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BAHĀ’Ī IDENTITY AND THE CONCEPT OF MARTYRDOM

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ABSTRACT
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The Bahā’īs have been persecuted in Iran for the greater part of the existence of this movement, especially during the 1850’s and the period after 1979. The persecution has been a dominating part of the Bahā’ī history and an active part of the creation of a special Bahā’ī identity. This persecution could probably have been avoided if the Bahā’īs had chosen to hide their religious believes but this has generally not happened and this makes a difference from the Shī’a identity. The Bahā’ī identity seems to form the basis of a martyr ideology as well as a servant ideology. The martyr ideology is, however, not an independent ideology but is rather an aspect of the servant ideology of Bahā’ī and can be traced to early Bābī texts.

The servant ideology in Bahā’ī has been used in the building of the special Bahā’ī administration, that has been developed gradually from the time of Bahā’u’llāh. This administration has been used as a tool to keep together the two different Bahā’ī identities: the Western identity, based on Christian Messianic expectations, and the Eastern identity based on Mahdī expectation in Shī’a Islam. The Bahā’ī administration has been used as a tool to diminish the effects of the persecutions in Iran and in this way the persecutions have served as an agent to unite these separate identities.

The reaction of the Bābī and Bahā’ī movement has differed during different periods. During the first period, the 1840’s, the Islamic concept of jihad still existed among the Bābīs who met the persecution in some instances with sword in hand in defence. This was not in accordance with the instruction of the Bāb and in the persecution of the 1850’s there were no attempts from the Bābīs to defend themselves in any way. Important for the change of attitude among the Bābīs was the conference 1848 in Badash, where Bahā’u’llāh was the driving force. What made the Shah in Iran avoid any more national persecutions was probably the reaction of representatives of Western governments, but the persecutions continued on a local level. When the persecutions started on a larger scale again in 1979 the servant ideology of the Bahā’īs in Iran took the form of a martyr ideology and the Bahā’ī communities in other parts of the world could co-operate with the international community with the goal to stop the persecution, using diplomatic ways, by drawing upon the servant ideology that functioned as the motivating force in the Bahā’ī communities.

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To Ishráq
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CHAPTER 1
Introduction

1.1 The Theme

The theme of this study is the development of a special Bahá’í identity that is separated from a Shí’a identity, especially regarding the aspect of the persecutions and the concept of martyrdom of the Bábís and the Bahá’ís\(^1\) in Iran during the 19th and 20th centuries\(^2\) and how this has been instrumental in developing this new identity. Seen from the viewpoint of Shí’a Islam, the persecution of the Iranian Bahá’ís is primarily an internal question of how to deal with a religious minority that has turned its back on the Religion of God. Different kinds of minorities can be a problem in every society and the main solutions to this problem seems to be either to accept the minority, to ignore it or to oppress it. In Islam the situation of the religious minorities has been regulated within the framework of the Sharí’a law, but only if these minorities have been one of the accepted minorities. In the case of the Iranian Bahá’ís, they have not been accepted and could not become so as Bahá’u’lláh claimed to have divine revelations after Muḥammad, which is impossible according to Islamic tradition. The way to treat this minority that once started as a Mahdī movement and developed into a religious minority in the present Iranian community, has therefore been persecution and oppression.

\(^1\) In the internal way of writing in Bahá’í it is written Bábí and Bahá’í, as this way of transcribing is recommended by Shoghi Effendi. The religion itself is internally called the Bahá’í Faith. In quotations and in book titles I will not change the internal way of writing. The complete way of transcribing can be found in *The Bahá’í World*, Vol. XIII (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1956), p. 1161.

\(^2\) During the persecution the Islamic republic there have been different kinds of discrimination and persecution. There has also been a threat that the total number of Bahá’ís in Iran would be killed, which would have meant perhaps 300,000 persons. In a booklet from 1993, *The Bahá’í Question* (New York: Bahá’í International Community, 1993), the total number of Bahá’ís being killed during the period 1979-1993 is, however, limited to 201 persons.
The aim of this dissertation is to study the development of the concept of Bahā’ī identity, especially with regard to martyrdom as it is presented in the Bahā’ī writings, and how it has developed during these persecutions. This period is the same as the period of existence of this religion – from 1844 until today. Special focus will however be put on the two periods of national persecution: in the 1840’s and 1850’s and during the Islamic revolution in Iran. Another focus is the concept of martyrdom in Bahā’ī in general. This development during this period is rather complex and might even seem strange, or at least unexpected. The Bābī/Bahā’ī movement started as a Mahdī movement in the middle of the 19th century where it took forms that, to the world at large, looked like a semi-political Mahdī revolt. In the next stage, after only a few years, it turned into a much more introvert movement that shunned all politics and that, in many ways, disappeared from the interest of the surrounding world. Perhaps it might be possible, during this period, to compare the Bahā’īs to certain Sufi movements, at least from the perspective of the surrounding world. Up to this point the development is not so problematic to understand. It has been discussed by others and explained in different ways. One of these explanations was given in the Great Soviet Encyclopedia3, where the Bābī movement was described as a popular revolution and the Bahā’ī religion as the bourgeois reaction.

The unexpected part comes a century after this, at the time of the Islamic revolution in Iran. When the world turned its eyes once again to this movement, it found a movement that had changed once again in a radical way. Now it was spread on an international level and, while still turning away from party politics, was able to function in an effective way in a global environment that had existed for only for a few decades. The development of Bahā’ī from being an Iranian Mahdī movement of the mid 19th century to become an international religious network in the late 20th century has been

discussed by other authors although not from the perspective of identity development. This problem will be discussed in its relationship to the persecution of the Iranian Bahāʾīs and the reaction of the Bahāʾī community at large to this persecution.

1.1.1 The Persecution of the Bahāʾīs in Iran

Iran is a vast country with a less centralised administration than European countries. Starting a national wave of persecution requires a very special situation and this is probably the reason why this has happened only twice. The incident that triggered the national wave of persecution in 1853 was an attempt to murder the shah, made by two Bābis, which seems to be a result of the persecutions of the 1840’s and the execution of the Bāb. There was nothing to suggest that the leaders of the Bābī community were behind this attempt, but the mere fact that they were Bābis was enough to start this wave of persecution. At other times during this century there was nobody sufficiently high up in the hierarchy to start a national wave of persecution. Moreover, the horror shown by the foreign diplomatic representatives during the 1853 persecution must have cooled off the shah’s possible wishes to continue the national waves of persecution of the Bābis/Bahāʾīs. This most surely became even truer as the influences of Russia and Britain increased during the later part of the 19th century.

The situation during the Islamic revolution has been quite different. The persecution of the Bahāʾīs has to a certain extent been a national issue and in the beginning there was nothing to stop it. ‘Ulamāʾ were organized on a national level and were able to use the full force of modern media. After a few years the situation changed somewhat. Once again the pressure from foreign powers put an end to the persecution, at least most of the executions. The international situation had, however, changed in the sense that there were no longer merely a few strong colonial powers as during the first period of national persecution. Instead there was a collective striving of more or
less the entire international community. The driving force behind it was the Bahá’í community that had grown to become a part of this international community, which made it possible to influence its different members to highlight this issue up to a point where Iran’s government decided to put an end to the executions. This growth was not primarily in number, as Bahá’í has never been a numerically large movement. It was rather the product of a growth in organization, which started in the 19th century and continued into the end of the 20th century.

A key to understanding this development is to understand the ideas behind it and the major forces involved. This set of ideas is called “the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh” in Bahá’í terminology: In contrast to order, represented by the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, stands the chaos of the present world order:

The world is in travail, and its agitation waxeth day by day. Its face is turned towards waywardness and unbelief. Such shall be its plight, that to disclose it now would not be meet and seemly. Its perversity will long continue. And when the appointed hour is come, there shall suddenly appear that which shall cause the limbs of mankind to quake. Then, and only then, will the Divine Standard be unfurled, and the Nightingale of Paradise warble its melody.

Central to the concept of the “World Order of Bahá’u’lláh” is the concept of martyrdom that grew out of the concept of shahíd (Arabic), especially in its basic meaning, witness. When Bahá’í moved away from its Shí’í background, this was connected with another central concept, the concept of ‘servanthood’, ‘abd (Arabic) or bandeh (Persian). In this way the ideal of shahíd in the World order of Bahá’u’lláh developed to become an accepted and very much respected aspect of the concept of ‘abd, but not

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4 About 5 million members today. (Homepage of the Bahá’í world center at Internet, 97-03-27).
5 This set of ideas, based on the idea of a present chaos and future order, is central to the world view of the Bahá’í religion. In the Bahá’í writings, it is a vision of a future global society that will develop under the influence of Bahá’í.
the only one. Other important ways of being a servant is to spread the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh and to serve in the Bahá’í administration.

1.1.2 Scholarly Background to the study of the Persecution of the Iranian Bahá’ís.

The scholarly study of Bahá’í by westeners started at a very early stage of its history. During the time of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá there were primarily scholars from France, Great Britain and Russia. In the first generation of scholars, the aim was to describe the Bábís. The most important contribution was made by the French scholar Count de Gobineau in his book *Religions et Philosophie dans l’Asie Central*. The next French scholar was A.L.M. Nicholas. His most famous books on this subject were *Siyyid Ali Muhammed, dit le Báb* and *Essaies sur le Bábism*. Among the Russian scholars, the most well known is probably the Russian ambassador Count Dolgorokov, who was part of founding a tradition of Bahá’í studies in Russia. This tradition was broken by the Russian revolution. At about the same time the British and French traditions of Bahá’í studies ended. Of all these scholars, Professors E.G. Browne, is, no doubt, the most important one and the one who has made the most serious attempts to study Bábism and Bahá’í and to put them into a general frame of the history of religions, not only describe it.

The background of this early interest in Bahá’í studies was, no doubt, the presence of Britain and Russia in Iran during the 19th century and the general interest of France in this region. It was most probably the presence of these foreign powers, especially Russia and Great Britain, that stopped any national persecution of the Bahá’ís during the later part of the 19th

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century, so the scholars of these two countries had an important role to play. This is especially true for Professor E.G. Browne.7

When E.G. Browne started to study the Bahá’í religion, there was nothing more for him to see than a Persian religious movement, with a background in an earlier Mahdī movement and this movement was not without parallels in other countries where the British had some kind of interest. The fact that only five years separated the persecution of the Bábís in Iran 1852 and the Indian mutiny 1857 was probably not irrelevant to him. His journey to Iran 1887-8 and his meeting with Bahá’u’lláh 1890 took place at a time when India was a Crown colony and the British were in control of southern Iran. This does not necessarily mean that his interest in Iran was directly coloured by any imperialistic ideology, but he must be seen as a part of his own culture. Therefore it is necessary to see him with the Orientalist discussion as a background, which is also true for the study of the other Western scholars.

One of the main issues for E.G. Browne was, however, to study the development of the Bábí/Bahá’í community as it appeared in the last decades of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century. To him, the most important question was the question of legitimacy: whether Bahá’u’lláh was the rightful leader of the Bábí community or not and his answer to this was that he was not the rightful leader. He interpreted the situation in such a way that it was instead Mírza Yahyá who could claim this kind of authority8 and the main reason for this conclusion seems to be that there was a document

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7 Because of his general studies of the Iranian culture, he is held in great esteem in Iran. His statue in Tehran is said to be the only statue of a European that was spared during the rule of Dr. Mossadeq. Browne, M. “E.G. Browne: Biographical note”, The New History of Mirzá ‘Alí Muhammed The Báb (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1975 (1893)), p. iv.

8 This does not mean that E.G. Browne should be considered to be a member of that group of Bábís that were called Azaliyyih. To him this was no doubt primarily a question of academic analysis where the study of documents was of central importance.
supporting his claim, while he could not find any similar document to support the claim of Bahá’u’lláh.

