

Searching for May Maxwell:

**Bahá'í Millennial Feminism,
Transformative Identity & Globalism
in the new World Order**

***Shaping Women's Role in
Early Bahá'i Culture 1898-1940***

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By

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ABSTRACT

Searching for May Maxwell: Bahá'í Millennial Religious Feminism, Transformative Identity & Globalism in the new World Order (1898-1940)

This dissertation demonstrates that a group of western women connected to May Maxwell through ties of faith and friendship exemplified a distinct form of early twentieth-century feminism in their adoption and promotion of the transplanted Bahá'í Faith. In actualizing their doctrinal principles, they worked to inaugurate a millennial new World Order predicated on the spiritual and social equality of women. This group championed a unique organizational structure and transnational perspective that propelled them to female leadership, both as inspirational models and agents of practical change.

By examining how Bahá'í doctrines shaped the beliefs, mythologies, relationships and reform goals of women, this dissertation broadens understandings of the ways in which religion can act as a vehicle for female empowerment and transformative identity. Together, western early Bahá'í women built individual and collective capacity, challenging gender prescriptions and social norms. Their millennial worldview advocated a key role for women in shaping nascent Bahá'í culture, and initiating personal, institutional, and societal change. Their inclusive collaborative organizational style, non-western origins and leadership, diverse membership, and global locus of activity, made them one of the first groups to establish and sustain a transnational feminist reform network. Although in some respects this group resembled other religious, feminist, and reform-oriented women, identifiably “Bahá'í” features of their ideology, methodologies, and reform activities made them distinctive.

This research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the role of women in the creation of modern religious and social mythologies and paradigms. A study of Bahá'í millennial religious feminism also expands current conceptions of the boundaries, diversities, and intersections of early twentieth-century western millennial, feminist, religious, and transnational reform movements.

KEYWORDS: ‘Abdu’l Bahá, anti-racism, Canada, community, early twentieth century, Esperanto, education, female friendship, first-wave, France, history, Iran, Montreal, myth, Oriental, Persia, religion, Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, Shoghi Effendi, social reform, transnational, women.

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DEDICATIONS:

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I offer this dissertation as a tribute to my (and all) children and grandchildren, who know they can accomplish whatever goals they set. You are the future of the world and will build the foundations of the new World Order.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PERMISSION TO USE & DISCLAIMER	i
ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
DEDICATIONS	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2. ORIGINS: TRANSFORMATIVE FEMALE BAHÁ'Í IDENTITIES	34
CHAPTER 3. A NEW PARADIGM: BAHÁ'Í MILLENNIAL RELIGIOUS FEMINISM	69
CHAPTER 4. OPERATIONALIZING THE NEW WORLD ORDER: BAHÁ'Í MILLENNIAL REFORM	110
CHAPTER 5. MYTH (& COUNTER-MYTH): HEROES, MARTYRS, MOTHERS AND SAINTS IN THE “NEW WORLD ORDER”	159
CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION	194
BIBLIOGRAPHY	199

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is essential to human progress and the transformation of society.¹

1. OVERVIEW: May Maxwell, a new World Order & Bahá'í Millennial Religious Feminism

In the early twentieth century, a small group of women connected to Mary (May) Ellis Bolles Maxwell (1870-1940), through their shared membership in a new, non-western, spiritual movement, engaged in a wide-ranging transnational feminist reform enterprise. They were some of the earliest western-born followers of the Bahá'í Faith, an “Oriental” religion originating in mid-nineteenth century Persia whose twin founders, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, claimed to have inaugurated a new universal era of peace, religious harmony and social progress.² A modern religious movement, Bahá'ís resisted the equation of modernism or feminism with secularism, instead seeing religion as a means for the liberation of women. This group of western women not only exemplified a form of millennial religious feminism in their adoption and promotion of the Bahá'í movement and its mythology, but, more significantly, worked to inaugurate a millenarian new World Order predicated on the spiritual and social equality of women.³

In their motivations and reform activities, western Bahá'í women both resembled and diverged from other “first-wave” and interwar feminists, reformers and missionary women. The millennial new World Order they envisioned promised world peace, social and economic justice, and a spiritualization of the planet, similar to Christian expectations of the “Kingdom of God on Earth.” However, Bahá'í conceptions of a “new heaven and earth” differed from those of other religious and millennial groups, in that they were delineated by the doctrinal spiritual and social principles contained in the sacred writings of the Bahá'í Faith. Also unlike other western groups, efforts to implement these principles were guided by a centralized middle-eastern leadership represented by ‘Abdu'l Bahá Abbas from 1892-1921 and, after His death, His grandson, Shoghi Effendi Rabbani from 1921-1957. Bahá'ís believed that a universal paradigm shift, instigated by Divine Will, would institute a new gender-equitable global civilization, to be gradually implemented through cooperative human efforts in which women would play a major role.

This dissertation asks when, where, why and how then did a strong female presence in western Bahá'í culture develop and how was it sustained? If that question was posed to the Canadian Bahá'í community, the answer would inevitably lead to one woman--- the ephemeral, magnetic, chronically ailing but indefatigable “mother” of the Canadian Bahá'í community, May Maxwell. This study began as a microhistorical examination of May Maxwell's life, but it quickly became evident that she was not a “lone soldier;” rather, she was a hub of an expanding web of female friendships rooted in a shared millennial worldview that energized their activism. She herself had a “spiritual mother,” Lua Getsinger, who, like May Maxwell, was lionized in Bahá'í origin myths. They also had a band of spiritual “sisters,” “brothers” and “children,” a remarkable number of whom now are recognized as formative figures and early exemplars of the Faith. This dissertation attempts to answer how this female cadre associated with May Maxwell became so central to shaping a nascent western Bahá'í culture. It also examines the ways in which the doctrinal Bahá'í principle of the equality of women and men, contested in both the Euro-Judeo-Christian west and the Middle-Eastern Islamic matrix from which the Bábí-Bahá'í

Faith emerged, affected the feminist identity and behaviours of May Maxwell and other Bahá'í women, especially in light of the widespread reformist spirit that characterized the “first wave” of feminism. This study explores the ways in which western Bahá'í women understood women's equality in this period and how their millennial aspirations shaped a Bahá'í millennial religious feminism distinct from that of other feminist and reform groups of the time.

This dissertation does not attempt to view a cross-section of Bahá'í adherents, but rather focuses on the central role of May Maxwell and a few of those prominent early Bahá'í women linked to her through their shared spiritual and social reform beliefs. These highly committed female adherents were recognized by the Bahá'í leadership and community as “exceptional,” and came to be held up as paragons. This group championed a unique organizational structure and a transnational, global perspective that propelled women to female leadership, both as inspirational models and agents of practical change. This study demonstrates the ways in which new religious and social prescriptions influenced the formative role May Maxwell and her female associates played in the development of early western Bahá'í culture. It also investigates the ways in which this millennial religious feminist group fit into larger patterns of transnational globalism and early twentieth-century western reform, feminist and religious movements.

2. METHODOLOGY, HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THEORETICAL STREAMS

METHODOLOGY:

A microhistorical methodology has been utilized in this thesis as it is congenial to those women's and gender, social, cultural and feminist historians who wish to focus on peripheral or marginal figures, communities or events in opposition to overarching “macrohistorical” metanarratives. A microhistorical approach also dovetails with the inductive approach employed in this dissertation, which moves from specific observations to broader generalizations. Microhistory takes a single personage, group, event or circumstance and relates it to networks of community and the larger historical context in ways that show both connection and exception. In this case, the ideologies and activities of May Maxwell and a close network of Bahá'í women, influenced by the social and religious currents of their adopted faith and the times, both intersect with and differ from other feminist, religious and reform groups. Microhistory relies on narrative, but does not have to be reconstructive, resisting the temptation to fill the “gaps in the documentation to form a polished surface.”⁴ This methodology privileges qualitative documentary and/or discursive analysis over quantitative historical sweeps. Theoretical references can be eclectic, and internal contradictions and complexities in the historical record may be allowed to stand as anomalous.⁵ Microhistory overlaps with biography, but rather than focussing the narrative on the life-course of a single, central subject, microhistory incorporates the historical context and culturally-situated mentality or worldview of the subject(s) as an integral part, or even the emphasis of, the study. In its inclusion of the mythical and symbolic aspects of a lived reality, it differs from a material feminist approach. Giovanni Levi in “On Microhistory” formulates a primary principle of microhistory as the assumption that:

[A]ll social action is seen as the result of an individual's constant negotiation, manipulation, choices and decisions in the face of a normative reality which, though pervasive, nevertheless offers many possibilities for personal interpretations and

freedoms....In this type of enquiry the historian is not simply concerned with the interpretations of meanings but rather with defining the ambiguities of the symbolic world, the plurality of possible interpretations to it and the struggle which takes place over symbolic as much as material resources.⁶

This accords with the current study, which posits that evolving millennial mythologies are the impetus behind the feminist and reform efforts of May Maxwell and her Bahá'í group.

While microhistory stresses a strong evidentiary base, it may also problematize the evidentiary nature of textual records, not necessarily reading them as representative. This has relevance when facing the particular challenges of researching Bahá'ís. The western Bahá'í writing "style," to the degree that one exists, is evident in the letters of May Maxwell and others. There is little mention of personal information or feelings, outside of uplifting sentiments and spiritual reflections. Prescribed behaviours enjoin them to be humble, eschew backbiting and gossip, and focus on the positive. Letters tend to express exhortations around Bahá'í principles and often contain large quantities of quotes, reflecting the centrality and functionality of the "sacred text" to this faith group. Similar patterns are also evident in pilgrim's notes, biographies, and publications such as the journal, *Star of the West*. In this dissertation, it has often been difficult to move beyond "prescriptive" writings, as written communications may be bland or ritually uplifting, and may ignore or excise what might be perceived as (even mildly) negative or potentially disunifying. W.C. van den Hoonaard, author of a foundational sociological/historical study, *The Origins of the Bahá'í Community of Canada, 1898-1948*, also notes this tendency to present a "rosy" but bland picture, observing that besides omitting possible "negatives," Bahá'ís praise others but seldom mention their own achievements, creating gaps in the factual base.⁷

Among other criticisms, microhistory has been taken to task for being too individualizing and "narrativizing," allowing the microhistorian too much latitude to generalize, forming connections and conclusions on the particular or the speculative. A history focussed on a few individuals potentially limits wider application, particularly in the case of May Maxwell and her associates, who were always considered unusual persons. Within the Bahá'í community, they were seen as signally important while to "outsiders," they often just seemed odd. However, as literary scholar Heather Murray argues, the dangers of a narrow sample are offset by the opportunity to focus on the individual as a "nodal point" of social and "ideational forces," challenging macro-historical notions of "centres" and "margins."⁸ The adoption of a microhistorical methodology in this study facilitates the use of both biographical and historical details to personalize the narrative and demonstrate the ways in which the precepts of a unique transplanted religious system began to be actualized by a small group of individuals.

Problems of representation are inherent in the writing process as the historian attempts to interpret the subjects' experiences, set in a cultural and religious context which is at least partially inaccessible to a writer situated in a different time/space continuum and cultural milieu. As Kali A.K. Israel observes, in "seeing" women historically, it is impossible to recapture their complex lived reality. At best, one presents a multitude of fragments, a kaleidoscopic pattern that shifts with the perception of the viewer.⁹ This is especially true in this study where there are multiple vignettes of connected subjects. To offset the potential for interpretive distortion, primary materials are used extensively to allow the nuances and complexities of the subjects'

voices to be heard. Views that may no longer accurately reflect current Bahá'í understandings are let stand as a part of the historical context. As Martha Vicinus argues, "Rather than raiding the past to find satisfactory models for today, we should look to the difficulties, contradictions and triumphs of women within the context of their own time."¹⁰

HISTORIOGRAPHY:

Bahá'í Historiography and Sources

The ways in which May Maxwell's and Bahá'í women's lives and contributions fit into the larger historiographical picture has been little explored to date. These women do not fit neatly into any existing religious, feminist, millenarian or other historiographical frame, although they are tangentially in relationship with many of the cross-currents of their time. It is for this reason that this thesis argues they should be characterized as "millennial religious feminists." Within the Bahá'í community, the historical category which May Maxwell and her associates comfortably occupy is as members of the first "heroic" contingent of strong-minded female western converts.¹¹ These women self-consciously saw themselves as the Bahá'í Faith's early western apostles, and the faith communities they helped to raise up still view them in this way. This study, while exploring the worldviews, activities, myths, and motivations of Bahá'í women, also locates them within the larger historiography of early twentieth-century feminist reformers.

The type and availability of primary archival and published sources have, as in most historical studies, determined the scope and direction of this dissertation. Research was conducted at the National Bahá'í Archives of the United States in Wilmette, Illinois; the Canadian National Bahá'í Archives in Thornhill (Toronto), Ontario; the Maxwell home (now a Bahá'í Shrine) in Montreal, Quebec; the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel; in the W. S. Maxwell fonds, Montreal records, black history, and other materials at the McGill University Archives in Montreal; and in the *National Council of Women* records at the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa, Ontario. Particularly useful have been the research interviews conducted by sociologist Lynn Echeverria and others for W. C. van den Hoonard's monograph *The Origins of the Bahá'í Community of Canada, 1898-1948*. These transcripts are deposited for the use of other researchers at the University of New Brunswick Archives in Fredericton, New Brunswick.

Van den Hoonard states that one of the reasons he undertook a broad sociological study of the expansion, membership and concerns of the Canadian Bahá'í community was to counter-balance the fact that so "much of the early Canadian history revolve[d] around the personality and activities of May Maxwell of Montreal."¹² In personal conversation with the author, he commented that May was "everywhere but nowhere," as specific records of her activities, particularly her social reform endeavours, were difficult to locate. The current study partly attributes that sense of her amorphous "presence," to her prominence in Bahá'í community mythology. This dissertation both builds on and diverges from Dr. van den Hoonard's work, re-positioning May Maxwell as a "pivotal" figure, but going beyond the Canadian context to link her to a select international group of Bahá'í women engaged in transnational endeavours.¹³ Unlike *Origins*, this study does not address the institutional growth of the Faith, but rather explores the ways in which Bahá'í teachings, evolving mythologies, and female exemplars influenced the worldview, identities and

reform activities of these early western Bahá'í women, and contributed to the building of both a nascent western Bahá'í culture and the first foundations of an anticipated new World Order.

Records of the reform activities of May Maxwell and other female Bahá'ís have been very sparse. Van den Hoonaard attributes some of the difficulty in writing Bahá'í history to the scarcity of documents passed on to future generations and suggests that “the singleness, or the childlessness of many early believers, may have something to do with that” as well as “the sad state of our Bahá'í archives,” particularly at the community level.¹⁴ Although repeated attempts were made, the Maxwell family papers, part of the estate of May and W.S. Maxwell’s only child, Mary Sutherland Maxwell, *aka* Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum Rabbani (1910-2000), were not available for research. Violet Nakhjavání, one of the literary executors of the Maxwell estate, recently published the first volume of an edited biographical account drawn from these papers, *The Maxwells of Montreal: Early Years, 1870-1922*.¹⁵ In it, a number of previously unavailable archival documents, such as “The Memoirs of Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum,” are included in their entirety.¹⁶ Otherwise inaccessible archival sources in these and other publications have been used in this dissertation to supplement available primary sources. Other publications containing relevant primary sources include a growing stream of female biographies and edited memoirs of prominent Bahá'í women such as Lua Getsinger, Martha Root, Marion Jack and others, and historical studies such as Kathryn Jewett Hogenson’s *Lighting the Western Sky: The Hearst Pilgrimage and the Establishment of the Bahá'í Faith in the West*, which chronicles the first pilgrimage to Akka/Haifa made by western believers, including May Maxwell.¹⁷ This body of literature is “inspirational,” produced by Bahá'ís for a Bahá'í readership, but since scholarly practices have become the norm for both academic and lay authors and historians of the Bahá'í Faith, newer accounts are often well-researched and referenced, including copious amounts of archival text. In biographical accounts, Bahá'í women are remembered primarily for their contributions within the Bahá'í community, while their male counterparts are more likely to be also remembered for their contributions to society at large.¹⁸ Because of this “internal” focus, records of Bahá'í women’s extensive collaborations with other feminist and reform groups and agencies are not well documented and much more research in this area is needed.

Published primary sources used were Bahá'í sacred texts and literature, as well as some non-Bahá'í and anti-Bahá'í literature. These materials include books, newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, ephemera, memoirs, and “pilgrim’s notes” such as May Maxwell's publication, *An Early Pilgrimage* (1917).¹⁹ “Pilgrim’s notes” are a category of literature composed of personal and subjective reminiscences, comprising an important “unofficial” part of the Bahá'í corpus. Because of the doctrinal certainty required of *authenticated* sacred texts, which are attributed to the three central figures of the Faith (i.e. the Báb, Bahá'u'llah, and ‘Abdu'l Bahá), a sharp distinction is made by Bahá'ís between “authoritative” scripture and pronouncements, and the reports, stories, or writings of believers. The retelling of personal stories is not discouraged but, as Bahá'í leader Shoghi Effendi explains, “...only those things that have been revealed in the form of Tablets have a binding power over the friends. Hearsays may be matters of interest but can in no way claim authority.”²⁰ Examples of pilgrim’s notes are *Agnes Parsons’ Diary*, *The Diary of Juliet Thompson*, and *Daily Lessons Received at Akka: January 1908*.²¹ In this thesis, pilgrim’s notes have been used extensively as they reveal early believers’ attitudes, worldviews, mythologies and understandings, as they existed in their own era, of the tenets of their faith.

Much of the material in this dissertation has come from *Star of the West*, the first international Bahá'í periodical, produced in the United States between 1910 and 1935.²² This journal was the primary organ of communication and repository of literature, including translations of Tablets and communications, many of which are not published elsewhere. It printed articles, letters, travelogues and editorials from Bahá'í authors and others, reporting administrative and community activities and other business of the Bahá'ís world-wide. Written mainly in English, there were also Persian inclusions with their own content, and some articles in Esperanto. *Star of the West* contributed substantially to the development of a distinctive global Bahá'í identity, even dating early volumes according to the Bábí-Bahá'í “Badí’” solar calendar, in addition to Gregorian dates.²³ The volumes of *The Bahá'í World*, the annual official international yearbook, also documented much of the activity of the early world community as well as offering biographical material, *In Memoriams*, and essays on various topics. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's transcribed talks from North America, Paris, and London were also used in this study.²⁴ While not wholly “authenticated,” these primary published sources might be called semi-official.

Although relatively invisible to the academic world or those outside the Faith, a growing Bahá'í historiography exists. Two major sociologically-oriented historical overviews have documented the growth, major trends, and institutional development of the Bahá'í Faith in North America, W. C. van den Hoonaard's study, *The Origins of the Bahá'í Community of Canada, 1898-1948* and Robert Stockman's 2-volume history of *The Bahá'í Faith in America*.²⁵ Thematic disciplinary groupings of sociologists, health professionals, development and globalization specialists, theological specialists, educators, poets, and other interest groups, are producing specific streams of literature. Part of this growing body of work is historical, much of it on early Bábí and Bahá'í history.²⁶ Especially in Middle Eastern Studies, a number of academic works have been produced about the Bahá'í Faith. Introductory texts have been published, as have a variety of books and research papers that explore specific aspects of the Faith's theology, history, sociology, or practical applications, many of which are found in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* and *Bahá'í Studies Review*.²⁷ Few academic works examining the Bahá'í Faith have been published by non-Bahá'í scholars beyond encyclopedia entries and overviews of world or new religions. A notable exception is the work of Danish sociologist Margit Warburg who has studied community practices and the Bahá'í Faith as a globalized religion.²⁸ There are also mentions of the Faith in areas where Bahá'í principles or efforts have had an impact, such as international development, the United Nations, or universalism. For instance, Ira Rifkin's *Spiritual Perspectives on Globalization*, and peace studies specialists Patricia Miche and Melissa Merklings' *Toward a Global Civilization? The Contribution of Religions*, favourably note the impact on development of the ethical values of the Bahá'í Faith.²⁹

Within this broad spectrum, there are an increasing number of authors taking scholarly approaches to "women's" issues. For example, Anne Breneman and Rebecca Mbuh have edited a volume on *Women in the New Millennium: The Global Revolution*, which takes a contemporary international look at the equality of women. Three academic theses that look at Bahá'í women in the second half of the twentieth century in Canada, employing a “life-writing” oral history interview approach, include Sophie Tamas' *Greater Boldness: Radical Storytelling with Canadian Bahá'í Women* (M.A.); Lynn Echevarria's *Life History as Process and Product: The Social Construction of Self Through Feminist Methodologies, and Canadian Black Experience* (M.A.); and her *Working Through the Vision: Religion and Identity in the Life Histories of*

Bahá'í Women in Canada (PhD.), now published as *Life Histories of Bahá'í Women in Canada: Constructing Religious Identity in the Twentieth-Century*. Therese (Terry) Teelen Poirier, in *Women Creating a Space for our Advancement: A Case Study* (M.A.), has used a participatory community research approach. She explores the ways in which women achieve autonomy and control in their lives in critical areas identified by the United Nations, such as health care, education, and policy-making, using a Bahá'í approach.³⁰ The current study differs from those of Tamas, Echevarria and Poirier, as it is an early twentieth-century historical study, utilizing mainly textual sources, which examines the transnational connections and activities of a small interlinked group of female adherents associated with Canadian May Maxwell. It also differs in that it locates early Bahá'í women in the continuum of western feminists and reform activists of the period, expanding the historiography of social, religious, and cultural histories of women.

Women's Historiography and Bahá'í Women

This study of western Bahá'í millennial religious feminists contributes to an ever-expanding women's and gender historiography. A broad interdisciplinary selection of historical and theoretical secondary sources was employed to support thesis arguments, and to assist in contextualizing and interpreting primary documents. Feminist social histories of the period during which most of this study's subjects were raised, such as Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*, and her article "*The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America*,"³¹ reveal that rigid gender-role differentiation characterized both family and society, and female ideals were embodied in the late Victorian "Cult of True Womanhood" such as piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity.³² However, gender boundaries were beginning to be challenged. Veronica Strong-Boag shows in *The New Day Recalled*, that while some things like women's access to education had improved between 1919-1939, traditional gender roles still remained a strong determinant of women's opportunities and activities.³³ May Maxwell and her female Bahá'í contemporaries, who in some ways kept within relatively traditional bounds, appear to have had considerably more agency in the public sphere, and more egalitarian marriages and male-female relationships, than the above-mentioned studies would indicate. In some cases, such as that of May Maxwell and Laura Clifford Dreyfus Barney, this may have been partly related to class advantages, as these women were relatively wealthy. However, even those Bahá'ís from poorer backgrounds, like Maxwell's friends Lua Getsinger and Martha Root, travelled widely (often alone), spoke in public, and acted as diplomatic and missionizing emissaries of the Faith.³⁴

Duncan Crow, in *The Edwardian Woman*, suggests that the trend to a greater public presence for women was partly the result of industrialization and urbanization.³⁵ During this period, with their movement into urban centres, more "new women," especially singles, were employed, living and acting independently of their families.³⁶ Martha Vicinus' examination of single middle-class English women in 1850-1920 cautions that women's participation in the public sphere, especially if they were married, was still limited in comparison to men, partly by law and tradition, and partly because caregiving and domestic labour kept them at home.³⁷ Smith-Rosenberg's proposition that the biological realities of frequent pregnancies, childbirth, nursing, and menopause bound women together in gender-segregated physical and emotional intimacy does not seem to hold in this study.³⁸ She suggests that strong inter-feminine bonding was based in large part on women's sense of common female suffering. However, in the

correspondence among this closely-knit group of early Bahá'í women, many of whom were single or childless, their high levels of bonding and intimacy seem to be based primarily on their adherence to their new faith, common millennial ideals, and shared religious language. There is little mention in the sources of the daily details of their lives. Writings on women's epistolary friendships, such as Pauline Nestor's *Female Friendships and Communities*, were used to analyze arguments about friendship and connection.³⁹ Writings of women in other marginal "enthusiastic" faith communities provide comparisons. For instance, Rosemary D. Gooden, in examining Shaker Sisters' letters and poems, concludes that ritualized expressions of "gospel affection" and "gospel union" were central to believers' lives, to their loyalty to the founder and to their way of life.⁴⁰ Similar sentiments expressed by Bahá'í women, addressing each other as spiritual "mother" or "sister" "in Abhá," reinvented and reinforced female and religious bonds.

General women's histories such as *Canadian Women: A History*,⁴¹ and *Canadian Women on the Move 1867-1920*,⁴² contextualize women's work and activities at various stages of life for different classes of women. Comparatively, this group of Bahá'í women, not professionalized as missionaries, but constantly travelling to domestic and exotic locales to further the goals of the Faith, were atypical. Martha Vicinus in *Independent Women*, and Joan Sangster in *Earning Respect*, discuss important aspects of new social expectations for women, which Bahá'í women exemplify, such as an independent intellectual life, the requirement on women for social service involvement and disciplined philanthropy as "public duty," the availability of "respectable" paid employment, especially for single women, and the development of concepts of "sisterhood."⁴³ The work of Joan Sangster in *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920—1950* also has some importance to this thesis as women in the socialist movement and the Bahá'í Faith had many similar societal goals, and some Bahá'ís, such as Rose Henderson, figured in both movements.⁴⁴ However, discouraged from engaging in partisan politics, Bahá'í women did not take the political route that many socialist or feminist reformers such as Agnes McPhail and Nellie McClung did. Bahá'ís believed that partisan socio-political institutions of the "old" world order were collapsing, and their energies should go into building a "new" World Order based on regenerative spiritual/ethical premises and the operationalization of Bahá'í social principles.

Religious Women and Bahá'í Women

Women in America and Europe were in the forefront of mystical and evangelical movements as is well-documented in Marilyn J. Westerkamp's study, *Women and Religion in Early America, 1600-1850*.⁴⁵ Within the confines of the "work of the spirit," women escaped, to a degree, the bounds of patriarchy and travelled as lay preachers and "exhorters."⁴⁶ As W. C. van den Hoonaard and Robert Stockman point out, most early North American Bahá'ís came from Protestant reform traditions such as Methodism, and some of their previous attitudes and practices were institutionalized in the Bahá'í community.⁴⁷ However, what Westerkamp calls the "excessive and eccentric" behaviours associated with revivals, such as swooning or speaking in tongues, were proscribed in the Bahá'í community, where excess, fanaticism and proselytising were discouraged by 'Abdu'l Bahá and Shoghi Effendi.⁴⁸ More evident were stories of prescient dreams, visions and serendipity. Many Bahá'ís, including May Maxwell, felt they had been "led" to the Faith. As religious historian Amanda Porterfield notes, "when religious receptivity was filled with an experience of God, social submissiveness might be overturned, replaced by an authoritative point of view that claimed the truth," a pattern consistently seen with prominent

female religious reformers.⁴⁹ This more mystical feminist model can be applied as well to other “alternative,” female-friendly new religious movements such as Theosophy, Transcendentalism, Christian Science, or New Thought. Many North American Bahá’ís had previously been adherents of such groups, who shared some similar aims. In the early decades, Bahá’ís sometimes partnered with other “alternative” faith groups, sharing speakers, venues, or joint conferences.

Comparisons between Bahá’í women and missionary women also can be drawn as many Bahá’í women travelled and “taught” others about the Faith. The situation of missionary women differed in important respects, not least of which was that they took a Euro-western Christianity “out” to other racio-cultural groups, while Bahá’ís promoted to Euro-Americans and others a culturally unfamiliar millennial “Oriental” faith, transplanted “in” to the west. However, mission methods and the idea of a “calling” influenced Bahá’í women. Like Protestant women, Bahá’ís learned organizational skills by arranging meetings, giving talks, and coordinating activities locally, nationally, and internationally. Patricia Hill notes in *The World Their Household* that concurrent with the rise of social reform movements, Protestant missionary movements expanded spectacularly from the 1880s to World War One. Hill also highlights the romantic appeal of foreign missions as attractive objects of female benevolence. The largest number were lay missions instituted by women's missionary societies, an interdenominational phenomenon that was substantially larger than any other mass movement of women.⁵⁰ This was an aspect of the “feminization” of religion, where women dominated the rank and file of churches. Robert Pierce Beaver in *American Protestant Women in World Mission* calls it the “first feminist movement in North America,” challenging male authority and causing consternation over the church's control of female sexuality.⁵¹ Unlike most religious and women’s reform movements, sexuality and the control of it, inside or outside the Faith, was a topic almost entirely absent in western Bahá’í discourse. Women's participation in missions expanded women’s horizons and helped to change the parameters of ideal womanhood before the movement faded into obscurity after World War One. Patricia Hill argues that in addition to the notion of a “special mission,” and the Victorian sanctification of motherhood, there was a domestic desire to “clean up” the world and Christianize, sanitize, and civilize “heathen” mothers. The link between a domestic and a social reform agenda is also explored in Mariana Valverde's *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925*.⁵² “Domestic” rhetoric is markedly less common in the discourse of Bahá’í women than in missionary or maternal feminist circles, although there is some limited crossover in reform activities such as May Maxwell's and others’ efforts in peace, public health, or children’s courts. Bahá’ís’ commitment to racial integration helped them to avoid the eugenic impulses of “moral reform,” “purification” and “civilization.”

Dana L. Robert, in *American Women in Mission*, identifies overarching themes in women's mission work, such as the premise that women should work with women, maintaining separate spheres. This idea also reflected the pragmatic reality that white missionary men had little access to local women, undermining efforts to establish self-sustaining Christian communities, particularly in Islamic or Asian areas.⁵³ Bahá’í communities took the opposite approach, where men and women struggled to learn to work together in more egalitarian ways. A major sphere of women's influence in church mission work was as teachers of girls, extending “mothering.” Bahá’í women also promoted women's education, assisting in schooling for girls in Iran and the Far East. While these educational ventures were similar to missionary efforts, they also resembled the kinds of philanthropic activities undertaken by wealthy women such as

Phoebe Hearst even before she became a Bahá'í. Female missionaries soon professionalized, serving as nurses, teachers, and social workers, even though they were usually (at least nominally) under men's control.⁵⁴ Bahá'í women, on the other hand, were independent lay persons voluntarily responsible to their highest leadership, 'Abdu'l Bahá, and after 1921, Shoghi Effendi, but not answerable to general hierarchical male administrative structures.

The Bahá'is and Religious Feminism(s)

For many late-Victorians and Edwardians, religion was more important than race, class, and gender as a means of interpreting the world.⁵⁵ But, as many feminist historians have shown, modernization, global shifts, and religious paradigms affected women differently than men.⁵⁶ Religion often defined gendered roles, as argued in essays such as those in *Women in Spiritual and Communitarian Societies in the United States*, edited by Wendy E. Chmielewski, Winnie Tomm's *A Religious Philosophy of Self*, and Rosemary Radford Ruether's *Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family*.⁵⁷ Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether's tome *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America*, documents varied forms of religious feminism.⁵⁸ Catholic and some Anglican women gained a measure of "feminist" freedom from domestic expectations by joining convents, as argued by Marta Danylewycz in *Taking the Veil: An Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood and Spinsterhood in Quebec, 1840–1920*, and Susan Mumm in *Stolen Daughters, Virgin Mothers Anglican Sisterhoods in Victorian Britain*.⁵⁹ However, Bahá'ís rejected cloistering, monasticism, and asceticism, and encouraged family life. Bahá'í women were more akin to spiritually motivated Protestant "first-wave" feminists such as Women's Christian Temperance Union leader Frances Willard, who endorsed the ideal of the "New Woman," "social Christian" peace activist Jane Addams, and Nellie McClung, whose "Christian social activism" is described by Randy Warne.⁶⁰ However, Christian feminists were often at odds with their own traditions as women's equality and leadership aspirations were dismissed or stymied by church leaders, as is shown by Valerie J. Korinek in "No Women Need Apply: The Ordination of Women in the United Church of Canada. 1918-1965."⁶¹ Bahá'ís shared many beliefs on women's rights and leadership, social justice, anti-racist, and peace concerns with Quaker women, although Bahá'ís were to avoid civil disobedience.

Western Bahá'í Religious Roots

Most first-generation Bahá'ís had liberal Protestant roots as noted in Robert Stockman's and Peter Smith's studies of the American Bahá'í Community, which Canada was institutionally part of until 1949.⁶² Stockman argues that converts were mainly disaffected evangelicals attracted to the Bahá'í fulfillment of Biblical prophecy, bringing into the community both Protestant values and their reaction against Protestantism. Smith argues that Bahá'ís were heavily influenced by the "cultic" milieu in North America, and had mainly abandoned Christianity for metaphysical groups before becoming Bahá'ís. He recognizes the Bahá'í millennial impulse toward "social reconstructionism" as part of building "the Most Great Peace," but argues that "good works" pertained to individual religiosity rather than group Bahá'í activity, with the possible exception of the advocacy of racial equality. Both agree that besides social action, a spiritualization of collective human life was called for to provide the moral impetus towards positive change.⁶³ Arthur Hampson in "The Growth and Spread of the Baha'i Faith,"⁶⁴ and W.C. van den Hoonard in *The Origins of the Bahá'í Community of Canada*, acknowledge the

influence on early members of both evangelical and theosophical streams, as well as socialism. Van den Hoonaard also documents a significant Jewish heritage in the Canadian group. The current study is less concerned with the sociological roots of the women studied, and more focussed on the transformative influence of Bahá'í beliefs and practices on their new identities.

Bahá'ís and the Social Gospel

Many feminist reformers identified with the tenets of social gospel ideology. Howard Hopkins argues the rise of social gospel movements in 1870-1940, peaking in 1900-1920, was a reaction to rigidly conservative church institutions' inadequate response to modernization, and an attempt to apply Christianity to the collective ills of an industrializing society.⁶⁵ Ferenc Morton Szasz outlines the split between conservative "fundamentalists," who retreated to selective literal interpretations of the Bible, and "progressives," who took direct social action to establish the "Kingdom of God on Earth."⁶⁶ Susan Curtis, in *A Consuming Faith*, suggests that progressive social gospellers were not primarily theologians; rather, they wanted to address social ills in practical ways.⁶⁷ Post-millennial Bahá'ís also saw themselves as fulfilling Christ's mission. As educator Stanwood Cobb observed, the social gospel movement was "in the right direction" as "The Bahá'í Cause has for its purpose this very thing, to establish Christ's spiritual principles in the daily life, and to help bring to earth the Kingdom of Heaven."⁶⁸ Bahá'ís shared with social gospellers an ethos of social reform, voluntarism, education, and community-building, and the belief that spiritual and ethical values, coupled with practical rational and scientific solutions, would transform both individuals and the social order.⁶⁹ Bahá'ís were "theological" in the sense that they considered specific principles laid out in their sacred writings, such as the establishment of an international auxiliary language, universal education, global institutions of governance, female equality, and other dictums, to be the divine blueprint for building the new World Order.

Unlike tightly bounded sects and utopian groups such as the Owenites, the early Bahá'í Faith had notably porous social boundaries.⁷⁰ Adherents could leave without recrimination, and in the early years, disaffiliation from previous memberships was not required.⁷¹ Although Bahá'ís were not "unitarian," and considered theirs an independent religion, they accepted the validity of previous "dispensations" such as Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, or Islam, and upheld an ethic of "unity in diversity," advocating cultural and linguistic variegation. They did not believe that the millennial transformation they envisioned would come about exclusively through Bahá'í efforts. The goal was to have all peoples contribute to the "inevitable" emergence of a world civilization.⁷² Therefore, Bahá'í women's conceptions of "teaching" were very broad. For example, they collaborated with those reformers who shared their spiritual, ethical and reform objectives, meanwhile "planting the seeds" with any who wanted to listen. With such a long-term, gradualist, universalist agenda, direct conversion, although desired, was less essential. In this, they differed from the more religiously exclusive social gospellers who, theologian Eleanor J. Stebner argues, pursued the twin goals of "Christianizing" (i.e. personal and societal conversion) and nation-building, imparting (Anglo-British/Canadian/American) nationalistic, Protestant cultural values.⁷³ Another major difference was that the Bahá'ís, despite individual and regional differences, were part of a unitary organization with a single leader and clear doctrinal goals, whereas social gospellers, with a plethora of denominational affiliations, disagreed on many fundamental issues such as temperance, suffrage, political involvements and the sanction of women in leadership roles.⁷⁴

THEORETICAL STREAMS:

Inside-outside: Bahá'í Positionality

The role of religious belief in women's lives, and the study of religiously inspired women as agents of social reform, are themes being creatively explored by an increasing number of feminist and social historians of religion such as Lynne Marks, Randi Warne, Ann D. Braude, and others. In the past, the idea prevailed among historians that those writing from within a community could not offer an "objective" view. Oddly, this insider "bias" did not seem to apply to a "mainstream" historian's view of "mainstream" issues. Jewish feminists Lynn Davidman and Shelly Tenenbaum question the long-held assumption that objectivity positively exists:

By its very being, feminist scholarship challenges the idea of objectivity in scholarship. Feminist scholars in all disciplines have demonstrated that although mainstream scholarship has purported to study basic human experiences and to reflect on universal texts, their definition of what is worthy of attention has reflected the standpoint of the male producers of this knowledge. Claims of objectivity and universality serve to reinforce the status quo and provide excuses for ignoring the experiences of groups of people who thereby are defined as marginal (such as people of color and white women) and for not incorporating their writings into literary canons.⁷⁵

These Jewish feminists raise interesting historiographical considerations for those writing about other groups or individuals on the "margins." Jewish scholarship, like Bahá'í, Hindu, Christian, or Muslim scholarship, is mainly being done from inside the faith tradition. Thus questions have arisen as to whether scholars who are "insiders" in the group being studied can be objective. Similar questions might be asked of those writing from within Aboriginal, racial, ethnic, feminist, or LGBT communities. Most historians and anthropologists now discount the concept of "objectivity." An inductive approach, which can be messy and tolerant of ambiguities, discovering insights along the way rather than beginning with theoretical assumptions, has been advocated by W. C. van den Hoonaard in the study of communities such as the Bahá'ís, especially when being written about "from the inside." Van den Hoonaard points out:

... the advantages of approaching the study of the Bahá'í community from an inductive perspective which embeds the research fully in the context of the meanings that Bahá'ís assign to the things they say and do. It is a grounded perspective that attempts to retain the integrity of the research "subjects," ensuring that the gathered data maintain a meaningful place in relationship to the wider belief system.⁷⁶

While "insider" loyalties or perspectives might potentially colour analyses, "insider" insight can be an advantage in understanding the language, thinking, and motivations of the group being studied. In a converse vein, since the 1980s, questions have arisen as to whether "outsiders" writing about a marginalized community can fairly or accurately represent a group to which they do not belong. They may even encounter accusations of cultural appropriation. One response to this "insider-outsider" dilemma has been that in some disciplines, such as Native, women's, race or ethnic studies, researchers are encouraged to understand and acknowledge their positionality.

Researcher's Positionality

Although a statement of one's positionality, outside of academic credentials, is not common in the discipline of history, I believe the motivations of the researcher comprise an integral component of the research process. This dissertation, focussed on May Maxwell and other western early Bahá'í women, came about as a result of a confluence of interests. Canadian history, culture, and the roles of women in society, have been my major areas of scholarly research. As a woman, community activist, feminist, artist, and observer, who understands we all live in myth and narrative, I am concerned with the question of the ways in which worldviews motivate behaviour. As a long-term member of the Bahá'í Faith, I support the idea that spiritual and moral ideologies are powerful determinants of social construction, individual and group identity formation, and change. Consequently, this dissertation explores the ways in which the adoption of a Bahá'í ideology transforms the identities and activities of women, shapes the early cultural beginnings of the western Bahá'í community, and encourages feminist reform activity.

This dissertation further develops themes which emerged from my MA thesis, *Pilgrim Sisters: Understanding the Role of Female Friendship in Victorian Canada in the Life of Frances Stewart (1794-1872)*. This case study of the experiences of an Irish-Protestant immigrant to Upper Canada, argued that Frances Stewart and her close friends adopted a providential Euro-Christian 'pilgrim's progress' mythos, life script and worldview which delineated and sustained a resilient imagined intellectual space that transcended temporal and international borders. This religious worldview facilitated the difficult adjustments required by immigration, re-formed behaviours, and re-interpreted daunting hardships as spiritual lessons on "the path of life." It assisted these settler women in powerfully reinventing feminine and class identities that located them as both insiders and outsiders in the Canadian "backwoods." Principles of mutual helpfulness and Christian charity encouraged an efficacious international female "friendship economy" operating on principles of reciprocity, which garnered the material, intellectual, spiritual and service resources required by the women concerned. If the theory that a shared religious worldview is capable of creating powerful bonds of female friendship and exercising transformative capacity holds true, it should be evidenced in other groups of women belonging to differing belief systems in various time periods. This study of Bahá'í women continues to examine the efficacy of socially constructed worldviews, their effects on human and group behaviour, and issues of representation, both within and outside the perceived boundaries of group membership. My particular concern lies in how individuals, in this case women, and groups re-form, transform, and represent their identities in the negotiation of major transitions.

Outside-inside: Bahá'í Liminality

The useful concept of liminality, described by Carolyn Heilbrun in *Women's Lives: The View from the Threshold*, is applicable to this study of early twentieth-century western Bahá'í women, who occupied a curious "insider-outsider" position in western society.⁷⁷ The mainly native-born, predominantly white, often well-educated adherents had access to most of the privileges of western society, and collaborated easily with other like-minded groups engaged in social reconstruction. However, they often experienced a dissonance of worldview and some social disapprobation in an overwhelmingly Euro-Judeo-Christian society, which, for Bahá'ís, strengthened their psychological and emotional identification with the ongoing persecution of

their eastern co-religionists. Bahá'ís are anomalous in adopting an “Oriental” religion rooted in Islamic tradition. Few transplanted non-western religions have been documented in early twentieth-century Euro-American history, and those are mainly linked to the ethnic groups that traditionally practiced them. Although some Bahá'í women adopted subtle markers of their religious status, such as the wearing of a Bahá'í ring, they did not emulate eastern Bahá'í female dress or behaviour. Unlike Hindus, Sikhs or Muslims, western Bahá'ís were relatively invisible. Some parallels can be drawn between Bahá'ís and Jewish women, who were not highly visible but differed from the mainstream in terms of their religious practice (such as holy days, fasting, and other creedal laws), symbolism, and worldview. Jewish women, like Bahá'ís, have an ethic of community activism and philanthropy. However, Bahá'í women, even those of Jewish heritage, directed their activities far beyond what Jewish feminist Paula Hyman says is considered the “natural” [domestic] constituency of Jewish women- i.e. women and children.⁷⁸ Unlike Jews, western Bahá'ís were not seen as an “ethnicity,” and seldom persecuted, but violent Bahá'í histories and close identification with eastern “martyrdoms” coloured their thinking.

Although the category of “women” or “Bahá'í women” is not specifically problematized in this study, it is recognized that various individual women had their own subjectively experienced, changeable experience of “Bahá'íness,” and of “womanhood,” depending on their personal background and the shifting cultural contexts in which they found themselves. For instance, when Lua Getsinger, who studied drama, first became a Bahá'í in Chicago, she dressed very fashionably with artistic flair. After spending months and years in Palestine, Iran, Egypt and India, able to speak Persian and wearing modest clothing that included a draped “blue costume” especially designed for her by ‘Abdu’l Bahá, she was apparently so schooled in Eastern manners that she could pass in Haifa for a local Christian woman. However, in the Persian-dominated eastern Bahá'í community in ‘Akká/Haifa and Iran, western female Bahá'ís also often were placed in a liminal “insider-outsider” gender position. Although female, these cultural outsiders were not regarded in the same way as eastern females, being allowed more gender latitude, and in some ways treated as honorary males. As Judith Butler argues, “gender” requires a degree of performance.⁷⁹ Although they maintained an identity as “western women” of a particular race, class, nationality, personality and time period, Bahá'í women also learned a wide repertoire of more culturally sensitive performances of “womanhoods” and/or “Bahá'í womanhoods,” used adaptively and strategically as they travelled throughout the world.

Developing Bahá'í Mythologies

Although there is some limited theological discussion to contextualize Bahá'í women's motivations and activities, unlike a religious studies approach, this dissertation does not focus on theological questions. It is more concerned with the cultural study of the ways in which particular doctrines influenced the mythologies, identities and reform activities of early female adherents. This study draws on theories advanced by Joseph Campbell and others who argue that mythical forms can transcend cultures, and can be used in different cultural milieus to influence, educate, inspire, and model identity for those of disparate cultural backgrounds.⁸⁰ In this study, the term “mythology,” when applied to Bahá'í or other religious teachings, is used in the widest possible sense of constructing individual or collective worldviews through a narrativizing process, and should not be read in any dismissive or derogatory way.

Particular attention is paid throughout the thesis to the overarching motivational myth of the Bahá'í new World Order. The development of it and other specific mythologies, particularly those that offered heroized female religious models, shaped western Bahá'í identity and inspired women's reform activism. In this regard, Chapter 2 examines the adoption of two primary Bahá'í female religious archetypes: a Bahá'í re-visioned Mary Magdalene, refashioned as a leader of the male disciples and a preeminent woman of Christianity, and the strong-minded, independent Persian Bábí poetess, Táhirih, who Bahá'í leader Shoghi Effendi called "the first woman suffrage martyr."⁸¹ Chapter 3 explores some of the features of Bahá'í millennial feminism, the outgrowth of a new religious myth of women's spiritual and social equality. Chapter 4 examines Bahá'í women's attempts to "operationalize" specific principles such as education, racial "amity" and the institution of a universal auxiliary language. These doctrinal precepts, some of the many that underpin the overarching myth of the construction of a new World Order, emerged as major social reform initiatives for Bahá'í women in the early twentieth century. Chapter 5 explores the myths and (rare) counter-narratives associated with the elevation of May Maxwell and other prominent female Bahá'ís to a near-hagiographic status. These idealized exemplars were instrumental in encouraging women to both internalize Bahá'í values, and to undertake activities that challenged normative female roles and early twentieth-century gender boundaries.

First-wave Feminism(s): Bahá'í Millennial Feminism

As historians Carol Lee Bacchi, Catherine Cleverdon, Jo Freeman and others point out, first-wave feminism was not a united movement. Feminist reformers had multiple aims and only collaborated for a few intense years in order to achieve the vote for women.⁸² This thesis argues that western Bahá'í women were part of a continuum of first-wave/interwar religiously motivated feminists. Bahá'ís advocated female equality, spoke to and collaborated with other feminist groups, and viewed their female exemplar, Táhirih, as a suffrage martyr. Among the many suffragists who met Bahá'í leader 'Abdu'l Bahá during His western travels in 1911-13 was Emmeline Pankhurst, whom He encouraged to continue in her work to help women take their rightful place in the world.⁸³ Susan S. Maneck, in her article "Women in the Bahá'í Faith," suggests that one reason women assumed such a preponderant role in the west of establishing the Faith was its attractive commitment to universal suffrage and creating a new, inclusive, global millennial World Order that advocated the spiritual and social equality of women and men.⁸⁴

The Bahá'í Faith, strongly millennial in its theology and activities, had some features in common with other millennial groups but also differed in many respects. Studies of millenarian movements suggest that they tend to occur in times of social flux and have a particular appeal for the disenfranchised, the poor, women (especially "commoner" women), and educated persons who feel undervalued, although exceptions abound. The western Bahá'í group was formed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a time of rapidly shifting social and religious values, and, in the western Bahá'í community, educated women predominated. While women are the backbone of community development in most millennial movements, men usually present the public face of the movement, interpreting it to others. Women may be given a voice in the early periods of expansion but are likely to be demoted to a subordinate position when the movement matures and gender "order" returns.⁸⁵ This did not occur with Bahá'ís mainly due to their doctrinal commitment to female equality; instead, women's status and value was bolstered by woman-affirming statements made by the leadership and female-heroizing mythologies. Early

twentieth-century Bahá'ís exhibited a fairly modern understanding of sex and gender, although not using that terminology. They accepted that certain biological functions such as childbirth made some roles complementary or sex-specific, and urged a higher valuation of maternal and traditionally “feminine” roles and attributes. However, Bahá'ís also argued that most social and economic differences between the sexes were socially constructed, or as Joan Scott describes them, “gendered.”⁸⁶ The Faith posited that any perceived inferiority was due not to lack of capacity, but to women’s historic lack of opportunity, and therefore open to change.

It was very rare for either religious or millennial movements to foreground the equality of women as a primary goal. In this study, I argue that Bahá'í women adopted a form of “millennial religious feminism,” inasmuch as their feminism was integrally linked to the millennial vision of the establishment of a new World Order. Although many women joined the movement already endorsing “first-wave” feminist ideals, Bahá'í scriptural support for female equality stimulated and augmented feminist values in the movement in general, influencing even those who were not previously supporters, including men. Other goals associated with a millennial World Order such as world peace, racial equality, education and an auxiliary language, became “feminist” projects in the sense that they could not be successfully instituted without attention to gender equality.

Addressing Orientalism

The adoption of a Persian woman, Táhirih, as an iconic figure for western Bahá'í women raises issues of colonialism and Orientalism, and could be seen as an appropriation of eastern culture. Writings based in feminist and post-colonial theory, such as Anne McClintock’s *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, Nora E. Jaffary in *Gender, Race and Religion in the Colonization of the Americas*, and Adele Perry’s *On the Edge of Empire*, bear on the whole question of cultural imperialism, particularly as it meshed with female gender prescriptions, and the complementary role of white women and Euro-Christian religion in “civilizing” non-Euro-heritage populations.⁸⁷ The prevalent historiography suggests that (white, usually Christian) women were both the agents and the victims of the imperialist enterprise. Specifically, their race and class privileged them, while their gender constrained their ability to self-determine actions. However, women like May Maxwell are difficult to categorize in these terms. Maxwell was undoubtedly both privileged by race and class, and constrained by gender, but how this can offer explanations for her championing of a non-white, non-western, persecuted, minority religion is less clear. As religious historian Catherine Wessinger and others have argued, women who joined “marginal religions” subverted patriarchal, imperialistic, and traditional religious norms.⁸⁸ Bahá'í women saw themselves as agents *to* western/non-western imperialistic or dictatorial societies, of a mission *from* an internally and externally marginalized religious group. Their position was further complicated by their globalizing objectives.

Jennifer Henderson, examining issues of imperialism in *Settler Feminism and Race Making*, emphasizes the point that an integral part of imperialism is the construction of racial hierarchies.⁸⁹ While racism was endemic, even virulent, during the time period being looked at, May Maxwell and the Bahá'ís were integrating with, and under the leadership of, “Orientals.” Bahá'ís actively campaigned against racial prejudice, encouraged inter-racial marriage and invited blacks and other minorities to join the Faith, even electing them to positions of leadership. Because Bahá'ís had no political or nationalistic ties with imperialists whose goal it

was to acquire land and resources, and because they did not aim to subject or impose an existing ethno-cultural model on populations, it is difficult to categorize them as agents of imperialism.

The terms “east” and “west,” “Oriental” and “Occidental” occur frequently in this thesis without extensive explication. This deeply rooted jargon bisecting humanity was commonly used (and still is) as a shorthand to simplistically represent culturally variegated groupings. Those who lived in the Middle East, India, China, and other Asian states were referred to as “eastern” or “Oriental” while “westerners” were the “Occidental” peoples of Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand, and colonies dominated by those of European descent. Edward Said, a Palestinian-American literary and cultural theorist whose book, *Orientalism*, redefined the analysis of east-west relations, argues that late nineteenth-century “Orientalist” stereotypes reinforced western conceptions of the Middle East as monolithic, mysterious, backward, corrupted, uncivilized, enigmatic, and dangerously erotic. Said charged that eastern women were subjected to a “male power fantasy,” while eastern men were linked to marginal “elements in Western society (delinquents, the insane, women, the poor) having in common an identity best described as lamentably alien” when compared to western masculine ideals of morality and rationality.⁹⁰ In contrast, in Bahá’í mythologies, eastern, heroized, Bábí-Bahá’í leaders, scholars, and men of all classes persecuted or killed for their beliefs, became idealized. They were held up as masculine models of courage, perseverance, and resolute faith against which westerners (both men and women) were measured. There have been some informative critiques of Said’s theory of Orientalism by feminists. Jane Miller’s *Seductions: Studies in Reading and Culture*, examines women in relation to colonialism, imperialism, racism and slavery, concluding that their treatment in east and west was more similar than different. Reina Lewis’s *Gendering Orientalism* questions the very idea of an Oriental hegemony.⁹¹

Said argues that Orientalist myths are emplotted to portray a homogenous, ahistorical, unchanging “Oriental mind” that is absolutely different from the “Western mind,” a crude, naive, and essentially false portrayal.⁹² The Bahá’ís, partly because of Muslim antagonism towards the Bahá’í Faith, did not view the east as the abstract monolithic “opposite” of Euro-Christian society, or “Orientals” as a “people [who] cannot speak for themselves, cannot understand themselves, and are hopelessly doomed to the base of the global pyramid,” as Said charges.⁹³ Western Bahá’ís, because of their faith’s “Oriental” origins, and their close interactions with eastern fellow-Bahá’ís, were more aware of the complex realities underlying the generalizations than most westerners. They knew Persians, Iraqis, Syrians, Egyptians, Indians, and other “Orientals” as their co-religionists, exchanging letters, visiting and closely collaborating with them. Bahá’ís even recognized that middle-eastern Bahá’ís (and some westerners) suffered from misplaced antagonistic “Occidentalist” stereotyping. Edward Said fails to mention that eastern authorities and activists also exploited monolithic, stereotypical views of “the West” for their own political and religious ends. For instance, Jamál-ad-Dín al-Afghání (1838-1897), a Persian activist and modernist intimately acquainted with Europe, who advocated local and pan-Islamic nationalisms, is credited with being the first to use the terms “Islam” and “the West” as connoting correlative, antagonistic, historical phenomena.⁹⁴ In the “othering” of Bábí-Bahá’ís that occurred in Iran, this played out in accusations that Bahá’ís were paid imperialist agents and spies for (competing) imperialist interests, notably the Russians and British. There were even false accusations that the Bábí-Bahá’í Faith was strategically invented by western imperialists, and its only mission was to disrupt and undermine the Islamic faith, culture and social unity.⁹⁵

The Bahá'í Faith was atypical in the early twentieth century in that it originated in the Middle East, maintained "Oriental" leadership, and reversed the prevalent "west to east" flow of missionary origins, cultural ideology and conversion efforts, disrupting stereotypical imperialist and "Orientalist" patterns. Likewise, theories of Orientalism that critique western attitudes to the east, as in the fascination with the exotic "other," fail to define this situation. There was some adoption in the western community of eastern Bahá'í words and symbols, as there was some adoption in the eastern community of western dress, Esperanto, and educational and medical systems, but this was interpreted by Bahá'ís as mutual cultural exchange, as part of their shared ownership of the Faith. While western imperialism was a historical reality and Orientalist assumptions were likely present to some degree within the western Bahá'í community, important differences existed. For instance, Yasmeen Abu-Laban's essay in *Revising Culture, Reinventing Peace*, on the influence of Edward Said, suggests that "his work encourages us to listen to the voice of the [Oriental] "Other" and to take responsibility and action in our social and political world."⁹⁶ May Maxwell and her group of Bahá'í women exemplified that advice. There was a constant emphasis on social and cultural integration and a leveling of east-west relations, advocating "unity" and adopting fictive "Bahá'í family" ties. When, in 1937, May Maxwell's daughter Mary wed Persian Bahá'í leader Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, the great-grandson of Bahá'u'lláh, it was viewed within the Faith as the symbolic unification of east and west. Mary Maxwell symbolically adopted a Persian name, Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum. Her husband usually wore western dress. This symbolism continued even after death when Shoghi Effendi was buried in "the west" in London, UK, where he died in 1957, while a monument similar to his was erected for Rúhíyyih Khánum when she was interred in the "east" in Haifa, Israel in 2000.

Invisible Bahá'í Women: Biographical Zoning, Sexularism and the Modernist Turn *Or...why does religious feminism matter?*

May Maxwell, who was born in New Jersey, grew up between France, America and Britain, and lived most of her adult life in Montreal, was one of the first western adherents of the Bahá'í Faith, a Persian religion transplanted to North America and western Europe in the 1890s. While May Maxwell is a famous, nearly hagiographic figure in Bahá'í world history, in mainstream Canadian history she is unknown, mentioned only in passing as the wife of well-known *Beaux Arts* architect William Sutherland Maxwell. He, with his brother Edward, owned the foremost Canadian architectural firm of their era, designing many Canadian landmarks such as the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, signature Canadian Pacific Railway hotels, and the Saskatchewan Legislature. At McGill University Archives in Montreal, the view of the Maxwells is almost the obverse of the view from inside the Bahá'í Faith. A large section of the McGill archives is dedicated to the W. S. and Edward Maxwell Architectural Archive, holding their records, photos, art and artifacts. W.S. Maxwell's Bahá'í involvement, along with that of his wife and daughter, merits only a brief passing mention.⁹⁷ McGill has almost no records concerning May Maxwell as a Bahá'í or a Montreal social reformer, Mary Maxwell's pre-eminent position in the Bahá'í world as the wife of Shoghi Effendi, or the unique designation of the Maxwell's Montreal home as the only Bahá'í shrine outside the Middle East.

Conversely, in a Bahá'í context, May Maxwell is a legendary figure, the "spiritual mother" of continents, countries, and many well-known Bahá'ís. Her only child, Mary, was

initially mainly viewed as May's daughter. After her marriage in 1937 to Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, the Guardian of the Faith and great-grandson of Bahá'u'lláh, Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum became prominent in her own right as the foremost Bahá'í spokeswoman, criss-crossing the planet and meeting with world leaders. After May's death in 1940, Sutherland Maxwell became recognized within the Faith as the architect of the Shrine of the Báb in Haifa. In 1951, three months before his death, he was named a *Hand of the Cause* by Shoghi Effendi.⁹⁸ Both a position of high honour and an administrative post, only fifty known Hands of the Cause were appointed between the Declaration of the Báb in 1844 and the death of Shoghi Effendi in 1957. No more will ever be appointed. However, within the Bahá'í community, Sutherland Maxwell is still popularly best-known as the husband of May Maxwell and father of Rúhíyyih Khánum.

Similarly, American Laura Clifford Dreyfus-Barney, who became a Bahá'í (c.1900) through May Maxwell in Paris, is cast by the several biographers of her mother, artist Alice Pike Barney, and her sister, prominent lesbian author and Paris salonnière Natalie Clifford Barney, as the peripheral, earnest, sensible, but boring damp blanket of the "eccentric" trio of Barney women. In contrast, in Bahá'í circles, Laura Dreyfus-Barney is a major figure, known for her many contributions to the Faith, her unique published interviews with Bahá'í leader 'Abdu'l Bahá, and the extensive peace, humanitarian, philanthropic and internationalist work for which she was named *chevalier* (1925) and *officier* (1937) of the French Légion d'Honneur.⁹⁹

Bahá'í women as a group are also virtually invisible in early twentieth-century feminist or reform literature. This is partly because the Bahá'í movement in western countries was numerically small and did not formally ally itself with particular causes, even though individual Bahá'ís might be very active in that cause. A few high profile women are remembered for their non-Bahá'í connections, such as American philanthropist Phoebe Hearst or Irish-British suffragist Lady Sara Louisa Blomfield.¹⁰⁰ W.C. van den Hoonaard has advanced the useful notion of "biographical zoning" to explain this phenomenon, pointing out that various biographical details become more or less salient depending on the context and who is doing the research.¹⁰¹ Individuals who are prominent in Bahá'í circles may be either noteworthy for another reason or nearly invisible to the mainstream. He first applied this idea of biographical zoning to Rose Henderson (1871-1937), a Canadian feminist reformer, socialist, labour and peace activist who was taught the Bahá'í Faith by May Maxwell. She has been variously studied by van den Hoonaard in a Bahá'í context, by historians Peter Campbell and Joan Sangster in a socialist context, and by historian Tamara Myers as a prison and educational reformer.¹⁰²

While biographical zoning is a reality, it seems that Bahá'í women's invisibility can also be attributed to a reticence, until recently, to explore the influence of religion on women's lives in feminist historical writing, perhaps in perceptions of feminism itself. Western feminism, along with modernism, has been strongly linked with secularism as women moved away from traditional patriarchal religion and worked towards civil, social, legal, and ideological reforms that furthered equality. In scholarly circles, the term "religious feminist" usually has referred to those who advance a feminist theology that reassesses, reexamines, reinterprets, revises and challenges prevailing masculinist scripture, theologies, and language, along with sexist traditions, practices and organizational structures and cultures, *within* particular religious traditions.¹⁰³ This secular-religious split within the discipline of history and the feminist movement reflects the social (and ontological) separation of religion from other aspects of life in

many western countries. Religion becomes a private affair seen to exist in tension with the public sphere, and often, the public good. This separation is especially evident in the United States and France, both countries whose feminists contributed a great deal to the “second wave” of feminism, which tended to see religion as oppressive. In fact, even the word “feminist” has become so strongly associated with progressive secularized ideals of equality that many religious women shun the term “feminist,” even while campaigning to improve the status, choices, and equity of women as a group.¹⁰⁴ However, acknowledgement by feminists that religion can be a vehicle for empowerment, as this dissertation posits, is beginning to be more widely accepted.

As the implications of a more internationalist and racially, ethnically, economically, sexually and religiously pluralistic “third wave” of feminism(s) unfolds, scholars have begun to integrate religion, along with race/ethnicity, class and gender, as another one of the interlocking hierarchies described by Ruth Frager that pertain to the study of women.¹⁰⁵ Historian Lynne Marks has shown that religion’s influence on the social construction of community and gender roles can be systematically analyzed in her study of Protestantism in late nineteenth-century small town Ontario.¹⁰⁶ Randi Warne has explored the ways in which first-wave feminist Nellie McClung was motivated by and utilized her strong Christian and feminist beliefs, often using her literary output as a “pulpit” for her religious ideals.¹⁰⁷ Janice Fiamengo, in her study of Agnes Maule Mahar, argues that Mahar’s religiosity cannot be separated from her feminism.¹⁰⁸ Other studies of the relationship of feminism with religio-social topics are also beginning to appear.¹⁰⁹

Joan W. Scott has coined the word “sexularism,” to describe the current secular bias of western society and western conceptions of feminism, where, she argues, secularism and gender equality are on the one side, and religion and the oppression of women on the other, best exemplified by the “politics of the veil.” She argues that secularism is often the “explicit justification” for racism, religio/ethnocentricity, and the preservation of the male prerogative to control accessibility to women’s sexuality.¹¹⁰ Mariam Esseghaier in “Assimilation in a Bikini” extends Scott’s concept of sexularism to argue that secularism, often advanced as liberating by feminists, has become a powerful tool of western cultural imperialism and assimilation.¹¹¹

As this third-wave feminist debate heats up, a report by French sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger argues that a characteristic of modernity itself is that a “proliferation of belief” characterizes “so-called rationally disenchanted modern societies,” undermining the secularization thesis.¹¹² Furthermore, New Religious Movements (NRMs) have recruited disproportionately from among certain groups of cultural intermediaries such as teachers, social workers, medical professionals, and workers in the arts. That a form of “religious feminism” can be considered a feature of modernity is validated in the current study. The educated “modern” woman was the type attracted to the Bahá’í Faith, with its modernist ideals and explicit support of female equality. Hervieu-Léger argues that the predominance of new religious movements does not support a characterization of religion as pre-modern, out-dated, or existing at the fringes of modernity, but rather shows that the reorganization of religion, and the creation of non-traditional patterns of meaning, are at the very heart of modernity. These “marginal” religious groups have assumed a growing importance in an alienated and atomistic society in creating emotional links and shaping identity. She therefore attributes the “new relevance” of religiosity as a field of academic study to the recent recognition by scholars of this phenomenon.¹¹³

SUMMARY

May Maxwell's conscious purpose, which she shared with other Bahá'í women, was to create a millenarian "new World Order," through the religious, social, and educational reform of society, and the spiritualization of the planet. Some of the specific goals these women tried to achieve during their lifetimes, reflecting their adherence to the principles of the Bahá'í Faith, were efforts towards individual spiritual development, the support of female equality, racial equality, religious harmony, education (particularly for girls), the support of mothers and children, universal peace and justice, and the establishment of a universal auxiliary language. In order to achieve their vision of regenerating humanity, they worked to build a functional faith community, and established collaborative transnational networks both inside and outside the Bahá'í Faith to advance local, national and global reforms. As part of achieving these millennial feminist goals, new mythologies and inspirational heroic female paradigms were constructed.

This dissertation explores the important role of women in developing Bahá'í culture, determining the ways in which they fit in with, or diverged from, other early twentieth-century western women engaged in religious, reform and feminist endeavours. It positions May Maxwell and Bahá'í women as millennial religious feminists in the larger historiography. In summary, this thesis contributes to studies of globalism, peace, multiculturalism, feminism, education, reform movements, and western non-Judeo-Christian "alternative" religions.

******INTRODUCTION: APPENDIX I******

ORIGIN MYTHS: THE BÁBÍ-BAHÁ'Í FAITH & A FEMALE ARCHETYPE, TÁHIRÍH

To better understand this dissertation and the belief system adopted by early Bahá'í women, this outline of the Bahá'í Faith, and one of its major female role models, Táhirih, has been appended.

Twin Founders: the Báb (1819-1850) and Bahá'u'lláh (1817- 1892).

In the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, many traditions experienced millenarian reform/revival movements as cultures grappled with modernity and the socio-cultural flux generated by imperialism, capitalism, democratization, science & technology, and accelerating globalization.¹¹⁴ Millennial groups predicted a (cosmic) conflict and a global renewal where good ultimately routed evil, annihilating tyranny and want. People hoped for a Redeemer to usher in a new age of peace, justice and righteousness. These were precisely the millenarian claims of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, twin founders of the Bábí-Bahá'í Faith.¹¹⁵ A young merchant of the lineage of the Prophet Muhammad in Shiraz, Persia (now Iran), named Siyyid 'Alí Muhammad, made a messianic claim in 1844 to be the promised Qa'im (or Madhi) and took the title, The Báb (gate/door). His first eighteen disciples, called the *Letters of the Living*, included the famed poetess, Táhirih, a religious scholar and rare female leader of the millennial Islamic *Shaykhi* sect, many of whose devotees became Bábís.¹¹⁶ Gaining tens of

thousands of followers in spite of brutal persecution, the Báb penned hundreds of “Tablets” (letters), instituting a monotheistic doctrine and new shari’a law. Before being executed at thirty in 1850 by a government firing squad, the Báb foretold “He whom God will make manifest,” the Promised One of all religions.¹¹⁷ Bahá’ís consider the Báb to be both an independent Prophet and the Herald of Bahá’u’lláh (Glory of God), whose given name was Mírzá Ḥusayn-‘Alí Núrí.¹¹⁸

A Persian noble, Bahá’u’lláh was stripped of wealth and imprisoned as a Bábí leader in 1852. With family and followers, in 1853 He was exiled to Baghdad, where in 1863 He declared that He was the universal prophet or “Manifestation of God” foretold by the Báb. All but a few Bábís accepted this claim, becoming Bahá’ís.¹¹⁹ Further exiled to Constantinople (Istanbul) and Adrianople (Edirne), in 1868, Bahá’u’lláh and His group were finally incarcerated in the pestilential Ottoman penal colony of ‘Akká, the former crusader fortress of St. Jeanne d’Acre, in Palestine (now Israel). Bahá’u’lláh “revealed” a large body of writings that Bahá’ís consider sacred. When He died in 1892, the religion had spread into the Middle East, India and Russia. ‘Abdu’l Bahá, the son of Bahá’u’lláh, was appointed leader of the Bahá’í Faith, expanding the Faith to western countries. On the death of ‘Abdu’l Bahá in 1921, His grandson Shoghi Effendi was appointed and led the Faith until 1957. ‘Akká-Haifa remains the “world centre” of the Faith.

Bahá’í Doctrine: Progressive Revelation and Universal Principles

The Bahá’í doctrine of “progressive revelation” teaches that there is one universal, unknowable Deity who periodically sends Messengers to guide humanity, progressively revealing religious truth. The Faith asserts that fundamental spiritual teachings in almost all traditions are nearly identical. Social and doctrinal pre/proscriptions associated with different Prophets such as Buddha, Christ, Krishna, Muhammad, or Indigenous teachers, vary according to the needs of the population at that time.¹²⁰ The Bahá’í Faith claims that the human family has reached a new stage of maturity, and Bahá’u’lláh has brought teachings suited to this era, to assist in the unification of all peoples into a just and peaceful global civilization. A complex Bábí-Bahá’í theology exists, but Shoghi Effendi sums up basic Bahá’í doctrinal tenets as:

- the independent search after truth, unfettered by superstition or tradition;
- the oneness of the human race, the Faith’s pivotal principle and fundamental doctrine;
- the basic unity of all religions;
- the condemnation of all forms of prejudice, whether religious, racial, class or national;
- the harmony which must exist between religion and science;
- the equality of men and women, the two wings on which the bird of humankind can soar;
- the introduction of compulsory education for both girls and boys;
- the adoption of a universal auxiliary language;

- the abolition of the extremes of wealth and poverty;
- world parliamentary institutions and a world tribunal to adjudicate disputes;
- the exaltation of work, performed in the spirit of service, to the rank of worship;
- the glorification of justice as the ruling principle in human society, and of religion as a bulwark for the protection of all peoples and nations;
- a permanent and universal peace as the supreme goal of all mankind.¹²¹

Shoghi Effendi listed the above principles, writing that:

...these stand out as the essential elements of that Divine polity which He [Abdu'l Bahá] proclaimed to leaders of public thought as well as to the masses at large in the course of these missionary journeys [to the West]. The exposition of these vitalizing truths of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, which He characterized as the "spirit of the age," He supplemented with grave and reiterated warnings of an impending conflagration which, if the statesmen of the world should fail to avert, would set ablaze the entire continent of Europe. He, moreover, predicted, [among other events]...that the "banner of the unity of mankind would be hoisted, that the tabernacle of universal peace would be raised and the world become another world."¹²²

Three Stages of Transculturation: Western Acceptance of a "Modern" Oriental faith

Stage 1 of Transculturation: European Observers

Before Euro-Americans adopted a "transmuted," more comprehensible, Bahá'í Faith, three transitional stages of transculturation occurred. During the first 1844-1892 phase, western diplomats such as Lord Curzon, Comte de Gobineau and Sir Justin Sheil, concerned with Bábí persecution and Persian political and religious upheaval, circulated reports framing brave Bábís as more akin to early Christians than Muslims. A key attraction was the important role played by Bábí women, especially the bold and gifted Táhirih, seen as a Persian Joan of Arc.¹²³ After 1863, with Bahá'u'llah's exile and His injunctions against violence and civil disobedience, western diplomatic interest waned. However, the romantic revolutionary images of the Báb and his "lieutenant," the inimitable Táhirih, had captured the western imagination, and travelogues such as Lady Sheil's *Glimpses of Life and Manners in Persia* (1856) remained popular.¹²⁴ In 1871, writer and critic Matthew Arnold commented that Bábism was a movement "of which most people in England have at least heard the name."¹²⁵ As the French writer Jules Bois said:

...among the *littérateurs* of my generation, in the Paris of 1890, the martyrdom of the Báb was still as fresh a topic as had been the first news of his death. We wrote poems about him. Sarah Bernhardt entreated Catulle Mendès for a play on the theme of this historic tragedy [in which she would play the role of Táhirih].¹²⁶

Táhirih was unusually well educated for a woman. Speaking from behind a curtain, she surpassed her father's male students.¹²⁷ Her father reputedly lamented, "would that she had been a boy, for he would have shed illumination upon my household, and would have succeeded me."¹²⁸ Married at about fourteen (possibly against her will) to her first cousin, she had two sons and a daughter in a troubled marriage, spending much time with her mother.¹²⁹ Táhirih espoused the millennial Islamic *Shaykhi* sect against the wishes of her father, father-in-law, and husband, and in 1843 joined the Shaykhis in Karbala, Iraq.¹³⁰ The leader, Siyyid Kázim, had just died but had told his followers to seek out the Messiah. Unable to travel as a woman, Táhirih met the Báb in a dream and was named His only female disciple, or *Letter of the Living*. Scholar Abbas Amanat argues Táhirih's inclusion as a *Letter* "was an acknowledgement of her equal place with men."¹³¹ Táhirih refused to return to her husband, who divorced her, taking custody of their children.¹³² A notable silence surrounds Táhirih's role as a wife and mother in western Bahá'í mythology. Her legend skips from her precocious youth to the Shaykhi-Bábí period, after which she is regarded as effectively single. It is as if in Karbala she was shorn of biological kin. Indeed, as a Bábí, Táhirih forged a new spiritual "family," claiming equal status with males. Shoghi Effendi affirms her public call, unprecedented for a woman, for "revolutionary transformation:"

Through her eloquent pleadings, her fearless denunciations, her dissertations, poems and translations, her commentaries and correspondence, she persisted in firing the imagination ... [addressing] each of the *ulamás* [clerical scholars] residing in that city [Karbala], who relegated women to a rank little higher than animals and denied them even the possession of a soul -- epistles in which she ably vindicated her high purpose and exposed their malignant designs.¹³³

Amanat argues "her conversion and rise to leadership characterized the messianic ethos around which the entire Bábí movement was formed."¹³⁴ Eastern Bábís saw her as the millennial "return" of the venerated Fátima, the Prophet Muhammad's daughter. However, esoteric Islamic prophecies held scant meaning for westerners and were seldom mentioned by them.¹³⁵

The Báb was incarcerated in 1847, and Táhirih was put under house arrest in 1848.¹³⁶ Bahá'u'lláh arranged her escape and transport to the village of Badasht, where He rented three gardens, for Himself, Táhirih, and Quddús (the eighteenth *Letter of the Living*). There eighty-one Bábí leaders met to discuss their beleaguered faith's future.¹³⁷ Conservative Bábís saw themselves as Islamic reformers, and Quddús, by prior agreement with Táhirih as orchestrated by Bahá'u'lláh, acted as their advocate. After Quddús dramatically contended with the more radical Táhirih, she met him in the garden of Bahá'u'lláh, ill in His tent. She stepped forward unveiled, symbolizing the abrogation of Qur'anic law and the advent of the new millennium, shouting aloud: "The Trumpet is sounding! The great Trump is blown! The universal Advent is now proclaimed!"¹³⁸ Her act scandalized the Bábís, spreading consternation.¹³⁹ Some fled; others left the Faith. One horrified Bábí slit his throat and ran away shrieking. Unperturbed, Táhirih declared: "I am the Word which the Qá'im is to utter, the Word which shall put to flight the chiefs and nobles of the earth!" She invited Bábís to celebrate the end of 1200 years of shari'a law.¹⁴⁰ Significantly, Bahá'u'lláh chose a man to represent conservative forces clinging to the past, and a woman as the voice of a profoundly different future. In the Bahá'í view, this "bare-faced" assertion of female independence symbolically abrogated all prior religious dictums, asserting female equality and forever altering the role of women. When Bábí men complained

about Táhirih's shockingly indiscreet behaviour, the Báb unequivocally defended her, telling them to submit and not dispute her.¹⁴¹ Implying her virtue could not be tarnished, the Báb said, "What am I to say regarding her whom the Tongue of Power and Glory has named Táhirih [the Pure One]?"¹⁴² In 1850, secret official orders condemned Táhirih, who was under house arrest. In Bahá'í lore, she was dressed in silk as if for her nuptials when she was led to her execution.

In Bábí-Bahá'í theology and chronology, the Báb's revelation, which includes Táhirih's unveiling at Badasht as a critical turning point, stands as the lynch-pin between the close of the old, prophetic "Adamic" cycle and the opening of a new cosmic era.¹⁴³ A Bahá'í religious and feminist archetype, nearly all events of Táhirih's life are seen to have deep import. Conversely, conservative Muslims saw Táhirih and the Bábís as instigators of the shocks Persia suffered in meeting modernity, and a mortal threat to Islam. Feminist Negar Mottahedeh observes that the public unveiling of such "a woman of great reputation and heritage" was perceived as a "sign of Iran's degeneracy in the hands of foreign and European powers."¹⁴⁴ As a measure of modernity's paradoxical relationship with women, female independence served as a marker of "progress" to Euro-Christian imperialists. This powerful symbol was used to assert claims of racial, cultural, and religious superiority over "backward" non-Euro cultures accused of subjugating females. The revolutionary Táhirih, antithesis of the stereotypical eastern woman, and emblematic of the Bábí-Bahá'ís, presented a striking anomaly. It predisposed westerners to laud a movement that undermined Asian norms, while safely distant enough not to challenge entrenched Euro-sexism. Within the Bahá'í community, Táhirih was (and is) uniquely important on many levels as a pivotal transitional figure. An independent woman who foreswore convention, sacrificing her life for her beliefs, she sets the ideal standard for Bahá'í women. A mythology grew up in the west which, although not always cognizant of her history as an eastern woman, had a substantive influence on the roles and identities of Bahá'í women. Dramatic elements of her story resonated with a stirring feminist consciousness, especially her reputed last words, "You can kill me as soon as you like, but you cannot stop the emancipation of women."¹⁴⁵ The events at Badasht are often paralleled with the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Conference, both of which occurred in July, 1848.¹⁴⁶ Táhirih achieved a prominence in her own culture, as well as nations of European heritage, that defied western stereotypes of repressed "Oriental" womanhood.

Although nineteenth-century westerners admired romanticized Bábí-Bahá'ís, the geographic and religio-cultural remoteness of the Faith did not impel them to adopt its millennial claims. However, by the 1890s, when a surge of interest in non-western cultures and religious beliefs instigated the rudiments of interfaith dialogue, Cambridge University Orientalist Edward Granville Browne revived flagging interest with his travelogue, *A Year Amongst the Persians* (1893). He brought the stories of the Bábí-Bahá'ís, particularly that of Táhirih, to a new generation, linking them to Judeo-Christian and "modern" values. Browne wrote:

The appearance of such a woman as Kurratu'l-Ayn is in any country and any age a rare phenomenon, but in such a country as Persia, it is a prodigy - nay, almost a miracle. Alike in virtue of her marvellous beauty, her rare intellectual gifts, her fervid eloquence, her fearless devotion and her glorious martyrdom, she stands forth incomparable and immortal amidst her countrywomen. Had the Bábí religion no other claim to greatness, this were sufficient - that it produced a heroine like Kurratu'l-Ayn.¹⁴⁷

Stage 2 of Transculturation: East Meets West: Ibrahim Kheiralla's Syncretic "Westernization" and "Christianization" of the Bahá'í Millennial Claim

Between 1892 and 1898, a second phase of acculturation rendered the Bahá'í Faith more geographically, culturally, and linguistically accessible to westerners. Ibrahim Kheiralla, a fashionably guru-like, English-speaking, Bahá'í of Syrian Christian background, landed in New York in 1892, and settled in Chicago in 1893 to pursue business and teach the Bahá'í Faith. His idiosyncratic syncretic mix of esoteric, occult, Bahá'í, and Euro-Christian millenarian teachings soon attracted a core of American converts, who taught the new religion to fellow westerners, creating the nub of a rapidly expanding Bahá'í community. Consistently, about two-thirds of the converts were women. Many of the men were businessmen, professionals, or artisans. By 1899, there were already an estimated eleven hundred adherents, drawn from all social classes, in mainly urban Bahá'í communities that stretched from Chicago to New York and San Francisco; by 1900, there were two to three thousand Bahá'ís in a dozen or more American cities.¹⁴⁸ However, because of Kheiralla's secretive, abstruse style, and the mixing of his arcane beliefs with Bahá'í doctrine, the embryonic community had only threads of Bahá'í identity.

Stage 3 of Transculturation: West meets East: 'Abdu'l Bahá Assumes Leadership of the Western Bahá'í Community

The third phase of the transition from a geo-culturally restricted "Oriental" faith to a nascent global religious community began in 1898, when a group of western pilgrims sponsored by American philanthropist Phoebe Hearst travelled to the prison city of 'Akká in Ottoman Syria (Palestine) to meet 'Abdu'l Bahá, the son of Bahá'u'lláh and leader of the Bahá'í Faith. They saw Him as a Christ-like patriarch, the central authority, interpreter and exemplar of the Faith. Western Bahá'ís then abandoned Kheiralla, who defected about 1900. From 1898 until His death in 1921, 'Abdu'l Bahá shaped western understandings of the transplanted faith, emphasizing practical reforms that constituted the core of the Bahá'í vision of a millennial new World Order, particularly gender equality, peace, education and the elimination of prejudices. His warm personality, familiarity with Judaeo-Christian teachings, and modern sensibilities enabled western women to feel as if this new faith was a natural fit - as much a modern western faith as an eastern one. With His support, they formulated a new religious culture, mythology, and identity in which women played a preponderant role as disciples, exemplars and leaders. This dissertation argues that a group of progressive, highly committed, western Bahá'í women emerged, most of whom were connected to May Maxwell. These women adopted a form of millennial religious feminism, began to build new female-centred mythologies and devoted their lives to actualizing a new, gender-equal, Bahá'í World Order. Many of these early female followers of Bahá'u'lláh then became exemplary role models for succeeding generations.

NOTES

¹ National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, "Two Wings of a Bird: The Equality of Women and Men: A Statement of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States," in *Women in the New Millennium: The Global Revolution*, eds. Anne Breneman and Rebecca Mbuh (Lanham, MD: Hamilton, 2006), 268.

- ² The Bahá'í Faith's forerunner, the Báb (Siyyid `Alí Muḥammad Shírání, 1819-1850), and founder, Bahá'u'lláh (Mírzá Ḥusayn-`Alí Núrí, 1817-1892), were messianic figures who Bahá'ís believe fulfilled the prophecies of all of the world's scriptures, ushering in a new era of peace and progress. See Appendix 1 of this introductory chapter.
- ³ "The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order." Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book* (1873; Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1992), 85.
- ⁴ Carlo Ginzburg, "Microhistory: Two or Three Things I Know About It," trans. John and Anne Tedeschi, *Critical Inquiry* 20, no.1 (Autumn 1993): 23.
- ⁵ Ginzburg, "Microhistory," 28.
- ⁶ Giovanni Levi, "On Microhistory," in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 94-95.
- ⁷ W.C. van den Hoonard, "Inside *The Origins of the Bahá'í Community of Canada, 1898-1948: A Personal Narrative*," 6. <http://bahai-library.com/essays/personal.narrative.html> (accessed March 17, 2013).
- ⁸ Heather Murray, "Literary History as Microhistory," in *Home-Work: Postcolonialism, Pedagogy and Canadian Literature* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2004), 411.
- ⁹ Kali A.K. Israel, "Writing Inside the Kaleidoscope: Re-Representing Victorian Women Public Figures," *Gender & History* 2, no.1 (Spring 1990): 41.
- ¹⁰ Martha Vicinus, "They wonder to Which Sex I Belong: Homosexuality, which Homosexuality?" conference paper, Amsterdam Free University, 1987, quoted in Dea Birkett and Julie Wheelwright, "How could she?" Unpalatable Facts and Feminists' Heroines," *Gender & History* 2, no.1 (Spring 1990): 50.
- ¹¹ "The Bahá'í Faith is divided into three Ages: the Heroic, Formative, and Golden Age. The Heroic Age began with the Báb's Declaration in 1844 and lasted until 'Abdu'l Bahá's death in 1921. The "Formative Age" began with Shoghi Effendi's leadership in 1922 and its length is unknown. See Shoghi Effendi, "8: Ages and Epochs," *Directives from the Guardian* (India/Hawaii, 1973), 2-3.
- ¹² W.C. van den Hoonard, *The Origins of the Bahá'í Community of Canada, 1898-1948* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1996), 35.
- ¹³ Van den Hoonard remarks: "Many scholars ignore the pivotal role an individual can play in elevating a new religion to a higher level of acceptance by the host society. Maxwell (née Ellis 1870-1940) should be regarded as such a figure." See van den Hoonard, *Origins*, 35.
- ¹⁴ W.C. van den Hoonard, "Inside *The Origins of the Bahá'í Community of Canada*," 5.
- ¹⁵ Violette Nakhjavání, "The Maxwell Literary Estate" in *The Maxwells of Montreal: Early Years, 1870-1922* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2011), xix-xx. Violette Nakhjavání was the long-time travel-companion of Rúhíyyih Khánúm and was appointed by her, along with Nell Golden in Haifa, as literary executor of the Maxwell papers.
- ¹⁶ Rúhíyyih Khánúm, "Memoirs of Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánúm," in Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 3-25.
- ¹⁷ Kathryn Jewett Hogenson, *Lighting the Western Sky: The Hearn Pilgrimage and the Establishment of the Bahá'í Faith in the West* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2010). Biographies of Bahá'í women outnumber biographies of men about 4:3 and the trend is not reversing. See Deborah van den Hoonard and Will C. van den Hoonard, *The Equality of Women and Men* (Douglas, NB: Art Bookbindery, 2006), 8.
- ¹⁸ Some women remembered for their contributions to the Bahá'í Faith are May Maxwell, Martha Root, Agnes Alexander and Lua Getsinger, among others. Exceptions are Lidia Zamenhof, a promoter of Esperanto (invented by her father), and Queen Marie of Romania, the first Bahá'í monarch. Examples of men remembered as much for their contributions to the world as to the Faith are architect William Sutherland Maxwell, musician Dizzy Gillespie, poet Robert Hayden, social philosopher and "father of multiculturalism" Alain Locke, lawyer Louis Gregory, painter Mark Tobey, biologist/psychiatrist Auguste-Henri Forel, and Anglican archdeacon George Townsend.
- ¹⁹ May Maxwell, *An Early Pilgrimage* (April 1917; Wheatley, Oxford: George Ronald, 1953), http://bahai-library.com/maxwell_early_pilgrimage (accessed March 17, 2013).
- ²⁰ There are thousands of Tablets (letters or treatises). The Bahá'í Faith discourages the reification of pilgrim's notes into *hadith* as in Islam. See Helen Hornby, "1431-1439," *Lights of Guidance* (New Delhi: India Publishing Trust, 1988), 147. Also http://bahai-library.com/compilation_pilgrims_notes (accessed March 17, 2013). Similarly, scholarly writings are considered valuable, but personal, interpretations and are not authoritative or binding.
- ²¹ Agnes S. Parsons, *'Abdu'l Bahá in America: Agnes Parsons' Diary, April 11, 1912 - November 11, 1912: Supplemented With Episodes from Mahmud's Diary*, ed. Richard Hollinger (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1996); Juliet Thompson, *The Diary of Juliet Thompson* (1947; Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1983); Helen S. Goodall and Ella Goodall Cooper, *Daily Lessons Received at Akka: January 1908* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979).

