women and girls—span decades from the founding of the religion in the mid-19th century through to the 21st century and demonstrate the evolution of the application of Bahá'í principles to the issues of the day. This period has seen girls being educated in the same way as boys, women gaining the right to vote and to be elected to sit in government, and the abuse of women exposed as ugly, unacceptable, and illegal.

All the themes selected are based on principles of the Bahá'í Faith found in the religion's scriptures and authoritative texts of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice, as well as in the oral statements of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Evidence of the practice of Bahá'ís at the individual, local, national, and international levels was not so easy to find. There is a lack of information on how violence against women and girls is addressed by the Bahá'ís in practice, although there is a vast international-level contribution to the discourse on the subject through the work of the Bahá'í International Community. This may be due to the confidential nature of the subject. On the other hand, there is much evidence regarding the participation of women in Bahá'í elections to its governing bodies and to their election onto these, yet not much discussion of this in discourses on women's participation and leadership. The theme of the education of the girl child provides much evidence, both for its implementation within the Bahá'í community for more than a century and for the community's contribution to the discourse on the subject.

For all the themes surveyed, Bahá'ís try to imbue their continuing efforts to advance the equality of women of men with the spiritual foundation that will ensure they are sustained over time, enhanced in their effectiveness and reach, and become part of the global transformation of all the structures of society such that the oneness of humanity and the ever-advancing civilization envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh may be realized.

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Notes

1 Lil Osborn describes in her book *Religion and Relevance* the intertwining strands of some of the social movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and discusses the relationship of the Bahá'ís and with those associated with the religion with these movements (Osborn 2014).

2 The editors of *Star of the West* note that Dodge's article 'was given to all of the New York newspapers and, through the Associated Press, was sent, though boiled down considerably, throughout the world' (Dodge 1912, p. 3).

3 The Kenosha, Wisconsin, Assembly wrote to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1910 asking whether it should dissolve its all-male board and re-elect one including women. In March 1911, 'Abdu'l-Bahá responded to them by stating that as Kenosha had a spiritual assembly for men, it could now form one for women (Dahl 1992, pp. 21–2). It is not known whether Kenosha took up this advice. However, Dahl notes that by 1917 women were serving on the Kenosha Board.

4 A modern translation was made at the Bahá'í World Centre in 1977 (quoted in Universal House of Justice 1988a, no. 52).

5 The first Bahá'í group on the European continent was established in Paris in 1899 by May Bolles (Stockman 1995, p. 151; Shoghi Effendi 1995, p. 259) and by 1901–2 numbered some 25 to 30 Bahá'ís. The first local spiritual assembly was formed in 1923 (Blackmer 1993).

6 The first local spiritual assemblies in the United Kingdom were elected in 1922, in London, Manchester and Bournemouth. The next local spiritual assemblies were not elected until 21 April 1939, at Bradford and Torquay (M. Momen 1997, Religious Studies Homepage).

7 Currently the legal age for marriage for females is 13 (and as young as 9, with a guardian's and court's approval, see (UK Government GOV.UK 2022), which is significantly below the age of 18 that UNICEF, and feminists, advocate to prevent forced child marriage, that harms the well-being of girls (UNICEF 2022). For comparison, the age of maturity of Bahá'í children is 15 and engagement and marriage before this age is forbidden. (Bahá'u'lláh 1992, pp. 133–4)

8 I was a speaker at a synodal conference on 26 November 2022 at Ushaw, Durham, sponsored by the National Board of Catholic Women for England and Wales, 'Women at the Periphery taking Centre Stage', that was examining the issue of women's participation in the church (National Board of Catholic Womenm 2022).

9 The sayings and practice of the Prophet Muhammad, transmitted orally over several generations before being written down. They are regarded as a source of holy law alongside the Quran.

10 A term often used in Bahá'í texts to refer to Bahá'í women. Men are often referred to as servants.

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Article

"This Is a Progression, Not Conversion": Narratives of First-Generation Bahá'ís

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Abstract: This paper discusses the concept of religious conversion in the Bahá'í Faith through conversion narratives of first-generation Bahá'ís. Through life story interviews, the converts narrate their process of becoming Bahá'í as "not converting", which aligns with a principle of the Bahá'í Faith called "progressive revelation". Religious conversion has frequently been described in the literature as a radical, sudden, dramatic transformation–often following a personal crisis and seemingly entails a definite break with one's former identity. Consequently, religious conversion studies have focused on the subjective experiences of the rapid changes in the lives and identities of individuals. However, such perspectives have, until now, focused mainly on Christianity and Christian models and have not adequately addressed religious conversion models in other Abrahamic religions, such as the Bahá'í Faith. The paradigm of conversion focuses our attention on the ways particular theologies shape life stories of conversion and what kind of narratives social scientists will include in the corpus of conversion. Therefore, this research asks to broaden the social scientific paradigms of religious conversion through the case study of the Bahá'í Faith.

Keywords: religious conversion; Bahá'í Faith; progressive revelation; life stories; conversion narratives; grounded theory

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1. Introduction

"I became Bahá'í; I did not convert". (Fabrizia,[1] Spain)

Based on life story interviews with first-generation Bahá'ís living mainly in Europe, this paper analyzes their narratives of the conversion process to examine the role such stories play in forming new religious selves. Anchored in the contemporary scholarship of religious conversion, the present analysis offers a new model of what is traditionally referred to as "conversion" and posits that in the Bahá'í Faith, the process is a transition to the Bahá'í Faith that focuses on religious progression rather than a religious conversion. More specifically, the "conversion" narratives of first-generation Bahá'í that are analyzed here emphasize a process of continuity of their religious and personal identity rather than discontinuity or rupture.

The Bahá'í Faith, named after its founder Bahá'u'lláh, originated in Iran in the late 19th century and is one of the world's youngest monotheistic religions. Its fundamental values, calling for removing boundaries between religions, gender, cultures, and countries, have attracted many Muslims, Christians, Zoroastrians, and Jews in Iran (Amanat 2013). Today, in Europe and most countries around the world other than Iran and other countries in the Middle East, many Bahá'í believers are first-generation Bahá'í, as opposed to having been born into a Bahá'í family.

While early research on conversion often analyzed subjects' accounts, focusing on the social and psychological factors predicting converts' changes in religious affiliation to create a unified model, most contemporary research has focused on how conversion narratives should be analyzed as religious practices.

This paper shows that its rhetorical focus on a religion that emphasizes the progressive identity of the interlocutors contrasts with most past and contemporary research on conversion that highlights narratives of temporal rupture or a complete break with the past life course of the convert. Furthermore, by examining how and why the religious identity of continuity and progression is expressed in Bahá'í conversion narratives, this analysis demonstrates how the rhetoric of "not converting" constitutes a form of religious experience and self-definition. Finally, this paper also indicates that though it is an Abrahamic religion, the Bahá'í Faith is exceptional in its perception of religious conversion.

The paper begins by situating first-generation Bahá'í narratives within broader approaches to conversion narratives. Of particular importance is how such Bahá'í narratives reconfigure the relationship between an individual's past and present religious identification. The analysis then proceeds to the theological principle of progressive revelation, demonstrating the need for a more inclusive model of and more inclusive discourse on religious conversion. Finally, this paper examines how "becoming Bahá'í" narratives challenge the model of a sudden life-changing experience or social crisis, new relationships, and social integration.

2. Religious Conversion

Scholars of religious conversion have often interpreted it as "a radical change in the religious identity, followed by a commitment to a new religious group" (Gooren 2010, p. 50). Gooren's definition regards conversion as a personal modification and engagement with a new community. The converts establish new boundaries and transgress pre-existing religious, political, social, and cultural boundaries (Rambo and Farhadian 2014). Köse (1994) defines conversion as "a definite break with one's former identity . . . a radical change in one's identity, beliefs, personality, ideas, behavior, and values" (Köse 1994, p. 195; in Köse 1999).

Social and psychological researchers of religious conversion, such as Snow and Machalek (1984), characterize conversion as a radical change in one's identity, meaning, and life, while Rambo (1993, p. 5) defines conversion as a bioprocess of change in a dynamic force field of people, events, ideologies, institutions, expectations, and orientations.

Ines Jindra (2014) claims that many studies of religious conversion have focused on individuals' subjective experiences, such as a rapid change in one's life and identity, including revision in religious affiliation, clothes, name, language, and more (Jindra 2014).

Hood et al. (2018) have mapped the study of religious conversion from a psychological point of view. They show that most studies on conversion involve a transformation of the self, which is not merely a process of maturing, but is usually associated with a process (either sudden or gradual) that leads to a significant change in the self. This transformation in the self is radical in its implications, as seen in an alteration of concern, interest, and action. Furthermore, this new sense of self is seen as "higher" or as freedom from a previous problem or situation. Therefore, conversion is a form of self-realization or self-reorganization in which someone finds or adopts a new self (Hood et al. 2018).

2.1. The Christianization of the Study of Religious Conversion

The origins of the notion of conversion can be found in Christianity. Christian tradition describes conversion as an individual's reorientation of their spiritual identity or soul, a dramatic change in beliefs, lifestyle, and more, radically altering one's view of reality, the world, and oneself. The tradition has early roots in the Confessions of Augustine[2] of Hippo and Paul's vision on the Road to Damascus (Jacobs 2012).