In his introduction to the English version of *Nuqtatu’l-Káf*, he commented upon the situation of the Bábí/Bahá’í communities in those days. First he stated that there were four categories of Bábís: 1) Bayání, who had accepted neither Mírzá Yahyá nor Bahá’u’lláh. 2) Azaliyí, who had accepted the leadership of Mirza Yahyá, but not Bahá’u’lláh as *Him whom God will make manifest*. 3) Those Bahá’ís, who had accepted Bahá’u’lláh, but not ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the *Center of the Covenant*. Instead they were followers of his half-brother, Muḥammad -Aff. 4) Those Bahá’ís, who had also accepted ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the *Center of the Covenant*. E.G. Browne’s comment is: “… it is curious to observe … how in the Bábí church the “stationary” or conservative party seems ever doomed to defeat.” Seen from the perspective of British colonial experience, he is no doubt right that this tendency is unusual among religious movements. Obviously he was here alluding to the fact that there had been very dramatic changes taking place in the Bahá’í history. What he could not foresee at that moment was that there were more dramatic changes to come. This was written before ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s travel to North America, before the publication of the *Tablets of the*

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10 The book was published in 1910.
13 Perhaps “revolution” is the only proper word to describe this pattern of development in Bahá’í history. Each step has come comparatively fast and has had a revolutionary effect on the Bahá’í community, which means that usage of the word “revolution” is in accordance with its normal definition in political sciences. This means that there have appeared at least four revolutions in the Bahá’í history: 1) When Bahá’u’lláh appeared as “Him whom God will make manifest” 2) When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was appointed “Center of the covenant” 3) When Shoghi Effendí was appointed as “Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith” 4) When the Universal House of Justice
Divine Plan and the Will and Testament’ of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā. It was also before the time of the Guardianship of Shoghi Effendi, which developed Bahā’ī in a perhaps even more dramatic way. Thus there is no question that Bahā’ī has had a history of dramatic changes and experience of willingness to take new steps of development, which confirms what E.G. Browne says in his commentary.

Shoghi Effendi has given a Bahā’ī version on the periods going up to 1944:

In its broadest outline the first century of the Bahā’ī Era may be said to comprise the Heroic, the Primitive, the Apostolic Age of the Faith of Bahā’u’llāh, and also the initial stages of the Formative, the Transitional, the Iron Age which is to witness the crystallization and shaping of the creative energies released by His Revelation. The first eighty years of this century may roughly be said to have covered the entire period of the first age, while the last two decades may be regarded as having witnessed the beginnings of the second.¹⁴

The heroic age and the formative age are believed to be followed by a future golden age, where Bahā’ī has been accepted by a majority of the peoples of the world and where the Bahā’ī administration has been fully developed and the world order been established on peace and justice. These periods reflect the vision of Bahā’ī, but up to 1944 it can be based on historical facts. What Shoghi Effendi calls the “heroic” period, is the period that is led by the Bāb, Bahā’u’llāh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahā. These three were functioning as charismatic prophets, as defined in the history of religions. In Bahā’ī writings, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā is not called a prophet and this is underlined in many places by himself. Still his way of functioning as a leader of the Bahā’ī community corresponds with the definition of a charismatic prophet, and therefore he is seen as such in this study. The period that Shoghi Effendi is referring to as the formative age starts with the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā

was elected and the Bahā’ī community for the first time stood without any individual leader.

¹⁴ Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p. xiii.
and the naming of Shoghi Effendi as “Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith”. Shoghi Effendi could not be called a charismatic prophet, although he is thought of as being lead by the Holy Spirit in his function as the Guardian. His way of leading the community was the building up of an administration and the training of the believers to be a part of this administration. Therefore I find it correct to see the period of his leadership as different from the period of the charismatic prophets, although the authority of this administration basically rest upon the personal authority of Shoghi Effendi as the “Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith”. I would like to classify it as a transitional period that is post-prophetic but still not with a fully developed theocratic system.

It was, however, not possible for the scholars in the 19th century and early 20th century to see this development. Those scholars that are taking part in the discussion on Bábí and Bahá’í today seem to accept this periodisation, although the terminology of Shoghi Effendi might not be used.

The religious identity in Bahá’í cannot be described as a pure Oriental identity, which must have been what E.G. Browne expected, and not as a purely Western. The Oriental identity can be described as a traditional identity where religious identity and ethnic identity grew to become one and this is not how Bahá’í identity can be described. The Western identity, where the religious identity has more or less disappeared has also no likeness with Bahá’í identity. It is also difficult to describe Bahá’í identity as a sectarian identity in either Oriental or Western background. The main reason for this is that such an identity must be defined by its attempts to put up very strict boundaries towards the society at large, which is not typical for Bahá’í, although Bahá’í identity is not without boundaries.

1.2 Method

It is a problem in the study of the Bahá’í religion as a part of the history of religions in that very little scholarly study on Bahá’í has been done. Other parts of history of religions have, however, a scholarly tradition
to refer to and it is of course possible to make use of this. Once one has decided to study Bahá’í as a part of history of religions, one has to decide whether it should be done within the framework of Islamic studies, Iranic studies or as a modern religion among others. The Bahá’í religion was born in an Islamic country and has developed in this environment. At the same time, ancient Iran has been a living part of that culture and has been a part of the background of Bahá’í. To study Bahá’í as a part of Islamic studies means that one is working with a marginal phenomenon, as Bahá’í is not a part of Islam and is naturally not of central interest in Islamic studies. To study Bahá’í as a part of Iranic studies, one has to remember that a large part of the history of the Bahá’í religion takes part outside Iran and that others than Iranians are taking an active part in its development. When studied as a modern religion, again Bahá’í is not of central interest, as the focus in this field is on the 20th century, often even on the period after the Second World War. There are, however, other modern religious movements that started in the 19th century that can be taken into comparative discussions, especially as many of these, like the Bahá’í religion, have their background in Messianic expectations. However, they have in common that they have to be studied primarily from the perspective of their own religious background, with possible comparative discussions when needed.

The main aspect of the method in the study, however, is the aspect of identity. The development of the Bahá’í identity is the theme of the study and especially seen as an aspect of the concept of martyrdom. Central to identity is the aspect of continuity and thus it is important to find this continuity in the Bahá’í identity. As the persecutions have showed that the Bahá’í martyrs prefer to die instead of changing their religion, even in a merely outward sense, I will look upon the Bahá’í identity as an identity that has a strong line of continuity. This method will put emphasize on the internal development of the identity as it tries to find out not only what different
parts this identity consists of, but also and primarily, the nature of the continuity of this identity, which is the force that keeps it together.

1.2.1 Outline of the Study

The study will consist of six main chapters, apart from the introduction in chapter one, each with a different discussion regarding aspects of identity and the persecution. In the second chapter, “Religious identity” I will discuss the concept of religious identity, which I will use as the basic concept to explain the background of the Bahá‘í martyrs. Especially important in this discussion is the process of role taking, as the concept of martyrdom is closely related to this process.

In the third chapter, “Martyr ideology and servant ideology” the process of role taking is expanded to form a pattern that is discussed in a comparative discussion. The aim of the discussion is to discuss the process of forming a religious identity with the background of an experience of persecution. In the fourth chapter, “Two waves of persecution”, I will discuss the two national waves of persecution of the Bábís and the Bahá‘ís. The aim of this chapter is to gain a perspective on the experience of persecution on a societal level as well as on an individual level.

In the fifth chapter, “Bahá‘í identity in the perspective of East and West”, I will define and discuss the aspect of Eastern and Western cultures in Bahá‘í. Bahá‘u’lláh is described as the promised one in all religions by Bahá‘í, which potentially can become a problem when seekers from different religions with different expectations accept Bahá‘u’lláh as the fulfilment of their respective religion. This problem has arisen in Bahá‘í history: Bahá‘ís from Iran, with a background in the martyr ideology of Shí‘a Islam, has accepted Bahá‘u’lláh as the Promised One,15 and Western Bahá‘ís with a

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15 When someone accepts Bahá‘u’lláh as a messenger from the Divine reality, it is not necessarily in accordance with the exact claims of Bahá‘u’lláh, but it will most
background in Christian Messianic expectations, would get a common religious identity in order to co-operate within the same religious community. Unlike the Iranian Bahāʾīs, the Western Bahāʾīs did not bring a living consciousness of martyrdom in everyday life from their religious background into the Bahāʾī community, but their Christian background did provide a living consciousness of servanthood. To the Iranian Bahāʾīs the concept of martyrdom had been kept alive, not only because of the common religious culture of Iran but also because the persecution of them could arise at any moment. The Western Bahāʾīs had little experience of religious persecutions and the concept of martyrdom was not a living concept to them. The concept of servitude was, however, well known and was in Bahāʾī exemplified by ʿAbduʾl-Bahā who was the living centre of their faith, thereby direct relating to their Christian background. This had a practical aspect as well as an aspect in principle, which became obvious during the periods of persecutions in Iran when this persecution was reacted upon by countries and organizations outside Iran. Because of this I believe it is possible to claim that the persecutions in a way have been an active force in uniting the Iranian Bahāʾīs and the Western Bahāʾīs.

In the sixth chapter, “Bahāʾī identity in the perspective of centre and periphery”, I will discuss the general ideology that lies behind the process of creating a Bahāʾī identity and how this ideology has taken an outward form in pilgrimage. The interest in this way is focused on the relationship between centre and periphery. The development, described in the third and the fourth chapter will be important to the understanding of the reaction of the Bahāʾī community to the persecution in Iran. A central theme in this chapter is the basis of servanthood in the Bahāʾī tradition. The martyr concept was primarily relevant in Iran, as it had been developed out of Shīʿa Islam. In the Bahāʾī writings it is, however, not as important as the concept of

probably relate to the religious background of that person and the expectations in that religious tradition.
servanthood. The martyr concept is related to the reaction of the hostile non-Bahāʾī majority in Iran, but the servant concept grew out of the relationship in the Bahāʾī tradition between God and the believers.

In the seventh chapter, “Martyrs, heroes and victims”, I will concentrate on the concept and ideology of martyrdom and martyr ideology in a comparative perspective. There will be a discussion on how martyrdom and heroism is described in the Bahāʾī writings and how it is applied by the individual Bahāʾīs as well as by the Bahāʾī community. In this chapter the meeting between the modern Western society and the Islamic society in Iran will be discussed as an aspect of the persecutions. Traditional society, founded upon religion, sometimes expressed in a martyr ideology, has often been superseded by the Western colonial society, founded upon the Enlightenment Philosophy. The meeting between the colonial power, based on rationality, and the traditional society, in Iran based on a martyr ideology, has caused problems in many cases and in Iran the Bahāʾī community has found itself drawn into this clash involuntarily.

1.2.2 Statements

How can one explain that the early Bābīs and the Bahāʾīs have been persecuted and what has made them accept martyrdom? These questions form the basis of this study. The answer to the first question has to be found in the religious and the cultural political situation in Iran during this period. The answer to the second question is related to the degree that a special Bahāʾī identity has been formed, that could motivate these believers to accept martyrdom.

The religious background to the persecution is that the Bahāʾīs are accused of heresy by the ‘Ulamāʾ. The cultural-political background of the persecutions of Bahāʾī seems to be the clash between the Islamic society in Iran and Western society, a conflict where the Bahāʾīs never officially took side. In the 19th century the political situation was such that Britain and
Russia were colonial powers, active in this area, and Iran a traditional Islamic society that found itself dominated by the West. Although the Bābī movement had little or nothing to do with this conflict, it found itself in a situation where it did not really belong to either society. Being in the middle of this conflict they found themselves being a scapegoat in Iranian society. The outbreak of the persecution in the 1850’s can at least partly be explained by this situation. As this middle situation has continued to exist, it can also help to explain the persecution during the Islamic republic.

Below I shall try to make the following statements plausible.

1. The willingness of the individual to take on the role of a martyr among the early Bābīs and the Bahā’ís in Iran is strongly related to the existence of a special identity as a Bahā’ī.

2. The persecution of the early Bābīs and the Iranian Bahā’ís is related to both Islamic theology as well as the religious situation in Iran. It has its background in the religious identity of the Shi’a community in Iran that saw the early Bābīs and the Bahā’ís as a threat to their own identity.

3. Historically, Bahā’ī identity has been developed in stages. During the early period there were basically two different Bahā’ī identities, based on the background of the believers as either Christian Westerners or Iranian Shi’a Muslims who have accepted the station of Bahā’u’llāh with their own background. These two identities have developed to become one single Bahā’ī identity.

4. Pilgrimage to the charismatic leader of Bahā’ī and, after the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, to the Bahā’ī World Centre has been important for the creation of this common identity. The vision of Bahā’ī has been included in this pilgrimage, as the Bahā’ī World Centre has become its most important symbol.
1.2.3 The Martyr in Society

Martyrdom as a part of history of religions is an important feature in this study. In some societies this has been a spiritual station that has been much admired. In the society of the Iranian Shī‘a Islam, the martyr has had a very important function, sometimes described as being so central that Twelver Shī‘a even has been called a martyr-religion. Because of this it is very interesting in this study to analyse the relationship between this concept of martyrdom and the Bahā‘ī concept of martyrdom.