²² Because this publication was mainly identified as *Star of the West*, this is the title by which this journal is consistently referenced in this thesis. The *Star of the West* began publication on March 21, 1910 and ended publication under this title in March, 1935. A precursor to *Star of the West* was a publication named *The Bahai Bulletin*, published in New York City from 1908 for eight months ending early in 1909. The first volume of *Star of the West*, the 19 issues which ran from March 21, 1910 to March 2, 1911 was published under the title of *Bahai News*. It was renamed *Star of the West*, and that publication began at Volume 2. The publication kept the name *Star of the West* until Nov. 1922, when that name became a subtitle the heading of *The Bahai Magazine*. In April, 1931, the subtitle *Star of the West* was dropped from the periodical. However, the name *Star of the West* re-appeared on the spines of annual hardbound volumes. A second publication under the title *Baha'i News Letter* (note the apostrophe) began in December, 1924, by the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and was shortened to *Baha'i News* in May, 1930. The journal has been republished in hard copy and digital form as *Star of the West*. See Duane K. Troxel, "An Introduction to Sifter- Star of the West," <http://bahai-education.org/star-of-the-west>; also <http://starofthewest.info> (accessed March 17, 2013).

²³ Robin Mihrshahi, "Symbolism in the Badí' Calendar," *Bahá'í Studies Review* 12, no.1 (2004): 15-3. For an introduction, see "Bahá'í calendar," *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bah%C3%A1'%C3%AD_calendar.

²⁴ 'Abdu'l Bahá Abbas, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, compiled by Howard MacNutt (Wilmette, IL: US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982); 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1911* (1912; London: UK Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1972); 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *'Abdu'l-Bahá in London* (1911, London: UK Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982).

²⁵ See van den Hoonard, *The Origins of the Bahá'í Community of Canada*; Robert H Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins 1892-1900*, vol.1 (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985), and Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Early Expansion, 1900-1912*, vol.2 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1995).

²⁶ Nabil-i-Azam, *The Dawnbreakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*, ed. & trans. Shoghi Effendi Rabbáni (1932; Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974); Peter Smith, *The Bábí and the Bahá'í Religions* (London, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Moojan Momen, *The Babi and Bahá'í Religions 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981), etc.

²⁷ An introduction is William S. Hatcher and J. Douglas Martin, *The Bahá'í Faith: The Emerging Global Religion* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1998). A practical application is Haig V. Setrakian, Marc B. Rosenman and Kinga A. Szucs, "Breastfeeding and the Bahá'í Faith," *Breastfeeding Medicine* 6, no.4 (Aug., 2011): 221-225.

²⁸ Margit Warburg, *Citizens of the World: A History and Sociology of the Baha'is from a Globalisation Perspective*. Numen Book Series, Studies in the History of Religions (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2006); M. Warburg, A. Hvithamar, and M. L. Warmind, eds., *Baha'i and Globalisation*, Renner Studies on New Religions, 7 (Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 2005); Margit Warburg, *Baha'i: Studies in Contemporary Religion* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 2003). There are other non-Bahá'í academics studying the Faith. For example, see Chelsea Dawn Horton's "'As ye have faith so shall your powers and blessings be': The Aboriginal-Bahá'í Encounter in British Columbia" (M.A., History, Simon Fraser, 2005), and "All is One: Becoming Indigenous and Bahá'í in Global North America" (PhD, History, UBC. n.d.). These studies focus on modern Indigenous Bahá'í communities.

²⁹ Ira Rifkin, *Spiritual Perspectives on Globalization: Making Sense of Economic and Cultural Upheaval*, (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2003).

³⁰ Breneman and Mbuh, eds., *Women in the New Millennium: The Global Revolution*; Sophie Tamas, *Greater Boldness: Radical Storytelling with Canadian Bahá'í Women*, MA thesis, Canadian Studies, Carleton University, 1998; Lynn Echevarria, *Life History as Process and Product: The Social Construction of Self Through Feminist Methodologies and Canadian Black Experience*, M.A. thesis, Sociology, Carleton University, 1992; Lynn Echevarria, *Working Through the Vision: Religion and Identity in the Life Histories of Bahá'í Women in Canada*, PhD diss., Sociology, University of Essex, UK, 2000; Echevarria, *Life Histories of Bahá'í Women in Canada: Constructing Religious Identity in the Twentieth-Century*.³⁰ Therese (Terry) Teelen Poirier, *Women Creating a Space for our Advancement: A Case Study*; MSc, Rural Extension Studies, Guelph University, 1997.

³¹ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (NY: A.A. Knopf, 1985); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs* 1, no. 1 (1975): 1-29.

³² Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (1966): 151-174.

³³ Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1988).

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- ³⁴ Kay Zinky, *Martha Root: Herald of the Kingdom* (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust India, 1983). See also N. Richard Francis, *Excerpts from the Lives of Early Believers on Teaching the Bahá'í Faith: Martha Root, Herald of the Kingdom, Lioness at the Threshold*, 1998, http://bahai-library.com/?file=francis_root_biography.html
- ³⁵ Duncan Crow, *The Edwardian Woman* (London: George, Allen & Unwin, 1978).
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- ³⁷ Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).
- ³⁸ Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual," 14.
- ³⁹ Pauline Nestor, *Female Friendships and Communities: Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).
- ⁴⁰ Rosemary D. Gooden, "'In the Bonds of True Love and Friendship,' Some Meanings of 'Gospel Affection' and 'Gospel Union' in Shaker Sisters' Letters and Poems," in *Women in Spiritual and Communitarian Societies in the United States*, eds. Wendy E. Chmielewski, Louis J. Kern, and Marlyn Klee-Hartzell (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1993) 104-13.
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- ⁴³ Joan Sangster, *Earning Respect: The Lives of Working Women in Small town Ontario, 1920-1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995); Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women*.
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- ⁴⁵ Marilyn J. Westerkamp, *Women and Religion in Early America, 1600-1850: The Puritan and Evangelical Traditions* (London & New York: Routledge, 1999).
- ⁴⁶ Westerkamp, *Women and Religion*, 8.
- ⁴⁷ van den Hoonard, *Origins*, 31.
- ⁴⁸ Westerkamp, *Women and Religion*, 106.
- ⁴⁹ Amanda Porterfield, *Feminine Spirituality in America: From Sarah Edwards to Martha Graham* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 155.
- ⁵⁰ Patricia Hill, *The World Their Household: The American Woman's Foreign Mission Movement and Cultural Transformation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985), 1-3.
- ⁵¹ R. Pierce Beaver, *American Protestant Women in World Mission: A History of the First Feminist Movement in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1980), 64-65.
- ⁵² Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991).
- ⁵³ Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 185-86.
- ⁵⁴ Hill, 4-5.
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- ⁵⁶ Hanna Herzog and Ann Braude, *Gendering Religion and Politics: Untangling Modernities* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Ruth Compton Brouwer, *Modern Women Modernizing Men: The Changing Missions of Three Professional Women in Asia and Africa, 1902-69* (Vancouver : UBC Press, 2002); Ruth Compton Brouwer, *New Women for God: Canadian Presbyterian Women and India Missions, 1876-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990); Rosemary R. Gagan, *A Sensitive Independence: Canadian Methodist Women Missionaries in Canada and the Orient, 1881-1925* (Montreal : McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992); Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag, *British Columbia Reconsidered: Essays on Women* (Vancouver : Press Gang Publishers, 1992).

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- ⁶⁴ Arthur Hampson, *The Growth and Spread of the Bahá'í Faith* (Ph.D. diss., University of Hawaii, 1980).
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- ⁶⁶ Ferenc Morton Szasz, *The Divided Mind of Protestant America, 1880-1930* (University of Alabama Press, 1982), 42-45, 56-58.
- ⁶⁷ Susan Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and American Culture* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).
- ⁶⁸ Stanwood Cobb, "Christ Comes to Des Moines," *Star of the West* 16, no. 2 (May 1925): 434.
- ⁶⁹ van den Hoonard, *Origins*, 113.
- ⁷⁰ For the Owenites, see Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).
- ⁷¹ Leaving the Faith was more difficult in the east, especially Persia, for cultural reasons. Families were identified as Bahá'í, intermarried, and were more unlikely to be accepted by Muslims if they chose not to be Bahá'ís.
- ⁷² Universal House of Justice, "Message of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of Iran" (2 March 2013), 2.
- ⁷³ Eleanor J. Stebner, "More Than Maternal Feminists and Good Samaritans: Women and the Social Gospel in Canada," in *Gender and the Social Gospel*, eds. Wendy J. Deichmann Edwards and Carolyn De Swart Gifford (Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press), 55.
- ⁷⁴ Deichmann Edwards and De Swart Gifford, *Gender and the Social Gospel*, 3, 5.
- ⁷⁵ Lynn Davidman and Shelly Tenenbaum, "Introduction," *Feminist Perspectives on Jewish Studies*, eds. Lynn Davidman and Shelly Tenenbaum (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 6.
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⁸⁴ Susan S. Maneck, "Women in the Bahá'í Faith," *Religion and Women* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994).

⁸⁵ Richard A. Landes, *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 104-106; R. A. Landes, ed., *Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Michael J. St. Clair, *Millenarian Movements in Historical Context* (New York, London: Garland Pub., 1992); Catherine Wessinger, *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁸⁶ Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), xi.

⁸⁷ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995-6); Nora E. Jaffary, ed. *Gender, Race and Religion in the Colonization of the Americas* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007); Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

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⁸⁹ Jennifer Henderson, *Settler Feminism and Race Making* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

⁹⁰ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (1978; New York, Toronto: Random House, 1994), 207.

⁹¹ Valerie Kennedy, *Edward Said: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000), 145.

⁹² Said, *Orientalism*, 95.

⁹³ Yasmeen Abu-Laban, "Humanizing the Oriental: Edward Said and Western Scholarly Discourse," *Revising Culture, Reinventing Peace: the Influence of Edward W. Said*, ed. Naseer Aruri and Muhammad A. Shuraydi (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001), 74.

⁹⁴ Wilfred Cantwell Smith in *Islam in Modern History* (p.49), quoted in K. Paul Johnson, *Initiates of the Theosophical Masters* (Albany: State University of New York Press), 73. Of course, religious antagonisms between "Islam" and western "Christendom" dated centuries back, to before the Christian Crusades.

⁹⁵ See Mujtaba Sultani, *Baha'ism: A Sect at the Service of Colonialism* (Tehran-Islamic Republic of Iran: Islamic Propagation Organization, 1985). Such polemic propaganda is plentiful in Iran, but rare in English.

⁹⁶ Abu-Laban, "Humanizing the Oriental," 74.

⁹⁷ John Bland, "William Sutherland Maxwell Biography," Maxwell Architectural Archive, McGill University, 2010, <http://cac.mcgill.ca/maxwells/willbio2.htm> (accessed March 19, 2013).

⁹⁸ A *Hand of the Cause* was both an honorific position, sometimes bestowed posthumously, and a lifetime administrative position. The Hands of the Cause were the "Chief Stewards" of the Faith, with international duties. Only fifty known Hands of the Cause were ever appointed. Twenty-seven were alive when Shoghi Effendi died. As no more can be appointed, in 1968, their administrative functions devolved upon the term-appointed Institution of the Counsellors. Re: Hands," see Barron Harper. *Lights of Fortitude* (Oxford, UK: George Ronald, 1997). See also Universal House of Justice, *The Institution of the Counsellors* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2001).

⁹⁹ "Laura Clifford Barney-Dreyfus: a remembrance," *Bahá'í News* (568): p. 4-6. July 1978. Her interviews were published as 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* (1908; Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981).

¹⁰⁰ Robert Weinberg, *Lady Blomfield: Her Life and Times* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2012).

¹⁰¹ W.C. van den Hoonaard, "Biographical Zoning and Bahá'í Biographical Writing: The Case of Rose Henderson." *Bahá'í Studies Review* 12:1 (2004): 50-66.

¹⁰² van den Hoonaard, "Biographical Zoning." See also Joan Sangster, "The Role of Women in the Early CCF 1933-1940," in *Beyond the Vote*, Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 118-138; Peter Campbell, *Rose Henderson: A Woman for the People*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010); Tamara Myers, *Caught: Montreal's Modern Girls and the Law, 1869-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

¹⁰³ Philosopher-theologians Mary Daly and Rosemary Radford Ruether are key contemporary Christian feminists.

¹⁰⁴ For instance, the conservative Christian group "REAL women" claim to be anti-feminist, conflating feminism with "leftist" ideas. However, they advocate for women in areas such as income-splitting for stay-at-home parents.

¹⁰⁵ See Ruth A. Frager, "Labour History and the Interlocking Hierarchies of Class, Ethnicity, and Gender: A Canadian Perspective," *International Review of Social History* 44, no. 02 (August 1999): 217-247.

¹⁰⁶ Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996). See also Lynne Marks, "Christian Harmony: Family,

Neighbours, and Community in Upper Canadian Church Discipline Records,” in *On the Case: Explorations in Social History*, eds. Franca Iacovetta and Wendy Mitchinson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 109-128; “‘A Fragment of Heaven on Earth’? Religion, Gender, and Family in Turn-of-the-Century Canadian Church Periodicals,” in *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History*, eds. Mona Gleason and Adele Perry (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2006), 124-144.

¹⁰⁷ Warne, *Literature as Pulpit: The Christian Social Activism of Nellie L. McClung*.

¹⁰⁸ Janice Fiamengo, “Agnes Maule Machar, Christian Radical,” *The Woman's Page: Journalism and Rhetoric in Early Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 29-58.

¹⁰⁹ Darlene M. Juschka, ed., *Feminism in the Study of Religion: A Reader* (London; New York: Continuum, 2001).

¹¹⁰ See Joan Wallach Scott, “Sexualism: On Gender Equality and Secularization,” *Ursula Hirschmann Annual Lecture on Gender and Europe*, European University Institute, April 2009. Also Joan Wallach Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 44-83, 90, 152-59.

¹¹¹ Mariam Esseghaier, “Assimilation in a Bikini: The Unveiling, Reveiling and Disciplining of Rima Fakhri,” in *American Multicultural Studies: Diversity of Race, Ethnicity, Gender and Sexuality*, ed. Sherrow O. Pinder (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2013), 165-180.

¹¹² Danièle Hervieu-Léger, “Secularization and Religious Modernity in Western Europe,” in *Religion, Mobilization, and Social Action*, eds. Anson D. Shupe, Bronislaw Misztal (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 19. The “secularization thesis,” first advanced in the 1960s, presumes that as societies modernize, religion loses its authority in all aspects of society, and concern with the spiritual and metaphysical aspects of life declines.

¹¹³ Hervieu-Léger, “Secularization and Religious Modernity in Western Europe,” 15-31.

¹¹⁴ See Seena Fazel, “Is the Bahá’í Faith a World Religion?” *Journal of Bahá’í Studies* 6:1 (1994): 1-16; Udo Schaefer, “The Bahá’í Faith: Sect or Religion?” trans. Gerald C. Keil, *Bahá’í Studies* (monograph) 16 (1982; Ottawa: Association for Bahá’í Studies-North America, 1988); See Abbas Amanat and Magnus T. Bernhardsson, eds., *Imagining the End: Visions of Apocalypse from the Ancient Middle East to Modern America* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002); James F. Rinehart, *Revolution and the Millennium: China, Mexico, and Iran* (London, Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1997); Todd A. Diacon, *Millenarian Vision, Capitalist Reality: Brazil's Contestado Rebellion, 1912-1916* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); G.W. Trompf, ed. *Cargo Cults and Millenarian Movements: Transoceanic Comparisons of New Religious Movements* (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1990); John Walliss, “From World Rejection to Ambivalence: The Development of Millenarianism in the Brahma Kumaris,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 14, no.3, 1999: 375-385.

¹¹⁵ See Stephen N. Lambden, “The Messianic Roots of Babi-Baha’i Globalism,” in Margit Warburg et al, eds., *Baha’i and Globalization* (Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 2005), 18, 30-32.

¹¹⁶ The early nineteenth-century Shaykhi sect was begun by Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa’i (1753–1826) and continued by his successor, Siyyid Kazim Rashti (1793–1843).

¹¹⁷ For an expanded discussion of Bahá’u’lláh’s global messianic claims, see Christopher Buck, “The Eschatology of Globalization: The Multiple-Messiahship of Bahá’u’lláh Revisited,” in *Studies in Modern Religions, Religious Movements and the Bábī-Bahá’ī Faiths*, ed. Moshe Sharon (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2004), 144-173.

¹¹⁸ Those of Christian heritage often compare the Báb’s role as herald to that of John the Baptist, although John the Baptist is not considered by Christians to be a founder of an independent religion, whereas the Báb is by Bahá’ís.

¹¹⁹ Bahá’u’lláh “manifested” God in a relationship compared to the perfect mirror reflecting the Sun. Bahá’ís reject the doctrine of “incarnation.” A few Bábís that did not become Bahá’ís were called Azalis, after Mírzá Yahyá Núrí, called Şubḥ-i-Azal (i.e. Morning of Eternity, 1831–1912), a younger half-brother of Bahá’u’lláh.

¹²⁰ An example of a universal fundamental spiritual truth would be “the Golden Rule,” found in nearly all traditions. Examples of social and doctrinal pre/proscriptions would be forms of prayer and worship, the day of the Sabbath, divorce, marriage, and other social laws, judicial injunctions, priesthood, etc., that differ between traditions.

¹²¹ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1971), 281-282.

¹²² Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 282.

¹²³ J. Arthur Comte de Gobineau, *Les Religions et les Philosophies dans l'Asie Centrale* (Paris: Didier et Cie, 1865).

¹²⁴ Lady Mary Leonora Woulfe Sheil, *Glimpses of Life and Manners in Persia* (London: John Murray, 1856). Other travelogues that mentioned the Bábís were Michele Lessona, *I Babi* (Turin, 1881), Aleksandr Jablonowski in articles in *Blucz* in 1871 and *Gazeta Polska* in 1875, Adolfo Rivadneyra, *Viaje al Interior de Persia* (Madrid, 1880-81, vol. 1, p. 244), and Mde. Dieulafoy, *La Perse, la Chaldee et la Susiane* (Paris, 1887, pp. 77-87).

¹²⁵ Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá’í Religions*, 25. References to the Báb appeared in literature such as Portuguese novelist Eça de Queirós’ *A Correspondencia de Fradique Mendes* (Lisbon, 1889, pp. 48-54); French writer A. de

Saint-Quentin's *Un Amour au Pays des Mages* (Paris, 1891); Austrian poet Marie von Najmajer's *Gurret-ül-Eyn: ein Bildauspersiens Neuzeit* (1874); E.S. Stevens' novel *The Mountain of God* (1911) and Russian writer Izabella Grinevskaya's dramatic poem entitled *Bab* (1903). See Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, 3-65.

¹²⁶ See Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, 50.

¹²⁷ Fátima Bigum Baraghání, (1817?-1852) named Qurratu'l-'Ayn (Consolation of the Eyes) by Siyyid Kázim, and Táhirih (The Pure One) by the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh (among other titles), was born into a wealthy, powerful family of religious scholars in Qazvin, Persia. See Moojan Momen, "Usuli, Akhbari, Shaykhi, Babi: The Tribulations of a Qazvin Family," *Iranian Studies* 36, no. 3 (Sept., 2003): 327.

¹²⁸ 'Abdu'l Bahá, "Jináb-i-Táhirih," in Sabir Afaqi and Jan Teofil Jasion, eds. *Táhirih in History: Perspectives on Qurratu'l 'Ayn from East and West* (Los Angeles: Kálimat Press, 2004), 3, 114-15. See also Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Bábí Movement in Iran, 1844-1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 297.

¹²⁹ 'Abdu'l Bahá, "Jináb-i-Táhirih," in *Táhirih in History*, 3. Her husband was a cleric, Mullá Muhammad Baraghání. See Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 297.

¹³⁰ See H.M. Balyuzi, *The Báb: The Herald of the Day of Days* (Oxford, George Ronald, 1973), 25; Afaqi and Jasion, *Táhirih in History*, 115-16; Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, 323-26; Siyyid Kázim considered Táhirih a mujtahid in her own right, a rare honour for a woman. See Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 298-299.

¹³¹ Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 331.

¹³² Táhirih's family was bitterly divided between Shaykhi-Bábí supporters and opponents. Because her husband rejected the Báb, she considered him an "unbeliever," and could therefore divorce him. See Afaqi and Jasion, *Táhirih in History*, 114-15, 134-36; Smith, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, 34-35; Nabil-i-Azam, *Dawnbreakers*, 274-76.

¹³³ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 72.

¹³⁴ Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 295.

¹³⁵ See Todd Lawson, "The Authority of the Feminine and Fatima's place in an Early Work of the Báb," in *The Most Learned of the Shi'a: The Institution of the Marja' Taqlid*, ed. Linda S. Walbridge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) rpt. in *Online Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 1 (2007): 138. Bahá'í concepts of "return" are the return of similar qualities in each era. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Iqán* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), 158-159.

¹³⁶ Táhirih had prophesied the murder of her powerful uncle/ex-father-in-law Mullá Taqí. See A.L.M. Nicolas, "Qourrèt-oul-Aïne" *Seyyèd Ali Mohammed dit le Bâb* (Paris: Dujarric nd Cie, Editeurs, 1905).

¹³⁷ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in Afaqi and Jasion, *Táhirih in History*, 8-10.

¹³⁸ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in Afaqi and Jasion, *Táhirih in History*, 10.

¹³⁹ Nabil-i-A'zam, *Dawnbreakers*, 294-95.

¹⁴⁰ Nabil-i-A'zam, *Dawnbreakers*, 295-96. The Báb superseded shari'a law with the *Bayán* (1848). Baha'u'llah superseded the *Bayán* with the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (1873). The Bábí-Bahá'í Faith differs from Islamic sects like the Ahmadiyya, who claim a messiah, but are still Muslims bound by shari'a law. See Morten Warmind, "Bahá'í and Ahmadiyya: Globalization and Images of Modernity," in *Bahá'í and Globalization*, eds. Margit Warburg, Annika Hvithamar and Morten L. Warmind (Aarhus University Press, 2005), 146-47.

¹⁴¹ Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 307.

¹⁴² This seems to refer to Bahá'u'lláh. Nabil-i-A'zam, *Dawnbreakers*, 293.

¹⁴³ Moojan Momen, "Ages and Cycles," for *Bahá'í Encyclopedia*, Bahá'í Library Online http://bahai-library.com/momen_encyclopedia_ages_cycles (accessed June 20, 2013).

¹⁴⁴ Negar Mottahedeh, *Representing the Unrepresentable: Images of Reform from the Qajars to the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press), 8.

¹⁴⁵ Susan Stiles Maneck, "Sacred Táhirih: A Religious Paradigm of Womanhood," *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 2, no.2 (1989): 39-54.

¹⁴⁶ Howard R. Hurlbut, "The Fortitude of Qurratu'l 'Ayn, Woman in Allegory and Fable, in Tradition and History in the Present Day and Age," *Star of the West* 18, no. 3 (June 1927): 72; Bradford W. Miller, *Returning to Seneca Falls* (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1995).

¹⁴⁷ E.G. Browne, "Note Q, Kurratu'l-'Ayn," in 'Abdu'l Bahá, *A Traveller's Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Báb*, vol. 2, ed., trans. E.G. Browne (1891; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 309.

¹⁴⁸ "Chicago, New Jersey, and Cincinnati Bahá'ís were middle class, New York and San Francisco Bahá'ís upper class, and Kenosha and Racine Bahá'ís were lower class." Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America*, vol. 1, 158-59.

CHAPTER 2.

Origins: Transformative Female Bahá'í Identities

Of that first meeting I can remember neither joy nor pain nor anything I can name. I had been carried suddenly to too great a height; my soul had come in contact with the Divine Spirit; and this force so pure, so holy, so mighty, had overwhelmed me....We could not remove our eyes from His glorious face: we heard all He said; we drank tea with Him at His bidding; but existence seemed suspended, and when He arose and suddenly left us we came back with a start to life: but never again, thank God, to the same life on this earth! We had 'beheld the King in His beauty. We had seen the land which is very far off.

May Maxwell, An Early Pilgrimage (1899)¹

Beginnings: May Maxwell

On Friday, February 17, 1899, American May Ellis Bolles (later Maxwell), was awakened early by “sister Maryam,” a Persian Bahá'í. May was in the Haifa lodgings arranged for her and her fellow pilgrims by their host, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, universally called “the Master,” a name given Him in childhood by His father, Bahá'u'lláh, founder of the Bahá'í Faith. May recalled being struck by the “breath of the Holy Land” laden with the perfume of roses and orange blossoms.”² May was not one of those common western Christian pilgrims described by writer Sarah Jeanette Duncan as “a great many middle-aged ladies... superannuated clergymen... quiet family parties and shy young men who taught in Sunday-school at home,” who travelled, “nineteen centuries after,” to “look upon the fields and the skies of the Master’s country.”³ May was one of the first fifteen western Bahá'í pilgrims seeking a new, living “Master.” For them, the *Qiblih* (point of adoration) had shifted from Jerusalem to the Ottoman prison-city of ‘Akká.⁴

For May, a latter-day prophet was not hard to accept. Her liberal middle-class parents were not particularly religious, vaguely Unitarian, but she had been a “seeker” from childhood, having visions and dreams that she later saw as prescient.⁵ As a girl, May dreamed a piercing light enveloped her, and next morning, in pain, she was unable to open her eyes, blinded temporarily.⁶ In another often retold dream, angels carried her to the heavens to view the earth chained and covered with wax seals. The seals opened to reveal a word written across the surface of the earth, but she only remembered the first letter B and the letter H.⁷ At fifteen, on a rustic bridge in pastoral Tunbridge Wells, Kent, May watched a singing bird reach for the sky, writing:

Mystery breathed on me and touched my soul – & it opened and expanded like a flower to the inflowing light. Slowly it grew in transcendent power, until it overflowed into the invisible, grown – visible, and I beheld as in a crystal – the sky, the earth, the air were my own – pregnant with an immortal affinity, and existed as palpable emanations of my own creative radiance. The secret was mine, I knew, I knew...

A moment later I was standing on the bridge alone. Yet never alone again, nevermore alone...The secret? I had – forgotten!! God knew – and he had taken me – forever.⁸

May was an unlikely mystic, born in Englewood, New Jersey in 1870 to a well-connected family in reduced circumstances after her maternal grandfather's New York bank was robbed in 1868.⁹ Unusually for the time, May's parents separated shortly after the birth of her brother Randolph, two years her junior.¹⁰ In 1875, May's mother Mamie Bolles followed the course of her class of Americans of restricted means, and took her two children "abroad" to be schooled in France. A lower cost of living and the generosity of her friend, wealthy American philanthropist Phoebe Apperson Hearst in making her apartments available to them, allowed the Bolles children to have the cultural advantages of what May described as a "free," "happy" and "enchanted childhood."¹¹ The Bolles returned to America in 1878 but in 1884, 14-year-old May helped a widowed uncle in England with his two children for a year. Maxwell biographer Violette Nakhjavání indicates that May, like her daughter (Mary) Rúhíyyih Khánúm after her, was "a born iconoclast," who refused formal education after her schooling in England.¹² Spiritually-minded, May investigated Christian creeds, Buddhism and Islam. On leaving England, friends gave her a Bible, which her daughter said she knew "inside-out." As a girl, she had mastered a game where her mother read aloud or concentrated on a passage and May, blindfolded, opened the Bible to the exact passage. Relative to her "society" cousins and friends, her lone-parent family was not well off, perhaps contributing to a life-long sympathy for the poor. May's fortunes later improved and she gave to all manner of individuals and causes. Rúhíyyih Khánúm remarked that "her generosity was the greatest I have ever personally come in contact with."¹³

At twenty-one, May contracted a "serious illness," a "nervous disease" that doctors could not identify or treat. As May's youthful energy gave way to a fatigue that often left her a semi-invalid, a failed romantic relationship precipitated a complete collapse.¹⁴ In 1894, May and her family moved to Paris, where her brother Randolph studied architecture at L'École des Beaux-Arts. Despondence set in as her mother Mamie's ex-patriot circle sought out eligible suitors. Rúhíyyih Khánúm later speculated, in keeping with saint-like legend that grew up around her mother, that the "strange independence and unworldliness that always characterized her" kept her "aloof from any such thoughts."¹⁵ May said she abhorred the "shallow conventions, heartless insincerities, frivolous occupations and pleasures" of a Paris alive with creative energy but infamous for its decadence.¹⁶ Her preoccupation with the spiritual dimensions of life was heightened by her illness and depressed state. On January 1st, 1895, at 5 a.m. she wrote:

I no longer pray to be led into safe paths – among His Holy Ways. I simply cling without hope – without fear – He is God. He is near. He is sufficient for us – he only can keep dark despair away from us. If I have waited and clung in Faith so long, surely the Light will come.¹⁷

Resistant to attempts to find her a husband, she contemplated "...the old idea of joining some earnest sisterhood" to escape the "empty, meaningless and fleeting" in order to "lead a life of humble devotion, at least, and try to give the help which I so sorely need myself."¹⁸ Her melancholy, insomnia and health deteriorated, causing her family to fear for her life. This malaise could be dismissed as Victorian "vapours," but Rúhíyyih Khánúm suggests May's ill-defined condition was congenital, as May's mother Mamie "was often distressed to see the tiny babe [May] convulsed by some agony of its own, the early signs of a strange malady that was to know no cure...." Before May's first major illness at twenty-one, her daughter reported she had

been “a dynamo of youthful energy” swimming in the morning, playing three sets of tennis in the afternoon and dancing till midnight. Her health was the “great tragedy of Mother’s life.”¹⁹ Twenty-eight year old May had lain ill in bed for about two years when her godmother, Phoebe Hearst, arrived in September 1898 at her Quai d’Orsay, Paris apartment. Alarmed by May’s frailty, Phoebe sent in her homeopath, Edward Getsinger. He was travelling as part of Hearst’s entourage on a pilgrimage she had arranged to a Turkish prison in ‘Akká [Haifa] to meet ‘Abdu’l Bahá, an “Oriental” spiritual leader, as part of an Egyptian tour.²⁰ Ascertaining that May’s affliction was as much spiritual as physical, Edward called in his wife Lua.

Louise (Lua) Aurora Moore Getsinger was from Hume, in upstate New York, but had followed a strong intuition to seek dramatic arts training in Chicago rather than the more logical choice, New York. Growing up, Lua’s mother saw millennial portents, raising Lua to question religion.²¹ In Chicago, Lua came in contact with Bahá’ís, began attending Syrian Bahá’í missionary Ibrahim Kheiralla’s classes, and was registered as a believer on May 21, 1897, just before her marriage.²² Edward Getsinger was an atheist, but after three unsettling visions of what he later knew to be ‘Akká, he abandoned his skepticism and became a Bahá’í five months after Lua. A short time later, Edward was drawn to a newspaper story about Phoebe Hearst and left in January 1898 for California to try to meet her. Lua later joined him in California and taught Phoebe, a feminist social and educational reformer, about the Bahá’í Faith.²³

Now Lua, sitting by May Bolles’ bedside in Paris, disclosed to May: “There is a prisoner in ‘Akká that holds the key to Peace.” As the story was later told by May and others, she abruptly “half-rose from her pillows, exclaiming, ‘I believe, I believe,’” then promptly fainted.²⁴ After declaring her belief in “El Baha,” May immediately wrote a long, passionate “declaration” letter to the ‘Akká prisoner, ‘Abdu’l Bahá, as was the practice at the time. Framed in her best King James English, she wrote: “Oh my Lord, my Lord-whom I have loved and sought as Jesus Christ, whom I have now found and adore as Abbas Effendi, I do beseech Thee to hear the voice of this lost child...” Later in the letter, she recounted a vision she had in her twenties, on a beach:

...Then Thou camest to me in a dream, standing beside the deep blue waters, and I was on the opposite bank, in a multitude of people all hurrying to and fro like ants, save one or perhaps a few who stood beside me and gazed on my face where they saw the light reflected from the glory of thy countenance. And my eyes were steadfastly upon Thee, and I said - Jesus, I am coming....²⁵

At this initial stage of contact, May interpreted the Bahá’í message according to her religio-cultural upbringing, conflating ‘Abdu’l Bahá with the Christ image to which she was so attached. Early western adherents often confused ‘Abdu’l Bahá with the return of Christ, which must have made the import of whatever messages He imparted to them very weighty. Even after they understood His station as “‘Abdu’l Bahá,” (the *servant* of Glory), their reverence remained. They closely followed ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s direction even though in other aspects of their lives, Bahá’ís like May and Lua often defied convention. For May, this experience was transformative. Determined to join the pilgrims but with no money for a ticket, she gathered her jewelry to sell. Phoebe Hearst, whom May called her “good fairy” godmother, offered to sponsor her, even buying her and the other young women costly gowns in which to meet the “Master.” Lua’s

teacher, Ibrahim Kheiralla, also on the pilgrimage, had wrongly prepared them to visit a Sultan rather than a prisoner. Hearst also purchased expensive ornaments and jewels for ‘Abdu’l Bahá, but May later learned those gifts were sold and the proceeds distributed to the poor of ‘Akká.²⁶

In her account of the ‘Akká pilgrimage, May remembered entering a dimly lit room lined with people, and instantly recognizing Abdu’l Bahá as the figure who had beckoned her across the water. She fell at His feet but ‘Abdu’l Bahá raised her up, speaking lovingly in Persian, a language she did not understand, “in a voice that shook [her] heart.” May recalled that He “breathed the Spirit of Life to our souls.” She wrote: “To me He said among other things: ‘You are like the rain which is poured upon the earth making it bud and blossom and become fruitful; so shall the Spirit of God descend upon you, filling you with fruitfulness and you shall go forth and water His vineyard.’”²⁷ May believed that ‘Abdu’l Bahá bestowed upon her a unique capacity for love and that this gift would enable her, like Christ’s disciples, to spread the new faith. She left ‘Akká on 25 February, 1899, tears streaming, writing: “We had left our Beloved in His glorious prison that we might go forth and serve Him; that we might spread His Cause and deliver His Truth to the world... *but the separation is only of our bodies; in spirit we are united forever.*”²⁸ Inspired, the first western Bahá’í pilgrims departed. May was not known as a social reformer before meeting ‘Abdu’l Bahá, but she spent the remainder of her life, until 1940, single-mindedly inculcating Bahá’í principles into her own life and the lives of those around her. However, not all the pilgrims were as deeply touched as May Maxwell and Lua Getsinger. Some of the others’ ardour cooled as they resumed their everyday lives. Ibrahim Kheiralla, finding his leadership ambitions frustrated, and himself at odds with ‘Abdu’l Bahá, defected soon after.²⁹

May’s “ethereal” persona and radiant enthusiasm soon attracted others to whom she gave a series of successive lessons culminating with the revealing of the “Greatest Name” (Bahá), using Kheiralla’s method as taught her by Lua Getsinger.³⁰ By 1902, the Paris group had risen to twenty-five or thirty people.³¹ They were more unified than the American community, having avoided the turmoil caused by Kheiralla’s disaffection. May taught Europeans like Hippolyte Dreyfus, the first French (Jewish) believer, as well as expatriates who became prominent Bahá’ís, such as Laura Clifford Barney, an American peace activist and philanthropist; Hawaiian Agnes Alexander, who promoted Esperanto as well as “opening” the Far East to the faith; New York artist Juliet Thompson, who painted “the Master’s” portrait; Louisa Mathew, a British music student who later married African American Bahá’í Louis Gregory; and New Brunswick artist Marion “General” Jack, humorously so nicknamed by ‘Abdu’l Bahá for her vigorous international travel-teaching of the new faith.³² These and other exceptional Bahá’í women later themselves became hagiographic figures emulated by succeeding generations of women.

Bahá’í Providential Millennialism

May Maxwell’s “pilgrim’s notes” typify in many ways the approach of the generation who first adopted this transplanted eastern religion. Their accounts attached providential mystic significance to their encounters with ‘Abdu’l Bahá and each other. Mainly of Protestant heritage and steeped in Biblical prophecy, they believed that Bahá’u’lláh fulfilled their millennial hopes, framing Bahá’í claims in familiar Judeo-Christian terms. This view was not discouraged by ‘Abdu’l Bahá, who accepted the Bible and frequently used Biblical references to elucidate the

Bahá'í Faith. Most new members coloured their interpretation of the Faith according to previous interests - whether in prophesy, mysticism, feminism, or other social reform agendas. However, by becoming Bahá'ís, they joined a small but determined cadre of western female (and male) reformers who optimistically believed that concerted collective effort to implement the Faith's new spiritual and social doctrines could (and would) restructure planetary relations.

Although a scripturally-anchored religion, new converts at first had very limited access to Bahá'í texts, most of which were not yet translated from Persian and Arabic. Nonetheless, using orally repeated stories, exchanged “pilgrim’s notes,” and a few translated “Tablets” (letters) and prayers, they began to fashion a faith community built on the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, as interpreted by ‘Abdu’l Bahá, which advocated the implementation in society of Bahá'í social/ethical principles, and personal piety through prayer, study, service and philanthropy. Encouraged not to retreat from the world, converts engaged in the political and social cross-currents of Euro-American society. In many respects, the lives of May Maxwell’s reform-minded group resembled those of other religious women and “first-wave” feminist reformers. Like many other reformers, Bahá'í women saw their overarching task as bringing into being a millennial “new divine order of righteousness and peace.”³³ Unlike most other groups, they claimed the equality of women was foundational to the success of every aspect of the new World Order.

Origin Stories: New Religio-cultural Mythologies

In order to become a lived experience, religion must adopt a cultural form, as Lynne Marks, Jonathan Vance, Marguerite Van Die, and others have shown.³⁴ Creating a new culture and worldview, by definition, required the construction of new mythologies. To this end, encouraged by the stories of ‘Abdu’l Bahá and influenced by the mores and standards of their time, May Maxwell and other early Bahá'í women fashioned empowering religious mythologies and “exemplary” female models. Assisted by these, they negotiated practices in their lives that helped them to integrate and adapt the values, ideals and symbolism that informed the underpinnings of an emergent Bahá'í culture and identity. Syncretism, synthesis and invented traditions, as well as a distinctly “Bahá'í” ethos, were evident in the new paradigms adopted by Euro-American women, reflecting the interface between their former western Christian adherence, the middle-eastern Islamic cultural roots of their new faith, distinctively Bahá'í teachings, and “modern” western ideals of womanhood.

Origin Stories: Millennial conversion chronicles

For May Maxwell and many of the earliest western believers, the decisive factor in their acceptance of the Bahá'í Faith was not the confluence of the Faith's principles with previously held social reform or feminist aims, although this was important. Bahá'í conversion stories also differed from patterns found in the widespread early twentieth-century Protestant female mission movement, where Dana Roberts notes biographies often began with an “obligatory recounting” of coming out of a “background of complacency and worldliness.”³⁵ The first Bahá'ís often cited Biblical prophecy, dreams, visions, and providential serendipity as having led them to accept Bahá'í millennial claims, instigating a transformation in identity. In 1900, May wrote:

My Lord appeared to me in a vision twice, two years before I heard the Great Message, and ... by the great bounty of God, and without regard to my unworthiness, I was permitted to be among the first Americans to visit Acca.³⁶

Irving Hexam and Karla Poewe argue that vivid “primal experiences,” such as visions, voices, spiritual healing, dreams, notions of destiny, and other extrasensory events, play a central role in religious conversion, and a “crucial” role in the establishment of new religious movements, because “they affirm the reality of an unseen world.”³⁷ They write:

People join new religions for many reasons...But the core group of converts always reports vivid proleptic experiences that compel them to see the world and their lives in a new way and to make practical changes accordingly.³⁸

Most, if not all, mystical millennial movements arise as a challenge to the mainstream, often amongst marginalized groups or as a form of resistance to the dominant religious mythology. However, paranormal experiences are both common and universal, affecting the religious and the non-religious alike, and are shown to profoundly affect the outlook of the individual who experiences them. Whether they are suppressed or broadcast depends on the meaning assigned to them within the subject’s cultural framework, whether a “psychological” framework, the dominant paradigm in secular western societies, or a religious, mystical or demonological framework, as can be the case in some western groups and in other societies.³⁹

Early western Bahá’ís usually interpreted their experiences according to the prevailing Judaeo-Christian religious worldview. May and other early Bahá’ís adopted an unswerving conviction that they had been “called” to the Faith and therefore had to strive to be among the few who were “chosen.”⁴⁰ This was not an unusual sentiment among activists who had religious motivations, and such experiences seemed to enable women to go against gender convention. For instance, medical reformer Florence Nightingale, who had some commonalities with May Maxwell in her upper-middle class background and her life-long invalidism, had the first of four mystical experiences at sixteen, where she believed God spoke to her and “called” her to His service. Her sense of destiny as God’s servant gave her the determination to make an unconventional break with her Victorian family, reject marriage and take up nursing in spite of their objections.⁴¹ For Florence Nightingale, following a religious “calling” was one of the few ways women could, without losing their “respectability,” circumvent gender expectations, achieve independence, and participate meaningfully in public life. Although often ambivalent about the position of women in society, Nightingale betrays her feminist stance in a letter to her father, writing: “Why can’t a woman follow abstractions like a man? Has she less imagination, less intellect, less self-devotion, less religion than a man? I think not.”⁴² Her example became an empowering model for generations of women, and a symbol of the nursing profession.

For May, the experience of becoming a Bahá’í was transcendental and life-altering. In a 1902 letter, she conveyed the transformative import of her first pilgrimage: “We have been called – awakened – chosen – resurrected from amongst the dead, and drowned in the Sea of God’s Mercy!”⁴³ Although May’s fervour expressed gratitude in being “chosen” to be a Bahá’í, the Faith offered no doctrinal promises of heightened status or attainment to some static state of

“salvation” for any individual, even the most prominent. Being “chosen” was a potential, perpetually conditional, aspirational station that required constant effort and sacrifice. As Lua and Edward Getsinger noted on a later pilgrimage, “In this Day every one must be tested, as the time of the “chosen ones” to prove their worth is indeed very short.... all who fail to attain to the standard through the tests are relegated to the “many who are called.”⁴⁴ Bábí-Bahá’í perceptions of sacrifice as necessary for spiritual attainment meshed easily with Anglo-Christian mythologies such as that captured by John Bunyan’s 1678 Protestant allegory, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, a spiritual quest narrative that was culturally ubiquitous in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴⁵ However, the Bahá’í vision differed from Bunyan’s in that salvation was simultaneously a personal and planetary endeavour. The uncertainty inherent in being “chosen” seemed only to heighten commitment. For Bahá’í women, such dictums around sacrifice both strengthened their resolve, and gave them a plausible explanation for whatever inevitable “tests” or resistance they might meet in embracing a marginal, non-traditional, “alternative” faith.

Convinced that she had been imbued by ‘Abdu’l Bahá with rare powers of love and influence, May Maxwell returned to Paris from ‘Akká in 1899 happier and healthier. She was now a passionate adherent with a sense of destiny, the first apostle in Europe. Seeing herself as following in the footsteps of Christ’s disciples, she dedicated herself to “sowing seeds” to propagate the faith, as did Lua and others who became her closest friends. However, as she warned a “spiritual sister,” one must “be careful” as “our dear Lord has told us never to give to drink of this pure water of Life, but to the thirsty....”⁴⁶ Enjoined not to “proselytize,” believers promoted Bahá’í principles but seldom gave the full “message” (i.e. the prophetic claim of Bahá’u’lláh) unless “seekers” asked for it.⁴⁷ Much of women’s “teaching” was done between individuals connected to each other, utilizing already well-established female friendship networks and organizational links. Small meetings and advertised public talks were also popular.

The conversion process itself often became a personal “origin myth,” usually constructed as a providential narrative. Bahá’ís typically asked each other about how they became a Bahá’í, as a way of establishing a rapport and a sense of “insider” shared belonging. For example, May’s close friend Agnes Alexander began her providential conversion chronicle with her missionary parents’ introduction of Christianity to Hawaii, perhaps alluding to her own later introduction of the Bahá’í Faith to Hawaii, Japan, Korea and China.⁴⁸ She describes how, in 1900, she was “given” a trip and “guided” to Rome where, in the Pension where she stayed, she saw Charlotte Brittingham Dixon and her two daughters, who were returning from ‘Akká.⁴⁹ She wrote: “In God’s plan they were to be the magnets which drew me to the Light of a New Day.... They seemed to have a radiance and happiness different from others and I could hardly take my eyes from them.”⁵⁰ Overhearing Dixon speaking with someone who had heard “the Bahá’í Message in Paris,” Agnes asked her to tell “what it was she had.” In response, Agnes received only a Bahá’í prayer copied in longhand.⁵¹ Meeting with Dixon each night, on the third evening she could not sleep, having had a “great inspiration” that “Christ was on the earth.” When she announced this the next morning, Charlotte Dixon replied: “I can see by your face that you know.”⁵² Agnes wrote a letter of belief to ‘Abdu’l Bahá, then spent three months alone with that one prayer. She later surmised that this was because “In order to grow [she] had to be tested.” She told a local pastor that “Christ was on the earth in Akka, Syria,” but he “opened his Bible and read passages” to dissuade her. She responded, “in my heart I knew it was the Truth and I could pray.” “Led” to

buy a Bible, prophecies “unfolded with new meanings” until she felt she must meet other Bahá’ís. She wrote to May Bolles (Maxwell), receiving in return a “heavenly letter...permeated with divine Love.” She concluded, “Through all that happened the Hand of God was guiding and training me for his service.”⁵³ A Tablet from ‘Abdu’l Bahá confirmed her providential thinking, stating: “the Spirit of Christ from the Supreme Concourse doth in every time and aspect announce to thee this Great Good News.”⁵⁴ Arriving in Paris to meet May, Agnes embraced the woman who opened the door. An awkward moment ensued until the matron, Mamie Bolles, smilingly said: “Reserve all this for my daughter, it is she you are seeking!”⁵⁵

Origins: Transformative Identities

Mamie Bolles was pleased that her daughter’s health had improved but was less enthused about the many “kindred spirits” visiting their apartment. As May wrote, “My dear Mother -- although broad and fine in all matters, had resented my constant work in the service of the Bahá’í Cause.”⁵⁶ One incident in particular, when May stayed in Paris on ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s instruction, rather than joining her mother and brother at the Brittany seaside, created dissension. Mamie was “dumbfounded and indignant,” seeing it as a choice between herself and “a Turkish prisoner.” She retorted that “no doubt” May’s Bahá’í friends would look after her, as she was closing the Paris apartment and leaving.⁵⁷ A wealthy older Bahá’í, Mrs. James Jackson of New York and Paris, stepped in as a maternal substitute, giving May a small apartment behind her home. There May spent an “unforgettable” month as the Bahá’í group deepened their knowledge of the Faith and reinforced their efforts, creating lasting bonds of friendship and shared belief.⁵⁸

Mamie may have hoped her sickly daughter might find support from someone other than her through marrying, but did not expect May to choose an alternative religion complete with an alternative support system. May, although thirty-one, was a dependent daughter and disobeying a parent to stay alone with no chaperone was scandalous. May must have sympathized with Táhirih, whose story she knew, who left her family of origin to reside with the Shaykhis for the sake of her beliefs. The idea of fellow believers as an extended “family,” culturally embedded in the eastern Bahá’í community, quickly transferred to the west. Although the Faith encouraged good relations with one’s birth family, Bahá’ís also created kinship ties based on shared religious allegiance. Early Bahá’ís adopted fictive family bonds, opening and signing letters as “mother,” “sister” or “brother,” sometimes adding “in El Abhá,” a variation on “The Greatest Name,” a reference to Bahá’u’lláh. Similarly, ‘Abdu’l Bahá often addressed believers as “daughter” or “son.”⁵⁹ However, when May saw the “deep reproach and utter lack of comprehension” in her mother and brother’s eyes as they left her in Paris, she spent the night in “prayer and tears...on the floor...” Interpreting these events within a Bahá’í cosmology, May saw this episode as a “test,” writing: “I knew the meaning of the Words of ‘Abdu’l Bahá when He said it is not the sacrifice of oneself in the path of God, but the sacrifice of the nearest and dearest that brings the greatest pain to the heart.”⁶⁰ What her mother saw as selfishness, disobedience, or misplaced allegiance, May saw as a sacrifice of family time for the Faith. Themes of “sacrifice” pervaded western Bahá’í women’s writings. As May and Lua’s close friend Juliet Thompson said when gazing at Mount Carmel, “I would ascend to the cross...To breathe this truth into the world, I would give my own last breath with joy. I can now understand the ecstasy of the martyrs. I pray

to be one of them-to be worthy of their destiny,”⁶¹ However, in the west, Bahá’í “sacrifice” and “martyrdom” were usually framed in terms of living for, rather than dying for, the Faith.

“Martyrdom” was already popularly associated in the west with femininity. Suffragist Nellie McClung wryly remarked that “This love of martyrdom is deeply ingrained in the heart of womanhood, and comes from long, bitter years of repression and tyranny” because “woman has been blocked out a weeping part....So the habit of martyrdom has sort of settled down” on women.”⁶² Nonetheless, first-wave feminists, including McClung, strategically used “sacrifices” to broaden the female “sphere.” For instance, western women claimed an equivalency of their “sacrifices” with the monetary, labour, and blood sacrifices made by men during the First World War, demanding equal entitlement for women to suffrage and recognition as full citizens.

In addition to Christian and feminist reckonings of the moral worth of sacrifice, for Bahá’ís, “sacrifice” and “martyrdom” had additional resonances. May’s “sacrifices,” while personally heart-wrenching, paled in comparison to the ongoing discriminations, tortures and deaths of her fellow believers in Iran, where, prior to 1954, approximately 94% of the world Bahá’í population resided.⁶³ May and other Bahá’ís’ efforts for the Faith were intensified and imbued with a sense of urgency by graphic reports of persecution in letters and through returning pilgrims and Persian travellers. In 1901, Mamie Bolles wrote to May’s fiancé, William Sutherland Maxwell, who was an architect friend of her brother, that May was having trouble finding an evening to dine with the family and his older brother Edward, who was in Paris to meet May and deliver an engagement ring. Mamie wrote: “Miss [Laura] Barney with a Persian teacher and his interpreter and one or two others are just back from Acca or Haifa and I believe there are to be constant meetings for a few weeks....”⁶⁴ Clearly, May’s concern with the affairs of the Faith outweighed family dinners, wedding plans and rings, the conventionally important feminine events that marked the passages of a woman’s life cycle. The plight of the Persian Bahá’ís, some of whom May had met on pilgrimage, or when they passed through Paris, may have shifted her perspective away from the “normal” activities of a young western woman.

Stories of Bábí-Bahá’í martyrs deeply moved western women and were frequently shared among them. In 1909, another pilgrim, Corinne True, a prominent Chicago Bahá’í, published the tale of one of several widows and orphans residing in ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s household. She wrote:

The widow of one of the martyrs sits on the floor in the Persian style and makes and serves the tea every morning. Her husband was one of three brothers who were imprisoned for this Cause. For days they had no news about them. One day they heard a great noise in the street and looking out they saw three heads placed on long poles and being carried through the streets, and when in front of their home they tossed these heads into their mother's room. She wiped them off with water and then threw them back, saying, "what I have given to God I will not take back." This woman who makes the tea had been married only one year to one of these brothers. Having lost all of her relatives through the persecution, and Persian women having no openings for self-support, the Master took her into his household.⁶⁵

Such harrowing origin tales of the Faith made a lasting impression on western women, even providing a mythical template for their lives. When May Maxwell “sacrificed” her own child to marriage, it was to this story she looked for a parallel. Hearing of the injustices suffered by women in Persia, and other regions in the expanding Bahá’í community, broadened western women’s feminist consciousness of the deep social changes required to bring about global justice. Believing that only a widespread transmutation of spiritual worldview would accomplish this, such stories acted both as salutary reminders to redouble their efforts, and as benchmarks for the degree of firmness and sacrifice that might be required. The allegiance of these young women to the Bahá’í Faith placed them in a liminal position within their own society, where the frivolity of Paris and the usual concerns of youth were tempered by vital links to other cultures. In this way, these women acquired a deep sense of responsibility to reform a suffering world.

In May’s eyes, her “obedience to ‘Abdu’l Bahá,” and personal sacrifice in staying in Paris while her family holidayed, was ultimately vindicated by her chance meeting with Thomas Breakwell, posthumously named by Shoghi Effendi as one of the “three luminaries of the Irish, English and Scottish Bahá’í communities.”⁶⁶ This story, one of the best-known of those which comprise May’s legend in the Bahá’í community, told how a young British Theosophist who had been working in America, Thomas Breakwell, was serendipitously put in touch with her. Over a few days, and after experiencing a vision, Breakwell declared his faith in Bahá’u’lláh. The same day May mailed his acceptance letter, she found a cablegram from ‘Abdu’l Bahá on her table saying she could now leave Paris anytime.⁶⁷ When the story was retold by Bahá’ís, it was the lesson of compliance with ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s instructions, the providential forces guiding Breakwell to May, and the mysterious but affirming prescience of ‘Abdu’l Bahá, that appealed to them. Thomas Breakwell, who died of tuberculosis about a year after his conversion, went on to occupy a uniquely mystical station in Bahá’í history.⁶⁸ Rejoining her family at the seashore, May ended her account: “How gratefully my heart dwells on the divine compassion of the Master, on the joy and wonder of my mother as I told her everything, and when she read the Master’s cablegram she burst into tears and exclaimed, ‘You have, indeed, a wonderful Master.’”⁶⁹

It seems her mother recovered from her pique. Although Bahá’ís valued family unity, if adherents encountered opposition to their religious choice, or wished to serve the Faith in the absence of adequate means, or were otherwise in need, they could usually count on the emotional and often material support of their fellow believers. This provided an alternate faith-based “friendship economy” of human resources that was especially important to dependent females, as it allowed them more independent choices.⁷⁰ On a larger scale, this incipient model of community promised to ease the twentieth-century transition from a traditional locale and family-based support system to a flexible, global system that encouraged women’s freedom of movement, both physically and intellectually. Being a sociable, even “bohemian” spirit, Mamie eventually adjusted to May’s many strange visitors.⁷¹ She even began to advise “thirsty” souls to see her daughter, who she said was “like a new being since she found some new strange Religion!”⁷² May, who in her mother’s eyes, “now possessed a transforming power in people’s lives,” herself exemplified a transformation from a state of weakness and depression to one of purpose and meaning.⁷³ For Mamie, religiously unconventional herself, May’s improved condition may have been adequate proof of the Faith’s value. Also, she liked to be around young

people and many of May's new friends were fascinated with Mamie. May believed that both her mother Mamie and her brother Randolph Bolles "recognized" the Bahá'í Faith later in life.

Agnes Alexander's, May Maxwell's and similar conversion stories were key in creating a new vision of themselves as modern independent women and as Bahá'ís. They were, in most cases, separating themselves from family and community norms, from the faith of their family or even their husbands, in an era when religious adherence was a major determinant of one's personal, family and social identity. Their conversion tales echoed the legend of Táhirih and other quest narratives where dreams, visions, prayer and search led them to the "Promised One," despite obstacles. A reliance on and trust in one's own (providentially guided) reason and intuition, and a willingness to question established authority and tradition, became hallmarks of Bahá'í identity, meshing easily with first-wave feminist attitudes towards self-determination.

Religiosity and/or Reason: Millennial Re-evaluation?

However much providential serendipity, visions, intuition and other mystical aspects of spirituality were relied upon, for Bahá'ís they were (usually) balanced by a doctrinal commitment to science, empiricism, and rationality. As Keith Ransom-Kehler, an outstanding American female Bahá'í teacher, argued, the "well-trained mind" enjoined upon Bahá'ís required the coherence of the intellect and the "well-trained heart," mirroring the harmony of science and religion. She wrote: "Bahá'u'lláh teaches us, not as a philosophy but as a religious mandate, the necessity of the complete functioning of the individual in all the degrees and stations of his life in order to make this prodigious transition."⁷⁴ Another author, Helen Bishop, argued that the early Bábís "exuberant" religiosity did not spring from "emotionalism, superb but irrational." Rather, it was a rational response to an "unshakable conviction... that by standing firm in a great cause they were perpetuating a Religion which would bestow an era of enlightenment." She continued: "A cogent example is Táhirih's defense before the dignitaries of Church and State: 'You can kill me as soon as you like, but you cannot stop the emancipation of women.'"⁷⁵ "Rationality" was conditioned upon millennial understanding. Following Bahá'í logic, this thinking was similar to May Maxwell's response to the consternation Thomas Breakwell expressed after their first meeting. After he left May, walking alone down the Champs Elysees, "some great force" nearly swept him off his feet and "a voice announced... Christ has come." Going back to May's apartment, he voiced his fear that he might be losing his mind.⁷⁶ May smiled, responding, "No, you are just becoming sane," then told him of the Faith.⁷⁷ In the Bahá'í worldview, logic, coupled with the intervention of spiritual impulses in everyday life, was part of the duality of being human, the conjoined "animal nature and the Divine nature."⁷⁸

Suprarational qualities such as intuition, or even the kinds of religious ecstasy associated with the Bábís, were, for practical reasons, self-moderated, but never *feared*. Bahá'í theology repudiated the existence of the Devil, or any "demonic maleness that rules the cosmos," as Rosemary Radford Ruether puts it.⁷⁹ Bahá'ís maintained a firm monotheism, believing there was "no existence or interference" in human affairs by any oppositional deity such as "Satan," who was seen as "a creation of human proclivities."⁸⁰ References in the Holy Books to evil spirits, demons or monsters were read as symbolic, and possession, black magic and the "evil eye," were dismissed as superstitions.⁸¹ As 'Abdu'l Bahá wrote, "Evil spirits are deprived of eternal life.

How then can they exercise any influence? But as eternal life is ordained for holy spirits, therefore their influence exists in all the divine worlds."⁸² While not discounting the existence of evil or "dark forces," Bahá'ís maintained that such impulses originated from the base "lower" nature of humans who willfully turned away from "higher" spiritual/ethical precepts.⁸³

Metaphysical concerns were rife in early twentieth-century western society, although culturally feminized. This "rationalist" (coded male) suspicion of mysticism and religious "enthusiasms" (coded female), often associated with gullibility, fraud and superstition, went back to the Enlightenment, at least. For instance, Cambridge writer Henry Coventry (c.1710-1752) portrayed "acceptable religion," as a "manly, rational, and social institution" while the "deluded votaries" of mysticism were most likely females whose frustrated sexual passions were "sublimated into devotion," this making up "the far greatest part of female religion."⁸⁴ However, because of the Bahá'í doctrine of equality (however imperfectly realized), May Maxwell and her circle felt no need to justify either their prominent role as women, or their "feminine" religiosity.

In this respect, the widespread, intense female pursuit of alternative spiritualities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries could even be interpreted as a romantic feminist assault on the creeping oppressive power of secular "rationality," implicitly defined in western culture as masculine, and racio-culturally coded as "white."⁸⁵ In non-Euro-western traditions, such as the "Oriental" Bahá'í culture into which these women stepped, inspired dreams, visions and intuitions were not feminized, but rather utterly conventional norms for both sexes. As popular early Bahá'í author, Mary Hanford Ford, wrote:

The western world is prone to be objective, and humanity has become thoroughly intellectualized in recent years.... Such thinkers forget that the essence of religion is to be in love with God. There is no religion possible without the element of ecstasy, and no ecstasy possible without love....Joan of Arc ...was consumed by the throes of a great love...⁸⁶

Ford then compares such ecstasy to the Persian martyrdoms, linking an "increase of capacity for love" with a decrease in "dogmatic theology."⁸⁷ Her words create a binary, positioning the heroic passionate lover against the prosaic "objective" intellectualizing thinker, religious passion against dogma, and, by implication, east against west, and feminine against masculine. Even in Judeo-Christian cultures, traditions of "ecstasy" such as sainthood, legitimated female religiosity and freed women from "ordinary" domestic constraints. But Bahá'ís were cautioned against strange or excessive displays of religiosity and narcissistic, self-indulgent, or sanctimonious piety by 'Abdu'l Bahá, who stressed practical reform, and deeds over words. He also warned against superstition and the cultivation of psychic capacities. In ways that were more similar to features of Aboriginal spirituality, in the early Bahá'í community, otherworldly messages were in the main accepted, expected, and given reasonable weight alongside other forms of "proof."⁸⁸

Fashioning New Identities

Another tool of transformation was the adoption of symbolic markers of a new identity. 'Abdu'l Bahá frequently used affirmative statements, and tangible talismanic items or gestures to

bolster women's self-assurance. For example, while on that first 1898 pilgrimage, just as May Bolles believed she had received the gift of a unique capacity for love, Lua Getsinger believed that the Master had given her a great talent for speaking. Her husband Edward related that 'Abdu'l Bahá placed something in her mouth and later said, "I have given you the power to speak and loosened your tongue. 'Lua' [Liva] in Persian means 'Flag' [or Banner] and you must be my flag and wave it in the East and the West."⁸⁹ Symbolic of a new identity, 'Abdu'l Bahá, like the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, frequently gave believers new Persian names with spiritual meanings to live up to, particularly when they requested this.⁹⁰ Often the bearers used this new name to sign correspondence or publish books, and others sometimes addressed them as such.

Around 1900, 'Abdu'l Bahá wrote to Lua: "Oh my Daughter - know thou art a woman, whose words will have a great effect on the hearts of the people, and to whose words they will listen. Do not lose one single opportunity in this blessed time to talk to the people..."⁹¹ He promised her "a confirmation-which you have never imagined-or conceived in your mind, and for this, I am the guarantee-and of it there can be no doubt."⁹² Thus assured, Lua challenged gender boundaries by addressing audiences around the world, even undertaking diplomatic missions on behalf of 'Abdu'l Bahá. For instance, she delivered a petition to Mozaffar-ed-Din Shah, the king of Persia, when he visited Paris, asking the ruler to stop the killing of Bahá'ís in his nation, which he agreed to do. In 1914, 'Abdu'l Bahá sent Lua to convey the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh to the Maharajah of Jalowar in India, who later kept up a correspondence with her.⁹³ For an eastern leader of stature to send a western woman as an official representative to converse with high-level eastern potentates was nearly unprecedented, demonstrating the confidence 'Abdu'l Bahá had in these women, particularly when there were many men, both eastern and western, whom He could have sent. Correspondingly, the women placed absolute certainty in what they considered the inspired veracity of 'Abdul Bahá, whatever their circumstances or misgivings about their abilities. Responding to 'Abdul Bahá's 1900 summons that she "speak," Lua observed: "Of course – I cannot comprehend these words, and their vast meaning, until I have fulfilled the command-for at present I feel myself to be nothing and the most unworthy of all the Believers – but as my Lord has thus spoken to me I feel constrained to obey..."⁹⁴ At another time in 1911, while living in 'Abdul Bahá's household, He handed her a piece of bread spread with honey and told her to eat it, saying "Let all of your words be as sweetly flavoured with kindness to all people as this bread is flavoured by honey." She recorded that when she swallowed the bread, she felt she had received a great spiritual blessing.⁹⁵ Edward Getsinger testified to Lua's faith in 'Abdul Bahá's vision of her in a eulogy written after her death in Cairo in 1916. He wrote: "She spoke with ease and brilliance and feared no one in debate. Her gift from 'Abdul Bahá made her confident and victorious."⁹⁶

'Abdu'l Bahá affirmed his support of the central role of women in the Bahá'í community in other significant ways. During his visit to New York in 1912, 'Abdu'l Bahá reiterated that He was the "Centre of the Covenant" [of Bahá'u'lláh], and in the presence of Juliet Thompson and May Maxwell dramatically appointed Lua Getsinger as His "Herald of the Covenant."⁹⁷ This unique public appointment elevated Lua, and by extension, women, to the highest echelon of honour and responsibility in the Faith, in contrast to the secondary positions usually held by women in traditional religious organizations. Lua's role as "Herald" was reminiscent of the pre-

eminence of Táhirih, the “Bugle” or “Trumpet” and remover of “veils,” in her proclamation of the Báb’s mission. May Maxwell accentuates this in the official eulogy she wrote for Lua:

I saw the victorious Lua...who shall shine from the horizon of eternity upon the world when all the veils which have hidden her today from mortal eyes have been burned away. As Kurat-ul Ayn [Táhirih] was the Trumpet of the Dawn in the Orient in the Day of Bahá'u'lláh, so Lua Aurora shall wave forever and ever the Banner of the Dawn in the Day of the Covenant [i.e. ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s era].⁹⁸

May Maxwell’s testimony that Lua would “shine from the horizon of eternity” when the “veils” of this world were removed makes evident a source of great strength for these women. Like Christian and other religious women, Bahá’is believed that their actions would not be judged in the present by their fellows, but by history and the Divine Arbiter in the “next world.” In this regard, May’s eulogy of Lua noted, “her age and generation knew her not, seeing only her mortal frailties.”⁹⁹ Here May is alluding to the fact that Lua was better served by her heroic myth than she was in her own time. Some believers criticized her as too unconventional and independent. In a similarity to Táhirih’s defence by the Báb, ‘Abdu’l Bahá regularly and unequivocally defended Lua. For instance, when western female Bahá’is were dispatched by ‘Abdu’l Bahá to teach, they were sometimes accompanied by male teachers, often middle-easterners. That such mixed travel challenged propriety, even in the United States, became evident in 1914 when Lua Getsinger was assailed by gossip and accused by her husband of infidelity in his divorce suit, following an extensive travel-teaching trip she made with a Dr. Farid.¹⁰⁰ In response, ‘Abdu’l Bahá countered vague but damaging insinuations that Lua was “unfaithful” to the Covenant by sending a Tablet outlining her service, ending with “she is worthy of love.” ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s letter drew support from newly formed North American institutions, and they devoted a whole issue of the journal *Star of the West* to Lua and the Covenant.¹⁰¹ Although repeatedly warned of the corrosive effects on unity of gossip, fault-finding and backbiting, which ‘Abdu’l Bahá called “the worst human quality,” the community still struggled to overcome this cultural penchant.¹⁰²

Modelling the New (Bahá’í) Woman: Fashioning Female Religious Paradigms

Most western Bahá’is came out of a patriarchal, mainly Protestant, Christian culture that offered few strong female role models, placed women under the legal and social patriarchal or paternal authority of men, and was seldom responsive to feminist aspirations for equality. Bahá’í women strongly desired to inculcate a more modern, more female-affirming, and more Bahá’í outlook, which led them to work for the inclusion of more egalitarian religious models and practices within the nascent western Bahá’í community. One of their major early initiatives was creating new female archetypal exemplars. Religious traditions nearly always offer one or more paradigms of the “ideal” woman. In Hinduism, there is Sita, a goddess of the earth who represents the ideal daughter, dedicated mother and the faithful, virtuous wife in spite of all odds. In Judaism, Rachel is the beautiful, patient and long-suffering wife and mother who supports her husband, and whose children improve the future of her people. In Christianity, the most prominent woman is the Virgin Mary, the symbol of purity, chastity, and holy motherhood yet symbolically detached from her husband and father, and, as Bahá’í scholar Susan Maneck notes, “discreetly aloof from her son’s ministry.”¹⁰³ Islam’s primary female exemplar is Fátimih, the

epitome of the devoted daughter, wife and mother, whose sanctified morality is above reproach. The mythical narrative of the ideal woman in various religions has developed, crystallized and shifted over time, as can be shown in the case of the Virgin Mary. As religious scholar Majella Franzmann argues, in the earliest gospel of Mark, Mary was included in the family of Jesus who were not well regarded because of their treatment of Him. In a later account, the Gospel of Luke, she was beginning to be seen as the virginal mother of an incarnate God.¹⁰⁴ Mary's semi-divine status as a saint grew within most Roman and Orthodox Christian traditions as centuries passed. The Protestant Reformation discouraged devotion to saints and the asking of boons and intercession from them, so Protestant women disengaged from the Madonna even though Mariology flourished among Catholic and Orthodox Christians. In Protestantism, Christ's mother was not maligned, but her importance was strictly limited, typically to the Christmas season.

The largely Protestant heritage of Euro-American converts shaped the organization of the early Bahá'í community. Adherents tended to emphasise teachings that appealed to them such as the lack of ritual and the absence of clergy.¹⁰⁵ It is curious, therefore, that an early attachment to idealized female figures would become a prominent feature of western Bahá'í culture. Protestant women suffered from a dearth of female models with whom they could identify. In Judeo-Christian tradition, the archetypal mother, Eve, was cast as a temptress and deceiver who caused the expulsion of humanity from the Garden of Eden. The Virgin Mary and a constellation of female saints were venerated by Catholics, but Protestants were dissuaded from this by fears of idolatry. Mary Magdalene was not an attractive model. Since at least the sixth century, she had been characterized as a repentant prostitute, an identity foregrounded in the eighteenth to late twentieth-century Magdalene Houses which strove to rehabilitate "fallen" women.¹⁰⁶ The chief female ideals offered to Protestant women were minor figures, Mary and Martha, sisters from Bethany. In the Gospels, practical Martha bustled about the home serving others, but soon complained that rather than helping her, her sister Mary was sitting listening at Jesus' feet. Jesus responded that Mary's devotion was more laudable. These sisters epitomized the two major roles available to Protestant, and indeed, nearly all religious women: quiet devotion guided by male leadership and selfless (mainly domestic) service. In most churches and synagogues, the Marthas predominated.¹⁰⁷ There were few Protestant contemplative traditions, but millions of hours of unpaid female labour dedicated to family, church and society. Catholic women had similar options, augmented, however, by a tradition of female contemplatives, female service orders, and the greater glorification of motherhood brought to the culture by the Madonna. Jewish women shared ideals of male-guided religiosity and sacrificial service to home, family, and community.

Early Bahá'í women did not entirely reject Christian models. Their dogma also enjoined them to pursue a life of selfless and sacrificial service, albeit with broader horizons than Martha's domestic realm. Their devotion to Bahá'u'lláh, and their longing to be near 'Abdu'l Bahá, mirrored in many ways the desire of Mary to sit at the feet of her Master. However, when 'Abdu'l Bahá proffered new affirmative female exemplars that interpreted female religio-historical figures in a more modern, woman-positive ways, with less emphasis on housekeeping and traditional female deference to men, and more emphasis on the active, even revolutionary role women could play in religion and society in this new era, they eagerly responded. In His talks and writings, 'Abdu'l Bahá substantially revised familiar Euro-Christian religio-cultural myths, such as the story of Adam and Eve, in more gender-neutral or female-positive ways. This

allowed Bahá'ís to be less conflicted than many religious women as they did not have to struggle against their own traditions, or accept the denigration of females as part of their belief system.

Two primary archetypal female models were adopted by early western Bahá'í women. The first was the redeemed and rehabilitated Mary Magdalene, re-styled by 'Abdu'l Bahá as a leading disciple of Christ and a premiere woman of Christianity. The second was the intrepid and outspoken Persian poetess Táhirih, the foremost woman of the Bábí period of the Bahá'í Faith, who western women heralded as a women's emancipation martyr. The Greatest Holy Leaf, Bahíyyih Khánum (1846-1932), the "well-beloved," unmarried full sister of 'Abdu'l Bahá, is acknowledged as the foremost woman of the Bahá'í Dispensation. She was elevated by Bahá'u'lláh to a "station such as none other woman hath surpassed," and comparable in rank to those immortal heroines such as Sarah, Ásíyih, the Virgin Mary, Fátimih and Táhirih, each of whom has outshone every member of her sex in previous Dispensations."¹⁰⁸ However, although esteemed as saintly, Bahíyyih Khánum was never widely adopted by early western women as a model. A few other Bábí-Bahá'í heroines, like the wives of martyrs and the peasant warrior-woman Zaynab, who fought and died, dressed as a boy, during the government siege of the Bábís at Zanjan, inspired dramatic stories, but never reached iconic status in western Bahá'í culture.

The mythologies of these two paradigmatic figures, Mary Magdalene and Táhirih, embodied emerging western Bahá'í feminist ideals blending east and west, with distinctly Bahá'í concepts reshaping Islamic and Judeo-Christian cultural understandings. From His very first contact with women of the west, during the 1898-99 Hearst pilgrimage, 'Abdu'l Bahá encouraged Bahá'í women to see themselves as being capable of "great deeds," even using heroic masculinising military metaphors telling them to go forth from 'Akká like "soldiers," hoping to return "having fought their battles" to great (spiritual) rewards.¹⁰⁹ As Ibrahim Kheiralla's fourth wife, English-born Marian Miller, recorded 'Abdu'l Bahá's words:

Many women in the past have made great names for themselves & have been distinguished among the famous of the world in ways both spiritual & material. Remember that those women are of the same flesh and blood as yourselves, possessing the same faculties & powers, that which was open for them is open for you....Far higher is this time than the time of Christ & yet see what wonderful things his disciples accomplished. You will be able to do more than they did, because the Holy Spirit of God is being poured out more abundantly on the earth.¹¹⁰

Marian Miller reported that 'Abdu'l Bahá exhorted them to follow Mary Magdalene. He said:

Be like Mary Magdalene whose faith was so strong that it was never shaken even for a moment, when Christ was put to death, but with steadfast faith she went to His discouraged disciples at that time & renewed and rekindled in their hearts the wavering light of their faith ... by the power of God working through them, the knowledge of God spread over all the earth.

Now in the eternal Kingdom their names shine as the most brilliant stars, & even here on earth their names are remembered with love & reverence by millions....Arise for the work

of God & His Cause, & you shall see His mighty power working in you, & you will conquer all things... then will you all be prospered in the work & gain ever greater gifts, & the Cause of God will be spread through all the countries by your means.¹¹¹

In this talk, ‘Abdu’l Bahá clearly privileged Mary Magdalene as a key figure, perhaps *the* key figure in the history of the spread of Christianity, as she had galvanized the shaken faith of the bereft male disciples. He further indicates other women also arose to teach:

In the Kingdom of God, there is no difference between the men and the women; both are considered alike -- only the one who works the hardest surpasses the other. In the time of Christ, women were the great agents in spreading the Kingdom. The disciples would not have been confirmed if it had not been for them -- Peter would not have been strengthened.¹¹²

‘Abdu’l Bahá held out the millennial promise to Bahá’í women that their actions in this time were equivalent or greater than those of Mary Magdalene and the Christian disciples. He glossed over the fact that Mary Magdalene had not always been “remembered with love & reverence by millions,” instead utilizing in His many references, a revisionist interpretation which cast her as being of singular importance, worthy of “love & reverence.”

Bahá’ís interpreted the Resurrection as symbolic rather than literal. In the Bahá’í interpretation, it was Mary Magdalene that first realized that although the physical body of Jesus had been crucified, the spiritual *reality* of the Christ had not perished. ‘Abdu’l Bahá writes:

Verily, Mary, the Magdalene, was a villager, but she kept firm in the Cause of Christ and confirmed the apostles at the time she declared to them (thus): "Verily, Christ is alive and eternal and death did not overtake Him; and verily, the foundation of His religion is not shaken by His crucifixion at the hand of the oppressors!" By this her face is eternally shining from the horizon of guidance.¹¹³

Rev. George Townsend (1876–1957), the Irish Anglican archdeacon who became a Bahá’í and was later named a Hand of the Cause, emphasized that a materialist interpretation of the apparent defeat of Jesus’ religion was overturned by the clarity of Mary Magdalene’s spiritual vision:

Quicker than any of the Twelve, she perceived the reality of His kingship, and recognised that if His body was dead, His spirit was indestructible and was alive breathing in mortal power...Purified by their suffering, animated by her spiritual power, [the disciples] now perceived for the first time the incorporeal nature of the dominion and glory of their Lord and of His kingdom...and if the glory of that confession belongs to Peter the glory of making it in the fullness of its spiritual sense belongs to the Magdalene.¹¹⁴

Mary Magdalene modelled “faith” for Bahá’í women, who needed to maintain their hope and vision of bettering the human condition, even when faced with the material circumstances of a tiny handful of adherents trying to reform a world undergoing mass sufferings, such as the First World War and the Great Depression. The message of Mary Magdalene was to remain firm.

Throughout His ministry, which ended with His death in 1921, ‘Abdu’l Bahá answered countless queries about Christian subjects, most notably those recorded by American Laura Clifford Barney in her book, *Some Answered Questions*. In it, ‘Abdu’l Bahá refuted the negative Christian view of Eve, stating that the story in Genesis was symbolic, not literal, and that it described the human tendency to become attached to the material world.¹¹⁵ He also positively mentioned the Virgin Mary. But on the subject of Mary Magdalene, He was expansive. During His travels to Egypt, Europe and North America between 1910 and 1913 He told numerous stories of her. In London, He said:

Consider what was the quickening power of the Christ when He was on earth. Look at His disciples! They were poor and uncultured men. Out of the rough fisherman He made the great Peter, and out of the poor village girl of Magdala He made one who is a power in all the world today. Many queens have reigned who are remembered by their dates in history, and nothing more is known of them. But Mary the Magdalene is greater than them all. It was she whose love strengthened the disciples when their faith was failing. What she did for the world cannot be measured. See what a divine power was enkindled in her by the power of God!¹¹⁶

‘Abdu’l Bahá intimated in the story, by repeatedly emphasizing Mary Magdalene’s peasant origins, that neither gender nor humble birth was a determinant of spiritual elevation. This “modern,” more egalitarian message resonated with the many working class women who had joined the Faith by 1911-13, when ‘Abdu’l Bahá undertook His western travels.¹¹⁷ In Washington, He emphasized that Mary’s transformed identity was measured by her service:

Mary Magdalene was a villager of lowly type, yet that selfsame Mary was transformed and became the means through which the confirmation of God descended upon the disciples. Verily, she served the Kingdom of God with such efficiency that she became well-known and oft mentioned by the tongues of men. Even today she is shining from the horizon of eternal majesty.¹¹⁸

The significance of such a metamorphosis in identity for women was that a high spiritual station could be gained through their own merit and concerted individual efforts. Their worth would not be assayed by their gender, or their class associations with husbands and fathers, as women’s status usually was, but rather through the quality of their independent faith and service. Besides implying that such a station was attainable for those of all backgrounds and classes, ‘Abdu’l Bahá frequently asserted the equality, even the superiority of women, as compared to men. In London, after relating a powerful story of the courage and accomplishment of an ancient Syrian warrior-queen, Zenobia, He stated: "The day is coming when woman will claim her superiority to man."¹¹⁹ He went on to recount a story of the unyielding faithfulness of Mary Magdalene when the hopes of the male disciples were shattered, stating: "Thus through her wisdom and encouragement the Cause of Christ was upheld for all the days to come. Her intuition enabled her to grasp the spiritual fact [that the Christ spirit lived]," adding, "But in the sight of God sex makes no difference. He or she is greatest who is nearest to God."¹²⁰

For a few of the early western Bahá'í women, the emulation of Mary Magdalene took the form of a personal identification with her. This practice began early when some believers still had misconceptions, taught by Kheiralla, about reincarnation. In September of 1900, when the Getsingers came through Paris on their second pilgrimage, the small group there speculated that perhaps Lua was Mary Magdalene, and May Maxwell was the return of Joan of Arc.¹²¹ In fact, May said that 'Abdu'l Bahá told her that she was the reincarnation of the spirit of Joan of Arc in this age.¹²² However, clarifying confusion on subject, He said, "the reincarnation of the spirit in successive bodies is not taught."¹²³ He explained that "return" meant certain qualities could reappear from age to age, using the analogy of fruits on a tree "returning" every year. The individual fruits differed but the essential qualities of the fruit reappeared season after season.¹²⁴

In this vein, May and Lua's close friend, Juliet Thompson, saw herself as the heiress (if not return) of Mary Magdalene, as is recorded in her diary. She writes that in July 1912, when at Green Acre, Maine, 'Abdu'l Bahá told her mother: "There are correspondences, Mrs Thompson, between heaven and earth and Juliet's correspondence in heaven is Mary of Magdala."¹²⁵ The "spiritual daughter" of May Maxwell, Juliet supported herself and her mother through her art. For instance, she painted a portrait of Grace Coolidge, wife of the U.S. President.¹²⁶ Juliet's friend, Marzieh Gail, described Juliet's New York Greenwich Village brownstone as being full of creative energy: "Here, at one given time, in an upstairs room Dimitri Marianoff, Einstein's former son-in-law, who had become a Bahá'í, was writing a book on Táhirih, while Juliet was revising her *I, Mary Magdalene* on a lower floor and I, at ground level, refugeeing from the family apartment uptown, was finishing *Persia and the Victorians*."¹²⁷ Juliet also reviewed there the manuscripts of her neighbour and friend Khalil Gibran, who met 'Abdu'l Bahá at Juliet's and rendered a sensitive graphite portrait of Him. Marzieh Gail wrote in the introduction to Juliet's published diary that "'Abdu'l-Bahá likened Juliet to Mary Magdalene because she loved, and saw, so much. She had that same storied love that Mary had--that love which after all is the only thing that holds the Bahá'ís together, or for that matter holds the Lord to His creatures, or keeps the stars in their courses." Marzieh then quotes 'Abdu'l-Bahá's prophesy that: "In the time to come, queens will wish they had been the maid of Juliet."¹²⁸ In this way, western women could assume some of the leading roles in the "modern" Bahá'í millennial revival of a recurrent cosmic passion play. Most previous narratives of the inception of a new religion had featured men.

Marguerite "Daisy" Pumpelly Smyth, the friend Juliet lived with at 48 West 10th Street, attests in her forward to *I, Mary Magdalene* that when they went on pilgrimage to Haifa and 'Akká, Juliet was so sensitive "to the vibrations that emanate from the spots which have been frequented by the Holy Messengers and Martyrs, that she was irresistibly drawn to an obscure path that led to a small dome-shaped dwelling." Daisy recalled Juliet's "joy when she learned from a peasant that it was the traditional site of the home of Mary of Magdala."¹²⁹ Daisy confirms the iconic status of Mary Magdalene for Bahá'ís when she writes of Juliet's novel,

...one is carried back two thousand years, into the soul and consciousness of Mary, the Magdalen — into that flaming heart of the archetypal woman of all cycles, vessel created to receive in torrential measure the love of her Lord — a link between His heart and all aspiring humanity.¹³⁰

The figure of Mary Magdalene acted as a transitional figure, allowing early Bahá'í women to incorporate rather than deny their love of Christ, releasing them from any feelings of disloyalty that might accompany a religious conversion. Unlike most conversion experiences, which tended to downplay or denigrate the convert's previous beliefs, Bahá'í mythology exalted Christ and elevated the status of women associated with Him. The parallels drawn by Juliet between Christ and 'Abdu'l Bahá are evident in *I, Mary Magdalene*, Juliet's fictional account of Mary Magdalene's meeting with Christ. Juliet illustrated this semi-autobiographical novel, drawn from her meetings with 'Abdu'l Bahá, with three portraits: the Christ figure was a haloed image of 'Abdu'l Bahá; the handsome lover, Novatus, had the face of an ill-fated beau of Juliet's, Percy Stickney Grant, a prominent New York socialist Episcopalian minister; while Mary's face was that of Juliet herself, whom 'Abdu'l-Bahá said she resembled. There was no claim to "channelling" here, but clearly Juliet and other Bahá'í women felt they could draw identity from archetypal female models, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá encouraged this identification.