Over the last several decades, scholars of religion have demonstrated that the central discourse of scholarly research on religious conversion, like many other allegedly neutral terms, has been based on case studies of Christianity and often unattributed Christian notions. Asad (1996) states in "Comments on Conversion": "Conversion is a process of divine enablement through which the intransitive work of becoming a Christian and attaining true consciousness can be completed" (Asad 1996, p. 266).

Recent studies have shown that religious conversion is conceived differently in different religious traditions, such as Islam, Buddhism (Bryant and Lamb 1999), and Judaism (Kravel-Tovi 2017, 2019). Jindra (2014) used in-depth interviews to develop a comparative approach to conversion by considering possible differences between religious groups (Jindra 2014). Still, even theories that have moved beyond Christianity to include other Abrahamic religions, such as Judaism and Islam, have not focused on the Bahá'í Faith.

2.2. Conversion Narrative in Christianity—A Narrative of Rupture

Christianity calls for a rupture in the personal history of those who convert, asking converts to forsake other behaviors, other belief systems, and certainly other gods. The literature presenting Christian conversion narratives often relates to the process as a rupture, such as occurs in Christianity's Pentecostal and Charismatic variants (Hurlbut 2021).

Brigit Meyer (1998) writes in her research on Pentecostals that they "make a complete break with the past" during the converter's trajectory; they seek to distance themselves from aspects of their prior lives. She demonstrates how Pentecostalist discourse about rupture allows members to approach the ideal of modern, individual identity and address all the ties they seek to leave behind that, up until that point, mattered in their lives (Meyer 1998).

Coleman and Hackett (2015) have also remarked that within the anthropology of Christianity, "one of the key theoretical tropes so far . . . has revolved around the question of 'rupture'" (13–14). Within the Pentecostal branch, for example, rupture might refer to fundamental transformations in the societies and cultures it has encountered. Encounters with Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism have facilitated the shift of populations toward radically new forms of self-conception and practice involving engagement with "modernity" and rejection of past customs (Coleman and Hackett 2015).

Yet the notion of rupture is not limited to Pentecostals or Evangelism. Virtually all denominations of Christianity emphasize the importance of radical change. As Robbins (2012) states, Christianity emphasizes the importance of radical change in several respects. First, almost all forms of Christianity tell its story as a break from Judaism, from which it originated. Second, Jesus' incarnation significantly changed the timeline of history, making Christianity a new and different force in the world. Finally, in many, not all, Christian eschatology of its forms also focuses on a drastic change in the future. Additionally, Christianity calls for a transformation in the personal history of its adherents, requiring them to convert to the faith. Therefore, according to Robbins, 'various forms of Christianity may stress these ruptures in their doctrine and ritual' (Robbins 2012, p. 12).

2.3. Continuous Conversion

In his work on Eastern Orthodox conversion narratives, Daniel Winchester found a contrast to the aforementioned Christian conversion practice; he termed the process of joining the new religion that he observed as "Conversion to Continuity" (Winchester 2015, p. 439). Through examining how and why temporal continuity is incorporated into Eastern Orthodox conversion narratives, his analysis demonstrates that narratives of self-continuity work to constitute forms of religious experience and self-interpretation that differ in important ways from the narratives of temporal rupture that have been so well analyzed in studies of Evangelical, fundamentalist, and Pentecostal Christian subcultures. He pays particular attention to how continuities between non-Orthodox pasts and the Orthodox present and future are established within their stories of religious becoming (Winchester 2015).

Other research, albeit a small fraction of the bulk of conversion discourse, has also found conversion experiences that stray from the common "complete break" stories. Conversion as a process and conceptions of the position of converts in society can be seen in the literature to turn on two poles of alternate emphasis, those of change and continuity. Tomas Sealy (2021) states that converts to Islam balance notions of change and continuity. British Muslim converts engage in a long negotiation process between their sense of self and the community they have left as opposed to the Muslim community they have joined.

Sealy argues that we need to focus on the dynamic process between change and continuity and the negotiations converts make when they navigate their identities and social relations (Sealy 2021).

Moving away from earlier models that emphasize conversion as a sudden epiphany, conceptualizations of conversion as a continuous process offer helpful frameworks for approaching conversion studies outside Christian contexts.

3. Conversion Rituals—A New Commitment

A significant part of the conversion process is transitioning from one religion to another (Rambo 1993). Many religions express this through a public rite of passage to mark that moment, and most traditions employ rejection, transition, and incorporation rituals at the commitment stage. In the ritual, the convert demonstrates a formal or informal and explicit or implicit decision to become a religious community member. The convert thereby leaves the previous religion and indicates their new identity by various means, such as dress (Islam, Judaism), a name change (Islam, Judaism), baptism (Christianity), mutilation of the body (Judaism), and more or less explicit acts of renunciation of the past.

In Hine's (1970) words, commitment rituals are "bridge-burning events" and can be very effective. Hine mentioned three significant functions of the rituals: First, the convert enacts the ritual ceremony and thus embodies the transformation process. Second, the convert's public proclamation of rejecting an old way of life and embracing the new consolidates the conversion process. Third, the bridge-burning conversion rituals provide the individual with powerful subjective experiences that confirm the group's ideology and transform the convert's self-image. New group members are ritually reaffirmed in their convictions and transported into new roles and statuses. The crowd observing and sometimes taking a critical part in the ritual is reminded of their own commitment to a new way of life. Finally, outsiders may be offended or bewildered by the "absurdity" or irrationality of the rituals. Such reactions help define a sense of boundaries between the religious group and the outside world (Hine 1970).

Robbins calls these performances "rituals of rupture" (Robbins 2003, p. 223). According to Robbins (2003), Pentecostals routinely enact a rupture from their prior faith and identity in ritual practices that make disjuncture a constant theme.

Contrary to the theme of rupture in the previously mentioned cases, the Bahá'í Faith practices virtually no rituals, conversion or otherwise. In order to examine what serves as a commitment ritual when "becoming" Bahá'í, I present personal narratives of people who have joined the Bahá'í Faith.

4. Methods, Research Process, and Analysis

The narratives presented in this paper are drawn from a selection of 60 interviews held online via Zoom and Skype and held face-to-face in Ireland and at the Bahá'í World Center in Haifa, Israel between 2020–2022. The interviews are part of large-scale research about the Bahá'í Faith and include extended ethnographic fieldwork in the Bahá'í community in Ireland. For this research, I interviewed first-generation Bahá'í rather than people that were born to Bahá'í parents, as I wanted to explore the experience of a new religious identity. These first-generation Bahá'í came from a variety of religious backgrounds. Most were raised Christian; others grew up in Jewish, Muslim, or mixed-religion households.

In this research, the methodology of life story interviews was employed. "A life story is a fairly complete narrating of one's entire experience of life as a whole, highlighting the most important aspects" (Atkinson 1998). Life story interviews are conducted as open interviews to hear about historical and personal experiences and obtain as comprehensive a picture as possible of different aspects of the interviewees' lives. The life story interview provides a practical and holistic methodological approach for collecting personal narratives that reveal how a specific human life is constructed and reconstructed to represent life as a story (Atkinson 2012).

Each interview comprised several stages. In the first stage, I introduced myself and my research. I then instructed the interlocutor, "please tell me about yourself", and I listened to their life stories without intervening. Next, I asked each interlocutor to clarify issues and provide details on the events mentioned. Each interview lasted between an hour and a half and four hours. In cases where the time frame set for the interview did not cover their story, I asked to speak with the interlocutor more than once, accumulating over 200 interview hours in total.

Jerome Bruner (1987, 1991) illustrated that personal meaning (and reality) is constructed during the making and telling of one's narrative and that stories are a way of organizing, interpreting, and creating meaning from our experiences while maintaining a sense of continuity through it all (Bruner 1987, 1991). Through the interviews, I sought to understand the identity and self-definition of the people who became Bahá'í and to grasp shared or different narratives in their life stories. Since no single conversion model could fit all conversions, I sought to understand the various narratives about how they became Bahá'í.

4.1. The Research Process

Due to COVID-19 restrictions in 2020, I started my fieldwork online. I began by contacting Bahá'í acquaintances and received a list of people that showed interest in sharing their stories. As a non-Bahá'í, this stage was critical to creating the first connections. Next, I emailed potential interviewees to introduce myself and the research objectives. Many referred me to their friends and family. This "snowball" recruiting method was most common among interlocutors from Italy and then in the fieldwork in Ireland. I did not aim for a purposeful sampling, yet a similar number of men and women were interviewed, 32 women and 28 men.

Furthermore, after learning about my research, the Bahá'í World Center invited me to interview five volunteers from various nationalities and ethnicities. Throughout the research, I interviewed 60 people from 16 nationalities: Germany, the USA, Canada, Chile, India, Spain, Italy, Guyana, Belgium, New Zealand, the UK, Switzerland, Tanzania, Belarus, Ireland, and South Africa. Yet, since most of the interlocutors were from Ireland and Italy, countries with a high percentage of the Catholic population, the majority of them came from a Catholic background. As "narratives about conversion contain elements shaped by specific religious traditions" (Smilde 2005, p. 785), it can be assumed that people with different ethnic and religious characteristics would present other issues and narratives, so, therefore, in this case, the "snowball" sampling has limitations regarding the lack of diversity of interlocutors.