The aspect of martyrdom as an ideal should be compared with the descriptive study of the persecutions and how these are interpreted in terms of martyrdom. The practical case of martyrdom does not necessarily fit the normative description, but both aspects of martyrdom must be discussed.

1.2.4 Taking on the Role of Martyrdom

The role of the martyr is central when it comes to identity and the group or society can always encourage or discourage martyrdom depending upon the existence of such a role, but it is always the individual that finally accepts martyrdom. Hjalmar Sundén has pointed out the importance of role taking in religion and this, most certainly, is applicable to martyrdom as well. A role, such as the role of the martyr, is, however, nothing that can easily be accepted. Therefore it is also a central question to ask how it is possible for someone to take on such a role. There are certainly cases where an individual has been pressed by his or her group to take this step, but I do not believe that this is normally the case. Instead the basis of my discussion will be that it is normally a personal decision to accept martyrdom and that it is related to the identity of that person. The martyrs are individuals that have taken this step by making a decision of their own, realize the consequences of it. They have taken their religious beliefs seriously to such a high degree.

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that it has become a central part of their identity. In this way the strength of their beliefs, and their identity as Bábís and Bahá’ís, becomes the focal point of interest in this study.

1.3 The sources

The sources that can be used are primarily the writings of the Báb, Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, the four leading persons that founded the Bahá’í religion as it is known today. There are, however, large amounts of material that are written by believing Bahá’ís who have studied their religion from different perspectives and I will use this material as well. Many of these sources are historical descriptions, biographical material and discussions on different aspects of Bahá’í. The writings of the four leading persons have a special importance either as writings of the prophet or authoritative interpreters and expounders of the teachings that are presented in these writings.

1.3.1 Language situation

The basic languages in Bahá’í is Arabic and Persian as these two languages are used by the Báb, Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in their writings. Translations and writings by Shoghi Effendi are authoritative in Bahá’í and considered divinely inspired because of his station as the Guardian. This has the consequence that Arabic texts by Bahá’u’lláh must be read in the light of these translations in order to understand them in the way they are understood by the Bahá’í community.

The Arabic used in the basic writings can be studied as an aspect of Arabic studies, but one has to remember that Bahá’í is not a religion that has grown out of the culture of Arabic speaking countries. The background in the Persian language means that Arabic will be used in accordance with Persian preferences in language and culture. What has also influenced the discussion is that the concepts have not only been transferred from an Arabic context to a Persian context, but also from the Persian context to an English
context. This situation might create problems for scholars in Arabic studies, but I find it important to have the primary aim to present the concepts as they are used in the Bahá’í religion.

1.3.2 Bábism and Bahá’í

The study of the Bahá’í religion is made complicated by the existence of two separate, but closely related religions being involved: Bábism and Bahá’í. The founders of these two religions were two charismatic prophets, known by their titles: the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh.

Bábism was founded 1844 by Mírzá Ali Muḥammad from Shiraz, known as the Báb. The Báb wrote extensively during his six years of leadership, covering a number of issues. His perhaps most important appeal to his followers was to eagerly wait for “Him whom God will make manifest” and to accept him as soon as he makes his claim. In 1863 Mírzá Husayn Ali, known as Bahá’u’lláh, proclaimed himself to be this figure and most of the Bábís accepted him as such. These Bábís became after some time known as Bahá’ís. A minority did not accept Bahá’u’lláh and therefore remained Bábí.

When writing on the Bahá’í religion, one has to accept that the Bahá’í community considers the period 1844-1863 to be a part of the Bahá’í history,

17 This is the name of the religion, as used in Bahá’í literature. There are other terms used by authors who write about Bahá’í, such as Bahaism and Behaism. There is however no established term in scholarly writings beyond the term “Bahá’í Faith” on discussions on Bahá’í as an organization. The objective way of describing this religion that I will use is Bahá’í that is used in a parallel way to the use of the word “İslam”. When I use the designation Bahá’í Faith, it will to show its internal designation. When using the term “Bahá’í community” I will refer to the collective members of Bahá’í. The method of transliteration of Arabic words that will be used is the same as in Islamic studies.

18 The word Bábism is an example of the western use of putting -ism to a name, while Bábí is an example of the function in Persian grammar where -i is used to show a relationship. A Bábí would, for example be a follower of the Báb.

19 One example is the tablet addressed to ‘Him who will be manifest’. The Báb, Selections from the Writings of the Báb, (Haifa: Universal House of Justice, 1978), pp. 3-5.
although Bahá’í was founded officially 1863 by the first proclamation of Bahá’u’lláh to some of the Bábís in the Ridván garden outside Baghdad. There is such a strong link between these two religions, that writing about persecution of the Iranian Bahá’ís also must include this period. However, there do still exist small groups of Bábís that have not accepted Bahá’u’lláh, such as the Azalíyyih group, and they cannot be considered Bahá’ís. Therefore the history of these groups cannot be taken into consideration in a study of Bahá’í, unless one has included the studying of the relation between these groups and Bahá’í. Because of the existence of these groups, I will use the terms “early Bábís” and “late Bábís”, when appropriate. By early Bábís I will mean the Bábís before the proclamation of Bahá’u’lláh 1863 and by late Bábís I will mean those who remained Bábís after this proclamation.

1.3.3 The Writings of Bahá’u’lláh

The foundation of the Bahá’í tradition is that the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh both are regarded as divine messengers and that whatever they have written is regarded as of divine origin. Regarding the writings of Bahá’u’lláh, a large part of them are written answers to questions, asked by believers or non-believers to Bahá’u’lláh. Many of these writings exist in the original in the Bahá’í archives. There is, however, a problem of what should be considered the original and what should not and the background to this problem is the existence of what is called “revelation writings” together with hand-written copies of these writings. The “revelation writings” are very difficult, or even impossible, to read. Taherzadeh gives an example of such “revelation writing” in The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, vol. 1, in the illustration facing page 110. There are some descriptions of how the writings of Bahá’u’lláh

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20 This is what it is called in Bahá’í tradition. At the time of Bahá’u’lláh it was called Najíbíyyih, owned by Najíb Pasha, who lent it to Bahá’u’lláh. A. Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, Vol. 1, revised edition (Oxford: George Ronald, 1976), p. 259.
were produced, one being the description of Siyyid Asau’l-lāh-i-Qumī, who lived together with Bahā’u’llāh in Acre\textsuperscript{21} from 1866.

I recall that Mīrzā Āqā Jān\textsuperscript{22} was recording the words of Bahā’u’llāh at the time of revelation, the shrill sound of his pen could be heard from a distance of about twenty paces. In the history of the Faith not a great deal has been recorded about the manner in which Tablets were revealed. For this reason … I shall describe it…

Mīrzā Āqā Jān had a large inkpot the size of a small bowl. He also had available about ten to twelve pens and large sheets of paper in stacks. In those days all letters which arrived for Bahā’u’llāh were received by Mīrzā Āqā Jān. He would bring them into the presence of Bahā’u’llāh and, having obtained permission, would read them. Afterwards the Blessed Beauty\textsuperscript{23} would direct him to take up his pen and record the Tablet which was revealed in reply…

Such was the speed with which he used to write the revealed Word that the ink of the first word was scarcely yet dry when the whole page was finished. It seemed as if some one had dipped a lock of hair in the ink and applied it over the whole page. None of these words was written clearly and they were illegible to all except Mīrzā Āqā Jān. There were occasions when even he could not decipher the words and had to seek help of Bahā’u’llāh. When revelation had ceased, then in accordance with Bahā’u’llāh’s instruction Mīrzā Āqā Jān would rewrite the Tablet in his best hand and dispatch it to its destination…\textsuperscript{24}

The “revelation writings ” can be seen as the most original texts, but as it is not possible to read them it would mean that the original is not possible to use. I prefer to see the revelation writings as a first stage in the process of producing an original text, and the final text the text that is written in a legible way. If the text in the revelation writings should be considered the original text it must be possible to certify that the legible text is a copy of the text in revelation writing and this is obviously not possible.

\textbf{1.3.4 Bahā’ī Hermeneutics}

In the Bahā’ī context there are rules on how to treat the Holy texts and these rules are to be observed by Bahā’ī authors. Authoritative interpretation

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} Shoghi Effendi wrote “‘Akka”, which is the Arabic form of the name of this town.
\item \textsuperscript{22} He was Bahā’u’llāh’s secretary.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Bahā’u’llāh was called by many titles by the believers. The Blessed Beauty was one of these titles.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
in the Bahā’ī tradition can only be done by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā as the “Master” and Shoghi Effendi as the “Guardian”. The role of the Universal House of Justice is to lead the Bahā’ī community in such a way that these interpretations are understood and put in practice in the correct perspective. Interpretations by others have to be made on a basis of a purely personal understanding and with no claims of being authoritative.

In an article on interpretation of Bahā’ī texts by Juan Cole, he discusses the different ways of interpreting with the background of Shi’a Islam.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Texts</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Authorized interpreter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ta’wil (subjective hermeneutics)</td>
<td>tafsīr (formal scripture commentary)</td>
<td>tabyīn (authoritative interpretation)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legal Texts</th>
<th>Individual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>istinbāt or ijtihād (individual legal interpretation for private or limited purpose)</td>
<td>1. tabyīn (authoritative interpretation by Holy Figures) 2. istinbāt (elucidation by the Universal House of Justice)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Some types of Bahā’ī Scripture interpretation

As seen in the figure above, Juan Cole makes some fundamental distinctions. He distinguishes between religious texts and legal texts and between individuals and the authorised interpreter. In the individual ta’wil interpretation of religious texts, Bahā’u’llāh gives a large freedom to the individual, which is used by the authors of many Bahā’ī books, such as the martyrlogies. This kind of freedom is, however, not given in legal texts. The formal scripture commentary, tafsīr, is a more strict interpretation with commentaries on language background, historical background etc. and is

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used by some Bahá’í authors, like Adib Taherzadeh in his book *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh*. A certain freedom of legal interpretation is given on the individual level, but such interpretation can only be done in areas that have not been defined by Bahá’í institutions and with no authority, save for the individual himself.

### 1.3.5 Pilgrim Memoirs

In order to understand the special identity of the Bábís and the Bahá’ís, one has to understand their relationship to the Báb and to Bahá’u’lláh. This identity was created with the personal acceptance of these two charismatic prophets and it was upheld through personal ties with them as Prophets of God. There are a number of ways to create these ties, but in the Bahá’í tradition, pilgrimage has been of major importance.

While many Bahá’ís from Iran and other places in the Middle East went on pilgrimage to meet Bahá’u’lláh, there was very little written about these personal meetings. The reason is that it was considered blasphemous to make any attempt to describe Bahá’u’lláh. A non-Bahá’í – Professor E.G. Browne in his introduction to *A Traveler’s Narrative*, written by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, therefore made the probably best personal description of Bahá’u’lláh. This description has been cited in many introductory books to Bahá’í, *Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era* being the most well known.

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26 In Bahá’í there exists a certain kind of memoirs, called pilgrim notes. These are notes, taken by pilgrims, at the time of pilgrimage and sometimes read by the Bahá’ís as authoritative statements from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá or Shoghi Effendi, which they are not. David Piff has discussed this in his book *Bahá’í Lore* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2000), pp. 39-40. By using the term “pilgrim memoirs”, I want to stress that I will study memoirs from pilgrimages, written as personal memoirs and presented as such.


From the time of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi the situation has been quite different. The number of pilgrim memoirs is much larger, many of them written by Bahá’ís from Europe and North America. There are especially many pilgrim memoirs from meetings with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, starting from the very first pilgrimage made by North-American Bahá’ís. There are also many memoirs written by Bahá’ís, who met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during his travels in Europe and North America. Whether these memoirs also could be called pilgrim memoirs is a matter of definition, but I prefer to see them as such. When the Bahá’ís met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá it was primarily a planned spiritual meeting with the centre of Bahá’í and some travelled far to come to these meetings. As a way of creating and upholding the Bahá’í identity, this had, no doubt, the same function.

1.3.6 Martyrologies

In the Catholic Church there is a tradition of making a list of martyrs, or rather of saints, in the order of their anniversaries and these lists are called martyrologies. They also exist in an extended version, giving biographical information: historical martyrologies.