Unlike traditional female religious exemplars, 'Abdu'l Bahá attributed Mary Magdalene's authority to her personal achievements and attributes, not to her role as wife, sister, mother, or daughter, the traditional levers of women's influence. He foregrounded her position as the strongest disciple in a group of men in dire crisis. In her pilgrim's notes published in 1918, early Bahá'í Elizabeth Fraser Chamberlain quotes 'Abdu'l Bahá as saying:

All were shaken but Mary Magdalen. She was a veritable lioness... Thus this heroine became the cause of re-establishing the faith of the apostles. My hope is that each one of you may become as Mary Magdalen — for this woman was superior to all the men of her time and her reality is ever shining from the horizon of Christ.¹³¹

'Abdu'l Bahá's attitudes to Mary Magdalene, and the role of women in general, were entirely Bahá'í. Other Abrahamic religions resisted giving women independent authority and leadership over men. In the Shi'a Muslim society that the Bahá'í Faith emerged from, women who talked to, or were even seen by unrelated males, were considered morally suspect. In comparison, 'Abdu'l Bahá affirmed the legitimacy, even the necessity, for female leadership, including women's direction of men. This stance contrasted sharply with the customs of the time where female leadership in both east and west was limited almost exclusively to the management of other women and children. 'Abdu'l Bahá's endorsement of a resolute, "take charge" Mary Magdalene, who refused to abandon her vision in spite of the vacillation of her male compatriots, must have strengthened Bahá'í women's resolve. Finally, the heroic figure endorsed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá carried no hint of the shamed, ritually "impure" harlot of Christian tradition, who required penitence. A transfigured Mary Magdalene, as a foremost Christian leader, could act as a role model for western Bahá'í women. Not so with her earlier ecclesiastically-derived Christian interpretation. In both eastern and western cultures of the era, a woman's status and reputation could be quickly and irrevocably undermined by being linked in any way to sexual impropriety.

However, in spite of 'Abdu'l Bahá's pronouncements, the negative western cultural associations of Mary Magdalene with illicit sexuality were difficult to completely erase, as was betrayed in the language Lua Getsinger used in a 1915 letter reacting to her husband's hurtful charge of infidelity. Speaking of herself, Lua writes: "Even had she [Lua] been a Magdalene —

who is he [Edward Getsinger] to stone her after her Lord and the one whom he acknowledges as his Lord had forgiven, trusted, and sent her out to herald His name – In the days of Christ all went out ashamed – before Jesus said ‘Neither do I condemn thee’!¹³² As Lua Getsinger’s plaintive statement makes clear, the mythic Bahá’í rehabilitation of Mary Magdalene had profound reverberations for women raised in a patriarchal culture. Accusations of promiscuity represented (and still do, albeit to a lesser degree) female degradation. The negative impacts on women of “Madonna/whore” dichotomies in Judeo-Christian cultures are well documented.¹³³ The “Magdalene,” a “fallen” woman (i.e. from God’s Grace), was socially positioned as the antithesis of desirable and respectable femininity. Although Bahá’í discourse did not reflect the anxiety of other feminist groups in regard to sexual predation or prostitution, such fears were culturally endemic in early twentieth-century western society. Mariana Valverde, Carolyn Strange, Kathy Peiss, and others have documented the “moral panic” that gripped communities that feared loosening restraints on female sexuality as women moved into the public sphere.¹³⁴ Rebellious female sexuality carried a “taint” that attached to women’s identity, that marginalized “defiled” women from the mainstream, threatening to relegate them to the lowest underclasses. A whole genre of “white slavery” literature and urban myth warned of sexual ruination for girls. Ubiquitous, mainly church-run, “Magdalene houses” attempted to rescue socially shamed women. Catholic “Magdalene laundries” incarcerated Irish women who had breached legal or sexual boundaries as late as 1996.¹³⁵ In many ways, the cautionary figure of the “Magdalene” signified a frightening potential for all women. Thus, the metamorphosis of Mary Magdalene’s image loomed larger for women who became Bahá’ís in the “progressive” era, because her heroization symbolically repudiated injustices done to women on the basis of their sexuality by patriarchal religion. Lua Getsinger, in another letter to the same friend, reclaimed her spiritual and feminine power in the face of her accuser, after she received ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s support. Having begged Bahá’u’lláh for martyrdom and severance from all else save God, she writes:

He is now answering me! I rejoice and thank Him. I long for suffering until I am purged from all else save His Holy Spirit and then I may sacrifice my life in His Path made so narrow and perfect by the Feet of His beloved His Son – His Covenant through which I have learned the fear of God – which has liberated me from the fear of any man!¹³⁶

As the twentieth century progressed, the importance of Mary Magdalene to Bahá’í women waned as Christianity’s centrality declined within the Bahá’í community, and in western society in general. Accounts of dreams, visions, and prophesy also became less prominent, although did not disappear. By 1927, another female Bahá’í “crusader,” Keith Ransom-Kehler, made the comment that “in the Orient people are attracted to the Manifestations and then to the principles, whereas in the western world people appear to be attracted first to the principles and then arrive at the Manifestations.”¹³⁷ Many Bahá’ís are now unaware that the myth of Mary Magdalene had such a profound influence on early female believers. However, as religious scholar Lil Abdo Osborne has pointed out, she remains one of the “most revered women in the Baha’i hermeneutic” inasmuch as ‘Abdu’l Bahá made more references to Mary Magdalene than to any other female historical figure.¹³⁸ She is counted an “immortal heroine” and a symbol of female equality. In 1912, in a Unitarian church in Philadelphia, ‘Abdu’l Bahá said,

... why should woman be considered inferior? This is not according to the plan and justice of God. He has created them equal; in His estimate there is no question of sex. The one whose heart is purest, whose deeds are most perfect, is acceptable to God, male or female. Often in history women have been the pride of humanity -- for example, Mary, the mother of Jesus... Mary Magdalene, Ásíyih, daughter of Pharaoh, Sarah, wife of Abraham, and innumerable others have glorified the human race by their excellences.¹³⁹

As feminist revisionist movements have swept many faith communities in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Mary Magdalene has become an increasingly iconic figure. Her myth is being reworked to reflect contemporary feminist aspirations and resistance to traditional patriarchal religious dominance. Christian feminists rescue positive portrayals in Gnostic Gospels of female disciples as “equal members of the circle,” with a few placing Mary Magdalene in a leading role as “the disciple to the disciples” “that corrected and brought higher vision” to the grieving males huddled in the upper room.¹⁴⁰ Scholarly work on the *Gospel of Mary*, found in Egypt in 1898, but only lately studied, has re-positioned Mary much as ‘Abdu’l Bahá did, as a leading disciple of Christ.¹⁴¹ Anthropologist Anna Fedele has studied the meanings assigned to Mary Magdalene in recently popular “alternative pilgrimages” to French Catholic shrines made by neo-pagan (post-Christian) visitors from Italy, Spain, Britain, and the United States. She argues that they now look to Mary as “an important reference point for women’s empowerment.”¹⁴² Even the twenty-first-century Russian punk collective, *Pussy Riot*, protesting what they see as a sexist, homophobic Russian church-state alliance, sings “Feminist Magdalene go demonstrate.”¹⁴³ British Anglican feminist Reverend Lucy Winkett commented on *Pussy Riot*: The relationship between religion... and protest is complex and long standing.... [Pussy Riot] express what one Christian theologian calls in the spirit of Mary Magdalene – ungovernable female energy. And in doing so they join a procession of women who have embodied protest in every denomination over centuries.”¹⁴⁴

While the eminence of Mary Magdalene has receded, at least temporarily, in Bahá’í culture, the other major idealized figure adopted by Bahá’í women, an even clearer symbol of feminist protest, has grown in prominence over time. Since the inception of the Faith, the Persian poet Táhirih has provided the most compelling Bábí-Bahá’í archetype for women worldwide. In Bábí circles, Táhirih was hailed as the promised incarnation of Fátima, the daughter of Muhammad, but for western believers, Islamic prophesy had little resonance. Western Bahá’ís viewed Táhirih as a religious and feminist trailblazer and emancipation martyr. Like the re-imagined Mary Magdalene, western Bahá’ís learned of Táhirih primarily through the stories of ‘Abdu’l Bahá. They also sought her out in the texts of earlier European admirers such as A.L.M. Nicolas, Lord Curzon, and Comte de Gobineau. Orientalist E.G. Browne revitalized interest in both Táhirih and her poetry in his 1893 book, *A Year Among the Persians*.¹⁴⁵

The complex history of Táhirih has strong theological significance in the Bahá’í Faith, which distinguishes her from Mary Magdalene, who was not a part of the Bábí-Bahá’í drama. Born into one of the most powerful theological families in Persia, beautiful and charismatic, she was extremely unusual for a woman of her time. She was known as a prodigy, an erudite Islamic scholar and a leader of the Shaykhi Islamic sect. In 1844, she was named the lone female Bábí *Letter of the Living*, one of the first eighteen disciples of the Báb. A key transformative figure,

her removal of the veil at the 1848 Conference of Badasht symbolically marked the abrogation of shari'a law, and the transition between the old "prophetic" cycle and the inauguration by the Báb and Bahá'u'llah of a new "cycle of fulfillment." Many metaphorical allusions in the Bahá'í sacred writings to the removal of veils evoke Táhirih's unveiling, a theme that has been explored by literary scholar Bahíyyih Nakhjavání.¹⁴⁶ As had mid-nineteenth-century Europeans, early twentieth-century westerners cast her as "the far famed and beautiful Kurratul Ayn, who was the Joan of Arc of her age and country," a passionate young woman killed for the sake of her beliefs.¹⁴⁷ She resisted the authoritarian rule of husband, male elders, religion and state, and fearlessly debated with powerful men as their equal. References to her as a "Joan of Arc" later declined in the western Bahá'í community, as Táhirih became more famous in her own right.

For Táhirih herself, as an eastern woman situated in a conservative, patriarchal culture, her defiance of the restrictive social codes that governed women brought damning charges of immodesty, even wild allegations of sexual profligacy and perversion.¹⁴⁸ In spite of the likelihood of her death, she rejected an easy route back to conformity, the Shah's offer of marriage.¹⁴⁹ Unable to silence or defeat Táhirih through argument, in 1852, she was murdered in the dark of night by a drunken soldier recruited by a conspiracy of government and clerics. In Bahá'í legend, Táhirih's romantic tragedy was mitigated by the fact that, gifted with "second sight," she knew of her imminent death, even bringing to the garden where she was killed the silk scarf she was strangled with, before being ignominiously dumped in an empty well and covered with stones.¹⁵⁰ Her martyrdom, chosen with joy and eyes wide open, was the quintessential female equivalent of the many dramatic tales of male Bábí-Bahá'í martyrs.

When westerners began to enter the Faith, her legend immediately attracted believers, particularly women, even as it had nineteenth-century European observers. She personified both religious fervour, and the audacious pursuit of the equality of women. She offered a compelling heroic paradigm for western women, especially those dedicated to teaching the Faith, such as May Maxwell and others who might be travelling as women alone, often in dangerous conditions. To Lua Getsinger, en route to India, Abdu'l Bahá wrote:

Peering through the impenetrable darkness of the night, the howling winds, the raging storms, I see the glorious Light beckoning me forward, forward. The balmy weather is coming, and the voyager shall land safely. Kurat-el-Ayn [Táhirih] had attained to this supreme state. When they brought her the terrible news of the martyrdom of the Bahá'ís, she did not waver; it did not make any difference to her; she had chosen her path, she knew her goal, and when they imparted to her the news of her impending death, no one could see any trace of sorrow in her face; she was rather happier.

Although she never cared for dress, that day she wore her best white silk dress and perfumed herself with the most fragrant attar of roses. She hailed the chamber of death as a happy bride entering the nuptial bower of the bridegroom. To this lofty summit of unchanging purpose thou must attain; like Kurat-el-Ayn, nothing must shake thy firm faith.¹⁵¹

“Bride” symbolism, with the exception of some mystical writings, is not common in the Bahá’í Faith, but must have had resonance for women of Christian heritage. Even non-Catholics knew the mystic symbolism of female devotees being known as “Brides” of Christ.

For Bahá’ís, Táhirih’s unveiling at Badasht signalled female emancipation. As preeminent teacher of the Faith, Pittsburgh journalist Martha Root, wrote of this event:

Until then, women all over the world were in a state of more or less subjection; now women...after centuries of somnolence, are wide awake to their new position and are stirring to new ideas. It should be of thrilling interest to them to know that the first woman suffrage martyr was not a Westerner at all, but a young woman poet, Táhirih, sometimes known as Qurratu'l-‘Ayn, of Qazvín, Iran.”¹⁵²

Martha Root travelled Persia seeking out sources to piece together Táhirih’s story, publishing her biography in 1938. As Martha’s friend Marzieh Gail notes, this plain and relatively impoverished middle-aged spinster seemed to have little in common with the young, beautiful, high-born and gifted Táhirih. Nonetheless, Gail says Martha looked to Táhirih for inspiration when she endured cold and chronic illness, “insufficient food... travelled steerage, third class, on crowded street cars, lived in poor rooms,” doggedly travelling four times around the world teaching the Faith and even enrolling its first monarch, Queen Marie of Romania.¹⁵³ In this early biography, Martha Root identified some of the many qualities in Táhirih she admired, quoting ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s tribute to Táhirih that she “bore persecution and suffering with the greatest heroism,” and “she never failed in her determination to work for the freedom of her sisters.” Martha continued:

Táhirih’s courageous deathless personality forever will stand out against the background of eternity, for she gave her life for her sister women. The sweet perfume of her heroic selflessness is diffused in the whole five continents. People of all religions and of none, all races and all classes to this day cherish the attar of her deeds, and weep tears of love and longing when her great poems are chanted. Through her fearless stand the balance is shifting, man and woman are becoming more equal...

One of the important teachings of the Bahá’í Faith is that women should be regarded as the equals of men and, should enjoy equal rights and privileges, equal education and equal opportunities. Táhirih had to die for these great ideals but today our task is to live for them.¹⁵⁴

In her talks, Martha Root held up Táhirih as a bold model of the “new woman.” Sometimes she even found that Táhirih’s legend had preceded her. In 1925, Marianne Hainisch, women’s rights and education activist, and mother of then President of Austria, told her: “The greatest ideal of womanhood all my life has been Táhirih (Qurratu’l-‘Ayn) of Qazvin, Iran. I was only seventeen when I heard of her life and her martyrdom but I said, ‘I shall try to do for the women of Austria what Táhirih gave her life to do for the women of Persia.’”¹⁵⁵ Mrs. Hainisch’s close friend, feminist philanthropist Marie von Najmajer, also had read about the Persian poetess and published in 1874 an epic poem in German entitled *Qurratu’l-‘Ayn*, later translated and published in *Star of the West*.¹⁵⁶ These women adopted Táhirih as a feminist model twenty years

before any westerners joined the Bahá'í Faith. In 1930, Martha visited Mrs. Sarojina Naidu of “Hyderabad, Deccan” whom she called a poet and speaker, “India’s best-known woman” and “the greatest worker for women so far this century,” and whose birthday is now celebrated as India’s “Women’s Day.” Naidu told her, “Oh, for ten years I have longed to have the poems of Táhirih!”¹⁵⁷ Martha had planned to copy them longhand, but a Persian Bahá'í from Karachi, who was accompanying her that day in Lahore, had “a thousand little Persian books printed” so that Martha could distribute them to various Islamic and Hindu women and men who had requested copies of Táhirih’s poetry.¹⁵⁸ Martha Root ends her biography, “O Táhirih!... You are to this day our thrilling, living Bahá'í teacher. And your work is only beginning, as you will bring our Bahá'í Faith to many millions yet unborn.”¹⁵⁹

Táhirih provided the ideal standard for Bahá'í women. When Lua Getsinger, singled out by ‘Abdu’l Bahá as an exemplary believer, died in Cairo, Egypt, the highest praise that could be offered in the official *In Memoriam* essay written by her spiritual daughter, May Maxwell, was that Lua had followed in the footsteps of Táhirih. She wrote:

... so future ages and cycles will love her—adore her—venerate her blessed name—and strive to walk in the path of her utter servitude, severance, and sacrifice. The passion of Divine love that consumed her heart shall light the hearts of mankind forever and forever.¹⁶⁰

Even for those women such as May Maxwell and Laura Clifford Dreyfus-Barney, who travelled with more financial and personal security than Martha Root or Lua Getsinger, Táhirih offered the model of the crusader, not afraid to speak out in the face of the approbation of family, neighbours, and authority figures. Many women faced “tests” from family and friends, who either disapproved of or were worried by their loved one’s involvement in what they feared might be a cult. Laura Clifford Barney, who was taught the Bahá'í Faith by May Maxwell in Paris in 1900, and her mother Alice Pike Barney, who joined shortly after, were two such women. The family was prominent in Washington society, where the women were publically ridiculed for their conversion. Laura’s father, Albert Barney, vigorously opposed his wife and daughter’s embarrassing new allegiance. In 1902, after Alice Barney paid rent on a downtown Washington property for Mirzá ‘Abu’l-Faḍl, a leading Bahá'í teacher, and a group of followers, Albert, furious, bought out the lease and closed the property down. One biographer suggests that his second heart attack, just months before a third and fatal one in 1902, was precipitated by his chagrin over Laura and Alice’s involvement in the Bahá'í Faith.¹⁶¹ Laura’s older sister Natalie, a leading cultural figure in Paris whose open lesbianism had also raised her father’s ire, derided Laura as: “My sister who is a saint ...”¹⁶² This was likely both a comment both on Laura’s serious, responsible nature, and on her Bahá'í involvement. Clearly, Laura Clifford Barney drew strength from the figure of Táhirih. In 1910, she published a play called *God's Heroes: A Drama in Five Acts*, which, according to the *Bahá'í Yearbook*, was “written around the great Bahá'í heroine and martyr, the poetess Qurratu’l Ayn.” The play even became popular in the east, with Persians asking for copies to be sent. In *God's Heroes*, Laura writes, “Religion, like all other things, must change... Sacrifices were acceptable. Now they are of another kind... They are now spiritual.”¹⁶³ With Táhirih as a model, Bahá'í women could better endure “tests.” Although western “persecution” was not mentioned, paling as it did in comparison to the trials of eastern

Bahá'ís, opposition existed. For example, comparing an article naming the Bahá'í Faith a “cult,” to a more positive one by socialist Upton Sinclair, American Bertha Hyde Kirkpatrick wrote:

Slowly indeed and in spite of ridicule and of vigorous and prejudiced opposition, the Bahá'ís are making a place for themselves in the western world, and many thoughtful and earnest people in America are beginning to recognize, as does Mr. Sinclair, that the Bahá'í Religion is both dignified and pure.¹⁶⁴

As was the case with Mary Magdalene, the emulation of Táhirih was encouraged by ‘Abdu’l Bahá and other Bahá'ís. Táhirih’s rallying cry, “You can kill me as soon as you like, but you cannot stop the emancipation of women,” resonated strongly with a generation of women who were engaged in a widespread struggle for suffrage and civil liberties such as education and legal rights.¹⁶⁵ The close association of the story of Táhirih with the suffrage movement was strengthened by ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s frequent mentions of her when He addressed suffrage leaders and women’s groups during His 1911-13 western travels. For instance, when “Mrs. [Charlotte] Despard and a number of her colleagues in the Suffragette Movement arranged a meeting on January 2nd [1913, London] to hear 'Abdu'l-Bahá,” Despard, who was not a Bahá'í, presented a brief history of the Bahá'í Faith, mentioning Táhirih as “a pioneer.”¹⁶⁶ Previously, in September, 1911, Despard had published a three-part article in the Women’s Freedom League newspaper, *The Vote*, entitled, “A Woman Apostle in Persia.”¹⁶⁷ Decades later, a report of a 1932 Women’s Peace Crusade, attended by “Bahá'í friends” who “were warmly supporting the meeting,” again mentions the presence of the then elderly “Mrs. Despard and Mrs. Pethick Lawrence,” writing:

The fruit of their work appeared in that it was now possible for women of every class, creed and party to meet, on equal terms with men, in support of one common cause, the cause to which they have lately testified at Geneva by some two million signatures. Bright shade of Qurratu'l Ayn did you rejoice in that hour?”¹⁶⁸

In Bahá'í talks and published articles, direct links were drawn between the actions of Táhirih and the goals of early twentieth-century feminism. For instance, in a magazine piece on “The World-Wide influence of Qurratu'l Ayn,” educator Stanwood Cobb began:

The power of a great life to inspire other lives is vividly typified in the remarkable and dramatic influence of the great Persian feminist and poetess, Qurratu'l Ayn on the New Woman Movement in Austria. The relation between this heroine of Persia, one of the greatest women the world has ever produced, and Marianne Hainisch, the greatest pioneer and leader in the Woman Movement of Austria for the last fifty years, is indeed dramatic.¹⁶⁹

The historical picture emerging with new scholarship reveals that this valiant western image of Táhirih was a simplified, softened, romanticized, version of her life, designed primarily to inspire similar dedication, and self-sacrifice to the millennial feminist Bahá'í cause. It downplayed Táhirih’s administrative and scholarly genius, her radical contentiousness, and civil disobedience. The reasons for this seem to be twofold. Some aspects of her story, such as her command of arcane Islamic scripture, prophesy, and jurisprudence, were lost on western

audiences. While understood as extraordinary for an eastern woman, Táhirih's Shaykhi-Bábí leadership and challenges to leading clerics were impenetrable to western observers, based as they were on esoteric points of Islamic law and internecine power struggles. The cultural horror generated by Táhirih's unveiling at Badasht was also unfathomable to westerners, as evidenced by the fact that they inadequately tried to equate it with a reaction to accusations of prostitution.

The western narrative of Táhirih also glossed over aspects of her life which may have troubled early twentieth-century women. Previous feminine religious archetypes and feminine cultural ideals glorified the long-suffering, dutiful and virtuous mother, wife, daughter, or sister, largely confined to a domestic setting. Neither Mary Magdalene, Táhirih, nor even prominent early western female Bahá'ís themselves, conformed to traditional ideals. However, in an era when feminism used claims of female religio-moral superiority and inherent maternal sensibilities to legitimate their increased influence in society, Táhirih's conscious rejection of her domestic, marital, and maternal roles must have raised uncomfortable questions. Never a dutiful daughter, Táhirih opposed and embarrassed her father, Mullá Salih, a prominent cleric, although he defended her against her husband. She is not admired for her success as a wife and mother, overturning gender prerogatives by leaving a husband who would not follow her lead, resulting in her loss of her children, who never became Bábís.¹⁷⁰ A Bahá'í worldview may have softened this point, by construing the loss of her children as a "sacrifice," in the way May Maxwell interpreted her loss of family time. This "sacrifice" of family ties for the sake of establishing the Faith more closely resembled the masculine model of the Christian disciples, who left family behind. Martha Root quotes Sir Francis Younghusband who, in his book *The Gleam*, wrote of Táhirih, "So strong in her faith did she become that she gave up wealth, child, name and position for her Master's service and set herself to proclaim and establish His doctrine."¹⁷¹

More often, such discussion was avoided in Bahá'í mythology as Táhirih's marital and maternal troubles were usually elided from the account, and she was viewed as a *de facto* single woman. In this respect, she offered a modern model for single, divorced, or childless, usually self-supporting, female Bahá'ís, especially those who challenged convention as feminist reformers or by traversing the world, often alone, to establish the "new World Order." Neither did her "single" status seem to present a conflicted message to women who wished to pursue a more traditional norm of marriage and child-rearing. They still looked to her as a model of courage and self-determination. For Bahá'í women, Táhirih forcefully demonstrated the right for women to choose their own course and be judged on their own merits, not in relation to male relatives, or the patriarchal cultural, class, or religious standards current in their societies. She affirmed the right of women to be well-educated, and to advance ideas that might be in opposition to those held by male authoritarian figures. The positioning of Táhirih as a universal exemplar by the central figures of the Faith reinforced the credibility of her position.

Like Joan of Arc, Táhirih was cast in the traditionally masculine mythic role of martyr-saint. In *Heroes of God*, Laura Clifford Barney wrote the scene of Táhirih's death, as her murderers piled stones into the well in which Táhirih's strangled body was dumped:

Tahira, Tahira! Loveliest of women, the truest of disciples! Your death opens my eyes to the meaning of your life, and I will fervently follow your example and cherish the Cause that has made a noble woman a divine martyr...

Cease your profanation! . . . weak of purpose! Do you think that you can bury her there? She will reappear, and be ever before you all! You have rendered her immortal in the minds of men, and her spirit of love will be transmitted to millions of living hearts. You have undone your work and have established her fame. Forever after Tahira will inspire courage and sincerity and truth!¹⁷²

True to Laura Barney's 1910 prediction, within Bahá'í culture, Táhirih's legend has only become stronger, with several recent books of her poetry and life being published, and scores of girls named after her. Philanthropic efforts mounted in her name include the American *Tahirih Justice Center*, which assists immigrant women and girls fleeing gender-based violence. Táhirih also is beginning to be recognized as one of the earliest Iranian feminists, rather than only a figure associated with the Bábí-Bahá'ís. Author Jian Khodadad calls her a "Persian Joan of Arc," while scholar Farzaneh Milani includes her as an important Iranian feminist writer.¹⁷³ Non-Bahá'í cultural and literary critic Azar Nafizi calls her, "The first [eastern] woman to unveil and to question both political and religious orthodoxy..."¹⁷⁴ As has been historically the case, Táhirih continues to act as a feminist model both inside and outside the Bahá'í community.

Conclusion

When the Bahá'í Faith first became established in the west in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Euro-American female converts lacked a pre-existing "Bahá'í" culture, worldview or identity. When they first encountered the Faith, these women tended to transpose Bahá'í terminology, ideals and mythologies, using words and symbols drawn from their Judeo-Christian religio-cultural background. A major factor in encouraging western Bahá'í women to move beyond their predominantly Protestant roots was the construction of transformative mythical narratives that assisted them in making the transition to a more distinctly Bahá'í and feminist identity. The conversion experience, frequently shared with others in their community as a providential narrative, constituted a personal origin myth which marked the believer's symbolic break from previous religious and cultural norms, and their initiation into a fellowship dedicated to the building of a millennial new World Order that emphasized the role of women. Other markers of a new personal identity might include the adoption of a new name, undertaking new roles in the community, or the discovery of new, unknown, or under-utilized capacities.

At an individual and community level, empowering female Bahá'í religious archetypes were adopted, particularly those of Táhirih and a re-visioned Mary Magdalene, who embodied ideals closely matching some of the qualities of the "new woman" espoused by the "modern" feminist movement: those of leadership, particularly in the public realm; the questioning of male authority and patriarchal structures; and an increased valuing of women's individual and collective contributions to religion, society, and humanity. Reflecting the Bahá'í, Protestant, and modernist reluctance to deify saints, these figures were framed as accessible human heroes. Bahá'í female exemplars attained spiritual distinction through a transformation resulting from a

universal outflow of Providence, and their own determined ongoing efforts, not as inherently saintly, sacred, or magical beings. This encouraged women to believe that similar spiritual advancement was attainable by all, regardless of gender, class or origin.

May Maxwell, and the western Bahá'í women associated with her, played a major role in beginning the process of individually, collectively, and collaboratively shaping a new Bahá'í religious culture that empowered women. Their worldviews and identities included a syncretic mix of western Christian and "Oriental" religio-cultural values, but, as the community developed, increasingly embodied distinctively "Bahá'í" millennial religious feminist ideals.

NOTES:

¹ May Maxwell, *An Early Pilgrimage* (April 1917; Wheatley, Oxford: George Ronald, 1976), 12-13. http://bahai-library.com/maxwell_early_pilgrimage (accessed March 19, 2013).

² Maxwell, *An Early Pilgrimage*, 11. Ibrahim Kheiralla arrived in Akká on 11 November, 1898. Three small successive groups followed between 8 December, 1898, and 12-13 March, 1899. See Kathryn Jewett Hogenson, "Annex 1," *Lighting the Western Sky: The Hearst Pilgrimage and Establishment of the Bahá'í Faith in the West* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2010), 269-70. At that time Haifa and 'Akká were part of Syria under Ottoman rule. Although 'Abdu'l Bahá was allowed some freedom due to the respect of local officials, it was dangerous "for strangers to be seen entering the city of sorrow." See Mrs. (Maryam) Thornburgh-Cropper in a letter to Sara Louisa Blomfield, in Lady Blomfield (Sitárih Khánum), *The Chosen Highway* (1940; Oxford: George Ronald, 2007), 235.

³ Sarah Jeanette Duncan, *A Social Departure: How Orthodocia and I Went Round the World by Ourselves* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1890), 363.

⁴ The *Qiblih* is the "point of adoration" or direction toward which one prays; for Bahá'ís, it is the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh near 'Akka; for Muslims, the Kaaba in Mecca; for Jews and Christians it is Jerusalem.

⁵ Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 30, 44.

⁶ These retold accounts often shifted: May's age differs from "9 or 10" to 11, and the blindness from 1-2 days.

⁷ Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 44; Hogenson, *Lighting the Western Sky*, 60. "B" and "H" are symbolic to Bahá'ís as the Arabic letters *Ba* and *Ha* comprise the "Greatest Name of God," *Bahá*, and its derivatives.

⁸ May Maxwell, quoted in Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 43.

⁹ Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 29-31.

¹⁰ May's parents never divorced, maintaining an affection, but never lived together again. John Bolles went to Colorado, probably to work with younger brother Richard Bolles. See Hogenson, *Lighting the Western Sky*, 58-59.

¹¹ Some of May's schooling took place in a convent. See Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 29, 34-35.

¹² Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 38-41.

¹³ See Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 45-46, 20, 37, 9. In 1917, at 47, after May had been a Bahá'í for nineteen years, her childless paternal uncle, Richard J. Bolles (1843-1917) left May and her brother Randolph nearly half of his substantial fortune; see "Richard 'Dicky' J. Bolles" in "Everglades Biographies," *Everglades Digital Library* <http://www2.fiu.edu/~glades/reclaim/bios/bolles.htm> (accessed March 19, 2013).

¹⁴ May's cousin Frank said after the broken engagement, he had "never set eyes on someone who looked so near death and lived." Frank Irwin to Rúhíyyih Khánum, 2 Aug., 1940, in Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 51.

¹⁵ Rúhíyyih Khánum quoted in Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 50.

¹⁶ May Bolles' journal in Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 52.

¹⁷ May Bolles' journal in Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 52-53.

¹⁸ May Bolles' journal in Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 53-54.

¹⁹ Rúhíyyih Khánum in Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 5-6. See also Rúhíyyih Khánum, Dec. 1967 talk at a commemorative service held for May Maxwell in Buenos Aires, in "Our Dawnbreakers: May Bolles Maxwell (Part 1), "The Roots of the Cause in the West," *Canadian Bahá'í News* (Feb-March, 1969): 4.

²⁰ Phoebe Elizabeth Apperson Hearst (1842-1919) was the widow of mining magnate George Randolph Hearst (1820-1891). Hearst's 1898 visit as a pilgrim was 2 days, short because her notoriety might endanger 'Abdu'l Bahá.

Hearst then travelled from Cairo down the Nile for six weeks visiting archaeological digs she sponsored. See Nakhjavání, 73-75; Hogenson, *Lighting the Western Sky*, 8, 68; Velda Piff Metelmann, *Lua Getsinger: Herald of the Covenant* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1997), 10-11.

²¹ Sears and Quigley, who use no footnoting or academic referencing in their inspirational biography, say Lua's mother, Ellen McBride Moore, prayed to God "If the child I am carrying in my womb is a girl, may she be given the chance to speak out and know the truth that has so long been denied to me, her mother," (17). See William Sears and Robert Quigley, *The Flame: The Story of Lua* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1972) 10-17.

²² See Metelmann, *Lua Getsinger*, 3-4.

²³ Hogenson, *Lighting the Western Sky*, 31-48.

²⁴ May Maxwell in Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 70; see also Janet Ruhe-Schoen, *A Love Which Does Not Wait* (Riviera Beach, FL: Palabra, 1998), 35-36.

²⁵ The beach was in Dinard, France, on a family vacation. See May Maxwell in Nakhjavani, *The Maxwells*, 44-45, 71-72. May's letter of belief is not extant but undated fragments are among her papers.

²⁶ Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 49-50, 71-74, 79. Rúhíyyih Khánúm said Phoebe Hearst at one time had suggested that she could take May and raise her as her own child, but Mamie Bolles refused. (*The Maxwells*, 50).

²⁷ Maxwell, *An Early Pilgrimage*, 12-13.

²⁸ Maxwell, *An Early Pilgrimage*, 43. Italics are in the original as May Maxwell is quoting 'Abdu'l Bahá here.

²⁹ The ambitious Kheiralla wrote to 'Abdu'l-Bahá that he "wished to be made the leader of America," but 'Abdu'l-Bahá answered, "Cast aside all mention of the ruler and the ruled, the governor and the governed." See 'Abdu'l-Bahá (aboard the Cedric, on the way to America, March 26, 1912) in Mírzá Maḥmúd-i Zarfání, *Maḥmúd's Diary: The Diary of Mírzá Maḥmúd -i- Zarfání Chronicling 'Abdu'l Bahá's Journey to America*, trans. Mohi Sobhani and Shirley Macias (Oxford: George Ronald, 1997), 16. For the story of Kheiralla in America, see Robert H. Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America: Origins, 1892-1900 vol. 1* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985).

³⁰ See A. Q. Faizi, *Explanation of the Symbol of the Greatest Name* (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, n.d.) <http://www.bci.org/prophecy-fulfilled/grstname.htm>.

³¹ Marion Holley, "May Ellis Maxwell (May 9, 1940)," *A Compendium of Volumes of the Bahá'í World: An International Record*, I-XII, 82-110 of the Bahá'í Era (1925-1954), comp. Universal House of Justice. (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981), 519.

³² See Laura Clifford Dreyfus-Barney and Shoghi Effendi, "Biography of Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney" (1928), ed. Thomas Linard, http://bahai-library.com/dreyfus-barney_biography_hippolyte_dreyfus-barney; "Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney: An Appreciation by Shoghi Effendi" *The Bahá'í World*, vol. 3 (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1930) 210-11, 214; U. R. Giachery, "Laura Clifford Dreyfus-Barney, 1879-1974," *The Bahá'í World*, vol.16 (1973-1976), compiled by the Universal House of Justice (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), 535-38; Juliet Thompson, *The Diary of Juliet Thompson* (Los Angeles: Kálimat Press, 1983); Duane Troxel, "Alexander, Agnes: 70 years of service, Chapter 1," *Bahá'í News*, October 1983; Jan Teofil Jasion, *Never Be Afraid to Dare: The Story of 'General Jack'* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2001); For Louisa Mathew is, see Jasion, 22.

³³ May Maxwell, "'Abdu'l Bahá in Montreal," in *'Abdu'l Bahá in Canada*, rev. ed. (Thornhill, ON: Bahá'í Canada Publications, 1962, 1987) 41.

³⁴ See Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Rollers Rinks: Religion, Leisure and Identity in Late Nineteenth Century Small Town Ontario* (University of Toronto Press, 1996); Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning and the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997); Marguerite Van Die, *Religion, Family and Community in Victorian Canada: The Colbys of Carrolcroft* (Montreal, Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 187.

³⁵ Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 4.

³⁶ May Bolles to Agnes Alexander, quoted in Agnes Baldwin Alexander, "An Account Of How I Became A Baha'í And My Stays In Paris In 1901 And 1937 Written At The Request Of Mrs. Laura Dreyfus-Barney, Kyoto, Japan June 23, 1958," in "Autobiographical Materials of Agnes Alexander," ed. Thomas Linard, *Research Notes in Shaykhi, Bábí and Bahá'í Studies* 6 (August, 1997): np. <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/notes/alexand.htm>.

³⁷ Irving Hexam and Karla Poewe, *New Religions as Global Cultures: Making the Human Sacred* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 59-60.

³⁸ Hexam and Poewe, *New Religions as Global Cultures*, 59-60.

³⁹ Hexam and Poewe, *New Religions as Global Cultures*, 60-62.

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- ⁴⁰ Matthew 22:14.
- ⁴¹ Martha Vicinus and Bea Nergaard, eds., *Ever Yours, Florence Nightingale: Selected Letters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 17, 19, 22, 27.
- ⁴² Vicinus and Nergaard, *Ever Yours, Florence Nightingale*, 30.
- ⁴³ May Maxwell to Agnes Alexander, 184 Cote St. Antoine Road, Westmount, Montreal, Canada c.1902.
- ⁴⁴ E. Getsinger [pilgrim's notes], *Star of the West* 6, no. 5 (Nur 1, 71; June 5, 1915): 41.
- ⁴⁵ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678; Swengel, PA: Reiner Publications, 1974). For collective salvation through sacrifice, see 'Abdu'l Bahá, *Writings of 'Abdu'l Bahá* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), 73.
- ⁴⁶ May Bolles to Agnes Alexander, in Alexander, "An Account Of How I Became A Baha'i," np.
- ⁴⁷ Bahá'í vernacular resembled that of Quakers and other groups with references to "seekers," "friends," "brothers," "sisters," and other terms. More research as to the origins of this vernacular, some of it still in use, needs to be done.
- ⁴⁸ Troxel, "Alexander, Agnes," np.
- ⁴⁹ In mid-1899, Mrs. Charlotte Emilie Dixon, founder of the Washington, D.C. Bahá'í community, made a pilgrimage to 'Akká accompanied by her sister and her two daughters, Elanor and Louise (Boyle).
- ⁵⁰ Agnes Alexander in Alexander, "An account of how I became a Bahá'í, np.
- ⁵¹ Agnes Alexander in Alexander, "An account of how I became a Bahá'í, np. Bahá'í literature was scarce.
- ⁵² Alexander, "An account of how I became a Bahá'í," np.
- ⁵³ Alexander, "An account of how I became a Bahá'í, np.
- ⁵⁴ The Tablet reached her in Paris. Alexander, "An account of how I became a Bahá'í, np.
- ⁵⁵ Troxel, "Alexander, Agnes;" see also Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 101.
- ⁵⁶ Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 138-39.
- ⁵⁷ May Maxwell, "Thomas Breakwell," *The Bahá'í World*, vol. 7, 93 and 94 of the Bahá'í Era, April 1936-1938, (New York, Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1939), 701.
- ⁵⁸ May Maxwell to Mason Remey, Montreal, Dec. 3rd, 1913, Mason Remey Fonds, M472, B1 USBNA
- ⁵⁹ Although paternal, 'Abdu'l Bahá was seldom addressed as "Father," possibly because they saw God as Father and Bahá'u'lláh as "coming in the Glory of the Father." Hence the title was tacitly reserved. In the very early days, 'Abdu'l Bahá was "the son" [of Bahá'u'lláh]. This contributed to their confusion of His station with that of Christ.
- ⁶⁰ Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 143.
- ⁶¹ Juliet Thompson, "Diary of a Visit to Akka, Haifa, Syria, June 28, 1909," Agnes S. Parsons Papers M32 B19 F12, USNBA.
- ⁶² Nellie McClung, *In Times Like These* (Toronto: McCleod and Allen, 1915), 90-91.
- ⁶³ By 1989, about 7% were Iranian, and about 90% of Bahá'ís were from the non-Muslim "Third World." Bahá'ís now live in every region, the second most widespread religion after Christianity. See Moojan Momen, "Is the Bahá'í Faith a World Religion?" in *Soundings: Essays in Bahá'í Theology*, ed. Sen McGlinn (Christchurch, NZ: Open Circle Publishing, 1989), 55-64. http://bahai-library.com/momen_bahai_world_religion (accessed March 19, 2013).
- ⁶⁴ Mamie Bolles to W.S. Maxwell in Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 139.
- ⁶⁵ Corinne True, "Notes Taken at Acca, Saturday, March 2, 1907" in *Table Talks and Notes Taken at Acca by Corinne True and Mirza-Hadi*, trans. Dr. Ameen u llah Fareed (Chicago, IL.: Baha'i Publishing Society, 1907), 29. http://bahai-library.com/true_hadi_table_talks (accessed March 19, 2013).
- ⁶⁶ Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá'í World, 1950-1957* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971), 174.
- ⁶⁷ May Maxwell to Mason Remey, Montreal, Dec. 3rd, 1913, Mason Remey Fonds, M472, B1, USBNA
- ⁶⁸ Rajwantee Lakshiman-Lepain, *The Life of Thomas Breakwell* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1998) http://bahai-library.com/lakshiman-lepain_life_thomas_breakwell.
- ⁶⁹ May Maxwell, "Thomas Breakwell" *Bahá'í World*, vol. 7, 709.
- ⁷⁰ For female "friendship economies" see Selena Crosson, "*Pilgrim Sisters: Understanding the Role of Female Friendship in Victorian Canada in the Life of Frances Stewart (1794-1872)*", MA thesis, Trent University, 2005.
- ⁷¹ Nakhjavání remarks: "Her bohemianism may have been equal to that of all the artists put together whom her son frequented." See Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 88-89.
- ⁷² May Bolles Maxwell in Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 98.
- ⁷³ Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 223-224.
- ⁷⁴ Keith Ransom-Kehler, "Many Mansions," *Star of the West* 16, no. 9 (December 1925): 638-39.

- ⁷⁵ Helen Pilkington Bishop, "An Ordered Social Life," *Star of the West* 25, no. 9 (December 1934): 266-67. Excerpted from Helen Pilkington Bishop, *A Study of the Rise and Diffusion of the Bahá'í Religion*, B.A. Thesis, Reed College, Portland, Oregon (1933).
- ⁷⁶ May Maxwell to Mason Remey, Montreal, Dec. 3rd, 1913, Mason Remey Fonds, M472, B1, USBNA.
- ⁷⁷ May Maxwell, "A Brief Account of Thomas Breakwell," *The Bahá'í World*, vol. 7, 93 AND 94 of the Bahá'í Era, April 1936-1938 A.D. (New York, Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1939), 707.
- ⁷⁸ 'Abdu'l Bahá, "How to Make Life Successful, from the Writings of 'Abdu'l Bahá," *Star of the West* 16, no. 6 (September, 1925): 542.
- ⁷⁹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine, A Western Religious History* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 302.
- ⁸⁰ 'Abdul Bahá, "Address of 'Abdul Bahá at All Souls' Unitarian Church, 4th Ave. and 20th St. New York City, Rev. Leon A Harvey," *Star of the West* 3, no. 11 (Sept 27, 1912): 14.
- ⁸¹ See Shoghi Effendi, "From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, June 26, 1936: *Bahá'í News*, no. 105, p. 1, February 1937," in Helen Hornby, *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, © National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Ecuador (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), no. 1667. Also, 'Abdu'l Bahá, "From a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: Spiritualism and Psychic Phenomena," in Hornby, *Lights of Guidance*, no. 1731.
- ⁸² 'Abdu'l Bahá, "From a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Mrs. Ella Goodall Cooper: *Daily Lessons Received at Akka*, p. 78, no. 1979 ed.; in Hornby, *Lights of Guidance*, no. 1732.
- ⁸³ Marguerite McKay, "The Unseen Assassins," *Star of the West* 24, no. 8 (Nov. 1933): 240. Many still believed in the objective reality of such beings. Women disproportionately suffered from scapegoating accusations of witchcraft, and "possession" was used to justify physical and psychological abuse, so this doctrine benefitted women.
- ⁸⁴ Henry Coventry, quoted in Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 2008), 37-38.
- ⁸⁵ Edward Said has complained that "Orientals" were similarly assigned a feminized inferiority by western cultural Orientalism and imperialism. See Said, *Orientalism*, 207.
- ⁸⁶ Mary Hanford Ford, "The New Feeling of Brotherhood," *N.Y. Sun*, Feb. 14, 1925, rpt. *Star of the West*, 16, no. 1 (April, 1925): 397.
- ⁸⁷ Ford, "The New Feeling of Brotherhood," 397.
- ⁸⁸ In the late twentieth century, about one-third of Canadian Bahá'ís were of Aboriginal heritage. 'Abdu'l-Bahá attached "great importance to the indigenous population of America" saying, "should they be educated and guided, there can be no doubt that they will become so illumined as to enlighten the whole world..." See 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan* (c. 1916; Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), 104.
- ⁸⁹ Lua is usually called "the Banner," not the "Flag." See Edward Getsinger, "In Memoriam: Mrs. Lua Moore Getsinger," *Star of the West* 7, no. 4 (Azamat 1, 72; May 17, 1916): 29.
- ⁹⁰ For instance, in response to a Tablet (letter) addressed to "the maidservant of God, Jessie Revell, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania," 'Abdu'l Bahá states: "As to the new name thou hadst requested, let it be "Nareman." 'Abdu'l Bahá, *Star of the West* 10, no. 17 (Sultan 1, 75; January 19, 1920): 317.
- ⁹¹ 'Abdu'l Bahá to Lua Getsinger. Quoted by Lua in a letter written from Detroit to Purley M. Blake of Cincinnati, February 23, 1900, in Metelmann, *Lua Getsinger*, 35-36.
- ⁹² Lua Getsinger to Purley M. Blake, February 23, 1900, in Metelmann, *Lua Getsinger*, 36.
- ⁹³ Also Muzaffari'd-Dín Sháh. See E. Getsinger, "In Memoriam: Mrs. Lua Moore Getsinger," 29.
- ⁹⁴ Lua Getsinger to Purley M. Blake, February 23, 1900, quoted in Metelmann, *Lua Getsinger*, 36.
- ⁹⁵ Metelmann, *Lua Getsinger*, 25.
- ⁹⁶ Dr. Edward Getsinger quoted in Metelmann, *Lua Getsinger*, 351. Edward Getsinger's appreciative statements are even more telling when considering that the couple underwent a bitter divorce during this period.
- ⁹⁷ See Thompson, *The Diary of Juliet Thompson*, 311-12; also Metelmann, *Lua Getsinger*, 157-58.
- ⁹⁸ May Maxwell, "A Tribute to Lua Getsinger, Montreal, Canada, 1916," *A Compendium of Volumes of the Bahá'í World I-XII, 1925-1954*, compiled by The Universal House of Justice (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981), 528. http://bahai-library.com/may_ellis_maxwell_bw
- ⁹⁹ Maxwell, "A Tribute to Lua Getsinger," 528. For a brief description of the Bahá'í conception of the afterlife, see J. E. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* (1923; Wilmette, IL: US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), 189-190.

- ¹⁰⁰ Edward Getsinger accused Lua of infidelity with “Fareed” (sic) [Amínu'lláh Faríd] and another Bahá'í. Dr. Farid was later expelled from the Faith as a “Covenant Breaker” by ‘Abdu'l Bahá. See *Star of the West* 5 (1914):237; also Moojan Momen, “‘Covenant, The, and Covenant-breaker,” for *Bahá'í Encyclopedia*,” Bahá'í Library Online, http://bahai-library.com/momen_encyclopedia_covenant. The gossipy association of Lua with Farid led to suspicions of her unfaithfulness to the Covenant. See Metelmann, *Lua Getsinger*, 320.
- ¹⁰¹ See *Star of the West* 6, no. 12 (Oct. 16, 1915): 89-96; see Metelmann, *Lua Getsinger*, 322, 332-339.
- ¹⁰² ‘Abdul Bahá, “Words of ‘Abdul Bahá: From tablet quoted in Diary of Mirza Ahmad Sohrab,” *Star of the West* 7, no. 19 (Ola 1, 72; March 2, 1917):196.
- ¹⁰³ Susan Stiles Maneck, “Táhirih: A Religious Paradigm of Womanhood,” *Táhirih in History: Perspective on Qurratu'l - ‘Ayn from East and West*, Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 16, ed. Sabir Afaqi (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 2004), 185.
- ¹⁰⁴ Majella Franzmann, *Women and Religion* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 50.
- ¹⁰⁵ van den Hoonard, *The Origins of the Bahá'í Community of Canada, 1898-1948*, 232.
- ¹⁰⁶ Rosemary Radford Reuther, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press), 122.
- ¹⁰⁷ For Mary and Martha, see Luke 10:38-42. Deborah (Judges 4) was an Israeli prophetess/ judge, but her mention was scarce by the late 1800s. See Marilyn Färdig Whiteley, *Canadian Methodist Women, 1766-1925: Marys, Marthas, Mothers in Israel*, Studies in Women and Religion, 10 (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier Press, 2005), 2-3.
- ¹⁰⁸ Bahíyyih Khánúm - *The Greatest Holy Leaf: A compilation from Bahá'í sacred texts and writings of the Guardian of the Faith and Bahíyyih Khánúm's own letters*, compiled by The Research Department at the Bahá'í World Centre (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre Publications, 1982), 62.
- ¹⁰⁹ “Notes of the Conversation between the Master and Miss Julia Pearson recorded by Marian Kheiralla, 26 February 1899,” USBNA. Printed as *Conversation February 26, 1899, At Acca: Answers in Reply to Various Questions*. Also Hogenson, 139.
- ¹¹⁰ “Notes of the Conversation between the Master and Miss Julia Pearson,” recorded by Marian Kheiralla, 26 February 1899,” USBNA. Also Hogenson, 139.
- ¹¹¹ “Notes of the Conversation between the Master and Miss Julia Pearson,” recorded by Marian Kheiralla, 26 February 1899,” USBNA. Also in edited form in “From Notes taken at Acca, February 26, 1899, by Miss Pearson,” *Star of the West* 12, no. 14 (Kowl 1, 77; November 23, 1921): 236.
- ¹¹² ‘Abdu'l Bahá, *Compilations, Bahá'í Prayers*, 9, 55.
- ¹¹³ ‘Abdu'l Bahá, *Tablets of ‘Abdul-Bahá Abbas*, vol. 2, trans. E.G. Browne (1915; New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1940), 268.
- ¹¹⁴ George Townsend, *The Heart of the Gospel* (1939; Oxford, UK: George Ronald, 1951), 133-134.
- ¹¹⁵ Laura Clifford Barney, *Some Answered Questions: ‘Abdu'l Bahá, Collected and translated from the Persian* (London: W Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1908; Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981), 126.
- ¹¹⁶ ‘Abdu'l Bahá, *‘Abdu'l Bahá in London: Addresses and Notes of Conversations* (1912; London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987), 88. This book was originally published “through the good offices of Lady Blomfield.”
- ¹¹⁷ See van den Hoonard, *Origins*, 231.
- ¹¹⁸ ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, “Talk at Bahá'í Banquet Rauscher's Hall, Washington, D. C., 9 November 1912, notes by Joseph H. Hannen,” *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), 420-421.
- ¹¹⁹ ‘Abdu'l Bahá, *‘Abdu'l-Bahá in London*, 104-05.
- ¹²⁰ ‘Abdu'l Bahá, *‘Abdu'l Bahá in London*, 104-105.
- ¹²¹ Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America, Early Expansion 1900-1912*, vol.2, 153.
- ¹²² Letter from May Maxwell to Lucienne Miguette, 11 February, n.d. Miguette was an early believer in France.
- ¹²³ ‘Abdu'l Bahá, “Answers of Abdu'l Baha (the servant of God) Haifa, July 20th, 1910: *daughter of the Kingdom!*” translated by Monever Khánúm, *Star of the West* 2, no. 6 (Rahmat; June 24, 1911): 8.
- ¹²⁴ ‘Abdu'l Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith*, 392.
- ¹²⁵ Thompson, *The Diary of Juliet Thompson*, 361.
- ¹²⁶ Although financially challenged, Juliet travelled in upper class and artistic circles. She became a Bahá'í in Paris, sponsored at art school by Alice Pike Barney. Gail, preface to *The Diary of Juliet Thompson*, xviii-x.
- ¹²⁷ Gail, preface to *The Diary of Juliet Thompson*, xviii-x.
- ¹²⁸ Gail, preface to *The Diary of Juliet Thompson*, xv.

- ¹²⁹ Marguerite "Daisy" Pumpelly Smyth, preface to Juliet Thompson, *I, Mary Magdalene* (New York: Delphic Studios, 1940).
- ¹³⁰ Smythe, in Thompson, *I, Mary Magdalene*.
- ¹³¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *On Divine Philosophy*, compiled by Elizabeth Fraser Chamberlain (Boston, MA: Tudor Press, 1918), 50.
- ¹³² Metelmann, *Lua Getsinger*, 332.
- ¹³³ Vladimir Tumanov, "Mary versus Eve: Paternal Uncertainty and the Christian View of Women," *Neophilologus: International Journal of Modern and Mediaeval Language and Literature* 95 (4) 2011: 507-521. Ethnic variations of the "Madonna/whore" dichotomy include the "Indian princess/squaw," and the Asian "wife/courtesan" dichotomy.
- ¹³⁴ Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Carolyn Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils And Pleasures Of The City, 1880-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).
- ¹³⁵ Sorcha Pollak, "The Magdalene Laundries: Irish Report Exposes a National Shame," *Time World*, Feb. 07, 2013, world.time.com/2013/02/07/the-magdalene-laundries; See also Joni Mitchell, "The Magdalene Laundries," performed by Joni Mitchell. On *Turbulent Indigo*. Track 6. Warner Music, 1994. Re-recorded on *Tears of Stone*. Track 4. NY: RCA, 1999.
- ¹³⁶ Metelmann, *Lua Getsinger*, 333.
- ¹³⁷ The "Manifestations" are the major Prophets. See Keith Ransom-Kehler, "Report on World Unity Conferences, Nineteenth Annual Convention of the Baha'is of the United States and Canada, Windsor Hotel, Montreal, April 29-May 3, 1927, p. 3." M8 Literary Notes, National Bahá'í Convention, 1927, 33 Box 23, F 26, USNBA.
- ¹³⁸ Lil Abdo Osborne, "The Lioness of God in the Baha'i Faith," *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review* 3, no. 2 (2012): 199.
- ¹³⁹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "9 June, 1912, Talk at Unitarian Church, Fifteenth Street and Girard Avenue, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Notes by Edna McKinney," *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 174-175.
- ¹⁴⁰ Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine*, 122.
- ¹⁴¹ Ann Graham Brock, *Mary Magdalene, the First Apostle: The Struggle for Authority* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Karen L. King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2003); Valerie Abrahamsen, "Human and Divine: The Marys in Early Christian Tradition" in *A Feminist Companion to Mariology*, eds. Amy-Jill Levine with Maria Mayo Robbins (London: T & T Clark International, 2005); Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Meaning of Mary Magdalene: Discovering the Woman at the Heart of Christianity* (Boston: Shambhala, 2010); Jane Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene: Legends, Apocrypha, and the Christian Testament* (New York/London: Continuum, 2004); Antti Marjanen *The Woman Jesus Loved: Mary Magdalene in the Nag Hammadi Library and Related Documents* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Esther de Boer, *Mary Magdalene: Beyond the Myth*, trans. John Bowden (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997); *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene: Legends, Apocrypha, and the Christian Testament*. (New York: Continuum, 2002). See also: Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).
- ¹⁴² Anna Fedele, *Looking for Mary Magdalene: Alternative Pilgrimage and Ritual Creativity at Catholic Shrines in France* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2012), 4.
- ¹⁴³ Pussy Riot, "Virgin Mary, Put Putin Away" and "Putin Got Scared" in "Lyrics of Songs of Pussy Riot," *Free Pussy Riot*, <http://freepussyriot.org/content/lyrics-songs-pussy-riot>. Another site translates this as "The glorious Madonna will teach us to fight, The feminist Magdalena stood up for democracy" in the song "Putin Pissed Himself" in Helen Stuhr-Rommereim, "Pussy Riot in Translation" (17 August, 2012), *Full Stop: Reviews, Interviews, Marginalia*, <http://www.full-stop.net/2012/08/17/blog/helen-stuhr-rommereim/pussy-riot-in-translation/> (accessed 20/06/ 2013).
- ¹⁴⁴ Reverend Lucy Winkett, "Thought for the Day-Rev. Lucy Winkett 16/08/2012," BBC Radio 4, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00xgfw5>, quoted in "The iconography of Pussy Riot: religion," *Lesbilicious*, <http://www.lesbilicious.co.uk/the-iconography-of-pussy-riot/> (accessed 20/06/ 2013). See also Lucy Winkett, "Go Tell! Thinking About Mary Magdalene," *Feminist Theology: The Journal of the Britain & Ireland School of Feminist Theology* 29 (2002):19-31.
- ¹⁴⁵ A. L. M. Nicolas' "Essai sur le Shaykhisme I & II" (Librarie Paul Geuthner, Rue Mazarine, Paris, vol. 1, 1910; vol. 2, 1914); A. L. M. Nicolas' "Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad dit le Bab" (Librairie Critique, Rue Notre-Dame-de-Lorette, Paris, 1908); Lord Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question* (2 vols.) (Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1892);

Edward G. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians - Impressions as to the Life, Character, & Thought of the People of Persia - Received during Twelve Months' Residence in that Country in the Year 1887-1888* (1893, Messrs A & C Black Ltd.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927).

¹⁴⁶ Bahíyyih Nakhjavání, *Asking Questions: A Challenge to Fundamentalism* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1990).

¹⁴⁷ Louise R. Waite, "The Bahai Revelation," *Star of the West* 12 No. 1 (Bahá'í, 77; Mar. 21, 1921): 10.

¹⁴⁸ Moojan Momen, "Usuli, Akhbari, Shaykhi, Babi: The Tribulations of a Qazvin Family," *Iranian Studies* 36, no. 3 (2003): 317-337.

¹⁴⁹ Martha Root, *Tahirih the Pure* (1938; Karachi, Pakistan; Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1981).

¹⁵⁰ See Šābir Āfāqī and Jan Teofil Jasion, *Tahirih in History: Perspectives on Qurratu'l-'Ayn from East and West*, Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 16 (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 2004).

¹⁵¹ 'Abdu'l Bahá, "'The Lofty Summit of Unchanging Purpose' Words of Abdul Baha to Lua Getsinger, Ramleh, Egypt, August 19, 1913. From the Diary of Mirza Ahmad Sohrab." *Star of the West* 4, no. 12, (Elm, October 16, 1913): 208, 210.

¹⁵² Root, *Tahirih the Pure*, 33.

¹⁵³ Marzieh Gail, in Martha L. Root, *Tahirih The Pure*, rev. ed. (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1981) 5,6,11.

¹⁵⁴ Root, *Tahirih The Pure*, 34.

¹⁵⁵ Root, *Tahirih The Pure*, 112.

¹⁵⁶ S. Cobb, "The Worldwide Influence of Qurratul 'Ayn," *Star of the West* 18, no. 2 (May 1927): 44.

¹⁵⁷ Root, *Tahirih The Pure*, 113.

¹⁵⁸ Root, *Tahirih The Pure*, 113-14. The Bahá'í of Karachi, India was Mr. Isfaniyár K.B. Bakhtiyári.

¹⁵⁹ Root, *Tahirih The Pure*, 114.

¹⁶⁰ Maxwell, "A Tribute to Lua Getsinger," 528.

¹⁶¹ Suzanne Rodriguez, *Wild Heart, A Life: Natalie Clifford Barney's Journey from Victorian America to Belle Epoque Paris* (New York: Ecco, 2002):140-41.

¹⁶² Jean Chalon, *Portrait of a Seductress: The World of Natalie Barney*, trans. Carol Barko (NY: Crown Publishers, 1979) 3-4, 25. In the Natalie-Laura-Alice trio, Laura, three years younger than Natalie, was the "responsible one," managing their family fortune after her father's death. Both sisters were childless.

¹⁶³ Laura Clifford Barney, *God's Heroes: A Drama in Five Acts* (1910; Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2010), 62-63. See also "News from the Orient, Esphahan [Persia]," *Star of the West* 2, no. 3 (Jamal, April 28, 1911): 6.

¹⁶⁴ Bertha Hyde Kirkpatrick, "A Remedy for 'The Confusion of Tongues,'" *Star of the West* 20, no. 1 (April, 1929): 29. The review compared Charles W. Ferguson, "Baha'ism" in *The Confusion of Tongues* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1928), and Upton Sinclair, *The Profits of Religion: An Essay in Economic Interpretation* (Pasadena, CA: Author, 1918).

¹⁶⁵ Martha Root, *Tahirih* (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1981), 98.

¹⁶⁶ Despard was a suffragist, a founder and President of the Women's Freedom League and the Irish Workers' Party.

¹⁶⁷ Charlotte Despard, "A Woman Apostle in Persia," *The Vote*, 30 Sept., 7 Oct., and 14 Oct., 191, London: Women's Freedom League, cited in Abdo Osborne, "The Lioness of God in the Baha'i Faith," 199. Abdo Osborne notes that Despard did not describe Tahirih as a "suffragette."

¹⁶⁸ Florence E. Pinchon, "Wings Over Europe," *Star of the West* 23, no. 1 (April 1932): 248-49

¹⁶⁹ Cobb, "The World-Wide Influence of Qurratu'l Ayn," 44.

¹⁷⁰ Maneck, 1.

¹⁷¹ Sir Francis Younghusband, *The Gleam: Being an account of the life of Nija Svabhava, pseud.* (1920), quoted in Root, *Tahirih The Pure*, 113.

¹⁷² Barney, *God's Heroes*, 100-101.

¹⁷³ Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992); Farzaneh Milani, *Words Not Swords: Iranian Women Writers and the Freedom of Movement* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011). Jian Khodadad, "Tahirih Qurratu'l-Ayn: Inaugurator of the Iranian Women's Movement, and Her Significance in Contemporary Iran," First International Conference on the Iranian Diaspora (Boston, Massachusetts, April 2004). Jian Khodadad, "Persian Joan of Arc, Tahirih Qurratul-Ayn: The Legacy," August 12, 2004. <http://www.iranian.com/Women/2004/August/JK/index.html>.

¹⁷⁴ Azar Nafizi [discussing Shirin Ebadi], *PBS NewsHour*, October 10, 2003. http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/middle_east/july-dec03/nobel_10-10.html (accessed March 19, 2013).

CHAPTER 3. A New Paradigm: Bahá'í Millennial Religious Feminism

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. Not until the world of women becomes equal to the world of men in the acquisition of virtues and perfections, can success and prosperity be attained as they ought to be.

‘Abdu'l-Bahá, “Tablet to the Hague” (1919)¹

Introduction

The social flux and millennial impulses that inspired May Maxwell and those linked to her to seek mystical solutions simultaneously provoked them, like other feminist groups, to seek to apply moral and religious ethics to the reform of individuals, groups and social institutions. One of the most attractive aspects of the Bahá'í Faith for women was that Bahá'u'lláh made the realization of “equal rights and privileges for women and men” a precondition for the attainment of that broader unity that would “ensure the well-being and security of all peoples.”² As religious scholar Mary Pat Fisher has noted: “Of all the global religions, the Bahá'í Faith is unique in promoting equality of the sexes as one of its fundamental principles.”³ Inasmuch as the equality of men and women was seen as an essential requisite for human progress, advancing gender equality was integral to all Bahá'í reform efforts. Feminist goals such as suffrage, female education, and legal equality were firmly supported by Bahá'ís, but were seen as aspects of a much broader campaign to reorder planetary gender relations. Bahá'í women believed that they had a mandate to advance the equality of women in all realms of human affairs. Conversely, they believed that furthering other foundational Bahá'í principles that underlay the idealized new World Order, such as peace, the elimination of prejudices, economic justice, and universal education, would work synergistically to support and foster female equality. This dissertation argues that because the Bahá'í pledge to establish global female equality was an integral component of their religious doctrine and millennial vision, which then drove a variety of reform activities, the form of feminism they practiced can be characterized as “millennial religious feminism.” That is to say, the feminist, millennial, religious, and reform aspects of their worldview were inseparable, interlocking and mutually incentivising.

Bahá'í women both resembled and differed from mainstream feminist, missionary, reform and millennial groups. Some of their rhetoric resembled that of other groups and they undertook similar reform activities, often in collaboration with like-minded non-Bahá'ís. Opportunity, personal interest, local conditions, and the aims of the leadership at any given time, dictated Bahá'í women's engagement in particular projects, choosing reforms that coincided with the doctrinal principles of their faith. Their feminist identity also conformed to Bahá'í teachings. For example, from the inception of the Faith, Bahá'ís were transnationally oriented, self-consciously locating themselves globally as “citizens of the world,” based on Bahá'u'lláh's race, class, and gender-levelling statement: “The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens.”⁴ The Bahá'í leadership, in the persons of ‘Abdu'l Bahá and His successor, Shoghi Effendi, actively promoted feminist ideals. They also enjoined male adherents' support, whereas Judeo-Christian feminists were often positioned in opposition to their own religious traditions and

hegemonic patriarchal familial, social, and clerical hierarchies. Similarly, while female equality was a fundamental Bahá'í aim, it was not a common priority of other millennial groups.

Bahá'ís maintained that, although critically important, it was not enough for women to gain the rights, opportunities and privileges of men. Rather, androcentric attitudes that privileged attributes identified as masculine, must shift. The Bahá'í millenarian vision of a new World Order called for a “rebalancing” of society, that saw laudable qualities as more gender neutral. They advocated that both sexes adopt more stereotypically “feminine” qualities, as these were held to be efficacious for a population reaching its planetary maturity.⁵ As ‘Abdu’l Bahá wrote:

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 ascendancy. 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.⁶

“First Wave” Religious Feminism:

Between the 1850s and the 1920s western countries experienced a spreading “woman movement,” now usually referred to as the “first wave” of feminism. “Feminism” is defined in this thesis as the active support and advocacy of the equality of women, as individuals and as an identifiable group. Feminists demanded emancipation for the female half of the population from oppressive ideologies of women’s inferiority, entrenched discriminatory systems of laws, male-only political and military regimes, the denial of economic and educational opportunities to women, violence directed at women and children, and sexual double standards.⁷ The burgeoning women’s movement spawned a myriad of organizations aimed at bettering conditions that adversely affected women and by extension, society as a whole. Some of the more prominent female reformers addressed peace, female education, suffrage, Temperance, social purity and hygiene, social welfare, and economic justice.⁸ Women’s efforts were thus diverse, and groups often disagreed on the best means to achieve their common goal of improving the state of women in society. In the early twentieth century, most groups coalesced around suffrage, but even on this pivotal issue, there was disagreement. Feminism was not always welcomed, meeting anti-feminist resistance from men and, to a lesser degree, some women and women’s organizations.⁹

Recognizing the movement’s diversity, historical scholarship has now identified various “first-wave” feminisms. These include maternal or social feminism, equality feminism, socialist or material feminism, liberal feminism, agrarian feminism and, more recently, religiously motivated feminism. Carol Bacchi, Randi Warne, Janice Fiamengo and others argue that religious commitment was a powerful incentive for many “first-wave” feminists. Much of the impetus for reform came from the desire of Anglo-Protestant women to reinstate (implicitly or explicitly Christian) moral values in a society experiencing social and economic dislocation and inequity due to factors such as industrialization, the rise of modern capitalism and rapid urbanization.¹⁰ Religion played a strong role in society and women’s lives. Bahá'ís were not

unique in being motivated by religious impulses or framing their reform efforts using creedal rationales. However, Bahá'í women had different organizational and leadership structures than Judeo-Christian women, and relied on a distinctive “blueprint,” garnered from Bahá'í scriptural prescriptions, that framed the gender-equitable “new World Order” they sought to build.

First-wave feminists generally believed in the regenerative power of spiritual ethics, and many women saw religiously defined organizations as appropriate vehicles for reform impulses, in spite of the fact that feminist activism could, and often did, cause friction in mainstream religious organizations. Conversely, reform groups, even non-sectarian ones, were frequently purveyors of religious doctrine. Overt religious declarations were typical of the era, as moral imperatives underpinned almost all reform efforts.¹¹ For example, “the application of the Golden Rule,” the core ethical teaching of Christianity, was entrenched as the guiding principle of the *National Council of Women*, a Canadian feminist umbrella organization.¹² As historian Barbara Roberts observes about feminist activists who shared a social-gospel perspective, but whose affiliations ranged from Christian to socialist to communist, deep religious commitment tended to be a “radical and activating rather than conservative and privatizing” influence on successive generations of feminists.¹³ For example, Canadian writer, suffragist, reformer and church activist Nellie McClung, who historian Veronica Strong-Boag places “in the mainstream of turn-of-the-century feminism,” was unabashedly religious. In fact, Randi Warne argues that McClung used her fame as an author and feminist as a “pulpit” to promote her Christian social activism.¹⁴ McClung often enlisted religious rationales to refute a passive acquiescence to historic injustices, including inequities suffered by women. In 1922 she wrote: “Everytime we say that human nature, meaning the evils of human nature, cannot be changed we deny the success of Christ’s mission.”¹⁵ Refusing to blame God for humanly created troubles, she wrote: “Thy will be done” is a call to fight- to fight for better conditions, for moral and physical health, for sweeter manners, cleaner laws, for a fair chance for everyone, even women!”¹⁶ By “enlisting” God as her ally, she effectively undermined human (and church) opposition to her reform agenda. British and American feminists demonstrated no less religiosity. Claiming a universal (retroactive) divine sanction for feminism, British suffragist Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence declared:

The Women’s movement takes its stand upon the ground that Womanhood is a great and glorious conception of the Divine Mind. Womanhood as a glorious idea is the fundamental conception of all the greatest religions and of all the greatest of the old civilizations.¹⁷

Agnes Maule Machar, another Canadian “Christian radical” feminist reformer, also looked to religion for personal and social regeneration. Machar campaigned for protective labour legislation and supported organizations such as the *Young Women’s Christian Association* and the *National Council of Women*, among others, as well as her Presbyterian Church’s mission for orphans and children in India.¹⁸ Like Nellie McClung, the literature Machar penned was a platform for unrepentantly didactic maxims affirming “how much good can be done by anyone, however lowly, who endeavours, in the strength and love that Christ can impart, to live earnestly and truly the life He has appointed...”¹⁹ Janice Fiamengo disputes secular interpretations of Machar’s life that emphasize her social activism while downplaying or treating in a condescending way her religiosity. She argues that Machar’s Christian and social commitment

were inseparable; an evangelical faith that led to individual salvation was not only “the source of moral life but also... the cornerstone of all effective social systems and ameliorative programs.”²⁰ Similarly, Bahá’í women explicitly linked all aspects of their religious, feminist and reform efforts to the greater doctrinal goal of establishing a millennial new World Order.

Most early Bahá’í activists such as May Maxwell and those associated with her would not likely be considered "radical" first-wave feminists, even though their choice of religion was heterodox, and undoubtedly they were thought by many to be peculiar. Nor did they as a group engage in radically confrontational or iconoclastic activities. Unlike militant “suffragettes,” Quakers, or others who practised conscientious civil disobedience, Bahá’ís were obligated by their creed to be obedient to laws and government. Although they sought to remould global social, political and legal systems, unlike socialist or social gospel reformers, Bahá’ís avoided involvement in partisan politics.²¹ Their methods of teaching their doctrines to others and instituting reforms were usually conciliatory and persuasive. As May Maxwell explained,

It is wiser for you to become friendly and sympathetic with people before you say a word – prepare the soil with the warmth of your love – just as the sun prepares the soil in Spring, or the seed will not grow. Remove the stones and weeds from the soil – that is to say, in a kind way try to remove prejudices – race, religion, etc. Uproot narrow superstitious ideas by suggesting broader and deeper ideas. Never Oppose People’s Ideas and Statements but give them a little nobler way of seeing life – such words and thoughts will take effect...²²

A unique aspect of Bahá’í millennial feminism was the central influence of their “Oriental” leader, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in shaping the feminist thinking of western followers, challenging assumptions that the promotion of women’s equality required female leadership. Feminist cultural critic Negar Mottahedeh states that “‘Abdu’l Bahá’s constant emphasis on women’s rights” led newspaper mogul William Randolph Hearst to “headline ‘Abdu’l Bahá as a suffragist.”²³ Unlike most western feminists, who belonged to organizations at arm’s length from ecclesiastical or rabbinical authority, Bahá’í women gave their religious leadership (in the persons of ‘Abdu’l Bahá and Shoghi Effendi) a high degree of credence. Although Bahá’ís accepted the centralized authority of these two unique male persons, there was no general transference of authority to other men by virtue of their sex. For Bahá’ís, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s feminist views lent coherence and continuity to their religious, millennial, and feminist beliefs.

In this, as in other ways, ‘Abdu’l Bahá defied easy categorization. He was a “venerable” white-bearded figure with turban and robes, who fulfilled “the usual conceptions of an eastern sage,” as Rev. F.R. Griffin observed when introducing Him in 1912 in his Church of the Messiah in Montreal; however, Griffin said, “The strangest part of all about him is that nothing is strange.”²⁴ An eastern patriarch with modern ideas and a warm, easy comfort with westerners, ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s non-authoritarian leadership style, based mainly on example, encouragement and exhortation, appealed to “modern” women who questioned hierarchy and masculine authority. However, for devout early Bahá’í women, to oppose the dictums of ‘Abdu’l Bahá would have

been as unthinkable as for devout Christian women to discount the teachings of Christ. While ‘Abdu’l Bahá dispensed guidance, mainly in “Tablets” (letters) shared among believers and printed in the Bahá’í journal, *Star of the West*, the combination of physical and cultural distance, coupled with a generally non-interventionist approach, meant western women, cradled in an ethos of “sisterhood” that nurtured close bonds of female friendship, collectively shaped their own transformative identities. After ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s death in 1921, Bahá’ís attributed unerring guidance, although not the same religious station, to His successor, grandson Shoghi Effendi.

The Bahá’í Faith disallowed a professional clergy, and only gradually developed an administrative order after the turn of the twentieth century. Sociologist Lynn Echeverria suggests that lacking a ministry, Bahá’í women underwent a process of “lifelong self-ordination” whereby they came to know their own theology, applied the teachings in their life, and shared their understandings with others.²⁵ Therefore, Bahá’í women, in contrast to women of older religious traditions, did not have an entrenched male-dominated clerical structure against which to react, the impetus for much religious feminism. Thus Bahá’ís largely were spared the intellectual and spiritual dissonance or ambivalence suffered by many feminists and missionary women who found themselves at times opposing their own religious history, traditions and leadership. Having such strong central figures in the Bahá’í Faith might potentially incite fears in women of excessive authoritarianism, but this was balanced by a doctrinal emphasis on “independent investigation of truth.” As early Bahá’í teacher and reformer Keith Ransom-Kehler explained:

Interpreting the great command of Bahá'u'lláh that stands among the Bahá’í principles as "The Independent Investigation of Reality," 'Abdu'l Bahá says that no man should follow blindly his ancestors and forefathers, but should see with his own eyes, hear with his own ears, and investigate truth in order that he may find The Truth; for the religion of ancestors is based upon blind imitation; therefore men should break from tradition and seek truth for themselves.²⁶

Because of the principle-based governance style of Bahá’í leadership, and the difficulties of communication between Haifa and the West, only general instructions were usually given to adherents. Although there were a few early elected administrative bodies, individuals were mainly self-governing. Bahá’ís routinely were expected to figure out how to accomplish whatever task they had taken on. When Bahá’í women initiated individual or collective reform initiatives, they tended to pray, read the “Writings” and other directives, study and debate aspects of the principles, and act as their circumstances would allow. Although personally responsible for their spiritual well-being, Bahá’ís were encouraged to cooperate and increase “unity.” This led to a flattened style of management where members relied on friendship networks more than hierarchical governance, amplifying women’s scope. This organizational pattern was the preferred style of most women’s voluntary organizations and was easily adapted to by westerners. The relative freedom of thought, action and movement, and ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s and Shoghi Effendi’s trust in their resourcefulness, empowered Bahá’í women, strengthening their sense of ownership of the Faith and shared identity. Bahá’í liberalism was not entirely *laissez-faire* or open-ended. Bahá’ís were enjoined to “consult” and strive for unanimity (or at least majority), but the final arbiter, if required, was either the sacred writings or their leadership.

Bahá'í women's relationship with 'Abdu'l Bahá and later, Shoghi Effendi, differed markedly from that of many Judeo-Christian feminists, whose religious convictions did not necessarily translate into support for leadership or doctrinal interpretations offered by clerics or religious institutions. For instance, Nellie McClung frequently castigated the churches for their reluctance to support women both inside and outside the church, where females continued to be excluded from positions of formal power or authority in masculinist hierarchies.²⁷ Formulating Biblical arguments to lend weight to her opposition, McClung quoted from *Genesis* saying, "God created man in his own image...male and female created he them... [and] gave them dominion, etc.," which led her to conclude that "men and women got away to a fair start. There was no inequality to begin with....Whatever inequality has crept in since, has come without God's sanction."²⁸ Although feminists like McClung might object to the historic subjection of women by church "fathers," for many nineteenth and early twentieth-century women, constrained by patriarchal economic and social structures and the vestiges of a Victorian "cult of domesticity," religion provided a vehicle for substantive reform, as well as an effective bridge to a wider involvement in society.²⁹ Beyond being a source of inspiration, religious vocation increased women's social and moral influence, allowed more latitude in gender boundaries, and enabled some women to rise to positions of leadership, albeit mainly in the management of other women.

However, traditional religion could also be constraining. Despite remaining a member of her church, McClung's feminist stance placed her in the awkward position of refuting centuries of Christian thought by interrogating the scriptural authority of the masculinist clerical bias of religion, in order to reclaim it for women. She complained, "Man long ago decided that woman's sphere was anything he did not wish to do himself...The church has been dominated by men and so religion has been given a masculine interpretation, and I believe the Protestant religion has lost much when it lost the idea of the motherhood of God."³⁰ She charged that the "Christian Church has departed in some places from Christ's teaching-noticeably in its treatment of women," citing the egalitarian stance of Christ, "a true democrat [who] made no distinction between men and women."³¹ Bahá'ís would have agreed. Their ideology of "progressive revelation" similarly separated the original teachings of the divine Prophets from what they saw as encrustations and perversions of the message by fallible human clerical and cultural dogmas. This critical lens allowed Bahá'í women to realign their religious identities by dismissing what they saw as obsolete "man-made" imperatives aimed at women. Bahá'í women believed that religion required female-affirming teachings suitable to the current stage of human development.

Bahá'í Feminism and the "First Wave"

Western Bahá'í women as a group supported most of the aims of the early twentieth-century "woman movement," but unlike many western feminists did not engage in the "victim" discourse which historian Antoinette Burton argues marked women as "wounded" citizens, through the use of abolitionist (i.e. women=slaves) metaphors, or nativist comparisons with non-white "foreign" males, who were cast as more ignorant and/or degenerate than Anglo-American (white) women, but eligible to vote by virtue of sex alone.³² As Mariana Valverde notes, North American cartoons supporting women's suffrage showed overtly racist images of "ethnic" Chinese and Aboriginal men voting, while respectable Protestant ladies remained outside the

polling booths.³³ In contrast, Bahá'í feminists advocated universal suffrage, regardless of gender, racio-ethnic, cultural, national, religious, or class origins, in part because suffrage was a prerequisite for the democratic election of a body of international institutions of governance, such as a World Parliament, anticipated in their millennial World Order.

Bahá'ís frequently addressed women's groups on women's rights and universal suffrage, using the "suffrage martyr," Táhirih, as their primary exemplar. When 'Abdu'l Bahá visited Europe and North America between 1911 and 1913 during the latter part of His life, the suffrage debate was raging. In London, it was reported: "'Abdu'l-Bahá's interest in women's work and progress is well known, and among the notable leaders who came to see him, may be mentioned Mrs. Annie Besant, President of the Theosophical Society, the organizers of various suffrage bodies, civic and philanthropic workers, the principals of several woman's colleges and lady doctors."³⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá delivered numerous talks to western audiences on the principle of the equality of men and women, not shying away from feminist issues. In Paris, 'Abdu'l Bahá stated:

In this Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, the women 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. Rest ye assured.

Do ye not look upon the present conditions; in the not far distant future the world of women will become all-refulgent and all-glorious, For His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh Hath Willed It so! 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.³⁵

'Abdu'l Bahá's endorsement of universal suffrage and women's inevitable entry into the larger public sphere, accepted as a dictum by His followers, was an almost unknown sentiment among male leaders in the East, and not even one widely shared by male leaders in "progressive" western nations. For example, when Manitoba Premier Sir Rodmond Roblin was petitioned in 1914 to grant Manitoba women the provincial vote, he did not view it as an "inalienable right." Rather, he opined that female suffrage was "illogical and absurd," and would "break up the home." He warned, "The majority of women are emotional and very often guided by misdirected enthusiasms, and if possessed of the franchise would be a menace rather than an aid"³⁶

'Abdu'l Bahá's support of women's rights was seen by His followers as a religious point as much as a feminist one. The equality of women was necessary and inevitable *because* "His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh Hath Willed It so!"³⁷ Like the harmony of science and religion, or the global overhaul of economic and political systems, female equality was an essential facet of the millennial World Order. For Bahá'ís, therefore, establishing women's rights was not only a social justice and modernizing impulse, but an integral part of the alignment of the world with the principles of Bahá'u'lláh, which they believed would undergird a new global era. Most feminists saw more equitable rights for women as a justice issue, and welcomed female suffrage as a means of expediting other reform agendas, such as Temperance. Bahá'ís also sought justice and reform, but beyond this, they believed that the lack of equality between women and men

stymied *all* human progress. As ‘Abdu’l Bahá stated, gender inequality is a “cause of human dissension... of discord and separation, for so long as humankind remains unequally divided male and female in right and importance, no unity can be established....”³⁸ From a Bahá’í point of view, unity was the “foundation of progress,” the “universal active force” required to galvanize peace, prosperity, equity and justice.³⁹ Therefore gender equality was vital to humanity’s success.

In the Bahá’í schema, to advance equality, both males and females were expected to acquire education, and it was “obligatory” for both sexes to “engage in a trade or profession” according to opportunity and capacity.⁴⁰ As American Bertha Hyde Kirkpatrick speculated: “Put into actual practice the principle of the oneness of mankind means, besides world government, employment for all, ‘no idle rich and no idle poor,’ justice to both capital and labor, education for all.”⁴¹ Both men and women were to engage in “an occupation which would profit themselves and others,” whether for remuneration or as voluntary or philanthropic service.⁴² The labour poured into homemaking and child-rearing, whether paid, unpaid or “paid in kind,” was deemed by Bahá’ís to be honourable and responsible work, important to society. For those unable to work, of either sex, Bahá’ís envisioned an extra-familial social welfare safety net. If someone was “stricken by dire poverty,” “incapable of earning a living,” or “helpless,” it was “incumbent on the wealthy or the Deputies” to provide “a monthly allowance.”⁴³

Suffrage did not become a central preoccupation of the small Bahá’í community, possibly because other, more nationally and regionally focussed groups were working towards it. Unlike most first-wave feminist groups, the Bahá’í community did not focus on politically-directed reform ventures at the national or provincial/state level, such as campaigns to change specific laws around alcohol, suffrage, divorce, property rights, and so on. Nor was suffrage singled out as a priority by ‘Abdul Bahá and Shoghi Effendi for intensive and sustained action in the way, for instance, peace or the abolition of racial prejudice was. Neither did the Bahá’í community import all feminist issues. Social purity, “vice,” “white slavery,” prostitution, “race-suicide” and birth control, major issues for some feminist reformers, are barely mentioned in Bahá’í literature. Nor does Temperance, the largest single reform focus of North American feminism, appear to have been a rallying point for Bahá’ís, which seems counter-intuitive given that Islamic, Bábí and Bahá’í ordinances forbid alcohol, and Bahá’ís are now enjoined to abstain from it, and other mind-altering substances, unless medically prescribed. However, even though Bahá’u’lláh’s *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Book of Laws) was in circulation in the early twentieth-century, refraining from alcohol was not enjoined on western Bahá’ís until the 1940s.⁴⁴ The selective application according to local circumstances of Bahá’í ordinances such as abstinence from alcohol, marriage requirements, and other laws of personal status, corresponded with Bahá’í methodologies of moderation and gradualism. Such social prescriptions were seen as secondary aspects of religion, and therefore, were not given the weight of primary spiritual verities such as human equality.