4.2. Data Analysis

I used grounded theory for this research, analyzing culture based on the interactions of individuals in society and the interpretations they give to their actions and the actions of others (Corbin and Strauss 2015). In grounded theory, data are compared throughout the research process rather than after data collection, enabling new categories to emerge and making direct relationships between concepts and categories. This facilitates a shift from description to higher levels of abstraction and theoretical elaboration. In addition, grounded theory can aid analysis by avoiding the use of pre-existing disciplinary categories, minimizing unsystematic and random data collection, approaching the data in novel ways to enhance the building of categories, concepts, and theories, and eliminating the artificial separation between data collection and analysis (Charmaz 2014).

Following the interviews, I began analyzing the transcribed data. First, I summarized and divided the data into key themes to focus on follow-up questions and to extract the critical narratives. Next, the interview transcripts were coded iteratively in search of common themes. In the second phase, similarities and differences were analyzed and eventually merged into significant themes. For this paper, I did not investigate the biographical aspects that led them to join the Bahá'í Faith.

An Institutional Review Board approved the study at Ben Gurion University. The interlocutors were given a consent form, agreeing to share their life stories and to be recorded. Most interviewed people agreed that I could use their real names, yet I chose to use aliases and change place names; the coded data and the interlocutors' names were stored separately.

5. Progressive Revelation and the Unity of All Religions

> "The religion of God is one religion, but it must ever be renewed". ('Abdu'l-Bahá 2006)

The theological basis of the Bahá'í Faith is the unity of the revealed religions. According to this doctrine, each religion is based on God's revelation to man of ideas that man would not have arrived at by his natural reason alone. Bahá'u'lláh claimed that he embodied the messianic figures of the four religious traditions that predominated in nineteenth-century Iran: Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Islam (Buck 1986). Followers believe that the founders of their religions, such as Moses, Zoroaster, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh, are human manifestations of God, and for the Bahá'ís, Bahá'u'lláh's revelations represent the culmination of the current prophetic cycle. Progressive revelation is considered a circular and continuous process; in other words, Bahá'u'lláh did not declare himself to be the last prophet, and the Bahá'í Faith is not the "last" religion; they are just the most updated versions for this time. Bahá'u'lláh said that the next divine revelation would come in 1000 years and must be accepted (*Bahá'í Reference Library—The Kitáb-i-Íqán, Pages 161–200* n.d.).

Over time, Bahá'u'lláh and his son 'Abdu'l-Bahá accepted the Old Testament prophets, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel ('Abdu'l-Bahá 2006). While Bahá'u'lláh spoke primarily of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Babism, and the Baha'i Faith itself, his son and successor, 'Abdu'l-Baha' (1844–1921), extended this philosophical framework to encompass the religions of Buddha and Krishna as well (Cole 1993). Moreover, Bahá'í scholars have sought to demonstrate that other beliefs, religious messengers, and prophets are connected in the Bahá'í writings. For example, in 1996, Christopher Buck related indigenous beliefs in North America to the Bahá'í religious framework. Bahá'í pioneers used native prophecies in efforts to teach Bahá'u'lláh's vision to Native Americans by creating an "eschatological bridge" between the native worldview and Bahá'í universalism, linking native wisdom and the Bahá'í vision (Buck 1996).

Some religions, however, have not had their manifestations recognized or mentioned in the Bahá'í scriptures. According to Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Confucius and Lao-Tzu (Chinese), Mahavira (Jainism), and Guru Nanak Sahib (Sikhism) were not manifestations. Furthermore, there is no official Bahá'í position on Mani, the founder of Manichaeism (Stockman 1995).

While Muslim clerics denied the validity of Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, and Buddhism and refused to accept the Christian Bible as reliably transmitted scripture (Cole 1993), the Bahá'ís did not follow suit, even though the Bahá'í Faith emerged from Islam. The Baha'i Faith recognized prophets who followed Muhammad, creating a new, liberalized religious law that acknowledged the validity of South Asian and non-Abrahamic faiths and accepted the Christian Bible and other holy books as generally valid scriptural texts (Momen 1988).

According to the aforementioned theological principle, God sends a messenger who transmits the epistle, the word of God, to human beings in every generation. Whatever it is called and whatever the means of transmission, the message is appropriate for the period and society in which it is given. In interviews, Bahá'í often used a metaphor for a child's education to describe the notion of progressive revelation: When a baby is born, it is cared for at the primary level; he is kept alive. Then the child grows, his abilities are intensified and perfected, and so is what we expect of him. In the same way, humanity is granted continuous and progressive revelation.

As the world's major religions and their prophets are part of the Bahá'í religious story, different narratives from different cultures are channeled into one meta-narrative, one story,

and one God. Thus, people from virtually all faiths and religions, even non-Abrahamic religions, such as Native Americans, are said to be able to find their beliefs and cultural heritage in the Bahá'í Faith. Moreover, unlike in most varieties of Abrahamic religion in which converts are required to renounce their past beliefs and commitments to create a rupture, in the Bahá'í "system," there is no exclusiveness of one theological principle or rejection of others. Therefore, the Bahá'í believe that there are no boundaries between religions and that, therefore, people do not leave their previous religions when they become Bahá'í.

Not leaving or breaking from one's previous religion is different from that which happens when one joins virtually all other religions and accounts for the Bahá'í experience being perceived as a "becoming" rather than a converting. This difference, in turn, affects the Bahá'ís' life stories; as Jindra (2014) marks in her research: "some converts might tell and reinterpret their story much more to match the doctrines of their new religion, whereas others might rely more on their emotional experience" (Jindra 2014, p. 18). In this paper, I will demonstrate how this theological principle has shaped how first-generation Bahá'ís narrate their conversion experience and religious identity.

6. Narrating Their Conversion: "This Is Not Conversion; I Am Not a Convert."

While interlocutors shared their life stories and described how they became Bahá'í, they did not call themselves "converts"; instead, they used the emic term "first-generation Bahá'í." From the Bahá'í community's point of view, this expression describes them as not being born to Bahá'í parents. However, on a personal level, this is also meant to declare their new religious identity and belonging to the community. Therefore, using the term "first-generation Bahá'í" implies the element of choice or free will of their religious identity, contrary to a religion into which they were born and that they did not choose.[3] Meanwhile, children of Bahá'í parents can choose whether to join the Bahá'í community when they turn 15 years old.

After establishing the rhetoric of being first-generation Bahá'ís and not converts, the interlocutors asked that I replace the terminology of "religious conversion" with "becoming Bahá'í" to describe their religious transformation. "Not converting" was a dominant narrative among all 60 interlocutors while describing their life stories and religious paths: they became Bahá'í; they did not convert. As one interlocutor recounted:

> "It's not conversion . . . I would never ever say I converted to the Bahá'í faith. That title was never part of my vocabulary; it was 'I became a Bahá'í'". (Bernadette, Ireland)

Another summarized: "I would never say I converted to being a Bahá'í" (Pearl, Ireland).

For Bernadette, Pearl, and other interlocutors, the term "conversion" does not define their spiritual and religious process. Moreover, using the etic term of religious conversion created resistance and even evoked negative connotations of necessity, violence, coercion, passivity, and more: "Nobody is pushing you to do anything because if there is not a clergy class, there is no one who is telling you what to do" (Sergio, Italy).

The concept of free will and the ability to choose one's faith and belief was a dominant part of their explanation. Therefore, I wanted to pursue and deepen the subject and understand why the term religious conversion had such a negative connotation and reaction and why they were so reluctant to use that word, even though their religious leaders, such as Shoghi Effendi, did use it in the Bahá'í writings (Shoghi Effendi 1957).

As described in the study population, most interlocutors were from Christian and predominantly Catholic backgrounds. In addition, the vast majority, men and women, had received strict religious education and were "indoctrinated," in their words, into those beliefs by the religious institutions and their representatives. Therefore, the interlocutors had also absorbed the Christian doctrine of religious conversion, how it is performed, and its outcomes: "I suppose conversion has the connotation of pressure. And I don't think for either one of us that was the situation for my sister and I" (Harriette, Ireland).

Harriette and her sister both became Bahá'í, the first in their family. Growing up in Catholic Ireland, they knew how Christianity spread worldwide, so she related conversion to Christianity's history and its violent efforts to convert people to the faith:

> I think that the connotation for Catholics in particular, and for Christians, we think of the missionaries who went to Africa and who would, you know, build churches and give people money. But the conversion was, it was almost like a transaction. I think, in particular, for Irish Baha'is who would have come from that background, there is the idea that conversion comes with the idea of there being a transaction involved, so no transaction would be permissible for a Bahá'í. (Harriette, Ireland)

Bahá'ís are expected to teach people about the faith, but not proselytize or pressure people to change their religions; in other words, they do not offer money or other benefits. Therefore, the interlocutors position themselves and the Bahá'í faith as not converting. Meanwhile, Han (2019) demonstrated how Asian Buddhists in America express ambivalence over using the label "convert" because of its Christian connotations and its associations with whiteness (Han 2019); thus, the rejection of the term is similar, but the motivation for rejection is unrelated.

Most research on conversion narratives engages with stories of people entering a new religious community who are also leaving a religious tradition. The community often encourages a person who joins a new religious group to create a narrative about their new identity that will present their story to the community and the world.

While narrating their life stories, some interlocutors described personal tragedy, grief, and even abuse. Yet even when they were asked directly about it, none of them linked such past experiences to their decisions to become Bahá'í. For example:

> I became Bahá'í before they (his parents) were even officially divorced. But, of course, it was very difficult nonetheless. And I think that that's important to add least. I think it (becoming Bahá'í) helps me, in general, to cope with difficult situations or with things that we might find hard to accept more. (Johann, Germany)

When Johann was investigating the faith at age 20, his parents divorced. He reports that the divorce had a significant emotional effect on him, yet, he does not believe that this event was a catalyst for his decision to join the Bahá'í Faith. Had such events been a root cause for changing religions, "converts" might have been more compelled to emphasize a break with their pasts.