In the Bahá’í tradition there exist a group of books, describing martyrs and giving information about the persecutions in a personal way, and I suggest that the same terminology be used for this literature, Bahá’í martyrologies, although they are not necessarily used in the same way as in the Catholic Church. The authors of these martyrologies have sometimes

30 There is no special way in Bahá’í to designate this group of books. Still the group exists. My suggestion to use the term “martyrologies” has as its reason a need to specify these books as a group that can be identified from other books on Bahá’í. Michael Fischer also has used the term “Martyrology” in his paper “Social Change and the Mirrors of Tradition: The Bahá’ís of Yazd” note 5, in The Bahá’í Faith and Islam, Proceedings of a Symposium, McGill University, March 23-25, 1984 (Ottawa: Bahá’í Studies Publication, 1990). He does not, however, make any attempt to define it in a Bahá’í context.
been asked to write the book, but often it is a purely personal wish to inform others of the persecutions. They could also be described as a feeling, expressed by one of the authors in the title of his book: *A Cry from the heart*. My suggestion to classify them as Bahā’ī martyrologies is given mainly as a tool of analysis and as a way to separate them from other kinds of books and official reports.

I define Bahā’ī martyrologies in the following way: they are written by Bahā’īs in a personal way with a feeling of a personal mission. These books are important documents for informing the Bahā’īs and others about the persecutions. In this way they have become a source of motivation for different forms of services for the Bahā’īs. As a definition I suggest the following:

1) They are not a mere collection of unrelated witness reports, but complete books where interviews might be a part.

2) They are not an analysis, but descriptions of the situation, motivated by a feeling of a personal mission.

3) They are not official reports, but are personal books.

4) They follow a certain style, referring to dreams and other ways of preparing for martyrdom. In this style the idea is sometimes included that the perpetrators receive some kind of personal punishment by divine will.

They are open to all readers and are spread as much as possible beyond the circle of members of the Bahā’ī community. Their first readers are, however, the Bahā’īs themselves and the primary effect of these martyrologies is to inform the believers and motivate them in their work to react properly to the persecutions.
One of the leader of the Bahá’í community has written two of them, *A Travelers Narrative* and *Memorials of the Faithful*, while other authors have a less prominent position. The authors have this in common, however, that they are trusted by the leading person or institution of the Bahá’í community.

### 1.3.7 Conflicting Sources

It must be seen as a normal part of the development of any religious movement that different sects and competing groups are formed. The Bábí movement and the Bahá’í religion are not excluded from this experience. The *Azaliyyih* is but one example of this and there are a number of sources from each of these groups.

In Bahá’í terminology such groups are called “covenant-breakers”. In other contexts the concept of “orthodoxy” would be an appropriate term for the mainstream Bahá’ís, but I will not use this concept for this purpose as one of these groups calls itself “Orthodox Bahá’ís”, but instead I will continue to use the concept mainstream Bahá’ís in this discussion. I also think it is possible to separate the mainstream Bahá’ís from the “heretical” groups, due to the present difference in size and the general historical development of the Bahá’í community that tended to give priority to the mainstream Bahá’í community.

The history of the Bábí movement and the Bahá’í religion has seen a number of changes and during each change there has been a number of believers that could not accept this change for one reason or another. In this way there has been a number of heretical groups that have produced literature. Most of these conflicting groups have not survived very long, even if a few exist even today, but they have produced books and letters that...
Sometimes can be used to study the problems that followed each stage of the development of Bahá’í.

There are different kinds of sources that must be taken into consideration in the discussion of this study: 1) “Holy writings”, fundamental to the Bahá’ís, like the Bible for Christians and the Qur’ân for Muslims. The total number of available documents that could be classified as Holy Writings is about 40,000.33 2) Individual books, like pilgrim memoirs and martyrlogies. Their usefulness depends upon their use of primary sources, such as interviews with eyewitnesses. 3) Official documents from the Bahá’í world centre that are reports from the development, written in a way that is more neutral. Normally they would give the same information as the official documents and are written in the same way, but as they are written by one of the parts involved, I put them in a special category. 4) Official documents from governments, United Nations, research institutions etc. that are written by institutions that have no interest in doing anything else than reporting simple facts.

1.3.8 The concept of Martyrdom

The fundamental parts of the concept of martyrdom is that the motivation for martyrdom should be to witness the truth in a certain cause and that there is a group that will accept this offering as martyrdom. Both can be found in the case of Bahá’í martyrs. Mostly martyrdom is mentioned in comments to Bábís or Bahá’ís that have been killed and are recognized as any, connections to Iran. Therefore, if there is a Persian name for this group, it has been translated from English and is not an original term.

33 It is estimated that among Bahá’u’lláh approximately 15,000 written documents (ranging from books, tablets, and especially letters), 7,160 have been allocated and preserved in the Archives at the Bahá’í World Center, Haifa, Israel. In comparison, for the works of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the figure is 15,549 out of c. 30,800, and for Shoghi Effendi, the amount is 16,370 out of approximately 30,100. The total amount of available written material thus amounts to 39,079. The rest of the written documents, estimated to be approximately 37,000, have either been destroyed, lost, or are hidden outside the institutions of the Bahá’í community. Universal House of Justice, Bahá’í Nytt Nov. (1993), p.3.
martyrs. Bahá’u’lláh does not dwell on the concept of martyrdom, neither in Kitáb-i-Aqdas nor in Kitáb-i-Iqân, considered to be the two most important books in Bahá’í. When there have been Bahá’í martyrs, the status of martyrdom is always pointed out as something that is very important, but it is very difficult to find texts that give any encouragement for the believers to become martyrs. This is a very sharp contrast to Shí’á Islam where martyrdom is hailed as very important to the believers and they are encouraged to seek martyrdom. This contrast seems even to be an important aspect of identity for Bahá’í in defining itself as a separate religion with a separate identity. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá equals the teaching of one person with attaining the status of martyrdom:

In this day, the beloved of God must not hesitate or delay an instant in teaching the Cause of the Manifestation; and reconciling words of the religion of majestic oneness; because, verily, in this day, to the soul who is the cause of guidance to another soul the recompense of a martyr in the way of God will assuredly be recorded by the pen of the Cause for his deed. This is from the Bounty of God unto thee. Do according to what has been commanded and do not be of those who tarry.34

In the tablet of Ahmad, one of the central texts, martyrdom is considered second to chanting that tablet:

...Learn well this Tablet, O Ahmad. Chant it during thy days and withhold not thyself therefrom. For verily, God hath ordained for the one who chants it, the reward of a hundred martyrs and a service in both worlds. These favours have we bestowed upon thee as a bounty on Our part and a mercy from Our presence, that thou mayest be of those who are grateful...35

As the concept of martyrdom is not really defined or discussed in the Bahá’í Writings as central texts, the concept that is referred to seems to be the concept in Shí’á Islam. It is praised as a sign of faith in this definition, but it seeking it is not encouraged. In the case where a believer has to choose between giving up his or her faith and to be killed, however, martyrdom is given as the solution and not the option to lie about ones belief. Even in

“Epistle to the Son of the Wolf”, which is a book directed to one of the leading ‘Ulamā’ in Iran, who had been the driving force in the persecutions in Isfahān, this concept is not defined or discussed although the persecutions are condemned. One example of martyrdom that had taken place is the martyrdom of two brothers, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, called “The King of Martyrs” and “The Beloved of Martyrs”.36

Judging by the way Shoghi Effendi describes martyrdom, it is primarily something that is related to the past that was necessary for the development of the Bahā’í administration: “In the blood of the unnumbered martyrs of Persia lay the seed of the divinely-appointed administration which, though transplanted from its native soil, is now budding out, under your loving care, into a new order, destined to overshadow all mankind.”37 The most important concept here is therefore Bahā’í administration, not martyrdom. As the Bahā’í administration is closely related to the servant ideology in Bahā’ī, it seems here that martyrdom is seen as a part of the past that prepares the way for the present and the future ideal which is the servant ideology.

1.4 Aspects of Terminology

Bahā’ī terminology has been created in a field of tension between the Western world and the world of Shī’a Islam. Much of the terminology of the Bahā’ī tradition stems from the writings of Bahā’u’llāh, which makes it a part of the cultural world of Shī’a Islam. When these texts in Arabic or Persian language have been translated into English by Shoghi Effendi, they have been transferred to another cultural world by an authorised interpreter. His interpretations are regarded as being based on divine inspiration, which implies that he has created an additional set of sources. Why Shoghi Effendi

has translated a text in a certain way is an interesting study in order to see changes between the first and the second version of the same source. This discussion has been started by some scholars and will probably continue for a long time. I will discuss a few aspects of the special Bahá’í terminology in this chapter and some discussions are also included in other parts of my study. The selection of concepts will obviously be only the first step towards a discussion, but hopefully enough to give the background to the most important concepts that are used in this dissertation.

Bahá’í: The word is mostly translated to “glory” in a Bahá’í context but not for the name of the first month in the Bahá’í calendar, Bahá’, where it is translated with “splendour”. Abhá is translated to “the most glorious”. The concept of the Greatest Name in Bahá’í has a number of forms. The concept refers to the Greatest Name of God, which is Bahá’, covering all aspects of God. It builds on the Islamic tradition that God has 99 names – which are different qualities of God – and that Allah is the name that covers them all. In Bahá’í the name Bahá’u’lláh consists of both forms that are considered the Greatest Name of God. One form, Alláh’u’ábhá, is used in certain prayers where the saying of the Greatest Name is required, and this form is also used as a greeting between Bahá’ís. Another form, Yá Bahá ‘u’l-Abhá, is used as an invocation and is common in Bahá’í homes as a piece of calligraphy that is displayed in a prominent position.

Hand of the cause of God: A certain number of individual Bahá’ís have been given the special task to promote the teaching of Bahá’í and

38 J.E. Esslemont, Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era, pp. 37, 185.
the protection against its enemies. This institution was initiated by Bahá’u’lláh and continued by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. In the time of Shoghi Effendi there were also some Bahá’ís who were given the same task on a national or regional level for a limited time and they were given the title auxiliary board members. After the passing of Shoghi Effendi no more hands of the cause have been named. Instead the institution of auxiliary board members has continued and has been developed by naming assistants on the local level and counsellors on the international and continental levels.

Kitáb-i-Aqdas: (from kitáb, book, and Quds, holy, Arab.) This must be considered the most central book of Bahá’í. Shoghi Effendi has described it as the “Most Holy Book” of Bahá’u’lláh. “…the Charter of His World Order, the chief repository of His laws, the Harbinger of His Covenant, the Pivotal Work containing some of His noblest exhortations, weightiest pronouncements, and portentous prophecies…”41 The book was written around 1873 but was long little known to the Western Bahá’ís, other than by name and by a synopsis of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas made by Shoghi Effendi, but in 1992 the complete book was published in English translation with notes and comments to the text.

Kitáb-i-Iqán: (Iqán, Certitude, Arab.) The Kitáb-i-Iqán, in English called the Book of Certitude. According to the description of Shoghi Effendi it “…occupies a position unequalled by any work in the entire range of Bahá’í literature, except the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá’u’lláh’s

Most Holy Book.” It was written in 1862, according to Shoghi Effendi within 48 hours, as an answer to some questions by the Báb’s maternal Uncle Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad, who had not accepted the claims of the Báb. A main theme of the book is that Bahá’u’lláh tries to show the truth of older religions, especially Islam, and that the Báb had founded a religion that was equally true. It was written when Bahá’u’lláh was living in Baghdad, the year before the declaration of Bahá’u’lláh as Man yuḍhiru’lláh.

Rūḥ-i-’Āẓam: (Rūḥ, Spirit, ‘azīm, Great, Arab.) “In the Bahá’í Faith, the symbol of the Most Great Spirit, respectively symbolized in Zoroastrianism, the Mosaic, the Christian and Mohammadan Dispensation by the Sacred Fire, the Burning Bush, the Dove and the Angel Gabriel.” Bahá’u’lláh has himself described an experience of the Holy Spirit in his account of his experience in the “Black Pit” – his prison in Teheran 1853, introducing his prophetic period: “During the days I lay in the prison of Tihrān, though the galling weight of the chains and the stench-filled air allowed Me but little sleep, still in those infrequent moments of slumber I felt as if something flowed from the crown of My head over My breast, even as a mighty torrent that precipitateth itself upon the earth from the summit of a lofty mountain. Every limb in My body would, as a result, be set afire. At such moments My tongue recited what no man could bear to hear.”