Permeable Bahá’í Boundaries

The Bahá’í Faith had permeable social boundaries, and in the earliest days in the west, it was sometimes seen as much as a feminist, universalist or reform movement as a religion. Women were able to maintain membership in churches or other organizations, which meant they did not have to sever themselves from family or community. This option made the adoption of the Bahá’í Faith seem less unorthodox to adherents and others. If individuals encountered

principles or restrictions at which they chafed, they might drift away and join other reform groups, although they often maintained aspects of Bahá'í belief, or personal contact with Bahá'ís. For example, Canadian feminist and socialist Rose Henderson, a spiritual woman with a millenarian vision, became a Bahá'í in Montreal through May Maxwell about 1903.⁴⁵ A reformer, she worked, like Maxwell, for children's welfare and education, health, prison reform, anti-racism, and anti-poverty causes.⁴⁶ Historians Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster have shown that women on the left, like Henderson, strove for women's rights in spite of their frequent marginalization and relegation to support positions in male-dominated leftist organizations.⁴⁷

There was significant crossover between the Bahá'ís and the labour, socialist, and communistic movements that were on the rise. Prominent Toronto Bahá'í Laura Romney Davis, who became a close friend of Henderson in the 1920s when they worked together on prison reform, was also sympathetic to socialism. She founded "The Good Neighbours Club" for the homeless, the "Friends of India Association of Toronto" for new immigrants, and worked for the local Civil Liberties organization, among other ventures. Laura Davis may have met Rose Henderson in 1922, at a Toronto meeting of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom through their mutual friend, May Maxwell. Davis was involved with the WILPF from 1920-45 (serving as national secretary for ten years) and Henderson was Canada's sole 1922 WILPF delegate to the Hague Conference.⁴⁸ However, in spite of her acceptance of Bahá'í principles, Rose Henderson moved away from the Faith towards the end of her life [d.1937], possibly because some of her ideas were, to quote a Montreal Bahá'í, "in clash with the Bahá'í point of view."⁴⁹ Davis's biographer, Marlene Macke, suggests Henderson may have been frustrated by the slow pace of the gradualist Bahá'í model of reform and felt that political activity was a faster route to social justice. However, she retained much of the Bahá'í perspective and some ties with the movement.⁵⁰ Proving the regard in which Rose Henderson was still held, shortly after her death on January 30, 1937, a laudatory elegiac poem was written in her honour by Laura Davis and published in the Communist Party paper, *The Clarion*.⁵¹ Although the activities of these three friends typified the types of first-wave feminist efforts Bahá'í women undertook, May Maxwell and Laura Davis spent increasing amounts of time on Bahá'í-related activities, which they considered their primary reform effort, while Rose Henderson moved further into socialist, labour and political activism.

Bahá'í Religious Feminism

The Bahá'í Faith promoted the equality feminists advocated. Bahá'u'lláh affirmed it as an inherent truth about human reality for all time, not just a desirable modern goal to better the welfare of half of humanity, asserting: "Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God."⁵² At a 1912 Woman's Suffrage Meeting in New York, 'Abdu'l Bahá stated:

In past ages it was held that woman and man were not equal—that is to say, woman was considered inferior to man, even from the standpoint of her anatomy and creation. She was considered especially inferior in intelligence, and the idea prevailed universally that it was not allowable for her to step into the arena of important affairs. In some countries man went so far as to believe and teach that woman belonged to a sphere lower than human... It has been objected by some that woman is not equally capable with man and that she is deficient by creation. This is pure imagination.⁵³

For Bahá'ís, these statements dismissed arguments justifying gender limitations based on notions of the *inherent* inferiority of women, and contradicted the systemic misogyny which had long (mis)shaped the development of western cultures and institutions. For instance, women were not allowed to be citizens of Greece, nor, in the early twentieth century, were they full citizens of “modern” western countries. Discriminatory Euro-American legal regimes, supported by Biblical traditions, condoned the authority of husbands and fathers over wives and daughters, and granted males more prerogatives.⁵⁴ This patriarchal principle permeated all institutional structures of society. Balancing patriarchal prerogatives, in theory at least, was a chivalric paternal obligation whereby men were counselled by religion and society to love and safeguard women. Women, as a dependent class, relied on this chivalric myth to the extent that many worried that a fight for equality would destroy chivalry. Feminists countered that “true chivalry” was based on a deep respect for women, not on a “sense of sex superiority, that attitude of indulgent (or sometimes not indulgent) contempt which is the very reverse” of chivalry.⁵⁵ Women, asserting their value as wives, mothers and religio-cultural guardians, exercised a legitimate lien on men’s kindness, fairness, and protection. This widely accepted, if informal, claim often led first-wave feminists to strategically ply “maternal” arguments in addition to equality arguments.

A similar mix of traditional and “modern,” maternal and equality arguments prevailed in Bahá'í discourse but for different reasons. Bahá'u'lláh had nullified doctrines used to condone women’s inferior, circumscribed place in western (and eastern) society. Therefore, paternalistic dictums were obsolete, although men still had care obligations as husbands, fathers and citizens. On the other hand, Bahá'í teachings upheld women’s traditional maternal station, privileges, and responsibilities. Bahá'ís recognized that some biological sex differences existed, advocated hetero-monogamous marriage, and contemplated some complementarity of social roles. For instance, mothers were called the “first educators” of children, in part because education was seen to begin before birth. The economic support of the family was more a male than a female responsibility, although that did not preclude females working outside the home or being primary providers.⁵⁶ In many regards, the tenets of the Faith conformed to the mix of traditional and progressive views held by most first-wave feminists and the majority of western female converts. However, the Bahá'í religious doctrine of gender equality promised to transform traditional marriage, family, faith-based, and societal structures to reflect a more egalitarian, companionate and consultative model. A difference between Bahá'ís and other groups was that those “feminist” transitions in the new World Order were expected to also be initiated and assisted by men.

“New World” Gender Identities: Women and Men

It is not clear whether the western cultural gender assignment to males of “rationality,” linked to secularism, allowing women greater freedom to act “intuitively,” was a key factor in women’s greater religiosity.⁵⁷ Early twentieth-century Christian clergy regularly bemoaned female “emotionality,” linking it to hysteria, gullibility, and anti-rational thinking inimical to “sound religion” (tacitly mainstream Protestantism).⁵⁸ These ideas were seldom part of Bahá'í discourse but in rare instances, amid ongoing gender struggles in America over developing administrative structures, there were complaints from men in a Bahá'í community dominated by

women both numerically and in terms of resources. In a burst of frustration in 1910, Thornton Chase (1847-1912), an older businessman who was accounted the first western convert, wrote:

Women are emotional, uncertain, unsteady, unwise in business affairs, carried away by "devotion," given to dreams and imaginations, and I am convinced that as long as the Cause in this land is so largely in the hands of women, it CANNOT PROSPER. They are extremists, lacking balance, unreliable, and this Blessed Cause needs the directly opposite qualities to uphold its banner among the whirlpools of occultisms and psychics that swirl everywhere in American society.⁵⁹

In a more positive 1911 letter, he wrote the only male believer (the rest were female) in Denver:

It is one of the great desires of my heart to see strong, clear-headed, steady-minded, earnest-hearted men attain to this Fountain of Life [the Bahá'í Faith]. Of course, spiritually, there is no difference; men and women are the same; but there is an element of steadiness, calmness, and permanence, which seems to abide more surely in men. . . . Man is more a creature of the head, and woman of the heart, but the real man must be a *hearty* man also if he is to be a universal man.⁶⁰

In this statement, playing on the dual meaning of "hearty," Chase concedes the necessity for a more balanced mix of stereotypically gendered qualities. He also mentions in the letter that other Bahá'í men were supportive of women's aspirations for equal administrative representation.

During His western travels, 'Abdu'l Bahá spoke extensively on male-female equality and in 1912, clarified American misconceptions that women could not serve on Bahá'í administrative bodies. He also lauded qualities culturally coded as "feminine," subverting male attacks on females' stereotyped lack of "rationality," a major anti-feminist rationale for keeping women out of public life. In 1911, in Paris, 'Abdu'l Bahá said: "In some respects woman is superior to man. She is more tender-hearted, more receptive, her intuition is more intense."⁶¹ This affirmation of "feminine" attributes mirrored some of the arguments of maternal feminists, who argued from an essentialist standpoint that more tender-heartedness and other "female" qualities would benefit the world. In the Bahá'í worldview, "feminine" qualities like intuition were not to be seen as one half of a hierarchical gendered binary, implying that women lacked the faculty of rationality. Bahá'ís resisted persistent western dualistic habits of mind that privileged masculine-identified qualities, perniciously reinforcing the oppression of women.⁶² For instance, when speaking of (implicitly masculinising) western secularization, and the "modernization" of society, with its concurrent denigration of religiosity as "feminine," educator Rosa Winterburn asked, "Do we not rather find a too frequent tendency to consider spiritual matters weak and womanish, or even superstitious? Is not spirituality often confounded with weakness?"⁶³ As biologist Lynda Birke points out, stereotypes of femininity and masculinity often mirror "the dichotomy between passivity and aggression."⁶⁴ Neither stereotype represented the Bahá'í ideal of gender balance.

Bahá'ís, like other "first-wave" feminists, construed "equality" as being both "sameness" and complementarity, an ideal captured by the late twentieth-century term "gender equity." However, Bahá'ís argued, although goals like suffrage were important, merely giving women the existing rights of men left unjust androcentric standards untouched. Bahá'ís aspired to create in

their new World Order, an egalitarian worldview in which attributes stereotypically identified as “masculine” or “feminine” were, if meritorious, equally valued and ultimately harmonized. As ‘Abdu’l Bahá told New York reporters in 1912: “The chief cause of the mental and physical inequalities of the sexes is due to custom and training,” opening the door to either sex’s acquisition of stereotypically gendered qualities.⁶⁵

Most of early twentieth-century western society accepted as axiomatic the idea that men and women were inherently different, and that while exceptional women might aspire to “manly” qualities such as intellectual vigour, or courage, it was believed “womanish” qualities always would be eschewed by “virile” men.⁶⁶ One solution tried by Christian churches, to reverse the feared “feminization” of religion, was to rebrand and market religion as more “aggressive,” “manly,” and “muscular.”⁶⁷ “Christian virtue” was, in this campaign, linked to masculine power and prowess, and morally or religiously apathetic men were castigated as suffering from a “degenerate effeminacy.”⁶⁸ The Bahá’í Faith, although clearly “feminized” in the west, in that it was predominantly adopted by women, instead took as one of its most distinctive feminist ideals the conviction that the tenets of the Faith required that men also become “feminists.” This term was free enough of pejorative connotations that in 1923 Bahá’ís could write, with admiration, that “Dr. Bessim Omar, President of the Turkish University, is an ardent feminist” because he had helped to advance female students.⁶⁹ Men even were encouraged to develop “feminine” qualities such as intuition. Although respectful of cultural heritage, Bahá’ís were enjoined to abandon learned “prejudices” “traditional superstitions,” and unexamined “dogmas” in order to “search after the truth fearlessly and with unbiased minds.”⁷⁰ Prominent UK Bahá’í author John Esselmont, posthumously appointed a *Hand of the Cause*, urged the use of both intuition and reason in the pursuit of this principle of the “independent investigation of truth.”

The good pupil is he who while accepting his teacher as an indispensable guide and help, yet tests every step of his progress by the light of his own reason and intuition, in other words, by the Inner Light of the Divine Spirit in his own mind and heart. That Inner Light must be his final authority.⁷¹

In his assessment, the *authority* of the “Inner Light” of discernment depended on the integration of feminine-associated “intuition” and masculine-associated “reason.” As an editor of *Star of the West* effused: “What a glorious civilization will prevail when man sublimates his sex along these spiritual lines and joins with woman in spiritual comradeship for the achievement of the highest humanitarian ideals; when for his greater effectiveness intuition is added to intellectuality, and self-will turns to spiritual guidance....”⁷² Other prominent Bahá’í men endorsed these comments. Educator Stanwood Cobb suggested “men and women...who have unusually developed powers of intuition” possess “an important advantage over others in the conduct of life.” He linked intuition to enhancing intellect, to creative “discoveries and inventions,” to understanding others, estimating intuitively “the outcome of a certain course of action,” and solving “unavoidable dilemmas,” adding: “In fact there is no career in which intuition is not an immense aid.”⁷³ Male Bahá’ís were generally encouraging of women’s efforts. Moreover, such unusual attempts of *men* to cultivate (albeit within masculinised parameters) feminine-identified attributes, showed the willingness of Bahá’í men to begin to put themselves on an equal footing with women. Bahá’í men made such intellectual and behavioural efforts in part because ‘Abdu’l Bahá specifically challenged men to champion women’s equality, and enjoined them to combat the

chauvinistic attitudes that maintained gender prejudices. In a 1912 talk to the Federation of Women's Clubs in Chicago, 'Abdu'l Bahá said:

In brief, the assumption of superiority by man will continue to be depressing to the ambition of woman, as if her attainment to equality was creationally impossible; woman's aspiration toward advancement will be checked by it, and she will gradually become hopeless.

On the contrary, we must declare that her capacity is equal, even greater than man's. This will inspire her with hope and ambition, and her susceptibilities for advancement will continually increase. She must not be told and taught that she is weaker and inferior in capacity and qualification.⁷⁴

Bahá'í men were not "natural" feminists, as early gender struggles over institutional power, authority and representation, well documented by Robert Stockman in his historical analysis of the American Bahá'í community, show.⁷⁵ In Bahá'í activities, it took time to overcome cultural tendencies to privilege men as speakers, elect males to the position of Chair, secretary or treasurer, and appoint them to committees that oversaw buildings rather than the education of children. For instance, writer Mary Handford Ford reported after an important "Ridvan Feast" held in conjunction with the First International Bahá'í Congress in San Francisco in 1915, that too few (three of the eleven or more) speakers were women. Ford wrote:

... the addresses of women were not a feature of this congress, and in fact one would hardly have surmised from scanning the program of the Congress how warmly the equality of women is advocated by Bahais everywhere. Perhaps the marked absence of women from the list of speakers will ensure their presence in the congresses of the future, for certainly the work of the women in the Bahai cause is of supreme importance.⁷⁶

Even with good intentions, sexism persisted. Nonetheless, although men were still more likely to choose "masculine" topics such as economic reconstruction, a surprising number wrote or spoke on topics like feminism, the equality of women and men, and the life of Táhírih.

A primary difference was that Bahá'í women could *expect* that men would support their equality, even if cultural habits might take time to overcome. This assumption was not shared by most feminists. As British feminist Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, who fought for peace and women's rights alongside Bahá'ís, but was not a member of the Bahá'í Faith, said:

...it is a man-made and a man-ruled world. Its laws are men's laws, its rules of commerce and everyday business are men's rules. Its moral standard, its public opinion, is formed by men. And it is getting worse...in no drawing room, in no social gathering, in no intercourse with the men they meet, do they [women] dare to say what they really think and feel about things."⁷⁷

Dominant not only numerically but in many aspects of leadership, Bahá'í women certainly had a voice and expressed it, overcoming gender inhibitions both inside and outside their faith community. They identified their right to speak as equals as a feature of the advent of a more gender-balanced millennial "new era," a position endorsed by 'Abdu'l Bahá, who wrote:

In this day there are certain women among the Bahais who far surpass men. They are wise, perfected, well informed, very progressive, most intelligent and the glory of men. They are far more courageous than men. When they speak in meetings the men listen to them with great respect.⁷⁸

In contrast, although Pethick-Lawrence's own husband was supportive, even joining her in a hunger strike for suffrage, Pethick-Lawrence framed the sexes as being in opposition. Writer Rebecca West went further, saying in 1912, "...we have known that men were swine. Now we know they are asses. Another anti-feminist publication and no woman will ever think of loving a man again."⁷⁹ Some feminists refuted the women's movement's "sex-antagonism," citing the formation of Men's Leagues for women's suffrage that grew up in Britain and America. Nonetheless, as British-American actress and feminist Beatrice Forbes Robertson Hale observed in 1914, the "most remarkable thing about the women's movement" was the "obstinacy" of men in resisting it when "it promised endless advantages to men."⁸⁰ This contention was somewhat similar to that of the Bahá'ís, who argued that women's equality was in men's best interests. However, Hale's idea of the "new man" was quite different from the Bahá'í ideal. She described a man with privileged racial and class characteristics, probably a feminist's husband or son who had "unlearned" the "deep-rooted habits and instincts of his sex," likely a professional, clergyman or socialist worker, and a "virile" American rather than a German, who were "subversive of all progress of women."⁸¹ She warned that "every male instinct of domination and sovereignty has to be bred out of him," along with his coercive "lust."⁸² An entire chapter in Hale's book, *What Women Want*, catalogued men's faults as "Difficulties with Brother." With her long list of inborn deficiencies and her narrow masculine requisites, it is clear that very few of Hale's "new men" were ever likely to exist.

Bahá'í feminism carefully did not constitute itself in terms of women's opposition to men. While demonizing men might rouse short-term female support for suffrage, it undermined the broader millennial aims of the Faith such as "unity." Bahá'í women strove to encourage male support. In a letter from St. John, New Brunswick, after May Maxwell had addressed the Rotary Club there, she remarked:

...it was indeed a joy and a privilege to meet such an intelligent, broad-minded and altruistic body of men. The Rotary movement ... reflects some of the greatest of the Bahai Principles, service to your fellow man, business conducted in a spirit of service, and of the greatest good to the greatest number, and friendship on the basis of the real man, the super-man, hidden within every human being.⁸³

In practical terms, it served feminist purposes to have men, who usually had greater resources and temporal power, support equality. Promoting collaboration, the Bahá'í approach was similar to that of Co-operative, agrarian, and socialist feminists, who also recognized women's shared interests with men in fighting for a greater cause. However, Bahá'ís differed inasmuch as those organizations did not highlight female equality as an essential component of their larger goals. In Bahá'í rhetoric, most of the condemnation of male domination came from men. For example, American Bahá'í Howard Hurlbut wrote:

Womankind should remember that every institution in the world today is the result of man's selfish or incapable striving and therefore no attempt to walk in the old worn paths should be made.

Womanhood is to carve for all the world the indelible traces of a service of love and devotion upon the tablets of the hearts. Of women such as these, 'Abdu'l Baha once said: "They are in the utmost firmness and power. Their will power is greater than that of man, their moral consciousness and intuition is superior to that of man and in all the virtues of humanity they shine like unto stars."⁸⁴

Hurlbut's statement might be read as being similar to anti-feminist dismissals of women from the "worldly" public sphere by limiting their purview to "service," "virtue" "moral consciousness," and so on, were it not for his condemning the status quo even more strongly than Pethick-Lawrence, and his belief that women could (and would) improve "every institution."

Male support of female equality was framed as being beneficial, even essential, to men. 'Abdu'l Bahá warned, "As long as women are prevented from attaining their highest possibilities, so long will men be unable to achieve the greatness which might be theirs."⁸⁵ Further, "Until the reality of equality between man and woman is fully established and attained, the highest social development of mankind is not possible."⁸⁶ 'Abdu'l Bahá explained: "men and women are both parts of the human branch, and for mankind two wings are necessary. If either one is weak the bird will not fly, but if both are strong mankind will soar to the exalted summit."⁸⁷ The "two-wing" metaphor became, for Bahá'is, the primary symbol of gender equality, challenging the "zero-sum" thinking that women's gain was men's loss. In order for Bahá'í feminism to succeed, new mythologies of masculinity would have to be crafted, in which masculinity was not construed as opposite to, or superior to, the "feminine." In fact, in "a spirited conversation due to the visit of an ardent suffragist" in London, 'Abdu'l Bahá overturned common assumptions that women comprised the "weaker wing" of humanity. As recorded:

After contrasting the general position of the Eastern and the Western women, and then describing how in many respects the Eastern woman has the advantage of her Western sister, 'Abdu'l-Bahá turned and said to the [suffragist] visitor: "Give me your reasons for believing that woman today should have the vote?"

Answer: "I believe that humanity is a divine humanity and that it must rise higher and higher; but it cannot soar with only one wing." 'Abdu'l-Bahá expressed his pleasure at this answer, and smiling, replied: "But what will you do if one wing is stronger than the other?" Answer: "Then we must strengthen the weaker wing, otherwise the flight will always be hampered."

'Abdu'l-Bahá smiled and asked: "What will you say if I prove to you that the woman is the stronger wing?" The answer came in the same bright vein: "You will earn my eternal gratitude!" at which all the company made merry.⁸⁸

'Abdu'l-Bahá then went on to discuss the higher value of the female in the vegetable and animal worlds, and cited moral attributes that were stronger in women than in men. This interchange made clear that even the androcentric, Eurocentric, evaluative scale by which western women

were measuring their equality, was open to question. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s comments implied that perhaps it was men who required the greater change and “strengthening.” Scholarly work on Bahá’í masculinities has been very limited thus far, and is an area which needs more research.

Bahá’í Maternalist Discourse and Reform

Although Bahá’ís preferentially promoted equality arguments, like other “first-wave” feminists, they saw no contradiction in also using maternalist arguments. As American poet and musician “Shahnaz” (Louise) Spencer Waite wrote in 1925: “A new dispensation, or cycle of time has dawned for humanity, and woman, ever the potential mother, shall arise from her long years of bondage and inferiority and take her place in the Divine Plan, in fact her position in the new age is pre-eminent.”⁸⁹ In early twentieth-century maternalist rhetoric, ideal “motherhood” had wider implications of intimate relationship and caregiving in a universal sense. For example, Winnipeg feminist-peace activist Francis Marion Beynon urged women to adopt “a new spirit of national motherhood” in which women would feel a sense of responsibility for the suffering of all children.⁹⁰ As Shahnaz Waite expressed, “Motherhood and womanhood are in reality one, for every true woman is a manifestation of the mother spirit, whether she is ever a physical mother or not...The reality of motherhood is a state of spiritual consciousness and she who has attained to the highest station of motherhood embraces in her arms the whole world of humanity.”⁹¹

The uncoupling of universal motherhood from biological motherhood was an important feature of Bahá’í feminism. Unlike the maternalism of some religious or nationalistic groups, or the eugenicist rhetoric of those concerned about Anglo-Saxon “race suicide,” there was little or no pressure on western Bahá’í women to marry or have children, although both were considered meritorious. The major Bahá’í female religious exemplars, Táhirih, Mary Magdalene, and Bahíyyih Khánum (‘Abdu’l Bahá’s sister), were effectively single and childless.⁹² This was also true of western female role models such as Lua Getsinger (divorced, childless), Martha Root (single), Juliet Thompson (single), Keith Ransom-Kehler (widowed, grown children), Marion Jack (single), and Agnes Alexander (single). Laura Clifford Dreyfus-Barney and Montrealer Lorol Schopfloch were both childless, but had supportive, active Bahá’í spouses. May Maxwell was married with one child but had an unusual situation in that her Bahá’í husband was supportive of her activities, both financially and in terms of providing alternative childcare when needed. A few prominent female Bahá’ís were married with children, such as Americans Corinne True and Dorothy Baker, but these were exceptions. A disproportionate number of early Bahá’í women were single or, at least, free of domestic constraints, a fact noted by sociologist Will van den Hoonaard.⁹³ Occasionally, ‘Abdu’l Bahá would try to act as a matchmaker. However, as occurred with American artist Juliet Thompson, one of His favourite surrogate “daughters,” the women could freely refuse to marry.⁹⁴

‘Abdu’l Bahá did not limit feminine or masculine-identified attributes to one or the other gender, but admonished women to show that they were “most capable and efficient; that their hearts are more tender and susceptible than the hearts of men; that they are more philanthropic and responsive toward the needy and suffering; that they are inflexibly opposed to war and lovers of peace.”⁹⁵ A story told by May Maxwell of destitute strikers seeking unionization demonstrated her “maternal” concern for human suffering, but also indicated that ‘Abdu’l Bahá hoped that such compassion would be shown not only by women but by all people. She relates:

I remember when the Master was in Montréal [1912] and there'd been a strike for months in Dublin, women and children starving and a generally desperate condition. It affected me painfully; I had slept little and could barely eat, and had that terrific helpless feeling, not knowing what to do about it. All this Sutherland [her husband] told to the Master, begging Him to tell me that my attitude was all wrong; and as he spoke the Master turned very white and great beads of perspiration formed on His brow through His own agony in human sufferings; then He said, "If more people felt as your wife does, the world would not be in this dark and terrible state." Then He added, "However you must strive to overcome these feelings, do everything in your power to help, pray, then leave it with God, because the world will grow steadily much worse, and if you suffer like this you will not be able to survive."

Nevertheless his words opened the door of help to those strike sufferers, and on my return to Montréal I went to a very wealthy and prominent Irishman there, whom I had never seen, burst into tears in his office, to his astonishment and mine, and asked him what he was going to do about it. Well, to end the story, he headed the committee to raise a fund which we sent to Dublin through private channels which came just in time to succour thousands of women and children.⁹⁶

Bahá'í discourse emphasized women's leadership in the millennial peace and reconstruction project, but universal "maternal" qualities also were meant to be aspired to by men. Bahá'í writings affirmed that men and women were more similar than different, and the differences that existed, particularly in terms of women's unequal position in society, were "due entirely to opportunity and education."⁹⁷ Almost all sex roles assigned to Bahá'í women urged them to widen their sphere. One exception was that 'Abdu'l Bahá dissuaded women from active military service, suggesting that military actions were "not worthy of women." It was the "duty of men" because women's "hearts are tender and they cannot endure the sight of the horror of carnage, even if it is for the sake of defence."⁹⁸ This injunction was not religious law, but Bahá'ís were pacifistic. Men also were asked to avoid active military duty unless legally compelled, and to seek non-combatant positions if required to serve.

The Bahá'í mix of maternalist and equality arguments created a complex feminist discourse. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's comments on the greater traumatic stress of war on females bolstered maternalist assumptions of some inherent sex propensities beyond the "characteristics and functions" that are "an inescapable fact of nature."⁹⁹ However, nuancing apparent inconsistencies between maternalist and equality statements, Bahá'u'lláh discounted the relative *importance* of whatever sex differences existed, asserting that the "Equality of men and women, except in some negligible instances, has been fully and categorically announced."¹⁰⁰ This statement coincided with Bahá'í teachings in general, which posited that equality did not require sameness, and that diversity, beyond being an essential fact of existence, should be celebrated.

Maternalist arguments were especially prominent in the advocacy of peace, a primary Bahá'í reform effort. In a 1912 "Woman's Suffrage Meeting" in New York, 'Abdu'l Bahá linked the equality-based goal of suffrage to a series of maternalist arguments about peace:

The most momentous question of this day is international peace and arbitration, and universal peace is impossible without universal suffrage. Children are educated by the women. The mother bears the troubles and anxieties of rearing the child, undergoes the ordeal of its birth and training. Therefore, it is most difficult for mothers to send to the battlefield those upon whom they have lavished such love and care.... So it will come to pass that when women participate fully and equally in the affairs of the world, when they enter confidently and capably the great arena of laws and politics, war will cease; for woman will be the obstacle and hindrance to it. This is true and without doubt.¹⁰¹

Women envisioned special “maternal” roles in the new World Order. As Shahnaz Waite wrote:

Each child should be taught by its mother the "oneness of the world of humanity" ...It is the mother who should, above all others, lend her aid in the abolishment of war, for she ever pays the greatest toll.... A child so taught will not only arise to call its mother blessed, but will be a priceless gift from her to the world of humanity. It is a great privilege to live in these days of reconstruction, of the passing away of the old - old dogmas, creeds and intolerance - and the establishing of the new ideals of Universal Love, Brotherhood and Cooperation...¹⁰²

Maternal responsibility did not absolve the duty of fathers, teachers, governments, and others. As one Bahá'í stated: “If the five million teachers of the two hundred and fifty million children of the world were to unite in teaching that truth [the oneness of humanity] which transcends limited patriotisms and religious prejudices, they could in a generation establish universal peace.”¹⁰³

As important as teaching children was, planetary regeneration was not construed as a simplistic “hand that rocks the cradle” solution. International problems required women’s full participation in ongoing cooperative efforts. In 1919, a Bahá'í, Rev. Dr. Albert Vail, queried:

Is there a soul on this globe today who is not praying in his heart for the dawn of the Most Great Peace amongst the nations? ... Politically, the League of Nations is the first great step. We need a society of nations, a democracy of the world. We also need woman's suffrage so that women, tender, loving and intuitive, may more completely direct the operations of the nation.¹⁰⁴

These sentiments echoed those of other feminists, reformers and peace activists who hoped that suffrage would change political landscapes. Canadian historian Barbara Roberts states that despite their hopes, mothers did not rise up in 1914-18, and “pre-war beliefs that women’s nature was immutably pacific and maternalism was inevitably a pacifistic force no longer held sway after the First World War.”¹⁰⁵ However, in 1929, the New York League of Women Voters still remained confident that women were “destined to bring this great gift to mankind, the end of war, the establishment of peace and good will among the nations.”¹⁰⁶ Perhaps the belief in the *inevitability* of pacifistic maternalism was lost, but belief in the potential of women to act collectively for peace never waned. Interwar feminists retained maternalist ideals, and peace organizations like the WILPF were steeped in maternalist rhetoric. In fact, links between maternalism, feminism and peace activism have never disappeared.¹⁰⁷

Maternalism also remained central to Bahá'í peace rhetoric. It had never contended that women were *immutably* pacifistic, as evidenced by stories 'Abdu'l Bahá told about women such as Syrian warrior-queen Zenobia, stating: "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. If necessary she can become a warrior."¹⁰⁸ He also spoke of female leaders such as Cleopatra, Catherine (wife of Peter the Great of Russia), and Queen Victoria, who defended their nations militarily.¹⁰⁹ However, He said, men were "more inclined to war than woman" and the "real evidence of woman's superiority" would be seen in "her service and efficiency in the establishment of Universal Peace."¹¹⁰ When equality failed to appear after suffrage, Bahá'í feminists could still imagine a future when women "confidently and capably" took their equal place in "the great arena of laws and politics," and war would cease.¹¹¹ Their gradualist millenarianism gave Bahá'ís a sense of continuity and purpose that persisted in spite of the disappointments of suffrage, or other particular events. Bahá'ís saw world problems as complex, deep-rooted spiritual issues, not remediable by material solutions alone. Even the "mechanics" of women's equality, such as suffrage or other reform legislation, was not a panacea. Bahá'ís believed that a major shift in spiritual/ethical values was needed to bring about the deep social and cultural changes necessary to establish permanent global peace and equity .

Bahá'í women, unaligned with any government or political party, were affected by the disruptions in communications during the two World Wars, but otherwise their peace and reform work continued unabated, and Bahá'ís on both side of the conflict remained as close as conditions allowed. As Barbara Roberts notes about the few Canadian feminist peace activists and reformers who refused to ally themselves with their own belligerent nations during wartime, a consistent peace-seeking stance marked them as "radical" in comparison to the majority of feminists who, upon a declaration of war, turned their organizations' resources to the support of their respective nations, including the armed forces.¹¹² The Bahá'ís, as a group, maintained a globalist perspective, styling themselves as members of "the party of God," which, as 'Abdul Bahá wrote in 1919, "has no other purpose and desire save peace, reconciliation, the oneness of the world of humanity, harmony and kindness."¹¹³ War was seen as part of the breakdown the old World Order, creating new opportunities for change. As May Maxwell wrote: Since the outbreak of war there has been an extraordinary awakening of humanity. Thousands of people who were sleeping in the grave of matter have been awakened by the call of a trumpet, and are everywhere seeking an explanation of these great signs and are becoming truth-seekers.¹¹⁴

Western Bahá'í women took seriously their "maternal" responsibility for creating peace. Many women like Alice Pike Barney, who was president of the Washington branch of the Women's Peace Party, belonged to several local and international peace and reform groups.¹¹⁵ Bahá'ís believed religion could be a powerful motivating force. In 1928, Martha Root attended a Geneva conference where Dr. Henry A. Atkinson spearheaded a "pact of world religions to convene for spiritual world peace."¹¹⁶ Root, with other Bahá'ís, helped Atkinson arrange a 1931 Universal Peace Conference where Australian feminist reformer Edith Glanville reported, "There were Christians of every denomination, Buddhists, Hindus, Bahais, Shintoists, Confucionists, Moslems, and many other sects."¹¹⁷ Root concurred with Glanville's comment that "Religion is one of the great controlling factors in human life. All treatise, pacts, and covenants are merely machinery."¹¹⁸ Universalized maternal ideals created imperatives to pursue practical solutions

for pressing world issues, including those that threatened the world's children. For example, the *Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child*, based on a document drawn up by *Save the Children Fund International*, which Irish-born British suffragist Lady *Sitarh* (Sara Louisa) Blomfield helped to found, was adopted by the League of Nations in 1924, largely through her influence.¹¹⁹ After World War Two, Laura Dreyfus-Barney played a key role in developing the relationship between UNICEF and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).¹²⁰ Bahá'í women saw no discrepancy between spiritual and material remedies; they were necessarily correlated. As British Bahá'í and travel writer Maude Holbach wrote, "Is not the League of Nations in its essence a religious conception?"¹²¹ In the Bahá'í vision of the new World Order, it was.

Diplomatic initiatives, lectures, conferences, literature distribution, and collaboration with other "world citizens" on various reforms were a major part of early Bahá'í feminists' work. In 1926, they established an International Bahá'í Bureau in Geneva. Martha Root noted:

...more than three hundred and fifty international associations have their annual sessions in this 'City of Nations.' Thirty-five international organizations have permanent headquarters here. Among the best known are the League of Nations, the International Esperanto Association, the new International Bahá'í Bureau, International Red Cross Society, World's Alliance of Y. M. C. A., International Labor Bureau, International Union for Help to Children, World Union for Women, Women's [International] League for Peace and Freedom...¹²²

Bahá'ís had ties with most of them. A largely female effort, the Bahá'í Bureau was headed by Jean Stannard, who had travelled on behalf of the Faith to Egypt, Burma (Myanmar), India, and other countries. Bahá'í travel-teacher and Esperantist Martha Root had an office there, assisted by Julia Culver. Women such as Laura Clifford Barney, active in the League of Nations and the WILPF, and Lady Blomfield, an Esperantist and supporter of the League of Nations, were some of the "many Bahá'í friends" who frequently passed through Geneva.¹²³

Ending warfare and improving the material and social well-being of the world's peoples were seen as moral issues that humanity, individually and collectively, must choose to address. However, the judgmentalism that accompanied many of the feminist "moral reform" and social hygiene campaigns, led by the middle-class women but aimed at the working classes or the poor, was discouraged by prominent female Bahá'í role models such as May Maxwell.¹²⁴ For instance, when once asked by a friend if she could go about smelling unclean, May answered: "If I was a mother of a family living in one room and the only water would be in a small basin at the far end of an entrance hall, the basin about six to eight inches, I'd smell to heaven!"¹²⁵ Here May, for all that she was characterized by the Bahá'í community as a luminous, ethereal, and vaguely otherworldly presence, demonstrated her clear analysis of the practical social and economic barriers many women faced. This pragmatism informed many of her "wide and active civic interests" such as her pre-1912 support of a Children's Court for Montreal, and her work on the Council of the Montreal Children's Aid society, which sought to care for and establish legal protections for abandoned, orphaned, neglected and dependent children, as well as juvenile offenders.¹²⁶ May also expended efforts in maintaining the Colborne Street Milk Station (*Gouttes de lait*), one of several depots established to create a steady, affordable supply of uncontaminated milk for French and English children to reduce child mortality.¹²⁷ Although a

millennial religious vision of a just social order provided the impetus for Bahá'í women's reform, their everyday efforts addressed real and pressing social problems.

Inter/Transnational Early Twentieth-Century Women's Organizations

Although much “first wave” feminist activity was directed at achieving individual rights through national or provincial/state legislative changes, self-consciously internationalist feminist alliances also formed in the western world to promote common issues such as Temperance, peace or female suffrage. These groups claimed universality, “crossing all barriers of caste, color, creed, or race.”¹²⁸ Marie Sandell, in her study of interwar feminism, argues that women's organizations such as the International Council of Women (ICW) and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), by instituting a series of measures to include women from non-western traditions, took the first steps towards international collaboration, marked by a series of international gatherings such as the Women's Pan-Pacific Conference held in Honolulu in 1928. However, Sandell concludes: “While much was made of non-Western women's membership... these associations originated from the West and their ideologies were steeped in Western traditions...the leadership remained firmly in Western hands.”¹²⁹ Feminist historian Leila Rupp notes that although some sections were added in Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia after World War One, transnational women's organizations remained physically and ideologically centered in north-western Europe and the “neo-Europes” such as the United States, Canada and Australia, with English, French and German as official languages. The International Council of Women of the Darker Races, created in 1920 by members of the U.S. National Association of Colored Women, tried to speak for the global solidarity of women of color but even in this group, the membership remained largely American.¹³⁰

Women's organizations such as the WILPF struggled to incorporate a more diverse membership, but when they achieved some success in recruiting more women from non-western countries, relations between national groups in transnational women's organizations sometimes became strained. For instance, women engaged in national independence or anti-colonial liberation battles lobbied the organizations for political support, prompting the predominantly Euro-American members to defend their countries' imperialistic actions. This, in turn, created defensiveness in non-western members who warned westerners against any “arrogant assumption of superiority or patronage.”¹³¹ Another area of stress was that non-western women, because of the complexity of the local problems they faced, were less able to focus on single issues such as feminism or peace. They often felt it necessary to work shoulder to shoulder with male compatriots who shared their nationalistic, political, and economic aspirations. However, the major international feminist groups were single-sex female bodies, dedicated to promoting a fairly narrow band of interests. Some local and national sections might choose to admit men, but men were not integral to (or necessarily even welcome at) international deliberations. This created some internal cultural conflict in feminist organizations. For instance, WILPF member Eva Fichet of the “Tunis section” determined that she would only bring her member husband to “the public meetings, if there are any” of the 1934 International Congress as “his presence will offend some of our collaborators.”¹³² In contrast, in the Bahá'í method of organization, men and women of various backgrounds, sharing doctrinal goals, were compelled to work together.

Women's international collaboration was thus impeded by the inequality of voice experienced by racio-ethnically and politically marginalized women within most international women's organizations, making recruiting from majority non-Euro-heritage countries difficult. As well, facing looming threats of war and the rise of anti-colonial movements, the interests of women from various European and Euro-settler nations increasingly diverged in the 1930s, both from each other and from women from non-Euro/colonized populations.¹³⁵ By the 1940s, the organizational unity of nearly all international women's organizations had fragmented either because goals had been substantially met, as in the case of suffrage, or because internal pressures had fractured their cohesion, leaving only vestiges of the movements by 1945.¹³⁴

In spite of these limitations, western Bahá'í women heartily supported other non-partisan, non-sectarian international women's organizations, conferences, and gatherings, if they were seen to serve the Faith's goals such as female equality, universal peace and international collaboration. Bahá'ís published notices of such activities, urging members to participate. For example, in 1926, May Maxwell's close friend Agnes Alexander attended the Pan-Pacific Conference in Honolulu, which she reported showed remarkable religious tolerance, was "composed of persons from all races and creeds," and contributed to better global understanding and cooperation.¹³⁵ Western Bahá'í women, drawn mainly from the majority white Euro-Protestant populations of Europe and North America, blended easily into the western model of missionary groups and international women's organizations. Some even reached high organizational positions in international organizations, like Laura Clifford Dreyfus-Barney, representing France as an international vice-President of the WILPF, as a delegate and member of the Peace Committee on the ICW, and in the educational section of the League of Nations.¹³⁶ Although Bahá'í cooperation with other feminist and reform groups was extensive, such efforts were nearly all undertaken by individuals rather than Bahá'í institutions, which rarely allied with other movements.¹³⁷ The systematic correlation of Bahá'í women's individual feminist and reform activities, mentioned only sporadically in Bahá'í communications, is a challenge that requires much further research. Perhaps these "personal" activities were seldom mentioned in Bahá'í interchanges because they were not seen as ends in themselves in the way that purely "Bahá'í" activities like teaching or administrative efforts were, or because feminism, reform activities, and philanthropy were normalized as a part of daily efforts to "live the life," serve the "Cause," and advance the new World Order.

It was a challenge for first-generation western Bahá'í converts, culturally similar to other Euro-American feminist reformers, to free themselves of notions of racio-ethnic essentialism and the superiority of western systems of education, health, governance, and so on, particularly since 'Abdu'l Bahá favoured some western systems such as parliamentary democracy, scientific methods, education, and the greater freedom of women. However, Euro-chauvinism was already being addressed in Bahá'í discourse. In a report published in 1926, Martha Root quoted Geneva psychoanalyst Charles Baudouin, who wrote an article about the "Bahá'í Movement," as saying:

As Europeans we believe Europe to be the only world that matters, though from time to time we may turn a paternal eye towards America...However, the great cataclysm of 1914 is leading some of us to undertake a critical examination of the inviolable dogma that the European nations are the elect. Has there not been of late years a demonstration of the

nullity of modern civilization...? We are now inclined to listen more attentively to whispers from the East [i.e. the Bahá'í Faith].¹³⁸

In this passage, Baudouin, who was sympathetic but not a Bahá'í, implies that the Bahá'ís were already recognized as not being Eurocentric. He identifies “the East” as signifying the Bahá'í Faith, positioning it, in classic Orientalist fashion, as the obverse of an arrogant, spiritually bankrupt western culture. Unlike other western women's international organizations, the Bahá'í Faith was not viewed as a western movement in either its origins or its religious ideology.

Transnational Bahá'í Feminism and the “Third Wave”

Bahá'í women's global organizational patterns were quite distinct from the patterns of other missionizing groups or transnational feminist organizations. While Bahá'í members might have differing backgrounds, their core identity had no national or ethnic base, was inextricably rooted in a progressive millenarian globalism, and was centrally directed by the common religious-social vision furnished by the Bahá'í writings, as interpreted by ‘Abdu'l Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. Thus individual and group processes might entail the negotiation and integration of multiple identities, but overall, doctrinal and functional coherence and identity were maintained.

Rather than national efforts, Bahá'ís were more apt to engage simultaneously in local and transnational efforts promoting the role of women in the institution of Bahá'í ideals such as education, social justice, civil rights, and global peace and security. In this way, their organizational patterns were more akin to the “glocal” focus of “third wave” feminism, which aims to maintain mutually supportive universalizing global networks for collective action, between self-determining partners linked by complex social and institutional ties, while simultaneously focussing energies on localized and particularized reform efforts, colloquially captured in the phrase “think globally, act locally.” It is not the purpose here to engage in an extended discussion of Bahá'ís' relationship to the “wave” construct of western feminism, but rather to demonstrate that the Bahá'í model of millennial religious feminism did not always match neatly the features often ascribed to early twentieth-century “first-wave” feminism.

Early Bahá'í women were also more similar to “third-wave” feminists in that they put a high premium on the diversification of their movement in terms of class, race, ethno-cultural and religious origin, age, and gender from its inception, while simultaneously maintaining somewhat essentialist definitions of their unique identities as “women,” as “western” (or “eastern,” Asian, Oriental, American, etc.) and as Bahá'ís. The Faith discouraged “excessive centralization,” “uniformity,” and “ritual,” enjoining instead an ideal of “unity in diversity.”¹³⁹ Although, like their first-wave peers, Bahá'ís offered generalized prescriptions as to what was “good” for women as a whole, there was also a recognition that situations differed, and women must define reform for themselves in ways that suited their individual circumstances. The necessity for varied approaches was highlighted in a 1931 article, “Glimpses of the New World Order,” by mother and daughter Mabel and Sylvia Paine. They wrote: “In each country the Bahá'ís have an especial problem. In Germany it is the Semitic question; in Persia polygamy and opium; in France, alcohol; in England, class prejudice; in America, racial prejudice.”¹⁴⁰ As Americans, they noted: “The Bahá'ís need to be more courageous in applying these principles” of “interracial relations” and the “oneness of mankind.” “Especially should they convince the Negro and the world at

large that they stand for lack of prejudice in social ways [i.e. integrate socially].”¹⁴¹ In another instance of cultural diversity, eastern and western Bahá’í women demonstrated their feminist ideals quite differently in ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s household in ‘Akka/Haifa. The eastern women deemed it wiser in that time period to conform to local Islamic customs in remaining somewhat secluded in female quarters, following the senior women of the household, ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s wife Munírih Khánum (The Holy Mother), and His sister, Bahíyyih Khánum (The Greatest Holy Leaf). However, their feminism was expressed in other ways, such as establishing facilities for female education.¹⁴² In contrast, western female pilgrims, less bound by local conventions, ate and fraternized with the men. Both groups were pledged to the equality of women, but they worked towards it according to the exigencies of their circumstances. Those same women, in different times or situations, might behave in other ways, reflecting the third-wave understanding that “feminism” cannot be universally defined and is subject to the perspective of the practitioner.¹⁴³

Bahá’í feminism, like third-wave feminism, was more cognizant of the right to self-determination of non-white, non-western and marginalized women. Notwithstanding the prominence among western Bahá’ís of a few Euro-American women, the Bahá’í community itself was not “western” in origin or leadership. In 1913, British journalist Sir Harry Luke wrote:

Bahá’ism is now estimated to count more than two million adherents, mostly composed of Persian and Indian Shi’ihs, but including also many Sunnis from the Turkish Empire and North Africa, and not a few Brahmans, Buddhists, Taoists, Shintoists and Jews. It possesses even European converts, and has made some headway in the United States. Of all the religions which have been encountered in the course of this journey - It is a thing which may revivify Islam, and make great changes on the face of the Asiatic world.¹⁴⁴

The Bahá’í Faith’s racially and culturally diverse base was comprised of women from a wide variety of national, ethno-cultural and religious backgrounds, expanding in the 1920s and 1930s to include adherents from South America, East Asia, Australia, and other regions. Therefore, Bahá’í models allowed for a greater flexibility of interpretation of feminist activism than early twentieth-century western models usually acknowledged. The Bahá’í definition of “feminism” was broadened even further because “equality” was not only measured by the achievement of discrete numerical, legal or political goals. Rather, it was interlinked and integrated as a base requirement for all of the Faith’s other religio-social principles.

Bahá’ís also differed in their organizational structure from other major religious or reform organizations whose members might be divided by sectarian religious, political, nationalistic or imperialistic attachments. The Faith was a unitary, non-partisan, sovereign organization. Unaligned with any political cause, their only “liberation” struggle consisted of diplomatic efforts to protect members in areas where they were being actively persecuted.¹⁴⁵ Not dominant in any national locale, adherents were all marginalized to varying degrees. While resident *in* places, in some sense, the Bahá’ís as a transnational group were “placeless.” The very small Persian-dominated ‘Akká/Haifa group that comprised the “world centre” was a diasporic “outsider” exile community, both ethnically and religiously, with no strong ties to either the local Arab population or to successive overseers such as the Turks and British.¹⁴⁶ The religion’s geographic “base,” to the degree that there was one, was affixed to areas immediately around the

Holy Places pertaining to the Báb in Iran and Haifa; Bahá'u'lláh in Iran, Iraq, Turkey and 'Akká; and 'Abdu'l Bahá in Haifa-'Akká, and the Maxwell shrine in Montreal.

Pilgrims and communications flowed to and from 'Abdu'l Bahá's "home," which became a well-understood metaphor for a rarified freestanding space disconnected from the prejudices of "outside," where all could gather in a state of amity. Referring to His diverse household, He said:

My home is the home of peace. My home is the home of joy and delight. My home is the home of laughter and exultation. Whosoever enters through the portals of this home, must go out with gladsome heart...¹⁴⁷

Western believers on pilgrimage often commented on how "bitter antagonism and hatred" between varying races and religious groups melted away in the home of the Master, and all blended together "as children of one God."¹⁴⁸ As "'Abdu'l-Bahá's home" signified a philosophy of inclusivity, harmony, and hospitality more than a location, that "home" was portable. Author Mary Hanford Ford, who had been to 'Akká/Haifa, recorded 'Abdu'l Bahá's reference to His Paris hotel suite: "This is my home and the home of my friends." Ford elucidated this ideal as: "everyone was admitted here without question, no matter to what cult or nationality he belonged, no matter how shabby were his clothes."¹⁴⁹ In London, Lady Blomfield hosted 'Abdu'l Bahá, and a friend said her "apartment in Cadogan Gardens was thrown open to all. It seemed quite like Abdul Baha's own home. The believers and truth seekers would begin coming at a very early hour of the morning, continuing their visits until night, Abdul Baha receiving them collectively in the drawing room, and individually in his own room..."¹⁵⁰ His "devoted hostess" said,

...they came from every country in the world. Every day, all day long, a constant stream, an interminable procession! Ministers and missionaries, oriental scholars and occult students, practical men of affairs and mystics, Anglicans, Catholics, and Non-conformists, Theosophists and Hindus, Christian Scientists and doctors of medicine, Muslims, Buddhists and Zoroastrians. There also called: politicians, Salvation Army soldiers, and other workers for human good, women suffragists, journalists, writers, poets and healers, dressmakers and great ladies, artists and artisans, poor workless people and prosperous merchants, members of the dramatic and musical world, these all came; and none were too lowly, nor too great, to receive the sympathetic consideration of this holy Messenger, Who was ever giving His life for others' good.¹⁵¹

Similarly, Mary Hanford Ford relates that when a 1915 "Rizwan [Riḍvan] Feast" was held in Oakland, California, another of 'Abdu'l Bahá's hostesses, Helen Goodall, described "how Abdul Baha had walked through her rooms [in 1912], and up and down the broad stairway repeating, with that wonderful smile of his, 'This is *my* house, this is *my* house!'" Mary Ford says, "Her description brought to every mind the vivid recollection of 'Abdul Bahá's presence in America, and seemed to place him bodily among the guests, so naturally everyone was happy. We were surrounded not only by the hospitality of Mrs. Goodall, but by the enveloping welcome of 'Abdu'l Bahá himself."¹⁵² Like Helen Goodall, May Maxwell often repeated, when the Master lodged with her and Sutherland Maxwell for three days in their Montreal home in 1912, visitors of all types streamed through, and He said, "This is my home...."¹⁵³ May Maxwell preserved the bedroom He stayed in and spoke of her home as 'Abdu'l Bahá's home. Her daughter recounted:

Mother always kept this before her, that He had said: 'This is my home,' and she acted accordingly. No one went empty-handed from our door; we always held open house for the Bahá'ís; we entertained more than any people - except those in official positions who are obliged to - I have ever met! Every race and class circulated in and out our doors. They all met with the same fragrance, the fragrance of a radiant nature that in truth loved its fellow-men and was ever ready and eager to help them. That ['Abdu'l Bahá's visit] was one reason - the major one undoubtedly - that our home was blessed with such an atmosphere.¹⁵⁴

This sense of an ineffable planetary home and "virtual" extended family led author Florence Pinchon, in a 1931 Bahá'í drama, to say: "Yes, the whole world being so to speak my home."¹⁵⁵

Bahá'í women were thus firmly globalist in their perspectives and activities. They can be identified as one of the earliest groups to establish and maintain a diverse transnational advocacy network with a feminist perspective that systematically worked to implement broad, ambitious, and well-defined common socio-religious goals on an international stage. They can be placed along the same continuum as those now involved in transnational feminist networks (TFNs) that advocate for women's rights, and transnational advocacy networks (TANS) that work for human rights, education, the environment, and other reforms. Although there are some other early examples such as interwar women's peace movements, transnational feminist social movements are usually identified as a phenomenon that has proliferated since the mid-1980s, often in response to the inequities and exploitive effects on women that are a feature of the global restructuring brought about by late capitalism.¹⁵⁶ The Bahá'í experience argues that by the early twentieth century, women representing various classes, races, ethnicities and nationalities were already collectively organizing around shared feminist and social reform goals with a planetary perspective and methodology. Espousing a coherent doctrinal millennial vision, Bahá'ís would have characterized this transnational reform activity as "building a new World Order."

Fostering Unity: Creating a Global "Family"

One of the mechanisms by which racio-ethnic, sectarian, national, class, and religious divisions were overcome and a sense of global belonging was nurtured, both in other feminist organizations and within the Bahá'í community, was through the concept of fictive family, especially "sisterhood." Although simplistic monolithic notions of universal "sisterhood" have been interrogated as part of the deconstruction of "second-wave" feminism by "third-wave" feminists, the idea of a shared identity with other women has nonetheless remained a salient feature of feminism.¹⁵⁷ An exchange recorded by artist Juliet Thompson while visiting Haifa, as she relayed various "petitions" she had brought from western believers to 'Abdu'l Bahá, demonstrates early Bahá'í cultural attitudes to female bonds. In her diary, Juliet writes:

First I gave Him Lua's and read Him a portion of one of her letters, speaking of her tests and difficulties. "You love Lua?" He asked in that voice of heart-piercing sweetness.... "She is dear to you? Your friend?" "She is my mother. I love her with my whole soul. Thy Love," I said, "has united so many hearts in eternal bonds." I spoke of my love for May Maxwell. "Your sister?" He asked. "My sister and my mother too." "Your mother." He said it was this that made Him happy: to see that the sisters loved one another."¹⁵⁸

Besides cementing close personal friendships, the narrative of fictive family reinforced the Bahá'í concept of the peoples of the world being one human family. As Isabella Brittingham, an early western Bahá'í, later named a “Disciple of 'Abdu'l-Bahá,” said in a 1924 radio address:

Originally we were one family; the human family! ...The Divine Civilization, upraising the educational and spiritual outlook, will forget race or nationality! This world citizenship is a divine future fact. Through it strife, hatred, warfare will be destroyed. Such a brotherhood and sisterhood born out of the present world troubles will be the restoration so longed for. ...Thus, and thus alone, can this humanity become the New Humanity...¹⁵⁹

Bahá'í women had a strong sense of female solidarity and “sisterhood” that extended idealistically to all womankind. This myth of global sisterhood helped to create cohesion among the Bahá'ís and bridge social divides between women, both inside and outside the community. For example, Coralie Franklin Cook (1861-1942), an African-American born into slavery who became a suffragist, a founder of the National Association of Colored Women, a member of the D.C. Board of Education and an English teacher at Storer College (WV) and Howard University, became a Bahá'í about 1910-13. She was a close friend of Susan B. Anthony, and worked for inter-racial cooperation.¹⁶⁰ While attending a conference that included many races, Coralie Cook wrote in 1924 of her personal experience and feelings of inter-racial “sisterhood.”

At dinner, you find yourself restfully near a beautiful woman with an abundance of white hair, crowning a face neither young nor old, but full of an indefinable something that draws you to her in unmistakable sisterhood, and you both talk of the things that have brought you here. Together you leave the table and the room still talking, and out along flower bordered walks you continue to talk. Surely there is, after all, such a thing as human brotherhood-- sisterhood! Here you are of two separate and distinct races, but you are finding so much in common! You are thinking the same thoughts about Education, about Americanization, Foreign Relationships and other things of pith and moment. This mutual understanding is all so new, so illuminating!¹⁶¹

A sense of universal sisterhood (and brotherhood) allowed Bahá'ís to both acknowledge and transcend particular identities, locating themselves as “world citizens.”¹⁶²

Another way Bahá'í women around the world fostered closer personal and institutional ties was by a continual exchange of Faith-related letters and visits. Non-westerners reported the latest news, including individual and community affairs, difficulties, and threats of persecution. These contacts allowed westerners to assist if they were able, and heightened intimate concerns for their co-religionists.¹⁶³ Conversely, westerners could rejoice with eastern Bahá'ís over their advances and victories. For instance, in 1910, the Corresponding Secretary of the Chicago Woman's Assembly of Teaching reported that the letters received “from the maid servants of the different assemblies in the Orient, have been most interesting, telling of their organized work in that country and of their joy at hearing so often from their Western sisters.”¹⁶⁴ In a 1910 letter from “Gasvin” [Qazvin, Persia], eastern Bahá'ís reported that “Two of our spiritual American sisters have arrived here after a brief visit with 'Abdul Bahá in Alexandria.” The Persian believers met them, discussed “the spread of the Cause in America,” and “from them inhaled the

spiritual fragrances of our western brothers and sisters.” Then several prominent men on their way to visit ‘Abdul Bahá arrived from Teheran and joined in “conversing and feasting with these two dear sisters.”¹⁶⁵ That these women conversed and feasted with Persian men was perhaps due not only to their being anomalous “western” females who were able to circumvent local gender customs, but also to a fictive kinship designating them “sisters” or members of the family.

Transnational Bahá’í Feminism: Efforts at Globalism

Western Bahá’í women, on the whole, pursued a wider range of international activities than most feminist or religious women, cultivating strong ties with women (and men) of other nations and cultures. Western women such as May Maxwell and others who had greater freedom than their eastern counterparts, met with Bahá’ís and like-minded feminists, reformers and leaders of thought, participated in social projects, and promoted the movement’s agenda to a wide variety of individuals and groups. Although the proportion of Bahá’ís who participated in reform efforts, at home or abroad, was very high, the women looked at in this study were exceptionally mobile, undertaking local, national and international trips to promote the Faith’s goals. Lorol Schopflocher, a Montreal friend of May Maxwell, typifies the activities undertaken by this group of atypical women. On one such extended journey, in about 1927, Lorol sought out an Indian feminist and social worker from Calcutta, Lady Abala Bose, writing:

Lady Bose is one of the outstanding women in India today. Her untiring efforts along educational and all other lines for the emancipation of her oppressed sisters, classifies her as a great leader in the Feminist Movement. Her "Industrial School for Widows and Married Women" in Bengal is the first institution of its kind to be established in India, and thus her dream of educating the neglected little widows who are bereft of human companionship, has been fulfilled. How refreshing it was to note the immediate and sustained interest of this woman of remarkable character in the great teaching of Bahá’u’lláh that "material and spiritual education should go hand in hand."¹⁶⁶

Lorol’s language betrays some familiar western stereotyping of Asian women as “oppressed,” although anyone familiar with the plight of child widows, who were ostracized in India, might agree with her. It is likely that western Bahá’í women sometimes characterized eastern women as a homogenous oppressed group, or conveyed subtle Orientalist attitudes of western superiority, or envisioned themselves as feminist mentors to non-western women. However, there is no evidence that they routinely infantilized, criticized, exoticized, or otherwise demeaned non-Euro-heritage women, as scholar Mari Yoshihara has documented sometimes occurred with other western women and groups.¹⁶⁷ Nor is there evidence that non-western Bahá’ís, who comprised the vast majority of the Faith’s adherents, felt inferior in any way.

Lorol Schopflocher relates that during her visit, lectures and teas were arranged for her by Indian leaders to meet officials, intellectuals, and “the most prominent thinkers...of both sexes,” commenting that many were “deeply moved by the narrative of the early life of our beloved teachers.”¹⁶⁸ Lorol’s recounting Bahá’í history was not unusual. One of the major means of introducing the Faith was to tell of its heroes, especially the stirring saga of Táhirih. Lorol notes that, accompanied by “distinguished” local Bahá’ís, she “visited many homes, and carried the Message of light into every available place,” including the palaces of “leaders and rulers of

several states.”¹⁶⁹ Lorol was on her way to visit the Maharaja of Jhalawar, who was “so splendidly sympathetic to Mrs. Lua Getsinger,” when Lua had visited India years before. Lorol observes, “It was not at all surprising to learn that they always refer to Mrs. Getsinger in these parts as ‘St. Lua.’”¹⁷⁰ Lorol’s white race, or her class position as the wife of wealthy Canadian industrialist Seigfried Schopflocher, may have enabled Lorol to utilize connections, possibly through Bahá’í friendship links, to penetrate the upper levels of the Indian and Burmese social structure in ways that perhaps local Bahá’ís could not. For instance, on another occasion, a local mullá opposed the talk Lorol was delivering in Kyigon, Burma. The chief official of the village, who was a Buddhist and “very friendly” to the Bahá’ís, told the mullá that ““The lady is a great friend of the Governor of Burma, Sir Harcourt Butler,” whereupon the mullá left and they “went on in peace.”¹⁷¹ Lorol herself attributed the open doors she encountered to Bahá’í attitudes of tolerance, remarking that “A Western Bahá’í believer can always have a sympathetic audience, for since he loves all religionists, his method of approach is constructive and harmonious.”¹⁷²

Lorol Schopflocher was one of a small but steady stream of western Bahá’í women (and men) who travelled and lived in Asia and other continents to teach the Faith, and visit or assist local communities. In the case of India and Burma, Lorol remarks that the “seeds of the patient work” of Jean Stannard, an American who had been teaching in Calcutta, had “borne fruit” in the form of the acceptance and promotion of the Bahá’í Faith by local people.¹⁷³ Stannard had previously lived in Egypt, arriving in Rangoon (Yangon) in 1922.¹⁷⁴ Burma by then had several “Bahá’í villages,” and Lorol recounts that Mrs. Inez Greeven, formerly of New York, had just visited the village of Kuinjangoon, known as the “Village of ‘Abdu’l Baha because all the inhabitants were Bahá’ís.”¹⁷⁵ Another close friend of May Maxwell’s, journalist Martha Root, travelled extensively in India on three occasions, as well as going to Egypt, China, Hong Kong, Japan, the Pacific Islands, Hawaii, New Zealand, Australia, eastern and western Europe, Africa, Mexico, Central and South America, Iceland, Canada, and beyond, circling the globe four times between 1912 and 1939. For Bahá’ís, Martha Root became the epitome of the commitment required of such itinerant teacher-reformers. She often endured a life of bare subsistence, finally succumbing in Hawaii in 1939 to the breast cancer she had battled during the entire period.¹⁷⁶ Physical trials are mentioned lightly in hagiographic accounts of Martha Root, May Maxwell, and others, and then only for the inspirational purposes of showing what can be accomplished with real effort in spite of hardships. These western Bahá’í women knew each other, sometimes travelled together and passed information, goods and money between themselves. Often at a local community’s request, the visits of western women would be arranged by ‘Abdu’l Bahá or Shoghi Effendi. For instance, a 1913 letter from Rangoon indicates Indian Bahá’ís had received a “Tablet” from ‘Abdu’l Bahá announcing the arrival to India and Burma of “two American Bahá’í ladies and an American Bahá’í doctor whom we welcome most sincerely.”¹⁷⁷

Whether or not western women went with the intention of acting as mentors, they changed the dynamics of feminist activity for local women in other cultures by their very presence. American Elizabeth Stewart, who worked as a nurse in association with the Bahá’í hospital in Persia from 1911-25, undertook a pilgrimage in 1921 to visit ‘Abdu’l Bahá. On her return trip to Tehran, she stopped off in Bombay (Mumbai) to attend the first All-India Bahá’í Convention, with delegates representing six different religions: “Hindus, Burmese, Parsees, Musselman, Jews,” and herself as the “Christian representative.”¹⁷⁸ By noting religious heritages,

part of the multiple identities Bahá'ís carried, Stewart emphasized the power of Bahá'í unity, as these religionists had previously been antagonistic towards one another. She further writes:

The Convention had decided not to permit the women to attend their meetings. When I arrived, they could not exclude me, so the women were permitted to come and they turned out well and it was a beautiful sight. Native women had never been known to be present at such public lectures and it was another surprise and instruction to the people. The audience was most respectful and asked good questions.

I spoke for five minutes upon the equality of men and women. ‘Abdul Bahá helped me or I could never have done it.¹⁷⁹

Elizabeth Stewart says she called to the attention of the men that women could be admitted to Conventions in India, that it accorded with governmental laws, and that female equality was a vital Bahá'í principle.¹⁸⁰ Stewart does not disclose why they “could not exclude” her but it is likely because she carried a message from ‘Abdu’l Bahá, which she says was that “men and women were equal and both must be educated,” and that there were “no differences in the brains of women and men. Given an opportunity the woman would prove equal to a man...”¹⁸¹ Stewart was the only female speaker at the first All-India Convention, but both she and a Mr. Hashmatulla spoke on the equality of men and women. He emphasized that the Bahá'í Faith taught that “the education of a girl [is] of the utmost importance for the future generation,” that women “needed education to bring up good children,” and that ‘Abdul Bahá had told them that “if they had a boy and a girl to be educated, they should educate the girl. That was how Bahá'ís understood the equality of men and women.”¹⁸²

However, when Stewart returned to work with other western and eastern women in Iran, she found that the Persian situation was not as amenable to change as in India. In this instance, ‘Abdu’l Bahá advocated patience on the part of Persian Bahá'í women who, influenced by circulated talks of ‘Abdu’l Bahá and the presence of American Bahá'í women, were pushing for the abolition of the veil and full representation in the local and national administrative institutions of the Faith.¹⁸³ He advised them that while they would one day achieve full equality, the threat of disunity within the community, and increased persecution from outside the community, called for a wise and cautious approach. He counselled them that women's assemblages should at that time focus on spiritual and educational matters rather than political ones, appealing to them “to obliterate this contention between men and women...”¹⁸⁴

The Persian women's impatience was understandable in the context of the fearless example set for them by Táhirih. But, somewhat surprisingly, considering the consternation that Táhirih's boldness of speech and action had created both within and outside the Bábí community, ‘Abdu’l Bahá in a Tablet directed them to “Ponder the manner in which Jináb-i-Táhirih used to teach. She was free from every concern, and for this reason she was resplendent.”¹⁸⁵ Although women voted within the Iranian Bahá'í community, they were not permitted to serve on Bahá'í institutions until 1954, more than a century after Táhirih's unveiling and declaration at Badasht. In the same Tablet to Persian Bahá'í women, ‘Abdu’l Bahá told them, “Ye need to be calm and composed, so that the work will proceed with wisdom, otherwise there will be such chaos that ye will leave everything and run away. ‘This newly born babe is

traversing in one night the path that needeth a hundred years to tread.”¹⁸⁶ In the interim, He encouraged them to train themselves for involvement in society, through pursuing education and mounting teaching efforts. A committee was even established for women’s liberation.¹⁸⁷ Each national, racial, or ethnic group that entered the Bahá’í Faith faced different challenges in reforming long-held religious or cultural conceptions, as they began to establish the equality of women in both the Bahá’í community and the greater society.

By 1932, the Persian Bahá’ís were one of the sponsoring bodies for the first “Women Congress” in Tehran, which hosted delegates from the Council of Women in Egypt, Syria, Hejaz, and other locales. About 100 “notable Bahá’ís, both men and women,” attended.¹⁸⁸ Part of the purpose of this gathering was to persuade the Persian government to institute a larger scope of rights for women. Rouhangiz Khanum Fath Azam, assistant principle of the Bahá’í *Tarbiát* School for Girls in Tehran, co-sponsored by eastern and western Bahá’ís but open to all faiths, spoke on how the emancipation of women had long been familiar to Bahá’ís as a basic tenet of their faith. She noted that Bahá’í women voted in the community and national elections for Spiritual Assemblies and consultative boards, whereas Persian women’s suffrage was not yet established. Women and girls received the same or more attention than males for “education and culture” from local and national Bahá’í Spiritual Assemblies, since ‘Abdu’l ‘Bahá’ had said that the “education of girls is more necessary than that of boys” as they would be the mothers.¹⁸⁹ Commenting on the methodologies of Bahá’í women “working for progress,” Rouhangiz said:

It is a special characteristic of the activities of Bahá’í women that they move with cautious feet and use moderation, tact and discretion in their work. They avoid outward display, violent means, and above all interference in politics and seek equality with men in acquiring knowledge of efficiency and capacity for doing service. They work in unison with men and their methods are by no means directed towards an upheaval for demanding social rights.

The Bahá’í men have themselves a perfect understanding of the scope and extent of this great work as taught by the Bahá’í Cause and they render every assistance to the women; this understanding makes the work of women quiet but deep. The general public and the government are also satisfied and thus our success is insured.¹⁹⁰

“The first ray of light,” Rouhangiz explained, “came from the Persian lady Táhirih Qurratul ‘Ayn who removed the veil of superstition and denounced the old school of thought which gave to woman a place subordinate to man in her will, her mind, and her capacities.... Following in her footsteps a large number of Bahá’í women arose in service to the cause of women.”¹⁹¹

Despite vast cultural differences between Persian and western women, understandings of their common faith’s stance on women’s equality were very similar. At that same Congress, Keith Ransom-Kehler, a “distinguished Bahá’í sister from America” who had just arrived back from the Persian provinces of Khurasan, Mazindaran and Gilan, gave a “stirring and thoughtful talk” comparing the conditions of women in Persia before and after the appearance of the Bahá’í Cause. She also “gave an outline of the life of the famous Bahá’í poetess and martyr, Táhirih.”¹⁹² The fact that Keith, like her Persian “sister,” lectured on Táhirih before an eastern audience, shows not only her sense of shared Bahá’í “ownership” of this female exemplar, but also the

degree of ideological coherence Bahá'í feminism had, in spite of its diverse membership and global scope. This congruity was attributable to the Bahá'í reliance on scripture and a centralized leadership, which meant that all communities shared similar doctrinal goals, although individual implementations varied widely according to local cultures, resources, and circumstances.

Within the Bahá'í model of “sister/brother/friend, western women such as Keith Ransom-Kehler and Lorol Schopflocher became transnationally linked to their co-religionists, assisting in various initiatives. Bahá'ís in other nations, in turn, aided westerners. For example, since only Bahá'ís may contribute funds to the Faith, groups around the world sent assistance to build the first western *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* (House of Worship) in Wilmette, near Chicago. The temple was the major “internal” project of the time, spearheaded by early believer Corinne True, appointed the “Mother of the Temple” by ‘Abdu’l Bahá. A letter with several hundred rupees from a local Spiritual Assembly in Mandalay, Burma, said: “No matter how far we live there is no distance in the spiritual realm....we could freely behold the brilliant faces of our dear brothers and sisters in America.”¹⁹³ In another, they wrote: “It is always a great pleasure with us to render service to our Occidental brethren and co-operate with them as far as circumstances permit in the establishment of His Kingdom on earth, and in the solidarity of the union of the East and West.”¹⁹⁴ Racist Orientalist and Occidentalist stereotypes broke down in the face of a united effort and mutual reciprocal assistance in building the “Kingdom.” Although aspects of western Bahá'í women’s activities were similar to those of other early twentieth-century feminist reformers, the primary objective of Bahá'í millennial feminism always remained the construction of a new World Order.

Conclusion

Early twentieth-century western Bahá'í millennial religious feminism was simultaneously conventional and unconventional, espousing both maternalist ideals and “modern” notions of female independence and gender equality. Western women who became adherents utilized Bahá'í doctrinal teachings to advance feminist reforms that, in turn, furthered the social and spiritual principles of their adopted religion. Many aspects of their activities resembled those of other “first-wave” feminists. Bahá'ís affirmed women’s essential human and spiritual equality, and used the rhetoric of equal rights to support measures that advanced the social equity of females. Like other first-wave reformers, they also promoted universalized maternalist ideologies that regarded women as having more highly developed qualities such as compassion, intuition, and sacrificial service, whether or not they were biological mothers. Bahá'ís were not considered “radical” feminists inasmuch as their methods were gradualist, persuasive, educational, non-partisan, and law-abiding. However, the millennial worldview Bahá'ís subscribed to called for a major global gender reformation, the scope of which went beyond the demands of most first-wave feminists. Bahá'ís suggested that not only must women take their equal place alongside men in the greater society, but previously androcentric, male-dominated human cultures must equally value beneficial, stereotypically “feminine” qualities, creating a more gender-equal balance of attributes for both sexes to aspire to. Bahá'í teachings, as distinct from those of other global religions, claimed the equality of women and men was essential for all human progress.

With their collaborative, consensus-building approach, more amenable to women, Bahá'ís often supported other progressive feminist and reform organizations, particularly transnational groups whose aims coincided with theirs. However, they remained an independent,

non-aligned, unitary, mixed-gender, faith-based group, with a coherent ideology, a clear organizational agenda, a consistent methodology, and strong leadership. Bahá'í millennial feminism was unique in its close reliance on Bahá'í scriptural prescriptions and the guidance of an eastern male leadership, in the persons of 'Abdu'l Bahá and, after 1921, Shoghi Effendi. A mythology of fictive family helped to breach socio-cultural boundaries, and integrate a disparate voluntaristic community. Although Bahá'ís endorsed most “first-wave” feminist goals, some aspects of Bahá'í transnational feminism, such as a firmly globalist worldview, more closely resembled features of “third-wave” feminism. The racio-ethnically and culturally diverse international membership of the group, their non-western origins and leadership, and their lack of sectarian, national and political attachments, set Bahá'ís apart from other western feminist transnational organizations.¹⁹⁵ These features helped Bahá'í feminism to avoid the declines many women's organizations experienced during and after the Second World War. In contrast, the Bahá'í community continued to diversify, expanding both its membership and geographic scope.

Although Bahá'í women's methodologies were gradualist, inclusive, and generally non-confrontational, their ultimate socio-religious aim was (quietly) revolutionary: to implement a millenarian vision that affirmed the essential oneness of the human race and transformed interlinked social, economic, and governance systems on the planet to reflect a more ethical, sustainable, and equitable model. All aspects of the broader Bahá'í program were held to be interdependent and no one principle by itself, not even female equality, was sufficient to resolve the intricate problems inherent in building a peaceful global civilization. Organizationally, Bahá'ís saw themselves as an organic, self-initiating, evolving network of individuals who were building a world-wide community, based on practices of consultation and adherence to ideals of “unity in diversity.” As Bahá'í teacher Keith Ransom-Kehler phrased it, “...that oneness of sentiment to which Bahá'u'lláh summons us can only be achieved as we realize that we are all cells of one Divine Body.”¹⁹⁶ They believed it was the sacred responsibility of *all* humanity to build a global millennial new World Order; but Bahá'í women, who felt they had been given the divine template, were especially tasked to replace outmoded, collapsing ideologies and infrastructures with feminist principles and ideals more suited to an emerging planetary civilization. As Keith Ransom-Kehler explained:

The whole future of a far flung incalculably splendid emprise hangs upon our frail endeavors... In this New Era Bahá'u'lláh makes us directly responsible for the establishment of His commands and teachings in the world. ... Our solemn, terrifying and magnificent responsibility should weigh upon us and inspire us in every thought and contact.¹⁹⁷

In Bahá'í communities and the larger global society, May Maxwell and her western female co-religionists strove to begin to implement the principles of their Bahá'í millennial religious feminism as a foundational element of a more gender-equal new World Order, believing the future progress of all humanity depended upon their “frail endeavours.”

NOTES

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- ¹ ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, “Lawḥ-i-Hague (Tablet to The Hague): A letter written by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’ to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace, The Hague, 17 December, 1919,” p.7, in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections From the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1982), 302.
- ² National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States, “Two Wings of a Bird: The Equality of Women and Men” (Wilmette, IL: NSA US) <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-9-1-9.html> (accessed March 18, 2013).
- ³ Mary Pat Fisher, *Women in Religion* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007), 278.
- ⁴ Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha’u’llah*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1952, 1983), 250.
- ⁵ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1991), 163-65.
- ⁶ ‘Abdu’l Bahá, quoted in Wendell Phillips Dodge, ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s Arrival in America, *Star of the West* 3, no. 3 (Jamal; April 28, 1912): 4.
- ⁷ See Catherine L. Cleverdon, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974); Joan Sangster, *Through Feminist Eyes: Essays on Canadian Women's History* (Edmonton: AU Press, 2011); Janice Fiamengo, *The Woman's Page: Journalism and Rhetoric in Early Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); Sharon Anne Cook, Lorna R. McLean, and Kate O'Rourke, eds., *Framing Our Past: Canadian Women's History in the Twentieth Century* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001); Alana S. Jeydel, *Political Women: The Women's Movement, Political Institutions, the Battle for Women's Suffrage and the ERA* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004); Crista DeLuzio, ed., *Women's Rights: People and Perspectives* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010); Ian Christopher Fletcher, Laura E. Nym Mayhall and Philippa Levine, eds., *Women's Suffrage in the British Empire: Citizenship, Nation, and Race* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000); Johanna Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage: Feminists in War and Peace* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989).
- ⁸ Janice Williamson and Deborah Gorham, eds., *Up and Doing: Canadian Women and Peace* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1988); Anne Wiltsher, *Most Dangerous Women: Feminist Peace Campaigners of the Great War* (London; Boston: Pandora Press, 1985); Holly Berkley Fletcher, *Gender and the American Temperance Movement of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Bradford Miller, *Returning to Seneca Falls: The First Woman's Rights Convention & Its Meaning for Men & Women Today* (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarn Press, Steiner Books, 1995).
- ⁹ See Kim Nielsen, *How Did Women Antifeminists Shape and Limit the Social Reform Movements of the 1920s?* (Binghamton, NY: State University of New York at Binghamton, 2004); Angela Howard and Sasha Ranaé Adams Tarrant, *Opposition to the Women's Movement in the United States, 1848-1929* (New York: Garland Pub., 1997); Goldwin Smith, *Essays on Questions of the Day, Political and Social* (New York; London: Macmillan, 1894).
- ⁹ See Carol Lee Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred: The Ideas of the English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983); May Wright Sewall, ed., *Women, World War, and Permanent Peace: International Conference of Women Workers to Promote Permanent Peace* (1915; Westport, CT: Hyperion, 1976).
- ¹⁰ Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred?*, viii. See also Randi R. Warne, *Literature as Pulpit: The Christian Social Activism of Nellie M. McClung* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1993).
- ¹¹ Cheryl MacDonald, *Adelaide Hoodless: Domestic Crusader* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1986), 35.
- ¹² NCW aims read: “We, the women of Canada, sincerely believing that the best good of our homes and nation will be advanced by our own greater unity of thought, sympathy and purpose, and that an organized movement of women will best conserve the highest good of the family and state, do hereby band ourselves together to further the application of the Golden Rule to society, custom and law.” (28 October, 1893). *Twenty-six Years of Activity of the Hamilton Local Council of Women, 1893-1919* (Hamilton, 1920), in MacDonald, *Adelaide Hoodless*, 35.
- ¹³ Roberts, “Women’s Peace Activism in Canada,” in *Beyond the Vote*, 280.
- ¹⁴ See Veronica Strong-Boag, “Ever a Canadian,” 182, quoted in Jane Errington, “Pioneers and Suffragists” in *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada*, 79. See also Randi Warne, *Literature as Pulpit: Feminist and WCTU activist Nellie McClung helped gain the first provincial female franchise in Manitoba in 1916. She was one of the “famous five” Alberta women (with Emily Murphy, Irene Parlby, Louise McKinney and Henrietta Muir Edwards), who successfully gained, in 1929, the recognition of women as ‘persons’ eligible to sit in the Canadian Senate.*
- ¹⁵ Nellie L. McClung, “Peace on Earth Begins at Home,” *The Western Home Monthly*, Dec. 1922, in Mary Hallett and Marilyn Davis, *Firing the Heather: The Life and Times of Nellie McClung* (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1993).
- ¹⁶ Nellie L. McClung, *In Times Like These* (Toronto: McLeod & Allen, 1915), 5.

- ¹⁷ Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, *The Meaning of the Woman's Movement*, Pamphlets for Women, National Women's Social and Political Union (Strand, WC: The Woman's Press, n.d [c. early twentieth-century]), 5.
- ¹⁸ See Janice Fiamengo, "Agnes Maule Machar," *The Women's Page*, 30-32. The social gospel movement is sometimes accused of supporting colonialism, exercising an "Anglo-Saxon providential sense of its mission to cast light into the 'dark' corners of the globe." See Dianne M. Hallman, "Cultivating a Love of Canada Through History: Agnes Maule Machar, 1837-1927," in *Creating Historical Memory: English-Canadian Women and the Work of History*, eds. Beverly Boutilier and Alison Prentice (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 26. Also Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985).
- ¹⁹ Agnes Maule Machar, *Katie Johnstone's Cross, A Canadian Tale* (Toronto: J. Campbell, 1870), Preface. See also Warne, *Literature as Pulpit*.
- ²⁰ Fiamengo, "Agnes Maule Machar," *The Women's Page*, 34-37, 53. See also Ruth Compton Brouwer, "The 'Between-Age' Christianity of Agnes Machar," *Canadian Historical Review* 65, no. 3 (1984): 347-370.
- ²¹ Bahá'is can vote or advocate to governments, but not support or belong to a partisan political party. They strongly support internationalist institutions, and have observer/consultative status with United Nations agencies.
- ²² May Maxwell, "Excerpts of letters of May Maxwell 1912-39, Tuesday, Kirkland Inn, Rye, NY (1914?)" compiled by Rosemary Sala 0/1/16 1002. May attributes this method of persuasion to her "great and wise teacher," Mírzá Abu'l Fazel, the Persian teacher sent by 'Abdu'l Bahá to deepen the understanding of the North American believers.
- ²³ Negar Mottahedeh, ed. *'Abdu'l-Bahá's Journey West: The Course of Human Solidarity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 9.
- ²⁴ Reverend F.R. Griffin, "Racialism Wrong Says Eastern Sage, Strife and War Caused by Religious and National Prejudices," *The Gazette*, Monday Sept. 2, 1912," in *'Abdu'l Bahá in Canada*, rev. ed. (Thornhill, ON: Bahá'í Canada Publications, 1987), 31.
- ²⁵ Lynn Echevarria, *Life Histories of Bahá'í Women in Canada*, American University Studies, Series 7, Theology and Religion (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 117-18.
- ²⁶ Keith Ransom-Kehler, "The Basis of Bahá'í Belief, Chapter II Part I, 'Tales of the Past,'" *Star of the West* 20 (February 1930): 327.
- ²⁷ For example, see Valerie J. Korinek, "No Women Need Apply: The Ordination of Women in the United Church of Canada, 1918-1965," *Canadian Historical Review* 74, no. 4 (December 1993): 473-509.
- ²⁸ McClung, *In Times Like These*, 103.
- ²⁹ By the mid-nineteenth century, the "separate spheres" paradigm was well established in prescriptive literature, if less commonly realized in fact. Females were counselled to focus their energies on maintaining an idealized home and family. The Victorian domestic ideal was epitomized by the "Angel in the House," a saccharine narrative poem by Coventry Patmore about his wife, published in 1854-1862. Feminists have long taken offense at this limiting, dependent, domestic image of women. Nellie McClung decries this line of propaganda, for instance, in her chapter "Should women think?" in *Times Like These*, 34-45. Also see American feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilmore, "An Extinct Angel." *Kate Field's Washington* 23(Sept 1891):199-200, in "*The Yellow Wall-Paper*" and *Other Stories*, ed. Robert Shulman (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995), 48-50. That religion can be empowering to women is a theme well developed in American and Afro-American women's history, but less so in Canada. The role of religion in Canadian feminism has been explored by Randi R. Warne, Marta Danylewycz, Lynne Marks and Janice Fiamengo.
- ³⁰ McClung, *In Times Like These*, 108-09.
- ³¹ McClung, *In Times Like These*, 104-105.
- ³² Antoinette Burton, "'States of Injury: Josephine Butler on slavery, citizenship and the Boer War'" in *Women's Suffrage in the British Empire: Citizenship, nation, and race*, eds. Ian C. Fletcher, Laura E. Nym Mayhall, and Philippa Levine (London: Routledge, 2000), 18-21.
- ³³ Mariana Valverde, "'Racial poison': drink, male vice and degeneration in first wave feminism" in *Women's Suffrage in the British Empire*, 39.
- ³⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *'Abdu'l-Bahá in London* (1911; London: UK Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), 101-102.
- ³⁵ See 'Abdu'l Bahá, quoted in Dr. Orrol L. Harper, "Humanity Unfolding a Limitless Self," *Star of the West* 18, no. 2 (May 1927):50. For the full statement see 'Abdu'l Bahá, "Tablet Revealed by 'Abdu'l Bahá, August 28th, 1913," *Paris Talks* (UK: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1972), 182-83.
- ³⁶ Sir Rodmond Roblin, *The Grain Growers' Guide*, 4 February 1914. Manitoba women gained the vote in 1916.
- ³⁷ 'Abdu'l Bahá, "Tablet Revealed by 'Abdu'l Bahá, August 28th, 1913," *Paris Talks*, 182-83.