If first-generation Bahá'ís have not converted, and this is not a conversion, as they adamantly claimed, then what is it? In their narratives, the Bahá'ís asked to redefine their process to align with progressive revelation principles.

7. From Conversion to Progression—Using New Rhetoric

> "It's a progression, not a conversion. So, there wasn't really any converting to do". (Sophia, Canada)

In most religious conversions, while obtaining new religious identities, religious converts leave their previous religious, personal, and even ethnic identities behind. This often happens in the process of commitment rituals, where the new believers claim their new identities by building a wall or, as Hine defines it, by "burning bridges" (Hine 1970). However, following the narrative of not converting, the first-generation Bahá'ís are not crossing a bridge and then burning it. Instead, they continue connecting with their prior faith, and, most importantly, they build new bridges to other religions. Becoming Bahá'í entails intensive learning and accepting the messengers and religious philosophies that came before Bahá'u'lláh. As one interlocutor said: "'Conversion' has the inference that you are somehow giving up what you previously believed; it's really not; you are adding to your understanding of what previously came" (Nichole, Ireland).

The narrative of "progression and not conversion" corresponds with the theological ideas and conceptions of the Bahá'í Faith, namely that of "progressive revelation," in which followers believe that the Bahá'í Faith represents the accepted "eternal truths" of all revealed religions. In the interviewees' perceptions, the transition to the Bahá'í Faith is part of their personal and spiritual development. There is no objection to or erasure of the religion they grew up in, as it forms part of their contemporary identity. While becoming Bahá'í, they can integrate most of their ethnic identity, such as their names, clothes, languages, scriptures, and even ceremonies, into the Bahá'í Faith. This is demonstrated by one of the interlocutors describing his identity: "My ethnic identity is Jewish. I'm Christian; I'm Muslim, I'm Bahá'í. I'm everything" (David, USA).

And another one shared:

> I didn't feel as if I was leaving that [Christianity] behind. It was more of an evolution or moving on into another stage of settlement with congruence. So that this whole kind of line of religion, is this whole kind of pantheon of religious figures lined up, and this is the next most obvious step to take, it seemed to me anyway, so I didn't feel as if I was rejecting anything that I was brought up with. (Justine, Ireland)

As mentioned, Bahá'ís often use the metaphor that every religion is a chapter in God's book, while the Bahá'í Faith's latest and relevant chapter is today. This also allows them to position themselves in the context of other religions and not just the Abrahamic ones. They believe that their personal and religious identity is evolving alongside the progression of God's plan.

> "What we Baha'is believe is the next chapter in the book. It's the same book. It's the same Creator. It's the same line of work, you know, revelation". (Dubán, Ireland)

> "Religion is progressive. The Word of God is progressive. That's why God's prophet's messengers [are sent] to update us". (Sophia, Canada)

To paraphrase the progression narrative that the interlocutors described, their religious identity has progressed; therefore, it can be claimed that if you are not progressing in your spirituality, you are receding. They believe that this is true for people and religions at the same time.

> "I wasn't leaving anybody behind, and I was going to something that was part of. I believe in the plan of God as this is progressive revelation, and this is how we progress. And if you look at nature, it teaches us about progression as well. Everything is progression. So, if it doesn't evolve, it recedes back". (Bernadette, Ireland)

8. Exclusiveness versus Inclusiveness

Monotheistic religions tend to insist on the exclusivity of their revelation as doctrine. Most Judeo–Christian religions will accept the prophets that came before but not the following ones. Jews do not accept Jesus as the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy, Christians do not accept Mormons as fulfillers of Jesus' mission, and Muslims do not accept Bahá'u'lláh.

Juan Cole (1993) claimed that fundamentalist movements tend to adopt an exclusivist point of view. The Christian church, for example, instituted the doctrine of exclusivity of salvation through Jesus Christ. For Muslims, it is the finality of God's revelation with Muhammad (Khodadad 2008). This was so widely held that it led to the persecution, imprisonment, and exile of Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, considered a prophet by his followers.

The Bahá'í Faith, on the other hand, offers a relatively revolutionary idea: the unity of all religions. While most religions demand believers to commit exclusively to them, the Bahá'í Faith provides a new point of view with Bahá'í texts asserting the underlying unity of the world and the unity of the prophets or founders of those religions (Cole 1993). Following the doctrine of progressive revelation and unity of all religions, the Bahá'í

Faith seeks to offer a more inclusive approach to believers. Instead of espousing a specific religious ideology and abandoning the old ones, they enfold all religions.

> "What I found with the Bahá'í Faith is that you're actually embracing all faiths . . . what you've learned in school, you're not going to throw it away. You're adding more to it". (Lorette, Ireland)

> "The Bahá'í faith embraces the other religions. So, you're not separated, you're all together". (Wilma, USA)

Another aspect is embracing rituals and other religious practices from their prior faith. As Bahá'í do not practice any religious traditions in everyday life, some choose to preserve their past customs. This is possible since those rituals do not contrast their new religious identity. In this way, Bahá'ís are not asked to exclude their prior religious practices, and they can include them in their new religious identity. For example, many interlocutors from Christian backgrounds mentioned Christmas as an example of a religious celebration that they practice primarily with their non-Bahá'í family:

> Christmas is the day they would do so [celebrate religious holidays] because we believe that all the manifestations of God come from the same God. We don't make the tree with all these colored balls, but generally, we don't have difficulties attending any Catholic or Christmas meetings today. Mainly, it is a big lunch on the 25th of December. All the friends come together. (Sergio, Italy)

> A lot of us, you know, have families who are not Bahá'ís. And so we do observe Christmas. We observe Easter. I mean, that's an individual call for myself. I like to remember that Christmas is about the birth of Christ, not about, you know, cake. And I mean, it's about, you know, gathering together and family and all of that. (Carly, New Zealand)

9. Declaring and Committing

To become Bahá'í, new community members declare that they believe that Bahá'u'lláh is the latest manifestation of God, and they agree to follow his teaching. With this, they are committed to the Bahá'í community and its spiritual institutions, such as the Universal House of Justice, the supreme religious authority of the faith.

In most Western Bahá'í communities, when a person wishes to join, they sign a declaration card and then become a full member of the Bahá'í community with all rights and duties (Warburg 2006). The declaration marks the individual's decision to join the Bahá'í community, yet they can still participate in some of their previous religious community activities. Therefore, there is no expectation that new believers will erase their identities or adopt new ones. Furthermore, the Bahá'í Faith allows the new believers to maintain their personal, social, ethnic, and cultural identity symbols, such as their names and clothing.

Instead of external or physical changes, such as particular clothes, body mutilation, or immersion in water, the Bahá'í Faith speaks of a spiritual progression that elevates one's spirituality through the individual process of enquiring about knowledge. Most of the people I interviewed who have become Bahá'í do not recall that the declaration was a significant part of their process of becoming Bahá'í: "I did not change my faith; I've declared myself" (Matilde, Italy).

Moreover, the declaration was not a public event but a small meeting, sometimes unplanned, and it was not facilitated. For the interlocutors, the turning point is how they feel about themselves, as put by one interlocutor: "being a better version of myself." Because no one is "burning bridges," there is no need to leave past religion, culture, or community behind. Similarly, there are no apparent features to mark this event, such as a purifying process. Nor are they asked to cut off all their previous social connections. From the Bahá'í point of view, becoming Bahá'í is an active process when declaring their faith:

> You just assert, really, I suppose, that you accept the laws of the Bahá'í Faith and that you try to live by them, you know? Then you just register as a Bahá'í. It's

> not a big moment, really. Well, it is in your soul, I think it is at the moment. But there isn't a big change. (Harriette, Ireland)

Dubán comments on his experience making the statement, comparing it to his previous religious background:

> The terminology at the time was a declaration of faith. You don't get water poured over you or anything like that. You just make a conscious decision, and you sign your name on a registration card to keep records of who the members are. Once you become a member, once you make that declaration and you are ready, the declaration card is usually sent to the Local Spiritual Assembly. Then in many cases, they will invite you in for a consultation, and they will welcome you, greet you to pray with you. In some cases, they might even give you a gift book to read. (Dubán, Ireland)

10. Discussion and Conclusions

In this research, I sought to describe and interpret the trajectories of religious conversion as told by first-generation Bahá'ís. Through life story interviews, I strived to explore the personal experiences of those who decided to become Bahá'í and to reveal their narratives with connections to concepts of identity, conversion, and community. This exploration shows how such narratives reconfigure the relationship between past and present religious identification, which is significant to the conversion discourse.

The rejection of the concept of "conversion" in Bahá'í narratives is likely rooted in the Christian backgrounds of the interlocutors. The notion of conversion to Christianity carries heavy connotations, such as valences, violent crusades, colonialism, and financial transactions. These attributes of conversion have shaped the Bahá'í narratives, in addition to Bahá'í theology of progressive revelation. The lack of a conversion ritual might also promote continuity because others do not have to witness the newly declared Bahá'í renouncing their past to join a community. This absence of conversion rituals might facilitate a stronger sense of continuity and identity within the Bahá'í Faith. Moreover, conversion could be seen to be more aligned with the Christian worldview than the Bahá'í worldview. The concept of "progressive revelation" at the center of the Bahá'í Faith declares that humanity as individuation need not stay static but progress over time.