Rasūl and Bāb: (Rasūl, prophet and Bāb, gate, Arab.) Both the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh are considered prophets of God, but the concept of

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43 Loc. cit.
44 Ibid., pp. 101, 121.
45 Bahá’u’lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 22.
Rasūl is rarely found as description of the Bāb and Bahā’u’llāh. ‘Abdu’l-Bahā has, however, explained the concept of prophet as twofold, minor prophets and major prophets, where the concept of Major Prophets is similar to the concept of Rasūl. The title Bāb referred from the beginning to the Bāb in early Shī’ā history – the link between the believers and the Imam. Later the Bāb more clearly announced himself as the coming of the Hidden Imam, using different titles that were attached to him such as al-Qā’im (He who will arise) and al-Mahdī (the Rightly-Guided One).

The station that Bahā’u’llāh primarily claimed was the station of Man yuẓhiru hu’llāh – Him Whom God will make manifest – the promised one of the Bāb. A parallel to the concept of prophet in Bahā’ī is the concept of manifestation of God. There are, however, many ways to designate the station of Bahā’u’llāh, like the Blessed Beauty, the Blessed Perfection etc.

Shahīd: The Arabic word shahīd and the Greek word martyrēin mean the same thing, ‘witness’, but both words are a part of their cultural backgrounds. The background of the Greek word martyrēin is a historical situation in the New Testament and the early history of the Church, where the Christians might face the situation of standing up in a court and witnessing about their beliefs with the risk of being executed. In this understanding “martyr” must be interpreted as blood-witness. The background of the word shahīd is, however, not a historical situation, but the centre of Islam, the shahādah, the confession where the believing Muslim bear witness that he or she

believes in God and that Muḥammad is the prophet of God. The same concept is used in the short obligatory prayer in Bahāʾī, which starts with the words “I bear witness…” which in Persian reads “Shahādat midaham…”.

Connected to the concept of shahādah and shahīd has been the concept of jihād, referring to the combats of Muḥammad, the prophet of Islam. By fighting the jihād the believer bears witness to the truth of his or her belief. There are two aspects of jihād, the first being the great holy war, al-jihād al-akbar, “against the carnal soul (nafs) and everything that tends towards the negation of God and His Will.” The second aspect is the external war, the “little holy war”, al-jihād al-asghar, that can be fought military, politically or socially.48

In Shiʿa Islam the concept of jihād has had a strong relationship with the death of Imām Ḥusayn at the battle of Karbilā. In a Bahāʾī context, however, the word shahīd has no relation to jihād in the meaning jihād al-asghar, which is not a part of Bahāʾī law. The Bahāʾī martyrs seem not to have searched for martyrdom and have not taken up arms in order to protect themselves against persecution. Their attitude could rather be described as sheep going to the slaughter. The definition of martyrs as witnesses that testify about the truth of their cause by accepting death is close to the understanding in early Christianity. The suicidal way of martyrdom, like in the interpretation among certain Islamic movements and also among the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka49 is

49 Peter Schalk has discussed suicide, or free death, among Tamil Tigers. P Schalk, “Konsten att dö: om den ritualiserade fridöden bland Ilavar på ön Ilam”, Riter och Ritteorier. Religionshistoriska diskussioner och teoretiska ansatser, Edited by
however not found among the Bahā’ī martyrs, especially when this would mean the death of other people. Even when martyrdom is happily accepted, it should not be seen as suicide, as the only way the Baha’i martyrs could have avoided martyrdom would have been to accept the demands of the persecutors, that is to leave the Bahā’ī community and become a Shi’a Muslim. The concept of martyrdom in the Bahā’ī tradition is motivated by religion and in a belief in life after death, which is not the case of all martyrs, the Tamil Tigers being one such example.

*Dīn*: In Bahā’ī terminology *Dīn* (religion, Arab.) is probably the most common word for religion, meaning religion of God or World Religion. Other words used are *Dīn* (religion, Arab.) and amr (cause, *Amr-i- Bahā’ī*, Arab., the Bahā’ī Cause or Bahā’ī Faith) The religion of God is based on divine revelation and there are nine such religions in historic time: Sabeism, Zoroastrism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islām, Bābīsm and Bahā’ī. These religions have been given to mankind as progressive revelations in the sense that the aims of these revelations have been to develop mankind on an individual level as well as a societal level. As Bahā’ī also accepts Minor Prophets as instruments of divine revelation, it is not only the founders of the nine World Religions, the manifestation of God, that are recipients of the Holy Spirit. There is also a possibility that poets in other religions, such as ethnic religions, can be such instruments as well, although these poets are not exemplified in the Bahā’ī writings. Religions of God that are true are contrasted with man made religions that are false. Because of the possibility of inspiration of prophets and

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Michael Stausberg, Olof Sundquist, Anna Lydia Svalastog (Nora: Nya Doxa 2002),
poets, it is however not so clear what divine religion is and what it is not. As religions are dependent upon truthful representatives of the clergy that will not lead the believers astray, it is even more difficult to decide what is true religion, not distorted by false religious leaders, and what is not.

The idea of progressive revelation in Bahá’í falls within the same pattern as the relation between the earlier religions in the thinking of Islam. Manfred Hutter has discussed the possible background of this idea and suggests that there is a link between Manicheism, Islam and Bahá’í. Mani described himself as an Apostle who was the return of Zarathustra, Buddha and Jesus that suggests a pattern that can be compared to the one in Islam. There is, however, little or nothing to find in the Bahá’í writings on Mani or Manicheism, which Hutter suggests is due to the historic situation. At the time of Bahá’u’lláh Mani was either known as a heretic that was refuted long ago or merely described as a literary figure. Another reflection that could be made is that there were few or no believers in Manicheism at the time of Bahá’u’lláh. An aspect of the idea of progressive revelation is that there should be a certain spiritual power in divine religions, which results in the creation of religious communities that exist for a long time. The two religions that were closest in time – Christianity and Islam – had substantial numbers of believers at the time of Bahá’u’lláh, and also older religions like Judaism and Zoroastrianism

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had large communities. Manicheism, however, could at that time be described as a dead religion.
CHAPTER 2
Religious Identity

2.1 Continuity and discontinuity

The search for a valid identity seems to be important as a driving force in history as man has tried to find a way to relate to himself and the physical world, that might be difficult, or even impossible, to control. This identity must be solid enough when it comes to continuity in order to function in different situations over time, and an aspect of this is to emphasize the boundaries to other individuals or other groups which will give a distinctive feeling of sameness. Manfred Hutter has discussed the importance of the development of a separate Bahá’í identity from the perspective of two separate events: the conference in Badášt and proclamation of Bahá’u’lláh in the Ridván garden in Baghdad. In these two examples he points out that there have been partial breaks and partial continuities in an ongoing process where a new identity has been created— a process that has started from an Islamic identity developed to become a separate Bahá’í identity. My suggestion is that this process is not specific for Bahá’í but is a general pattern in the formation of identity.

Continuity seems to be of crucial importance for the identity of the individual as well as for the group, and the link between individual identity, group identity and religious or idea based identity is the need to keep this continuity. If identity could be defined as the self-consciousness of the individual and the group and the function of the concept of identity is to keep a feeling of sameness within the individual and the group, and a sound

relationship with other individuals and groups, then discontinuity ought to be very problematic for the identity.

Discontinuity might ultimately lead to identity crises that need to be handled in such a way that discontinuity is turned into continuity. When the child starts to develop to become an adolescent it is a process that can not be controlled or stopped by the individual or by the group as it is a biological process, which means that a discontinuity is at hand and that discontinuity might lead to an identity crises. Therefore this has to be met in some way and the answer of the group is normally to find explanations and to develop rituals that will take farewell to the child and welcome the new adult. The same thing happens when a new family is borne as it is handled by marriage ceremonies. Again there is a discontinuity as the young boy and the young girl now have become physically ready to become parents and this has come as the result of a biological process that can not be controlled by the individual or the group. It seems to be normal to find passage rites when these occur in all kinds of social structures. Considering the aspect of identity these rites seem to have a function in this that they help the individual as well as the group to heal discontinuity and to overcome identity crises. Also a myth could have this function as when the story of the death of Jesus motivated Christians to become martyrs.

There are other examples of discontinuities that could happen to the individual and the group than what is covered by passage rites. Illnesses will always be crises to the individual as well as for the family, but not only with respect to medicine but also with respect to identity as this situation will imply a discontinuity. The once healthy individual is forced to handle a new situation and perhaps to change his or her identity. As this will have consequences for the group, this will also become an identity crisis for that group. Also changes in the social and political situation imply changes of identity. Peoples have dominated other peoples, new social situations have
arisen, important technological developments have occurred, economic bases have ceased to exist etc. and in this new situation the old identity was no longer fit to answer the need to heal the discontinuity.

Two examples of absolute discontinuity are birth and death. When a new person is born this is by itself a major break with what could be called the principle of continuity and must be explained in such a way that continuity is restored. The explanation must be plausible and be possible to include into the worldview of the group by the use of rituals. The same is true with death. When life is taken away from the person and only a dead body remains this has to be explained in some way and brought into the worldview of the group. This has primarily been done within religious identities.

A religious identity must always be related to individual identity and to group identity in order to be meaningful and therefore it is important that this identity can answer questions related to discontinuities in the life of individuals and groups. If that process is successful a religious identity will be of great help at times of discontinuity that otherwise will lead to identity crises for the individual and the group. An identity that is well functioning could be developed to become the basis of a larger group and even an entire people. When a religious identity becomes that important it will become the ideological basis for that group, worth defending if it is threatened. Such an identity will not easily change, partly due to the great number of people that has included it as their own. There will be a problem in this as such an identity will have to function as a means to help the individuals to overcome discontinuities in times of change, which will demand that the offered identity can present a certain flexibility and thus to change in accordance with the demand of the individual but still to have the necessary stability. If this religious identity does not have a proper balance of stability and flexibility there is a possibility that competing identities will come forward,
which eventually might result in persecutions of the followers of this new identity.

There does not seem to be a guarantee that the new identity is better than the old one. Only time will show this. The principle seems, however, to be competition between identities and a question of which one is the best fitted to serve as the identity of the group at a certain time. If the new identity is obviously less fitted to serve as an identity than the old one, it ought to be much easier for the institutions of the old identity to defend it and this could be done in a sophisticated manner without the spilling of blood. Religious persecution would therefore indicate that the old identity has problem defending itself on an intellectual level towards the new one and has to resort to violence.

2.2 Identity Based on Ideas

In my discussion on religious identity I have also had to consider identities such as nationalistic identities and racist identities that have this in common with religious identities that they are based on ideas. In order to handle the problem of how to designate these identities I have used the concept idea based identities that include all these identities, also religious identities. In my discussions I use three basic kinds of identity: 1) personal identity, 2) group identity where ethnic identity might be considered one very specific example and 3) idea based identity, including religious identity. The individual will be related to all three of them.

My studies of religious identity in Bahá’í have started with my study of the persecution of the Bahá’ís in Iran. As I studied different cases of martyrdom during this persecution, it seemed that these individuals had an alternative possibility. They could have escaped the persecution by converting to Islam and at the same time secretly remain Bahá’ís. This did,

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however, not happen. The conclusion I draw is that there must exist a special Bahá’í identity. The decision to accept martyrdom was made by the individual, who reflecting on his personality found himself sharing the same religious values as the group to which he belonged.

This role of suffering in life has been given to the individual as an ascribed role. This has been done to a certain degree in Bahá’í, like in most religions, including Islam, when a child is born and exposed to ascribed religious roles. The martyr role is also ascribed. When later it comes to the believer who has made a choice to prefer martyrdom when given a possibility to survive this must be considered a personal achievement. When the individual is put in a situation where he or she is about to be killed, an ascribed role does not seem to be enough to motivate the individual. There must be a personal acceptance of martyrdom that goes beyond mere ascription. It must be internalised and be transformed from ascription to personalization.

Idea based identity seems to have a strong relation with symbols. The importance of symbols to religious identity lies in its power to carry complex ideas and display it to the person, thus emphasizing the sameness of the religious group. Symbols have been called the language of religion and as such have the power to point toward the totality of the religious identity of an individual, simply by his or her carrying of certain cloths, a small cross, the star of David etc. By displaying symbols in homes, churches, temples etc. it is also possible to build up a religious identity within a certain group, especially when the mere displaying is combined with explanation of the meaning of these symbols. The displaying of symbols will thus emphasize sameness of the group as well as distinctiveness of the person. Sameness can be expressed in different ways by emphasizing a common history, territory, language, caste, race or religion. In the case of the Bahá’ís sameness is a common dominating religious category. This feeling of sameness idealises
suffering and rejects armed resistance in a situation of persecution. In a situation of peace, the ultimate value is rather summarized in the concept of servanthood.