- ³⁸ ‘Abdu’l Bahá, “Equality of Men and Women, Compiled from the Utterances of ‘Abdu’l Bahá,” *Star of the West* 18, no. 2 (May 1927): 41.
- ³⁹ ‘Abdu’l Bahá, ‘*Abdu’l Bahá in London*, 58; ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, vol. 2, 437.
- ⁴⁰ Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1992), 192.
- ⁴¹ Bertha Hyde Kirkpatrick, “The Fulfillment of Religion,” *The Bahá’í World*, vol. 7, 93 and 94 of the Bahá’í Era, April 1936-1938 A.D. (New York: Bahá’í Publishing Committee, 1939), 721.
- ⁴² Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 193.
- ⁴³ Shoghi Effendi and ‘Abdu’l Bahá quoted in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 192-93.
- ⁴⁴ Western adherents were (and are) not bound by many of the laws in the *Kitáb-i Aqdas*. Middle-eastern Bahá’is, accustomed to shari’a law, adopted them immediately. For a description of the *Kitáb-i Aqdas*, see Peter Smith, *A Concise Encyclopedia of the Bahá’í Faith* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2000), 43–44, 223-25.
- ⁴⁵ Peter Campbell quotes Gerald Tuchinsky, who points out that in Henderson’s era, the “messianic impulse” was as likely to be channeled into socialism as into Zionism. It is not surprising that socialists became Bahá’is. See Peter Campbell, *Rose Henderson: A Woman for the People* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), 45.
- ⁴⁶ van den Hoonard, *The Origins of the Bahá’í Community of Canada*, 38-40. Van den Hoonard notes that by 1903, the year following May Maxwell’s move to Montreal, Rose Henderson was counted as a Bahá’í (*Bahá’í World*, 8, 636). Macke suggests that Rose joined the Montreal Bahá’í community in 1909. See Marlene Macke, *Take My Love to the Friends: The Story of Laura R. Davis* (St. Mary’s, ON: Chestnut Park Press, 2009), 48.
- ⁴⁷ See Linda Kealey, “Women in the Canadian Socialist Movement, 1904-14” in *Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics*, eds. Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 171-75.
- ⁴⁸ See Macke, *Take My Love to the Friends: The Story of Laura R. Davis*, 48-51.
- ⁴⁹ Montreal Bahá’í Emeric Sala states, “She [Rose Henderson] was a well known speaker in Montreal. She spoke on many platforms, mostly socialist or leftist orientation. And her statements were often, well, occasionally, in clash with the Bahá’í point of view. It was at the end of her life she lost physical contact with the Bahá’í community.” See “Interview with Rowland Estall and Emeric Sala by Michael Rochester, August 24, 1987, transcribed by D. Cormier, p.1-2. van den Hoonard, series 4, ss4, file 5, Harriet Irving Library, University of New Brunswick.
- ⁵⁰ Macke, *Take My Love to the Friends: The Story of Laura R. Davis*, 49.
- ⁵¹ Campbell, *Rose Henderson: A Woman for the People*, 272-73.
- ⁵² Bahá’u’lláh, quoted in *Women: Extracts from the Writings of Baha’u’llah, ‘Abdu’l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice*, (Thornhill, ON: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Canada, 1986), no. 54.
- ⁵³ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “20 May 1912, Talk at Woman’s Suffrage Meeting, Metropolitan Temple, Seventh Avenue and Fourteenth Street, New York, notes by Esther Foster,” *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), 133,135.
- ⁵⁴ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, Richard McKeon, ed. (New York: Random House, 1941) 1254b, quoted in Lorraine Code, “Feminist Theory” in Sandra Burt, Lorraine Code and Lindsay Dorney, eds., *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada*, 2nd Ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993), 23. Before 1918, Canadian suffragists fought a federal Election Act that decreed that “no woman, idiot, lunatic, or criminal shall vote” and women were not recognized as “persons” able to serve in the Senate until 1929. See Harry Gutkin and Mildred Gutkin, “‘Give us our due!’ How Manitoba Women Won the Vote,” *Manitoba History* 32, (Autumn, 1996). See Monique Benoit, “Are Women Persons? The “Persons” Case,” *The Archivist* 119, Library and Archives Canada, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/publications/002/015002-2100-e.html>. For Christian doctrine endorsing male headship, see Eph. 5:22, 28-31, 5:23, 1 Tim. 2:11-12. Also see Katherine Kroeger, “The Apostle Paul and Greco-Roman Cults of Women,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30, no.1 (1987): 25-38.
- ⁵⁵ Pethick-Lawrence, *The Meaning of the Woman’s Movement*, 10-11.
- ⁵⁶ See ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1982), 126. Also Helen Hornby, ed., *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá’í Reference File* (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1988), 230.
- ⁵⁷ “In western societies influenced by Christianity, women are more religious than men on virtually every measure.” See Tony Walter and Grace Davie, “The Religiosity of Women in the Modern West,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 49, no. 4 (Dec., 1998): 640.
- ⁵⁸ Dr. R.W. Conant, *The Manly Christ: A New View* (Ravenswood, Chicago, 1904), 8.
- ⁵⁹ Thornton Chase to Charles Mason Remey (copy), 19 January 1910, Los Angeles, 3-4, TC, USNBA.
- ⁶⁰ Thornton Chase to Nathaniel Clark, Denver (copy), 7 August 1911, Los Angeles, 3, Thornton Chase, USNBA.
- ⁶¹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, 161.

- ⁶² For a discussion of dualism, see Carol P. Christ, *Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflections on a Journey to the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 143.
- ⁶³ Rosa V. Winterburn, "The Call of Today," *Star of the West* 16, no. 7 (October, 1925): 586.
- ⁶⁴ Lynda Birke, *More Than Parts: Biology and Politics*, ed. J. Silvertown (London: Pluto Press, 1984) 25, quoted in Lata Ta'eed, "Sex, Gender, and New Age Stereotyping," *Bahá'í Studies Review* 4:1 (1994).
- ⁶⁵ 'Abdu'l Bahá, *Star of the West* 3, no. 3 (Jamal; April 28, 1912):4.
- ⁶⁶ Conant admits womanish religion might attract men of "emotional temperament or religious tendencies," ironically discounting the religious men, who he is trying to recruit, as effeminate. Conant, *The Manly Christ*, 9.
- ⁶⁷ Conant, *The Manly Christ*, 10. See also Donald E. Hall, ed., *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
- ⁶⁸ Susan L. Roberson, "Degenerate effeminacy" and the making of a masculine spirituality in the sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson," in *Muscular Christianity*, 156.
- ⁶⁹ "The Spirit of the Century: President Harding and World Peace," *Star of the West* 14, no. 6 (Sept. 1923): 180.
- ⁷⁰ 'Abdu'l Bahá, *Star of the West* 16, no. 4 (July, 1925): 478, 484.
- ⁷¹ J. E. Esslemont, M.B., "Religion and Science in the Light of the Bahai Revelation," *Star of the West* 8, no. 7 (Kalimát 1, 73, July 13, 1917): 71.
- ⁷² Editor, *Star of the West* 18, no.2 (May 1927): 37.
- ⁷³ Stanwood Cobb, "Editorial [on education and intuition], *Star of the West* 25, no. 6 (September, 1934):163.
- ⁷⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "2 May 1912, Talk to Federation of Women's Clubs, Hotel La Salle, Chicago, Illinois, notes by Joseph H. Hannen," *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 76.
- ⁷⁵ See Robert Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America 1900-1912*, vol. 2 (George Ronald, Oxford, 1995).
- ⁷⁶ Mary Handford Ford, "The Feast of Rizwan [Riḍvan] At the home of Mrs. Helen S. Goodall, Oakland, California April 21, 1915, 2 p.m." *Star of the West* 6, no. 5 (Nur 1; June 5, 1915): 36. Riḍvan (April 21) is the annual holy day celebrating Bahá'u'lláh's declaration of His mission in 1863, in the Garden of Riḍvan, just outside Baghdad.
- ⁷⁷ Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, *The Meaning of the Woman's Movement*, 4-5.
- ⁷⁸ 'Abdu'l Bahá, "Education of Women More Important than that of Men," *Star of the West* 9, no. 7 (Kalimát 1, 74; July 13, 1918): 85.
- ⁷⁹ Barbara Green, "The New Woman's Appetite for 'Riotous Living': Rebecca West, Modernist Feminism and the Everyday," *Women's Experience of Modernity, 1875-1945*, eds. Anne L. Ardis and Leslie W. Lewis (Baltimore, London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 228.
- ⁸⁰ Beatrice Forbes-Robertson Hale, *What Women Want: An Interpretation of the Feminist Movement* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1914), 49.
- ⁸¹ Hale, *What Women Want*, 253-256.
- ⁸² Hale, *What Women Want*, 256-57.
- ⁸³ May Maxwell, "My beloved Sister [?], from The Royal Hotel, The Raymond & Doherty Company Limited, Saint John, New Brunswick, June 27th 1917," M21 B6 F29Albert R. Windust papers, USNBA.
- ⁸⁴ Howard R. Hurlbut, "Woman in Allegory and Fable in Tradition and History in the Present Day and Age" Part 2, *Star of the West* 18, no. 3 (June 1927): 75.
- ⁸⁵ 'Abdu'l Bahá, *Paris Talks*, 40.
- ⁸⁶ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "1912 Talk at Woman's Suffrage Meeting, New York," *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 76.
- ⁸⁷ 'Abdu'l Bahá, "Tablets Received by American Baha'is in 1919: Abdul Baha Abbas, Bahjeh, Acca, Palestine, July 20, 1919, To the maid servant of God, Mrs. Mabel Rice Wray, Detroit, Michigan, Upon her be Bahaollah El Abha!" trans. Shoghi Rabbani, *Star of the West* 11, no. 10 (Eizzat 1, 76; Sept.8, 1920):163-164.
- ⁸⁸ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Abdu'l-Bahá in London*, 102.
- ⁸⁹ Shahnaz [Royal Falcon] Waite, "The Mother's Part in Peace," *Star of the West* 16, no. 8 (Nov. 1925): 623. Louise R. Spencer Waite was an American Bahá'í poet, musician and author who worked for peace and race unity.
- ⁹⁰ Barbara Roberts, "Why do Women do Nothing to End the War: Canadian Feminist-Pacifists and the Great War," *The CRIAW Papers*, no. 13, ed. Linda Kealey (Ottawa: Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAW), 1985), 7.
- ⁹¹ Waite, "The Mother's Part in Peace," 623.
- ⁹² Táhirih was divorced and lost her three children to her husband. 'Abdu'l Bahá is reported to have said Mary Magdalene later went to Rome married a Roman officer, but a husband or children do not figure in her myth. See

‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas* [*Tablets of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 2], trans. E.G. Browne (1915; New York: Bahá’í Publishing Committee, New York, 1940) 467; Ali Kuli Khan, “Unimportance of numbers; the importance of purity and adherence; story of Mary Magdalene,” *Ali Kuli Khan 1906 Pilgrim Notes*, ed. David Merrick (2010), 56-57. http://bahai-library.com/ali-khan_pilgrim-notes_1906 (accessed March 18, 2013).

⁹³ W.C. van den Hoonard, “The Question of Gender in Canadian Bahá’í History,” North American Bahá’í History Conference, 5-6 June 1994, Wilmette, IL. http://bahai-library.com/hoonard_gender_canadian_history

⁹⁴ See Juliet Thompson, “27 August 1909,” “16 April 1912,” *Diary of Juliet Thompson*, with preface by Marzieh Gail (1947; Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1983), 74-76, 252-253.

⁹⁵ ‘Abdu’l Bahá, *Star of the West* 18, no. 2 (May 1927): 49.

⁹⁶ Earl Redman, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Their Midst* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2011), 186-187.

⁹⁷ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1912 Woman’s Suffrage Meeting, New York,” *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 135.

⁹⁸ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, 182-83.

⁹⁹ Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 7.

¹⁰⁰ Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 7.

¹⁰¹ ‘Abdu’l Bahá, “Woman’s Suffrage Meeting, Metropolitan Temple, Seventh Avenue and Fourteenth Street, New York, 20 May 1912, notes by Esther Foster,” in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 134–35.

¹⁰² Waite, “The Mother’s Part in Peace,” 623-625.

¹⁰³ “Education for Peace,” *Star of the West* 14, no. 12 (March 1924): 369.

¹⁰⁴ Albert Vail, “The Servant of God, Address by Albert Vail, of Chicago, delivered at the Ninth Session of the Bahai Congress, held in Hotel McAlpin, New York City, Wednesday evening, April 30th, 1919,” *Star of the West*, 11, no. 3 (Jamal 1, 76; April 28, 1920): 45. Albert R. Vail was “a young and gifted” University of Illinois (Urbana) Unitarian minister (Harvard Divinity School) before becoming a Bahá’í in 1918. See Jane C. Anderson, “A History of the Channing-Murray Foundation,” 1992. <http://www.channingmurray.org/docs/CM-History.pdf>.

¹⁰⁵ Barbara Roberts, “Women’s Peace Activism in Canada,” in Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster, eds., *Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 277.

¹⁰⁶ “‘Weekly News’ published by the New York League of Women Voters,” in “World Thought and Progress,” *Star of the West* 20, no. 6 (Sept. 1929):190-191.

¹⁰⁷ See Glen Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right: The Mothers’ Movement and World War II* (Chicago:University of Chicago Press, 1996), 179-180; Wendy Sharer, *Vote and Voice: Women’s Organizations and Political Literacy* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004); 1960s maternalism saw groups like *Voice of Women*. The 1980s saw environmental feminism, REAL Women, New Age feminism and others. See Alison Bailey, “Mothering, Diversity, and Peace Politics,” *Hypatia*, Special Issue: Feminism and Peace 9, iss. 2 (May 1994): 188–198.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London*, 102-03.

¹⁰⁹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 282.

¹¹⁰ ‘Abdu’l Bahá, “Equality of Men and Women,” *Star of the West* 18, no. 2 (May 1927): 42.

¹¹¹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 134.

¹¹² Barbara Roberts, “Women’s Peace Activism in Canada” in *Beyond the Vote*, 276-77.

¹¹² “‘Weekly News’ published by the New York League of Women Voters,” *Star of the West* 20, no. 6 (Sept. 1929):191.

¹¹³ ‘Abdu’l Bahá to Abha Mirza Mohammed, *Star of the West* 10, no. 2 (Jalal 1, 75; April 9, 1919): 26.

¹¹⁴ May Maxwell to Anne Savage, Monday, August 14, 1914, in “Excerpts from letters of May Maxwell, p. 2,” found in Canadian Bahá’í National Archives, van den Hoonard Series 5 ss4, file 122, Harriet Irving Library, UNB.

¹¹⁵ Karla Jay, *The Amazon and the Page: Natalie Clifford Barney and René Vivien* (Indianapolis, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 28.

¹¹⁶ Martha L. Root, “Disarmament of Minds,” *Star of the West* 19, no. 9 (Dec. 1928): 271. See also Church Peace Union, *The World’s Religions Against War: The Proceedings of the Preliminary Conference held at Geneva, September, 1928 to Make Arrangements for a Universal Religious Peace Conference*, Foreword by Dr. Henry A. Atkinson (Church Peace Union, 1928).

¹¹⁷ Root, “Disarmament of Minds,” 271. Edith Glanville, “All the Religions: A Remarkable Conference,” *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Saturday, January 18, 1930): p.11 col. 4.

¹¹⁸ Glanville, “All the Religions,” 11.

- ¹¹⁹ “Memorial to a Shining Star,” London, U.K., *Bahá’í World News Service* (10 August 2003). <http://news.bahai.org/story/237> (accessed March 18, 2013). See also Rob Weinberg, *Bahá’í Journal of the United Kingdom*, May/June 2003; *The Bahá’í World*, vol. 8; also Lady Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway*.
- ¹²⁰ “Advancing the Status of Women,” Bahá’í International Community, <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-7-0-6.html>
- ¹²¹ Maude M. Holbach, “The Psychological Atmosphere of Geneva,” *Star of the West* 16, no.11 (Feb. 1926): 713. Re: UN, see Bahá’í International Community Statement Library at <http://www.bic.org/statements-and-reports>.
- ¹²² Martha Root, “A Glimpse of the Baha’i Movement and Esperanto: A few thoughts from the Seventeenth Universal Esperanto Congress held in Geneva,” *Star of the West* 16, no. 10 (January, 1926): 681.
- ¹²³ Elizabeth B. Nourse, “Among Friends at Geneva, July, 1925,” *Star of the West* 16, no. 6 (September 1925): 567.
- ¹²⁴ See Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991).
- ¹²⁵ Rosemary Sala writes: “These things were told to me by Anne Savage when we would meet together and talk about our beloved May Maxwell, p.1,” van den Hoonard, s5, ss4, file 169, Harriet Irving Library, UNB.
- ¹²⁶ Children’s Aid Society, *Second Annual Report of the Children’s Aid Society* (Montréal, Québec: Commercial Stationery, 1908/09), 1-2. Canadian Pamphlets and BroadSides Collection, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library Digital Collections, University of Toronto Libraries, <http://link.library.utoronto.ca/broadsides> (accessed April 13, 2013). The report thanks the Montreal Women’s Club for paying the salary of the probation officers, who in 1909 were Mlle. M. Clement, and May Maxwell’s fellow-Bahá’í Mrs. M. (Rose) Henderson.
- ¹²⁷ Marion Holley, “May Ellis Maxwell, May 9, 1940,” in Memoriam, *A Compendium of Volumes of the Bahá’í World I-XII, 1925-1954*, comp. Universal House of Justice (Haifa): 521. Montreal had very high child mortality.
- ¹²⁸ Leila J. Rupp, “Challenging Imperialism in International Women’s Organizations, 1888-1945,” in Barbara Ryan, ed., *Identity Politics in the Women’s Movement* (NY: New York University Press, 2001), 245.
- ¹²⁹ Marie Sandell, “‘A Real Meeting of the Women of the East and West’: Women and Internationalism in the Interwar Period,” *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements Between the World Wars*, ed. Daniel Laqua (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 175.
- ¹³⁰ Rupp, “Challenging Imperialism,” 245-46.
- ¹³¹ Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 250-53.
- ¹³² Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 252.
- ¹³³ Sandell, “A Real Meeting of the Women of the East and West,” 176.
- ¹³⁴ See Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred*; Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster, eds., *Beyond The Vote: Canadian Women And Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989); Catherine Foster, *Women for All Seasons: The History of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989). New groups, post-WW2, spawned a new set of international movements in the latter part of the twentieth century.
- ¹³⁵ Agnes Alexander, in “The Cooperative Spirit of the PanPacific Union in Honolulu,” *Star of the West* 17, no. 12 (March, 1926): 56.
- ¹³⁶ For WILPF see Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women’s Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997). For ICW see Nellie S. French, “A Notable Fellowship Dinner,” *Star of the West* 16, no. 4 (July 1925): 504. For League of Nations, see Martha Root, “A Pilgrimage Through Persia: Hamadan, Part 2,” *Star of the West* 21, no. 5 (August 1930): 141.
- ¹³⁷ Bahá’í institutions avoid sectarian aims but support the League of Nations and the United Nations.
- ¹³⁸ Prof. Charles Baudouin [Geneva University] quoted in Martha Root, “A Glimpse of the Bahá’í Movement and Esperanto: A few thoughts from the Seventeenth Universal Esperanto Congress held in Geneva,” *Star of the West* 16, no. 10 (Jan. 1926): 683. Baudouin’s article on the Bahá’í Movement was published in *Contemporary Studies*.
- ¹³⁹ Kenneth Christian, “The Laboratory of Civilization,” *Star of the West* 24, no. 8 (November 1933): 233.
- ¹⁴⁰ Mabel Paine and Sylvia Paine, “Glimpses of the New World Order: Notes on a [1931] Visit to Haifa and Akká,” *Star of the West* 23, no. 12 (March 1933): 375.
- ¹⁴¹ Paine and Paine, “Glimpses of the New World Order,” 374.
- ¹⁴² Edith (Roohieh) Sanderson and Munírih Khánum, *Star of the West* 12, no. 8 (Asma 1, 77; Aug.1, 1921): 148-149.
- ¹⁴³ For example, an early photograph of Bahíyyih Khánum shows her with no head covering, in western dress.
- ¹⁴⁴ Sir Harry Charles Luke (*aka* Lukach), *The Fringe of the East. Journey through Past and Present Provinces of Turkey* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1913), 266. It is unknown how many people called themselves Bahá’ís.

- ¹⁴⁵ A very small group of disaffected Azali Bábís, and Bahá'í's who contested 'Abdu'l Bahá's leadership existed, but the vast majority of followers belonged to the unitary organization led by 'Abdu'l Bahá, then Shoghi Effendi.
- ¹⁴⁶ 'Akká-Haifa was in Ottoman Syria, then British Mandate Palestine (c.1922), then Israel (c.1948).
- ¹⁴⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 250.
- ¹⁴⁷ 'Abdu'l Bahá, "My home is the home of laughter and exultation: From Diary of Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, March 26, 1914," *Star of the West* 9, no. 3 (Jamal 1, 74; April 28, 1918): 39-40.
- ¹⁴⁸ Roy Wilhelm, "Knock and It Shall Be Opened Unto You" (1908), in Roy Wilhelm, Stanwood Cobb and Genevieve L. Coy, *In His Presence: Visits to 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1989) 4.
- ¹⁴⁹ Mary Hanford Ford, "With Abdu'l Baha in Paris," *Star of the West* 2, no. 14 (Kowl, November 23, 1911), 3.
- ¹⁵⁰ Mason Remy, "Extracts from a recent letter written by Mr. Charles Mason Remy," *Star of the West* 2, no. 12 (Elm; October 16, 1911): 10.
- ¹⁵¹ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (1944; Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979), 283.
- ¹⁵² Ford, "The Feast of Rizwan At the home of Mrs. Helen S. Goodall, 1915," *Star of the West*, 35.
- ¹⁵³ May Maxwell, "Memoirs" in Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 280. The house was named a Shrine by Shoghi Effendi in June, 1953. See Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to Canada*, 2nd ed. (Thornhill: Bahá'í Canada Publications, 1999), 179. Rúhíyyih Khánum gave her family home to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada.
- ¹⁵⁴ Rúhíyyih Khánum, "The Memoirs of Amatu'l Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum" in Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 11.
- ¹⁵⁵ Florence E. Pinchon, "Drift and Direction" *Star of the West* 22, no. 7 (October 1931): 218. A lot of Bahá'í women wrote didactic Bahá'í dramas, including Rúhíyyih Khánum. Many of these were performed at Green Acre.
- ¹⁵⁶ For further discussion of modern TFNs, see Valentine M. Moghadam, *Globalizing Women: Transnational Feminist Networks* (Baltimore, London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2005).
- ¹⁵⁷ For "sisterhood," as expressed in the "third wave," see Rebecca Walker, "Becoming the Third Wave" in Barbara Ryan, ed., *Identity Politics in the Women's Movement* (NY, London: New York University Press, 2001), 79-80. Sarah Glassford and Amy Shaw, eds., *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service: Women and Girls of Canada and Newfoundland during the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012); Michele Tracy Berge, *Workable Sisterhood: the political journey of stigmatized women with HIV/AIDS* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); See also Christine Bolt, *Sisterhood Questioned?: Race, class and internationalism in the American and British women's movements, c. 1880s-1970s* (London, NY: Routledge 2004); Deborah Siegel, *Sisterhood, Interrupted: from radical women to grrls gone wild* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), etc.
- ¹⁵⁸ Juliet Thompson, "2 July 1909," *The Diary of Juliet Thompson* (1947; Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1983), 27.
- ¹⁵⁹ Isabella Brittingham, "The Oneness of Humanity, A Radio Talk by Isabella Brittingham," *Star of the West* 15, no.8 (Nov. 1924): 238. See also Robert Stockman, "Brittingham, Isabella D. (1852-1924)," *The Bahá'í Encyclopedia*, http://bahai-library.com/stockman_brittingham (accessed March 18, 2013).
- ¹⁶⁰ Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (1984; New York: Perennial Harper Collins, 2001), 166.
- ¹⁶¹ Coralie Franklin Cook, "Finding a Basis for World Unity," *Star of the West* 15, no. 4 (July 1924): 96.
- ¹⁶² Bahá'u'lláh, "CXVII," *Gleanings*, 250.
- ¹⁶³ Velda Piff Metelmann, *Lua Getsinger: Herald of the Kingdom* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1997), 87-93.
- ¹⁶⁴ Louise R. Waite, Corresponding Secretary of the Chicago Woman's Assembly of Teaching, "News Notes," *Star of the West* 1, no. 15 (Masa'il; December 12, 1910): 6.
- ¹⁶⁵ "News from the Orient, Persia, Gasvin [Qasvin]," *Star of the West* 1, no. 15, Masa'il (Dec. 12, 1910): 4.
- ¹⁶⁶ Lady Abala Bose was an Indian feminist, wife of scientist Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose. See Florence Evelyn Schopflocher, "Through India and Burma: An American Traveler Visits Bahá'í Communities of the Far East," *Star of the West* 18, no. 3 (June 1927): 93. Also Bharati Ray, "Women in Calcutta: the Years of Change" in *Calcutta: The Living City*, Vol II, ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 36-39. For South Asian widows c.1930s, see Deepa Mehta, *Water* (2005), film, directed by Deepa Mehta (Canada: Mongrel Media, 2005).
- ¹⁶⁷ See Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 6-11.
- ¹⁶⁸ Schopflocher, "Through India and Burma," 93.
- ¹⁶⁹ Schopflocher, "Through India and Burma," 93. This warm reception was likely helped by previous visits. Mirza Jamal Effendi and Siyyid Mustafa Roumie (a Mandalay Bahá'í), "travel-taught" in India as early as 1879. See Sen McGlenn "Roumie's account" <http://senmcglenn.wordpress.com/2010/03/13/roumies-account>. Mirza Jamal Effendi and Siyyid Mustafa Roumie were challenged by one king to stop a smallpox epidemic. They mixed "ripe scabs"

with milk from a woman nursing “a male child,” bundled needles and vaccinated about 500 children a day. Only 1% died. See Siyyid Mustafa Roumie, “Bahá’í Pioneers: A Short Historical Survey of the Bahá’í Movement in India, Burma, Java Islands, Siam, and Malay Peninsula,” *Star of the West* 22, no. 11 (February, 1932): 342-343.

¹⁷⁰ Schopflocher, “Through India and Burma,” 95. Lua Getsinger visited the Maharaja of Jhalawar in April 1914. See Lua Getsinger, “What Constitutes a Prince,” *Star of the West* 15, no.4 (July, 1924): 102-06.

¹⁷¹ Schopflocher, “Through India and Burma,” 95. It would require more research to know how she met Butler.

¹⁷² Schopflocher, “Through India and Burma,” 92.

¹⁷³ Schopflocher, “Through India and Burma,” 94.

¹⁷⁴ Mustafa Roumie, 27 January 1923 to Victoria Bedikian, Victorian Bedikian Papers. 23/4-5. Syed Mustapha Roumie. USNBA quoted in Graham Hassall, “Bahá’í country notes: Egypt” Bahá’í *Communities by Country: Research Notes*, 1997. http://bahai-library.com/hassall_notes_egypt (accessed March 30, 2013).

¹⁷⁵ Schopflocher, “Through India and Burma,” 94. Mrs. Inez Greeven was formerly Mrs. Inez Cook of New York.

¹⁷⁶ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 386-87; also Janet Ruhe-Schoen, *A Love Which Does Not Wait* (Riviera Beach, FLA: Palabra, 1998); M.R. Garis, *Martha Root: Lioness at the Threshold* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Pub. Trust, 1983).

¹⁷⁷ Syed Janab Ri, “Sec’y Baha’is of Rangoon, India,” “Extract from a Letter from Rangoon, India,” *Star of the West* 4, no. 13 (Kudrat; Nov. 4, 1913): 226.

¹⁷⁸ Elizabeth H. Stewart, “Letter from Elizabeth H. Stewart (portion of a letter received by Mrs. I.D. Brittingham from her niece, Miss Elizabeth H. Stewart, written on her return journey from her recent visit to His Holiness Abdul-Baha, to Teheran, Persia) S.S. Chakdars, January 6, 1921,” *Star of the West* 12, no.1 (March 21, 1921): 26-27.

¹⁷⁹ Stewart, “Letter from Elizabeth H. Stewart,” 26-27.

¹⁸⁰ Dr. Susan I. Moody and Miss Jessie Revell, “Elizabeth Stewart: The Faithful Nurse,” *Star of the West* 17, no. 8 (Nov. 1926): 263.

¹⁸¹ Elizabeth Stewart, quoted in “The Bahai Convention: The Next Avatar, from *The Times of India*, Bombay, December 28, 1920,” “The First All-India Bahai Convention,” *Star of the West* 12, no. 1 (Baha 1, 77; March 21, 1921): 24.

¹⁸² “The First All-India Bahai Convention,” 21-24. See also “Educating Girls: An Investment in the Future,” Bahá’í International Community statement submitted to the 39th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women New York, USA; 15 March - 4 April 1995 <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-7-6-9.html>

¹⁸³ Susan Maneck, “Women in the Bahá’í Faith,” in *Religion and Women*, ed. Arvind Sharma (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 211-228.

¹⁸⁴ ‘Abdu’l Bahá (from a Tablet translated from the Persian), quoted in *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 2, by Bahá’u’lláh, Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and Universal House of Justice, compiled by Research Department of the Universal House of Justice (Mona Vale: Bahá’í Publications Australia, 1991), 361.

¹⁸⁵ ‘Abdu’l Bahá, quoted in *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 2, 361.

¹⁸⁶ ‘Abdu’l Bahá, quoted in *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 2, 361.

¹⁸⁷ Janet Adrienne Khan and Peter Khan, *Advancement of Women: A Bahá’í Perspective* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 2003), 186.

¹⁸⁸ A. Samimi, “Women Astir in Persia: Compiled from a Report by A. Samimi,” *Star of the West* 23, no. 11 (Feb. 1933): 352.

¹⁸⁹ Samimi, “Women Astir in Persia,” *Star of the West*, 353. Iranian women gained the right to vote in 1963.

¹⁹⁰ Rouhangiz Khanum Fath Azam quoted in Samimi, “Women Astir in Persia,” *Star of the West*, 353-54.

¹⁹¹ Azam quoted in Samimi, “Women Astir in Persia,” *Star of the West*, 352-53.

¹⁹² Samimi, “Women Astir in Persia,” *Star of the West*, 353.

¹⁹³ Spiritual Assemblies administer in lieu of clergy. Sayyid Mustafa for the Spiritual Assembly of Mandalay to W.H. Randall, “A Letter from Mandalay, Dec. 3, 1918,” *Star of the West* 9, no. 18 (Mulk 1, 74; Feb. 7, 1919): 216.

¹⁹⁴ Sayyid Mustafa, “Rangoon, Burma to Mrs. Corinne True, Chicago,” *Star of the West* 10, no. 7 (Kalimát 1, 75; July 13, 1919):140.

¹⁹⁵ For a discussion of political involvement see: Ian Christopher Fletcher, “‘Women of the Nations, Unite!’ Transnational suffragism in the United Kingdom, 1912-1914,” in *Women’s Suffrage in the British Empire*, 103-120.

¹⁹⁶ Keith Ransom-Kehler, “Members One of Another,” *Star of the West* 16, no. 1 (April 1925): 396. See also ‘Abdul Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, trans. Marzieh Gail (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1957), 39.

¹⁹⁷ Kehler, “Members One of Another,” 396.

CHAPTER 4. Operationalizing the new World Order: Bahá'í Millennial Reform

...strictly speaking, in a Bahá'í society there is no distinction between things secular and things religious....No longer does a core of faith draw around itself immobile dogmas and practices; a distinct institution denoted as religion is not possible. The faith, rather, goes out to engage in life, and the secular, being spiritualized, is raised to the level of a new order of action. People think religion is confined to an edifice, to be worshipped at an altar. In reality it is an attitude toward divinity which is reflected through life.

Marion Holley, "Studying the New World Order" 1932.¹

Introduction

In the early twentieth century, western Bahá'í women, linked by bonds of female friendship and informed by a belief in female equality, engaged in a variety of faith-driven "teaching" and other reform activities, at home and abroad, aimed at implementing the Bahá'í principles they believed undergirded the establishment of a millenarian new World Order. In order to bring about a major shift in social ethics, Bahá'í women saw teaching others their principles, and enlisting their support, as the most direct and efficacious of their many reform efforts. Although some Bahá'í "teaching" activities resembled the pursuits of missionary women, there were differences. Having no clergy, teaching the Faith to others was a duty enjoined on all believers. However, "teaching" was very broadly defined. It encompassed everything from public talks and the distribution of literature, to hospitality, to reform enterprises, to bettering the world through "commendable and seemly conduct" and "pure and goodly deeds."² This latter type of teaching was often referred to as "living the life."

The social reform efforts discussed in this chapter represent only a small glimpse into the numerous activities pursued by Bahá'í women worldwide, and only touch on a few of several key doctrinal Bahá'í principles. Some principles, like universal peace and the equality of women, intersected with all efforts and were foregrounded in Bahá'í discourse and activities. Other convictions, like the harmony of science and religion, were widely accepted within the Bahá'í community, but generated limited direct activism. The Bahá'í doctrinal endorsement of secular science, unusual in an era when many sects saw scientific investigation as threatening to religious authority and tradition, contributed to dissipating superstitions, and the promotion of modern methods in Bahá'í endeavours such as health and education. The Bahá'í economic program to eradicate extremes of wealth and poverty appealed to many, especially socialists. However, unlike socialists, Bahá'ís argued that the world's economic crisis was primarily spiritual, requiring a recognition of "the oneness of mankind;" therefore, a materialist analysis, however vital, was "inadequate."³ Bahá'ís believed that a "new economic order" required "a vast spiritual force, a new conscience, a new heart of humanity" to facilitate cooperative efforts to abolish want and have "ideals of service prevail over the desire of profit seeking and exploitation."⁴ "Teaching," and encouraging others to adopt Bahá'í principles, were seen as ways to begin to rectify inequalities. Although Bahá'ís pursued a wide variety of reform activities, individually and in groups, a few key areas emerged in the early twentieth century as particularly characteristic of Bahá'í women's transnational feminist reform efforts: specifically, education (especially of women), the adoption of a universal auxiliary language, and the abolition of prejudices. Like all Bahá'í women's reform endeavours, teaching the Faith and actualizing

doctrinal principles were motivated by, inseparably linked to, and framed within the mythical matrix of the greater millenarian goal of establishing the foundations of a new World Order.

Building the New World Order: Millennialism, Missionization, or “Living the Life”?

Like other feminists, reformers, Social Gospellers, and missionary women, Bahá’í women understood that building a “new earth” required dedication, sustained effort, and personal sacrifice.⁵ Bahá’í values meshed easily with western Protestant ideals, as a high value was placed on industriousness, self-discipline, civic responsibility, and the performance of “good works.”⁶ Bahá’ís valorized pioneer ethics of individualism, self-reliance, and communal voluntarism, implicitly subscribing to the maxim, “God helps those who help themselves.”⁷ In this, they were similar to many Christian reformers who felt they had better roll up their sleeves and build the Kingdom of God on Earth themselves, according to Christ’s precepts.⁸ Bahá’ís anticipated that the construction of a new civilization would be powerfully aided by divine forces, but they did not expect it to appear instantly or supernaturally. As Keith Ransom-Kehler observed:

“The principle of faith is to lessen words and to increase deeds.” It seems apparent that if the human experiment is to succeed it must succeed solely through the efforts of human beings; the heavenly hosts are not going to descend and work out our problems for us; we are promised their assistance only as we strive for ourselves; human conditions cannot be changed except through human agencies; the old evil things of this world can only be obliterated by men and women; the new shining order of peace and good will can only be established as we incorporate it into our souls and reflect it in our deeds.⁹

Using a natural metaphor, Bahá’ís saw the world entering a “Divine Springtime,” when the dross and decay of “old world order” ideas and institutions would be swept away through a series of convulsive social and economic tribulations. The organic growth of new ideals and institutions would gradually transform the planet, and a new World Order would be hastened by believers’ teaching Bahá’í concepts and operationalizing the Faith’s principles in concert with other like-minded reformers. While ultimate success was scripturally assured, progress could be advanced or retarded by free will and human choices.¹⁰ A gradualist millennial vision inspired perpetual hope. May Maxwell, preparing for ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s’ 1912 Montreal visit, wrote:

...it may be of interest to know of the progress in Montreal and of the widespread change which is taking place in Canada. This change has covered a period of several years, in which old, dead systems are giving way to new social and political groups, old, crystallized forms are dissolving in the radiance of the broad, generous ideas of the new age, and personal power and authority are giving place to principles of justice and truth, to a higher conception of human brotherhood.”¹¹

Bahá’ís believed that to the degree humanity adopted the Faith’s spiritual principles and practical programs, they would escape the ills of social breakdown. Therefore, teaching Bahá’í ideals was seen as a duty, in order to mitigate human suffering. As Rúhíyyih Khánúm wrote:

To fail in one’s moral duty to humanity these days is a heavy failure. How would we like to be without this Cause today? Where would we see any hope, any real security ahead in

the future? ...Can any one of us feel he can receive such a bounty and yet withhold it from others, rest quiescent in his own inner sense of security and leave others untaught and unhelped in these disastrous days the world is passing through? ¹²

Overall, Bahá'í reformers believed that the most effective, long-lasting metamorphosis of individual and collective behaviour occurred when others accepted, promoted and shared the work of actualizing the Bahá'í vision. If the worldview and ethics of populations shifted, substantial social transformation would follow. Although new believers were desired, having hearers convert was less central than spreading the "message." As American Grace Krug paraphrased: "About teaching, 'Abdul Bahá said: 'Give the message with love and joy to those we meet and leave the souls to God.'"¹³ For Bahá'í women, one's thoughts and motives, individual spiritual growth, "living the life," service projects, feminist activism, and "teaching" were all coherently linked components of global reform. This attitude invested all human interactions and even the most menial of everyday activities with cosmic significance, giving women's lives a constant sense of purpose and meaning.

Unlike more formalized "preaching," this inclusive thinking allowed a great deal of latitude for women to actively "serve." For example, Clara and Hyde Dunn, in later middle-age and nearly impoverished, became the first Bahá'í "pioneers" to Australia, arriving in 1920. "Pioneering" involved moving to an area that (usually) had few or no Bahá'ís, with the intention of "living the life" and otherwise teaching. It differed from a Christian missionary model in that Bahá'ís had little or no institutional direction or infrastructure and were (usually) self-supporting. While Hyde Dunn travelled widely as a salesman, giving Bahá'í talks, Clara, who had nursing skills, "remained in the cities striving, by faithfully living the life and lovingly serving all with tenderness, thoughtfulness, and kindly actions, by visiting the sick, comforting the forlorn, advising the perplexed, to lead souls to the Cause."¹⁴ Such typically "feminine" activities were also reckoned as "teaching." A 1933 *Star of the West* article about the Dunns quoted 'Abdu'l Bahá: "We must act and teach mankind with the irresistible force of example. One drop of deed is better than an ocean of words, and one ounce of action is more valuable than a ton of eloquent speeches."¹⁵ Shoghi Effendi later named both Clara and Hyde Dunn "Hands of the Cause," demonstrating the equivalence of their contributions.¹⁶ This high level of official recognition of Clara's activities, as compared to her husband Hyde's public speaking, differed markedly from the scant acknowledgement usually given missionary wives' similar services. Unlike Christian missionization, which was seen as a mainly male endeavour assisted by women, in the western Bahá'í community women were acknowledged as playing a greater role in "teaching" than men. In Paris, 'Abdu'l Bahá said, "Women must make the greatest effort ...until their enlightenment and striving succeeds in bringing about the unity of mankind. They must work with a burning enthusiasm to spread the Teaching of Bahá'u'lláh among the peoples, so that the radiant light of the Divine Bounty may envelop the souls of all the nations of the world!"¹⁷ To this end, nearly all Bahá'í women undertook "teaching" others, either directly, or indirectly by example.

Teaching became a consuming passion in the lives of some. For instance, after May Maxwell's 1902 marriage to architect William Sutherland Maxwell, a story often retold by their daughter recounted that Sutherland feared that he and his wife were drifting apart because of her constant Bahá'í work and his demanding professional work. Rúhíyyih Khánúm said her mother was "terrified" by the implications of his words but instead of cajoling him and changing her

behaviour, as expected of a woman of her time, she gently reminded him that before they had married, she had told him that the Cause would always come first and said, “If I must, I will go on alone on this chosen path in my life.” To this, taking her hands in his, he responded, “I will go with you all the way.”¹⁸ The repetition of this story within the Bahá’í community positioned “teaching” as a higher purpose, reinforcing the right of women, even married women, to define their own destinies, while affirming to men the necessity of supporting them. May Maxwell’s millenarian convictions allowed her to be unconventionally individualistic for a woman, telling Sutherland, “the only reason for a human being’s life on this earth is to attain to the Knowledge of God – all else is nothing, all else passes away as a wind passes away.”¹⁹ Her frequent extended absences for Bahá’í teaching and administrative work challenged her contemporaries’ views, and occasionally, Sutherland’s patience. Many women did not receive the same levels of male support. Another legendary teacher who followed her own “chosen path,” in spite of her husband’s divorcing her, was Lua Getsinger, eulogized with the words: “She knew but little rest for ‘Abdul Bahá had said: ‘Day and night thou must engage in spreading the message. Nothing else will avail thee.’”²⁰ The voice of ‘Abdu’l Bahá, personifying the “Cause,” pre-empted that of husbands. Bahá’í women believed the “right” of men to control women had been overturned.

Many of the reform, teaching and charitable efforts undertaken by May Maxwell and her peers resembled missionary efforts. These women circled the world, speaking to all races and classes, engaging in reform and service projects, inaugurating, building and strengthening Bahá’í communities. Like missionary women, many of these women were single, or at least without pressing domestic responsibilities. Also like missionary women, a significant number boasted a better education than most of their peers, suggesting that this new religious movement offered them an outlet for their knowledge and skills.²¹ Some, like May Maxwell, were self-educated, while others were part of the first contingents of university educated women. A few examples include Juliet Thompson and Marion Jack who studied art in Paris, Lua Getsinger who studied drama in Chicago, and Martha Root who graduated from the University of Chicago in 1895 as a journalist, specialising in automobiles. Keith Ransom-Kehler, who probably knew May Maxwell in Paris but did not become a Bahá’í until 1921, earned an MA in 1904 and taught English at Albion College, later becoming a businesswoman.²² Montreal reformer Rose Henderson was one of Canada’s first female PhDs.²³ Dr. Susan Moody, a doctor and educator in Tehran, studied art and medicine in New York and Chicago.²⁴ Coralie Franklin Cook, an African-American early Bahá’í, graduated from Storer College in 1880, then taught English at Storer and Howard University, the first member of her family, former slaves, to achieve higher education.

The class origins and situations of this group of “exemplary” female Bahá’ís varied considerably. A few, like Phoebe Hearst, Alice Pike Barney, and Laura Dreyfus-Barney were independently wealthy. May Maxwell and Keith Ransom-Kehler were less affluent but benefitted from social norms that condoned the philanthropic reform activities of middle-class women, allowing them a degree of freedom. Juliet Thompson associated with “high” society, but supported herself and her mother with her painting. Lua Getsinger was mainly dependent on the aid and hospitality of other believers. Artist Marion Jack and Martha Root funded themselves by their own (meagrely paid) employment, with help from family and friends. Like missionary women, a religious “calling” allowed Bahá’í women to sidestep conventional expectations, even

marriage, offering them unusual opportunities for travel, adventure and autonomy while preserving social respectability within the semblance of a familiar missionary model.

However, there were important differences between the organizational patterns and restrictions encountered by western Bahá'í women and those impinging on missionary women. With no clerical class, all Bahá'í women (and men) were charged with “teaching” the Faith through words, or more admirably, deeds. Opposed to ritual beyond the basic requirements of their scriptures, there were no rites or sacraments to administer. This led to a flattened hierarchy in the faith community, allowing a greater scope for women. Members “shared” the teachings rather than having (implicitly superior) theologians “feeding the flock.” In speaking of Keith Ransom-Kehler’s Persian travels, Mariam Haney drew a firm distinction between Bahá'í and missionary activities, writing: “It was a mission not undertaken for the sake of proselyting (sic) Orientals into a religion of the Occident, but for the sake of creating and cementing ties of friendship already inherent in the miracle which rallied peoples of the East and peoples of the West around one unifying Center, Bahá'u'lláh.”²⁵ Certainly in Persia, birthplace of the Bahá'í Faith and most of its adherents, western Bahá'ís were positioned differently than missionary women. However, even in “virgin” territories, where Bahá'í activities were clearly missionizing, the conceptualizations and rhetoric of the venture were consciously different. One Bahá'í put it:

Since religious orders and the profession of the clergy is absolutely forbidden... each Baha'i is expected to consecrate a certain portion of his [or her] life to producing union and progress for all. In other words the Bahá'í religion may be looked upon as a missionary movement which demands democratization of religious instruction and extends its clerical function to all humanity.²⁶

In “teaching” roles, Bahá'í women had greater opportunities for leadership than women of most religions. Even in efforts that responded to requests from ‘Abdu’l Bahá, Shoghi Effendi or elected Bahá'í institutions, most ventures were self-initiated and self-directed. Most religious women were prohibited from overstepping the bounds reserved for male clergy. If they chose to live intensely religious lives, Catholic or Anglican women could enter female religious orders. Protestants could adopt short or long-term adjunct assistant roles as (usually young and single) missionary women. Those seeking life-long commitment might become “missionary wives” whose distinct, if not well-articulated, obligations were as onerous, if not more so, than those of male missionaries. Missionary wives bore responsibilities for child-bearing, child-rearing and domestic management in a foreign environment, assisting their husbands in the mission venture and often taking on the task of evangelizing indigenous women, “enlightening their minds, raising their characters and challenging their social customs.” However, wives were “laity,” while their husbands were “clergy,” so women had “neither voice nor vote” in mission theory, strategy, and often, placement.²⁷ Enjoined to focus on the home, they were expected to undertake benevolent pursuits but were often not allowed to “preach,” administer rites, or deliver sermons.²⁸ Jewish women, less likely to enter the mission field, were similarly expected to engage in maternal, domestic and benevolent work, and leave rabbinical functions to men.

In contrast, while Bahá'í women might also have domestic responsibilities, and were expected to be spiritual and material “helpmates” to husbands (as were husbands to wives), many women also assumed local, national and transnational leadership positions, either informally or

through election or appointment to positions in the emerging administrative order.²⁹ Maternal virtues were valued, but Bahá'í women were not admonished to limit themselves to a domestic role. As American Bahá'í author Orrol Harper wrote in about 1927:

In centuries past woman has been the helpless, uneducated, unhonored part of mankind. As far back as his topical records go woman's chief sphere of activity has been the home. Her time has been so completely taken up with household duties and the rearing of children that her intellectual growth has suffered.

What a difference exists today! Civilization has advanced, and woman is awake to her identity. She is becoming conscious that she is the equal and complement of the masculine element of humanity – Education is freeing her from the bondage of ignorance – the Feminist Movement has demonstrated that woman is capable of filling a definite place in the world. Her development is necessary to the progress of the human race.³⁰

In fact, the Bahá'í ideal of “home” reversed many aspects of the tenacious Victorian image of home as a haven guarded from the world, tenanted by a domestic female “angel” who served the needs of one (tacitly white, middle-class) man and his offspring after their forays into the “worldly” public arena.³¹ Instead, Bahá'í women were to expand the boundaries of “home” to be inclusive of the greater world. As ‘Abdu’l Bahá wrote to one “maidservant,” “Blessed art thou for having opened the door of thy home unto the people...”³² Bahá'ís were admonished to overcome “conventionality” and “be kind to strangers,” especially those from foreign lands such as “Turkey, Japan, Persia, Russia, China or any other country in the world” and “make them feel at home; find out where they are staying, ask if you may render them any service; try to make their lives a little happier.”³³ This injunction stood in marked contrast to growing early twentieth-century nativism, racio-ethnic antagonism, and religious intolerance, as eugenicist, social hygiene, and protectionist efforts sought to curb what many saw as “undesirable” immigration and social mixing.³⁴ Bahá'í “teaching” was also linked to home-based hospitality, in part because the Bahá'í community had almost no built infrastructure. Informal informational meetings held in homes later became popularly known as “firesides,” a primary Bahá'í teaching method.³⁵

Although Faith-related activities might last a lifetime, Bahá'ís, unlike missionaries, did not view their efforts as a career. Rather, they saw themselves as performing a series of voluntary acts integrated into a larger pattern of “service,” and “living the life,” which might include any number of local, national or international teaching or reform activities, determined by the exigencies of the “Cause” and the direction of their leadership. Bahá'í women often promulgated the Faith’s principles through “travel-teaching,” initiating, assisting or consolidating Bahá'í communities. “Pioneers” might settle short or long-term, as Agnes Alexander did in Japan. When couples such as Laura and Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney travelled on Faith-related assignments, as they frequently did, they were both “laity” and went as equals. In fact, this particular couple graphically signalled their equality upon their marriage by both adopting a hyphenated surname comprised of both surnames, which led to some ridicule of Laura’s “eccentricity” and a perceived lowering of her husband’s masculine status. As gossipy Washington columnists remarked: “Just what Laura thinks of her [husband] may be judged in the manner in which Laura now styles herself – Dreyfus–Barney, if you please.”³⁶

Feminist activities could also be encapsulated by “teaching,” as this expansive concept included the promotion of any Bahá’í tenet. Author Mary Hanford Ford, speaking at the 1915 San Francisco International Bahá’í Congress, put forward Táhirih as the ideal teacher. She said:

This wonderful and lovely creature, one of the most distinguished women of Persia in her day, took off her veil, went about teaching publicly, and insisted upon the realization of the truth of the Báb’s teaching in regard to the equality of women...³⁷

Táhirih also served as a heroic model for western women who faced opposition in their reform objective of building a future civilization, the ultimate goal of Bahá’í “teaching.” Ford wrote:

Can't you imagine how she looked at those men who threatened her and said to them: "Do you suppose that for the sake of the little thing you call life, and that I know is not life, I would be silent upon this important question which is the foundation of the future civilization of the world, the true civilization?" So she went on just the same, speaking to both the men and the women who came to hear of the power and significance of this part of the Báb's teaching, that men and women are equal and must stand equal in the face of the world...³⁸

Undoubtedly, some westerners saw themselves as “civilizers” and “improvers” in similar ways to missionary women and other reformers, as they viewed the Bahá’í Faith (and spiritual ethics generally) as a “means of civilizing the world and preserving order.”³⁹ The Bahá’í definition of “civilization” was not, however, nationally, racioethnically, imperially, or economically defined. Disavowing proselytism or the eradication of cultures, British Bahá’í author Alice Buckton repeated ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s teaching advice, writing: “To spread the knowledge of the Kingdom by teaching requires the skill of the physician; a wise physician does not offer help to those who do not need treatment.”⁴⁰ Bahá’í “civilization” included but was not defined by technological progress; the goal was “to produce a world civilization ...which is not merely the exploitation of nature but rather a fitting environment for the soul.... in which the social aspects of the Bahá’í teachings are supremely important at the present day.”⁴¹ This definition of civilization also encompassed feminist aspirations. As Edith “Roohieh” Sanderson, an early Paris Bahá’í, phrased it: “...where there is no equality between men, and women, there can be no real civilization. This is a new era, a new dispensation, and we believers are forerunners of a new civilization...”⁴²

Education for a New World Order

One of the Bahá’í principles that stood out as the “means of initiating a new and better civilization” and “a momentous factor in human progress” was education.⁴³ It became a major focus of twentieth-century women. In a 1925 radio talk, Bahá’í Isabella Brittingham explained:

For humanity is realizing that the world must become one home. One of the greatest foundation planks by which this can be made practicable is Universal Education. When ignorance is destroyed and a plan of equal opportunity is made for all which is the right of every member of the human family then the "pillars of justice will be raised" and the real world civilization will become stably founded.⁴⁴

Education was a doctrinal principle, simultaneously an end in itself, a “plank” in the new World Order, a prerequisite for the “independent investigation of truth,” and a primary methodology for accomplishing other Bahá’í goals such as equality. Education was where the spiritual, social, and practical intersected. Stanwood Cobb, a co-founder of the Progressive Education Society, argued that universal education, including “virtues” and “moral character,” was efficacious in building the mutual trust required to solve “social problems” and build a global political and institutional framework through consultation and cooperation, the *modus operandi* of the new World Order.⁴⁵

The Bahá’í injunction, unique in religious scripture, to prioritize the education of girls and women was the key to speedily educating the planet. As ‘Abdu’l Bahá noted in London, “The woman is indeed of the greater importance to the race. She has the greater burden and the greater work.”⁴⁶ Keith Ransom-Kehler explained “that if education not be given to all the members of a family it must be the girls who receive it, for they are the potential mothers of the race, and enlightened mothers are necessary to the rapid progress of society.”⁴⁷ Isabella Brittingham also predicted economic adjustments, as “in this advancing age the daughter must be given the most complete education... [and when] every race has equal educational opportunity, then labor will assume a newly adjusted attitude in the concepts of the human family.”⁴⁸ Brittingham also envisioned significant pedagogical changes, saying:

Every soul must put into practice the study of an art, trade or profession which will contribute to human welfare. Thus the methods of acquiring education must differ from the present.... the education of the future will involve the moral and spiritual life of the child. New sciences and new arts likewise rapidly developing will become a great factor in the future universal education.⁴⁹

Bahá’í-sponsored education, whether secular, moral, or religious, was open to those of all faiths. For instance, Dorothy Ward Wade and Rosemary Sala held Saturday children’s classes in Montreal in the 1920s. Dorothy remembered:

We had a lot of children from the coloured church came up and she [Rosemary] gave them the principles, coloured crayons to write out the leaves of one tree and little very simple principles. They were always very happy to come because she was an excellent teacher, Rosemary. Wonderful imagination.⁵⁰

What Rosemary was likely teaching was the popular Bahá’í scripture that all people are “the leaves of one tree,” which was meant to combat prejudices like racism.⁵¹ Dorothy recalled that about eight Afro-Canadian children came regularly with the blessing of their Union United Church pastor, Reverend C. H. Este. Dorothy commented: “I don’t think any of those children ever became Bahá’ís. But, of course, one never knows.”⁵² Although Bahá’ís probably hoped that some might eventually “recognize” the Faith, by teaching key principles such as the fundamental “oneness of humanity,” they were “planting the seeds” of the ideal new World Order.

Bahá’ís believed “a new race” was “being formed on this globe, a race more tender, more illumined, more spiritual;” therefore, “training of the child must consist not so much in molding this representative of the growing generation in accordance with old patterns, as in stimulating, inspiring and freeing the child soul for the exercise of its own spiritual powers”⁵³ They did not

want to “impose upon them the dogmas, the blind forms of the past;” they felt their “duty” was to “refrain from repression, from even too much direction,” believing they would “find their way, as bees to the home nest, to the idea and ideals of the New Kingdom.”⁵⁴ However, new educational models were not Rousseauian, laissez-faire, or unstructured. The Bahá’í credo demanded the inculcation of academic and scientific excellence, as well as what Bahá’ís saw as universal spiritual ethics. One editorial warned there was “no more dangerous fallacy” than the “evolutionary theories to the effect that humanity contains within itself the power to advance and progress to higher and higher civilizations,” unaided by the moral teachings of the “Manifestations.”⁵⁵ As Isabella Brittingham proposed, “Character training, forming an integral part of the new education, will destroy prejudice, and the golden daybreak of true brotherhood and universal peace will be ushered in upon a storm tossed world.”⁵⁶

Education thus became an imaginative gateway to a utopian future, overturning not only social ills, but also dreary conformity and oppressive discipline. As one Bahá’í wrote:

It is through joy, 'Abdu'l Bahá affirms, that the intelligence of the child is best awakened and developed. The education of the future Bahá’í world, directed upon such lines, will be far different from the drudgery, strain, and continual drill work which characterize present systems....The whole human race will be happier, more spontaneous and artistic, more intuitive and penetrating in mental qualities, when this new education is universally applied.⁵⁷

Keith Ransom-Kehler characterized traditional “old world” educational methods as a “monstrous attack” on a child “required to sit for several hours a day, passive, quiescent, listless, learning things that in no way relate to his world or to his interests; while his two most precious assets, energy and curiosity, are fatally transmuted into the inhibitions and repetitions of class room routine.”⁵⁸ She characterized both children and women as victims of the “tyranny” of a traditional social system that did not accord either group much value. She wrote:

“The child, like the woman, in times past was alternately a toy, or a nuisance. Because their respective functions were not recognized in the administration of society, we are today inheritors of those evils that ever attend tyranny in any form.”⁵⁹

Western Bahá’ís were drawn to “progressive” education. Keith Ransom-Kehler praised the “new freedom” of children and the “noble experiments of John Dewey, Marietta Johnson, Maria Montessori and those other inspired pioneers” who freed education from competition and “meaningless” memorization. Instead, in a “modern educational system,” with the “wise and persistent direction” of the teacher,” educators stimulated the “unfoldment of those inner potentialities that enable the child to ‘learn by doing....’”⁶⁰ Such a problem-solving approach furnished a child “with adequate equipment to enter into higher states of responsibility and of duty.”⁶¹ As Keith asserted: “To know how to reason is one of the prime requirements of civilized life.”⁶² She explained, “Baha'u'llah gives to the modern world a new trinity: religion, science and reason as the three essentials required to bring our great human adventure safe to shore.”⁶³ Continuous self-education would be necessary to keep pace with the “truly astounding” increase in knowledge and people must be taught “where and how to attain knowledge for themselves.”⁶⁴ Bahá’í enthusiasm for progressive education can be explained by the fact that the expected

outcomes of these models coincided with the ideals sought in “New Era” adults who were freed from paternal or clerical oversight: autonomy, independent learning, and personal responsibility.

May Maxwell, who had herself abandoned formal education at fourteen, also deplored the rigidity of traditional educational methods and was drawn to “alternative” education. In a letter (c. 1900) to her future husband, Sutherland Maxwell, May wrote:

Frank [May’s cousin] was telling me yesterday of a man who has adopted a little girl, and educated her on a system of his own, by making all the lessons play, & so attractive that she loved them, and the result was that at the age of 3 years, she can read write & speak in three languages! I am sure that in this wonderful time that is coming in the world the whole system of education will be changed, and everything we learn will be spontaneous & happy. And it will be so different- for we shall learn to see – to understand and to do as never before – instead of accumulating a mass of dry facts called knowledge.⁶⁵

When her daughter Mary was born in 1910, when May was 40, she had governesses, common in middle-class families of that era. However, May also saw an affinity between Bahá’í educational goals and Montessori-style methods, popular among Bahá’ís.⁶⁶ On the boat to North America in 1912, a Mr. and Mrs. Austin told ‘Abdu’l Bahá that Montessori managed her school in Rome “in such a way that now most of the schools in Europe and America are following her standards.”⁶⁷ Although not entirely true, it revealed their regard for Montessori. Visiting the Maxwell home in 1912, when high-spirited Mary was two, ‘Abdu’l Bahá told May not to restrain her, as she would face many restraints in the future. About 1914, May Maxwell began a kindergarten, recalling:

...You may know that when Ruhíyyih was three or four years old I imported the first set (Montessori Method) to Canada, with a Montessori teacher from New York and established the first school of this type in Canada (Montreal) in our own home....

It really did wonders for her and the other eight children, and ‘Abdu’l Bahá, with whom I discussed Montessori’s work in 1912, said she was the greatest modern psychologist...It was through all this that I became interested in the “Movement of Progress and Education” of which I was practically a charter member and subscribed to their magazine edited by Stanwood Cobb.⁶⁸

Perhaps May’s interest in education derived partly from her godmother, Phoebe Hearst, a major benefactor of education, especially female education, at all levels from kindergarten to university.⁶⁹ Of May Maxwell’s eight other students, some were relatives, such as the children of Sutherland’s cousin, Bahá’í Martha MacBean, and some were less privileged neighbourhood children.⁷⁰ The school does not seem to have lasted long, possibly due to May Maxwell’s travels. From that point forward, Rúhíyyih Khánum’s education was unorthodox, with stints at school and a variety of tutors, augmented by a wide exposure to various cultures and life experiences.

Bahá’í doctrine did not prescribe particular educational theories or recommend cultural preferences such as coeducation, but argued that in the future when education became more systematized and universal, both sexes “should follow the same course of study and have the

same education,” in the hope that when “all mankind receives the same education, and the equality of men and women is realized,” the foundations of warfare would be “utterly destroyed.”⁷¹ In this way, education intersected with peace, equality, and other doctrines.

Eastern Reforms, Western Assistance: Bahá’í “brothers” and “sisters”

Bahá’ís also supported educational endeavours, especially female education, in other countries. Such projects were attractive to westerners for many reasons: they fell into a comfortably familiar purview of women’s reform and missionary work; they served the Bahá’í mandate of providing universally accessible, high quality, scientifically-based education to both boys and girls; and they were seen as the most efficacious method of reducing class and race prejudices and encouraging peace. In one such school project, the wife of ‘Abdu’l Bahá, Munírih Khánum, prevailed on her western co-religionists in 1920 to collaborate with her in establishing a school for girls on Mt. Carmel in Haifa, Palestine.⁷² This school for girls was, like many Bahá’í female reform projects, a transnational effort, in this case between Europe, America and Palestine. Munírih Khánum appealed to her “dear spiritual daughter” Edith (Roohieh) Sanderson, a Paris Bahá’í who came into the Faith through May Maxwell. Munírih Khánum assured her that creating such a school would “help the education of the Bahá’í girls and serve the uplift of the world of humanity.” She further mentioned that ‘Abdu’l Bahá “desired that this work be done by Bahá’í women.”⁷³ Munírih Khánum explained that missionary education was already available for girls, but they wished for a Bahá’í school. However, when Edith Sanderson launched her appeal to westerners, she instead linked the educational question to a clear feminist call to have western believers help their eastern “sisters” to emancipate themselves. She wrote:

A call from the women of the East to the women of the West to assist them to liberate themselves, and in so doing to help the East to shake off the shackles that have held and bound her for so many centuries, for there, where there is no equality between men, and women, there can be no real civilization. This is a new era, a new dispensation, and we believers are forerunners of a new civilization, therefore, we cannot remain deaf to Monereh Khanum’s appeal.⁷⁴

Although invoking Orientalist images, Edith Sanderson demonstrated the inseparability in Bahá’í rhetoric between female education and feminist aspirations, highlighting the reciprocal nature of education, the advancement of women, and the progress of society. Edith was familiar with eastern women’s circumstances in Palestine as she, along with Lua Getsinger, had stayed with ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s family in Haifa during World War One. In her appeal, Edith also argued that the school would be a tribute to Munírih Khánum, the Holy Mother. This quiet, strong woman was called by Edith “a magnificent example to womankind,” who was not adequately recognized, in part because her “name and personality” was “concealed behind the power and majesty of the Master.”⁷⁵ Munírih Khánum, along with ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s sister Bahíyyih Khánum, whom Shoghi Effendi called “the outstanding heroine of the Bahá’í Dispensation,” were greatly admired by western women.⁷⁶ However, they never became iconic exemplars in the west in the way Táhirih did. This may be because western feminists, attuned to popular images of the “modern woman” could not transcend cultural barriers to imagine emulating women who quietly endured Islamo-Persian/Palestinian gender restrictions, or embrace as heroic women whose

service was primarily domestic. Another factor was that, unlike Táhirih, whose story had been mythologized and thereby made amenable to being shaped into a western suffrage parable, Munírih and Bahíyyih Khánúm were living eastern women, making their own pragmatic daily choices as to how best to advance reforms and goals suited to their particular situations.

Although western women did not conform to eastern models, and vice-versa, eastern and western women collaborated extensively, especially on female education in Iran. Bahá'ís, like other Iranian religious minorities, had education long before the Muslim majority because clerics and politicians opposed importing “western” ideas. Education was linked to social stature and literacy was low, especially among girls, as it was unusual to allow them outside the home. Until 1905, girls' schools in Tehran were solely foreign.⁷⁷ British medical officer C.J. Wills observed:

The daughters of the rich and learned are the only women who are at all educated... About one woman to fifty educated men is found, the policy of Mahommedism being ‘not to open the eyes of a woman too wide.’ Among the educated class, many are infidels [i.e. non-Muslims]...⁷⁸

The opening of modern schools by the largest Persian religious minority, the Bahá'ís (still called Bábís), differed from other non-Muslims, in that they were not protected by the Qur'an as “people of the book.” Therefore, they could be plundered or killed without recrimination on the mere accusation of being a Bahá'í.⁷⁹ Social, organizational and practical changes, such as mutual aid, building modern hospitals, and following religious prescriptions such as avoiding disease-ridden public baths and washing with fresh water, had improved the lives of Bahá'ís.⁸⁰ Added to fears of difference, and claims of Bahá'ís being imperialist agents, there were jealous suspicions that because of a strong commitment to education, Bahá'ís were overtaking Muslims in business, the civil service, and the professions. Bahá'ís also were favoured for positions of trust, due to their reputation for moral rectitude.⁸¹ Ongoing persecution led to boys and girls being taught by families, tutors, or in unofficial schools in towns or villages with high Bahá'í populations. To combat illiteracy, educated urban Bahá'ís travelled to rural areas to set up classes for Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís alike. In 1892-98, during a lull in persecution, ‘Abdu'l Bahá directed Persian Bahá'ís to establish schools for boys and girls, most of which were later recognized by the state.⁸² Bahá'í schools were also being established, as circumstances permitted, in India, Egypt, Turkey, Palestine, and southern Russia. Persian Bahá'í emigrants to a more tolerant 'Ishqabad, Russia, established a school for boys in 1894 and girls in 1897. The first Bahá'í school in Iran, the Tarbíyát Boys' School, opened in Tehran about 1899, and in early 1911, the Tarbíyát School for Girls began, followed by more than 50 schools, open to all religions, in towns and villages over the next 35 years.⁸³ By 1920, an estimated 10% of the estimated 28,000 primary and secondary Iranian students were enrolled in Bahá'í-run schools. About half the pupils attending Bahá'í schools in Tehran were not Bahá'ís.⁸⁴ The schools' reputations as superior western-style institutions prompted prominent, ambitious families to enroll their children, including those of the Pahlavi ruler, Reza Shah.⁸⁵ By 1934, when most Bahá'í schools were closed by government decree during a period of intense persecution, there were at least 25 schools for girls.⁸⁶ The depth of stereotypical links between “Bábís” [Bahá'ís], western-style education, and scientific modernism in Persia is revealed in Qajar princess Taj al Saltanih's (1884-1914) memoirs:

Right up to my eighteenth year, I had held beliefs taught to me by my nanny that the heavens were pulled by a chain in an angel's hand, or that when God's wrath was incurred, the sound of thunder came...As I progressed in my studies day by day, my irreligiosity grew until I was a complete naturalist myself. Since these ideas were new to me, I was eager to impart them to my mother, my relatives, and my children. As I would begin to talk, however, my mother would curse at me, 'You have turned Babi!' My relatives would invoke God's forgiveness and keep their distance, refusing to listen.⁸⁷

Feminist cultural critic Negar Mottahedeh argues that the idiomatic use of the term 'Bábí' as a metonym for modernism reveals a "remarkable" and enduring conflation of Bábí-Bahá'í ideology and "modern subjectivities," westernization, internationalism, feminism, and challenges to conservative Shi'a cultural and religious norms.⁸⁸ In this way, the home-grown Bábí-Bahá'í millennial movement was stigmatized xenophobically as the foreign, westernized "other."

It was into this conflicted Persian situation that western Bahá'í women, wanting to advance education, and accustomed to missionary models of foreign schools as "good works," strongly inserted themselves. Many westerners, including May Maxwell, supported the Tarbíyát Schools, providing scholarships for needy students. *Star of the West* reported contributors, funding appeals, the progress of individual students, and reports on the schools from both Persians and westerners. Bahá'í schools were initiated, managed, and mainly funded by local communities, but western Bahá'ís contributed funds and sent female teachers, doctors, and nurses to assist schools and hospitals, leaving Persian Bahá'ís open to hackneyed but dangerous claims of being spies or imperialist agents. Such collaboration reinforced cross-cultural ties, and expanded both eastern and western understandings of the practical institution of Bahá'í precepts.

One of the first western Bahá'í women to dedicate her services to Iran was Dr. Susan I. Moody (1851-1934), who had become a Bahá'í in Chicago in 1903.⁸⁹ In 1908, a group of male Persian Bahá'í doctors, who were setting up a hospital in Tehran, transmitted to 'Abdu'l Bahá a plea for an American female doctor to attend to the medical needs of women. Dr. Susan Moody, a single woman of nearly sixty, rose to the call to go to Persia in 1909. Local Bahá'ís welcomed her at sixteen of the nineteen relay stations she traversed before reaching Tehran.⁹⁰ Becoming proficient in Persian (Farsi), Moody remained there, specializing in gynecology, obstetrics, and "women's diseases, treating all classes and the sick of all nationalities, Moslem, et al."⁹¹ A 1910 report from "Esphahan" [Isfahan] relates: "We have just heard that two of our American sisters have arrived at Teheran. We hope that through their endeavor and service the problem of women's education will find new inspiration in Persia."⁹² About 1910, Dr. Moody built on the efforts of local women, who had started informal schools in homes. Moody helped to establish a girl's school sponsored by the Bahá'ís of Tehran, saying, "My heart aches for the neglected ones."⁹³ Her friend Jessie Revell, who later visited Iran, in 1934, reported:

She [Dr. Moody] found many of the Bahá'í men were in full sympathy with her views and through Bahá'í cooperation and consultation a girl's school was started with an attendance of thirty pupils. It now has an enrollment of several hundred and is known as the Tarbíyát School for Girls. Someone has declared it to be "the greatest among all the schools in Tihrán."⁹⁴

Dr. Moody also began outside religious study classes for Bahá'í girls, at first run by trained teachers but later by graduates themselves.⁹⁵ In her medical practice, Moody was assisted by Dr. Sarah Clock and nurse Elizabeth Stewart, who arrived in 1910 and remained until their deaths.⁹⁶ In 1911, another early American Bahá'í, Lillian Kappes, became the first director of the Tarbíyát School for Girls, at which she taught English. They endured influenza epidemics, famine and “a variety of dreadful conditions,” including harassment by officials and fanatical Muslims. Due to dire anti-Bahá'í, anti-western conditions in Tehran, Dr. Moody returned to America in 1925.⁹⁷ In 1928, at age 77, Moody went back to Persia at Shoghi Effendi's request. Viewing the region through a millennial Bahá'í lens, she reported providential “liberating forces” at work bringing about “vast changes in the social order of the world,” especially in the East.⁹⁸ Like other western Bahá'í women, who by the 1920s were working around the globe, she located her efforts within the metamyth of the organic growth of a new World Order. When Dr. Moody died in Iran in 1934, Shoghi Effendi instructed Persia to rear a monument to this “far-famed pioneer” who had “forged” the “first link” in the “chain” uniting the “spiritual destinies” of Persia and America.⁹⁹

In 1922, Dr. Genevieve Coy became second director of the Tarbíyát School for girls.¹⁰⁰ She was a specialist in the education of gifted children and a professor of psychology with a PhD from Columbia University. In a 1922 article about her move to Tehran, she was held up as an example of “the appeal of the Bahá'í teachings to the highly trained university scientist.”¹⁰¹ The article included her testimonial of how she was averse to religion until hearing stories of the lives of Bahá'u'lláh and ‘Abdu'l Bahá created in her “an intense desire to know more of how they would help [her] to *live* the things [she] had dreamed of doing.”¹⁰² Clearly, she saw the opportunities offered by the Faith as emancipatory. Coy wrote regular articles, showing how feminist aspirations were woven into Tarbíyát's curriculum and activities, and prompting other westerners to volunteer services, visit, or contribute financially to the schools.¹⁰³ Under her able supervision, the school for girls became one of the foremost institutions in Iran. Open to all, it produced numerous students who became teachers, helping to develop female education throughout the country.¹⁰⁴ Upon her return to America, Genevieve Coy served on the elected local Spiritual Assembly of New York City, was principal of the progressive Dalton School (NYC), and administered the legendary Green Acre Bahá'í School.¹⁰⁵ In 1958, she offered to “pioneer” to either Alaska or Africa, and spent the remainder of her life serving the Faith in Salisbury, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). In a show of high ceremonial honour and racial harmony, she was buried in 1963 beside the first African Rhodesian woman to become a Bahá'í.¹⁰⁶ Like other western female Bahá'í exemplars, her reform efforts followed a broad transnational pattern.

Liminal Western Bahá'í Women: Western Imperialism or Bahá'í Cultural Exchange?

Western women who engaged in reform efforts in the Middle or Far East were not treated like eastern women, even in the Bahá'í community. Unlike the wives of western diplomats or missionary women, Bahá'í female reformers were not under the supervision of western males. In Persia, particularly, locals of Islamic heritage rarely interacted with western women. Western missionary women mainly ministered to non-Muslim indigenous Christians, or Christianized orphans. The hierarchical segregated “spheres” of men and women, and the liminal position of western Bahá'í women in relation to those divides, is graphically evidenced by early twentieth-century Persian Bahá'í “community” photographs. Early photos of eastern women, shown in

same sex groups, are rare and almost never labeled as “the Bahá’ís of...” Instead, this label is routinely affixed to photos of exclusively male Bahá’í groups, a mark of prevalent cultural androcentrism. By contrast, western community photographs almost invariably show mixed-sex groups with gender-integrated seating. When groups of Persian women were photographed with western women, the westerners were placed in the central front seat, conveying both their favoured position as honoured guests, and their implicit location as “outsiders.” More remarkable are group photographs with a western woman (or women) front and centre, surrounded by a large group of eastern men.¹⁰⁷ Since eastern women were almost never formally photographed with male groups, it seems western women were accorded a form of honorary male (outsider) status.

The gender ambivalence shown toward western women in eastern societies, where they occupied an odd position as not quite “women,” but not men, allowed western women a latitude in terms of gender expectations and restrictions not available to eastern women. Rúhíyyih Khánum recalled that during her 1923 Haifa pilgrimage with her mother, there was a large meeting of Bahá’í men in the central hall of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s home. She joined the eastern women, including the honoured Bahíyyih Khánum, in a room opening on to it. They sat in the dark so as to be unseen while the door was opened to “hear a little of what was going on.” “In those days,” Rúhíyyih Khánum says, “the eastern men and women, following the custom of the country, were entirely sequestered.”¹⁰⁸ May Maxwell and Edith Sanderson were seated beside Shoghi Effendi, in with the men. Western women were sometimes also assigned a degree of authority unusual for women, particularly if they were known to be emissaries of ‘Abdu’l Bahá or Shoghi Effendi. In 1930, when Martha Root travelled throughout Persia, she attended Bahá’í receptions and lectures in Tehran of one to two hundred people, six nights a week, for five weeks. Although no one was invited twice, she did not see “nearly all of the Bahá’ís.” Although she attended all events as the guest of honour, only two meetings “were attended by men and women together.” She writes, “This is a great innovation for husbands and wives to come together and to sit together. One young woman made a most eloquent speech of welcome, but it was the first time she had ever spoken before men.”¹⁰⁹ It is evident that western women saw such segregation of women as a form of gender oppression. In a footnote, Martha Root notes that “Only two years ago a law passed permitting that men and women could ride together in the same carriage. Certainly during the reign of His Imperial Majesty Shahanshah Pahlavi much progress has come in the equality of men and women, and in the education of women.”¹¹⁰ In spite of the fact that western women were singled out for special treatment, they emphasized their “sisterhood” with eastern women. Martha Root remarks that one afternoon, when leaving a reception in Tehran, it was raining,

...but the women and girls and little children all came through the garden to the outer door where the carriage stood.... They were not thinking of the rain on pretty frocks; it was sisters of the East and the West meeting together for just one afternoon...Others said: "It is the promise of Bahá'u'lláh fulfilled, for He said our fair haired sisters with blue eyes would come to us from the west."¹¹¹

Dr. Susan Moody relates a similar story describing the ways in which her gender position as a westerner in Persia differed markedly from that of eastern women. Unlike them, she was not required to wear a veil or excuse herself from social interaction with men. A letter (c.1910) was published in *Star of the West* directly below a photograph of Dr. Moody in the centre of a group of Persian women, accompanied by children. They hold up an oversize

calligraphic image of “The Greatest Name,” indicating that they are Bahá’ís, a common practice in Bahá’í photographs. Remarkably, the women’s faces are unveiled. Dr. Moody wrote:



Dr. Susan Moody with Tehran women in one of the first “unveiled” photographs. (Star of the West 1:2, 9.)

DEAREST EVA: Please redeem a promise I have made to the sisters here that their photo should be copied and spread in America. I think I mentioned that this is an important event in their lives; they have thrown down one rule, *for once*, that is, to show their faces to the world. I cannot describe to you how they are deprived. Again today I was in a home -- the wife's *mother* was closely veiled because the husband's young brother was in the room; and later all the women left the room because two men friends of the family were coming. I could stay and enjoy hearing the newcomers tell of a recent trip to Russia, etc. On leaving I went to say good bye to the women -- their rooms are in an entirely separate court, as if in another house. A man servant passed just as I raised the heavy curtain to leave, and all the women screamed and pulled down their veils, or drew the "chadur" up over their mouth and nose. The [Bahá'í] husband we met in Paris and since being on the continent he is anxious to help free the women from their dreary life.¹¹²

It is clear from this vignette that western women moved more freely in eastern societies than eastern women, although eastern women wielded influence by other means. It can be supposed also, from the remark about the husband’s desire to “help free the women,” that the presence of western women acted in concert with Bahá’í imperatives for gender equality to intensify demands of eastern women for change. It is unlikely that western cultural chauvinism was completely eradicated, inasmuch as western women saw themselves as liberated and their eastern “sisters” as oppressed. However, it is difficult to assume their presence constituted a form of western cultural imperialism for several reasons. As members of a religion marginalized everywhere, the efforts of western Bahá’í women differed from those of missionary and other

reform groups who were based in the west and often had links with imperial powers. Unlike western-based ideologies, Bahá'í precepts originated in, even though they diverged from, Islamo-Iranian culture, and Bahá'ís were directed by a Persian leadership based in Palestine, that had no vested interest in imposing western cultural, political, or religious ideologies. The scripturally-rooted millenarian project of creating a new World Order was therefore not conflated with western interests. Most western Bahá'í women's international efforts were either recommended by their Persian leadership, or initiated by non-western Bahá'í communities who appealed for aid from their western co-religionists. Unlike some other missionary movements, the Bahá'í model of “unity in diversity” advocated the protection of indigenous cultures, although self-initiated cultural evolution or exchange might occur. Although western women's natal ideologies and cultural habits were never entirely subsumed by Bahá'í culture, neither was their locus of identity a western one. In these and other ways, the Bahá'í Faith does not conform well to post-colonial models of a missionizing religion, with western adherents, acting as a vector for western imperialistic or cultural domination of non-western populations.

Nonetheless, the assistance and presence of western Bahá'í women could not be separated entirely from the global context of the relative economic, racial, political, and military dominance of western imperialist nations. Pragmatically, local communities sometimes strategically used the racial or class advantages, economic and educational resources, and greater cultural freedoms allowed to western women in eastern societies, to gain access and influence that local Bahá'ís might not easily have. For example, when individuals or communities were threatened, Bahá'ís were constrained by their doctrines of non-violence and obedience to law. Instead, the Bahá'ís appealed locally, nationally, and internationally to influential individuals, authorities, and the law to defend social justice. In spite of patriarchal eastern cultures' ambivalence about both women and “the West,” ‘Abdu'l Bahá and Shoghi Effendi sometimes sent western women on diplomatic missions to lobby persons of influence. The American community also sent petitions or letters to support persecuted fellow-believers.¹¹³

Those who assisted their co-religionists were admired in the community. For instance, Shoghi Effendi commended American Keith Ransom-Kehler for her efforts on behalf of the Persian friends. Keith (1876-1933) was an independent middle-class woman with a daughter, who was associated with Jane Addams, the Women's International League of Peace and Freedom, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Liberal Religious Fellowship, among other organizations. A friend of May Maxwell's, she became a Bahá'í in 1921. After being widowed for a second time in 1923, she travelled widely lecturing on child psychology, philosophy, the role of women in modern life, interior design, comparative religion, and the Bahá'í Faith. Keith taught Bahá'í classes, served in Bahá'í administration, spoke on behalf of racial unity, and regularly joined inter-racial Bahá'í “firesides” in Harlem. She helped to organize a series of World Unity conferences and undertook travel throughout North America, the West Indies, Asia, Australia, and the Indian subcontinent for the Faith after 1929. In 1932, Shoghi Effendi sent her to Iran, where she repeatedly petitioned Reza Shah Pahlavi to lift the ban on the entry and distribution of Bahá'í literature in Iran, and other limitations set on a community beset with outbursts of violence—arrests, beatings, murders, thefts, expropriations, and desecrations of graves and holy places.¹¹⁴ For her defense of the believers of Iran, where she died of smallpox in 1933, Shoghi Effendi praised her example:

...the tenacity and self-sacrifice of the fearless and brilliant Keith Ransom-Kehler, the first American martyr, who, journeying to Persia had pleaded in numerous interviews with ministers, ecclesiastics and government officials the cause of her down-trodden brethren in that land, had addressed no less than seven petitions to the Shah, and, heedless of the warnings of age and ill-health, had at last succumbed in Isfahan.¹¹⁵

The breadth of transnational activities undertaken by women like Dr. Susan Moody, Lillian Kappes, Genevieve Coy, and Keith Ransom-Kehler was unusual, even in the reform community.

The reform, social, and humanitarian service, teaching and administrative efforts of these women were viewed as sacrificial. Sometimes, as in the cases of Keith Ransom-Kehler, Lua Getsinger, May Maxwell and others, they included laying down one's life in a far-off land. That the women approached their tasks with a sacrificial intent is clear from a letter written by nurse Elizabeth Stewart about the passing in 1920 of her co-worker, teacher Lillian Kappes, in Tehran from "typhus fever," after nine years spent educating girls in Iran. Stewart writes:

What a glorious crown she will receive, for she has done a splendid work in the school during these years. For her dear mother and family my heart is sad. But what difference does it make if one is working here or there for the Cause. God knows where we can do the best work, and our lives are in His hands....This is the Day of God, and there is nothing else but that. May my life be a sacrifice to His feet and to the life of the friends.¹¹⁶

Although these women died of illness rather than violence, their deaths were framed as having an equivalency to heroic blood sacrifices of persecuted Persians. Shoghi Effendi named Keith a martyr, also posthumously appointing her the first female Hand of the Cause. He cabled:

Keith's precious life offered up sacrifice Beloved Cause in Baha'u'llah's native land. On Persian soil for Persia's sake she encountered challenged and fought forces of darkness with high distinction, indomitable will, unswerving exemplary loyalty. Mass of her helpless Persian brethren mourn sudden loss the valiant emancipator.¹¹⁷

Keith is here accorded an "honorary male" warrior persona, emancipating her "brethren" in a Manichean end-times battle, reversing typical chivalric tropes of brave men rescuing helpless women. She was interred, symbolically, in the Isfahan Bahá'í cemetery near the hallowed graves of two highly esteemed brothers martyred in 1879.¹¹⁸ Reinforcing Keith Ransom-Kehler's heroic status, Shoghi Effendi sent the respected Abu'l-Qásim Faizí as his representative to place a wreath on her grave and tell the Iranian Bahá'ís that she had "solidly welded the Bahá'ís of the East and the West," and had "glorified and exalted God's cause."¹¹⁹ Bahá'í burial law decreed that a body be buried not more than an hour's travel time from the place of death.¹²⁰ In Bahá'í world culture, as in Islam or in the case of Christian saints, the graves of fallen spiritual warriors became sites of visitation where prayers were offered. Such a high honouring of a female, and the placing of a visible monument, was an important marker of equality, a cultural interpretation not restricted to Bahá'ís.¹²¹ Such international graves became symbols of Bahá'í identity and solidarity transcending nationalisms, race, and gender, signalling a "new world" unity.

Western women, in their relations with non-western cultures, made attempts to transcend typical western identities. In the pursuit of their reform goals, western Bahá'í women frequently learned the local language, developed intimate, lasting, personal intercultural friendships, and adapted to non-western cultural practices that did not contradict Bahá'í principles in a sincere, if occasionally Orientalist-seeming fashion. As previously noted, Bahá'í women often used Persian names bestowed on them by 'Abdu'l Bahá (if they had been given one), and used the phrase *Alláh-u-Abhá* (lit. God is Most Glorious) in greeting each other.¹²² They frequently displayed pictures of 'Abdu'l Bahá, or jewelry or plaques bearing calligraphic renderings of the "Greatest Name" symbol. However, these constituted Bábí-Bahá'í cultural conventions, not Islamic or eastern ones, *per se*. As Lorol Schopflocher wrote in 1927, while travelling throughout Persia:

Every city in Persia has thousands of Baha'is with one common purpose, bound together by that "Love which passeth all understanding and whose motto is "Unity in Diversity." How often have I been greeted by that musical salutation so familiar to Baha'is all over the world, "Allah Abha," yet unknown and meaningless to those who have not yet entered the tent of unity and accepted the New Revelation.¹²³

Unless specifically instructed to do so (as they occasionally were for their own safety), western women as a group did not adopt the veil or other traditional eastern or other indigenous dress, although there were no restrictions against this. Rúhíyyih Khánum, after her marriage to Shoghi Effendi in 1937, often chose to wear a sheer, untied, headscarf on formal occasions. She also occasionally donned local garb, such as a sari in India, as a show of honour for local customs.