First-generation Bahá'ís state that they are "not converting." Unlike most scholarly accounts of religious conversion, which emphasize crisis and rupture with past religious and social commitments, the Bahá'í principle of progressive revelation leads Bahá'ís to describe their affiliation as a continuous result of their previous religious orientations. This view of religious change is progressive, emphasizing the continuity of one's identity and faith. This is contrary to the concept of rupture that is dominant in Christianity.

Furthermore, continuous approaches for conversion, as Winchester (2015) and Sealy (2021) suggested, still employ a notion of change and acquiring new religious selves. By examining how and why continuity of religious identity is performed in Bahá'í Faith "conversion" narratives, this analysis demonstrates how narratives of "not converting" work to constitute forms of religious experience and self-definition that differ from the narratives of temporal rupture customarily analyzed in studies of religious conversion. Therefore, the Bahá'í narratives appear not to relate to change resulting from life crises, but from personal growth. Thus, instead of burning bridges with their prior beliefs, they seek to build new ones that connect them not only to their previous faith but also to other religions and religious messengers.

Further research about Bahá'í conversion narratives should try to answer questions such as: How do the person's birth, faith, nationality, race, and ethnicity affect their decision to become Bahá'í? How do "converts" combine their cultural motives in the Bahá'í Faith? What ideas or practices do first-generation Bahá'í leave behind? Moreover, ethnographic research based on the Bahá'í communities will contribute to our understanding of how Bahá'í believers practice the religious faith within that community. Finally, it will allow us to

demonstrate how the theology of the new religion, Bahá'í, as well as previous background, shapes conversion narratives in new ways.

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Notes

1 Throughout the paper, I will use pseudonyms to keep the interlocuters anonymous.

2 Augustine (later named St. Augustine) was a philosopher; his work consists of sixteen volumes called confessions. His writings have had a profound influence on Christian spiritual life.

3 Asian American converts to Buddhism consider themselves as having long family histories of being Buddhist in America and, therefore, consider themselves to be "multi-generation" and reject the concept of a "first-generation" Buddhist as the first member of the family to be Buddhist in America (Han 2019).

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Article

A New Wave of Bahā'ī Intellectual Thought: The Impact and Contributions of *World Order* Magazine

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Abstract: This paper explores the scholarship and intellectual contribution of the second series of *World Order* magazine, which published from 1966 until 2008 over 38 volumes. In so doing, I provide a narrative overview of the main themes and papers in *World Order*, and by extension some of the topics being discussed in the worldwide Bahā'ī community. This is complemented by interviews with past *World Order* editors, who provided information on papers, topics and issues that generated the most interest and print runs, a listing of the number of pieces and articles by topic, and a questionnaire survey of those attending an academic Bahā'ī conference. I compare themes identified in the overview with contemporary discourses over a similar period drawing on surveys of textbook and journal contents in similar areas. In addition, I summarise available information on the most cited (from Google Scholar) and downloaded (from Bahā'ī Library online) *World Order* papers, and hence those contributions with the most impact using these quantitative approaches. I show that Abizadeh's paper on 'Ethnicity, Race, and a Possible Humanity', which discusses how the concept of the oneness of humanity can potentially address racial problems, is the most cited paper, and Stokes's paper on 'The Story of Joseph in Five Religious Traditions', a piece on comparative religion, is the most downloaded. Overall, the most cited and downloaded papers are indicative of the breadth of topics covered in *World Order*, with pieces on political philosophy, law, education, history, theology, and psychology. The number of articles and editorials on social issues, such as racial justice, women's rights, and environmentalism, is one indication that the Bahā'ī community was at the forefront of thinking about social action.

Keywords: Bahā'ī; intellectual; publishing; magazine; periodical; citations

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1. Introduction

Very little has been written on the development of intellectual thought in North American and European Bahā'ī communities. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, books and articles were written by orientalists and diplomats interested in the origins of the Bahā'ī religion, but it was only from the 1950s that a more scholarly approach developed in the English language. Within the Bahā'ī community, some of this new thinking about the religion and its implications was published in a Bahā'ī-sponsored periodical, *World Order* magazine. In this paper, I will examine the scholarship and intellectual contribution of the second series of *World Order* magazine, which started in 1966 and continued until 2008 after publishing 38 volumes. In so doing, I aim to provide an overview of the main themes and papers over this period, and summarise available information on citations and downloads in order to capture one measure of its impact.

Bahā'ī News was the first English-language periodical and launched in 1910. It was renamed *Star of the West* (reflecting the terminology of the time) in 1911.[1] In 1922, Shoghi Effendi, the head of the Bahā'ī community from 1921 to 1957, wrote that he wished for the magazine to become 'more and more universal so as to interest all those who are working for universal brotherhood, religion and peace' (NSA 2011). *Star of the West* then became *The Bahā'ī Magazine*. *World Order* was formed from combining *The Bahā'ī Magazine* with another periodical, *World Unity.* The latter was a monthly magazine that started in October

1927 with Horace Holley as managing editor,[2] and there were 15 volumes published until its last issue in March 1935. Thus, the first series of *World Order* started in April 1935.[3] It was under the editorship of Horace Holley and Stanwood Cobb, prominent Bahā'īs of their time, and published by the Bahā'ī Publishing Committee in New York. However, this series ceased publication in 1949 due to a shortage of funds, initially for two years 'in an effort to ensure funds were available to complete the Bahā'ī House of Worship in Wilmette' at the request of Shoghi Effendi. The acute financial burden continued up to the House of Worship's completion in 1953 (NSA 2011), but even after this, *World Order* did not restart until 1966.

The idea behind reviving *World Order* was first proposed by Firuz Kazemzadeh in 1965, who was a Yale historian and prominent Bahā'ī, to the US National Spiritual Assembly, the elected nine-person administrative council of the Bahā'īs of the United States, of which Kazemzadeh was a member (Interchange 1998–1999). David Ruhe, who was also on the National Assembly at the time and a medical academic at the University of Kansas, was instrumental in suggesting it, securing funding and recommending what it should do (Fisher 2017). The first editorial board included Kazemzadeh and Howard Garey (also a Yale academic).[4] In 1967, Glenford Mitchell, who was teaching English and journalism at Howard University, became managing editor and remained until 1982. In 1968, Robert Hayden and Betty Fisher joined the editorial board; Betty Fisher becoming managing editor after Glenford Mitchell until *World Order* ceased publication in 2008. The first issue of the new series of *World Order* stated that its mission was to 'represent a dialogue among those, whether Bahā'ī or not, whose efforts to understand and do something about the human condition have brought them to a point at which exchange of ideas and insights will be of common benefit', and 'providing an opportunity for the discussion of a vast number of problems which must be solved if the goal of a unified and peaceful humanity is ever to be achieved' (Editors 1966). This mission statement was revised in 1998, with the aim of 'nurturing, exploring and eloquently expressing the intellectual, spiritual and creative lives of Bahā'īs'. The US National Assembly and its office of External Affairs reportedly sent 300 copies of each issue of *World Order* to various national-level contacts, and the Bahā'ī Office at the United Nations (also known as the Bahā'ī International Community) in New York and official Bahā'ī public information representatives shared copies (NSA 2011).

The design from 1966 onwards was innovative in many ways.[5] This series followed the design and colour scheme of the last few issues of the first series of *World Order*.[6] The typeface lettering of 'World Order' is clearly influenced by Bauhaus fonts (see Figure 1), and remained consistent throughout its publication history with a band under the title that extends to the back cover. There was abstract art on the back cover from Spring 1967, and photography from the Fall 1967 issue (usually taken by Glenford Mitchell). Two colours were used on the front cover, 'to create moods that change with the seasons'.[7] Colour combinations were occasionally bold (Figure 2). Photographs and paintings also appeared inside the magazine from 1967.[8] From the Fall 1977 issue, some further changes were made (to the spacing of the table of contents on the cover)[9] and also a photograph 'wrapped' itself from the front and back. Further occasional changes were made. Recognising this, *World Order* won a design award out of a field of 450 journals in 2004, with the judges commending the 'full-bleed photos that open each article' and the periodical's 'crispness'. On receiving the award, Betty Fisher, managing editor, stated, 'We wanted the design to reflect a publication that is thought-provoking but exciting, serious but engaging, innovative but accessible' (Bahā'ī News 2005). Looking at the design history, it is notable that Frank Lloyd Wright, America's best known architect, designed a cover of *World Unity*, its precursor (Interchange 1998–1999)[10], and this will very likely have influenced subsequent designs that maintained some key aspects of his original design, including the font and integration of the front and back.

Figure 1. Typeface for 1966 *World Order* magazine.

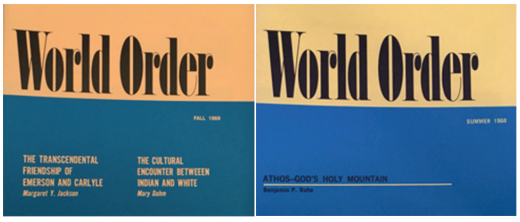

Figure 2. Early *World Order* covers incorporating the two-colour design.