One feature that is emphasized when an individual joins the Bahá’í community is that this individual does not necessarily abandon his or her basic religious belief, although he or she has to change membership of religious organization. To the believers, Bahá’í is the confirmation of all religions and the fulfilment of their prophecies, which is important for the believer as it will certify a temporal continuity when he or she converts to Bahá’í. In the book Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era it is explained in the following manner:

Bahá’u’lláh declared, plainly and repeatedly, that He was the long-expected Educator and Teacher of all peoples, the channel of a wondrous grace that would transcend all previous outpourings, in which all previous forms of religion would merge, as rivers merge in the ocean.53

This quotation that is in the line of a servant ideology is, to my estimation, very significant for Bahá’í. It does however not explain the martyrs in the Bahá’í history. In the study of martyrdom the continuity in relation to objects of identification is very important, as ideologies of martyrdom are centred on the primal martyr, like Jesus in Christianity and Imám Ḥusayn in Shi’a Islam. In Bahá’í the situation seems to be more complicated. The Báb could very well be seen as such an object of identification, but that does not explain the fact that there were martyrs already in the first years of the Bábism, although the Báb was not executed until 1850. Therefore he could not have been the primal martyr to those bābis. The martyrideology that was perceivable at the Mazindāran upheaval in 1848-49 shows that the battle of Karbilá was still the major concept that motivated the partakers. Parallel with this ideology there seems to be another ideology that had the capacity to function as a martyr ideology as well as a

servant ideology, depending upon the needs and my suggestion is that this ideology can be found in a precursory form in the Bāb’s speech to his first followers, the Letters of the Living,\(^5^4\) before he left for Mecka in summer 1844:

O My beloved friends! You are the bearers of the name of God in this Day. You have been chosen as the repositories of His mystery. It behoves each one of you to manifest the attributes of God, and to exemplify by your deeds and words the signs of His righteousness, His power and glory. The very members of your body must bear witness to the loftiness of your purpose, the integrity of your life, the reality of your faith, and the exalted character of your devotion. For verily I say, this is the Day spoken of by your God in His book: ‘On that Day will We set a seal upon their mouths; yet shall their hands speak unto Us, and their feet shall bear witness to that which they shall have done.’ Ponder the words of Jesus addressed to His disciples, as He sent them forth to propagate the Cause of God. In words such as these, He bade them arise and fulfil their mission: ‘Ye are even as the fire which in the darkness of the night has been kindled on the mountain-top. Let your light shine before the eyes of men. Such must be the purity of your character and the degree of your renunciation, that the people of the earth may through you recognize and be drawn closer to the heavenly Father who is the Source of purity and grace. For none has seen the Father who is in heaven. You who are his spiritual children must by your deeds exemplify His virtues, and witness to His glory. You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? Such must be the degree of your detachment, that into whatever city you enter to proclaim and teach the Cause of God, you should in no wise expect either meat or reward from its people. Nay, when you depart out of that city, you should shake the dust from off your feet. As you have entered it pure and undefiled, so must you depart from that city. For verily, I say, the heavenly Father is ever with you and keeps watch over you. If you be faithful to Him, He will assuredly deliver into your hands all the treasures of the earth, and will exalt you above the rulers and kings of the world.’ O My Letters! Verily I say, immensely exalted is this Day above the days of the Apostles of old. Nay, immeasurable is the difference! You are the witnesses of the Dawn of the promised Day of God. You are the partakers of the mystic chalice of His Revelation. Gird up the loins of endeavour, and be mindful of the words of God as revealed in His book: ‘Lo, the Lord thy God is come, and with Him is the company of His angels arrayed before Him!’ Purge your hearts of worldly desires, and let angelic virtues be your adorning. Strive that by your deeds you may bear witness to the truth of these words of God, and beware lest, by ‘turning back’, He may ‘change you for another people’, who ‘shall not be your like’, and who shall take from you the Kingdom of God. The days when idle worship was deemed sufficient are

\(^{5^4}\) The Letters of the Living were the first 18 Bābīs, who all accepted the Bāb independently. Together with the Bāb himself, they make up the first unit, the first vahīd.
ended. The time is come when naught but the purest motives, supported by deeds of stainless purity, can ascend to the throne of the Most High and be acceptable unto Him. ‘The good word riseth up unto Him, and the righteous deed will cause it to be exalted before Him.’ You are the lowly, of whom God has thus spoken in His book: ‘And We desire to show favour to those who were brought low in the land, and to make them spiritual leaders among men, and to make them Our heirs.’ You have been called to this station; you will attain it, only if you arise to trample beneath the feet every earthly desire, and endeavour to become those ‘honoured servants of His who speak not till He hath spoken, and who do His bidding.’ You are the first Letters that have been generated from the Primal Point,55 the first Springs that have welled out from the Source of this Revelation. Beseech the Lord your God to grant that no earthly entanglements, no worldly affections, no ephemeral pursuits, may tarnish the purity, or embitter the sweetness, of that grace which flows through you. I am preparing you for the advent of a mighty Day. Exert your utmost endeavour that, in the world to come, I, who am now instructing you, may, before the mercy-seat of God, rejoice in your deeds and glory in your achievements. The secret of the Day that is to come is now concealed. It can neither be divulged nor estimated. The newly born babe of that Day excels the wisest and most vulnerable men of this time, and the lowliest and most unlearned of that period shall surpass in understanding the most erudite and accomplished divines of this age. Scatter throughout the length and breadth of this land, and, with steadfast feet and sanctified hearts, prepare the way for His coming. Heed not your weaknesses and frailty; fix you gaze upon the invincible power of the Lord, your God, the Almighty. Has He not, in past days, caused Abraham, in spite of His seeming helplessness, to triumph over the forces of Nimrod? Has He not enabled Moses, whose staff was His only companion, to vanquish Pharaoh and his hosts? Has He not established the ascendancy of Jesus, poor and lowly as He was in the eyes of men, over the combined forces of the Jewish people? Has He not subjected the barbarous and militant tribes of Arabia to the holy and transforming discipline of Muhammad, His Prophet? Arise in His name, put your trust wholly in Him, and be assured of ultimate victory.56

The text must be seen together with the social background of the Bāb movement. In the Shi’a as it was understood in Iran, the idea of martyrdom was the foundation of society, the concept that every believer was brought up with and served as the ideal concept. Therefore, when the Bāb says “You have been called to this station; you will attain it, only if you arise to trample beneath the feet every earthly desire, and endeavour to become those honoured servants of

55 One of the Bāb’s titles.
His who speak not till He hath spoken, and who do His bidding”, it must be understood in the terms that they must be ready for any kind of service, be it martyrdom or anything else.

A religious identity that can sustain religious persecution without taking up arms to oppose it can be described as having a high degree of continuity, a fundamental part of identity. Anita Jacobsson-Widding has discussed the concept of continuity as a basis for identity and found that it can be created in two ways: as a temporal unity and in relationship to objects of identification.\(^{57}\) The Bahá’í view of continuous spiritual development of the person through different kinds of services must therefore be seen as important in the creation of a temporal unity of a special Bahá’í identity.\(^{58}\) Also the object of identification exists in Bahá’í, as the Báb, Bahá’u’lláh and especially ‘Abdu’l-Bahá all serve these purposes, as Bahá’u’lláh described ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the Perfect Exemplar for the Bahá’ís.\(^{59}\)

It is possible to use the concept of sameness in relation to idea based identity. If someone is ready to die for a cause, that person must be very clear on what that cause is and what it is not. Every religion, philosophy or movement is in a more or less distinct way and therefore it is possible to use the concept of sameness when a person makes himself an upholder of it. This does not, however, mean that a person would automatically like to die for it. For this to happen there must have been someone who has shown by example that this cause is

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58 Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, pp. 63-64.
worthy for a person to give up his or her life for. In this way that person becomes the foundation of an ideology of martyrdom like Jesus Christ in Christianity. Then an identity, based on a martyr role, has been created. Still, however, it is not clear how a person by his or her own volition take on the role of a martyr. This role taking has to be related to deeply personal reflections of existential nature.

Anita Jacobsson-Widding also dwells on ethnic identity and cultural identity. These aspects of identity are, however, not so important to Bahá’í identity, as I see it, even if religion could be used to identify the Bahá’ís as an ethnic group. The Bahá’í community is ethnically often quite diversified, although the persecutors of the Iranian Bahá’ís have tried to isolate them in such ways as declaring them *najis*.60 Also their contact with Bahá’í communities in other countries, their high degree of mobility within the country61 and their acceptance of converts from all Iranian groups has made it impossible to isolate them in this way. The tendency towards ethnical plurality is encouraged in the Bahá’í writings and because of that the Bahá’ís generally take pride in representing different ethnic backgrounds.

To discriminate against any tribe because they are in a minority is a violation of the spirit that animates the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh. As followers of God’s Holy Faith it is our obligation to protect the just interests of any minority element within the Bahá’í Community. In fact in the administration of our Bahá’í affairs, representatives of minority groups are not only enabled to enjoy equal rights and privileges, but they are even favoured and accorded priority. Bahá’ís should be careful never to deviate from this noble standard even if the course of events of public opinion should bring pressure to bear

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61 To go on different conferences, summer schools, administrative meetings etc. is a part of what could be called Bahá’í culture.
upon them. The principles in the Writings are clear, but usually, it is when these principles are applied that questions arise…

Whether it is possible to talk about a special Bahá’í cultural identity is dependent upon what definition of culture that is chosen. In this article two definitions are discussed. One is the totality of values of that group and this could be seen as sameness, based on religion. The other one is defined by outward activities, such as dances, rituals, songs, language etc. Some of these, such as songs and rituals, could perhaps be used to define a Bahá’í sameness depending on the definition of the concept of ritual, but these expressions of culture cannot be seen as primary to the Bahá’ís. What is primary to the definition of the identity of the Bahá’ís is, however, their belief in Bahá’u’lláh as Prophet of God and because of this I prefer to classify Bahá’í identity as religious identity.

2.3 Role Taking as Individual Achievment

In his book *Religionen och Rollerna*, Hjalmar Sundén gives an example of a man, Castellio, who is willing to be the shepherd of the souls for people, suffering from plague. He does this as a way of following the example of Christ, which makes it a very good example of the relationship between role taking and religious identity. It is related to the existential questions, as he by doing this relates to questions of life and death. It also relates to the fundamental definition of identity by referring both to distinctiveness and sameness. By accepting this very dangerous task, he has answered the central question “who am I?” by referring to Christ and by accepting him as the absolute object of identification. To bring the most central

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existing question together with his object of identification, e.g. with the martyr role of Christ, was a personal decision. From the example from Hjalmar Sundén one can see that Castellio could take on this role, because he recognized the example of Christ.

Who are the victims and who are the persecutors? In many cases this is so obvious that the question is never asked. The group that seems to be the persecutors have become that, however, because they themselves have felt threatened. To them, there is already a war going on, a war of ideas that was not started by them. Their reaction is therefore to defend their own religious identity, which might include keeping the true faith clean and to stop others from destroying the cosmic order of their group. I therefore look upon religious persecution as a kind of war that follows an earlier war of identities. In this first war, the religious identity is threatened and the aim of the second war is to protect the religious identity of that group.

In the case of the persecution of the Iranian Bahá’ís, the threat includes their use of Islamic concepts in a way that contradicted traditional Islamic interpretation. The most basic example among the Bábís and the Bahá’ís was that they claimed that a new and independent revelation from God was possible. It was commonly accepted among the Muslims that Muhammad was the “Seal of the Prophets”, meaning that no prophet would come after him. This became a serious threat to the continuity of the Islamic community in Iran, as it was directed towards their religious fundament, although they themselves might have neglected the concept of “the Seal”. When coming to persecutions, we as outsiders, distinguish between
historical and imagined persecutions. This distinction is suspended in the mind of a martyr-to-be.