Collaborative transnational educational and humanitarian efforts between geographically and culturally separated Bahá'í communities not only provided material and practical assistance that helped to build capacity in local populations, but also knit closer bonds of shared identity between Bahá'ís worldwide, especially between the historically, religiously, and racially, divided "Orient" and "Occident." Internationalist ties were consciously cultivated. For example, obeying 'Abdu'l Bahá's directives, a number of Persian communities took up the study of Esperanto as an auxiliary international language. Overall, Bahá'ís believed, "education for loving cooperation in the new World Order is the supreme task of the future."¹²⁴

Beyond Babel: A Universal Auxiliary Language in the New World Order

In Bahá'í doctrine, a crucial aspect of universal education was the adoption of a single auxiliary language to be taught as part of the global curriculum, in addition to native languages. Bahá'ís believed that an auxiliary language would "help immensely in establishing universal friendship among the nations."¹²⁵ Although a less common transnational feminist or religious reform goal, the promotion of a universal auxiliary language (UAL) was a major area of activity for early twentieth-century Bahá'í women. In the quest to "cause the whole earth to be regarded as one country," Bahá'í scripture advocated that one common language and script should be invented, or chosen from among existing languages. It must then be agreed to by "all tribes and nations," to be learned by all peoples in addition to their mother-tongue.¹²⁶ An auxiliary language would foster international "unity and concord," allowing populations to share information and integrate economic, scientific, technological, educational, governance, legal, and social systems as the world advanced towards collaborative planetary administration. A common tongue

improved efficiency, reducing administrative costs and time spent learning other languages to communicate, travel, study, or work with others. It fostered social equality and cohesion, as no person or group would be disadvantaged because they lacked facility with the dominant language, as in the past. It could even protect linguistic diversity, “the cultural treasure of the human race,” as this language would be secondary to one’s mother tongue.¹²⁷ The protection of minority languages was especially likely if a neutral language was adopted. If a *lingua franca* took hold by default, due to the economic and/or cultural dominance of a language group, that tongue would necessarily contain the “national bias” of that group and might decimate weaker languages and cultures.¹²⁸ Bahá’ís believed that a “complete union between the various sections of the world would be an unrealized dream as long as an international language was not established.”¹²⁹ In the early twentieth century, many intellectuals, governments, and the League of Nations were seriously considering the official adoption of a common auxiliary language.

Finding a like-minded group in pursuit of the goal of an international auxiliary language, Bahá’í women were greatly drawn to Esperanto. Polish Jewish oculist Ludwíg Lazarus Zamenhof invented the artificial, easy to learn, Indo-European-based language with the intent of overcoming racial hatred and misunderstandings caused by language barriers. As a doctor, he published his findings (Russian-1887; English-1889) under the pen name *Doctoro Esperanto*, “the one who hopes.”¹³⁰ Subsequently, this alias attached to the language. Zamenhof gave up any personal rights to the language, making it free to anyone. National organizations quickly formed and the first Esperanto World Congress was held in Boulogne-sur-Mer, France in 1905.

Bahá’ís and Esperantists had much in common. Although Esperantists were religiously “neutral,” Zamenhof had a millenarian vision of a modern reformed Judaism, which he called *Hilelismo* (Hillelism), emphasizing spiritual ethics and the *Golden Rule*. Later, he deemphasized its Jewish roots, calling it *Homaranismo*, or Humanitism, a doctrine of universal kinship.¹³¹ He believed his philosophy and invented language could link religions and increase global peace and harmony. A non-partisan, non-sectarian, transnational organization, Esperantists shared with Bahá’ís a one-world philosophy, and advocated global cooperation. Zamenhof defined this “interna ideo,” as being the “idea of brotherhood and justice among all peoples,” which aimed to “establish a neutral foundation, on which the various races of mankind may hold peaceful, brotherly intercourse.”¹³² ‘Abdu’l Bahá and Shoghi Effendi supported Esperanto as it had “all the potential qualities of universal adoption,” although they did not declare it the only possible language alternative.¹³³ ‘Abdu’l Bahá advised believers to study it, and Shoghi Effendi reported in a message sent through Martha Root and Julia Goldman, his official representatives to the 1927 19th Universal Esperantist Congress (Danzig), that “many followers even in the most distant villages and hamlets of Persia, where the light of Western civilization has hardly penetrated as yet, as well as in other lands throughout the East, are strenuously and enthusiastically engaged in the study and teaching of Esperanto....”¹³⁴ However, despite decades of efforts by Esperantists and prominent Bahá’ís like Martha Root and Agnes Alexander, no major nation adopted the language. It did not even become the working language of the Bahá’ís.

In her memoirs, Agnes Alexander, who became a Bahá’í in Paris in 1900, shows the ways in which Esperanto coincided with and assisted her Bahá’í efforts. In 1913, she left her home in Honolulu to spend a month with May Maxwell in Montreal. There, she read ‘Abdu’l-

Bahá's advice to learn Esperanto and it "ignited" in her a "desire to obey His request."¹³⁵ Drawn to Japan, 'Abdu'l Bahá sent her a Tablet saying, "if thou travellest toward Japan unquestionably divine confirmations shall descend upon thee . . ." ¹³⁶ In Brooklyn, NY, Bahá'ís Rufus W. Powell and his wife taught Agnes Esperanto, which they thought would be helpful in Japan. Esperanto, like the Bahá'í Faith, was popular with socialists, labour activists, youth, intellectuals, and idealists who opposed imperialism and supported democratized international change. Many of these, even Chinese and Japanese anarchists, were Esperanto's supporters in Tokyo. ¹³⁷ Esperanto also was adopted by a Shintoist women's movement, Oomoto (Great Origin), inspired by peasant housewife Deguchi Nao (1837-1918). It was a rare millenarian movement that, like the Bahá'í Faith, espoused equality of women as a central goal, along with peace and world harmony. ¹³⁸ Unlike the Bahá'ís, Oomoto sought only Japanese members and regarded L.L. Zamenhof as a deified spirit. For Bahá'ís, Zamenhof's honour rested in 'Abdu'l Bahá's high praise of his efforts.

Upon Agnes Alexander's departure from Brooklyn, Mrs. Powell gave her a linen-covered student book embroidered with an Esperanto green star so she could study. In July, 1914, in Geneva, Agnes joined the Universal Esperanto Association (UEA), writing: "It gives one many opportunities in traveling to spread the Cause." ¹³⁹ At UEA Headquarters, she met a "Russian lady Esperantist." Hearing Agnes was going to Japan, she mentioned a young blind Russian man, an Esperantist, giving her a contact in Japan and beginning Agnes' long friendship with the blind. ¹⁴⁰ The woman then took her home where Agnes "gave the Message" of the Bahá'í Faith. The woman said "she would tell of it in city and town."¹⁴¹ Forging strong links with Esperantists, who shared Bahá'í ethics of reciprocal self-help, was advantageous in many ways for western Bahá'ís. By the mid-1920s, there were Esperantists in nearly every country. By joining the international "Green network" of "associations, consuls and clubs" a new *samideano* (comrade) could find hospitality, companionship, even help in finding homes and jobs. ¹⁴² Members spoke the same language, so information could be exchanged and bonds quickly formed. Also, financially strapped Bahá'í women could pick up work, as there was a living to be made in writing for, translating, and teaching Esperanto, which produced an extensive literature. ¹⁴³

Associations with Esperanto also provided Bahá'í women with fertile fields for teaching their faith. Esperantists' vision of "the dawn of a new day," their goals and ethical outlooks, closely aligned with Bahá'í objectives. L.L. Zamenhof spoke positively of the Bahá'í Faith and the need for a universal religion. ¹⁴⁴ Esperantists generally were sympathetic to Bahá'í principles, arranging introductions, sponsoring Bahá'í talks, and printing Bahá'í literature. ¹⁴⁵ Esperantist Joseph Dubin stated in *The Green Star* that "the Bahá'í faith is the only religion I know of which consciously teaches" ideas of religious harmony and "a true international order" with a universal auxiliary language. He then directly quotes Bahá'í scriptures supporting these ideals. ¹⁴⁶ When elderly Esperantist Anna Tuchinski met Martha Root at the 1927 Danzig Congress she said, "You are the first Bahá'í I have ever met, but very often I have read of Bahá'u'lláh's Principles in the Esperanto magazines." ¹⁴⁷ Esperanto's close links with the Bahá'ís were illustrated during the 1925 17th World Congress in Geneva, where portraits of both L.L. Zamenhof and 'Abdu'l Bahá looked out across the several thousand Esperantists in the enormous Esperanto Hall. Martha Root reported that at the end of this Congress, "the President of one of Europe's best known Peace Societies and a noted Esperantist, summed the whole matter when she said in the open forum: 'Let us work that all Bahá'ís may become Esperantists and all Esperantists become Bahá'ís!'"¹⁴⁸

Martha Root, a foremost Bahá'í teacher, was a passionate Esperantist, writing: "I know of no key to open more wonderful doors in taking a great Message around the world than this universal auxiliary language of Esperanto."¹⁴⁹ Teaching the Bahá'í Faith, feminism, and other principles like the establishment of an auxiliary language, were all interlinked in Bahá'í rhetoric. When Martha Root travelled to the Persian birthplace of Táhirih, she wrote of the Bahá'í women:

It was exquisite to see these women of Qazvin from whom the world expects so much, for since Qurratu'l 'Ayn has come from this city, women in every continent who have admired her so deeply, naturally expect all women of this historic city to be beautiful, highly cultured, spiritual, marvelous speakers, and fearless, possessed of a courage which thrills the world. I was not surprised to find Esperantists among them, for I feel sure if Qurratu'l 'Ayn had lived in this generation she would have learned this international auxiliary language.¹⁵⁰

Before travelling to an area, Martha Root would write to the Bahá'ís (if any) and also to the Esperantists, many of whom she had never met. She would send her schedule and rely on them to pre-arrange newspaper coverage, set up meetings with dignitaries, and publicize lectures that intertwined the Bahá'í movement, Esperanto, and other Bahá'í principles like world peace, to various groups, clubs or other forums. Having confirmed Martha's itinerary, Esperantists met her at the station "with flowers and love," waving the green flag of hope.¹⁵¹ Of Europe she wrote:

In one city where owing to revolution the Esperantists some of them had no food that day, they stood smiling at the railway station holding out four tulips! They did not mention their hunger; they arranged a big Esperanto meeting where the Principles of Baha'u'llah were explained, particularly Baha'u'llah's solution of the economic problem. Hundreds of times I spoke in Esperanto in cities where I did not speak their language or they mine, any one of the Esperantists in the hall would volunteer to come forward and interpret, and never once did one halt or fail to understand the thought.¹⁵²

The Esperantists' Geneva office was near the International Bahá'í Bureau (est. 1926), which served, among other activities, as a base for Bahá'í participation in the League of Nations, an organization both groups supported.¹⁵³ Although learning Esperanto was not compulsory, some national Bahá'í communities had groups, and the Bahá'í Bureau fielded some Esperanto correspondence.¹⁵⁴ Bahá'ís were active participants in Universal Esperanto Congresses, where "every shade of opinion, (religious, political and others) was represented."¹⁵⁵ For instance, two Bahá'í Conventions were held during the 18th Esperanto Congress (1926). Martha Root reports:

Dr. Immanuel Osvanger, representative of the Zionist Movement in Great Britain... presented the writer [Martha Root] who spoke on, "The Positive Power of Universal Religion," in which she clearly set forth the Baha'i Teachings. ... Then Mr. Friedrich Gerstner, of Hamburg, Germany, editor of "La Nova Tago," gave a short stereopticon talk showing slides of 'Akka and Haifa, Palestine, and the progress of the Baha'i Cause in different lands.¹⁵⁶

Western women also spoke as both Esperantists and Bahá'ís in other international venues. At the 1924 Pan-Pacific Food Conservation Conference in Honolulu, Agnes Alexander

“spoke of the value of Esperanto as a means of bringing nations together,” recounting her seven years in Japan and the necessity to eliminate racial prejudice and promote world peace.¹⁵⁷ There was much cross-fertilization at these international gatherings. Agnes quotes Dr. R. Masujima of Tokyo, first president of the International Bar Association and International Law Chair of the Pan-Pacific conference, who knew American Bahá'ís, as saying “mankind is all one.”¹⁵⁸ On her return to Tokyo, he invited her to a garden party of about one hundred persons. She writes:

[There were] Esperantists, Bahá'í friends and others. Dr. Inazo Nitobe, who was one of the secretaries at the League of Nations for eight years, was the speaker of the afternoon... in Geneva he had met some of the Bahá'ís, Lady Bloomfield, Mountfort Mills, Mrs. White. He is a Quaker and his wife an American, and they stand for better understanding between the nations. Last year Dr. Masujima had a party in his garden and gave a talk on the Bahá'í Teachings, which was afterwards published here...

Two members of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom were here on their way from China to America, Miss Pye (English) and Mme Drevet (French). Miss Pye was wearing a beautiful Bahá'í ring. She told me she was not a Bahá'í, but Mrs. White (sic), mother of Sir Frederick White [Whyte], had put it on her finger and told her it would help her. This especially interested me, as Sir Frederick White [Whyte] headed the English delegation at the Institute of Pacific Relations in Honolulu last summer.¹⁵⁹

Dr. Masujima, “a staunch friend of the Cause,” subsequently hosted celebrations like *Naw Rúz* (New Years) and meetings in “his law library building in the garden, where Bahá'í talks were given to the law students from Keio University who gathered there once a week.”¹⁶⁰

Agnes also gave “the Bahá'í Message” at the Tokyo School for the Blind where two students spoke Esperanto. She attended weekly meetings of young female Japanese Esperantists, one of whom attended an Esperanto Convention in Osaka, being “the first time for a young woman in Japan to attend such a Convention.” She hoped the young women might “become interested in our Bahá'í Cause,” noting “One of them asked me questions at the last meeting.”¹⁶¹ Internationalist organizations also assisted Bahá'ís. Agnes Alexander reports that in 1923, “The League of Nations Association of Japan which has 10,000 members, is publishing an article on the Movement with ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's picture, in their publication.”¹⁶² For Agnes, teaching the Faith, Esperanto, and international reform intertwined to advance goals like anti-racism, peace, education, global governance, and women’s rights. A blind Japanese Bahá'í told how Agnes, his “beloved spiritual mother from Tokyo” worked with various allies. Tokijiro Torii writes:

In Japan we have many Esperantists, most of whom are interested in the Bahá'í Teachings, as they have similar ideas such as world peace and the brotherhood of mankind. Miss Alexander speaks Esperanto and has attended the conventions every year and so the Bahá'í Teachings are widely spread among the Esperantists. Last October when we held a special meeting for the blind Esperantists, in Kyoto, she gave a beautiful talk about, “The Bahá'í Movement and the Blind in Japan,” which I translated into Japanese.

I think one of the most efficient ways of promoting the Bahá'í Cause in Japan is to have as many Bahá'í books in Esperanto as possible, and also it is very important for us to have books which explain the teachings thoroughly and profoundly, because Japanese young people like to study radically and systematically, otherwise they are not satisfied. We hope that Bahá'í Esperantists will make an effort to have Bahá'í literature translated into Esperanto as Lidja Zamenhof has done...¹⁶³

Much ideological crossover occurred in universalist, internationalist movements. For instance, *Esperanto* editor Hector Hodler approximates the Bahá'í ideal of “unity in diversity” saying, “the Esperantist ideal...not merely tolerates, but proclaims, individual difference and dissimilarity. As Tagore puts it, we don't want uniformity, but harmony.”¹⁶⁴ There were also, however, major differences between Esperantists and Bahá'ís. While Bahá'ís supported the adoption of an auxiliary language, they believed that the emerging global civilization required the systematic implementation of *all* interconnected Bahá'í principles. Bahá'ís believed only the power of religion could unite the world, while many Esperantists, particularly socialists and the secular Paris group, believed Esperanto should be delinked from religion.

Some family members and prominent Esperantists were upset when L.L. Zamenhof's younger daughter Lidia (1904-42), a lawyer and linguist, became a Bahá'í in 1925 through Martha Root, and began to speak on the Faith at major gatherings.¹⁶⁵ This, in their view, took up too much of Lidia's time and allied Esperanto too closely to the Bahá'í Faith. Nevertheless, Lidia continued to teach and translate Bahá'í writings. At the 27th Universal Congress of Esperanto (1935) in fascist Italy, Lidia gave a Bahá'í talk, for the first time on the main program, on immortality, free will, destiny, and suffering, and spoke to the Union of Esperantist Women on women as a force for peace.¹⁶⁶ In the 1936 Vienna Congress she told the UEW that the bitter era during which “women bore the yoke of male rule” had ended, and that “Women must arise - they want to arise - they are arising!” She predicted that after a period of transition, women would be economically equal, suggesting the teaching profession, which could change the world's future. Advocating internationalism in an era of extreme nationalisms, she urged others to not only love family, city and nation, but also to “extend a hand to brothers from beyond the borders.”¹⁶⁷

Also in 1935, at Shoghi Effendi's request, May Maxwell and twenty-five year old Mary Maxwell, for two years, visited communities across Europe, especially in Germany, to unite and strengthen them against the coming war.¹⁶⁸ Esperantists, having internal schisms between secularists and those who held to *Homerisimo* ideals, split.¹⁶⁹ The Geneva UEA, aligned with Lidia Zamenhof, stood up against the Nazi regime and assisted Jews to flee. German National Esperantists accommodated themselves to the Nazi ideology, joined the Nazi party and expelled Jewish members. But, by 1925, Hitler had already denounced Esperanto as the potential language of Jewish enslavement of the world, and, in spite of their collaboration, Esperanto was banned in Germany in 1936.¹⁷⁰ The Nazi leadership also banned the Bahá'í Faith in Germany on May 21, 1937, and all archives, books, and pamphlets of the Bahá'í Faith and the Bahá'í Esperanto Club were confiscated. The official explanation was that the Faith had “international and pacifist tendencies” and the Bahá'í teachings ran counter to the Third Reich's new race laws.¹⁷¹ In 1938, Lidia Zamenhof visited the United States, but was expelled and sent to Poland, where she began the first Polish Bahá'í community. Confined to the Warsaw ghetto in 1940 as a Jewish Bahá'í Esperantist, Lydia died at 38 at the Treblinka death camp in 1942.¹⁷² Both the

movement itself, and Bahá'í links with Esperanto, were greatly damaged during World War Two. A Bahá'í Esperanto League (BEL) was formed in 1973, but membership is very small.¹⁷³

“Racial Amity”: Bahá'í Anti-racist Activism and the Modelling of Mixed Race

It is not surprising that the Nazis saw the Bahá'í Faith as antithetical to its ideology, inasmuch as the fulcrum of the new World Order of Bahá'u'lláh was the recognition of the unity and equality of humanity. Therefore, one of the reform activities that garnered a great deal of attention from Bahá'í women, especially in North America, was “racial amity” or “racial unity.” In a 1912 talk to the Peace Forum in New York, ‘Abdu’l Bahá set out the Bahá'í position:

Racial distinctions and national differences are purely imaginary. Humanity is one in essence; it is one progeny of a common ancestor inhabiting the same globe... God has created all humanity.¹⁷⁴

‘Abdu’l Bahá described a new global phase where “humanity is going through a process of transformation. A new race is being developed... New ideals are stirring the depths of hearts and a new spirit of universal consciousness is being profoundly felt...”¹⁷⁵ This recognition of the essential “race unity” of the human species abrogated imagined racial hierarchies.

This concerted anti-racist effort set Bahá'ís apart from most first-wave feminists, many of whom subscribed to popular ideas of eugenics and scientific racism.¹⁷⁶ By contrast, Bahá'í principles advocated not only full racial integration, but also interracial and inter-cultural marriage as part of an effort to create a more unified “new race”¹⁷⁷ The integration of global systems and populations foresaw that races would be less discrete in the future. But the vision was not one of uniform homogeneity. Racial harmony was set within in the larger ideal of “unity in diversity,” which posited that human variegation contributed to a richer, multi-faceted whole. ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s hope was that “human hearts shall meet and embrace each other, the whole world become as a man's native country and the different races be counted as one race.”¹⁷⁸

This support of the value of diversity and racial mixing stood in stark contrast to the tenets of social hygienists and others who advocated racial separation, and the elimination of the “unfit.” Eugenics, with its pseudo-scientific ideals of “racial purity” and social Darwinism, was very popular among intellectuals and moral leaders, including feminists, during the early twentieth century, before it was discredited by its association with Nazi atrocities in World War Two. Social engineering that included “selective breeding” was hailed as a means of solving vexing social issues such as poverty, criminality, insanity, and sexual non-conformity, which were attributed to individual flaws and weaknesses, rather than structural economic and cultural causes.¹⁷⁹ This doctrine reified an older racial hierarchy that identified members of the dominant Anglo-Saxon Christian group who were economically successful, in good physical and mental health, and had not transgressed legal, social or sexual boundaries, as “superior stock.” Those who should not contribute to the gene pool included those with mental or physical disabilities, the economic underclasses, drunkards, the criminally or sexually “perverse,” or those of less “desirable” races or cultures, including the “inferior stock” of eastern and southern Europe, and the “unassimilable” “undesirables” of Asian, African or Aboriginal heritage.¹⁸⁰

In 1914, Manitoba feminist and moral educator Beatrice Brigden, a member of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Women's Labour League, and the Political Equality League, lectured young women on sex hygiene, drawing much of her material from Scott and Nellie Nearing's *Women and Social Progress*, which included a mix of feminist rhetoric and "progressive" American eugenic thought.¹⁸¹ Female scientists like Helen MacMurphy, a prominent Ontario physician and public health campaigner, and Montreal feminist Carrie Derrick, a botanist who was the first Canadian female professor (McGill), promoted eugenics to protect society from the "menacing shadow" of "defectives" and the birth of "degenerate" babies, which seemed to be especially prevalent among alcoholics, prostitutes, rural families, the poor, ethnic minorities, and "aliens" (new immigrants).¹⁸² Suffragists Nellie McClung and Emily Murphy supported the racialized immigration exclusion of Asians, advocated laws that would impose involuntary sterilization of the "unfit," and sanctioned eugenically inspired interventionist policies in schools, hospitals, orphanages, and asylums.¹⁸³ The National Council of Women, concerned with issues of moral purity and race regeneration, was the first organized group in Canada to support the campaign to segregate more effectively the "feeble-minded," a broad term that could encompass anyone from the severely "retarded," to young women who had out-of-wedlock pregnancies.¹⁸⁴ Miscegenation was strongly discouraged, as was cross-cultural or inter-religious marriage. Many first-wave feminists have been criticized in a post-multicultural Canada for their endorsement of these ideologies, now considered racist and classist.¹⁸⁵ Of course, not all feminists subscribed to the philosophy of eugenics, but the Bahá'ís were unusual in that they doctrinally opposed such prejudices and social divisions, and actively promoted close inter-racial, inter-cultural, inter-class, and inter-faith associations.

One might suppose that Bahá'ís, with their modernist proclivities, and their principle that "religion must be in conformity with science and reason," would have supported eugenic precepts, as these were considered to be at the leading edge of modern science and social planning.¹⁸⁶ As Marion Carpenter, the first Bahá'í student at Stanford, stated in 1925: "Not religion or science, but religion and science, the combination of faith and reason, is the teaching of Bahá'u'lláh to the world today."¹⁸⁷ However, in the Bahá'í schema, religion and secular science were not equal partners. Because science was evolving, and therefore constantly open to revision, and Divine Revelation was by definition "true" and not open to correction, if there was a disagreement, it was assumed that science had not yet discerned "reality." Therefore, Bahá'ís were more likely to espouse scientific views that closely matched their religious beliefs. For instance, sociologist Herbert Adolphus Miller, a pioneer in the field of racial and minority groups, who opposed "superior vs. inferior" racial classifications, was a featured speaker at a 1926 Bahá'í-sponsored *World Unity Conference* in Cleveland. Arguing against the scientific basis of racism, Miller said:

Here was one group with one color that had one culture, and another group of another color had another culture. Of course it was obvious that the ones with the one color and one culture thought they had the superior culture and it wasn't until anthropology and psychology had been called in, in the last five years, that it was demonstrated that there is no question about it, that there is no basis whatever for that old theory.¹⁸⁸

However, racially accommodating views such as Miller's were in the minority. The majority of scientists, intellectuals and medical personnel in North America did not distance

themselves from eugenics until the late 1930s and 1940s, when news of Hitler's grisly eugenics-driven program began to leak out of Germany.¹⁸⁹ Even still, the retreat was not complete. A.R. Kaufmann, a well-known Canadian supporter of birth control, commented in 1941 that "...Hitler's methods of getting rid of parasites are harsh but effective."¹⁹⁰ In 1945, conservative feminist Charlotte Whitton supported opposition to instituting a "family allowance," colloquially called the "Baby Bonus," asserting that it represented a "subsidy to the birth of defectives."¹⁹¹ Eugenicist legislation that allowed forced sterilization stayed on the books in Canada until 1972, targeting the socially and economically marginalized, including the mentally ill, the physically or mentally handicapped, the poor, women (especially unwed mothers), southern and eastern Europeans, Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, and most notably, Aboriginal people.¹⁹² In the United States, where forced sterilization laws existed until 1977, and "coerced" sterilization still exists, the targets were "promiscuous" lower-class women, immigrant women, imprisoned women, and women of colour, especially Native Americans, African-Americans and Latinas.¹⁹³ In contrast to this impulse to "purge" society, Bahá'ís were admonished by 'Abdu'l Bahá and Shoghi Effendi to level class, status and economic divisions, overcome religious and cultural differences, achieve gender parity, and demonstrate "racial unity." The solving of social problems such as crime was to be done through education, elimination of poverty, and other structural mechanisms, as well as through inculcating individual and societal spiritual ethics.¹⁹⁴

As early as the Hearst pilgrimage in 1898, 'Abdu'l Bahá modelled to westerners His own attitudes towards the privileges of class and race. Robert Turner (c.1855-1909), Phoebe Hearst's butler, became the first African-American Bahá'í, after he overheard the Getsingers explain the Faith. When Robert arrived in 'Akká in 1898 as part of the pilgrimage group, 'Abdu'l Bahá "showered" "loving kindness" upon him, treating him as an honoured guest rather than a servant. The pilgrims' prejudices made it difficult for them to accept Robert Turner as an equal, especially Americans May Bolles (Maxwell) and Phoebe Hearst's niece, Anne Apperson, as both were born into privileged households.¹⁹⁵ Recalling her first day in 'Akká, May Maxwell wrote:

On the morning of our arrival, after we had refreshed ourselves, the Master summoned us all to Him in a long room overlooking the Mediterranean...Seeing that one of the believers was absent, He said, 'Where is Robert?' This was a coloured servant, whom one of the pilgrims in our party [Hearst], in her generosity, had sent to 'Akka. In a moment Robert's radiant face appeared in the doorway and the Master rose to greet him, bidding him be seated, and said, 'Robert, your Lord loves you. God gave you a black skin, but a heart white as snow.' Then our Master spoke and said:

'We can all serve in the Cause of God no matter what our occupation is. No occupation can prevent the soul coming to God. Peter was a fisherman, yet he accomplished most wonderful things; but the heart must be turned always towards God, no matter what the work is; this is the important thing: and then the power of God will work in us.'¹⁹⁶

'Abdu'l Bahá, whose self-chosen title meant "servant of Glory," insisted on serving the pilgrims Himself, including Robert, in spite of the remonstrances of those who insisted the butler should serve. On one occasion, in deference to them, He allowed Robert to *assist* him.¹⁹⁷ The lesson was clear to May Maxwell and the rest of the pilgrims. When Phoebe Hearst returned to America, she sponsored a reception for prominent African-American educators in Washington, D.C., a city

deeply divided by race.¹⁹⁸ Robert Turner was posthumously singled out for highest honours, named one of the nineteen disciples of ‘Abdu’l Bahá by Shoghi Effendi.¹⁹⁹

Over the next few decades, the Bahá’í community actively recruited African-Americans and worked to integrate their communities, although members from some racially segregated areas of the United States at first practiced a “separate but equal” approach, with “Negroes” or “Whites” attending parallel functions. However, during His western travels, ‘Abdu’l Bahá made it clear that full integration was necessary. He spoke to many black audiences, white Bahá’ís in tow, and praised racially mixed gatherings when they occurred. In segregated Washington, D.C., in 1912, He spoke to a morning crowd of more than a thousand in Rankin Chapel at Howard University, an African-American institution, and in the evening addressed a large gathering at Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church. In between, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá attended a formal luncheon reception in His honour sponsored by the Chargé d’Affaires of the Persian Legation, Ali Kuli Khan and his American wife, Florence Breed Khan, both Bahá’ís.²⁰⁰ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’ made a point of asking African-American Bahá’í, lawyer, and civil rights activist Louis G. Gregory (1874-1951), who had not been invited, to meet him there for an interview. Asking for a chair, He seated Gregory in the place of honour at His right, disrupting diplomatic seating. Proceeding as if nothing had happened, He then spoke of the oneness of mankind.²⁰¹ A public reception attended by the social elite followed, where He spoke of “education and improvement of women” and “the promotion of unity and peace in the world.”²⁰² After this event, Washington socialite Agnes Parsons, who became a Bahá’í in 1908, wrote obliquely in her diary, “There was some delay in the luncheon as ‘Abdul Bahá saw fit to rearrange the places of some of the guests.”²⁰³ Ignoring the blatant challenge to racist conventions, she lists Gregory among the guests without comment, although she scrupulously notes ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s encounters with the prominent. Parsons had rarely moved outside her class circle until she joined the Faith in middle age and seldom interacted with the working classes, poor, and African-Americans, even after becoming a Bahá’í.²⁰⁴ However, when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá returned to Washington seven months later, the Bahá’ís organized a large interracial banquet attended by some three hundred.²⁰⁵

The Washington Bahá’í community at that time was already remarkably diverse in terms of race and class, as compared to nearly all other groups, because committed Bahá’ís such as Pauline and Joseph Hannen, who taught Louis Gregory before he joined the Faith in 1909, and Mr. and Mrs. Andrew J. Dyer, an African-American and her white husband, focussed on desegregation. As *Star of the West* reported:

On the evening of March 6th [1910] an important gathering assembled at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Hannen, representing the joining in one meeting of the white and the colored Bahais and friends of this city. Considerable work is being done among the latter, and a regular weekly meeting is held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Dyer, 1937 13th street, N. W. on Wednesdays.

In February of last year, Abdul Baha commanded that to prove the validity of our Teachings and as a means of removing existing prejudices between the races, a Spiritual Assembly or meeting be held, preferably at the home of one of the white Bahais, in which both races should join. This is the first meeting of that character, and is to be repeated monthly. There were present about 35 persons, one third of whom were colored, and

nearly all believers. It is also planned that every fourth Unity Feast, beginning April 9, should be held in such manner that both races can join. This is a radical step in this section of the country, and is in reality making history.²⁰⁶

It was surprising then (or perhaps not so surprising given His penchant for challenging prejudices) that in 1920, ‘Abdu’l Bahá asked Agnes Parsons “to arrange a Convention for unity of the colored and white races,” which she successfully did in spite of initial misgivings.²⁰⁷ ‘Abdu’l Bahá also may have discerned that the endorsement of Mrs. Parsons, with her high social position, lent credibility to the Faith’s stance on the contentious issue of racial integration. This first Amity Convention, called the “mother convention” by ‘Abdu’l Bahá, spawned hundreds more across North America. Agnes Parsons apparently rose to the demands of levelling race relations in spite of the social opprobrium it undoubtedly caused her. Even her husband Jeffrey Parsons, supportive but not a Bahá’í, expressed to ‘Abdu’l Bahá in 1912 a wish that all blacks would return to Africa. To this, ‘Abdu’l Bahá replied that it would have to begin with Wilber, the Parsons’ esteemed butler, which of course, the family would not favour.²⁰⁸ When she died suddenly in 1934 at the age of seventy-three, Agnes Parsons was Chair of the Bahá’í National Interracial Committee, and a member of the Interracial Committee of the Bahá’ís of Washington, D.C.²⁰⁹ Her metamorphosis was not atypical for Bahá’í women, who often discovered undreamt of capacities in themselves as they took on major reforms. The challenge to promote racial “amity” was not only directed to white Bahá’ís. Communities and committees also were assisted by many dedicated Bahá’ís of African American heritage, as well as other racial backgrounds, who were working to advance civil rights and bridge racial divides.²¹⁰ As ‘Abdu’l Bahá wrote to Louis Gregory:

Strive with heart and soul in order to bring about union and harmony among the white and the black and prove thereby the unity of the Bahá’í world wherein distinction of colour findeth no place, but where hearts only are considered...Variations of colour, of land and of race are of no importance in the Bahá’í Faith; on the contrary, Bahá’í unity overcometh them all and doeth away with all these fancies and imaginations.²¹¹

This message was central to ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s talk given at Hull House in Chicago in April, 1912, to “the rich and poor, the educated and ignorant, the managers of business and the industrial slaves.”²¹² It was arranged and introduced by Jane Addams, an activist for peace and the elimination of discrimination against the marginalized, including women. An audience of over 750 heard that a key to the “unity and the solidarity of mankind” was the “fellowship and equality of the white and colored races.” Appealing to both faith and reason, ‘Abdu’l Bahá stressed points of agreement between the races, saying, “God is not pleased with—neither should any reasonable or intelligent man be willing to recognize—inequality in the races because of this [colour] distinction.”²¹³ In 1935, Ruth J. Moffat, a Bahá’í who had “spoken on the same platform with Miss Addams and dined as her guest,” interviewed Jane Addams about the event. Moffat wrote, “Because in 1912 racial prejudice and hatred were very intense and because of the outstanding historical work that Miss Addams had achieved, ‘Abdu’l Bahá spoke of the races being like many varieties of flowers in one garden.... The basis for the establishment of world peace and the amity of man cannot be based upon color, but only upon noble qualities.”²¹⁴

Nature metaphors were popular with Bahá'ís. In another well-known illustrative story, 'Abdu'l Bahá fondly compared an African-American "urchin" from the Bowery to a precious "black rose."²¹⁵ Bahá'ís viewed all acts of 'Abdu'l Bahá as inspirational examples. Ruth Moffat wrote that 'Abdu'l Bahá expressed pleasure at meeting Jane Addams "because she was serving mankind." He then "went out into the dingy crowded street" distributing coins to "little children and the under privileged poor" along with "kindly words of encouragement, sympathy, love and hope, which brightened the eyes, strengthened the courage and uplifted the faith and hope of all who met Him."²¹⁶ Following the talk at Hull House, speaking at the Fourth Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 'Abdu'l Bahá told the audience that "color or race is of no importance...The standard of divine measure and judgment is his intelligence and spirit.... The character and purity of the heart is of all importance."²¹⁷

'Abdu'l Bahá unrestrainedly promoted racial integration during His travels in the United States. After a lecture on May 6, 1912, to about five hundred people, reporters interviewed Him. The next day, the front page article of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* read, "Bahaist Approves Unions of Races: Persian Teacher Tells Cleveland Women Intermarriage Results Ideal." It said:

Abdul Baha, a venerable Persian now touring America as leader of the Bahaist movement for a universal religion, declared last night for an amalgamation of the white and negro races by intermarriage.... 'All men,' said Abdul Baha, "are progeny of one-Adam. They are of different color but color is nothing..." The heavenly Jerusalem is no other than the divine civilization, and it is now ready. It can be and shall be organized, and the oneness of humankind will be a fact.²¹⁸

Although many Bahá'ís still married within their own circle, intermarriage between different races, cultures, and socio-economic groups was encouraged and became increasingly common.

In one of the first of such mixed marriages, Louisa Mathew, a Cambridge university graduate from a well-to-do white British family, with 'Abdu'l Bahá's encouragement married lawyer Louis Gregory, whom she liked but would never have considered as a mate. After a quiet New York ceremony on 27 September 1912, the couple settled in the racially tense United States where "miscegenation" was widely condemned and in most states, illegal.²¹⁹ Louise Gregory could not always accompany her husband because the sight of mixed couples inflamed volatile racial hatreds. Louis Gregory was acutely aware, having been raised in the South and having had his step-grandfather, a former slave, murdered by the Klan, that black men might be lynched if seen with white women. Nonetheless, he led the national effort to teach the black community about Bahá'í precepts, advocating for civil rights, organizing conferences, and holding "race amity" meetings, even in the southern states.²²⁰ With Louise's support, he closed his law practice and real estate business, and refused a position on the law faculty at Howard University. Despite the poverty caused by his activities, he travelled, taught and served the Faith in many capacities, including being elected to national governing bodies for over three decades. Posthumously, he was named a "Hand of the Cause" by Shoghi Effendi in 1951.²²¹ Supporting herself by teaching music, English, and Esperanto, Louise Gregory travelled extensively in Europe after 1922, and helped to establish Bahá'í communities in several countries, including Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. The Gregorys "pioneered" together to Haiti in January 1937, forming a fledgling Bahá'í group there, but government opposition caused them to return to New York in April 1937. In a later

“mixed marriage” in the early 1930s, early Bahá’í, Rev. Howard Colby Ives, performed a marriage between his divorced daughter, Muriel Ives, and the Reverend Reginald G. Barrow, a “man of color, who was born in the West Indies.” Family history tells that the couple “spent their wedding night on a park bench, as they could not obtain a room in a hotel in Boston.” Ordained as an Anglican priest in Barbados, Barrow was a Bishop of the African Orthodox Church when he declared his faith in Bahá’u’lláh. Rev. Barrow later became Archbishop of the African Orthodox Church for North America, before he retired. Although it was unusual, Shoghi Effendi allowed him to keep his job as a Christian minister, because he was supporting a family.²²²

Progress in race relations, both within and outside the Bahá’í community, was steady if not always consistently paced. Gayle Morrison, Louis Gregory’s biographer, observes:

Under the difficult and dangerous conditions that characterized a prejudiced and racially segregated society, the American Bahá’í community in its first half century struggled to exemplify its stated belief in oneness. It experienced spurts of systematic progress, aroused by stirring calls to action from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, followed by periods of retrenchment and apathy.²²³

The biography of Alain Locke, African-American “Harlem Renaissance” philosopher, also documents tensions between various community members working on “race amity” efforts, although not necessarily due to racial differences. Locke expressed frustrations with both white and black members, for instance, Coralie Franklin Cooke, a black intellectual leader in the Washington African-American community, and Dr. Leslie P. Hill, the black principal of the Cheyney Institute, a teacher training school.²²⁴ Disagreements arose from personality conflicts or differences in approach and methodologies, but not due to opposition to racial integration, a highly contentious issue in the rest of American society. Like female equality, a commitment to racial equality could be *expected*, as this was a Bahá’í doctrinal principle. However, thorny race issues were not easily resolved. As Coralie F. Cook wrote to ‘Abdu’l Bahá in March 1914, the rancorous issue of inter-racial marriage was eliciting at that time some resistance from a few (white) “so-called Bahá’ís,” in part, because they felt such a stance made the Faith less attractive to Americans. Cook pointed out pragmatically that after 250 years of domestic slavery with “the female slave at the command of her master,” racial amalgamation was “settled past undoing” in America. She called on her fellow-Bahá’ís to embrace principles of racial integration in contrast to nearly all Christian Churches, which had divided along racial lines.²²⁵ She wrote:

If the true believers only stand by the teachings though it requires superhuman courage, and live the life, it is only a question of time when every seeker after truth will be swept into Bahá’í embrace...It is not clear to all that the TEST is crucial and that the times are so momentous that what may seem for the present to put back the Cause of Bahá’í may be in reality the one thing that will put world progress forward immeasurably.²²⁶

Having little appropriate literature, May Maxwell and Mariam Haney, who worked on race amity in Washington, D. C., compiled in 1920, a sixteen-page pamphlet with a preface by Louis Gregory, called “The Removal of Race Prejudice,” consisting mainly of quotes from ‘Abdu’l Bahá. Still unpublished in 1924, the title was changed to “Racial Amity.” There was some opposition, particularly from Albert Vail, a Unitarian minister who became a Bahá’í in

1918, to publishing “a separate pamphlet of the divine teachings on account of the racial prejudice in this country.” However, May Maxwell rejoined that there was “an ever-increasing need for these tablets, which are the water of life to quench the ever-increasing fire of hate....”²²⁷ Visiting Haifa, she submitted the matter to Shoghi Effendi, and he agreed that since the pamphlet was needed and the national governing body had approved it, it should be published immediately. Although the project was initiated and paid for by May Maxwell, by 1920, teaching and reform efforts were becoming more systematized within a developing administrative structure. For example, besides a general approval of the “Racial Amity” pamphlet, Louis Gregory’s preface was reviewed by a National Reviewing Committee. The text of the pamphlet was ultimately made less radical, deleting references to intermarriage. Shoghi Effendi told May Maxwell to abide by the decision of the National Spiritual Assembly, in keeping with his efforts to shift dependence away from himself and towards an elected and appointed national and local Bahá’í institutional framework. May Maxwell later explained that “the consultant body” discussed this issue “in consultation with Louis Gregory who knows fully the conditions of the South” and upon his advice decided that it would be “most unwise to refer to this question of inter-marriage during the present acute phase of this problem in America, and this decision has been confirmed several times since.”²²⁸ The fact that by the 1920s, both women and African-Americans were represented and seriously consulted at the highest national level of institutional governance, distinguished the Bahá’ís from most other religious and secular organizations.

May Maxwell and the Montreal community as a model for “amity” efforts in Canada

“Amity” between blacks and whites was especially important in America, but relations also were nurtured with other ethnic groups, depending on the circumstances of each Bahá’í community. For instance, in 1932, members of the Chinese Club in Los Angeles, in addition to Japanese and American Indians, attended interracial dinners sponsored by the Bahá’ís of that city.²²⁹ Bahá’í women in Canada also worked to diversify their communities and better race relations. Although not as focused as Americans on black-white “amity,” in some communities like Montreal and Halifax, where larger populations of African-Canadians resided, efforts more closely followed the U.S. pattern. The proportion of people of African heritage was much lower in Canada than the United States, but there were still resilient social, economic, administrative, and legal barriers separating the races. In the early twentieth century, class divisions were also evident between the established black community and newer West Indian immigrants, between middle-class black railway porters or clergy, and working-class domestic or manual labourers, and the less “respectable” underclasses, although upward mobility was possible.²³⁰ Social mixing between blacks and whites was unusual, as was intermarriage, but ‘Abdu’l Bahá explicitly said integration meant close, genuine, social interaction. In New York, in 1912, Marie L. Botay, a Bahá’í who attended the Mathews’ wedding, wrote: “I asked ‘Abdu’l Bahá if he meant by telling me to affiliate the hearts of the white and colored people, that I must strive to have them meet together in love and fellowship in one meeting place. He replied: “Yes, that is what I mean.”²³¹

In the Montreal community, the central figure of May Maxwell provided a model for advancing racial harmony through philanthropic efforts and by opening her home to diverse races and classes of people. Stories of May Maxwell’s warm relations with those of differing backgrounds abound, demonstrating that she overcame the initial reluctance shown on her first pilgrimage to accept the social equality of Robert Turner, Phoebe Hearst’s butler. It is not clear

when May Maxwell and other Bahá'ís first established links with Montreal's black community, but in 1912, when 'Abdu'l Bahá made his only stop in Canada in that city, the minister from the "black church" [Union Congregational Church] invited Him to speak.²³² Also, Mr. And Mrs. Archibald (Archie) Eddington, African-Canadian Bahá'ís "who played such an active part in getting the most outstanding newspaper publicity of 'Abdu'l Bahá's visit to America," attended a reception for "intimate friends" on September 1, 1912, in honour of 'Abdu'l Bahá's first day at the Maxwells' home.²³³ Archie Eddington was a *Montreal Daily Star* reporter.

In the 1920s, May Maxwell, her daughter Mary, and other members of the Bahá'í community became close friends with Rev. Charles H. Este, an immigrant from Antigua. Este was a progressive social activist and under his leadership from 1925-1968, the Union Church took on a larger reform and advocacy role. He fought for blacks' inclusion and fair treatment in the community and workplace, and succeeded in having black women admitted to nurses' training in Montreal hospitals.²³⁴ In 1927, Este organized the Negro Community Centre, now the *Charles H. Este Cultural Centre*, whose purpose was "to alleviate social and economic conditions among Blacks in Montreal," particularly offering services for children and youth.²³⁵ After collaborating with other groups to find the financial means for support for the Negro Community Centre, a report states, "a financial drive was held through the kindness of the Bahai group."²³⁶ Montreal Bahá'í Dorothy Ward Wade remembered Reverend Este as "a wonderful man" who "used to come up to the Maxwells and bring a lot of his people."²³⁷ Mary Maxwell and Rosemary Sala spoke at his church many times, and some members became Bahá'ís, although they did not give up church membership.²³⁸ However, multi-cultural traffic was not always well tolerated in the Maxwells' prestigious (Golden) "Square Mile" neighbourhood.²³⁹ May Maxwell's friend Roland Estall recounted:

The [Maxwell] house was full of people, the Bahá'ís and many members of the Negro United Church of which Reverend Charles Este was pastor. Mrs. Maxwell had addressed Reverend Este's congregation the previous Sunday and had invited the congregation to visit her the following Thursday, or so. During the course of the evening, I was sitting beside Mrs. Maxwell in Mr. Maxwell's study and a maid came and said that Mrs. Maxwell was wanted at the front door. A policeman had arrived in response to a complaint from a next-door neighbour that there was some disturbance in the neighbourhood. Mrs. Maxwell said she was simply entertaining guests and invited the policeman to see for himself. Somewhat embarrassed and obviously taken aback by Mrs. Maxwell's charm and graciousness in inviting him to come in, he demurred and departed. This was one incident which demonstrates the hostility of some of the neighbours in that exclusive residential district at the time and to Mrs. Maxwell's unconcern for the prejudices of her neighbours....²⁴⁰

May Maxwell also was reputed to have been a strong supporter of early black organizations. Her friend, Marion Holley, stated in her 1940 memorial essay that May Maxwell was "Honorary president of the Negro Club of Montreal, 1927," but no clear association has been uncovered between Maxwell and such a group.²⁴¹ It may have been the Coloured Women's Club of Montréal, founded in 1902, the oldest formalized black women's self-help and service organization in Canada.²⁴² Several of the CWC's founding members were wives of railway porters and members of the Union Church, which began as a porter's church committed to

Christian worship with equality of participation, “regardless of gender, one’s ethnic origin or faith.”²⁴³ A Coloured Women’s Charitable and Benevolent Association and other service organizations in Montreal also assisted African-Canadians, primarily West Indian immigrants.

In her own home, May Maxwell followed ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s injunction to associate with those of other races. One Montreal Bahá’í showed how far this personal concern extended:

...the first day that Millie-Rena [Gordon] went to visit before she was a Bahá’í, she went to visit May Maxwell at her invitation. And when she arrived, the maid came bustling down the stairs and said she really didn’t think Mrs. Maxwell could be disturbed today, she was terribly sorry, and then Mrs. Maxwell herself came down the stairs and apologized profusely but she said that she had a woman upstairs giving birth to a baby because she was black and none of the hospitals would take her. So she was bringing in her own doctor and having this baby be born right in her house and would Millie mind coming back another day.²⁴⁴

In another instance, a Mrs. Blackburn, as well as her two daughters, had become Bahá’ís in the early 1930s as members of Rev. Estes’ Union Church. The Blackburn sisters, along with their mother, were later tragically murdered by Mr. Blackburn (who was not a Bahá’í). Dorothy Ward Wade, a peer of the daughters, speculated on the cause of the violence:

I think because the father was white and the mother was black. And I think the prejudices affected him very much. ‘Cause one day he came home and he killed the family, but not Freddy Blackburn, he was out at the time...He was the son who went to live with the Maxwells for a time after that.²⁴⁵

The non-Bahá’í son, Freddy Blackburn, stayed with the Maxwells but apparently lost touch, possibly after May’s death in 1940, as Rúhíyyih Khánum wrote from Haifa to a Bahá’í friend in 1947: “I was pleased you mentioned Freddy Blackburn. I often think of him and was wondering what on earth had become of him. If he should phone again, please give him my love.”²⁴⁶

After 1922, Shoghi Effendi insisted even more stridently that class, cultural, and especially racial integration, proceed. However, these ideas were not easy for everyone to accept and some Bahá’ís struggled to adjust their thinking. Montreal Bahá’í Emeric Sala remembered Amine DeMille, his wife Rosemary’s “spiritual child” who became a believer in 1937 in St. Lambert, Quebec, who “had difficulties about the Faith because of the race issues. She came from the south; she could not accept black as an equal. That was one of her great obstacles.”²⁴⁷ His friend, Roland Estall, then commented that he later met Amine in Little Rock about 1959. He said: “Amine was a pillar of strong efforts to bring about racial harmony in this city which of course had been the centre of some very great troubles during the school desegregation. So she had overcome her original prejudices.”²⁴⁸ Rosemary also recalled Amine’s time in Little Rock:

When she arrived there after her husband’s death, it was a time of race struggle. When her relatives, who were among the leading citizens, saw her consorting with negroes, they disowned her! ...She last served the Faith actively in Panama where she lies buried.²⁴⁹

Breaking down class, race, gender and religious barriers within the diverse Bahá'í community was a significant challenge. One of the major ways Bahá'ís worked towards this was through the development of functional new mythologies, such as the repetition of anecdotes centred on the actions of 'Abdu'l Bahá. Particularly compelling were "eyewitness" stories told by May Maxwell and other early believers. These carried informal authority even though they constituted a type of "pilgrim's notes," a genre that Bahá'ís shared widely but were cautioned not to treat as authoritative. Such popular chronicles became *de facto* parables in the Bahá'í community, which thrived on storytelling. Using parables to shape behaviour was a device familiar to those of Judeo-Christian background, but resonated even more strongly in a Bahá'í community enjoined to look to 'Abdu'l Bahá as a model. For example, Shoghi Effendi wrote:

We should teach as the Master taught. He was the perfect Exemplar of the Teachings. He proclaimed the universal truths, and, through love and wise demonstration of the universal verities of the Faith, attracted the hearts and the minds.²⁵⁰

It may have been easier for the second generation of Bahá'ís to abandon some of their racial, class, cultural and gender prejudices although, of course, social mores continued to affect relationships. May Maxwell's daughter can be looked to as an example. One of the episodes that first drew new immigrant Emeric Sala to the Bahá'í Faith was a public talk (c.1927) given by seventeen year-old Mary Maxwell on interracial marriage.²⁵¹ While at McGill University, Mary rejected sorority exclusivity, "although of the sort of family that would be rushed." Instead, she began a more gender, race and class-inclusive group. Her friend, Roland Estall, remembered:

And so she formed the Fraternity Club which was really a cross between a fraternity and sorority. And she collected the kind of students from other countries that obviously would never had belonged to sororities or fraternities, and other people...they did visit restaurants and hotels and cabarets but to the extent that there [were] any people who were not acceptable in those places they then went down to the Negro cabarets on St. Antoine Street. Because it was the only place where they could all be acceptable, you see...and it was a period of great prejudice...²⁵²

Members of the Fraternity Club included persons of black, white, Asian, mixed race, Jewish, and Christian heritage, with some Bahá'ís.²⁵³ A Bahá'í youth group initiated in 1927 by Estall and Sala had some crossover in membership with the Fraternity Club.²⁵⁴ One such member was Eddie Elliot, the first black Bahá'í in Montreal. His mother had been a maid in the Maxwell home and he and Rúhíyyih Khánum became childhood friends, remaining so until his workplace death in July 1953. Rosemary Sala said Rúhíyyih Khánum considered Eddie akin to a brother. In a letter from Haifa to a Montreal Bahá'í friend, she chided him for not writing, saying: "Also give Eddie my love and tell him he is the poorest imitation of a brother any human being ever had, and he owes me a letter..."²⁵⁵ Eddie Elliot was more wary of racism than the white Bahá'ís, possibly because he did not want to put his friends in an awkward position, but also, quite likely, because he more apt to suffer its effects. Because of "the enormous prejudices in those years," Eddie Elliot maintained close contact with the "Negro United Church" [Union Church] where Rev. Este was pastor, partly because of the difficulties inherent in associating across class and colour lines. He would often "excuse himself" when other Bahá'í youth went to movies or restaurants.²⁵⁶ In order not to excite suspicion in the Maxwell's exclusive neighbourhood, he

would arrive after dark. Mildred (Millie) Rena Gordon, a Montreal actress and comédienne of Jewish background, confirmed in the Bahá'í Faith by May Maxwell, remembered asking him, "When are you coming to the fireside? He said, 'After dark, you know I wouldn't come when it's light.' So nine o'clock he'd show up and it was time to go home. These are sad things about those days."²⁵⁷ Later, Elliot was elected to the Montreal Local Spiritual Assembly, serving as its Chair several times.²⁵⁸ For Rúhíyyih Khánum, raised in the cosmopolitan Maxwell household, close friendships with those of different races and religions seemed relatively normal. She and her mother had several friends of colour such as Louis Gregory, Reverend Este, and others in the black community of Montreal, as well as numerous middle-eastern Bahá'ís. When, in 1937, Rúhíyyih Khánum married the Persian grandson of 'Abdu'l Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, then leader of the Bahá'í Faith, Montreal Bahá'í community members were thrilled, but such a mixed-race marriage was considered unusual, if not unfortunate, by many outside her faith's circle. In later life, Rúhíyyih Khánum was well-known for her strong support of Indigenous/Aboriginal peoples.

Social Leveling and Building Capacity

Social leveling efforts were not restricted to associations between Anglo-Canadians and Canadians of African descent. For instance, Emeric Sala arrived in Montreal in 1927 as a penniless twenty-one year old Romanian/Hungarian refugee. He was from a liberal Jewish background, but by the age of fifteen considered himself an atheist humanitarian who was interested in European and world federalism.²⁵⁹ He attended free Bahá'í public meetings, mainly to learn English. Although he was "someone with whom they could hardly communicate, except through the spirit," it was "this communication and acceptance" that "attracted" him.²⁶⁰ He remembered that he did not encounter a sense of Anglo-superiority or anti-semitic prejudice when he met the Bahá'í community, even though he was acutely sensitive to such discrimination and felt it was present in Anglo-Canadian society.²⁶¹ In a June 18, 1927 letter to the editor of the *Montreal Star*, he expressed his distaste for racism and nationalisms, stating that he was "anxious to learn the language and characteristic of this country. [But] I am sorry to say that the people here have a bad opinion of us foreigners," signing himself "A Citizen of the World." He later said, "I had formulated these ideas of brotherhood intellectually; here [in the Bahá'í community], I saw them in practice."²⁶² Agreeing with the Faith's global agenda for re-ordering society, he quickly became a Bahá'í. Although he encountered some frustrations as a youth wanting faster change in the somewhat staid Montreal community, he developed a close friendship with the Maxwell family. May Maxwell, a maternal figure, made a particular impression on him.

She was an excellent teacher and raconteur. But her overriding quality was love. She seemed to draw from an inexhaustible Source, as no one else could, such unending, all-encompassing love and concern and sympathy, that we were overwhelmed, and we were anxious to do anything to please her. What saddened us all was that she spent only a small part of each year in Montreal. When she left, there was a general letdown. We somehow felt like orphans.

Without Mrs. Maxwell, the Montreal community appeared to me like a club, consisting of well-brought up elderly ladies and gentlemen. The meetings continued and were prayerful but dull. There was no hint of the fact that we were members of the most world-shaking, revolutionary movement of the age.

Even though May Maxwell was a world travelling teacher, she also employed the traditional feminine hostess, maternal, and marriage roles to advance the principles of a new World Order. Much of the work of integrating individuals of differing race, class and cultural backgrounds, and thereby imparting to them the principles of the Faith, was accomplished by May Maxwell and other women through hospitality and the nurturing of personal friendships. One such example is the case of Dorothy Ward, a British immigrant. At seventeen (1907?), she married an artist, which “horrified” her family, was widowed at nineteen or twenty, immigrated to Toronto with a six-month old daughter, then moved to Montreal. Her daughter, Dorothy Ward Wade, remembered that when her mother learned of the Bahá’í Faith (1924-25?) from restaurant owners who became friends, she was not actively seeking a faith, and “didn’t have any great belief at all.”²⁶³ The couple, Ida and Albert Goodstone, wanted to take her to the Maxwells, ‘the centre of activities in Montreal. She was “very reluctant to go, was finally persuaded and most fascinated with the people she met in the Maxwell home.”²⁶⁴ Dorothy Ward Wade continued:

You see, she was interested in the people rather than the religion of the Bahá’í Faith. She thought that the people were wonderful that she met. She was so fascinated with them and found them so interesting that in time she did become a Bahá’í. Mrs. Maxwell asked about our family and suggested next time she bring me, and she had a daughter my age (15-16) and so I became interested too. .. It was like such a long, wonderful fireside that went on for days and she would say to me, ‘Dorothy, don’t you think you should tell your mother where you are?’ And then I would go home for awhile and it seemed so strange to come back to earth. The atmosphere was very difficult and one grew into the Faith in those days...²⁶⁵

Dorothy Ward Wade also joined the Montreal Bahá’í community and was initiated into the more informal, participatory nature of the Faith, where community members, non-Bahá’ís, and even a young girl like herself, would be invited to contribute to the gatherings. She recalled:

Very often in those early days it [the Nineteen Day Feast] would be at the Maxwell home and then we had a hall on Union Avenue... the special Faith Days were wonderful because we had all these lovely people come... and Doctor Este, and a lot of well-known people in Montreal used to come. And we would have singing and wonderful reading from the friends and the atmosphere was so special, it was very spiritual, it was lovely.

I remember when I was quite young and went to one of the meetings and Mrs. Maxwell came along with the readings and she handed me one, “You read this Dorothy.” I was horrified. I thought, “I won’t be able to speak.” I looked around in horror, all these people here, and thought, “Well, I have to do it. I have to do it well as I can.”²⁶⁶

This capacity-building approach was adopted, in part, because there was no clergy and only a basic protocol of worship. Meetings tried to be inclusive of people of various languages, races, cultures, educational and socio-economic levels, and age. This approach inhibited ritualization, which Bahá’ís were to avoid, and guarded against anyone having special status, in effect, an informal priesthood. Members learned tolerance, conducting and hosting meetings, speaking in public, and a myriad other organizational and mutual support tasks required to effectively run a disparate voluntary organization like the Bahá’í community. In this way, young

people like Dorothy Wade were better prepared when they, in turn, “pioneered” to new areas with few or no Bahá’ís. In 1937, Dorothy Ward Wade married, and in 1938 went to Halifax, then to West Vancouver in 1948. She recalled that she was good at “hostessing” meetings at her home at which every type of person was welcome or “getting a small group together and talking about the Faith.”²⁶⁷ Clearly, she had adopted the hospitable, less race and class-conscious, self-reliant pattern of community functioning modelled by early Bahá’í women such as May Maxwell.

In another of the numerous Bahá’í “mixed” unions, in 1934, Rosemary Gillies, a middle-class Scottish-Canadian Bahá’í of Presbyterian background, married Emeric Salas, still poor because he had helped his Jewish family to escape Hitler.²⁶⁸ They wed at the home of millionaire Seigfried Schopflocher (a German immigrant also of Jewish background) and his wife, Lorol. The 1937-40 period brought a new wave of activity, carried by a new generation of women, but still led by earlier trailblazers like May Maxwell, who set off for South America in 1939 despite her always poor health. On March 1, 1940, May Maxwell died of a heart attack and was buried in Buenos Aires, her tomb designed by Sutherland Maxwell. In the spring of 1940, following her example, Rosemary and Emeric pioneered to Caracas, Venezuela. Rosemary reflected:

So many Bahá’ís went out, mostly women, which was amazing. Women, not young, not speaking the language, who had the daring to go out in a continent that was consumed by machismo, for the man ruled. And yet, they conquered the continent. Some Bahá’í men went pioneering too, of course.

The Salas continued to “travel-teach” in North America, Mexico, Central and South America. In 1954, they “pioneered” to South Africa, where apartheid laws meant African friends entered through the back door. By 1964, they had visited twenty-five African countries and islands and, assisted by black and white South Africans and Canadians, Rosemary helped to build eleven school libraries in black township schools. They then pioneered to Mexico where, in 1980, Rosemary was buried, leaving Emeric to carry on.²⁶⁹ Their exposure as youth to role models like May Maxwell and other women, who tried to operationalize Bahá’í principles of a new World Order, had set them on a path of global citizenship and transnational millennial reform.

Conclusion

Western Bahá’í women steadfastly believed that if they played their part in working to systematically inculcate Bahá’í social reform principles in societies around the globe, they would hasten the advance of the millenarian new World Order foretold by Bahá’u’lláh. They considered “teaching” their primary reform effort as it encompassed direct “proclamation” of Bahá’í claims and tenets, teaching by example or “living the life,” and the promotion of other reforms that advanced specific Bahá’í principles. While all Bahá’í social principles were considered important, a few emerged in the early twentieth century as especially active areas of female reform, such as the three examined in this chapter: education, the establishment of a universal auxiliary language, and the elimination of racial prejudices. Although these reforms were not specifically “feminist” projects, the principle of the equality of women was interwoven into all efforts. Similarly, female equality, universal education, the eradication of prejudices, and the establishment of an auxiliary language, were considered integral components of establishing world peace. In the worldview of this group of Bahá’í women, *all* reforms advocated by

Bahá'u'lláh were seen as interdependent elements essential to their primary goal of the establishment of the Bahá'í millennial new World Order.

Within the matrix of this overarching worldview, each discrete principle intersected with all other principles and, to the degree they could be operationalized, both at home and abroad, these women saw themselves moving the world closer to a more just and peaceful society. Although individuals dedicated more personal effort to certain aspects of the teachings, a concerted effort was made to situate all activities as collectively advancing the larger, global Bahá'í mythology. This methodology was framed as an aspect of “unity in diversity,” i.e. making diverse efforts toward a united goal. This way of thinking worked to offset human tendencies to congregate around teachings that particularly appealed to them, which might potentially create factions, as happened in Esperanto and other transnational movements.²⁷⁰ Women's efforts in teaching others about the Faith, reducing prejudices, implementing universal education, and promoting a universal auxiliary language, gender equality, and other principles, were all linked in Bahá'í discourse to the larger reform goal of actualizing a millennial new World Order.

NOTES

¹ Marion Holley, “Studying the New World Order: Baha'i Summer School, Geyserville, California,” *Star of the West* 23, no. 8 (Nov. 1932): 243-244. Holley at this time was a recent graduate of Stanford University.

² Bahá'u'lláh in Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), 24-25.

³ Marion Holley, “A Fellowship of Free Men: An Interview with Norman Thomas,” *Star of the West* 24, no. 10 (January, 1934): 295.

⁴ Editor, *Star of the West* 24, no. 10 (January, 1934): 292. Alfred E. Lunt, “The Supreme Affliction: A Study in Baha'i Economics and Socialization,” *Star of the West* 23, no. 3 (June 1932): 97.

⁵ For Biblical references to the “new earth” see Isaiah 65:17, 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1

⁶ “Good works,” hard work and self-reliance as inherently redeeming values were associated with a “Protestant work ethic” in Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1930).

⁷ This “phantom verse” is not found in the Bible. Some argue that the Bible counsels reliance on God and not oneself (e.g. Jer 17:5 Prov 28:26). It is attributed to Ben Franklin (*Poor Richard's Almanac*, 1757) and Algernon Sydney (*Discourses Concerning Government*, 1698), but goes back to Sophocles who wrote “Heaven ne'er helps the men who will not act” (*Fragment 288* Plumptre's Translation). The Arabs say, “Trust in God but tie up your camel.”

⁸ R. A. Landes, *Encyclopedia of Millennialism and Millennial Movements* (Florence, KY: Routledge, 2000), 81.

⁹ Keith Ransom-Kehler, “Members One of Another,” *Star of the West* 16, no. 1 (April 1925): 396.

¹⁰ Universal House of Justice, *Promise of World Peace* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), 1-2.

¹¹ May Maxwell, *Star of the West* 3, no.1 (21 March, 1912): 8. For Abdu'l Baha in Canada, see W.C. van den Hoonaard, *The Origins of the Bahá'í Community of Canada, 1898-1948* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1996), 43-60.

¹² Rúhíyyih Khánúm, “Success in Teaching” [first published June 1949 as “Teaching Problems], in *Bahá'í News*. Bahá'í Library Online, http://bahai-library.com/khanum_success_teaching (accessed March 19, 2013).

¹³ Mrs. [Grace] Florian Krug, “The Bahai Congress for Teaching and the Fourteenth Annual Convention,” *Star of the West* 13, no. 4 (Azamat 1, 78; May 17, 1922): 90. Grace Klug was the wife of Dr. Florian Klug, who attended ‘Abdu'l Bahá at His death (Nov. 28, 1921) in Haifa. See also Shoghi Effendi, “Even if they are not always good prospects as far as being converted to the Faith goes, it is very necessary that they should hear of it and be made friendly towards it” (10 February 1951, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer), in Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, “Guidelines for Teaching, by Bahá'u'lláh, Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi” *Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 2, sec. 3, no. 1978 (1991).

¹⁴ Margaret Dixon, “New Light,” *Star of the West* 24, no.1 (April 1933): 27.

- ¹⁵ ‘Abdu’l Bahá quoted in Dixon, “New Light,” 24. Clara Dunn emulated ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s life as she understood it.
- ¹⁶ Hyde Dunn was named a “Hand” posthumously. See Graham Hassall, “Dunn, Clara (1869–1960), and Dunn, John Henry Hyde (c. 1855–1941),” for *The Bahá’í Encyclopedia Project* (Wilmette, IL: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’is of the United States, 2009) <http://www.bahai-encyclopedia-project.org> (accessed March 15, 2013).
- ¹⁷ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “The Tenth Principle—Equality of Sex, 4 Avenue de Camöens, Paris, November 14th,” *Paris Talks* (London, UK Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1972), 163.
- ¹⁸ Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 228.
- ¹⁹ May Maxwell to W.S. Maxwell, Green Acre, ME, 1903, in Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 212.
- ²⁰ “In Memoriam: Mrs. Lua Moore Getsinger,” *Star of the West* 7, no. 4 (Azamat 1, 72; May 17, 1916): 29.
- ²¹ Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 15.
- ²² Keith Ransom-Kehler’s first husband studied art in Paris. See Janet Ruhe-Schoen, “Ransom-Kehler, Keith Bean (1876–1933),” for *The Bahá’í Encyclopedia Project*, 2009, <http://www.bahai-encyclopedia-project.org> (accessed March 15, 2013).
- ²³ W.C. van den Hoonard, *The Origins of the Bahá’í Community of Canada, 1898-1948* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1996), 38-40.
- ²⁴ Jessie E. Revell, “A Bahá’í Pioneer of East and West - Doctor Susan I. Moody Amatu’l-A’la (The Handmaid of the Most High),” *The Bahá’í World*, vol. 6, 1934-36 (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1937), 483-486.
- ²⁵ Mariam Haney, “Keith Ransom-Kehler: A Brief Sketch of a Dynamic Personality,” *Star of the West* 24, no.9 (December 1933): 269.
- ²⁶ Abdul Hussein Isphahani, “The Baha’i Religious and Social Plan,” *Star of the West* 21, no. 5 (Aug.1930): 145.
- ²⁷ Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 3.
- ²⁸ Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 10.
- ²⁹ ‘Abdu’l Bahá affirmed mixed gender institutions. See Robert Stockman, *The Bahá’í Faith in America*, vol. 2.
- ³⁰ Dr. Orrol L. Harper, “Humanity Unfolding a Limitless Self,” *Star of the West* 18, no. 2 (May, 1927): 50.
- ³¹ This feminine domestic ideal was epitomized by Coventry Patmore, “The Angel in the House,” (1854, Cassell & Company, 1891) <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext03/anghs10.txt> (accessed March 15, 2013).
- ³² ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Abbas*, vol.1, trans. E.G. Browne (Chicago: Baha’i Publishing, 1909) 68.
- ³³ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, 15.
- ³⁴ For example, see J. S. Woodsworth, *Strangers Within Our Gates; or, Coming Canadians* (Toronto: F.C. Stephenson, 1909); Valerie Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates: Canadian Immigration and Immigration Policy, 1540-2006* (Toronto : Dundurn, 2007); John, Higham, *Strangers In The Land Patterns Of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, NJ : Rutgers University Press, 2002); Donald Avery, *Reluctant Host : Canada's Response To Immigrant Workers, 1896-1994* (Toronto : McClelland & Stewart, 1995); Kristofer Allerfeldt, *Race, Radicalism, Religion, And Restriction: Immigration In The Pacific Northwest, 1890-1924* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2003).
- ³⁵ See Shoghi Effendi, #1974 (24 February 1950); #1983 (11 December 1952); #1987 (27 December 1954); #2000 (20 October 1956; #2005 (27 January, 1957), *Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 2, sec. 3, no. 1978 (1991).
- ³⁶ “The Barney eccentricity is ever uppermost in mother and daughters alike.” “*Club Fellow & Washington Mirror* 11/15/1913,” quoted in Suzanne Rodriguez, *Wild Heart, A Life: Natalie Clifford Barney's Journey from Victorian America to Belle Epoque Paris* (New York: Ecco, 2002), 210-211.
- ³⁷ Mary Hanford Ford, “Ceremonies at the Official Reception given to the International Bahai Congress by the Directorate of the Panama Pacific International Exposition in Festival Hall, Exposition Grounds Saturday, April 24, 1915,” *Star of the West* 6, no. 4 (Azamat 1, 71; May 17, 1915): 32.
- ³⁸ Ford, “Ceremonies at International Bahai Congress,” *Star of the West*, 32.
- ³⁹ Mirzá Abu’l Faḍl, “The Import of Religion,” *Star of the West* 16, no. 12 (March 1926): 746.
- ⁴⁰ Arthur Cuthbert, “News of the Cause in London, 27 May, 1911,” *Star of the West*. 2, no. 5 (Nur, June 5, 1911): 7.
- ⁴¹ H. Holley, “The Origin and Development of the Baha’i Cause,” *Star of the West* 16, no. 2 (May, 1925): 428.
- ⁴² Edith Roohieh Sanderson, “Paris, France, April 21, 1921,” *Star of the West* 12, no. 8 (Asma 1, 77; Aug.1, 1921): 149.
- ⁴³ *Star of the West* 15, no. 10 (January, 1925): 283.
- ⁴⁴ Isabella D. Brittingham, “Ideal Education: A Radio Talk by Isabella D. Brittingham,” *Star of the West* 15, no. 10 (January, 1925): 300.

- ⁴⁵ Stanwood Cobb, "Cultivating the Social Virtues," *Star of the West* 18, no. 12, (March, 1928): 379. Cobb founded the Progressive Education Society with others such as John Dewey, Marietta Johnson, and A.E. Morgan.
- ⁴⁶ 'Abdu'l Bahá, *'Abdu'l Bahá in London: Addresses, and Notes of Conversations* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), 102.
- ⁴⁷ Keith Ransom-Kehler, "The New Education," *Star of the West* 17, no. 6 (Sept. 1926):177.
- ⁴⁸ Brittingham, "Ideal Education, 300.
- ⁴⁹ Brittingham, "Ideal Education, 300.
- ⁵⁰ Dorothy Ward Wade, "Interview with Dorothy Wade, White Rock, B.C. by W.C. van den Hoonard, July 16, 1990, transcribed by D. Cormier, 9," van den Hoonard, s5, ss4, file 198, Harriet Irving Library, UNB.
- ⁵¹ "Ye are all the leaves of one tree and the drops of one ocean." See Bahá'u'lláh, "The Thirteenth *Bishárát* (Glad-Tidings)," *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette, IL: US Bahá'í Publishing, 1988), 27.
- ⁵² Dorothy Ward Wade, "Interview," 9. One could not formally "declare" belief in Bahá'u'lláh before fifteen.
- ⁵³ *Star of the West* 15, no. 10 (January, 1925): 283.
- ⁵⁴ *Star of the West* 15, no. 10 (January, 1925): 284.
- ⁵⁵ *Star of the West* 15, no. 10 (January, 1925): 284.
- ⁵⁶ Brittingham, "Ideal Education," 300.
- ⁵⁷ *Star of the West* 15, no. 10 (January, 1925): 284.
- ⁵⁸ Ransom-Kehler, "The New Education,"177.
- ⁵⁹ Ransom-Kehler, "The New Education,"178.
- ⁶⁰ Ransom-Kehler, "The New Education,"178.
- ⁶¹ Ransom-Kehler, "The New Education,"178.
- ⁶² Ransom-Kehler, "The New Education,"178.
- ⁶³ K. Ransom-Kehler, "Some Informal Opinions on Education," *Star of the West* 18, no. 6 (Sept. 1927): 176.
- ⁶⁴ Dale S. Cole, "The Task of Self Education," *Star of the West* 18, no. 6 (Sept. 1927):167.
- ⁶⁵ Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 316. These ideas were not new in the twentieth century. See Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Maria Edgeworth, *Practical Education* (1798, G. F. Hopkins; Brown & Stansbury, 1801).
- ⁶⁶ In the 1980s, May Maxwell's close friend Emeric Sala and his second wife, Donya Vroclava Knox, who owned a Montessori school for many years, made a travel- teaching tour across Canada. They gave 44 lectures on the Bahá'í Faith, to which "Donya added talks about the Montessori system." See Ilona Sala Weinstein, ed. *Tending the Garden: the edited letters and papers of Emeric and Rosemary Sala* (New Liskeard, ON: White Mountain Publications, 1998), 155.
- ⁶⁷ Mirzá Mahmúd-i-Zarqání, "Mon Apr.1, 1912 (aboard the *Cedric*)," *Mahmúd's Diary: The Diary of Mirzá Mahmúd-i-Zarqání Chronicling 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Journey to America*, trans. Mohi Sobhani , asst. trans. Shirley Macias (Oxford: George Ronald, 1997), 25. Mr. and Mrs. Austin were Bahá'ís from Denver, Colorado who boarded the ship Mar. 29, 1912 at Naples and travelled with 'Abdu'l Bahá to New York. After Naples, the entourage was three Persians (besides 'Abdu'l Bahá) and six Americans. See Zarqání, 22- 23.
- ⁶⁸ Violette Nakhjavání, *A Tribute to Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum* (Thornhill, Nepean: Bahá'í Canada & Nine Pines Publishing, 2000), 7. Although early, May Maxwell's was not the first school. Mabel Hubbard and Alexander Graham Bell, first president of the Montessori Educational Association, had a school in "Beinn Bhreagh," Cape Breton, N.S. in 1912, and in Washington, D.C. about 1913. Bell hosted and attended receptions for 'Abdu'l Bahá.
- ⁶⁹ Hearst supported kindergartens, the women's club movement, female higher education; education for blacks, miners, and immigrants; and helped found the PTA, among other ventures. See Alexandra M. Nickliss, "Phoebe Apperson Hearst's 'Gospel of Wealth,' 1883-1901," *Pacific Historical Review* 71, no. 4 (Nov. 2002): 580-82; also Judith Robinson, *The Hearsts: An American Dynasty* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1991).
- ⁷⁰ Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 235, 319-20.
- ⁷¹ Albert R. Vail, "Practical and Spiritual Education for the New Civilization," *Star of the West* 17, no.6 (Sept.1926): 167.
- ⁷² Edith Roohieh Sanderson, "Letter from Monereh Khanum, the Wife of 'Abdul Bahá Addressed to Edith R. Sanderson" and "Letter from Miss Sanderson," *Star of the West* 11, no 13 (Kudrat 1, 76; Nov. 4, 1920): 225. Edith, Hippolyte and Laura became Bahá'is through May Maxwell. See Laura Dreyfus-Barney, "Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney: Article for *The Bahá'í World*," <http://bahai-library.com/essays/barney.html>.
- ⁷³ Sanderson, "Letter from Monereh Khanum," 225.

- ⁷⁴ Edith Roohieh Sanderson, *Star of the West* 12, no.8 (Asma 1, 77: August 1, 1921): 148-149.
- ⁷⁵ Sanderson, "Letter from Monereh Khanum," 225. Sanderson, *Star of the West* 12, no. 8: 149.
- ⁷⁶ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, IL: US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979), 108; also *Bahíyyih Khánum: The Greatest Holy Leaf, A Compilation* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), 3, 62, 34-35.
- ⁷⁷ Foreign Christian schools were established for boys and some girls, aimed mainly at minority Nestorian, Assyrian and Armenian Christians. Indian Parsees assisted Persian Zoroastrians. The British Christian Mission to Jews (CMJ), the (AIU) Alliance Israélite Universelle (Paris), and by 1921, local Zionists, offered Jews modern schooling and some vocational training for girls. Muslim males learned rudiments and memorized the Qur'an in Arabic, a language most did not comprehend. See Soli Shahvar, *The Forgotten Schools: The Bahá'is and Modern Education in Iran, 1899-1934* (London, New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2009), 24-29, 30-39, 43-48, 56-57.
- ⁷⁸ C.J. Wills, *In the Land of the Lion and the Sun, or, Modern Persia, Being Experiences of Life in Persia from 1866 to 1881* (1893, Washington, DC: Mage, 2004), 337-39. Wills was with the Indo-European Telegraph Department.
- ⁷⁹ Christians, Jews, Sabians, and Magians (Zoroastrians), as "people of the book," were (theoretically) protected by the Qur'an. There were (and are) more Bahá'is in Iran than all these other groups put together.
- ⁸⁰ Washing the body and clothing with fresh water are laws in Bahá'u'lláh's *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, (Book of Laws).
- ⁸¹ The Universal House of Justice, *Century of Light* (Thornhill, Nepean, ON: Bahá'í Canada Publications and Nine Pines Publications, 2001), 11. Also Shahvar, *The Forgotten Schools*, 78.
- ⁸² Shahvar, *The Forgotten Schools*, 46-47., 61-62, 69-70.
- ⁸³ Girls' schools (outside homes) were possible only after 1909 when a counter-coup defeated anti-constitutionalists. See Shahvar, *The Forgotten Schools*, 57, 60-77.
- ⁸⁴ "Chapter III: The History of Bahá'í Educational Efforts in Iran," *Closed Doors: Iran's Campaign to Deny Higher Education to Bahá'is*, An Official Site of the Bahá'í International Community, <http://denial.bahai.org/003.php>
- ⁸⁵ Janet Ruhe-Schoen, *A Love Which Does Not Wait*, 155.
- ⁸⁶ See "Chapter III: The History of Bahá'í Educational Efforts in Iran," <http://denial.bahai.org/003.php>
- ⁸⁷ Tāj al Saltanah, *Crowning Anguish: Memoirs of a Persian Princess from the Harem to Modernity, 1884-1914*, ed. Abbas Amanat, trans. Anna Vazan and Amin Neshati (Washington, DC: Mage, 1993), 309. The degree of authenticity of these memoirs has been questioned but this does not take away from the "Bábi" rhetoric point.
- ⁸⁸ Negar Mottahedeh, "Ruptured Spaces and Effective Histories: The Unveiling of the Babi Poetess Qurrat al-'Ayn-Tahirih in the Gardens of Badasht," *UCLA Journal of History* 17 (1997): 59-81.
- ⁸⁹ Susan Moody (1851-1934) studied the Faith with Isabella Brittingham. Jessie E. Revell, "In Memoriam: A Bahá'í Pioneer of East and West- Doctor Susan I. Moody (The Handmaid of the Most High) Amatu'l A'lá," *The Bahá'í World* vol. 6, 91-92 of the Bahá'í Era, 1934-1936 A.D. (Wilmette: IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1936), 483.
- ⁹⁰ See R. Jackson Armstrong-Ingram, "Susan I. Moody," *Research Notes in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Studies*, no. 2 (June, 1997) <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/notes/moody.htm>
- ⁹¹ A Tíhrán newspaper of 1910, quoted in Revell in "In Memoriam," 484-85.
- ⁹² "News from the Orient, Persia, Esphahan," *Star of the West* 1, no. 17, (Sultan, Jan. 19, 1911): 11.
- ⁹³ Revell, "In Memoriam," 485.
- ⁹⁴ Revell, "In Memoriam," 485.
- ⁹⁵ Revell, "In Memoriam," 485.
- ⁹⁶ On Kappes' passing, Dr. Moody started the "Kappes Memorial Fund" to raise money for the school, and also named a part of the school the "Kappes Memorial School." See Revell, "In Memoriam," 485.
- ⁹⁷ Revell, "In Memoriam," 485.
- ⁹⁸ Dr. Susan I. Moody, "The Swiftmess of Liberating Forces: Dr. Susan I. Moody's Observations Enroute to Persia," *Star of the West* 20, no.1 (April 1929): 17. Dr. Moody returned to Iran accompanied by Adelaide Sharp who became director of the Tarbíyát Girl's School.
- ⁹⁹ Revell, "In Memoriam," 485.
- ¹⁰⁰ Dr. Coy described the Tarbíyát School in an article. See Genevieve Coy, "Educating the Women of Persia," *Star of the West*, 17, no. 1 (April 1926): 50.
- ¹⁰¹ Albert Vail, *Star of the West* 13, no. 5. (August 1922): 121.
- ¹⁰² Genevieve Coy quoted in Albert Vail, *Star of the West*, 121.
- ¹⁰³ Genevieve Coy, "The Need for the Education of Women in the Near East," *Star of the West* 13, no. 7 (October, 1922): 177.

¹⁰⁴ In 1911, Godseah Ashraf became the first Iranian Bahá'í woman to travel to America for the purpose of pursuing graduate work in educational psychology. See Susan Maneck, "Women in the Bahá'í Faith," *Religion and Women* (Albany, NY:SUNY Press, 1994) http://bahai-library.com/maneck_women_bahai_faith

¹⁰⁵ Green Acre, begun by Sarah Farmer c.1892, was a retreat for the exchange of progressive philosophical and religious ideas, dedicated to ideals of peace and religious unity. Farmer, a Bahá'í, hosted 'Abdu'l Bahá in 1912. See Anna J. Ingersoll, *Greenacre on the Piscataqua* (1900; Eliot, ME: Green Acre Bahá'í School Council, 2005).

¹⁰⁶ The Universal House of Justice, "In Memoriam: Genevieve Lenore Coy (1886-1963)," "From a letter written by Dorothea Morrell Reed," *The Bahá'í World - An International Record*, vol 14, 1963-1968 (Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, England: Broadwater Press, 1974), 326-28.

¹⁰⁷ I do not know of any photographs of western men with a group of eastern women, although they may exist.

¹⁰⁸ Rúhíyyih Khánum, *The Priceless Pearl* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969), 145-46.

¹⁰⁹ Martha L. Root, "A Pilgrimage Through Persia (Part 3): Qazvin and Tihran," *Star of the West* 21, no. 6 (September, 1930): 177-178. Martha Root notes that the attendance to meetings was limited to invited guests, so as not to have such large meetings as might excite the suspicions of the authorities.

¹¹⁰ Root, "A Pilgrimage Through Persia, Part 3: Qazvin and Tihran," 178.

¹¹¹ Root, "A Pilgrimage Through Persia, Part 3: Qazvin and Tihran," 178.

¹¹² Susan Moody, "Letters from Dr. Moody, Teheran, Persia, Jan. 11, 1910," *Star of the West* 1, no. 2 (Jalal, April 9, 1910): 9-10.

¹¹³ In 1923, a letter from Haifa noted: "The deep sympathy shown by the friends in the Occident when their brothers and sisters in Sangsar were in trouble has brought about, in an incredible short time, a change in conditions... after the sad occurrence of last year things have resumed a perfectly normal course." [Sangsar is a small town about 220 km. east of Tihrán] See "Baha'i News and Notes," Haifa, Palestine, April 9, 1923, *Star of the West* 14, no. 4 (July, 1923): 120. Jináb-i-Faḍl recounted the trials of the Bahá'í farmers, peasants and shepherds of Sangsar, remote villagers who were formerly "prisoners of ignorance, submerged in the ocean of illiteracy and captive to primitive habits" but who had sacrificed to build a "fine school" and a "Mash-re'Ul Azkar" (*Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*: i.e. temple). Faḍl asserts that "instead of their example becoming contagious," their effort instead ignited "the fire of envy and hatred" in surrounding townfolk. Between 1906 and 1921, with collaboration between government and local mobs, numerous Bahá'ís were murdered, their properties confiscated, and many reduced to living in caves. Their new school and temple were razed by fire. Faḍl does not disclose what actions were taken by westerners to mitigate the situation. See Jináb-i-Faḍl, "The Growth of the Bahai Cause in the East: From a News Letter of Jenabe Fazel," *Star of the West* 13, no. 11 (Feb. 1923):311-12. See also Moojan Momen, "Tehran, Iran (including Qumm, Simnán and Dámghán): 8. Simnán, Shahmírzád, and Sangsar," <http://www.momen.org/relstud/tehran.htm#8>

¹¹⁴ Ruhe-Schoen, "Ransom-Kehler, Keith Bean," for *The Bahá'í Encyclopedia Project*, n.p.