In 2008, after 42 years, which was volume 38 number 3, *World Order* ceased publication due to funding difficulties following a national economic crisis and the desire of the US National Assembly to concentrate any funding on Bahá'í studies toward the *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, which was the quarterly publication of the Association of Bahá'í Studies–North America.[11] An online version of *World Order* was considered but did not materialise. In 2008, the National Assembly requested *World Order* to cease publishing as a subscription print magazine and 'to effect a transition to a new, free online magazine' and to make it operational by November 2009 (NSA 2008). The editorial board was thus dissolved in March 2009, and a new task force was appointed to take this forward including 'recommending goals for the first year of the online magazine's functioning'. When the board was dissolved, a number of manuscripts were under consideration, and this task force 'consulted at length' about what to do with them, studied 'dozens of magazines and journal sites', started working with web designers, and placed adverts on a bimonthly basis in *The American Bahá'í* (NSA 2010), a national newsletter that was distributed to all US Bahá'ís. However, in early 2011, the National Assembly decided to bring to a close the work of the task force 'as there was no prospect of the journal moving forward online for some time'[12] and asked the magazine's managing editor, Betty Fisher, to archive the magazine's files and summarise its history.[13] The task force expressed its hope that the magazine would be revived for a third time (NSA 2011).

2. Major Themes

I will examine major themes and contributions by decade as one way of examining the intellectual interests and trends of *World Order*, and by extension the US and Western Bahá'í community. From 1966–1970, *World Order* was published quarterly, and most pieces were written in an essay style, many of which were on racism and environmentalism. At the same time, contributions were diverse with pieces on Frankenstein, the cellist Pablo Casals as he turned 91 years old, TV journalism, the world's oceans, California's Coast Redwoods by the environmentalist, Richard St Barbe Baker (St Barbe Baker 1967), and a bio-bibliographical sketch of the early Bahá'í poet, Naim, by Roy Mottahedeh (Mottahedeh 1967). There was a contribution by the Canadian Prime Minister of the time, Lester Pearson (Pearson 1967). Two contributions stand out—Glenford Mitchell's review of Malcolm X's autobiography (G. Mitchell 1966),[14] and Robert Hayden's poem, 'And All the Atoms Cry Aloud' (Hayden 1967).

In the 1970s, there were many pieces on the equality of the sexes, economics, and particularly education, which were increasingly scholarly in nature. Important contribu-

tions included Ervin Johnson's paper on 'The Challenge of the Bahā'ī Faith' (Johnson 1976), which was an early academic attempt to examine Bahā'ī thought by someone who was not a Bahā'ī, and an article considering, from a Bahā'ī perspective, the failure of the Persian prophetic figure, Mani (Conner 1977). New material on Khalil Gibran's encounter with 'Abdu'l-Baha (Gail 1978) and Alain Locke's links with the early American Bahā'ī community were published (Mason 1979).[15] The editors wrote that three articles had become 'immortalised'.[16] Over this period, the wide variety of topics was a consistent feature—with papers not directly on Bahā'ī topics but nevertheless addressing broader questions of multiculturalism and unity, including on Canadian Arctic communities, Maroon identity in Jamaica, modern Islam in India and Pakistan, and a book review on Erich Fromm's *Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (Kazemzadeh 1974). It also included the text of a lecture by Pierre Trudeau, then Prime Minister of Canada (Trudeau 1975). A paper on the ANISA educational model, proposed by Dan Jordan and colleagues at the University of Massachusetts (Jordan and Streets 1972), was reprinted in 2001. The Fall 1971 issue was themed around 'Abdu'l-Baha, the head of the Bahā'ī community from 1892 to 1921, on the 50th anniversary of his passing (*World Order* 1971), and 50,000 copies were published (Fisher 2017),[17] with a notable paper by Amin Banani on the writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha (Banani 1971). Eyewitness accounts of the Bab's public execution, translated into English for the first time, were published in the Fall 1973 issue (*World Order* 1973).

The late 1970s produced some of the highest quality and most interesting work in *World Order*, with one letter noting that nowhere 'else can we find such a banquet' in the Bahā'ī world (Cole 1978–1979). Other scholarly outlets included the Canadian Association of Bahā'ī Studies, which started publishing monographs in 1976 (including reprinting a *World Order* paper by John Hatcher in the same year, and shortly after reprinting *World Order* pieces by Douglas Martin and William Hatcher), and the associated *Journal of Bahā'ī Studies* from 1988. In addition, the academically-oriented *Bahā'ī Studies Bulletin* started privately publishing from 1982 and *Bahā'ī Studies Review* from 1990. Over this period, two pieces in *World Order* are noteworthy: 'A Forum: Concerning Saint Paul' (*World Order* 1979)[18] included a series of letters on St Paul from a Bahā'ī perspective, and is an early model of an informed scholarly dialogue within the Bahā'ī community. Juan Cole's paper on 'Problems of Chronology in Baha'u'llah's Tablet of Wisdom' (Cole 1979) was a ground-breaking study of Bahā'ī texts, which elicited responses from Todd Lawson, Jack McLean and William Hatcher, and it was the latter who called it a 'significant contribution' but with a 'seriously defective conclusion'.[19] These two contributions, on St. Paul and the Tablet of Wisdom, in their openness to discuss important theological topics in a balanced way, was an indication of increasing quality. Another printed edition highlighted by a former editor, Glenford Mitchell (B. Mitchell 2022), was one which focused on the US's bicentenary as a nation with an editorial, papers, a poem and a series of interviews with a diverse group of Americans (including Robert Hayden, who was a Bahā'ī, shortly before his appointment as the first African-American Consultant in Poetry to the US Library of Congress, which later became known as poet laureate) (*World Order* 1975–1976). A special issue remembering Mark Tobey is notable with pieces by Marzieh Gail, Bernard Leach, and Firuz Kazemzadeh (*World Order* 1977). A further sign of the periodical's improvement was the quality of book reviews, which had become increasingly critical rather than descriptive. Firuz Kazemzadeh's reviews are masterful in this regard, in particular his critique of the hagiographic tendency in some Bahā'ī literature (Kazemzadeh 1978–1979)[20] and highlighting the need for historical and theological context to meaningfully read Bahā'ī texts (Kazemzadeh 1978).[21]

The 1980s led to a number of pieces on the persecution of Bahā'īs in Iran (Editorial 1982)[22] (which had increased substantially after the 1979 Islamic Revolution) and also on the life and work of Robert Hayden. In addition, *World Order* published important historical pieces, e.g., Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida's links to early Bahā'īs (Cole 1981), and how Indian Bahā'īs created culturally sensitive devotional music (Garlington 1982), the latter being key in demonstrating how the Bahā'ī Faith transcended its socio-cultural

background in becoming a world religion.[23] One article on the intestate inheritance laws of the Baha'u'llah's Kitab-i-Aqdas by Linda Walbridge and John Walbridge in 1984 generated considerable discussion (Walbridge and Walbridge 1984–1985),[24] including a series of letters in *Dialogue* magazine, and commentaries and papers in the *Bahā'ī Studies Review* more than a decade later.[25] The 20th anniversary issue (*World Order* 1986–1987) included reprints of papers by Douglas Martin on Bahā'ī teachings, William Hatcher on science and religion, Constance Conrader on gender equality, and Patti Raman on education, reflecting some of the key *World Order* themes in its first two decades.[26] Nader Saeidi wrote a paper on 'Faith, Reason and Society' (Saeidi 1987) that Juan Cole considered the best that *World Order* had published.[27] Overall, in the 1980s, the material in the periodical became more directly connected to Bahā'ī teachings and history.

One other feature of *World Order* in the 1980s was a few letters being published that reflected a tension among the readership towards more academically informed pieces. For example, some wrote to *World Order* editors complaining that papers used 'obscure philosophical jargon' (Liggitt 1984), should be 'thrown away',[28] and in response there were pleas for more tolerance and open-mindedness (Cole 1982).[29] Another questioned whether the links between drugs and spirituality, which had been the subject of a letter, was a 'valid topic' for discussion (Lample 1982).[30] An editorial commentary in defence of its intellectual content anticipated this (Interchange 1973), and was a sober and thorough response examining the beneficial role of a rational and scientific approach to Bahā'ī texts and teachings, which merits re-reading.[31] Interestingly, these themes played out in Bahā'ī studies more widely in the 1990s and 2000s, a period that coincided with a thinning out of a scholarly discourse within the Bahā'ī community (Fazel 2003).

In the late 1980s, *World Order* started to publish behind schedule, and also double up issues, and it skipped publication years (from 1990 to 1993) in order to make up the difference. In the 1990s, thematic issues started based on papers at specially commissioned conferences, such as on inter-religious dialogue, the persecution of Iran's Bahā'īs, the American Bahā'ī community, and Shoghi Effendi. There are few notable articles. One example was a paper on Robert Abbott, who was an early black Bahā'ī who founded the *Chicago Defender* newspaper and the Bud Billiken Parade and Picnic, currently the second largest public parade in the US (Perry 1995). There were pieces on some contemporary social challenges, such as moral development, violence, and public health, with superficial links to Bahā'ī teachings.

In the 2000s, with a new editorial board, there was a change in direction towards covering more culture, and there were reviews of contemporary music, fiction, film, and an exhibition. Thematic issues continued with an examination of a seminal scholarly work on Bahā'ī history and thought, *Making the Crooked Straight* (*World Order* 2004),[32] and there were special issues on race, peace, family, education, inter-religious dialogue, as well as two on film. Issues continued to be delayed, although they were produced quarterly. A special issue focused on Alain Locke and his work in 2005, which included a previously unpublished poem, 'The Mood Maiden', on interracial marriage (Locke 2005).[33] There was a comprehensive and important paper on Bahā'ī elections (Abizadeh 2005).[34] The last issue, published in 2008 (volume 38, number 3), included newly translated materials on Bahā'ī persecutions in the 1950s in Yazd, and an informative book review that tried to make sense of Alain Locke's Bahā'ī affiliation (Smith 2007). Beyond more articles on culture, I did not identify any clear shift in topics in the 2000s.