An important precursor to the formula of martyrdom in Bahāʾī has been the narrative of Muslim martyrs. In Islam, the martyr ideology is primarily found in Shiʿa Islam. The word for martyr is Shahīd, meaning witness. Through this word, there is a relationship to Christian martyr ideology and there is also an acceptance of the martyrdom of Christ. The most important martyr to Shiʿa Islam, however, is Imām Ḥusayn, who was killed in a battle by the Sunni Caliph Yazīd at Karbilā in the year 680.64 This, together with the persecution of the other Shiʿa imams by Sunni Caliphs, has created a special Shiʿa identity. In this identity the martyr is an ideal and the martyrdom of Imām Ḥusayn has been a symbol that is often referred to and remembered in the month of Muharram, in the day of ‘Āshūrā.65

Has the same pattern occurred in the Bābī and Bahāʾī case? The religion that was in control in Iran in the 18th century was Shiʿa Islam and the school that had gained control was the Usulī school, which is still in power. I have discussed this in my paper Förföljelse av Irans Bahāʾīer 1844-1955. Especially important to this school is the principle of taqlīd, that each Shiʿa must emulate an ākhūnd – who has a lower rank as a member of the ‘Ulamā’, who is to emulate a mujtahid, who is to emulate the marja at-taqlīd, the representative of the Hidden Imam, Imam Mahdī. This means that the Shiʿa system of the Usulī school becomes an example of protectors of the cosmic

64 M. Momen, An Introduction to Shiʿi Islam, pp. 29-30.
65 Ibid., p. 327.
order. In such a system, everyone who does not follow the system represents some kind of threat. This threat will be total if a religious movement would claim that the foundation of the cosmic order does not exist, like the Bábís, who claimed that the Hidden Imam was no longer hidden. Such a great threat to the cosmic order must arouse all the powers of the defenders of the cosmic order, which it also did. The violent persecutions of the late 1840’s and the early 1850’s are in this perspective not difficult to explain.

2.4 Islamic and Bahá’í Identity

Is Bahá’í a movement within Islam or is it a separate religion? The question is relevant as Bahá’í has a Shi’a Islamic background and there are important similarities to Islam, like the acceptance of the Qur’án as a holy book and of Muhammad as a messenger of God. When reading a book by Bahá’u’lláh, like Kitáb-i-Iqán, it is easy to see how important the Qur’án is to Bahá’í simply by noting how often it is quoted. Still Bahá’í must be considered to be a separate religion and Bahá’í identity a separate identity. One reason for this is the self-consciousness of a religious community as expressed by Bahá’u’lláh in such parts of his writings as in his letter to Pope Pius IX: “O Pope! Rend the veils asunder. He Who is the Lord of Lords is come overshadowed with clouds, and the decree hath been fulfilled by God, the Almighty, the Unrestrained... He, verily, hath again come down from Heaven even as He came down from it the first time.” As outsiders, we usually respect such a self-consciousness as we do for example in the case of Buddhism that still today has defined itself

against the evaluation of Hindus that Buddhism is nothing but a part of Hinduism.

Islamic identity and Bahā’ī identity are not comparable in all aspects. Islam offers at least two different identities, as the identity offered in Sunni Islam and twelver Shi’a Islam are quite different. One is centred on religious law and the other one is primarily centred on the martyrdom of one central person. Because of the longer Islamic history, it is also not always clear what is religious identity and what is ethnic identity. Bahā’ī identity has developed to become one single identity and, as it has never become a majority religion in any place, the ethnic aspect to identity has never been allowed to dominate the religious aspect. Another aspect is that it is a choice of the individual to accept or not accept the identity that is offered by Bahā’ī, while the individual is not allowed to leave Islam and thus has no acceptable possibility to choose. Because of this possibility, the role of the individual is more central to Bahā’ī identity than in Islam. One aspect of both Islamic and Bahā’ī identity is whether there is a difference in identity in these two martyr dominated religions. The identity in Shi’a is related to a hero who defends a cosmic order and Bahā’ī to the suffering servant who faces death.

2.5 The Ideal Role: the True Servant Prepared for Martyrdom.

The servant ideal is central to Bahā’ī identity and the servant role in the Bahā’ī tradition is defined by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā.

This is... my firm, my unshakeable conviction, the essence of my unconcealed and explicit belief – a conviction and belief which the denizens of the Abhā Kingdom fully share: The Blessed Beauty is the Sun of Truth, and His light the light of truth. The Bāb is likewise the Sun of Truth, and His light the light of truth.... My station is the station of servitude – a servitude which is complete, pure and real, firmly established, enduring, obvious,
explicitly revealed and subject to no interpretation whatever… I am the Interpreter of the Word of God; such is my interpretation.67

To the Bahá’ís he is the perfect example, which means that his “station of servitude” is a station that the Bahá’ís should strive towards.

In the Bahá’í community that has developed under the guidance of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, service is mainly interpreted as to spread the Bahá’í message and to build up the Bahá’í community by being active in the Bahá’í administration. To be active in the Bahá’í administration was, however, not an option in the time of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. The Bahá’í administration started among the Bahá’ís in North America during the last years of the 19th century but it took some decades before the Bahá’í administration, as it is known today, had found its form. It was, however, a major way to serve in the West from the beginning. In Iran the situation was quite different. The hostility of the Islamic community towards the Bahá’ís made it impossible to develop an administration as freely as in the West. The historical background was also not favourable for the development of an administration that was not based on individual leadership. Bahá’í identity in Iran was also based on service, but partly emphasized in other ways, such as accepting martyrdom, developing Bahá’í learning and protection of the Bahá’í community towards its enemies, together with the common goal of spreading the Bahá’í message.

67 Shoghi Effendi, World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 133.
CHAPTER 3
Martyr Ideology and Servant Ideology

My studies of idea based identity have started in my study of the concept of martyrdom in the Bahá’í tradition. The study of idea based identity is concerned with what identity a certain idea based movement can offer and how this identity relates to the personal identity of the individual believer. In order to be able to work with this question, it has been necessary to ask whether the identity that is offered by religion has any special features compared to a secular group identity or a social identity. My suggestion regarding idea based identities is, however, that there is something that is different from other kinds of identity. I find it in man’s need to find an answer to existential questions, such as what the meaning of life is, where we come from and whether there is an existence after the physical death, questions which must be answered in order to create an idea based identity. The idea based identity will give some kind of answer to these questions in such a way that the individual and the group will see the continuity in life. The primary existential question in this respect, however, is the question “who am I?”, that is relevant to all idea based identities, whether religious, political or other and fundamental to the feeling of continuity of the individual.

Anthony Giddens has discussed the role of anxiety during the post-modern era, or the late modern age, as he prefers to call it. Anxiety and lack of security has always existed in human history, but in traditional society where few things changed from generation to generation the identity of the individual was not so difficult to find. In
modern society where the individual has to connect the individual identity to social change, this situation will cause more individuals to feel anxiety.\textsuperscript{68}

The definition of personal identity, given by Eriksson, presupposes that a person has to see continuity in life and one aspect of this kind of continuity must be that every human being has a need for an answer to the existential questions.\textsuperscript{69} I do not see idea based identity basically as an example of either group identity or personal identity, although this is not to say that idea based identity is not related to the group or to the individual. Systems of ideas normally develop within a certain social context and they are described with a system of symbols that is easily understood in that social context. The foundation of ideas is, however, individual, as it is always an individual that carries and relates to this set of ideas and personalizes them.

Martyr ideology and servant ideology seem to form a charter for interpretation. What stands in the focus is an ideal that functions as a role model, such as Jesus to Christians and Imam Husein for Shī’a Muslims. This role model stands as a centre for a charter of ideas that relates to action to a large number of people.

In the discussion of ideologies, Berger-Luckman has emphasized that the same universe can be interpreted in different ways, depending upon concrete inherited privileges in the society. In the example of Christian martyr ideologies, it would mean that to a

\textsuperscript{68} A. Giddens, \textit{Modernitet och självidentitet} (Göteborg: Bokförlaget Daidalos, 1997), p. 45.

certain part of the Church this would be the way to interpret the Christian universe and to others there would be other ways. It is also true that to the main part of the Western church the martyr ideology was the way to interpret their universe. Once the ideology has been formed it can be changed to fit the needs of the group as has been done within Bahá’í where the ideal of service even when facing martyrdom is given preference.70

3.1 Background of Bahá’í Identity

I see the acceptance of martyrdom as an expression of religious devotion, taken to an extreme. Is it possible to see the persecutor in the same light? I will use this question as a starting-point in the efforts to find a general model that can be used in the study of religious persecution and I will primarily apply it on the persecution of the Iranian Bahá’ís. I have chosen the concept of identity as a foundation of such a model.

The martyr ideology with roots in Shi’a Islam that is so easily recognized in the Bábí religion was gradually developed into a servant ideology under the leadership of Bahá’u’lláh and was put into practice by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the development of a Bahá’í modernity. In this process the practice of pilgrimage, the Bahá’í administration and the teaching plans became instruments to turn the international Bahá’í project into personal projects. The martyr ideology that was perceivable at the Māzandarān upheaval shows that the battle of Karbalā was still the major concept that motivated the partakers.

What makes a certain group of people an ethnic group? There are a number of factors to decide this and religion is one of them. The Muslims in India are considered an ethnic group and the only factor that defines them as such is their religion. There are so many examples that show how difficult it is to separate ethnicity and religious identity that one might even ask whether it is meaningful to make this separation. In order to gain perspective on this problem, I believe it is necessary to ask the following question: Is a person religious because he belongs to a certain group and finds his identity confirmed in this group or is it because a certain religion answers existential questions in such a way that the individual can accept them as the true answers? This question is closely related to the fundamental question of this study: why do the Iranian Bahà’ís accept martyrdom? Is it because they belong to a certain group or is it primarily the individual who is standing before his creator and prefers to be persecuted instead of denying this relationship? This question can also be expressed as: with what should the primary relationship of the individual: be with the group or with God? Bahà’u’llàh uses the concept “the People of Bahà”71 in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas to designate the Bahà’ís. He is, however, in this place not referring to the Bahà’ís as an ethnic group, but to those who individually have accepted him.

The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation. Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good; and whoso is deprived thereof hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed. It behoveth every one who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable

71 Bahà’u’llàh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 62.
without the other. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Source of Divine inspiration.\(^\text{72}\)

These are the opening words of the *Kitâb-i-Aqdas* and they are addressed to the individual believer and not to the ethnic group. On the other hand, there are similar words that can be found in other religions as well and still the believers of those religions have been considered an ethnic group. The situation of the Bahá’ís must, however, be seen as special because they are accepted as Bahá’ís by the Bahá’í community on an individual basis. They have to declare themselves as believers at the age of 15 or older by an individual decision even if they are born in a Bahá’í family and they can by their own volition leave the Bahá’í community. Because of this I find it necessary to separate group ideals and personal identity when discussing the background of the persecution of the Iranian Bahá’ís. Which one of them should be the primary background according to Bahá’í can be discussed in relationship to individual cases of persecution.

### 3.2 Religious Persecution and Religious Identity

Religious persecution has taken place in other areas than the Middle East, but without having a crucial importance for the religious identity of that area. In India there are prevailing factors which do not exist in the West that have given some unity to the religions. This is the reason why the persecution has not made the same impact. The first is that in India there is a unity between religion and philosophy in that Indian philosophy has not been separated from religion. In Europe there has been an important line of separation between the Christian church and the pagan Greek philosophers. Important attempts have

been made to bridge that gap and solutions have been found, but the separation of these two traditions was nevertheless made permanent during the Age of Enlightenment. The second difference is that there is a principle in Indian thought that is generally accepted and that is the principle of reincarnation. A similar principle does not exist in the West. Instead martyr ideologies have received an important position among the Western religions.

The existential questions might be important to the individual in situations of crisis or in special situations in life, but few would consider them in every day life. The attitude in every day life would normally be to relate to the totality of answers to these questions, which makes up a fundamental worldview to the individual or to the group, a cosmic order that is given as the foundation to the religious identity. The cosmic order is directed towards the group and the individual will be a part of it by accepting it. The Indian solution with a hierarchical, but balanced, system seems to underline that the driving force in religious identity would include a search for a cosmic order – an important part of the concept of reincarnation. In the West there have been attempts to find a similar cosmic order, but in order to do this, the religions normally have to develop the martyr ideology in such a way that it will become an ideology of a cosmic order.

The process that is discussed has thus as a goal to settle a relationship between competing religious identities and it is a process related to Western religions. The martyr ideologies are related to the martyrdom of one important personality, they are strongly connected to time, e.g. the moment of the martyrdom of that personality. The

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cosmic order is based on a theocratic principle or system, it is traditional and it is primarily related to men. It does not mean that women have not been a part of it, but the active partners have mostly been men. Psychologist Carol Gilligan has given another aspect to this, as she has showed that men and women perceive the world differently. Men tend to have an “ethic of justice”, which proceeds from the premise of equality, but women tend to have an “ethic of care” that rests on the premise that no one should be left alone and hurt. As I see it, there is a connection between the male “ethic of justice” and the cosmic order, based on justice, which can explain the male dominance among the defenders of the cosmic order. Erik H. Erikson has discussed the fact that women support men in their competitions and wars, although this might ultimate lead to the splitting of their homes and killing of their sons as they have learnt that it is hopeless to resist it. What happens, according to Eriksson, is that women fear the possibility to be left behind. His suggestion to this problem is that war might not stop until women learn to resist their fear and dare to accept and support resistance without weapons.