¹¹⁵ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 398.

¹¹⁶ Elizabeth H. Stewart, "News from the Near East Letter from Bagdad, Mesopotamia to Miss Alma E. Albertson, Chicago," *Star of the West* 12, no. 2 (Jalal 1, 77; April 9, 1921): 38. See also R. Jackson Armstrong-Ingram, "'American Bahá'í Women and the Education of Girls in Tehran, 1909-1934,'" in *In Iran*, ed. Peter Smith (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1986), 181-210.

¹¹⁷ Shoghi Effendi, "No. 80 - January 1934 - page 14, Concerning Mrs. Keith Ransom-Kehler," *Extracts from the USBN: U.S. Bahá'í News, Compilation of Letters and Extracts of Writings from the Guardian Published in the Bahá'í News of the United States, December 1924 - November 1934, No. 1 to No. 88.*

http://bahairesearch.com/english/Baha'i/Authoritative_Baha'i/Shoghi_Effendi/Extracts_from_the_USBN.aspx

¹¹⁸ On Nov. 3, Shoghi Effendi instructed Isfahan Assembly to inter Keith near the grave of Sultanushuuda, named by Bahá'u'lláh "King of Martyrs." The Isfahan *Núrayn-i-Nayyirayn* (twin shining lights) were Mírzá Muhammad Hasan (King of Martyrs) and his elder brother, Mírzá Muhammad Husayn (Beloved of Martyrs). Shoghi Effendi, "No. 80 - January 1934 - p. 14, Concerning Mrs. Keith Ransom-Kehler," *Extracts from the USBN*. Just before her fatal illness, Keith visited their graves, praying and weeping. See Ruhe-Schoen, "Ransom-Kehler."

¹¹⁹ Ruhe-Schoen, "Ransom-Kehler," n.p. Abu'l-Qasim Faizi was appointed a Hand of the Cause in 1957. See *Abu'l-Qásim Faizí, Conqueror of Hearts: Excerpts from Letters, Talks, and Writings of Hand of the Cause of God Abu'l-Qásim Faizí*, Shirley Macias, ed., Bahá'í Library Online. http://bahai-library.com/faizi_conqueror_hearts

¹²⁰ Bahá'u'lláh, "Burial, Bahá'í," *Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 1 (Haifa: Universal House of Justice, 1991), 9.

¹²¹ When the "Women are Persons" monument was installed as the first statue of females on Canada's Parliament Hill (Oct.18, 2000), it was hailed as a feminist milestone. <http://www.heroines.ca/celebrate/statuepersons.html>

¹²² *Abhá* is a superlative of the word *Bahá*, which means “Glory.” It is a form of the Greatest Name, and is also a Bahá’í prayer. Bahá’ís are enjoined by Bahá’u’lláh in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (*the Book of Laws*) to repeat the phrase *Alláh-u-Abhá*, 95 times per day.

¹²³ Florence Evelyn Schopflocher, “Flying in Material and Spiritual Atmospheres,” *Star of the West* 18, no. 5 (August, 1927): 153-154.

¹²⁴ Vail, “Practical and Spiritual Education for the New Civilization,” 167.

¹²⁵ Vail, “Practical and Spiritual Education for the New Civilization,” 167.

¹²⁶ Bahá’u’lláh, “Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd (Tablet of Maqṣúd),” *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1988), 165-66. This specific linguistic instruction is unique in religion.

¹²⁷ James F. Morton, SR., “Esperanto and the Baha’i Teachings,” *Star of the West* 15, no. 12 (March, 1925): 366.

¹²⁸ Morton, “Esperanto and the Baha’i Teachings,” 365. See also Gregory Paul P. Meyjes, “Language and world order in Bahá’í perspective: A new paradigm revealed,” in Tope Omoniyi and Joshua A. Fishman, *Explorations in the Sociology of Language and Religion* (John Benjamins, 2006) 29-31, 35-37.

¹²⁹ ‘Abdu’l Bahá, “Address Delivered in Paris [to Esperanto Group] From Persian notes; trans. Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, *Star of the West* 4, no. 2 (Jalal, April 9, 1913): 36.

¹³⁰ The *Unua Libr* (first book) *Lingvo Internacia* was published in Russian in Warsaw in 1887. Dr. Zamenhof commissioned Richard Geoghegan to do an English translation (replacing a poor J. Steinhilber English translation).

¹³¹ Esperantists held multi-faith gatherings at major events. See Henry W. Hetzel, “President of Esperanto Association of North America, World Peace and a World Speech,” *Star of the West* 16 (January 1926): 679.

¹³² L.L. Zamenhof, “Presidential Address at the Third Esperanto Congress at Cambridge, 1907,” quoted in Nitobe Inazo, “Esperanto and the Language Question at the League of Nations, A Report submitted to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations (August 31st, 1921): 7.

http://nitobe.info/ld/dokumentujo/dokumentoj/nc_dokumento-18-enkonduko3_en.pdf

¹³³ “Esperanto, The Brightest Ray,” *Star of the West* 16, no. 11 (February, 1926): 710. ‘Abdu’l Bahá, “Address Delivered in Paris to the Paris Esperanto group, February 12th, Hotel Modern,” from Persian notes; trans. Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, *Star of the West* 4, no. 2 (Jalal, April 9, 1913): 37. See also Shoghi Effendi, “67: Esperanto (The Subject of), Letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada, June, 1937,” *Directives of the Guardian* (India/Hawaii, 1973), 26.

¹³⁴ Shoghi Effendi, quoted in *The Priceless Pearl*, Rúhíyyih Rabbani (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1969), 271-272.

¹³⁵ Agnes Baldwin Alexander, *History of the Bahá’í Faith in Japan 1914-1938*, ed. Barbara Sims (Osaka, Japan: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1977) 8.

¹³⁶ Alexander, *History of the Bahá’í Faith in Japan*, 8. She was in Brooklyn, NY at this time.

¹³⁷ Gregor Benton, “Esperanto,” in *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism: Forgotten Histories, 1917-1945* (London, New York: Routledge, 2007), 93-94.

¹³⁸ Emily Groszos Ooms, *Women and Millenarian Protest in Meiji Japan: Deguchi Nao and Omotokyo* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2010). It is not clear if there was any involvement with the women of this group. Agnes Alexander writes that she and Ida Finch accompanied Martha Root to Kyoto and from there “Martha went with Mrs. Finch to Ayabe, the headquarters of the Oomoto religion, which had spread in Japan, but was later disbanded by the government.” See Alexander, *History of the Bahá’í Faith in Japan*, 46.

¹³⁹ Alexander, *History of the Bahá’í Faith in Japan*, 9. She was in Locarno, Switzerland.

¹⁴⁰ Agnes B. Alexander, “The Blind of Japan in the New World Order,” *Star of the West* 22, no. 9 (December, 1931): 276-279.

¹⁴¹ Alexander, *History of the Bahá’í Faith in Japan*, 9. The blind Russian was Vasily Eroshenko.

¹⁴² Joseph W. Dubin, *The Green Star* (Philadelphia, PA: National Institute of Esperanto, 1944), 181-82, 186-89. Consuls are national contact persons, who will then put a person in touch with local Esperantists.

¹⁴³ Dubin, *The Green Star*, 192.

¹⁴⁴ M.R. Garis, *Martha Root: Lioness at the Threshold* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1983), 232.

¹⁴⁵ The Persian *Hidden Words* (*Kasitaj Vortoj tie Baha'u'llah et la Persa*) was printed by the British Esperanto Assoc. See “The “Hidden Words” in Esperanto,” *Star of the West* 8, no. 12 (Elm 1, 73; October 16, 1917): 152.

¹⁴⁶ Dubin, *The Green Star*, 46.

¹⁴⁷ Martha L. Root, “What Danzig Has: How to bring a Universal Congress of Esperanto in your city,” *Star of the West* 18, no.1 (April, 1927): 30.

- ¹⁴⁸ Garis, *Martha Root*, 232.
- ¹⁴⁹ Martha L. Root, "Why I am an Esperantist," *Star of the West* 17, no. 7 (Oct. 1926): 214.
- ¹⁵⁰ Root, "A Pilgrimage Through Persia, Part 3: Qazvin and Tihran," 173-174.
- ¹⁵¹ Root, "Why I am an Esperantist," 214.
- ¹⁵² Root, "Why I am an Esperantist," 214.
- ¹⁵³ Dubin, *The Green Star*, 192.
- ¹⁵⁴ Staff member Anne Lynch mentions a letter from "a Mr. Lorey, Editor of the German Bahá'í Esperanto Magazine." See Anne Lynch to Horace Holley, "Confidential [Manuscript:] For Mrs. L. D. Barney, 40 Grand'Rue, Geneva. May 25, 1946," posted by Thomas Linard, "Materials for the Geneva Bahá'í Bureau's History" from the Laura Dreyfus-Barney Collection at the French Bahá'í National Archives (Bahá'í National Center, Paris)," *Documents on the Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Movements*, vol. 2, no. 1 (January 1998) <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/docs/vol2/geneva1.htm>. For Anne Lynch see "In Memoriam. Anne Slastiona Lynch, 1892-1966," *The Bahá'í World*, vol.14, 1963-1968 (Haifa, Israel: Bahá'í World Centre, 1974), 355-356.
- ¹⁵⁵ M. L. Root, "The Universal Esperanto Congress at Edinburgh," *Star of the West* 17, no. 6 (Sept. 1926):182.
- ¹⁵⁶ Root, "The Universal Esperanto Congress at Edinburgh,"183.
- ¹⁵⁷ Agnes Alexander, quoted in "World Thought and Progress: Pan Pacific Meeting [from the Honolulu Advertiser]," *Star of the West* 15, no. 8 (Nov. 1924): 243.
- ¹⁵⁸ Agnes Alexander, "The Spirit of Hawaii and its Food Conservation Conference," *Star of the West* 15, no. 7 (October, 1924): 207.
- ¹⁵⁹ Alexander, *History of the Bahá'í Faith in Japan*, 72-73. She has misspelled "Whyte" as "White."
- ¹⁶⁰ Alexander, *History of the Bahá'í Faith in Japan*, 72-73.
- ¹⁶¹ Alexander, *History of the Bahá'í Faith in Japan*, 73
- ¹⁶² Alexander, *History of the Bahá'í Faith in Japan*, 72.
- ¹⁶³ Tori, "The Baha'i Movement in Japan." Lidia Zamenhof was honorary president of the Association of Blind Esperantists (Heller, 123). 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote 19 Tablets to Japanese Bahá'ís and five of these were to the blind.
- ¹⁶⁴ Hector Hodler in *Esperanto*, quoted in Dubin, *The Green Star*, 199-200. Rabindranath Tagore was a Bengali poet and social activist. See P.C. Hogan and L. Pandit, eds., *Rabindranath Tagore: Universality and Tradition* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003). Hodler (Swiss) became president of the World Esperanto Assoc.
- ¹⁶⁵ Lidia was the lone Bahá'í in Poland; she relied on Bahá'í visits, like Martha Root's trips to Warsaw. Canadian Lorol Schopflochler visited at least twice. Lidia also corresponded with Agnes Alexander and Shoghi Effendi. See Wendy Heller, *Lidia: The Life of Lidia Zamenhof* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1985), 80, 166-70.
- ¹⁶⁶ Heller, *Lidia*, 128-29.
- ¹⁶⁷ Heller, *Lidia*, 143-44.
- ¹⁶⁸ Marion Holley, "May Ellis Maxwell," "In Memoriam," "May 9, 1940," *The Bahá'í World* (Wilmette, IL: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, 1942) 639. For May Maxwell and Lidia Zamenhof, see Heller, *Lidia*, 186.
- ¹⁶⁹ Heller, *Lidia*, 110-11.
- ¹⁷⁰ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf, Volume 1, Chapter XI*. trans. James Murphy (1925, London: Hurst and Blackett Ltd., 1939) <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks02/0200601.txt>; See Heller, *Lidia*, 79, 95-97, 138-39.
- ¹⁷¹ Heinrich Himmler, the head of the SS, issued the order to ban the Bahá'í Faith, disestablish its national and local institutions and prohibit Bahá'í gatherings. In 1939 and 1942 there were sweeping arrests. See Harry Liedtke, *The German Bahá'í Community under National Socialism: A Historical Perspective with Notes and Postscript* (Kelowna, BC: Okanagan Publishers, 2000) 27-28. See also Walter Kolarz, *Religion in the Soviet Union*, Armenian Research Center Collection (St. Martin's Press, 1962) 470-473; also Heller, *Lidia*, 132-36.
- ¹⁷² Lidia mentions there were five Bahá'ís in Poland in August 1939. See "The Cost of Constancy: Impressions of Lydia Zamenhof," *Bahá'í News* (515) (February 1974): 19-21. Also Heller, *Lidia*, 228-33, 246-48.
- ¹⁷³ The Universal House of Justice gave their consent to the Bahá'í Esperanto League in a letter dated 19 March 1973 (18.19.129 BE). See *Komuna Bahaa Letero* Issue No. 5 (April 1973). Also <http://bahaaeligo.bahai.de/>
- ¹⁷⁴ 'Abdul Bahá, Meeting of the International Peace Forum held at Grace Methodist Episcopal Church, West 104th St. New York, Sunday May12, 1912. See Mírzá Maḥmúd -i-Zarqání, Maḥmúd's *Diary*, 93. For a transcript of this talk see Zarqání, Maḥmúd's *Diary*, 91-98, or 'Abdu'l Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 116-22.
- ¹⁷⁵ 'Abdul Bahá, "The New Day," *Star of the West* 13, no. 1 (Bahá 1, 78; March 21, 1922): 7.

- ¹⁷⁶ See Janice Fiamengo, "Rediscovering Our Foremothers Again: The Racial Thinking of Canada's Early Feminists," in *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History*, eds. Mona Gleason and Adele Perry, 5th ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2006), 144-62.
- ¹⁷⁷ 'Abdul Bahá, "The New Day," 7.
- ¹⁷⁸ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Abdu'l-Bahá in London*, 38.
- ¹⁷⁹ Angus McLaren, *Our Own Master Race; Eugenics in Canada, 1885-1945* (McClelland & Stewart, 1990), 9-10, 36-37, 46-57.
- ¹⁸⁰ McLaren, *Our Own Master Race*, 18-27.
- ¹⁸¹ Beatrice Brigdon was employed to lecture by the Methodist Department of Social Service and Evangelism. The book was Scott Nearing and Nellie Marguerite Seeds Nearing, *Woman and Social Progress: A Discussion of the Biologic, Domestic, Industrial and Social Possibilities of American Women* (New York: Macmillan, 1912).
- ¹⁸² McLaren, *Our Own Master Race*, 24, 30-45.
- ¹⁸³ McLaren, *Our Own Master Race*, 37.
- ¹⁸⁴ McLaren, *Our Own Master Race*, 37-38.
- ¹⁸⁵ See Carol Bacchi, "Race Regeneration and Social Purity: A Study of the Social Attitudes of Canada's English-speaking Suffragettes," *Histoire social/Social History*, 11 (1978): 460-73; Veronica Strong-Boag, *The Parliament of Women: The National Council of Women of Canada, 1893-1929* (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1976); Janice Fiamengo, "Rediscovering Our Foremothers Again: The Racial Thinking of Canada's Early Feminists," 144-62.
- ¹⁸⁶ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "*Lawh-i-Hague* (Tablet to The Hague) to the Central Organization for Durable Peace in The Hague, The Netherlands, 17 December 1919" in *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), 299. 'Abdu'l-Bahá remarks that religion and science must be harmonious because religion alone "would quickly fall into the quagmire of superstition" whilst science alone, lacking an ethical base, "would also make no progress, but fall into the despairing slough of materialism," even "madness." 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* (1912; London: Bahá'í Distribution Service, 1995) 143; Also 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, 181.
- ¹⁸⁷ Marion Carpenter, "The Unity of Science and Religion," *Star of the West* 15, no. 12 (March 1925): 372.
- ¹⁸⁸ Herbert Adolphus Miller, quoted in Dale S. Cole, "Thinking in World Terms," *Star of the West* 17, no. 10 (January, 1927): 311.
- ¹⁸⁹ McLaren, *Our Own Master Race*, 147-164.
- ¹⁹⁰ McLaren, *Our Own Master Race*, 148.
- ¹⁹¹ McLaren, *Our Own Master Race*, 158. McLaren quotes from Charlotte Whitton, "The Baby Bonus is a Dog in the Security Manger," *Saturday Night* (3 March, 1945), 6, quoted in P.T. Rooke and R.L. Schnell, *No Bleeding Heart: Charlotte Whitton, A Feminist on the Right* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1987), 79, 121, 123.
- ¹⁹² Timothy J. Christian, "The Mentally Ill and Human Rights in Alberta: A Study of the Alberta Sexual Sterilization Act (Edmonton: University of Alberta, Faculty of Law, 1973). See also McLaren, *Our Own Master Race*, 159-62.
- ¹⁹³ Martha C. Ward, *Poor Women, Powerful Men: America's Great Experiment in Family Planning* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986). In a recent eugenics case, concerns were raised over "coerced" sterilization of female prisoners in California, in part, to reduce anticipated future welfare costs. See Corey G. Johnson, "Female Inmates Sterilized in California Prisons Without Approval," Center for Investigative Reporting, *NBC Bay Area News*, July 8, 2013, <http://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/california/Female-Inmates-Sterilized-in-California-Prisons-Without-Approval-214634341.html> (accessed July 09, 2013).
- ¹⁹⁴ Rosa V. Winterburn, "Crime Control," *Star of the West* 18, no. 8 (November 1927): 247.
- ¹⁹⁵ Hogenson, *Lighting the Western Sky*, 143-44.
- ¹⁹⁶ May Maxwell, *An Early Pilgrimage* (1917; Oxford: George Ronald, 1974), 20.
- ¹⁹⁷ Hogenson, *Lighting the Western Sky*, 144.
- ¹⁹⁸ *World Order*, vol. 12, no. 1, p. 29, quoted in O.Z. Whitehead, *Some Early Bahá'ís of the West* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1976), 17.
- ¹⁹⁹ Shoghi Effendi, *The Bahá'í World*, vol. 4, 118.
- ²⁰⁰ 'Abdu'l Bahá, "23 April 1912, Talk at Howard University, Washington, D.C. Translated by Amin Banani," *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* (Wilmette, IL: US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), 44-46; also 'Abdu'l Bahá, "23 April 1912, Talk to Bethel Literary Society, Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church, M Street, NW, Washington, D.C., Notes by Joseph H. Hannen," *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 49-52.

²⁰¹ Harlan Ober says the reception was “attended by many noted people... some of whom were members of the official and social life of Washington, as well as a few Bahá’ís.” Agnes Parsons and Juliet Thompson say guests included the Turkish Ambassador, Díyá Páshá, Admiral Peary and Alexander Graham Bell, among others. See Harlan Ober, *The Bahá’í World*, vol. 12 (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1956), 668; Richard Hollinger, ed., *Agnes Parson’s Diary: Abdu’l Bahá in America April 11, 1912–November 11, 1912* (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1996), 31–35; Juliet Thompson, *Diary of Juliet Thompson*, 269–73; Louis Gregory, *Some Early Recollections of the Bahá’í Faith in Washington, D.C.*, 13.

²⁰² Mírzá Mahmúd-i-Zarqání, *Mahmúd’s Diary*, 55–56.

²⁰³ Hollinger, *Agnes Parson’s Diary*, 31. Agnes Parsons (1861–1934) was a Washington D.C. socialite.

²⁰⁴ Hollinger, *Agnes Parson’s Diary*, xiv–xvi.

²⁰⁵ This banquet was held at Rauscher’s Hall. See Wendi Momen, “‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Encounter with Modernity During His Western Travels,” *Irfan Colloquia*, 300. http://irfancolloquia.org/pdf/lights13_momen_modernity.pdf

²⁰⁶ “Washington,” *Star of the West* 1, no. 1 (Bahá; March 21, 1910): 18–19. “Feasts” are structured community meetings usually held on the first day of every Bahá’í month, in other words, every 19 days.

²⁰⁷ ‘Abdu’l Bahá, quoted in Mariam Haney, “Mrs. Agnes Parsons, In Memoriam,” *The Bahá’í World*, vol. 5, 412–13.

²⁰⁸ Jeffrey Parsons’ comment is gleaned from Charles Mason Remy, “The Master Abdu’l Baha in Washington,” in “Baha’i Reminiscences, diary letters, and other documents by Charles Mason Remy,” Oriental Division, New York Public Library, folio 6, pp. 21–23 quoted in Hollinger, *Agnes Parson’s Diary*, xv–xvi.

²⁰⁹ Mariam Haney, “Mrs. Agnes Parsons, In Memoriam,” *The Bahá’í World*, vol. 5, 414.

²¹⁰ For contributions of black Bahá’ís, see Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis and Richard Thomas, eds. *Lights of the Spirit: Historical Portraits of Black Bahá’ís in North America: 1898–2000* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing, 2006).

²¹¹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Tablet “To his honor, Mr. Louis Gregory, care of his honor, Mr. Hannen, Washington D. C. Upon him be Bahaollah El Abha!” *Star of the West* 11, no. 5 (Nur 1, 76; June 5, 1920): 92. Also ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 112–13.

²¹² Ruth J. Moffett, “‘Abdu’l Bahá’s Historic Meeting with Jane Addams,” *Star of the West* 25, no. 12 (March 1935): 364.

²¹³ ‘Abdu’l Bahá, “30 April 1912, Talk at Hull House, Chicago, Illinois (Notes by Joseph H. Hannen),” *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 68.

²¹⁴ Moffett, “‘Abdu’l Bahá’s Historic Meeting with Jane Addams,” 364.

²¹⁵ Howard Colby Ives, “Portals to Freedom, (An Autobiographical Story) Chapter 6,” *Star of the West* 25, no. 12 (March 1935): 390–92; also Ives, *Portals To Freedom*, 60–68.

²¹⁶ Moffett, “‘Abdu’l Bahá’s Historic Meeting with Jane Addams,” 364–65.

²¹⁷ ‘Abdu’l Bahá, “30 April 1912, Talk at Fourth Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Handel Hall, Chicago, Illinois, Notes by Joseph H. Hannen,” *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 70.

²¹⁸ Allan L. Ward, *239 Days: ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s Journey in America* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing, 1979), 60–61.

²¹⁹ “Matrimony in the Baha’i Spirit: Mr. and Mrs. Gregory,” *Star of the West* 3, no. 12, (Elm; October 16, 1912): 15. When Louis and Louise Gregory married, antimiscegenation laws existed in 30 of the 48 U.S. states, and in Dec. 1912, Georgia Democrat Seaborn Roddenbery introduced a (failed) amendment to insert a clause into the American constitution forever banning interracial marriage between Caucasians and persons of color using the “one-drop” rule. See United States Congressional Record, *62d. Congr. 3d. Sess., December 11, 1912*, 502–503.

²²⁰ Gayle Morrison, “Gregory, Louis George,” for *The Bahá’í Encyclopedia Project* (Wilmette: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States, 2009) n.p. <http://www.bahai-encyclopedia-project.org> (accessed Mar. 9, 2013).

²²¹ Gregory was elected in Feb. 1911 to an administrative body in Washington D.C., and in 1912, to the governing body for Canada and the US at the time, the nine-member Executive Board of the *Bahai Temple Unity*, a body formed to build the Bahá’í House of Worship in Wilmette (Chicago), IL. He was elected to the *National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada*, which superseded the *Bahai Temple Unity*, serving 1922–24, 1927–32, and 1939–46. See Gayle Morrison, *To Move the World: Louis G. Gregory and the Advancement of Racial Unity in America* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing, 1982), 156, 310–11. The Canadian National Spiritual Assembly was first elected in 1948, and incorporated in by a Canadian Act of Parliament in 1949.

²²² When Barrow came to the United States in 1923, the Episcopal Church was segregated, so he worked with the African Orthodox Church. See Muriel Ives Barrow Newhall, “Introduction,” *Mother’s Stories: Stories of ‘Abdu’l-*

- Bahá and Early Believers told by Muriel Ives Barrow Newhall to her son Reginald Grant Barrow.* Edited by Reginald G. Barrow, Jr. (Bahá'í Academics Resource Library, 1970; 1998) <http://bahai-library.com/ives/> (accessed March 19, 2013). See also Will C. van den Hoonaard and Lynn Echevarria-Howe, "Black Roses in Canada's Mosaic," *Lights of the Spirit: Historical Portraits of Black Bahá'ís in North America, 1898-2000*, eds. Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis, Richard Thomas, Richard Walter Thomas (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing, 2006), 154.
- ²²³ Gayle Morrison, "Gregory, Louis George," for *The Bahá'í Encyclopedia Project*, n.p.
- ²²⁴ Christopher Buck, *Alain Locke: Faith And Philosophy*, Studies in the Bábi and Bahá'í Religions, vol. 18, gen. ed. Anthony A. Lee (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 2005), 167.
- ²²⁵ Coralie F. Cook, "Letter to 'Abdu'l Bahá Abbas," in Etter-Lewis and Thomas, *Lights of the Spirit*, 239-243.
- ²²⁶ Cook, "Letter to 'Abdu'l Bahá Abbas," in Etter-Lewis and Thomas, *Lights of the Spirit*, 243.
- ²²⁷ May Maxwell to Albert R. Windust, Bittersweet, Elliot, Maine, Sept. 3, 1924, Albert R. Windust papers, M21 B6 F29, USBNA.
- ²²⁸ May Maxwell to Albert R. Windust, 716 Pine Ave, Montreal, October 4, 1924, Albert R. Windust papers, M21 B6 F29, USBNA.
- ²²⁹ Louis Gregory, "Racial Amity in America: An Historical Overview," *The Bahá'í World*, vol.7, 1936-1938, 663.
- ²³⁰ For instance, Charles H. Este, an immigrant from Antigua worked as a shoeshine boy, then in steel mills, as a porter on the Intercolonial Railroad, at the LaCorona Hotel, then again shining shoes. After becoming an ordained minister, he became a leading citizen in the black community. See Rev. F. Gabourel, "Canada Loses Great Religious Leader," *The Montreal Oracle*, vol. 2, no.1 (Thursday January 20, 1977). <http://www.learnquebec.ca>
- ²³¹ Mrs. Botay, "From notes of Mrs. Botay from a private interview with Abdul Baha in New York City, June 17, 1912," "The Removal of Race Prejudice," *Star of the West* 12, no. 5 (Nur 1, 77; June 5, 1921): 108.
- ²³² 'Abdu'l Bahá was unable to speak there due to lack of time. It was most likely the second pastor of the Union Congregational Church (est.1907), Reverend H. B. Gantt, whose term ran from 1910-1915.
- ²³³ Amine de Mille, "Memoirs of Amine de Mille" quoted in van den Hoonaard, *Origins*, fn.16, 98.
- ²³⁴ Rev. Charles H. Este, immigrated to Canada in 1913, graduating in June 1925 from the Congregational College (McGill). See Gabourel, "Canada Loses Great Religious Leader," 1.
- ²³⁵ "How It All Started..." *Negro Community Centre/Charles H. Este Cultural Centre* <http://www.nccmontreal.org/history.php>
- ²³⁶ Gabourel, "Canada Loses Great Religious Leader," 1. "How It All Started..." *Negro Community Centre/Charles H. Este Cultural Centre* <http://www.nccmontreal.org/history.php>
- ²³⁷ Dorothy Ward Wade, "Interview with Dorothy Wade, White Rock, B.C. by W.C. van den Hoonaard, July 16, 1990, transcribed by D. Cormier, p.6," van den Hoonaard, s5, ss4, file 198, Harriet Irving Library, UNB.
- ²³⁸ Roland Estall, "Interview with Roland Estall and Emeric Sala by Michael Rochester, August 24, 1987," p. 69. transcribed by D. Cormier, van den Hoonaard s 4, ss4, file 5, Harriet Irving Library, University of New Brunswick.
- ²³⁹ The "Square Mile" in Montreal was the most wealthy and exclusive neighbourhood in Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The adjective "Golden" seems to have been applied about the mid-twentieth century. Many of the homes in the "Square Mile" were designed by Edward and W.S. Maxwell.
- ²⁴⁰ Rowland Estall, *Memoirs of Rowland Estall* (1977), quoted in van den Hoonaard, *Origins*, 89.
- ²⁴¹ Marion Holley, "May Ellis Maxwell, In Memoriam," *The Bahá'í World*, vol. 8, 1938-1940 (Wilmette: National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, 1942, rpt. 1981), fn. 10, 639.
- ²⁴² W.C. van den Hoonaard suggests that it is more likely that May Maxwell was honorary president of the Coloured Women's Club. See van den Hoonaard, *Origins*, fn. 17, 98-99.
- ²⁴³ "Our History and Spiritual Heritage," *Union United Church* www.unionunitedchurchmtl.ca
- ²⁴⁴ "Interview with Lily Ann Irwin, Penticton, B.C. by Carrie Jenson, October 6, 1982, transcribed by D. Cormier," p.24, van den Hoonaard, s5, ss4, file 90, Harriet Irving Library, University of New Brunswick.
- ²⁴⁵ "Interview with Dorothy Wade, White Rock, B.C. by W.C. van den Hoonaard, July 16, 1990 transcribed by D. Cormier," van den Hoonaard, s5, ss4, file 198, Harriet Irving Library, University of New Brunswick.
- ²⁴⁶ Rúhíyyih Khánum to Dorothy Ward, Haifa, 1947, van den Hoonaard, s5, ss4, file 198, Harriet Irving Library, University of New Brunswick. At the time this letter was written, Dorothy Ward was acting as housekeeper for W.S. Maxwell as he was living in Haifa with his daughter after May Maxwell's death.
- ²⁴⁷ Emeric Sala, "Interview with Roland Estall and Emeric Sala by Michael Rochester, August 24, 1987," p. 64.
- ²⁴⁸ Roland Estall, "Interview with Roland Estall and Emeric Sala by Michael Rochester, August 24, 1987," p. 64-65.

- ²⁴⁹ Rosemary Sala, "Amine de Mille: Info provided by Rosemary Sala to Ilona Weinstein (née Sala)," van den Hoonard, s5, ss4, file 112, Harriet Irving Library, UNB. Sala mentioned that Amine de Mille wrote the booklet, "Abdu'l Baha in Canada" as well as articles on Lua Getsinger and Emogene Hoag for the American *Bahá'í News*.
- ²⁵⁰ Abdu'l-Bahá, "Teaching, Guidelines for, by Bahá'u'lláh, Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi," republication of *The Individual and Teaching: Raising the Divine Call*, compiled by Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, in *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 2, 323.
- ²⁵¹ van den Hoonard, *Origins*, 86.
- ²⁵² Roland Estall, "Interview with Roland Estall and Emeric Sala by Michael Rochester, August 24, 1987," p. 27-28.
- ²⁵³ They included Phil Edwards, "the first Black doctor to be graduated from McGill University and ...an Olympic runner," George Beattie (mother Asian, father English), and the Blackburn sisters (parents black and white). See Roland Estall, "Interview with Roland Estall and Emeric Sala by Michael Rochester, August 24, 1987," p. 27-28. Re: Blackburns, see Estall, p. 69. See also van den Hoonard and Echevarria-Howe, "Black Roses."
- ²⁵⁴ The group was initiated with the help of U.S. travel teacher, Elizabeth Greenleaf, supported by the Montreal Local Spiritual Assembly. Estall and Sala, "Interview with Roland Estall and Emeric Sala by Michael Rochester, August 24, 1987," p.27. See also van den Hoonard, *Origins*, 78-83.
- ²⁵⁵ Rúhíyyih Khánúm to Dorothy Ward, Haifa, 7th July, 1947, van den Hoonard s5, ss4, file 18, Harriet Irving Library, UNB. A handwritten notation on the typed copy of Rúhíyyih Khánúm's letter, provided by Rosemary Sala to Ilona Sala Weinstein, says that "Eddie Elliot was the first Canadian Baha'i negro dearly love (sic) by the Maxwells. Rúhíyyih Khánúm always called him her brother."
- ²⁵⁶ Estall and Sala, "Interview with Roland Estall and Emeric Sala by Michael Rochester, August 24, 1987," 26-27.
- ²⁵⁷ Mildred (Milli) Rena Gordon, quoted in van den Hoonard, *Origins*, 91.
- ²⁵⁸ van den Hoonard and Echevarria-Howe, "Black Roses." Elliot represented the Canadian National Spiritual Assembly at the African Intercontinental Teaching Conference held in Kampala, Uganda in February 1953.
- ²⁵⁹ Estall and Sala, "Interview with Roland Estall and Emeric Sala by Michael Rochester, August 24, 1987," p. 80.
- ²⁶⁰ Weinstein, *Tending the Garden*, 32.
- ²⁶¹ Estall and Sala, "Interview with Roland Estall and Emeric Sala by Michael Rochester, August 24, 1987," p. 80. See also Weinstein, *Tending the Garden*, 7, 27. Emeric Szalavetz, from Sibiu, Romania, changed his name to Sala in Montreal. He spoke five languages, but not English. See Weinstein, *Tending the Garden*, 32.
- ²⁶² Weinstein, *Tending the Garden*, 30-31.
- ²⁶³ Ida and Albert Goodstone owned a restaurant called the Salad Bar on St. Catherine Street. See Dorothy Wade, "Interview with Dorothy Wade, White Rock, B.C. by W.C. van den Hoonard, July 16, 1990, transcribed by D. Cormier," p.1, van den Hoonard, s5, ss4, file 198, Harriet Irving Library, University of New Brunswick. Dorothy Baile Ward (1890-1962) had her daughter Dorothy in Watford, England, October 20, 1909.
- ²⁶⁴ Wade, "Interview with Dorothy Wade, White Rock, B.C. by W.C. van den Hoonard," p.1.
- ²⁶⁵ Wade, "Interview with Dorothy Wade, White Rock, B.C. by W.C. van den Hoonard," p. 3-4.
- ²⁶⁶ Wade, "Interview with Dorothy Wade, White Rock, B.C. by W.C. van den Hoonard."
- ²⁶⁷ Wade, "Interview with Dorothy Wade, White Rock, B.C. by W.C. van den Hoonard," p. 8.
- ²⁶⁸ Weinstein, *Tending the Garden*, 22, 42-43.
- ²⁶⁹ Weinstein, *Tending the Garden*, 102-105, 116-17, 128-132. Rosemary Sala died February 20, 1980 and is buried in Guadalajara. Her headstone reads "Pionero de la Fe Bahá'í." Weinstein, 152.
- ²⁷⁰ For instance, Thornton Chase notes in a 1910 letter to Helen Goodall the Chicago community's intention to institute a general meeting on Sundays because "it may restrain the natural inclinations to magnify one phase of the Teachings at the expense of the others..." Chase speaks of "cliques" in the past tense, suggesting that by 1910, the situation had improved. See R.H. Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America*, vol. 2, 177, [f.n.335] 472.

CHAPTER 5

Myth (& Counter-myth): Heroes, Martyrs, Mothers and Saints in the “new World Order”

Once there was a little girl whose heart reached out for higher things. What exactly these were the child did not know for her parents were not orthodox, just good, decent people who, if asked, might have characterized themselves as Christians tho' they seldom went to church. The little girl's heart seemed to impel her to want to worship, to reach out to what she vaguely felt as the Great Being, to praise Him on High. She would gather, in the pleasant semi-wild woods near her home, sticks, leaves, flowers & make herself a crude altar at which she could pour out these vague feelings, these compelling impulses to praise, to pay homage, to raise her face & heart upwards to that benign unknown she craved & felt was there. That child was May Bolles.

Rúhíyyih Khánum (beginning a biography of her mother, May Maxwell)¹

Introduction

The first generations of western Bahá'í women had a profound sense of the importance of their role as the harbingers of a new faith, which inaugurated, they believed, a millennial planet-altering new World Order that endorsed gender equality. Over a short period of time, within decades of the introduction of the Bahá'í Faith to the west, outstanding adherents such as May Ellis Bolles Maxwell and a few of her close associates became the focus of a form of heroic female hagiography within the developing Bahá'í community. This tendency to mythologize a select few lay women, a group traditionally marginalized in religion, both exemplified and stood in contrast to the absence of a clerical strata, and the general class and race-levelling tendencies of the Faith. The mythologies woven around these women were not merely expressions of admiration, but rather served distinct purposes in creating the base of western Bahá'í community identity. The frequent repetition of heroic stories and parable-like anecdotes helped to delineate religious tenets and practices, inspired women (and men) to ever greater service and sacrifice, strengthened bonds of intimacy, and offered new, “modern,” female models of religious identity.

The legends that grew up around the first trail-blazing women who spread the Bahá'í Faith around the world were set in the context of pre-existing eastern Bábí-Bahá'í mythologies of heroic martyrdom, and the millennial mythology of Bahá'u'lláh's “World Order” that anticipated a “new will” entering “the social body,” leading to the planetary adoption of Bahá'í principles. This impulse would, Bahá'ís believed, revamp social, economic, political and gender relations, creating an “order more equitable in design.”² Previous chapters examined some of the ways in which the Bahá'í millennial myth, as interpreted and modelled by ‘Abdu'l Bahá, assigned women a key place in both the development of the Faith, and the building of a new global civilization. An overarching millennial feminist vision shaped western women's religious and social worldviews, transformed their self-perceptions, and spurred them to engage in a myriad of reform endeavours meant to actualize Bahá'í principles in their own lives, their faith community, and human society. Therefore, the mythic ideals that developed around this group of western women emphasized qualities deemed necessary to female equality, individual and collective spiritual development, the growth of an inclusive community, and global social reorganization. These principles and processes were deemed inseparable in Bahá'í ideology.

Western Bahá'í women both utilized and became the subjects of the distinctive mythologies, metaphors, and rhetoric employed by the community to elucidate and instill Bahá'í tenets and identity. Inspirational stories motivated and sustained the efforts of those working to disseminate the teachings of the Faith, or, as Bahá'í travel teacher to South America, Loulie Mathews, triumphally phrased it, who joined “the ranks of those who in the forefront of battle are gloriously engaged in summoning the multitude to this New Day of God.”³ This chapter explores aspects of the ways in which May Maxwell and western women close to her contributed to the process of religio-cultural myth-building, and the role that these mythologies played in the shaping of individual and collective early twentieth-century western Bahá'í religious identities.

Of Myth and Metaphor

The Bahá'í Faith appealed to historically religious, but rapidly secularizing, western populations, in part, because it proffered both traditional mystical elements of religion, such as prayer, dreams and prophecy, as well as constructive methods to advance humanist ethical ideals, modern rational/scientific methods, and democratic forms of social organization, that promised to remedy practical global problems. This problem of addressing simultaneously the metaphysical, psychological, and prosaic dimensions of existence, and the everyday organization of individual and collective lives, constitutes the major challenge and function of religion or, indeed, any social system. Religions and cultures negotiate the amorphous boundaries between the material and transcendental aspects of reality, through the creation and repetition of somewhat stylized mythologized narratives that reflect serious social truths. These can be presented as binding religious verities or in other symbolic forms such as metaphors, allegories, legends, sagas, fables, parables, or various other forms of stories that can be told and retold.⁴

“Myth” is a plastic word that has had many historical usages and whose meaning depends on context. For the purposes of this analysis, “myth” is used broadly and leans toward the meaning of *mythos*, as applicable to all kinds of organized narratives which have an underlying archetypal plot structure, and that express basic values and attitudes of a group. The patterns of myth are recognizable, even if the content changes to suit particular circumstances, because it is a collective *style* of foundational communal narrative that is culturally inheritable.⁵ Thus, when words like “myth,” “mythologizing,” or “mythical,” are applied in this dissertation in the context of the Bahá'í communities' tendencies to repeat stories about well-known members or episodes orally, in print or in creative forms such as poetry, drama, music and visual art, these terms are not meant to dismiss or denigrate the subjects, the stories or the storytellers in any way. Nor do they challenge the narratives' possible historical accuracy. A myth in this context simply refers to a narrative pattern that conveys a larger social, spiritual or cultural message.

Such stories, although they may not necessarily represent “objective truth” (to whatever degree that is possible), or the historical and biographical totality of a particular event or individual, are nonetheless not fictional, imaginary or untruthful endeavours; rather, such mythologized narratives serve useful purposes in the community as practical everyday tools for guidance. Cultural myths assist individuals and groups in organizing and resolving cosmic, social and developmental questions such as what is the role of fate or providence? How do individual goals complement or disrupt communal or cosmic goals? What is the appropriate behaviour as a

member of the group? When should authority be obeyed, questioned or resisted, and by whom? Who should one trust, lie to or avoid? and so on.⁶ Archetypal mythical templates suggest options for the formation of individual and group identities. Paradigmatic figures who populate myths, whether heroes or tricksters, saints or martyrs, victims or victors, can act as commendable or cautionary models for the development of selfhood, demonstrating proper relations between humans and the divine, prescribing or proscribing behaviour, and regulating boundaries between various ages, classes, races and genders, insiders and outsiders, novices and masters, and other groups. Familiar mythical motifs, paradigms, and scenarios function to bring a sense of coherent narrative order to the complexity of human experience.⁷ The retelling of myth, whether highly ritualized or a facet of ordinary everyday metaphorical understanding, also allows for the transmission of distilled accumulated social knowledge across time and distance. Mythical narratives resonate with existing belief structures to create deeper shared understandings, inasmuch as comparable stories are found across divergent cultures and historical time periods, as Joseph Campbell has argued.⁸ Thus myths are even capable of bridging dissimilar cultures, or unifying communities around a shared common identity, key elements of the Bahá'í endeavour.

It is beyond the scope of this study to examine the larger question of Bahá'í theological or scriptural mythologies, or compare them to other belief systems. However, at the community level, various events, individuals, and groups of followers, especially those early believers closely associated with the founding figures of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l Bahá and, to a lesser degree, Shoghi Effendi, became invested with special status as exemplary martyrs, saints, disciples, apostles, and heroes, as distinctive Bahá'í cultural mythologies began to coalesce. Female ideals, as expressed in Bahá'í myth-making, often dovetailed with both western feminist aspirations, and western (mainly androcentric) models of heroization, making them psychologically accessible to western women as inspirational models.

Myth and the “modern” religion

The Bahá'í Faith claimed to be a modern independent faith, while simultaneously locating itself as the most recent stage in a perennial religious continuum emanating from a single Creator. To reconcile these seemingly conflicting ideas, metaphors of a “spiritual springtime,” evolution, or “grades in school” were employed.⁹ Because of the malleable concept of Progressive Revelation, which selectively subsumed and rejected aspects of previous traditions, Bahá'ís did not need to develop counter-myths to dislodge or deprecate previous religions. As American Bahá'í and educator Rosa V. Winterburn explained, Bahá'u'lláh “has come to give us more, not to take away nor to belittle what any preceding great teacher has given to man...a student “does not leave at the door of an advanced grade what he learned in the preceding grades.”¹⁰ This forward-moving historico-religious model was also congruous with the prevailing western meta-myth of “progress.”¹¹ Early western adherents were likely to retain strands of their prior identities as Christians, Jews, socialists, anarchists, Theosophists, suffragists, or followers of other ideologies, while gradually renovating aspects which did not accord with their understanding of Bahá'í beliefs. This, coupled with the Faith's “modern” lack of support for obeisance to ritual and tradition, and its commitment to female equality, allowed them to begin to mould new narratives individuating their identities as Bahá'ís, and as women. These narratives, in turn, supported and shaped the formation of new female religious identities.

“Look at Me, Follow Me, Be as I Am” – Bahá’í Religious Exemplars

The Bahá’í Faith is structurally unique among world religions in that Bahá’u’lláh appointed a specific authoritative figure, ‘Abdu’l Bahá, as Interpreter and universal Exemplar, to whom all Bahá’ís should turn, and after whom they should model their lives.¹² Never a literalist tradition, members did not need to be male, dress in an *‘aba* (cloak) or turban, or speak Farsi or Arabic to comply. Followers were enjoined to emulate the behaviours, attitudes, and principles of ‘Abdu’l Bahá. For Bahá’ís of Christian heritage, this was reminiscent of Christian emulation of Jesus. ‘Abdu’l Bahá set out a few of these expectations in His final words to the first western Hearst pilgrims in 1898, which May Maxwell included in its entirety in her published notes. The excerpt below from this farewell address is frequently quoted by Bahá’ís (or even sung):

... look at Me follow Me, be as I am, take no thought for yourselves or your lives, whether ye eat or whether ye sleep, whether ye are comfortable, whether ye are well or ill, whether ye are with friends or foes, whether ye receive praise or blame; for all of these things ye must care not at all. Look at Me and be as I am. ... Behold a candle how it gives its light. It weeps its life away drop by drop in order to give forth its flame of light.¹³

In response to this injunction, nearly all acts of ‘Abdu’l Bahá were interpreted by Bahá’ís as having an educative purpose. As a result, the majority of story-telling within the early western Bahá’í community revolved around the actions and sayings of ‘Abdu’l Bahá, relayed by those who visited Him in Akka/Haifa, and supplemented by chronicles of His western travels. Sharing anecdotes about Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l Bahá, and exceptional Bahá’ís was an eastern practice quickly adopted by westerners. As narratives were repeated and their message distilled, these stories functioned as parables. As western Bahá’í women shared their own and others’ experiences, many of these anecdotes intersected with stories of ‘Abdu’l Bahá. Especially popular were tales that hinted at providential or serendipitous circumstances, and told of theirs’ or others’ spiritual lessons.¹⁴ Soon, the western community accumulated a body of cultural mythology that revolved not only around the universal exemplar, ‘Abdu’l Bahá, but also around individuals either recognized by the community, or formally identified by ‘Abdu’l Bahá and Shoghi Effendi as demonstrating heroism, fortitude, love, courage, selflessness, or other desirable virtues.

Measuring Heroes: The Mythology of Martyrdom

May Maxwell and her close friends such as Lua Getsinger, Juliet Thompson, Agnes Alexander, Marion Jack, Martha Root, Keith Ransom-Kehler, and a few others who dedicated their lives to service of the Faith, mainly outside of the domestic realm, emerged as heroic Bahá’í paradigms. This positioned these women within the globalizing Bahá’í Faith as attainable modern western female religious exemplars, reinforcing women’s leadership roles. In the eastern Bábí-Bahá’í community, most heroization involved intense persecution and physical martyrdom, emphasizing bravery, self-sacrifice, and “radiant acquiescence.” Of the thousands killed, a few became iconic in Bábí-Bahá’í origin narratives.¹⁵ Dramatic eastern Bábí-Bahá’í martyr tales emphasized courage, perseverance, and adherence to a higher ideal, fitting easily into western

masculine hero traditions, whether Judeo-Christian, Greco-Roman, chivalric, or other mythic tropes. Táhirih, a female archetype for western women, was tacitly an “honorary male,” like Joan of Arc, to whom “masculinised” qualities such as daring and independence were attributed.¹⁶ Cast as a feminist “suffrage martyr” when her mythology was transposed to a western context, Táhirih also fit a heroic archetype popularized in the early twentieth century, the “crusader,” a term frequently applied to feminists. Bahá’ís, unlike Shi’a Muslims and other religionists, did not celebrate saintly or martyred figures with festivals, Holy Days, shrines or formal pilgrimages.¹⁷

Although honouring martyrs, Bahá’u’lláh disavowed violence and *jihad* (holy war), counselling that a life of sacrificial service was equivalent to, or greater than, shedding blood for the Cause.¹⁸ In the west, this alternate “martyrdom” was more apt and culturally palatable. With strong gendered western religio-cultural injunctions for females to be self-sacrificing, women quickly adopted the Bahá’í ideal of a “martyrdom” of sacrificial service. ‘Abdu’l Bahá endorsed an equivalency between physical suffering and other forms of “sacrifice.” He warned that in a parallel to the physical tests of the east, “severe mental tests,” would “inevitably sweep over His loved ones of the West – tests that would purge, purify and prepare them for their noble mission in life.”¹⁹ ‘Abdu’l Bahá maintained that one’s response to “tests” was within one’s own control, attesting that He had always remained “free” in prison.²⁰ This support of individual volition appealed to western cultural ideals of overcoming challenges through one’s own efforts.

Heroic stories of the persecution of the Báb, Bahá’u’lláh and exemplary believers defined the Bahá’í community. These were both deeply embedded origin tales, and of current import as ongoing injustices and atrocities were reported through letters and magazines by pilgrims to ‘Akká/Haifa, eastern visitors, or westerners who spent time in the Middle-East. When, in 1924, persecutions of Bahá’ís resurged in Iran, Mariam Haney, a Washington reformer who worked on “race amity” and other causes, recalled western responses to previous Persian sufferings:

Never shall we forget the sorrow which overwhelmed us - the Bahá’í group in America - particularly when in the year 1903 the stories reached us of how our brothers and sisters in Faith in Persia were being cut to pieces by the fanatical mobs instigated by the fanatical Muhammadan clergy. These blessed Persian brothers and sisters accepted martyrdom willingly in the Path of God. They manifested such devotion to the Cause, such firmness in faith, such loyalty, such superhuman patience and endurance (showing forth only love for and kindness to their persecutors) that one can find no record in history where such sublime heroism and devotion were surpassed.²¹

Mariam Haney reflected: “One dwells long and often on the fact that religious history seems to repeat itself, for we find that the foundation of almost every religion of Divine origin was cemented with the blood of its martyrs, and in this Day the martyrdoms have largely exceeded in number and severity those of any past age.”²² The idea that “the tree of the Cause of God” was ever watered with sacrifice was integral to the Bahá’í view of recurring patterns in religion.²³ Stories of heroic martyrs permeated early western Bahá’í literature. Anglo-Irish suffragist Lady Sara Louisa Blomfield’s early history of the Faith, *The Chosen Highway*, chronicled stories she heard from the women of the family of Bahá’u’lláh, during a 1922 visit to Haifa. Her book contained a story of a Bábí woman who expressed pride in her only son, who was “nailed to the

cross” for his beliefs, then killed by a fanatical mob. The mob vowed also to kill “this foolish mother,” falling upon the Bábí woman. Still she loudly rejoiced that “she had given her dearest treasure for the Cause of God -- and they beat her till she, too, died.”²⁴ The mythic resonance of a mother seeing her “only son” crucified must have evoked strong responses from Christians like Lady Blomfield. When westerners, Bahá’í or not, encountered stories of the persecution of Bábí-Bahá’ís, nearly all related them to stories of the early Christian martyrs.²⁵ For Bahá’í women, such episodes set a high standard.

The religious consciousness that accompanied such horrific tales of sacrifice could scarcely be fathomed by western women. Western culture was ambivalent about sacrifice, even though it was central to Christianity. Nineteenth and twentieth-century Christianity did not celebrate martyrdom in the ways, for instance, Shi’a Islam did. A reverence for martyrs, particularly Imam Husayn, the grandson of Muhammad, was also a dominant feature of Bábí-Bahá’í theology, and eastern Bahá’í culture.²⁶ In the west, religious critics like philosopher Karl Marx, whose views were popular in the early twentieth century, argued that religious suffering, with its promises of justice and reward in the next world, blinded the population to the structural and economic causes of human suffering in this world, particularly those induced by exploitive features of capitalism.²⁷ Many were cynical about the motives of those who encouraged the sacrifice of others, while protecting themselves, their families, and their assets. However, the concept of religious sacrifice was also deeply rooted in the west. Ideals of “sacrifice” were used routinely, and very successfully, in military propaganda to encourage men to fight, and women to justify the absence and loss of loved ones. Women, marginalized by gender in industrializing economies, were enjoined to perform “sacrificial” un/under/paid labour, and most women took pride in their voluntary maternal, domestic, community, and patriotic acts of service.

In spite of this ambiguous divide, both within western culture, and between east and west, western Bahá’í women measured their own sufferings against those of eastern co-religionists. For instance, when May Maxwell’s daughter Mary married Shoghi Effendi, an act to which the Maxwells, as parents, would have had to explicitly consent under Bahá’í marriage law, May Maxwell compared her own sufferings at the loss of close contact with her child, and her acute awareness of the trials that her daughter would have to endure as the wife of the Guardian, to those of the Persian mother who had thrown back the severed head of her child to the persecutors, asking why they had returned what she had sacrificed to God?²⁸ By comparing the sufferings, privations and dangers they encountered when serving the Faith to those of persecuted eastern Bahá’ís, western women could minimize their troubles and feel some comfort in offering their own sacrifices, knowing their co-religionists had given much more. Interpreting “tests” within a Bahá’í ontology that saw sacrifices as attracting Divine power, and a generative source of, and stimulus to, the advancement of the Cause, gave purpose and meaning to troubles. However, asceticism was discouraged, and trials were not to be self-induced or sought out. ‘Abdu’l Bahá cautioned Bahá’ís to take measures to protect themselves and others. Sacrifices were viewed as a predictable cost in the cosmic religio-historical scheme, in attempting to establish a new religion.

The mythology of heroic martyrdom, although it existed to some degree in other western religious and feminist movements, was pervasive in Bahá’í millennial feminism. Western

adherents believed that sustained, willing, self-sacrifice was integral to their collective endeavour to erect a global World Order. It was their responsibility to both mitigate the sufferings of their co-religionists, and to avenge their “eastern brethren’s” sacrifices by working harder to spread the Faith and put Bahá’í precepts into practice. As Mariam Haney remarked: “The result of such [1903] persecutions, such crimes shedding the blood of human beings in an attempt to retard the progress of the Cause only increased the ardor of the Bahá’ís throughout the whole world, and the great Spiritual Light of the Cause shone ever more and more brightly.”²⁹ This concept of sacrifice as an impetus to growth was conducive to believers not losing hope in the face of opposition or seeing setbacks as failures of doctrine. Bahá’í women believed further education of humanity, whether by words or calamities, would inevitably bring success. As Haney explained:

Gradually as the birth of the new cycle is fully explained and understood, as the new ideals fill the hearts of humanity and are translated into the world of action, the darkness of all “superstitious fancies will be annihilated,” for mistakes and trials and difficulties appear through “limited interpretations.” However, as ‘Abdu'l Bahá has said in his wonderful writings “The Cause continued to grow; no restriction or opposition could arrest its progress.”³⁰

In the above essay, Mariam Haney goes on to juxtapose gruesome Persian persecutions with the heroic response of an exemplary western woman. She remarked that the current persecutions brought “vividly to mind... Lua Moore Getsinger, and her dramatic and tragic appeal,” at ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s request, to Muzaffari’-d-Dín Sháh of Persia when he visited Paris in 1902. Mariam Haney had accompanied Lua to Paris, where for weeks Lua prayed daily, even hourly, that the Shah’s heart would be “softened.” Refusing to be put off by his Grand Vizier, Lua finally met with the Shah, accompanied by Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney. Haney describes how, “in the grand reception hall of the Elysee Palace hotel where the entire suite of one hundred and fifty Persians were awaiting His Majesty, this one American woman, the only woman in this large group of men, stepped forward and handed to His Majesty the petition she had faithfully written.”³¹ Lua also delivered a forceful speech suggesting that such “uncivilized” cruelty was shaming Persia, and that if the mullás examined the history of Islam, “they would soon see that the shedding of blood is not a means of annulling, but rather the cause of promulgating every religious movement.”³² Lua then told the assembled men a heartrending story of a woman whose husband, brother and eleven year-old son were viciously killed by mobs, and when the woman “throws herself upon their mangled corpses,” she “is beaten into insensibility.” Lua asked the Shah, “is it justice on the part of your Majesty to allow such heinous crimes to go unpunished?”³³ As was done by women in the peace movement and other “causes,” Lua appealed to chivalry by using the story of a mother and child to add emphasis to the inhumanity of such persecutions. As a result of Lua’s petition, so unusual for a woman of her time, the Shah promised to heed her request, which brought a “remarkable cessation of persecutions” for several years.³⁴

This inspiring picture of Lua Getsinger as a warrior woman works in the realm of heroic Bahá’í myth-building on several levels. First, for Bahá’ís, Lua presents a clear parallel to Táhirih. For the sake of justice, in large part for women, she boldly puts herself forward to stand alone in a group of men against the orthodoxy of the mullahs and the state, representing symbolically the patriarchal superstructure of the old world order. In this effort, Lua Getsinger,

was (at least) triply disadvantaged in an eastern male arena (albeit protected by the environs of Paris). She was a woman, considered of little account, and, moreover, a western woman, stereotypically morally suspect in eastern male eyes. She was a *farangi*, a Euro- foreigner, considered ritually “unclean” by Muslims, and worse, a Bahá’í, maligned in Persia for heresy, moral crimes, and espionage. Lua had no wealth for bribes, or connections inside or outside of Iran. She had no temporal power and, like Táhirih, relied only on *words*, which in the Bahá’í writings are frequently cast in masculinised military metaphorical language as being akin to “swords.”³⁵ However, when Miriam Haney summed up Lua, she also emphasized “motherhood:”

Her irresistible charm, her remarkable gifts as a teacher, her forceful character and unique personality with the great and added charm of the spirit, this together with the fruit of her confirmed and distinguished services, placed her in the class of the world's greatest Bahá’í teachers. She passed away in Cairo, Egypt, several years ago, but her spiritual children not only in this country, but around the world, know that she is ever LIVING.³⁶

Universal spiritual “mothers” and “mothering” were held up as exemplary. However, no traces of ancient or revived “mother goddess(es)” emerged, as they did in some other alternative faiths.

Run down and suffering from an illness contracted in India, Lua died unexpectedly from a heart attack at forty-five in Cairo, Egypt, in 1916. She was ceremoniously later interred in the same tomb as the great Persian scholar, teacher, and “Apostle of Bahá'u'lláh,” Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl-i-Gulpáygání (1844-1914), over which a large joint monument was erected.³⁷ However, like a saint, Lua did not succumb (in community memory, at least) to death. By 1924, she was already “immortalized” within the Bahá’í community, in part for her prolific spiritual “mothering.” Mariam Haney attributes Lua’s greatness to sacrifice, writing, “. . .for among the world's great women there are none who should come nearer receiving honor and distinction than those who in truth share the suffering and sorrows of their fellow human beings, and who offer the sacrifice of their Own life that others may live.”³⁸ Haney interprets Lua’s “martyrdom” as self-chosen so “that others may *live*,” echoing Biblical allusions to sacrifice ransoming spiritual “life.” In this way, “martyrdom” becomes thoroughly hybridized as both a physical and a daily lived spiritual condition. By equating Lua Getsinger with Persian martyrs, Haney reverses the Orientalism that Edward Said claims portrays eastern men as weak and feminised. In this case, male “Orientals” set the standards for heroism, and western females, by being compared to them, symbolically acquired stereotypically masculinised attributes like bravery, independence, fortitude and loyalty.

Another famous story of Lua Getsinger, who often begged ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for the privilege of martyrdom, demonstrates the way in which Bahá’í “parables” provided comparative benchmarks of sacrifice for women. The story relates that on one of Lua’s many visits to ‘Akká and Haifa, she and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá were walking along the beach. Lua dropped behind and began placing her feet into His footprints. Early Bahá’í Muriel Ives Barrow Newhall tells the story, which she says was told to her by Grace Roberts Ober, a spiritual “child” of Lua Getsinger:

After a few moments the Master turned to ask what she was doing. “I am following in your footsteps,” said Lua. He turned away and they walked on. A few moments later, He turned again, “Do you wish to follow in my footsteps?” He asked. “Oh, yes,” said Lua.

They walked on - and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá turned again, “Lua! Do you wish to follow in my footsteps?” His tone was louder and stern. “Oh, yes,” said Lua again. Then, the third time he stopped and faced her. “Lua!” it was almost a shout, “Do you wish to follow in My footsteps?” “Oh, yes!” said Lua for the third time - and with that, a great tarantula jumped out from a hillock of sand and bit her ankle. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá saw this and paid no attention, turning away and again walking. Lua followed, still fitting her footsteps into His. Her ankle swelled, the pain became excruciating, till, finally, she sank down with the agony of it. Then ‘Abdu’l-Bahá picked her up and carried her to the ladies quarters, where the Greatest Holy Leaf [‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s sister, Bahíyyih Khánum] put her to bed.

The agony increased. Lua’s temperature flamed; delirium set in. Finally, the Greatest Holy Leaf could stand it no longer and she implored ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to heal her. He examined her carefully then laid His hands gently on her forehead. The temperature drained away, her head cleared she was healed. And it was only later that it was explained to her that she had been suffering from a strange and virulent condition of her blood which the bite of the tarantula had cured.³⁹

In another version, Lua Getsinger is stung by a scorpion, and the fever and healing episodes are omitted. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s continues to walk until Lua’s suffering is unbearable, then stops and gently tells her, “This is what it means to walk in My footsteps.”⁴⁰ The lesson remains consistent.

Sacrifice transforms identity. In a popular tale, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asks Lua to take food and care for a poor, ill, ‘Akká friend, as He is too busy. She returns, fleeing the “awful stench, filthy rooms, and degrading condition of the man,” lest she contract some disease. “Sadly and sternly,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells her, “Dost thou desire to serve God, serve thy fellow man...” He says that if the house is filthy, she should clean it; if her brother is dirty, bathe him; if hungry, feed him. “Many times had He done this for him and cannot she serve him once?” Lua overcomes her weakness, and returns.⁴¹

When Lua’s friend and “spiritual child” May Maxwell wrote the official *In Memoriam* for *Bahá’i World*, she offered an adulatory account of Lua’s extraordinary service to the Cause, but tempered it with an acknowledgement of her weaknesses. May began by painting a tender picture of “her frail form, her lovely sensitive face, her pleading child’s eyes,” saying that the human Lua, that “bruised and broken reed,” rose “victorious, majestic in her death—the Lua who shall live through all ages... Even as her age and generation knew her not, seeing only her mortal frailties—so future ages and cycles will love her—adore her—venerate her blessed name—and strive to walk in the path of her utter servitude, severance, and sacrifice.” She calls Lua a martyr, comparing her to “Kurat-ul-Ayn” (Táhirih).⁴² May adds other mythologizing allusions, writing,

Great and wonderful were her qualities - in her own person she bore the sins and weaknesses of us all, and redeeming herself she redeemed us. She broke the path through the untrod forest: like the grasshoppers, she cast her soul and body into the stream and perished making the bridge by which we cross: she was a Niobe all her days, washing our sins in her tears: she was burned to cauterize our wounds....⁴³

May Maxwell thus simultaneously emphasizes Lua's frailty, transcendent spirit, and strong leadership. She positions Lua as both Táhirih-like and Christ-like, sacrificing herself to redeem humanity, cleansing their sins with water, like Queen Niobe weeping for her slain children, and with fire, like Joan of Arc. Here, May Maxwell reinforces both Lua's mythic universality, and her identity as a woman. In fulfillment of May's prophecy, Lua Getsinger has arguably become the foremost popular female exemplar in the western Bahá'í community, after Táhirih herself.⁴⁴

Intrepid Bahá'í Women: Mothers, Apostles, Disciples, and Saints

An examination of some of the kinds of stories told and the ways in which they were told within the Bahá'í community provides useful insights as to how and why such mythologies were constructed. Some stories, like those of Lua Getsinger, are dramatic, as Lua herself was. Others emphasize a daily lived "martyrdom" of spiritual constancy. In this regard, the "myth" of May Maxwell provides a case study. When 'Abdu'l Bahá singled out May Maxwell as "a real Bahá'í," He enhanced what was already by 1902 her near-mythical stature within the small western Bahá'í community.⁴⁵ His attribution of this station to May Maxwell implicitly conveyed that this ideal was attainable to everyone who exerted themselves to a similar degree. May was not a mysterious figure; she was well known and visible in the community. However, those with whom she came in contact reputedly perceived a mysterious spiritual power in her. But not everyone was immediately impressed with May Maxwell or the Bahá'í Faith. Rosemary Sala, a Montreal Bahá'í, told how her mother, a "Scotch Presbyterian," refused to go when invited by her a family doctor friend "interested in esoteric movements" to see "a wonderful person from Persia ['Abdu'l Bahá]" in Montreal in 1912.⁴⁶ In 1926, Rosemary, now a young teacher, heard her colleagues talking about the Bahá'í Faith and "what an unusual teenager" Mary Maxwell was.⁴⁷ Rosemary does not elaborate on what "unusual" meant but Rúhíyyih Khánum was a strong-minded, outspoken redhead. A high school girlfriend, whose mother volunteered for social movements with May Maxwell, told Rosemary about the Bahá'í youth group and she and her friend Edith (later a missionary in China) went to the Maxwells'. They decided "they were just a little bit too fluttery for us," although "kind and hospitable."⁴⁸ However, after attending talks in the Bahá'í Hall and meeting Emeric Sala, she became a Bahá'í in 1927.⁴⁹ Her opinion later shifted to reflect the myth surrounding May Maxwell. Describing May, Rosemary said:

You know the words that 'Abdu'l Bahá said of her—"She is truly a Bahá'í. Everyone who comes into her presence feels re-vivified, feels the effect of her spirit." I am paraphrasing, of course. Even Rúhíyyih Khánum said, "I've known many people who've a quality of love, but I've never known anyone with this quality that mother had. So that it was an event when you were going to see her. And this I felt, day in and day out," said her daughter, "and it never became commonplace." So that when you speak of May Maxwell's methods of teaching, you can't speak of methods; she was just herself, as 'Abdu'l Bahá said, a Bahá'í.⁵⁰

On a historiographical note, in such storytelling, it was typical for believers to use a form of Bahá'í "referencing," naming sources to better authenticate the account. In this instance, Rosemary relied first and foremost on the words of 'Abdu'l Bahá about May Maxwell. His statements, in a Bahá'í context, were unassailable. She then moved to the "first-person" veracity

of family authority, quoting Rúhíyyih Khánúm. There was perhaps even a bit of “celebrity” (so to speak) endorsement, as Rúhíyyih Khánúm was the best-known female Bahá’í of her era, first as the daughter of May Maxwell, then as the wife of Shoghi Effendi, and finally as a Hand of the Cause. Rosemary herself had credibility as narrator, both because of her long association with the Maxwells, and because she and her husband Emeric were themselves prominent Bahá’í teachers and “pioneers.” The combination of these factors, 1) making reference to the words of ‘Abdu’l Bahá, 2) possessing a Bahá’í “lineage” as a spiritual daughter of May Maxwell, and an association with other known believers, and 3) recognized service to the Faith, constituted a type of *de facto* “Bahá’í credentials” that gave stories weight and credibility in the eyes of others within the faith community, even though they remained unauthoritative. Although generally Bahá’ís repeated stories in a similar pattern, the fact that they were like “pilgrim’s notes” freed the stories to naturally grow, wane or shift according to the interpretation and needs of the individuals or communities utilizing the narrative, rather than having to present a scrupulously accurate rendition, as might be hoped for when quoting “sacred text.” In this way, the free circulation of inspirational stories allowed the Bahá’í Faith, in whatever national or cultural milieu it took hold, to flexibly respond to people’s need for dynamic narrative myth-building.

Beginnings: The Magnetic May Maxwell

The myth of May Ellis Bolles Maxwell’s slightly otherworldly but powerful presence was attested to as early as her Paris days (1898-1902). Edith McKay, an opera singer who was part of the first Paris group, recalled that in 1900 she first met “an angelic creature. It was May...” continuing, “A mysterious force drew me to her and I said: ‘I believe you have something to tell me.’ ‘Yes, she said, ‘I have a message for you.’”⁵¹ May then told her of the Bahá’í Faith. Another early Paris Bahá’í, Berthalin Allen, was first attracted to these “unusual people—one in particular, a very beautiful girl who seemed to radiate a special magnetic charm.”⁵² Artist Juliet Thompson described May’s “personal fascination...so fragile, so luminous...and the most delicate, perfect beauty, flower-like and star-like.”⁵³ These glowing, florid accounts read like love letters, and there was indeed great passion and strength in these female bonds. In “one of the most precious memories” of her life, Agnes Alexander described meeting May, “...a frail young woman filled with a consuming love which the Master said was divine. It was this heavenly love which brought the friends together and united all the hearts.”⁵⁴ Agnes received a “heavenly letter” from May telling of twice having had visions of her “dear Lord” before hearing “the Great Message” and being “permitted to be among the first Americans to visit ‘Accá” and “the foot of Mount Carmel, the New Holy Jerusalem.”⁵⁵ In it, May forecast Agnes’ destiny:

I feel by your beautiful letter that God has chosen you to be a servant in His blessed Vineyard... for we are the pioneers and are believers in the most wonderful time of His Appearance... Read Isaiah which contains wonderful prophecies of these the “latter days”, “the end of the world” which means the end of the power of evil – for this is the dawn of Most Great Peace, the “Day of God” which is not followed by the night, and already the Sun of Truth has risen and is shining from the zenith.⁵⁶

May’s millennial vision resonated with Agnes, daughter of missionaries, who travelled alone to Paris although she had “always been the most timid of creatures.”⁵⁷ Agnes wrote:

She was then very slender and seemed to me an angel of light. She gave me some pressed violets which had been given her by the Master in Akka and a photograph of our Lord taken when he was a young man in Adrianople. The feelings which came over me as I gazed on the photograph cannot be described. From that day on May became my spiritual mother and through all the years her tender love has been a guiding star in my life...⁵⁸

Paradoxically, Agnes portrays the physically frail May as a point of great stability and constancy, a “guiding star.”⁵⁹ As with Lua Getsinger, in most accounts of May Maxwell, a dichotomy of strength and fragility exists; her ephemeral presence and physical weakness mask a spiritually robust woman with great internal fortitude. The mix of “feminine” delicacy and spiritual potency makes her mythology malleable. She was able to be many things to many people.⁶⁰

Agnes Alexander herself went on to also become legendary in the Faith. In June 1901, just before she left Paris, a Tablet from ‘Abdu’l Bahá told her: “Proceed to thy native country [Hawaii].” Of her “spiritual mother,” Agnes wrote, “May told me afterwards that she felt her heart would break at the parting, so tender was the love she bore to all who came under her spiritual influence, a love the Master said was divine.” Arriving at Honolulu, Agnes spoke of her sense of destiny - “alone I was to stand there, the first Bahá’í to touch that soil. The youngest of my family and hitherto extremely timid, God raised me up to carry His Message to these islands of the Pacific.”⁶¹ Touched by May’s elixir, Agnes became a “pioneer,” taking the Faith to Hawaii, Japan, Korea and China. In 1957, she was also named a Hand of the Cause.⁶²

Agnes, an unmarried schoolteacher, rather conventionally resettled in the home of her parents, who she called “real Christians,” remaining until their deaths in 1912-13. Her father, a prominent missionary, scholar and civic leader, disapproved of his daughter’s new allegiance, writing an article critical of the Faith in 1909, after two American travel-teachers arrived and there was an influx of Bahá’í conversions.⁶³ In 1911, Professor Alexander wrote to a fellow clergyman saying that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá “permits himself to be worshipped by American women, who believe him to be a reincarnation of Jesus Christ;” that “Bahá’ism aims at superintending Christianity, whose cardinal doctrines it rejects ... Long after Bahá’ism shall have died out, Jesus Christ will be Lord of all.”⁶⁴ Agnes downplayed these tensions, deciding: “I had to show through my life and not by words, the great happiness that had come into my life.”⁶⁵ Neither did she openly contest her father’s very public counter-narrative of the Faith. As with many western Bahá’í women whose main opposition came from families, the idea of a living martyrdom, enacted through persevering lives of service, was a useful one. Agnes also found strength in female friendship. She writes that for over twelve years in Hawaii, “May’s letters like fresh breezes of the Divine spirit, came stimulating the hearts. All who heard the message there shared in her love and heavenly influence. Thus the foundation of the Bahá’í Faith in Hawaii was permeated with her influence.”⁶⁶ This statement, both personal and transcendental, harks back to ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s characterization of May’s love as “divine.” May’s letters must have helped to sustain Agnes’ and the tiny Bahá’í community’s spirits, but Agnes implies that May Maxwell’s “divine” love stimulated, permeated and transformed eastern Asia and the Pacific islands, making them more spiritually receptive to the message of Bahá’u’lláh.

Many Bahá'ís referred to May Maxwell as a point of light, even seeking her intercession on their behalf: "Pray for me, May," wrote Keith Ransom-Kehler from Persia in 1923. "It is my only refuge. . . . Through this bitter storm of trial in which every attribute of light is obscure or withdrawn, you still stand, a dazzling presence on the further shore toward which I struggle, a gift and evidence lent me by the Master. . ."⁶⁷ Here, as in many places, May Maxwell is cast in saint-like terms, particularly in the frequent references made to the light that observers seemed to feel emanated from her. There was no claim of holy powers such as healing for these western female exemplars, and no tradition of the power of relics, or other saint lore. There was, however, a strong belief in the power of prayer and Bahá'ís frequently asked others for prayers.

Although cults of personality, miracles and other traditions around saints and martyrs were not part of Bahá'í teachings, this did not mean that individuals who came from cultural backgrounds where such beliefs were strong did not sometimes transfer those beliefs to Bahá'í figures. For instance, Persians had a strong tradition of pilgrimage to the graves of martyrs and asking for boons. This cultural penchant was seen in the Persian treatment of Táhirih, whose mythology eclipsed that of all other women in the Faith. In 1915, *Star of West* reported:

...today, because of the memory of Kurat Ul Ayn, not only of the beauty of her face, but the loveliness of her soul and character, pilgrims walk many miles to her grave. They believe that when they stand by its side they are healed of all their ills; but especially, if their eyes have been blinded or afflicted, they believe that as they stand near the dust of that wonderful, clear seeing woman, all the trouble disappears from them and they themselves see clearly once more.⁶⁸

Spiritual power was attributed to these legendary females. For instance, Martha Root, accounted the foremost teacher of the Faith, was middle-aged, dowdy, yet admitted to many state capitals, teaching the Faith to prominent leaders and converting the first Bahá'í member of royalty, Queen Marie of Romania. Describing Martha's talks in Montreal, Rosemary Sala says:

...if you listen to her intellectually, she'd be the dullest speaker on earth. She gave you 20 subjects to choose from (for her talks) but they were all the same. And yet when she began to speak, that spirit came riding on these words and wafted you into the other world, if you were perceptive enough to understand. I know the first time she came to Montreal, after I had become a Bahá'í, I brought along a dour, Scottish friend of ours, who was sort of lonesome, to the meeting and he was just enraptured with her. There she was on the platform, a short little figure in a very simple dress, speaking in this very simple, yet luminous, way.⁶⁹

As with the stories of May Maxwell that juxtaposed her physical weakness and spiritual strength, stories of Martha Root showed that her plain appearance, "dull" speaking style, sparse lifestyle, and tenuous health, belied her extraordinary capacities. In their mythical import, these contrasts emphasized that it was possible for anyone with enough dedication and courage to step outside the norm, to overcome their weaknesses, and achieve the seemingly impossible. This modern, more "democratic," transformative heroic template was a frequent theme in Bahá'í writings. As Shoghi Effendi observed, "The history of our Faith is full of records of the remarkable things

achieved by really very simple, insignificant individuals, who became veritable beacons and towers of strength through having placed their trust in God.”⁷⁰

Mythologies: Narratives, Gaps, and Counternarratives

In the case of May Maxwell, inspirational stories related about her invariably focussed on the degree to which her behaviour and attitudes exemplified “a real Bahá’í,” rather than her personal life or foibles. This was partly because ‘Abdu’l Bahá stressed that “The worst human quality and the most great sin is backbiting.”⁷¹ As He told the first Hearst pilgrims, “Another commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another even as I love you... Never forget this; look at one another with the eye of perfection.”⁷² It may be because of this injunction that Bahá’í women’s faults were glossed over.

Stories about early Bahá’í women nearly always were tailored in such a way as to relate back to ‘Abdu’l Bahá, or to elucidate some aspect of the Bahá’í teachings. A story told by May Maxwell, as retold by her friend Rosemary Sala, illustrates this phenomenon:

She [May] recalled once, of how when she was in Haifa, and like many Bahá’ís, they felt they couldn’t stay in ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s presence too long. Sometimes He would leave when He felt this sort of elevated feeling coming to them, or sometimes He dismissed them from His presence. But there was a group of Bahá’í pilgrims at that time, and she [May] began to weep, couldn’t contain herself; so she went out of the room. One of the secretaries of ‘Abdu’l Bahá escorted her.

She walked in the gardens weeping, and ‘Abdu’l Kazim, this wonderful gardener, asked what was happening to this lovely lady, and he said, “Oh, she is so overcome with the wonder of ‘Abdu’l Bahá that she can’t even be in His presence. And ‘Abdu’l Kazim said, “Yes, ‘Abdu’l Bahá is wonderful. ‘Abdu’l Bahá is loving. ‘Abdu’l Bahá is everything. He is the Master.” Then he paused, and said, “But ah! ah! To have known Bahá’u’lláh.”⁷³

This story illustrates (at least) three points: first, the lower rank of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in comparison with the exponentially greater magnitude of Bahá’u’lláh; second, the intensity of the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, demonstrating what Bahá’ís saw as His unique, divinely appointed station; and third, the unusual spiritual sensitivities and susceptibilities of May Maxwell. In terms of the first point, clarifying the appropriate rank of the Master, May Maxwell was instrumental in correcting the very early Bahá’í community’s misapprehension of the Son, ‘Abdu’l Bahá, as the return of Christ, a mistake attributable to the incorrect teachings conveyed by the first teacher in America, Ibrahim Kheiralla, and to many early believers’ fervent, Biblically-based millennialism. The above story told by May, instilled the “correct” understanding of the Bahá’í spiritual hierarchy. This, coupled with her recognized international institutional service, established May Maxwell as an administratively aware believer who was “faithful to the Covenant,” a pressing issue during a period when the successorship of ‘Abdu’l Bahá was being contested, mainly in the eastern Bahá’í community. In a later era, similarly fraught with the potential for schism, after ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s *Will and Testament* appointed the “Guardian” in 1921, May Maxwell rallied the community to support ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s twenty-three year old successor, Shoghi Effendi. It was

undoubtedly due partly to her loyalty and grasp of the Bahá'í “administrative order” that Shoghi Effendi told May Maxwell that had Rúhíyyih Khánum not been her daughter, he would not have married her.⁷⁴ Rúhíyyih Khánum, childless, played a key role in the development of the Faith. She was Shoghi Effendi's secretary and mainstay until his sudden death in 1957. She then, as the wife of the Guardian and one of the living Hands of the Cause, assumed an interim leadership role in the six-year interregnum leading to the 1963 election of the Universal House of Justice.⁷⁵

The organizational expertise and leadership of May Maxwell is seldom part of her mythology, even though she served for four decades, in numerous high-level capacities, on local, national and international administrative bodies, maintaining a personal and institutional transnational letter-writing network. It is not unusual for mythology that grows up around exemplary women to elide their administrative capacities. A similar phenomena occurs in the persistent romantic, maternal myth of Florence Nightingale as the “Lady with the Lamp,” when her primary skills were those of organizer, manager, lobbyist, and promoter in advancing her nursing and sanitary reforms. Feminist sociologist Lynn Echevarria notes in her study of Canadian Bahá'í women active in the 1938-60 period that “unlike the situations of teachers and pioneers, storying oneself as an ‘administrator’ is not usual in Bahá'í discourse,” even though it comprised a large part of nearly all early Bahá'í women's community activities.⁷⁶

The second point of May Maxwell's story was a testimonial as to the remarkable effect proximity to the presence of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá had on individuals. Such attestations served to inspire devotion and reinforce the legitimacy of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's pre-eminence as the central authority of the religious community, thus unifying the believers around Him as the “Centre of the Covenant.”⁷⁷ Stories of individuals, both Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís, or even enemies of the Faith, being profoundly affected by the presence and actions of the Báb, Bahá'u'llah, and ‘Abdu'l Bahá, abound in Bahá'í mythology. In this vein, Rosemary Salas also recounted a story that she heard from early believers about Agnes Parsons, who she calls “one of the social arbiters of Washington, very conscious of her wealth and position.”⁷⁸ When Agnes first met ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, when she visited as a tourist in the Mediterranean, Agnes felt “a dazzling, blinding shaft of light seemed to stream from the Master's eyes to penetrate hers. After a moment of unconsciousness, she found herself prostrate on the ground, and ‘Abdu'l Bahá lovingly assisting her to her feet.”⁷⁹

Agnes Parsons' story is a close parallel to May Maxwell's first meeting with ‘Abdu'l Bahá, described in her account of the Hearst pilgrimage.⁸⁰ But Rúhíyyih Khánum presents an alternate version of this story in her notes for her mother's biography, writing:

She [May] beheld the face of her Lord, who was seated on the opposite side from where she stood. The next thing she remembered was being raised up from His feet, upon which she seemed to have fallen and over which her hair had streamed. She was then bidden by Him to be seated at His side. She related that as she looked on His face she felt as if all her life, her very being, was ebbing out towards Him as if by an irresistible attraction. She felt very weak. Suddenly He turned and spoke quickly to someone in Persian who came and led her to a seat on the other side of the room farther from Him, where she gradually began to recover herself.⁸¹

This “insider” account is more dramatic than the version in May Maxwell’s published pilgrim’s notes, where May’s fainting, falling, and life “ebbing out” of her are not mentioned.

In the early twentieth century, the (almost entirely male) scientific, pseudo-scientific, and “skeptical” investigators of metaphysical and “psychical” phenomena, or “parapsychology” as it became known in the 1930s, questioned the legitimacy of ostensibly paranormal experiences. Probably unconsciously, Salas reinforced the credibility of her story by pointing out Parsons’ social respectability. Mentioning Agnes’ unfamiliarity with the Bahá’í Faith when first meeting ‘Abdu’l Bahá also subtly conveyed the message that Parsons was an independent and impartial voice, appealing to modern standards of “rationality.” Perhaps May Maxwell’s abridging the “public” account of her collapse, and Salas’ adding peripheral “legitimizing” information to Agnes Parsons’ story, were meant to ward against the stereotypical accusations of female “irrationality” and flightiness that were often leveled at women who strayed from convention by adopting an “Oriental” religion. Such portrayals even comprised a popular literary genre, where predictable plotlines featured an avaricious and/or lusty Oriental guru taking advantage of foolish and/or naïvely gullible, usually wealthy, women.⁸² These stories provided a powerful counter-narrative to the earnest religiosity of (usually female) adherents of “alternative” religions.