Complementary this more qualitative approach, I have listed the number of articles in a table by specific topics in all the issues based on a thematic index of contents prepared by Betty Fisher, the longest serving managing editor (Table 1).[35] Most articles were on: general religion (116), current affairs (94), the arts (80), historical topics (77), persecution of the Bahā'īs (73) and 'racial unity' (69).

Table 1. Number of articles in *World Order* by topic/theme.

Broad Topic	Number of Articles/Editorials
Religion general	116
Current events	94
The arts	80
History of religions/Bahā'ī religion	77
Persecution of the Bahā'īs	73
Racial unity	69
Bahā'ī central figures	56
Education	43
Equality of women and men	43
Politics	33
Human rights and justice	31
Marriage and family life	25
Socio-economic development	24
Environmentalism	18
Urban planning	16
Peace	14
Spirituality	12
Health and healing	12
Science and religion	10

This is a wide range of topics, and overlaps to some extent with contemporary issues. However, there is little on music (an editorial (Editorial 1981) and a piece on Pablo Casals) and nothing on the cultural implications of sport. In relation to current events, *World Order* responded to certain key issues. In the late 1960s, there were editorials on violence in America, human rights, nationalism, and peace (and one article on the Vietnam war). In the 1970s, editorials covered ecology, war, world hunger, racism, and the arms race. The 1980s had editorials on drug abuse, peace, freedom of religion and AIDS; the 1990s on animal welfare, the UN and women's rights. In the 2000s, editorials addressed racism, the role of religion, the International Criminal Court, and genocide. Compared to overviews of the social, political and cultural life of each decade, there was a relative lack of attention in *World Order* to the counterculture of the 1960s, the sexual revolution and its implications from the 1960s and beyond. Terrorism, science and technology, communications (and the internet) and globalization are also not covered to the extent of their importance in wider society. One gauge of these wider trends is outlined in *The Oxford History of the Twentieth Century*, which in a section covering science, technology, and medicine, highlights advances in space travel and discovery, genetic engineering, computer science, the internet, and therapeutic advances in medicine since the 1960s (Wood 1998).

3. Themes in the Social Landscape

Did the major themes covered in *World Order* reflect wider societal concerns? As the journal primarily served as one way that a religious community interfaced with others with similar aims and interests, comparisons are not straightforward. Periodicals such as the *New Yorker*, *Harper's* and *Atlantic Monthly* are not comparable as they drew on a vastly larger pool of contributors, sold hundreds of thousands of copies, and were commercially oriented. Religious magazines from other traditions were often aimed at converting non-believers or entirely internally oriented. Thus, *World Order* sat in a relatively unique space drawing on writers inside and outside the Bahā'ī community, whether they were academics,

students or others, to contribute. Despite this, one approach to identify themes and their relative prominence during this period is to look at educational materials. From this, it is clear that there was an appreciation of the role that social movements were developing (Torney-Purta et al. 2001) and the importance of human equality in a more global context (Schissler and Nuhoglu 2005). Another study examining textbooks over this period suggests increasing awareness of citizenship and human rights issues (Skinner and Bromley 2019). These emerging themes—social movements, human equality and citizenship—align with prominent themes in *World Order* and suggest that the periodical, at one level, reflected the thinking current at its time.

Another approach is to compare *World Order* with journals dealing with similar areas. Two such thematic analyses were identified. The first study follows on from the above as it was based on a religious education journal. The study reported a focus in the 1990s and early 2000s on six main areas: educational theory; models and methods of religious education, including how they can be implemented; morals, values and character education; policy issues or organizational curriculum documents; spiritual, cultural or social issues, including how religious education can tackle contemporary problems such as pluralism and violence; and theological or historical topics (English et al. 2003). Compared with *World Order*, there is some alignment with a focus on some social problems but *World Order* is more focused on history, particularly of the American Bahā'ī community. Furthermore, there was more emphasis on educational models in the 1970s *World Order*, which waned in the 1990s and 2000s, suggesting less new thinking on these questions in the Bahā'ī community. A second relevant study is an investigation of 'spirituality research' from 1944 to 2003, which allowed for the examination of temporal trends (Ribaudo and Takahashi 2008). This found that there was a recurring pattern whereby a period of more conceptual pieces (attempting to explore the construct of spirituality) was followed by applied ones (using spirituality to change lives), with a similar number of articles on these two areas overall. Methodologically, there was an increasing number of studies on measurement, interventions and education. The more empirical trend towards measurement and interventions is not as clear in *World Order*, but a consistent number of more conceptual articles remained.

4. Relative Measures of Impact

How can we evaluate the impact of *World Order* articles? Approaches in academia to assess impact include whether specific papers have generated further scholarship, how many times they have been read or downloaded, qualitative assessments by experts and the extent of citations from others. However, these approaches are more accepted in the social and natural sciences. The whole notion of impact is more difficult in the arts and humanities, where such quantitative measures may not correlate with academic or social influence (and where impact may be mediated in other ways, e.g., a textbook citing a work). Nevertheless, taking these quantitative measures in turn in relation to downloads, this is a limited measure, as few *World Order* articles have been made available online in ways that allow for such metrics to be collected. One reliable source of information is bahai-library.org, the largest repository of online secondary materials on the Bahā'ī religion, which has more than 50 *World Order* articles online (Winters 2021). Based on this, the most downloaded pieces include some historical items (Table 2), including of 'Abdu'l-Baha's travels in the West', indicating one enduring value of the magazine in publishing such documents for the first time. The most downloaded paper is on comparative religion (Stokes 1997).

Table 2. Number of downloads for selected *World Order* articles.

***World Order* Publication (Short Title, Author, Year)**	**Downloads (000s) to 31 December 2021**
Story of Joseph in Five Religious Traditions (Stokes 1997)	50
Story of Joseph in the Bābī and Bahā'ī Faiths (Stokes 1997–1998)	35
Juliet [Thompson] Remembers Gibran (Gail 1978)	20
Baha'u'llah's Epistle to the Son of the Wolf (Gail 1946) [from the first series of *World Order*]	16
'Abdu'l-Baha's Meeting with Two Prominent Iranians (Qazvini 1998)	16
Becoming Your True Self (Jordan 1968)	14
'Abdu'l-Baha: Portrayals (Khan et al. 1971)	14
The Mountain of God (Stevens 1970)	14
Radiant Acquiescence (Rexford 1937) [from the first series]	13
The Bab's Bayan (Afnan 2000)	12

Citations is another a key measure of impact, although more relevant in the sciences than in the arts and humanities, where citations can lag many years behind publication date, and patterns of citation vary substantially between disciplines. Using search strategies in Google Scholar, there have been citations to 61 papers from the second series of *World Order* (equating to around 10% of all the papers). As of 31 December 2021, citations are reported in Table 3.

Table 3. Total number of citations to *World Order* articles.

***World Order* Publication (Short Title, Author, Year)**	**Google Scholar Citations from Publication until 31 December 2021**
Ethnicity, race, and a possible humanity (Abizadeh 2001)	81
Preventing future genocides (Pace and Deller 2005)	42
Problems of chronology (Cole 1979)	16
The ANISA model (Jordan and Streets 1972)	12
Democratic elections (Abizadeh 2005)	12
Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida (Cole 1981)	10
Economics and moral values (Hatcher 1974)	8
Challenge of the Bahā'ī Faith (Johnson 1976)	7
Religion and personality (Keene 1967)	7
Expressive style (Bausani 1978–1979)	6

These most cited papers are indicative of the breadth of topics covered in *World Order*, with pieces on political philosophy, law, education, history, theology and psychology.[36] Abizadeh's paper on 'Ethnicity, Race, and a Possible Humanity', discusses how the concept of the oneness of humanity can potentially address racial problems (Abizadeh 2001). The challenge of racism and fostering unity between nations has been an occasional theme in *World Order* over its four decades.

Another way to consider the impact of articles is through qualitative surveys. One such survey in 2000 asked speakers and participants at a Bahā'ī studies conference about the most influential articles on Bahā'ī thought and history (*Associate* 2000). Two respondents mentioned the Cole paper on chronology (Cole 1979).[37] Separately, editor Betty Fisher (Fisher 2017) noted that the editorial board received positive feedback on the Forum on St. Paul, and Amin Banani's paper on 'Abdu'l-Baha's writings (Banani 1971). She added that the 200th anniversary issue on the founding of the USA (*World Order* 1975–1976) was very widely used, and the 1972 paper on the ANISA model was 'very popular' (Jordan and Streets 1972). Robert Stockman (Stockman 2017) also noted the Cole chronology paper (Cole 1979), the Walbridges' essay on the intestate inheritance laws (Walbridge and Walbridge 1984–1985) and historical pieces on the dating of Baha'u'llah's Book of Certitude (from a

paper on the conversion of one of the Bab's great uncles) (Rabbani 1999), accounts of the execution of the Bab (*World Order* 1973), and the translation of an 1867 petition of a Persian Bahā'ī community to the US congress (*World Order* 2006).

5. Conclusions

Overall, *World Order* comes across as a remarkable achievement of the Bahā'ī community of the United States. This achievement was as a periodical that focused on cultural and intellectual life, not an academic one. The breadth of subjects and authors, its outward-looking and intellectually curious perspective, and the sustained regular output over nearly four decades is impressive. The period in the late 70s and early 80s is particularly noteworthy, with many original and thoughtful articles which continue to be discussed within Bahā'ī circles. Contributing to its success was a 'sense of humor and openness to criticism' (Hatcher 1973) and a willingness toward 'tackling tough issues' (Interchange 1998–1999). The readership was large in the 1970s and 1980s with around 2000 subscribers (Stockman 2017),[38] and it had an important public relations role in raising the issue of the persecution of the Bahā'īs of Iran with the wider American public and government. This was particularly noteworthy in the 1970s and 1980s as there were very few Bahā'ī periodicals. *World Order*'s considerable number of articles and editorials on social issues, such as racial justice, women's rights and environmentalism, was one indication that the Bahā'ī community was at the forefront of thinking about social action.

The cessation of *World Order* in 2008 has meant that the Bahā'ī community has lost another periodical,[39] which cannot be compensated by the various news magazines (which focus on recent events and showcasing Bahā'ī activities) or publications such as the *Journal of Bahā'ī Studies* that are primarily focused towards the Bahā'ī community. Although the loss of *World Order* reflects a broader thinning out of scholarly discourse in the Bahā'ī community (with scholarly journals in France, Spain, Germany, Australia and Singapore also stopping),[40] it nevertheless demonstrates what is possible—a quarterly cultural and intellectual periodical with a strong sense of design, which was published for around 40 years produced by a single national Bahā'ī community. In publishing editorials tackling contemporary social issues, original articles on a wide range of topics, and documents and translations of important episodes in Bahā'ī history, it created a venue for 'nurturing, exploring and eloquently expressing the intellectual, spiritual, and creative lives of Bahā'īs' (Interchange 1998–1999).

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Data Availability Statement: Data on citations is available from Google Scholar, and on downloads can be requested directly from Bahā'ī Library online.

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Conflicts of Interest: I published two book reviews in *World Order*.

Notes

1 A similar periodical from Ishqabad (Ashqabad), *Khurshid-i Khavar* ('Sun of the East'), began in 1917.

2 With the aim to record and interpret 'those significant changes in present-day thought which mark the trend towards universal understanding'.

3 See https://bahai.works/Baha%27i_News/Issue_73/Text#pg5 (accessed on 25 March 2023).

4 Also included were Monroe Michels (who ran the production and business management of the magazine, and died in 1968) and a business manager, Muriel Michels (who passed away in 1969).

5 The logotype was chosen by Monroe Michels, one of the first editors (see Interchange 1979).

6 Personal communication, Glenford Mitchell in an email to author from Bahia Mitchell, 30 May 2022 (B. Mitchell 2022).

7 In Summer 1967, there is an art director attributed, who was Henry Marguiles. There were other art directors in the late 1960s.

8 Very occasionally, there were paintings on the back cover instead of photographs, including an aboriginal bark painting by Gowarrin in Spring 1968.

9 John Solarz was the cover designer.

10 'World Order has received a call that piqued the editors' interest. A retired architect is in New York City is looking for issue of World Unity magazine because 6 covers in volume 5 (October 1929 through March 1930) were designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.' No further correspondence on this was published. This will be subject of a forthcoming paper.

11 Both Betty Fisher and Robert Stockman, who were *World Order* editors at the time, explained this when I interviewed them in 2017 (Fisher 2017; Stockman 2017). Robert Stockman added that the 2008 recession also led to the closure of the NSA's Research Office, and contributed to halting of the Bahā'ī Encyclopedia project (Stockman 2017).

12 The transition to an online journal was further complicated by the lack of relevant experience of the editor (Stockman 2017).

13 A complete topical index prepared by Betty Fisher exists at: https://bahai-library.com/pdf/w/world_order_topical_index.pdf (accessed on 25 March 2023), and all the issues were recently put online at https://bahai.works/World_Order (accessed on 25 March 2023).

14 This contributed to the decision to invite him to the editorial board (Fisher 2017).

15 This was the only piece that examined the considerable links between Locke and the Bahā'ī community before Christopher Buck's seminal paper 24 years later (Buck 2001–2002).

16 See (Interchange 1976). However, these papers (B. Mitchell on alcohol; Conrader on gender equality; and Raman on Hinduism) have been rarely cited.

17 Glenford Mitchell, managing editor at the time, stated that he was 'very much attached to' this issue, which was 'challenging' to put together (B. Mitchell 2022).

18 Summer 1979. This issue was a response to William Hatcher's review of Udo Schaefer's *Light Shineth in the Darkness* (Hatcher 1978).

19 See also letters in response Fall 1979, Winter 1979–1980. Frank Lewis discussed this issue in 'Discourses of Knowledge' (Lewis 2001–2002), and came to a broadly similar conclusion as Cole: that their underlying meaning is considerably more important than whether they are factual accurate.

20 Kazemzadeh was critical of the compilation of Bahā'ī biographies by O.Z. Whitehead and described one as 'flattening, de-individualising and distorting the subjects . . . As one reads one, they begin to resemble one another and lose their distinctive characteristics' (Kazemzadeh 1978–1979). This tendency towards bland hagiography was discussed in the thoughtful review 'All the Saints Come Marching' (Morrison 1986).

21 See reviews of Taherzadeh's *Revelation of Baha'u'llah* in which Kazemzadeh points out that the criteria by which the texts selected for inclusion in the books are not discussed, and their relative importance and the temporal circumstances of their revelation are not dealt with. Of volume 1, he notes it was 'not easy to evaluate' (Kazemzadeh 1976), and of volume 2, he states that others might consider it 'uncritical and excessively worshipful' (Kazemzadeh 1978). See also the informative and scholarly book reviews by Frank Lewis (e.g., Lewis 1996), which build on an academic tradition of long-form book reveiws.

22 See the strongly worded editorial in Spring 1982.

23 Rather than ethnic religion, which would have imposed its own sociocultural traditions based on its origins in any new setting (discussed in Fazel 1994).

24 Robert Stockman congratulated the authors (Spring/Summer 1985), and there were further positive letters in Fall 1985.

25 See, e.g., (McGlinn 1995).

26 These papers have been rarely cited.

27 Letter in Fall 1987/Winter 1987–1988.

28 Winter 1982.

29 Cole notes: 'Totalitarian governments often rewrite history and delete as non-persons those they do not like; I should hope that Bahā'ī historians will be more honest . . . I must end with pleas for more tolerance and open-mindedness among the friends who are not historians, in regard to the writing history. This is one area where the independent and unfettered investigation of reality is a paramount duty'.

30 Fall 1982.

31 Spring 1973.

32 Also see letter by J. McLean in 35.4 (Summer 2004).

33 Buck's introduction to this poem posits that it is 'a love poem, with a white woman as its object of affection . . . envisioning the prospect of interracial marriage, which is the ultimate expression of interracial unity' (Interchange 2005).

[34] See also letter *World Order* 37.2.

[35] https://bahai-library.com/pdf/w/world_order_topical_index.pdf (accessed on 25 March 2023).

[36] Looking at reference books, the scholarly impact has been limited, partly by lack of accessibility. Two *World Order* papers are cited in Peter Smith's 2000 *Concise Encyclopedia of the Bahā'ī Faith* (Oneworld), and four in Robert Stockman's 2013 introductory book on the Bahā'ī Faith (*The Bahā'ī Faith: A Guide for the Perplexed* [Bloomsbury]). This compares with 6 citations to *Bahā'ī Studies Review* (BSR) and 12 to *Bahā'ī Studies Bulletin* (BSB) in the *Encyclopedia*, and 7 to JBS and 4 to BSR in the Stockman book (with these journals having considerably fewer citeable articles).

[37] This survey also highlighted John Hatcher's paper on the metaphorical purpose of physical reality, published by the Canadian Association for Baha'i Studies in the same year (1977) as *World Order* did.

[38] Stockman estimates that it reduced to around 300–400 when *World Order* ceased.

[39] The first volume of *Bahā'ī World* from 1925–1926 documented 11 magazines, including one published in Burma, one in Esperanto, and four in German. One of the first general letters of Shoghi Effendi to the Bahā'īs of the West explained that all Bahā'ī assemblies 'must encourage and stimulate by every means at their command, through subscription, reports and articles, the development of the various Bahā'ī magazines' (letter dated 12 March 1923), and added, 'articles on broad humanitarian lines, well-conceived, adequately treated, and powerfully presented, should have their proper place in every issue together with such accounts of the history and the teachings of the Cause as will portray to the Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í alike the unique beauty as well as the compelling power of the Bahá'í spirit' (letter dated 27 November 1924). To the Bahā'īs in New Zealand, Shoghi Effendi stated that a 'good periodical' would be the 'greatest help' for the religion 'establishing' itself there: "He was very glad to learn of the encouraging prospects you have for your 'Herald of the South'. He hopes that it will daily progress and add to its importance in drawing the attention of the people there. A good periodical fully representative of the spirit and teachings of the Cause is the greatest help the Movement can have in establishing itself in a country. So though difficulties may be faced at the outset we should bear them patiently & await that the future should give us our reward" (letter written on his behalf dated 18 September 1926).

[40] Briefly discussed in 'Bahā'ī studies at the crossroads' (Fazel 2018).

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