A Counternarrative: Leacock, “Boohooism” and the feminist threat of alternative religion

The Bahá’ís, being a small group, were seldom the butt of lampoons, but Canadian humorist Stephen Leacock published in 1914 a short story of “idle rich” females duped by an unscrupulous Eastern guru.⁸³ The satire, called “The Yahi-Bahi Society of Mrs. Resselyster-Brown,” parodied ‘Abdu’l Bahá and the “the cult of Boohooism” (from “Bahaism”). The story plays on Orientalist stereotypes of ancient Egyptian, Buddhist, Islamic, and especially, Hindu images, but curiously, not actual Bahá’í motifs, probably because they were unknown to his audience. The guru figure, “Mr. Yahi-Bahi” is cast as a slippery con man only interested in collecting the cash of his unsuspecting high-society devotees. As a neighbour and fellow-member with W.S. Maxwell of the exclusive Montreal *Pen and Pencil Club*, no doubt Leacock’s jibes were at least partly aimed at them, and, as a biographer later wrote, “must have given hurt to a small coterie of his fellow citizens who represented a branch of the Middle East religious sect.”⁸⁴ There is no record of comment on the part of Bahá’ís. Montreal was not a hotbed of religious innovation, dominated as it was by the ultra-conservative Catholic Church, smaller Protestant denominations, an established Jewish community, and a few less traditional groups such as Unitarians. At that time, May Maxwell was the center of a miniscule Montreal Bahá’í community that had only nine members before ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s visit in 1912, and averaged about thirty between 1912 and 1927. Leacock’s story was published just two years after ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s Montreal visit, during which the “Sage” was met with warm receptions from local dignitaries, packed venues, and extensive newspaper coverage, including front page headlines and feature articles in the English and French press. The presence of Turks, Persians, Blacks, and a variety of others must have been noticeable, especially to those living nearby the Maxwells.⁸⁵

Leacock’s story offers an interesting “outside” view of the Bahá’ís, and of women’s involvement in alternative religion in general. The acclaimed satirist was debunking May

Maxwell, ‘Abdu’l Bahá and the Bahá’í Faith, but buried in the subtext of the story was a scathing critique of his leading female character, a caricatured socialite and suffragist. He writes:

...Mrs. Rasselyer-Brown and her three hundred friends moved backwards and forwards on Plutoria Avenue, seeking novelty in vain. They washed in waves of silk from tango teas to bridge afternoons...they sat in glittering rows and listened to lectures on the enfranchisement of the female sex. But for the moment all was weariness. Now it happened, whether by accident or design, that just at this moment of general *ennui* Mrs. Rasselyer-Brown and her three hundred friends first heard of the presence in the city of Mr. Yahi-Bahi, the celebrated Oriental mystic. He was so celebrated that nobody even thought of asking who he was or where he came from. They merely told one another, and repeated it, that he was *the* celebrated Yahi-Bahi. They added for those who needed the knowledge that the name was pronounced Yahhy-Bahhy, and that the doctrine taught by Mr. Yahi-Bahi was Boohooism. This latter, if anyone inquired further, was explained to be a form of Shoodooism, only rather more intense. In fact, it was esoteric—on receipt of which information everybody remarked at once how infinitely superior the Oriental peoples are to ourselves.⁸⁶

Although this story ostensibly lampoons the Bahá’ís, on delving into the story, one notices that Mrs. Rasselyer-Brown’s crowd are portrayed as wealthy but shallow materialists, pursuing not religion but leisurely diversions which, tellingly, include “lectures on the enfranchisement of the female sex.” “But for the moment all was weariness,” implies that by 1913, the energy of the drive for the vote was so spent that even society women, cast as superficial dilettantes, were tired of it. By linking the fight for suffrage to a search for novelties such as “tango teas,” Leacock, a vociferous anti-feminist, trivializes the suffrage movement and by extension, women’s equality. Leacock’s anti-feminist views were well known, with his clearest statements coming in a 1916 satirical essay, “The Woman Question.”⁸⁷ While the suffrage movement had no direct link to the Bahá’í Faith, the Bahá’í stance on suffrage and women’s equality was clear. Sophie Tamas, in her study of Canadian Bahá’í women, quotes Rúhíyyih Khánum as saying May Maxwell was “a flaming suffragette.”⁸⁸ In dissecting the Leacock satire, it seems that feminists, more than Bahá’ís, were his target and in the story, he conflates feminism and the radicalizing potential of alternative, female-dominated religions.

Unlike Leacock’s “Mrs. Rasselyer-Brown,” May Maxwell was not extremely wealthy or a leading socialite like Agnes Parsons or Phoebe Hearst. Her chronic ill health, bordering on invalidism, and frequent absences, made her a peripheral member of the Montreal establishment, even though Sutherland Maxwell’s architectural firm, serving Canada’s small but powerful elite, most of whom lived in the “Square Mile,” ensured them a place in the upper middle classes. May’s consuming interest in social causes and the Bahá’í Faith left her little time for frivolous leisure. In fact, Leacock’s entire satire is nearly bereft of actual Bahá’í content. It seems odd that Leacock, a McGill professor of economics and political science, with deep philosophical and social concerns and a personal acquaintance with W.S. Maxwell, did not even match his guru’s physical description to that of ‘Abdu’l Bahá, whose picture was printed in Montreal newspapers in 1912. Leacock’s “Mr. Yahi-Bahi” was tall,” with a “long brown face,” “liquid brown eyes,”

and a “drooping Oriental costume” that made him “seem taller,” whereas ‘Abdu’l Bahá was of (at most) medium height, with a medium fair complexion, white beard, and hazel-blue eyes.⁸⁹

D.M.R. Bentley, editor of *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich*, the anthology from which this short story comes, argues that in this collection of essays, Leacock is satirizing the “Mausoleum Clubs” as “grandiose tombs haunted by the self-serving beneficiaries of an egregiously iniquitous social-economic system that can and must be changed to serve the legitimate needs of the many rather than the extravagant pleasures of the few.”⁹⁰ However, this may be an overstatement as, although progressive in some ways, such as supporting government social safety nets for the needy, Leacock was a mainly conservative voice economically, socially, and politically. Although the story sideswipes rich women, “The Yahi-Bahi Society of Mrs. Resslerer-Brown” expresses much sympathy for their prosperous industrialist husbands, so it seems that the male Canadian plutocracy was not Leacock’s main target. It can be surmised that rather than explicitly attacking Bahá’ís, Leacock was affixing exotic-sounding names to well-known stock guru caricatures to exploit suspicions of Orientals for humour’s sake, and ridicule the fascination and credence given to Eastern religions by women, especially, according to the stereotype, irrational, flighty, society women.⁹¹ Leacock was not a great respecter of women’s rationality. Of the fictional Mrs. Resslerer-Brown’s daughter, he wrote:

There is no doubt that Dulphemia Resslerer-Brown was a girl of remarkable character and intellect. So is any girl who has beautiful golden hair parted in thick bands on her forehead, and deep blue eyes soft as an Italian sky... Viscount FitzThistle, who explained to Dulphemia for half an hour the intricacies of the Irish situation, was captivated at the quick grasp she showed by asking him at the end, without a second's hesitation, "And which are the Nationalists?" This kind of thing represents female intellect in its best form.⁹²

On closer examination, this satirical story, at its base, is held together by a sustained attack on women, leading one to suspect that the anti-feminist Leacock feared that women’s enthusiastic embrace of alternative religion was a Trojan horse for feminism. In Leacock’s first few sentences, the main character, Mrs. Resslerer-Brown, confesses to her “three hundred friends” that her husband is “a severe handicap,” “a drag,” “a tie, and a weight, and a burden, and in Mrs. Resslerer-Brown's religious moments a crucifix.”⁹³ Of another character, Leacock writes: Mrs. Buncomhearst “had just lost her third husband—by divorce.” When she “learned of the remarriage of her second husband—she had lost him three years before, owing to a difference of opinion on the emancipation of women—she showed the most complete Bahee possible... Her one wish was, on her own statement, to lose herself. So very naturally Mrs. Resslerer-Brown looked at once to Mrs. Buncomhearst to preside over the meetings of the new society.”⁹⁴ Leacock then parodies a “Boohooist” women’s meeting that conducts a nonsensical round of motions, minutes, and votes, taking aim at the customary “Robert’s Rules of Order” management style of female voluntary organizations and, coincidentally, the Bahá’ís. Having the president of a female-dominated alternative religion’s meetings divorce three times, at least once over feminist ideologies, played on the popular anti-feminist argument that female emancipation would lead to a breakdown of the family, as women would be tempted to abandon their traditional roles.

Leacock implies that such women derided their hard-working husbands, while greedily taking their money and spending time frivolously gossiping at “the Bridge Club and the Art Society and the Dante Club.” This jibe may have indicated a certain level of sympathy for William Sutherland Maxwell, a responsible, economically and socially successful man who was burdened (in Leacock’s eyes) with a wife whose interest was consumed by spiritual and reform pursuits.⁹⁵ Leacock feared a decline in morality (at least female morality). He castigated the “new morality” as a “cult of self-development,” saying of another popular woman-led religious group, “It arrogates to itself the title of New Thought, but contains in reality nothing but the Old Selfishness.”⁹⁶ No doubt Leacock and other neighbours looked askance at May Maxwell’s extensive travels for the Faith, and annual sojourns to the United States to avoid the cold for her health, leaving her husband, sometimes with Mary, to fend for himself (albeit with a cook and servants). Certainly, May’s access to resources gave her additional freedoms. A cynical observer may have seen this as selfishness, as her behaviour deviated from feminine domestic ideals, whereas May herself saw her time apart from her husband and child as her most significant “sacrifice.” Some comment of this sort may have provoked the skeptical Leacock to write:

The chief aim of Bahee itself was sacrifice: a true follower of the cult must be willing to sacrifice his friends, or his relatives, and even strangers, in order to reach Bahee. In this way one was able fully to realize oneself and enter into the Higher Indifference.⁹⁷

The Montreal Bahá’í community, where May Maxwell was the candle they revolved around, viewed her absences differently, bereft when she left. It would have shocked Leacock further if he had known that inside the Bahá’í community, W.S. Maxwell’s stature paled in comparison to his wife’s. Rúhíyyih Khánúm mentions that she was grateful for Shoghi Effendi’s great friendship with her father after May Maxwell’s 1940 death. She writes, “Until the last decade of my father’s life it had always been my mother who was the famous Bahá’í...when I arrived with my mother, on my third pilgrimage to Haifa in 1937, the status of my father inside the Faith can best be described as being ‘Mrs. Maxwell’s husband.’”⁹⁸ After her marriage, he also became known as “Rúhíyyih Khánúm’s father.”⁹⁹ What May Maxwell saw as the “sacrifice” of family time was only comprehensible in the light of the larger context of her millenarian belief that she was working for a higher purpose, the institution of a new World Order. Leacock, who did not welcome change to traditional gender roles, would not have accepted that premise.¹⁰⁰

As feminist historian Randi Warne argues, Leacock saw the non-traditional woman, religious or otherwise, as “both the sign of social disintegration and, through her rejection of the past, the very perpetrator of it.”¹⁰¹ Even worse, according to Leacock, was that these free-thinking women seemed to aspire to be men, a frequent claim of anti-feminists. He parodied:

It is hard for a woman to have to realize that her husband is making a fortune out of coal and wood and that people know it...It ties one down. What a woman wants most of all... is room to expand, to grow.... Mrs. Rasselyer-Brown would feel faint with despair at the nonentity of her husband. So one can understand how heavy her burden was... “Every morning after breakfast off to his wretched office, and never back till dinner, and in the evening nothing but his club, or some business meeting. One would think he would have more ambition. How I wish I had been a man.” It was certainly a shame.¹⁰²

The characters of Mrs. Rasselyer-Brown and her beleaguered husband did not conform to that of May and W.S. Maxwell, but may be a composite of those things that Leacock disapproved of in Bahá'í women, and women involved in alternative religions and mysticism in general. He was known to complain that he lived in an “an age addicted to thaumaturgy” (miracles), a foolishness he primarily associated with women.¹⁰³ Overall, it seems that Leacock’s parody of the Bahá'ís was at its base less a Bahá'í counter-narrative than an anti-feminist diatribe, invoking a popular trope of acquisitive Oriental charlatanism to attack the female capacity for analytical thinking. Discounting female rationality was, not coincidentally, a central plank in that era’s anti-feminist campaigns. However, Leacock’s suspicions that women’s embrace of marginalized “alternative” religion was interlinked with feminism was, at least in the case of the Bahá'ís, very true.

Practical Myth: Searching for May Maxwell.

In the Bahá'í community, the heroic myths of May Maxwell, Martha Root, Lua Getsinger and their associates were very modern: these are ordinary, flawed, frail or timid women who are transformed by extraordinary circumstances, and their own mettle. They providentially discover a new, nearly unknown millennial faith, which they believe holds in its grasp the fate of the world, and become its champions. Through a series of tests, they exhibit, by overcoming various challenges, a previously unknown strength of character. Their stories, as heroic myths are meant to, inspire other initiates to higher devotion and increased efforts to accomplish their herculean task, building a new global World Order. This quest helps them to move beyond personal and gender barriers to experience a metamorphosis in their personal and collective identities, discovering new capacities and competencies. In the early Bahá'í narratives, these women are often attributed some special qualities, mainly a “searching” soul and an intuitive knowledge of and sensitivity to the spiritual realm, often revealed through dreams and visions. May’s mythology, like that of many other exemplary Bahá'í women, includes providential stories of prescience, visions, and serendipity. Although these incidences may be historically “true,” they are primarily retold for their inspirational value. For instance, at the 1990 Conference in Buenos Aires, commemorating the 50th anniversary of May Maxwell’s 1940 death and burial in that city, Rúhíyyih Khánúm dwelt at length upon the topic of her mother as “very spiritual-minded...a heavenly soul...” whose spiritual awareness made her sensitive not only to “spiritual forces” but also people and nature.¹⁰⁴ In the Bahá'í view, human effort alone, unaided by Divine power, could not hope to succeed in what was essentially a spiritual world-altering quest, to radically transform global society. Conversely, Bahá'ís believed that mystical forces could only be fully utilized on the material plane through the power of human volition. “Divine impulses” needed to be channelled through concerted, sustained, united human effort to effect change.

To motivate others to further the millennial project, Bahá'í speakers regularly recounted inspiring, touching or thought-provoking anecdotes of early believers such as May Maxwell surmounting barriers and “arising” to act, in ways large and small, and undertaking tasks that might seem daunting. For instance, in a tale of overcoming hardship, Rúhíyyih Khánúm told her audience in Buenos Aires that her mother had “a very beautiful body, had a very keen mind, but I never walked two blocks with my mother in my whole life. She just couldn’t do it.” She explained, “I tell you these things because I think that it gives us an idea of how much you can serve Bahá’u’lláh and with what handicaps.”¹⁰⁵ She also used May’s story to emphasize the

point that suffering tempers and strengthens one, saying that May's poor health was to "be the greatest test in the life of the woman to come, the steel, one might say, of lifelong suffering that was to enter into her soul, be her interminable battle, help forge the beauty of her spirit"¹⁰⁶ Rúhíyyih Khánum often remarked, "God chose the weakest vessel in Europe to spread His Cause."¹⁰⁷ She does not mention that May's invalidism also thrust added responsibilities on her at a young age, as May's daughter, to assist, protect and shield her often bedridden mother. Some might complain that this responsibility was unfair to a child. However, Bahá'ís maintained that one's spirit was fortified by overcoming "tests,"¹⁰⁸ Rúhíyyih Khánum, no doubt, would have viewed her situation with her mother as having helped to forge her own very strong character.

The story of May's dire illness, and recovery upon her recognition of the Faith, was often repeated by Bahá'ís, its veracity sometimes bolstered by 'Abdu'l Bahá's assertion that "Had she not found Bahá'u'lláh and His healing message, she would have died."¹⁰⁹ Invoking echoes of Lazarus's rising, with familiar metaphorical implications of rising from spiritual death to life, the conversion story of May Maxwell's encountering Bahá'u'lláh through His emissary, Lua Getsinger, parallels healings performed by prophets, saints and mystics. Healing, miracle, and resurrection myths were entrenched in both western and eastern cultures, so it is not surprising that these themes figure in Bahá'í mythologies. For instance, May Maxwell devotes much of her account of 'Abdu'l Bahá's 1912 Montreal visit to a story of His healing a neighbour's child.¹¹⁰

Within the Bahá'í community, May was perceived to possess considerable informal spiritual rank, because of her closeness to 'Abdu'l Bahá and His accolades that "this beloved handmaid of God is like a flame of fire and thinks day and night of nothing save service to God," and that she was "a real Bahá'í."¹¹¹ There was little resistance to May Maxwell's status, which is surprising given that this was a community composed mainly of people who had consciously rejected religious and social hierarchy in other religions and organizations. An explanation for the ready acceptance of certain individuals being marked as "special" can be attributed to the capacity of Bahá'ís, habitual in the thinking of the community, to distinguish between the individual human personality and their "station," usually derived from elected or appointed positions, or acknowledgements by the central authorities of the Faith. For instance, Rúhíyyih Khánum was asked by a young man who was a newly enrolled Bahá'í, why Bahá'ís stood up when she entered a room. She responded that he didn't have to stand up as it was not required, but it showed respect for the station, in her case as a "Hand of the Cause," and if the Mayor of the city entered the hall, she would be the first to stand up for him in acknowledgement of his rank.¹¹² Showing respect for the position, rather than the individual *per se*, maintained the Bahá'í concept of social leveling on an interpersonal level, where all Bahá'ís were to be co-equal.

However, Rúhíyyih Khánum's friend, early Montreal Bahá'í Roland Estall, reported that as one of three youthful "upstarts" elected in their early twenties to the nine-member municipal governing council of the Bahá'í community, the Local Spiritual Assembly, in the late 1920s, he had chafed at the deference shown to May Maxwell:

The adulation of dear and wonderful May Maxwell was total. And anything May said was gospel amongst those early, old believers. And one can understand that; she was after all the disciple of 'Abdu'l Bahá...But in May's case that was not conscious; it was merely

that the other members, if she said something, would say, “Yes May, yes May,” you see.¹¹³

As Bahá’í Assemblies are supposed to function through consultation, with each member having an equal voice, this situation constituted a challenge for him.¹¹⁴ However, he went on to explain that the focus on “personalities” in the early period of administrative development was part of an evolution in the growing maturity of the community and the institutional framework of the Faith.

At the time of the 1987 interview in which he discussed the above situation, Estall was an elderly life-long Bahá’í recounting his frustrations as a youth. In the interview he exhibited a high degree of introspection and insightful analysis regarding the process of myth-building within the Bahá’í Faith. After making what he feared might be perceived as (very mildly) critical comments about May Maxwell and some of the early believers, he said:

Some of these comments I’m not sure should not really actively be recorded. And I hope someone will use the discretion to edit them out ...Particularly if it refers to the Maxwells or to Rúhíyyih Khánúm for example. These people are so distinguished that one remembers how the Guardian looked at their lives ... and the House of Justice is using the same technique, records the lives in brief biographies that appear in *Bahá’í World*. Nothing negative appears in any of them, less they all appear to be saints. Which of course they were. But the other side which perhaps a secular historian would record is completely eliminated. And maybe that’s the criteria we should use for recording any of this stuff. I hope it will be the criteria used when they record, if they ever do, about me. Having said all that I hope someone will use some discretion when they listen to all this. And perhaps in the case of the Maxwells every bit of it should be referred to Rúhíyyih Khánúm anyway who’s writing a history, a biography about her mother and father.¹¹⁵

Estall’s comments must be read first in terms of the high degree of respect and regard he had for the Maxwells and for Rúhíyyih Khánúm, who was still alive at the time of the interview. However, his concern about sounding negative can be interpreted more broadly in the light of strong Bahá’í injunctions against fault-finding, and the mandate to focus one’s attention upon the positive rather than the negative.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, Bahá’ís were also enjoined to investigate truth for themselves, be “just” in judgement and be frank as well as loving in consultation.¹¹⁷ The three central figures of the Faith, Shoghi Effendi, and even Rúhíyyih Khánúm herself, demonstrated a judicious blend of positive interpretation and honest appraisal. However, at the level of everyday practice, this was difficult for individuals to accomplish this unless they were very mature in their understanding. In this case, where May Maxwell’s status in that instance was that she was one of nine equal Local Spiritual Assembly members, Estall was right to question his fellow-Bahá’ís. But, then, she was May Maxwell... and “after all the disciple of ‘Abdu’l Bahá.”¹¹⁸ Estall’s comments reveal how powerful the effects of the modelling behaviours of the central authorities of the Faith have been on the mythologies of the community. Estall was consciously trying to shape what was to be said about the Faith, and particularly the Maxwells, to conform to what he perceived to be the laudatory standard set by Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice in their official commemorative *In Memoriams*. This behaviour of looking to central authority for examples had its roots in the

Bahá'í understanding of the Covenant they undertook as followers of the Faith, and in their learned habit of looking to 'Abdu'l Bahá as the "Perfect Exemplar."¹¹⁹ Lynn Echevarria notes a similar phenomenon in her interviews with Canadian female Bahá'ís active in the 1940s-1960s:

It is rare to find, in Bahá'í narratives, a complete appraisal of another person's character that takes into account both the strengths *and weaknesses*, for it would be unusual for one person to expose the faults of another. In the Bahá'í teachings, backbiting is considered a sin, and personal aggrandizement a non-virtue, and therefore discouraged....Whatever human foibles these role models possessed would not be appropriate to mention by the Bahá'ís, or, if they were mentioned, it would be to illustrate how the person had overcome them.¹²⁰

The pervasiveness of this self-censoring attitude towards what might be considered mild criticism is evident in the fact that there is very little negative commentary included in the mythologies surrounding prominent Bahá'í figures, even though historians such as Robert Stockman have shown that there was dissension, sometimes publically, in the early formation of the western Bahá'í community.¹²¹ The fact that few criticisms are directed towards these iconic women is even more surprising when one considers that May Maxwell, Martha Root, Lua Getsinger, Juliet Thompson, Keith Ransom-Kehler, and the rest were true originals, noted for their honest and forthright expression of opinion. These women were quite open about their own shortcomings, a quality seen within the Faith as self-effacing. As May Maxwell records in *An Early Pilgrimage*, her account of the 1898 Hearst voyage, fault-finding in others was strongly discouraged, and maintaining a positive view of others could be hard-won. She writes:

We had learnt that to be with 'Abdu'l-Bahá was all life, joy and blessedness. We were to learn also that His Presence is a purifying fire. The pilgrimage to the Holy City is naught but a crucible in which the souls are tried; where the gold is purified and the dross is consumed. It did not seem possible that anything but love could ever again animate our words and actions. Yet that very afternoon, in my room with two of the believers, I spoke against a brother in the truth, finding fault with him, and giving vent to the evil in my own heart by my words. While we were still sitting together our Master who had been visiting the poor and sick, returned, and immediately sent for my spiritual mother, Lua, who was with us. He told her that during His absence one of His servants had spoken unkindly of another, and that it grieved His heart that the believers should not love one another or that they should speak against any soul. Then He charged her not to speak of it but to pray.

A little later we all went to supper, and my hard heart was unconscious of its error, until as my eyes sought the beloved face of my Master, I met His gaze, so full of gentleness and compassion that I was smitten to the heart. For in some marvellous way His eyes spoke to me; in that pure and perfect mirror I saw my wretched self and burst into tears. He took no notice of me for a while and everyone kindly continued with the supper while I sat in His dear Presence washing away some of my sins in tears. After a few moments He turned and smiled on me and spoke my name several times as though He were calling

me to Him. In an instant such sweet happiness pervaded my soul, my heart was comforted with such infinite hope, that I knew He would cleanse me of all my sins.¹²²

However, as ‘Abdu’l Bahá sometimes demonstrated, the prohibition on fault-finding did not mean one should be blind to character faults. May’s friend Juliet Thompson says the Master told her to be careful in her associations, including a female acquaintance who He says would have been arrested if she and May Maxwell had not got her out of America, at the risk of getting in trouble with the authorities. In the case of X (name withheld by Juliet), ‘Abdu’l Bahá advised:

I [Juliet] must always be kind to her and give her money if I could, but that I must not travel with her or associate with her as a companion. I must only associate with those who would help me to become spiritual... He laughed in that wonderful way, humorous beyond *human* humour, with a wealth of sweetness in it. "Even Christ cannot help some people," He said. "How can you expect to?" But He said He felt very sorry for X. He forgave her and He would pray for her.¹²³

The question then remains, was May Maxwell as saintly as she has been portrayed or have the Bahá’ís merely adopted a “sin-covering eye” and forgotten to be “frank” as well as “loving”?

May Maxwell: “a true Bahá’í”

A key element of May Maxwell’s legend in the emerging western Bahá’í community was that she offered a model of what it was to be a “true Bahá’í,” as she was described as such by ‘Abdu’l Bahá. May Maxwell, by her own account, was not a flawless or perfect follower. However, she strove to the best of her ability to serve “the Cause,” and learned from her experiences. Rúhíyyih Khánum, who describes herself as the “beloved child” of a biological mother who was also the “Mother of her soul,” who she “adored and looked to for all that is best and noblest in a woman,” was extremely close to May, describing theirs as a “great love” born of the spirit and transcending ordinary bounds.¹²⁴ Nonetheless, she offers a reasonably balanced view of her mother, saying she was not perfect, but “most adorably human.”¹²⁵ She writes:

I often wonder if I would call her a saint. In the orthodox sense of the word I don’t think she was. That is one who is all goodness, all detachment, all resignation, all sacrifice - she was too vivid, somehow, to be classified that way. But she was the best all-round good person I ever saw. If goodness is active love, an ocean of generosity, and passionate devotion to God-then she was good to the core of her bones.¹²⁶

In her memoirs, Rúhíyyih Khánum told this story of her mother’s being a “true Bahá’í”:

All my life no beggar went empty handed from our door. Often she herself would go down into the kitchen and see that they had food and a hot drink, if they were ready to eat when they came to our home – if not, a sandwich to take away or some food for their family. She often gave money but preferred to give food or aid as so many beggars go and buy drink, but then she would say, ‘Poor soul, I guess if I were in that state I might drink too to get warm and forget!’

She had the most marvellous interest in everyone. One could say she was a lover of her fellow-men. She truly loved them. It was not affected or sanctimonious at all....¹²⁷

Illustrating the same point of May's genuine concern for others, Rúhíyyih Khánúm wrote:

Once I left Mother waiting in a taxi in the Bowery in New York City while I went into a store.... When I came out it was dark and she was not in the taxi. I looked up and down the street and saw her standing not far off talking to a man; I went to join her and much to my surprise found her holding the hand of a very tall, old Jew. He was truly of the ancient, Hebrew type, with bent shoulders, grey beard and aquiline nose. I heard him say, 'What for?' and she said, 'Because you are my brother!' Then she let go of his hand and joined me. It seemed, with her usual interest in people, she had watched him come by and stop in front of a cheap coffee shop where coffee was advertised for 5 cents a cup; he looked in the window, but evidently did not possess even that much, and turned away. Mother then got out of her taxi and went after him, took his hand and pressed a dollar bill into it. He was surprised at this sudden gesture and had asked 'What for?' in broken English. Her answer was her whole belief about life.

There were no barriers between her and her fellow-men. She felt just as friendly towards the Negro pastor or the waiter or the taxi man or towards a social equal or, for that matter, a superior. She could get acquainted faster than anyone I ever saw. In fact, it would be practically impossible for her not to get acquainted.¹²⁸

Rúhíyyih Khánúm tells other stories of May's helping strangers, the poor, families, and unwed mothers, even bringing those in difficulty into her home to live.¹²⁹ These stories echoed stories of 'Abdu'l Bahá's dealings with the needy, whether financially or spiritually in want. Culturally, such stories resonated, as they resembled parables of Jesus Christ. May's actions and attitudes reinforced and actualized conceptions of what it meant to be a "real Bahá'í." Early Bahá'ís attached great import to preserving anecdotes of 'Abdu'l Bahá and each other because they saw early believers as disciples and apostles of the new faith. They felt that the oral and written records of these significant experiences were a precious heritage for those to come and would be valued as much as the records of the early days of Christ or of Muhammad were. As one believer said after sharing stories of May Maxwell and other early believers, "I hope that something of the treasure that these memories give me can be important to others. Because the spirit within them lives forever."¹³⁰ Rúhíyyih Khánúm even predicted that: "Perhaps a day will come soon when the generation who only knew His apostles [such as May Maxwell] will be marvelled at for the stories they tell, not of Him ['Abdu'l Bahá] but of those in the West who first loved Him!"¹³¹

Rúhíyyih Khánúm comments "that to really know a person you have to live with them and that for a long time." Having lived with her mother for twenty-five years, she saw May's most prominent characteristic as the utter lack of "meanness" in her nature in spite of the fact that "Nearly all of us, in some way, be it ever so small, are mean," whether it manifests as "petty

uncharitable behaviour, stinginess or low-mindedness.” However, she also remarked that May Maxwell was “unspeakably frank, - a trait often misunderstood.”¹³² Rúhíyyih Khánum recounts that a young Montreal Bahá’í, who was May’s spiritual child, told her: “Mother almost killed me the other day. I telephoned her from a booth down town and she was mad at me for something I had done and she gave me a terrific lecture and the combination of the heat of the lecture and the telephone booth, almost suffocated me!”¹³³ Rúhíyyih Khánum adds, “Needless to say he did not object to her ‘lecture.’” She notes in May’s favour that she never nagged or was “cold-that horrible trait so many women have.”¹³⁴ When May heard that someone was upset over something that she had “actually or supposedly said or done,” she would telephone or speak to the person face-to face, saying “What’s this I hear that you, etc.” She was “equally direct” in giving compliments, or giving someone “a piece of her mind.”¹³⁵ May Maxwell would have probably concurred with her daughter’s honest and nuanced, if admittedly not “disinterested,” observations of her, as May counselled frankness in others as well as practicing it herself.

Rúhíyyih Khánum did not subscribe to the portrayal of her mother as a weak, helpless, flighty, or completely “ephemeral” person. May’s own stories emphasized dreams, visions, prescience and serendipity, but May herself never associated these qualities with weakness, rather, with spiritual awareness and a strong trust in Providence. However, discounting negative female stereotypes often painted those with metaphysical interests as less than grounded, particularly if the person in question was “sensitive,” with mediumistic qualities, as May was.¹³⁶ In contrast, Rúhíyyih Khánum states that her mother was “remarkably highly organized” and “intensely dynamic” in spite of her delicate health, the “great tragedy of Mother’s life.”¹³⁷ Rúhíyyih Khánum observes that symbolically, nothing could better represent her mother than a photograph taken on the steps of the Hotel Rockingham in Portsmouth, with two pillars behind her and a lion at her side, epitomizing her mother’s character, “for she was lion-like in her courage and a true pillar of the faith in every way.”¹³⁸ May’s conscientiousness in undertaking her many tasks, and the reliance others placed on her for advice and direction in personal and administrative affairs, spoke to her competence. She maintained a voluminous correspondence, as well as keeping up a hectic schedule of social activism, entertaining, travelling, teaching, and conducting Bahá’í activities, albeit often from her sickbed. Rúhíyyih Khánum’s tribute to her mother sums up the prevailing narrative that has endured of May Maxwell as a “true Bahá’í”:

If to be a Bahá’í is to be one whose deeds exceed their words a thousand fold; one who at all hours, in all states of mind and health, is ever ready to proffer the divine chalice of the knowledge of God to whosoever seeks it; one whose love shines tenderly on friend and foe, on the important and the least of human riff-raff; one whose friendship is an abiding security, uncorrupted by time or separation; one whose word was honest and kept; one whose purse and home alike were ever open to those in want; one of whom it can truly be said she was a refuge for the hearts of those who turned to her – then May Maxwell was a true Bahá’í.¹³⁹

The Inter-generational Power of Heroic Bahá’í Mythologies

The myths of May Maxwell, and the other prominent early Bahá’í women associated with her, have provided powerful inspiration and motivation to the generations of women who

followed them. Stories, such as that told by Loulie Mathews (1869-1966), illustrate how heroic metaphorical images and comparisons to both eastern male “martyrs” and western female exemplars, empowered other women to aspire to valiant spiritual ideals, and undermined materialistic standards. Loulie, a wealthy New York “suffragette,” who founded a home for working girls and later worked for racial harmony, became a Bahá’í about 1914. In 1916, she went to Paris, engaged a “luxurious” Paris hotel suite in “which to serve tea and discuss the Faith,” but had little success.¹⁴⁰ There, Loulie met one of the many eastern believers who passed through Paris, noticing his “wrists that had been severed through to the bone.” Loulie exclaimed on his suffering but he replied “Suffer? When I was in prison with my Lord? Oh, but every moment was a blissful joy.”¹⁴¹ Questioning her own worthiness to teach, she decided to return to New York. In a scenario reminiscent of May Maxwell’s experience with Thomas Breakwell, a Persian visitor gave her a prescient letter from ‘Abdu’l Bahá saying, “...Do thou go home and be humble and obedient and bye and bye, thou shalt become ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s lion and roar across the Seven Seas.”¹⁴² This story, like many Bahá’í exempla, emphasizes willing sacrifice as essential to success, and instills skepticism about relying on material means such as a “silver tea service.” Loulie sailed home to New York but returned to France again in 1917 to volunteer at “Mission Ambrine,” a burn hospital at Compeigne, near the front lines.

In 1929, Loulie Mathews recovered from nearly-fatal pneumonia after her daughter asked Shoghi Effendi for prayers. The doctor, surprised by her recovery, warned she might never speak aloud. Loulie writes, “But he had not read ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s letter saying I ‘should roar across the seven seas.’”¹⁴³ After convalescing in Colorado, on Shoghi Effendi’s advice, she set off with her husband to retrace Martha Root’s first 1919 teaching trip to South America.¹⁴⁴ Loulie says she kept the model of Martha Root before her in spite of her husband’s insinuations that such travel was irrational, a charge frequently levied against religious women. Before embarking for South America, Loulie Mathews visited Martha Root in a “cubicle-”sized Manhattan hotel room surrounded by “bags and bundles” for her next trip to Europe.¹⁴⁵ Martha’s frugality, born both of necessity and her desire to spend all she had on her teaching work, was a part of her legend. For Bahá’ís, she exemplified a self-sacrifice modelled after ‘Abdu’l Bahá, who often deprived Himself in order to give to others. As she had done with the “Oriental” believer, Loulie measured herself against Martha, remarking, “How calm she was! I felt like a small tug beside an ocean liner - would I ever attain such magnificent poise?”¹⁴⁶ This grandiose view of Martha Root signalled a transformation in Loulie’s values. She admits that when she first met the Faith, she was concerned with Paris fashions and “important” people, and “still enough of a Philistine” to be put off when the Bahá’ís “went into raptures” over “a certain woman whose skirts drooped in the back and hiked up in front, and whose hair needed cutting.”¹⁴⁷ This may have been Martha Root, whose uneven hems and poor haircuts were remarked upon. In her 1951 memoirs, Loulie recounted in glowing terms Martha’s traversing South America “armed with the Mighty Word” (i.e. one tiny pamphlet in Spanish), even riding a mule over treacherous mid-winter passes in the Andes. Loulie writes, “All the time Martha was repeating the Greatest Name of God, calling down the blessings on this wild country.”¹⁴⁸ For Loulie, Martha had become a heroic persona to be emulated. As happens in quest stories, the old warrior gave the neophyte valuable clues and talismans. Martha Root told Loulie stories of her adventures, gave her addresses, and bestowed on her “a crowning gift of the Tablet ‘Abdu’l Bahá had written for inquirers and sent to South

America.”¹⁴⁹ Loulie Mathews also paid homage to May Maxwell, “who gave her life and her talents to the Faith and finally journeyed to Argentina to teach, and died in that faraway land.”¹⁵⁰

Seventy-year-old May Maxwell, accompanied by her niece, Jeanne Bolles, had left New York on January 24, 1940, in response to Shoghi Effendi’s call for pioneers and travel teachers to implement ‘Abdu’l Bahá’s millennial vision of delivering the Bahá’í message to the planet, as laid out in the *Tablets of the Divine Plan*.¹⁵¹ May had just embarked on her teaching trip when on March 1, 1940, she succumbed to a heart attack in Buenos Aires. Shoghi Effendi cabled:

'Abdu'l-Bahá's beloved handmaid, distinguished disciple May Maxwell [is] gathered [into the] glory [of the] Abhá Kingdom...priceless honor [of] martyr's death [is] now added....Southern outpost [of] Faith greatly enriched through association [with] her historic resting-place destined remain [a] poignant reminder [of the] resistless march [of] triumphant army [of] Bahá'u'lláh.¹⁵²

Calling women such as May Maxwell and Keith Ransom-Kehler “martyrs,” denoted a spiritual rank paralleling that of eastern Bábí-Bahá’í martyrs.¹⁵³ Bahá’í commentaries about her burial in Buenos Aires intimate that May Maxwell’s earthly remains, like those of a saint, sanctified the continent and lent power to the advance of the Faith. Believers were enjoined to visit her grave to say prayers, as with Martha Root’s, Lua Getsinger’s, Keith Ransom Kehler’s, and other “luminaries” resting places. Her eulogy by Marion Holley proclaimed her saint-like, maternal, but also soldierly leadership: “Yet May Maxwell lives—adorable, rarest spirit! And her children around the world have given up their weeping, to follow her in the ‘resistless march.’”¹⁵⁴

The mythology of the first generation of western female exemplars became entrenched in the Bahá’í community. For instance, Rosemary Sala says she and friend Anne Savage “would meet together for tea and talk about our beloved May Maxwell.”¹⁵⁵ Doris McKay, a younger Bahá’í who knew May Maxwell said, “May was a person set apart by an almost invisible aura...a being of such beauty and poise, and of such a power of attraction that we had restrain ourselves from staring at her...the memory of her was like a perfume that could not be contained in a bottle.”¹⁵⁶ Lynn Echevarria, in her study of Canadian women who were Bahá’ís in the 1940s-1960s, observes that it is difficult with charismatic figures, viewed by their community as modern-day disciples and apostles, to move beyond the legend to an account of the everyday challenges they faced. Nevertheless, these figures were still felt by the Bahá’í community to be accessible, described as self-effacing and in many ways, “down to earth.”¹⁵⁷ Their “modern” myths are those of “ordinary” women transformed in service of a millennial world-reforming vision. As their lives became common narrative property in a developing Bahá’í culture, these women were (and are) looked to as archetypes who defied “normative” feminine roles and limiting gender stereotypes. As one of Echevarria’s later generation of Bahá’í women reported: “The early women teachers who were role models...were not in line with the general social ideals of women’s role and place...they took initiative and responsibility and were dedicated and courageous.”¹⁵⁸ With their legends firmly established in Bahá’í culture, later generations of women looked to the rich heritage of mythologies developed around early female believers for new religious models on which to build their own identities as Bahá’í feminist reformers.

Conclusion

Heroization was an organizational feature of the Bábí/Bahá'í Faith from its inception. “Oriental” Bahá'ís venerated a set of Bábí/Bahá'í paradigmatic figures, predominately Persian males (with the notable exception of Táhirih), who were exiled, tortured and/or killed for their faith. Bahá'ís retold tales of the lives and experiences of heroic followers, visited and said prayers at their graves, and sometimes even asked for their intercession or assistance from the next world. So, in some ways, a saint-like spiritual potency was attributed to these individuals. Because of differing religious and cultural heritages, as well as dissimilar gender compositions of the eastern and western Bahá'í communities, stories of physical martyrdom, although inspiring, did not translate easily in terms of providing prescriptive role models to a group of western women attempting to actualize the precepts of Bahá'í doctrine. Therefore, in the first years of the formation of the western Bahá'í community, a parallel mythology featuring mainly female heroic figures emerged, functioning in tandem with that of eastern Bábí-Bahá'í heroes and martyrs.

Having “modern” western female religious exemplars, with varying backgrounds, personalities and achievements, gave western Bahá'í women (and men) attainable, culturally accessible models. This efficacious feature of the Bahá'í community, coupled with the primary exemplar, ‘Abdu’l Bahá, set this organization apart from other feminist and reform groups. Most groups looked to leaders as examples, but did not attribute to them a spiritual “station.” Few believed, as Bahá'ís did, that the “sacrifices” and deaths of such members infused their reform cause with more spiritual vitality. Other missionizing and millennial groups heroized exceptional members, but female paradigms were rare. By comparison, when Shoghi Effendi addressed American Bahá'ís in 1940, he singled out three fallen heroes, all female. He wrote:

And now as this year, so memorable in the annals of the Faith, was drawing to a close, there befell the American Bahá'í community, through the dramatic and sudden death of May Maxwell, yet another loss, which viewed in retrospect will come to be regarded as a potent blessing conferred upon the campaign now being so diligently conducted by its members... To Keith Ransom-Kehler, whose dust sleeps in far-off Isfahán; to Martha Root, fallen in her tracks on an island [Hawaii] in the midmost heart of the ocean; to May Maxwell, lying in solitary glory in the southern outpost of the Western Hemisphere [Buenos Aires]—to these three heroines of the Formative Age of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, they who now labor so assiduously for its expansion and establishment, owe a debt of gratitude which future generations will not fail to adequately recognize.¹⁵⁹

While this “special” status awarded to exemplary women seemed to contradict the general social leveling tendencies of the Faith, in fact, it did not. Such levelling applied mainly to eliminating prejudices regarding material conditions such as wealth, class, gender, ethnicity, race, and religious background. From the movement’s beginning, countervailing rhetoric supported individual merit and the idea that varying capacity and effort brought differing rewards.¹⁶⁰ In encouraging believers, ‘Abdu’l Bahá said He desired spiritual “distinction” for His followers, and both He and Shoghi Effendi sometimes marked that distinction with aspirational names or honorific titles.¹⁶¹ For example, May Maxwell, known for her love, was called “a real Bahá'í” by ‘Abdu’l Bahá, a “martyr” by Shoghi Effendi, and the “mother” of France, Europe, Canada, and

the Latin peoples. Keith Ransom-Kehler was the first American “martyr,” and a “Hand of the Cause.” Lua Getsinger was named “Herald of the Covenant” by ‘Abdu’l Bahá, and “Mother teacher of the West” by Shoghi Effendi. Martha Root was singled out as “that archetype of Bahá’í itinerant teachers and the foremost Hand [of the Cause]...Leading Ambassadors of His Faith and Pride of Bahá’í teachers, whether men or women, in both the East and the West.”¹⁶²

The impetus for such female myth-making in the western Bahá’í community seems to have been driven by the efforts of the larger Bahá’í community to establish a distinctive Bahá’í identity and origin story, and the necessity of cementing the social and cultural coherence of a heterogeneous female-dominated group of converts. These goals were assisted by the creation of culturally accessible shared symbols, heroic exemplars, and quest narratives. The formation and rapid growth of the western Bahá’í community in the early twentieth century, during the peak of the “first-wave” feminist movement, supported enlarging the role of women in the public sphere. However, this dissertation has argued that the entry of women into religious and secular arenas that were formerly the social and institutional strongholds of men, was further legitimized within the Bahá’í community by the doctrinal principle of the equality of women and men, an integral feature of an anticipated millenarian new World Order. It is clear from this limited study that the primary purpose of myth-making in the nascent western Bahá’í religious community was to succinctly convey to a select population of adherents, by means of parable, allegory or metaphor, information that was aspirational, motivational, or didactic. It was not to closely historicize or biographically contain a subject. However, the educative purpose of Bahá’í myth-making did not undermine the joy and sense of shared identity members gleaned from being engaged in creative communal narrative-building. Out of this process, certain prominent early Bahá’ís such as May Maxwell and her associates, a cohort of western women who dedicated their lives to building a millennial new World Order, modeled new forms of female religious identity, and emerged as female leaders and paradigmatic archetypes. Their example quickly became, and remained, an agent of transformational change for later generations of Bahá’í women.

NOTES

¹ Rúhíyyih Khánúm, “The Little Girl” in Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 41.

² Marion Holley, “Youth’s Door of Hope,” *Star of the West* 24, no. 4 (July 1933): 120.

³ Loulie A. Mathews, “Whence Comes the Light,” “Chapter 5. The Guardian and Administration,” *Star of the West* 20, no. 7 (October, 1929): 200. Also “Loulie A. Mathews,” *The Bahá’í World*, vol. 14, 1963-68 (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1974), 360-362.

⁴ William G. Doty, *Myth, A Handbook* (Westport, Conn; London: Greenwood Books, 2004), 1-4.

⁵ Doty, *Myth*, 113-15.

⁶ Doty, *Myth*, 3.

⁷ The idea that cultures maintain coherence and acculturate members through a “a system of inherited concepts expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men (sic) communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” was pioneered by cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz. See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 89.

⁸ See Joseph Campbell, with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, ed. Betty Sue Flowers (New York: Doubleday, 1988), xvii. See also Doty, *Myth*, 3-4.

⁹ Rosa V. Winterburn, “The Bahá’í Revelation: The Fulfillment,” *Star of the West* 15, no. 10 (Jan., 1925): 304.

¹⁰ Winterburn, “The Bahá’í Revelation,” 304. See Leonard V. Rutgers, *Making Myths: Jews in Early Christian Identity Formation* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 17; Rosemary Radford Reuther, “Witches and Jews: The Demonic

Alien in Christian Culture,” in *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies & Human Liberation* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1975), 89-110.

¹¹ See Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (London: Heinemann, 1980).

¹² ‘Abdu’l Bahá was appointed as the perfect Exemplar by Bahá’u’lláh. See Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 3.

¹³ May Maxwell, *An Early Pilgrimage* (April 1917, Wheatley, Oxford: George Ronald, 1953), 41-42. Bahá’is are counselled against strict asceticism, which is seen as not being useful in helping oneself or humanity as a whole.

¹⁴ Bahá’is were advised not to dwell on miracles. See ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*, compiled by Howard MacNutt (vol.1, 1922, vol. 2, 1925; Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), 364.

¹⁵ See Nabil-i-A’zam, *Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá’í Revelation*, ed. & trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1932); also ‘Abdu’l Bahá, *Memorials of the Faithful*, trans. Marzieh Gail (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1971). Eastern believers well-known in the west were Táhirih (d.1852); the Bábís at Fort Shaykh Tabarsi, Zanjan and Nayriz, including Zaynab, the peasant warrior woman; the first *Letter of the Living*, Mullá Husayn (d.1849); the last *Letter of the Living*, Quddús (d.1849); Vahid, Muhammad Shah’s erudite envoy who converted and died by torture (d. 1850); Anis, the youth who was executed with the Báb (d.1850); Haji Sulaymán Khan (d.1852) who danced to his death with candles in his flesh before being hewn in half with a hatchet; Badi’ (d. 1869), the youth executed for delivering Bahá’u’lláh’s Tablet to Nasiru’-Din Shah; Varqá who was cut into pieces, and his 12-year old son Rúhu’llah who watched, then asked to join him and was strangled; the Seven Martyrs of Tehran (d.1850), and the two brothers, the King of Martyrs and the Beloved of Martyrs (d. 1879). These believers could have recanted or dissimulated, evasions permissible in Islam, but not the Bahá’í Faith.

¹⁶ See Robert A. Segal, ed., “Joan of Arc (French): Hero as Saint/Hero as Martyr/Female Hero as Male,” in *Hero Myths: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 147.

¹⁷ The Bahá’í (Badí‘) calendar has nine major Holy Days to commemorate anniversaries of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh, on which work is to be suspended. Two minor Holy Days, on which work continues, commemorate ‘Abdu’l Bahá.

¹⁸ Bahá’u’lláh, “Bishárát (Glad-Tidings),” *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette, IL: US Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1988 pocket-size edition), 21.

¹⁹ ‘Abdu’l Bahá quoted by Shoghi Effendi in “Letter of 14 November 1923” to the American National Spiritual Assembly, in Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1974), 50.

²⁰ Henrietta C. Wagner, “The World’s Greatest Prisoner,” *Star of the West* 19, no. 4 (July, 1928):121.

²¹ Mariam [Mary Ida] Haney, “In Behalf of the Oppressed,” *Star of the West* 15, no. 8 (November 1924): 230.

²² Haney, “In Behalf of the Oppressed,” 230.

²³ See Millie B. Herrick, “Heralds of the Dawn,” *Star of the West* 25, no. 2 (May 1934): 39.

²⁴ Lady Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway* (1940; London, UK: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1975), 194. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá named her “Sitárih Khánúm.” In Persian, “Sitárih” means “star,” and “Khánúm” is an honorific meaning “lady.”

²⁵ For accounts of western non-Bahá’í responses to Bábí-Bahá’í persecutions see Momen, Moojan, *The Bábí and Bahá’í Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981).

²⁶ Martyrdom is a dominant theme in Islam, particularly Shi’a Islam, with passion plays and mass commemorations. See Negar Mottahedeh, “Scheduled For Judgment Day: The Ta’ziyeh Performance in Qajar Persia and Walter Benjamin’s Dramatic Vision of History,” *Theatre InSight* 8.1 (Spring, 1997): 12-20; Negar Mottahedeh, “Ta’ziyeh: A Twist of History in Everyday Life,” *The Women of Karbala Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shi’i Islam*, ed. Kamran Scot Aghaie (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 25-44; Jonah Winters, “Dying for God: Martyrdom in the Shi’i and Bábí Religions” (MA thesis, University of Toronto, 1997).

²⁷ Karl Marx, “A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right,” in *Classical Sociological Theory*, edited by Craig Calhoun et al. (February 1844; Malden, MSS: Blackwell, 2002), 26-33.

²⁸ Marion Holley, “May Ellis Maxwell, May 9, 1940,” in *A Compendium of Volumes of the Bahá’í World I-XII, 1925-1954*, compiled by The Universal House of Justice (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981), 526.

²⁹ Haney, “In Behalf of the Oppressed,” 230.

³⁰ Haney, “In Behalf of the Oppressed,” 234. The quote is from ‘Abdu’l Bahá, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy*, compiled by Elizabeth Fraser Chamberlain (Boston, MA: Tudor Press, 1918), 63.

³¹ Haney, “In Behalf of the Oppressed,” 233.

³² Haney, “In Behalf of the Oppressed,” 233.

³³ Haney, “In Behalf of the Oppressed,” 233-34.

- ³⁴ Haney, "In Behalf of the Oppressed," 234. Lua Getsinger wrote a second petition to the Shah in the fall of 1903 after persecution re-erupted, and again in December 1903, expressing gratitude for his restoring order.
- ³⁵ e.g. "The Bahai's wage war with all the armies of the nations of the world... Their sword is the Word of God;" See Mirza Assad'u'llah, "The Bahai (Glorious) Message," *Star of the West* 4, no. 1, Baha (March 21, 1913): 12.
- ³⁶ Haney, "In Behalf of the Oppressed," 230-31.
- ³⁷ "Tomb of Lua Getsinger & Mirza 'Abu'l-Faql, Cairo, Egypt," *The Bahá'í World*, vol. 11, 1946-1950 (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1951), 196.
- ³⁸ Haney, "In Behalf of the Oppressed," 231.
- ³⁹ Muriel Ives Barrow Newhall, *Mother's Stories: Stories of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Early Believers told by Muriel Ives Barrow Newhall to her son Reginald Grant Barrow*, ed. Reginald Grant Barrow (1970), 41-42. <http://bahai-library.com/ives>. Muriel Newhall said, "This one was told me by Grace Ober, who heard it from Lua herself."
- ⁴⁰ See Annamarie Honnold, *Vignettes from the Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1982), 124.
- ⁴¹ Howard Colby Ives, *Portals to Freedom* (1937; Oxford: George Ronald, 1983), 84-85.
- ⁴² May Maxwell, "A Tribute to Lua Getsinger, Montreal, Canada, 1916," *A Compendium of Volumes of the Bahá'í World I-XII, 1925-1954*, compiled by The Universal House of Justice (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981), 520.
- ⁴³ Maxwell, "A Tribute to Lua Getsinger, 520.
- ⁴⁴ See Robert Quigley and William Sears, *The Flame* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1972); see also Velda Piff Metelmann, *Lua Getsinger: Herald of the Covenant* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1997).
- ⁴⁵ See Bahá'u'lláh, CXXX, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Pub., 1990), 285.
- ⁴⁶ Rosemary Sala, "Conversation with Rosemary and Emeric Sala, p.1-2," interview by Ilona Sala Weinstein, van den Hoonard, s5, ss4, file 169, Harriet Irving Library, UNB. Her mother regretted this after Rosemary was Bahá'í.
- ⁴⁷ Rosemary Sala, "Conversation with Rosemary and Emeric Sala, p.2".
- ⁴⁸ Rosemary Sala, "Conversation with Rosemary and Emeric Sala, p.3".
- ⁴⁹ Rosemary Sala, "Conversation with Rosemary and Emeric Sala, p.2".
- ⁵⁰ Rosemary Sala, "Conversation with Rosemary and Emeric Sala, p.7." For Rúhíyyih Khánúm's statement see Holley, "May Ellis Maxwell, May 9, 1940," 523.
- ⁵¹ Edith McKay quoted in Janet Ruhe-Schoen, *A Love Which Does Not Wait* (Riviera Beach, FL: Palabra, 1998), 45.
- ⁵² Berthalin Allen, quoted in Ruhe-Schoen, *A Love Which Does Not Wait*, 45.
- ⁵³ Juliet Thompson, quoted in Ruhe-Schoen, *A Love Which Does Not Wait*, 44-45.
- ⁵⁴ Agnes Alexander, "An account of how I became a Bahá'í and my stays in Paris in 1901 and 1937 written at the request of Mrs. Laura Dreyfus-Barney, Kyoto, Japan June 23, 1958," in "Autobiographical Materials of Agnes Alexander," ed., Thomas Linard, *Research Notes in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Studies*, no. 6 (August, 1997), n.p. <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/notes/alexand.htm>. Original is in Barney Collection, French Bahá'í National Centre).
- ⁵⁵ Bolles to Alexander, "An account of how I became a Bahá'í ..." n.p.
- ⁵⁶ Bolles to Alexander, "An account of how I became a Bahá'í ..." n.p.
- ⁵⁷ Alexander, "An account of how I became a Baha'i..." n.p. This literary style is typical of Bahá'í women's letters.
- ⁵⁸ Alexander, "May Maxwell-A Tribute," 2.
- ⁵⁹ Alexander, "May Maxwell-A Tribute," 3.
- ⁶⁰ I am indebted to Valerie Korinek for this insight.
- ⁶¹ Agnes Alexander quoted in Duane Troxel, "Alexander, Agnes: 70 years of service, Chapter 1," *Bahá'í News*, October 1983.
- ⁶² Alexander, "May Maxwell-A Tribute," 3.
- ⁶³ 'Abdu'l-Baha sent Howard Struven of Baltimore and Charles Remy of Washington, D.C. on a global teaching trip. Agnes persuaded her father to let them deliver their first address on his lanai (porch). After the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* ran the headline "Would Unite Mankind," Professor Alexander wrote a critical editorial, "What the Bahá'í Movement Really Is." See Troxel, "Alexander, Agnes, Ch. 1."
- ⁶⁴ Wm. D. Alexander, Oct. 9, 1911, Cooke Library, Punahou School, Honolulu, in Troxel, "Alexander, Agnes," Chapter 1, fn. 24.
- ⁶⁵ W. D. Alexander (1833-1913) was one of Hawaii's first Surveyor General (1870-1901); a member of the King's Privy Council; president of Punahou School and Oahu College, and a prolific scholar. See Agnes Alexander, *Forty Years of the Bahá'í Cause in Hawaii: 1902-1942* (Honolulu: National Spiritual Assembly, rev. ed., June 1974), 10.
- ⁶⁶ Alexander quoted in Troxel, "Alexander, Agnes."
- ⁶⁷ Keith Ransom Kehler, quoted in Holley, "May Ellis Maxwell, May 9, 1940," 523.

- ⁶⁸ *Star of the West* 6, no. 4 (Azamat 1, 71; May 17, 1915): 32.
- ⁶⁹ Rosemary Sala in "Conversation with Rosemary and Emeric Sala, p.5"
- ⁷⁰ From a letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi (27 March 1945) to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of The British Isles, in "The Power of Divine Assistance" in *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 2, compiled by Research Department of Universal House of Justice (Bahá'í World Centre: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991), 222.
- ⁷¹ J. E. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* (1923; Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), 83.
- ⁷² May Maxwell, *An Early Pilgrimage*, 41.
- ⁷³ Rosemary Sala, "A Conversation with Rosemary and Emeric Sala."
- ⁷⁴ Rúhíyyih [Khánúm] Rabbání, *The Priceless Pearl* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969), 149-150.
- ⁷⁵ Fifty known Hands of the Cause have been appointed since 1844. Twenty-seven were alive when Shoghi Effendi died. After his death, no more will be appointed. See Rúhíyyih Rabbání, *The Ministry of the Custodians: An Account of the Stewardship of the Hands of the Cause 1957-1963* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992).
- ⁷⁶ Lynn Echevarria, *Life Histories of Bahá'í Women in Canada* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2011), 158.
- ⁷⁷ See H. M. Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1971).
- ⁷⁸ Rosemary Sala quoted in "Rough Copy by Iona Weinstein, July 1994, p. 4," van den Hoonard, s5, ss4, file 169. Harriet Irving Library, University of New Brunswick. Agnes Parsons became a prominent Bahá'í, hosting 'Abdu'l Bahá in Washington and promoting racial amity. See Mariam Haney, "In Memoriam: Agnes Parsons (1861-1934)," *The Bahá'í World*, 1932-1934, vol. 5, 410-14; and Agnes S. Parsons, Richard V. Hollinger, *'Abdu'l-Bahá in America: Agnes Parsons' Diary, April 11, 1912-November 11, 1912, Supplemented with Episodes from Mahmúd's Diary* (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1996).
- ⁷⁹ Sala quoted in "Conversation with Rosemary and Emeric Sala, p. 4."
- ⁸⁰ May Maxwell, *An Early Pilgrimage*, 12.
- ⁸¹ Rúhíyyih Khánúm quoted in Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 78.
- ⁸² The caricatured guru is reprised in Canadian humorist Mike Myers' 2008 film, *The Love Guru*.
- ⁸³ Stephen Leacock "The Yahi-Bahi Society of Mrs Resselyer-Brown," *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich*, ed. D.M. R. Bentley (New York: John Lane; Toronto: Bell & Cockburn, 1914; Ottawa: The Tecumseh Press, 2002). Leacock lampooned religion in general, and various denominations of Christian clergy, not only the Bahá'ís.
- ⁸⁴ David M. Legate quoted in van den Hoonard, *Origins*, 60. See also Leo Cox, "Fifty Years of Brush and Pen: A Historical Sketch of the Pen and Pencil Club of Montreal" (unpublished manuscript, 1939), 8-10, quoted in Henry B. Yates, "The Lives of Edward and William S. Maxwell," *Canadian Architecture Collection: McGill University*, <http://cac.mcgill.ca/maxwells/essay/01.htm>. See also "Administrative History - Biographical Sketch," Pen and Pencil Club of Montreal fonds (P139) 1890-1966. McCord Museum (Source: City of Montréal Archives).
- ⁸⁵ van den Hoonard, *Origins*, 72.
- ⁸⁶ Stephen Leacock, "The Yahi-Bahi Oriental Society of Mrs Resselyer-Brown," 73-74. There are rare nuggets of truth in Leacock's send-up, for instance, classifying the highly aspirational Bahá'í Faith as a form of Shoodooism.
- ⁸⁷ Stephen Leacock, "The Woman Question," *Essays and Literary Studies* (Plymouth, Great Britain: The Mayflower Press, 1916). In *The Hohenzollerns in America with the Bolsheviks in Berlin and other Impossibilities* (1919). Leacock says, "I am a Liberal Conservative, or, if you will, a Conservative Liberal with a strong dash of sympathy with the Socialist idea, a friend of Labour, and a believer in Progressive Radicalism," quoted in Bentley, xvi.
- ⁸⁸ Rúhíyyih [Khánúm] Rabbani in a public talk in Pierrefonds, PQ, 1995, quoted in Sophie Tamas, *Radical Storytelling with Canadian Bahá'í Women* (MA Thesis, Carleton University, 1999), 74.
- ⁸⁹ Leacock, "The Yahi-Bahi Oriental Society of Mrs Resselyer-Brown," 79.
- ⁹⁰ D.M.R. Bentley, "Editor's Preface," in Leacock, *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich*, xvi.
- ⁹¹ For 'Abdu'l Bahá's reception and press coverage in Montreal, see van den Hoonard, *Origins*, 48-60. A similar complaint to Leacock's was made in *Le Nationaliste*, during 'Abdu'l Bahá's visit, that one needed to travel far and have an "unusual sounding name" like "Abdu'l Baha" to be considered a prophet, whereas if an ordinary person voiced the same ideas, people could take it or leave it (*Origins*, 58-59). Most press coverage was sympathetic. French language coverage was more critical (excepting *Le Devoir*) than the English language press (*Origins*, 60).
- ⁹² Leacock, "The Yahi-Bahi Oriental Society of Mrs Resselyer-Brown," 72.
- ⁹³ Leacock, "The Yahi-Bahi Oriental Society of Mrs Resselyer-Brown," 67.
- ⁹⁴ Leacock, "The Yahi-Bahi Oriental Society of Mrs Resselyer-Brown," 78. Bahá'ís did not favour divorce, but allowed it, unlike a number of faiths and governments of the time.

- ⁹⁵ It was William Sutherland Maxwell that belonged to many clubs. May belonged, at least, to the “Woman’s Club.” May warned Sutherland that clubs might be a waste of time. See Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 227.
- ⁹⁶ Stephen Leacock quoted in Gerald Lynch and Alan T. Davies, *Stephen Leacock: Humour and Humanity* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1988), 12.
- ⁹⁷ Leacock, “The Yahi-Bahi Oriental Society of Mrs Resselyer-Brown,” 80.
- ⁹⁸ Rabbaní, *The Priceless Pearl*, 149-50.
- ⁹⁹ Shoghi Effendi appointed W.S. Maxwell the architect of the Shrine of the Báb and later, a Hand of the Cause.
- ¹⁰⁰ Ironically, in “Women’s Level,” Leacock says, “In the new world we are to make after the war, it must be taken for granted that women are to have all the political rights and professional rights that men have – the right to vote on anything and sit on anything that a man can sit on, a size larger if need be.” He then presents sexist, eugenicist arguments that women should reject careers and have more children to combat “polyglot” immigration. See Stephen Leacock, “Women’s Level,” in *Last Leaves* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1945), 92, 100-101.
- ¹⁰¹ Randi Warne, *Literature as Pulpit: The Christian Social Activism of Nellie L. McClung* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1993), 107.
- ¹⁰² Leacock, “The Yahi-Bahi Oriental Society of Mrs Resselyer-Brown, 68-69.
- ¹⁰³ Leacock quoted in Lynch and Davies, *Stephen Leacock: Humour and Humanity*, 48.
- ¹⁰⁴ Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 43-44.
- ¹⁰⁵ Rúhíyyih Khánúm, 1990 Conference in Buenos Aires, in Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 44.
- ¹⁰⁶ Rúhíyyih Khánúm, “Mother’s Biography,” in Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 5.
- ¹⁰⁷ Kathryn Jewett Hogenson, *Lighting the Western Sky: The Hearst Pilgrimage and the Establishment of the Bahá’í Faith in the West* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2010), 61.
- ¹⁰⁸ See Brian Kurzius, compiler, *Fire & Gold: Benefiting from Life’s Tests* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1995).
- ¹⁰⁹ Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 54.
- ¹¹⁰ May Maxwell, “‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Montreal: Excerpts from her account,” *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Canada*, Rev. Ed. (Thornhill, ON: Bahá’í Canada Publications, 1987) 41-42. The child, who lived across the street, was nine-year-old Geraldine Birks, the grand-daughter of Henry Birks, the Montreal jewelry merchant. Van den Hoonaard reports that the elderly Geraldine, when interviewed in 1991, did not remember the incident. See van den Hoonaard, *Origins*, 46.
- ¹¹¹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of Abdu’l-Baha* (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1978), 107. See also Rabbaní, *The Priceless Pearl*, 149.
- ¹¹² See “transcript of talks given by Mr. [Ali] Nakhjavani and his wife [Violette] whilst in East London, South Africa, 2001,” watsongregory.homestead.com/files/nakhjavai.htm (accessed Mar. 15, 2013).
- ¹¹³ Rowland Estall, Emeric Sala and Rosemary Gillies (later Sala) were elected to the Montreal Local Spiritual Assembly in 1928 or 29. See Rowland Estall, Interview with Rowland Estall and Emeric Sala by Michael Rochester, August 24, 1987, transcribed by D. Cormier, p.30-31, van den Hoonaard, s4, ss4, file 5, Harriet Irving Library, UNB.
- ¹¹⁴ In Bahá’í parlance, “consultation” has very specific parameters, especially when undertaken as a member of a Local Spiritual Assembly. The equality of Assembly members was well known, as Estall demonstrated.
- ¹¹⁵ Rowland Estall, “Interview with Rowland Estall and Emeric Sala by Michael Rochester,” 31.
- ¹¹⁶ For instance, ‘Abdu’l Bahá advised: “To be silent concerning the faults of others, to pray for them and help them - through kindness - to correct their faults....See Ella Wheeler Wilcox, “‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Teacher of Religion, Devotes His Life to Humanity and a New Faith,” *Omaha Nebraska Bee*, Apr. 22, 1912, quoted in *U.S. Bahá’í News*, <http://centenary.bahai.us/news/abdul-baha-teacher-religion-devotes-his-life-humanity-and-new-faith>.
- ¹¹⁷ “Let us also bear in mind that the keynote of the Cause of God is not dictatorial authority but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation.” Shoghi Effendi, “Letter 19, Haifa, Palestine, February 23, 1924,” *Bahá’í Administration* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1974), 63.
- ¹¹⁸ Rowland Estall, “Interview with Rowland Estall and Emeric Sala,” 31.
- ¹¹⁹ The Bahá’í “Lesser Covenant” is a voluntary agreement to follow the dictates of Bahá’u’llah, and be obedient to the “Centre of the Covenant” (‘Abdu’l Bahá), the Guardian (Shoghi Effendi), and the Universal House of Justice.
- ¹²⁰ Lynn Echevarria, *Life Histories of Bahá’í Women in Canada*, American University Studies. Series VII. Theology and Religion (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 21-22.
- ¹²¹ See Robert Stockman, *The Bahá’í Faith in America: Origins 1892-1900* vol.1 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1985) and Robert Stockman, *The Bahá’í Faith in America 1900-1912* vol. 2 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1995).
- ¹²² Maxwell, *An Early Pilgrimage*, 25-26.
- ¹²³ Juliet Thompson, *The Diary of Juliet Thompson* (1947; Los Angeles, Kalimát Press, 1983), 117.

- ¹²⁴ Rúhíyyih Khánum “Mother’s Biography,” 3-4.
- ¹²⁵ Rúhíyyih Khánum, “Mother’s Biography,” 8.
- ¹²⁶ Rúhíyyih Khánum, “Mother’s Biography,” 8.
- ¹²⁷ Rúhíyyih Khánum, “Mother’s Biography,” 7.
- ¹²⁸ Rúhíyyih Khánum, “Mother’s Biography,” 17.
- ¹²⁹ Rúhíyyih Khánum “Mother’s Biography,” 13-19.
- ¹³⁰ Rosemary Sala, “Interview with Rosemary Sala, Toronto, Ontario by Evelyn Raynor, transcribed by D. Cormier. p. 18,” van den Hoonard, s5, ss4, file 169. The interviewer, Evelyn Raynor was a longstanding Toronto Bahá’í.
- ¹³¹ Rúhíyyih Khánum, “Mother’s Biography,” in Nakhjavání, *The Maxwells*, 20.
- ¹³² Rúhíyyih Khánum in “Mother’s Biography,” 8.
- ¹³³ Rúhíyyih Khánum, “Mother’s Biography,” 8-9.
- ¹³⁴ Rúhíyyih Khánum, “Mother’s Biography,” 8-9.
- ¹³⁵ Rúhíyyih Khánum, “Mother’s Biography,” 3.
- ¹³⁶ Rúhíyyih Khánum, “Mother’s Biography,” 20.
- ¹³⁷ Rúhíyyih Khánum, “Mother’s Biography,” 6.
- ¹³⁸ Rúhíyyih Khánum, “Mother’s Biography,” 21.
- ¹³⁹ Rúhíyyih Khánum, “Mother’s Biography,” 7.
- ¹⁴⁰ Loulie Albee Mathews, *Not Every Sea Hath Pearls* (Happy Camp, CA: Naturegraph Publishers, 1986, 1951): 10. Muriel Ives Barrow Newhall, “Tea in Paris...: Told to many of us by Loulie Mathews at Temerity [her Colorado home] c. 1946,” *Mother’s Stories: Stories of Abdu’l-Baha and Early Believers told by Muriel Ives Barrow Newhall to her son Reginald Grant Barrow*, 1970, 1998. Loulie had been a short-term hospital volunteer in France in 1914.
- ¹⁴¹ Newhall, “Tea in Paris.”
- ¹⁴² Mathews, *Not Every Sea Hath Pearls*, 11-12.
- ¹⁴³ Mathews, *Not Every Sea Hath Pearls*, 65-66. See Keith Ransom-Kehler and Lorol Schopflocher, “Notes at Haifa, May 12, 1932,” typescript in Horace Holley Papers, USNBA.
- ¹⁴⁴ Coincidentally, ‘Abdu’l Bahá also enjoined Martha Root to “become self-sacrificing” and travel “to the different parts of the globe and roar like unto a lion in the Kingdom of God.” See ‘Abdul-Baha Abbas, “To the maid servant of God, Martha L. Root, Cambridge Springs, Pa,” trans. Shoghi Rabbani, January 10, 1919. Haifa, Palestine. *Star of the West* 10, no.2 (Jalal 1, 75; April 9, 1919): 30.
- ¹⁴⁵ Mathews, *Not Every Sea Hath Pearls*, 76. The hotel was the *Martha Washington*, previously the *Women’s Hotel*.
- ¹⁴⁶ Mathews, *Not Every Sea Hath Pearls*, 71.
- ¹⁴⁷ Mathews, *Not Every Sea Hath Pearls*, 4-5, 9.
- ¹⁴⁸ Mathews, *Not Every Sea Hath Pearls*, 71-72. Shoghi Effendi says Martha “was equipped with a handful of inadequately translated leaflets.” Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 398.
- ¹⁴⁹ Mathews, *Not Every Sea Hath Pearls*, 72.
- ¹⁵⁰ Mathews, *Not Every Sea Hath Pearls*, 104.
- ¹⁵¹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan* (1916-17; Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1959).
- ¹⁵² Holley, “May Ellis Maxwell,” 527.
- ¹⁵³ For an example of popular community use of heroism, see historical charts of heroes at “Bahá’í Story Telling” <http://members.shaw.ca/lovelight/BahaiStorytelling.htm>. A pragmatic use is Susan Gammage, Bahá’í Life Coach, “A Great Gap to be Crossed: Lessons from the Bahá’í Martyrs,” <http://susangammage.com/a-great-gap-to-be-crossed>
- ¹⁵⁴ Holley, “May Ellis Maxwell” 51.
- ¹⁵⁵ Anne Savage quoted by Rosemary Sala in “Info, received from Rosemary Sala by Ilona Sala - (now Weinstein)” p. 2, van den Hoonard, s5 ss4, file 170, Harriet Irving Library, University of New Brunswick.
- ¹⁵⁶ Doris MacKay, quoted in Echevarria, *Life Histories of Bahá’í Women in Canada*, 22.
- ¹⁵⁷ Echevarria, *Life Histories of Bahá’í Women in Canada*, 26-27.
- ¹⁵⁸ Echevarria, *Life Histories of Bahá’í Women in Canada*, 116-17.
- ¹⁵⁹ Shoghi Effendi, “Their God-Given Task,” 39-40. It was fairly unusual for Shoghi Effendi to mention individuals.
- ¹⁶⁰ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “Talk Given by ‘Abdu’l Bahá at 780 West End Avenue, New York City (Home of Mr. and Mrs. E. B. Kinney) April 17, Notes by John G. Grundy,” *Star of the West* 3, no. 10 (Ezzat; September 8, 1912): 9.
- ¹⁶¹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “Talk at 309 West Seventy-eighth Street, New York, 15 June 1912, Notes by Howard MacNutt,” in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* (Wilmette, IL: US Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), 190.
- ¹⁶² Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, IL: US Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1971), 386.

CONCLUSION: BAHÁ'Í MILLENNIAL FEMINISM AND THE NEW WORLD ORDER

One of the bounties of the Bahá'í Revelation is that women of heavenly capacities can never more be hindered by the ancient stupid form of male supremacy, but may rise to help in the establishment of the New World Order, and of peace and good will to all mankind.

(Ruhaniyyih) Ruth J. Moffett, "Abdu'l Bahá's Historic Meeting with Jane Addams," *Star of the West* 25:12 (March 1935): 365.

This study, using May Maxwell as a focal point linking a group of western early Bahá'í women, reveals that women played a key formative role between 1898 and 1940 in the creation of distinctive worldviews, mythologies, and feminist reform enterprises that strengthened female religious identity and broadened women's leadership role in the emerging western Bahá'í community. This dissertation argues that Bahá'í women's commitment to the establishment of a millennial new World Order, predicated on women's spiritual and social equality, underpinned the development of a unique form of Bahá'í millennial religious feminism that can be located within the spectrum of western feminisms. Although aspects of the reform activities of western Bahá'í women resembled those of other groups, Bahá'í women were distinct from other first-wave/interwar feminists, millennial movements, missionary women and reformers, for their religious base, institutional structure, and the transnational worldview that shaped their efforts.

The foundation of Bahá'í millennial feminism was the doctrinal imperative recognizing and promoting the spiritual and social equality of women. This doctrine was firmly embedded in the sacred writings of the religion, which was founded in Persia in 1844 by the Báb, the Prophet-forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh, whose followers after 1863 became known as Bahá'ís. The equality of women was also strongly encouraged in the early twentieth century by the Faith's appointed central leadership, in the persons of 'Abdu'l Bahá Abbas, the son of Bahá'u'lláh, and His successor, Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, the grandson of 'Abdu'l Bahá. The absence of a professional clerical class, and the less hierarchical administrative structures and consultative practices adopted by Bahá'ís, were more inclusive of women, minorities, and other marginalized populations, encouraging their leadership. Firm institutional support meant that Bahá'í women, unlike most other religiously motivated feminists, were not in conflict with their own organization's history, precepts, or leadership.

Bahá'í doctrine also enjoined men to advance women's equality, in an effort to make the world, both ideologically and practically, more equitable and gender-balanced. Bahá'ís adopted the compelling metaphor, advanced by 'Abdu'l Bahá, of men and women being the "two wings" of humanity, needing equal development and strength to progress. Therefore, Bahá'ís posited that it was in men's best interests to encourage the equality of women. In keeping with gradualist Bahá'í methodologies, and with the guidance of the central leadership, female equality was implemented to the degree that diverse cultural and political circumstances would allow. Although the Bahá'í feminist vision of equality was not always immediately or consistently realized in the early years, it nonetheless remained as a fundamental organizational mandate. These features, religious millennialism, a doctrinal commitment to female equality, and

unequivocal support by the highest leadership, distinguished Bahá'í millennial feminism from most other early twentieth-century religious and millenarian movements, which typically did not foreground female equality as a primary conceptual and organizational goal.

As part of the process of transforming individual and collective identities to better conform to a Bahá'í religious feminist ideal, western women developed new origin myths. They held up as female archetypes a Bahá'í re-visioned image of Mary Magdalene, framed as the heroic leader of the male Christian disciples, and the idealized figure of Persian Bábí poet Táhirih, recast in the west as a bold, independent, feminist “suffrage martyr.” The fashioning of these female religious exemplars incorporated syncretic aspects of eastern and western culture, as well as the beginnings of a distinctively Bahá'í mythology that aspired to globalism.

Bahá'í feminism strove not only to make women more equal with men, but to establish a less androcentric, more gender-equal global civilization which privileged stereotypically “feminine” virtues as much as stereotypically “masculinised” attributes. Bahá'í feminist discourse was mainly focussed on equality of the sexes. However, Bahá'í doctrine acknowledged a degree of complementarity in gender roles, and urged a higher valuation of traditionally feminized roles such as child-rearing. It espoused a universal maternalism, delinked from biological maternity. Maternalist rhetoric was particularly evident in peace efforts. It also appeared in discussions of female education, which was to be preferred to male education if circumstances did not allow both. Although offering some maternalist supports, it neither advocated nor required gender-role separation, as was common in socio-cultural ideologies which promoted “separate spheres,” or enforced sex-segregation. Bahá'í scriptures did not limit women's role to a domestic one. They stressed the necessity for universal suffrage, and insisted that all avenues of education, employment, and public life must be open to women. The single exception was that women were discouraged from (not barred from) active military service, if not required by law. The Bahá'í writings declared that men and women were more similar than different. Existing inequitable gender roles and notions of female inferiority were attributed to women's historic lack of opportunities, and therefore amenable to change. These false perceptions of inequality, Bahá'ís suggested, could be best remedied through education, especially of females, and by enlisting men's support for women's equal status.

The overarching goal of Bahá'í millennial religious feminism was to build a peaceful, equitable global civilization, a new World Order, in which strong female contributions, identities, and leadership were key. Within an ideal Bahá'í worldview, there was virtually no separation between religious practice and “life,” as was demonstrated in the lives of “exemplary” women such as May Maxwell and Lua Getsinger. This required significant, sometimes uncomfortable, adjustments from traditional gender patterns on the part of adherents, spouses, and family members. Bahá'í women who were able to actively participate in the affairs of the Faith were more likely to be either single, or have more supportive, egalitarian, companionate marriages than was the norm, a pattern also seen with other prominent western feminists. For Bahá'í women, the most direct reform effort to achieve their vision of a regenerated planet was to increase the size, organization, diversity, and commitment of their faith community to better accomplish their goals. The definition of Bahá'í “teaching,” a personal responsibility incumbent on every follower in a faith without clergy, was so broad that most of the time and efforts of the itinerant group who are the subject of this study went to “teaching” at home and abroad. Like

other religiously motivated “first-wave” feminists and missionizing women, Bahá’í women promoted their faith either directly by disseminating their ideas through literature, the press and public meetings, or indirectly through nurturing spiritual growth, “living the life,” philanthropy, providing hospitality, and engaging in interpersonal relationships. Many undertook reform efforts, homefront and overseas “pioneering,” and extensive local, national, or international “travel-teaching.” The efficacy of “teaching” (or accomplishing any goal) was held to be dependent on one’s character, purity of motive, prayer, unity, and other spiritual intangibles.

In keeping with the idea that the implementation of any principle affected the success of all other principles underpinning the new global society, Bahá’í feminists framed prominent early twentieth-century reform efforts such as education, racial equality, and peace, as positive contributions to gender equality, and vice-versa. Education was seen both as an end in itself and a primary methodology for achieving other doctrinal objectives. Bahá’ís supported universal education, particularly of women and girls, helping to establish schools in North America, Iran, and other countries. In western countries there was a strong interest in new pedagogies, and Bahá’ís like May Maxwell were drawn to progressive methods such as those of Maria Montessori. Another major educational initiative undertaken by Bahá’í women was the attempt to implement an auxiliary universal language, seen as essential to global peace and understanding, as well as an aid to international political, educational, and scientific cooperation. Bahá’ís argued that when all peoples had equal access to education and a common auxiliary language, disparities and barriers between genders, classes, and racial, ethnic, national, and linguistic groups would be reduced. International institutions, elected by universal suffrage, which were foreseen as a part of the new World Order, could then enact more gender-equitable legislation and establish fairer, regulated, international legal and economic systems.

Western Bahá’í women also actively supported and participated in other non-partisan movements that coincided with the Bahá’í agenda, such as women’s and peace movements, and early efforts to establish an internationalist framework of law and governance, beginning with the League of Nations. Women like Martha Root and Agnes Alexander had strong links with the widespread Esperanto organization, whose founder L.L. Zamenhof shared their universalist ideals and a commitment to the institution of an auxiliary universal language. However, when internal divisions fractured the Esperanto movement, precipitating its decline, the Bahá’ís largely disengaged from collaboration with the group. Although a doctrinal imperative to promote the adoption of a universal auxiliary language remained, Bahá’í efforts to establish an auxiliary language waned after World War Two. Associations with “like-minded” religious and reform organizations like the Esperantists, “alternative” spiritual groups like the Theosophists, and feminist movements like the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), helped to further Bahá’í goals, as well as giving women of the small Bahá’í community welcome moral support, practical assistance, and hospitality in their activities and travels, many of which they undertook alone. Collaboration with other groups linked Bahá’í women into much larger international organizational and social support networks, allowing them to share their Bahá’í millennial principles more widely with others.

Although having much in common with the “first-wave” women’s movement of the time, in many ways, Bahá’í feminism also resembled aspects of what is known as the “third wave” of western feminism. The Bahá’í organizational model was globally-minded in origin, ideology and

practice, unlike other international first-wave and interwar women's organizations which originated and remained grounded in western values, with predominantly western leadership in spite of attempts to obtain wider representation. Unlike most international women's and peace organizations, the Bahá'í adherence to a unified global vision that eschewed nationalist or partisan stances prevented the group from being badly damaged by divisive internal imperialist, anti-colonialist or nationalistic political contention or sectarianism. Even the First and Second World Wars did not fundamentally impair their collective efforts, beyond the disruptions in communication which accompanied these spasms of violence. Their common identity was that of "world citizens" building a new World Order. They saw the achievement of their ambitious millenarian goal of globally instituting Bahá'í reform principles, which they hoped would lead to cooperative human relations based on social justice and ideals of "unity in diversity," as superseding limiting affiliations and nationalisms and driven by a "higher purpose."

Bahá'í millenarian religious feminism was conspicuous among its first-wave counterparts for its non-western origins, transnational base, and the degree to which it sought to level distinctions of class, creed, nationality, gender, and religious heritage within Bahá'í communities and in the greater society. Racio-ethnic equality, integration and harmony were key goals. Bahá'ís avoided eugenic ideologies, supported anti-prejudice efforts, and worked to broaden diversity within their faith community. In order to bridge racial, cultural, class, and gender divides, and strengthen community bonds locally, nationally, and internationally, the early Bahá'ís strove to develop close fictive family ties of global "motherhood," "sisterhood" and "brotherhood." This fictive family model also provided a "friendship economy" which offered women spiritual, psychological, and practical resources and supports, allowing women greater autonomy, independence and mobility. A diverse, expanding, international religious base allowed Bahá'í feminists to engage in more egalitarian reciprocal collaboration between women of various cultures, races and nationalities.

Bahá'ís strongly believed that racial, cultural, religious, and other prejudices that divided humanity must be overcome. Bahá'í women resisted the Victorian-Edwardian myth of the home as idealized private sanctuary, trying to emulate instead "Abdu'l Bahá's home," by creating an inviting space in homes and communities open to people of a diverse mix of backgrounds. Perhaps the most radical of their anti-prejudice initiatives was to encourage interracial, cross-class, and cross-cultural intermarriage. Such marriages became increasingly common, modelled at the highest level by May Maxwell's daughter, (Mary) Rúhíyyih Khánum, in her 1937 marriage to Persian Bahá'í leader Shoghi Effendi, which Bahá'ís interpreted as symbolically uniting east and west. Although in some instances, early twentieth-century western Bahá'ís reflected the Orientalism endemic to Euro-American culture, because of their adherence to a religion with eastern origins and leadership, their greater understanding of eastern cultural and individual diversity, and their close identification with their eastern co-religionists, western Bahá'ís were less likely than other westerners to conceive of the "Orient" as a monolithic (backward, inferior) counterpoint to the (progressive, modern) "Occident." Although western Bahá'ís occasionally voiced Orientalist tropes about uplifting eastern women from oppression, they primarily acted to assist eastern-initiated and directed diplomatic, medical, educational, and feminist reform efforts.

There were strong ideological, institutional, and emotional ties between western and eastern Bahá'í communities, and westerners adopted some of the foundational eastern Bábí-

Bahá'í origin myths which valorized sacrifice and martyrdom. A form of equivalency, initiated by Bahá'u'lláh, and further developed by 'Abdu'l Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, was created within the larger Bahá'í mythos between the blood sacrifices of mainly male (and some female) eastern martyrs, and the "living" sacrifices of western women (and some men). May Maxwell and Keith Ransom-Kehler were two such western early Bahá'í females officially recognized as "martyrs."

As early as the 1898-1902 Paris days, May Maxwell, along with her spiritual "mother" Lua Getsinger, and other prominent Bahá'í women connected with them, came to be seen by western believers as near-hagiographic female apostles of the Faith. The development of these more culturally accessible western female models conformed to modernist and feminist mythological patterns of heroization. Average, even weak or flawed *women* (i.e. not men) such as the ailing May Maxwell, the "timid" Agnes Alexander, and the frumpy, poor, ill Martha Root could, after being providentially "chosen," and divinely assisted by the transformative power of the "new revelation," arise to save the world. Within the Bahá'í community, this band of women became the première exponents and western exemplars of the Faith. These western female religious paradigms, who exhibited many of the qualities identified with feminist ideals of the self-reliant, independent, self-actualizing, "modern" woman, acted as inspirational models for their peers and succeeding generations.

Overall, Bahá'í women saw their feminism as an integral part of the inculcation of Bahá'í principles and prescriptions, and the implementation of substantive reform efforts that would further the establishment of a peaceful, more equitable, global World Order. These efforts were construed as being inseparably linked and mutually dependent upon each other for success. For Bahá'ís, both men and women, *all* personal, philanthropic, religious, and reform efforts carried an imperative to conceive of and implement them in gender-equitable ways, giving rise to a more universalist, integrative form of feminist activism.

In summary, this dissertation establishes that a select group of western women associated with May Maxwell not only exemplified a form of "first wave" millenarian religious feminism in their adoption and promotion of the Bahá'í movement and its mythology, but, more significantly, worked to inaugurate a new World Order predicated on the spiritual and social equality of women. This group championed a unique organizational structure and a transnational, global perspective that propelled them to female leadership both as inspirational models and agents of practical change. By exploring the ways in which Bahá'í doctrines influenced the beliefs, mythologies, relationships, and activities of this group of western women, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the diversities of early twentieth-century women's history, first-wave feminisms, transnational, millennial and social reform movements, and female religious expression.

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