My suggestion is that the reason for persecution is that religious minorities are seen as a threat to the religious identity of the dominating group, the defenders of the cosmic order. What the defenders of the cosmic order are doing in their own estimate is to protect religious identity of the group against the forces that threaten to destroy it and create chaos. The killing, raping and pillage done by

these persons can be and is motivated by their role as defenders of the cosmic order. Creating and defending this cosmic order is considered a heroic deed by them and the central function of the hero is to function as the creator and defender of the cosmic order and also to be a symbol of it.

I use the concept “defender of the cosmic order” to be able to underline some points in the discussion. One such point is that persecution can be seen as a violent meeting between two systems of thought and both these systems are a potential threat to each other. Another point is that each system of thought is striving towards the goal that is inherent in this system. The persecutors are therefore upholding their system of thought in a critical situation that, according to their consideration, could ruin their system of thought and therefore also their identity. Eriksson has not used this terminology. Instead he has used the word “identity territorialism”. His terminology could also have been useful to a certain extent in my discussion as it refers to a situation that could include religious persecution, but that concept does not have the aspects of relativity that I feel are necessary in this discussion. In the discussion of Fereshte Taheri Bethel she discusses the situation of the martyr as a very stressful situation, which I agree with. By using the concept “defender of the cosmic order” I am also saying that persons, who are also feeling some kind of stress, although for other reasons, perform the persecution. It is always stressful for a person when someone threatens his or her

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identity and I interpret it in such a way that the stress can even be so strong that one chooses to kill the one who causes that threat.

The hero that is described as a creator and defender of the cosmic order becomes a model for role-taking and can therefore be a part of religious identity, just as the model for martyrs can. When two such models arise in a religion there will also develop two separate kinds of religious identity in the same religion. Examples of this are Christ as the victorious king and a hero, representing the cosmic order and Christ as the suffering servant of God – a martyr model that has made it possible for the believer to accept death at the hands of the powers of chaos. In Shī‘a Islam Muḥammad represents the cosmic order \(^{78}\) and the martyr model is Imām Ḥusayn. In Bahā’ī, the Bāb is described as the martyr-prophet and Bahā’u’llāh as the instrument of creation and representative of the cosmic order. In order to make these two separate models become one, some kind of concept needs to be developed that can function as a common platform. The acceptance of martyrs as saints in the Christian churches must be seen as such a development. The corresponding solution in Bahā’ī is the role that is ascribed to ‘Abdu’l-Bahā as the servant of God, who served with a constant threat of being killed himself.

3.2.1 Experiences of religious persecution

I will discuss religious persecution in the beginning of the history of each religion. Obviously religious persecution can happen at later stages as well, but whatever happens in the beginning of the history of a religion will have a greater impact on the development of
the identity of that religion. One way to see this is to note how strong it has been established in the religious calendar, which is a part of the cosmic order. The defenders of the cosmic order have as a prerequisite that there have existed a cosmic order, described in the calendar that presently is threatened and must be guarded. This order was established in the legendary past when the religion was founded and, because of this, it is especially interesting to have a comparative discussion of this period of each religion.

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Figure 2: Experience of religious persecution in different religions

The Jewish experience in Egypt during the time of Moses is described as an experience of slavery. The Egyptians no doubt, saw the slavery of the Jewish people as a part of a cosmic order and because of this the minority religion of the Jews could not be seen as a threat. When the Jewish people broke away from the slavery, this could be seen as a threat to the cosmic order, which started the activities of the defenders of the cosmic order. It is, however, not a

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78 Both Muhammad and Imam Mahdi could, to my understanding, be selected as the representative of the cosmic order. My reason for choosing Muhammad is that he is the founder of the Sharía law, which is fundamental to the cosmic order of Islam.

79 Exodus chap. 1:11.
case of martyrdom according to the original meaning of the word, which stems from the Greek word *martyrein*, meaning witness. This word has not been connected to the context of early Jewish history, but rather with the New Testament Christian context. It might be possible to see the Jewish people as victims of persecution but as there was no Jewish ideology of martyrhood, it is not possible to call them martyrs. In later Jewish history some models of martyrdom developed but there are no signs of any such model in early Jewish history.

The Egyptian persecutors reacted as the defenders of the cosmic order, which created a new historical situation. The ideology that came out of this situation was that the Jewish people became God’s chosen people and the upholders of monotheism. They got a religious identity that was connected to religious law, e.g. they became themselves the defenders of a cosmic order. The religious festivity that is celebrated in memory of this event – *Pesach* – has become central in importance to Jewish identity.

The Christian experience of initial religious persecution has some differences from the Jewish one. The most important difference is that from the beginning there was a martyr model – Jesus Christ – that thus made it possible to form an ideology of martyrdom. The first reason for persecution was connected to Judaism, the mother religion, but the main persecutors were the Roman authorities from the martyrdom of Jesus until the time when the Christians became an accepted religious group in the Roman Empire. The martyrs were hailed as saints and were given special days in the Calendar and the martyrdom of Jesus Christ was remembered through the Easter holiday. The effect of the martyrdom on Christian identity was also of
great importance. The ideal of martyrdom was later changed into an idea of servanthood as the martyrs were turned into saints. The effect of the activities of the defenders of the cosmic order could be seen in the reaction of the Jewish authorities when Christians became a threat to established Jewish religion. They also became a threat to the balance of power in the Roman Empire since the Christians disassociated themselves from the established Roman religion and especially the authority of the emperor by not accepting the worship of the Roman emperor. The result was that the activities of the defenders of the cosmic order of the Romans were also started.

Christianity could perhaps be seen as an exception to the pattern of the defenders of the cosmic order as described in this discussion, as there is no major religion that was persecuted in the beginning of its history by Christian defenders of the cosmic order, but rather there were Christian groups that were considered heretic. The idea of a cosmic order has, however, been an important part of the Christian church during its time of existence and there has been a large number of religious persecutions because of this. The defenders of the cosmic order of Christianity have especially directed themselves towards the Jewish communities. This has been motivated by the Crucifixion of Christ. The cosmic order that was established by the atonement was made possible through the martyrdom of Jesus. As the Jewish communities were symbols of the cosmic order of Judaism, they came to symbolize the perpetrators in the tradition of the martyrdom of Jesus Christ. By denying the validity of the atonement they became a threat to the cosmic order of the Christian Church itself and thus the
threat to Christian identity that motivated the persecutions. This persecution, however, took place against the will of the leaders of the Catholic Church, which shows that the defenders of the cosmic order are not necessarily the same persons as the religious leaders.

In its relation to early Islam, the Church has however not been the defender of the cosmic order and so this model cannot be used as a tool of discussion in this case. The contact between Islam and the Christian church came at a later stage and it was not until then that the activities of the defenders of the cosmic order of the church started. At this stage, Islam had grown to become an organization that could be compared in strength with the Church and so it has fallen outside the frames of this discussion.

The issue of martyrdom in Islam has primarily been upheld by Shi‘a Islam in its relation to Sunni Islam. The concept of martyrdom is, however, not excluded from Sunni Islam, which has been obvious in many conflicts in the modern world where Islamic fundamentalists are active. To support this there are verses in the Qur’ān that indicate the positive aspect of dying as a martyr:

And repute not those slain in God’s path to be dead. Nay, alive with their Lord, are they richly sustained; Rejoicing in what God of his bounty hath vouchsafed them, but have not yet overtaken them, that on them no fear shall come, nor grief.81

And they who have fled their country and quitted their homes and suffered in my cause, and have fought and fallen, I will blot out their sins from them, and I will bring them into gardens beneath which the streams do flow.82

80 I believe it is possible to see the minority situation of the Jewish community as a parallel to religions that are newly established.
82 The Koran, p. 404.
The relationship between martyrdom and war for the sake of religion is obvious especially in the second verse. If this is seen from the background of the discussion that W. Montgomery Watt has regarding holy war, the connection between *jihād* as holy war and martyrdom in early Islam must be seen as well established. The background of the institution of holy war, the razzias that the Arabic tribes were raging towards each other, was developed into war against non-Muslims with the purpose of expanding the Muslim community.83

This concept of martyrdom has, however, a special station in importance in Shi‘a Islam where Imam Ḥusayn is seen as the primary martyr, which gives him a station that is parallel to the station of Jesus Christ as the primal martyr in a martyr ideology. No doubt, the background in the Qur‘ān was of major importance, but what happened when Imam Ḥusayn was killed in the battle of Karbila was that the Shi‘a community saw an example of someone who had actually been killed in a way that was described in the Qur‘ān and who was believed to be in a special relationship with God. In this way a hierophany was created and Shi‘a Islam got its own martyr ideology. This hierophany was remembered in the calendar, especially in the beginning of the month of Muharram and its culmination at the day of Āshūrā, and became the basis of a Shi‘a identity. During this period three kinds of meetings dominate the life of the believers: 1) the *hay‘ats* where groups in the neighbourhood or other groups meet to listen to the preachings of a member of the ‘Ulamā’. 2) The *rawḍa-khāni* where people can listen to the sufferings of Imam Ḥusayn either in the home of someone or in a special house, a Ḥusaynīyyih. 3) The

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funeral marches, called *ta’ziya*, in memorial of the martyrdom of Imam Ḥusayn where flagellants form the most spectacular part of a mourning march.84

The model of defenders of the cosmic order is also applicable in this case. The imams in Shī’a Islam claimed to be the righteous protectors of the cosmic order and by this they posed a threat to the cosmic order that the Sunni Caliphs claimed to protect. The reaction of the Sunni Caliphs was to protect their cosmic order and thus Caliph Yazid attacked Imam Ḥusayn. This does not, however, mean that there were no other reasons for the attack, but the motivation for the attack was probably related to this pattern with two conflicting identities and the conflict between the two major schools of Islam had started.

The idea of a just law as an aspect of a cosmic order is central to both Islamic identity and Bahā’ī identity, although the Shari’ā system, unlike the Bahā’ī law, has been tested as an instrument to build up civilisations. The instrument to uphold this legal system is, however, different. In Islam there is a group of specialists of religious law, the ‘Ulamā’. These are not only theoretical specialists, but are also themselves upholders of the law. In Bahā’ī there does not exist such a group, which might be explained by the small number of its members. If the development of Bahā’ī would be such that it grew in number substantially there is no principle to stop a similar group to develop within Bahā’ī. Because of the nature of Bahā’ī administration, this group would however not be the primary upholder of Bahā’ī law, as

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this responsibility would rest upon the elected bodies in the Bahá’í administration and the members of these bodies are elected without any demands of a certain education or ordination. The only prerequisite is that the members are adult members of the Bahá’í community and that their voting rights have not been removed for some reason. There is also no possibility for the individual to indicate whether he or she would like to be a member of such a body. This has influenced the religious identity in the Bahá’í tradition. The individual Bahá’í is in a situation where he or she might be elected to such a body and because of this they have to be more actively aware of the details and structure of Bahá’í law. The individual Muslims have another relationship to the Sharia law, as they can leave these matters to experts. So, there is no point of having ‘Ulamá’ within Bahá’í.

One problem with religious identity that is found in any religion that aspires to go beyond its ethnic limits is how to relate to its primary ethnic background. This problem exists in Islam in its relation to Arabic language and Arabic culture. It also exists in Bahá’í in its relation to Persian language and Persian culture, but there are important differences.

In Islam, Arabic has been a holy language, the language of the Qur’ān. As long as the Muslims also have been or become Arabic speaking, this has not been a problem. The majority of Muslims today, however, do not have Arabic as their mother tongue. There are a variety of ethnic backgrounds among Muslims, which naturally must be seen as strength to a missionising religion. It does however create

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85 Lights of Guidance, pp. 10-11.
problems for the religious identity when a religion is so strongly related to a certain ethnic background as Islam and there are many examples of this tension in the history of Islam.

In Bahāʾī the ethnic identity is more complicated. The writings of Bahā’u’llāh are either in Arabic or Persian and the same applies to the writings of the Bāb and ‘Abdu’l-Bahā. A large extent of the writings of Shoghi Effendi is in English. The ethnic background of Bahāʾī is in Persian culture and many of the Bahāʾīs are of Persian background. This ethnic background is, however, not as strong as the Arabic background in Islam, as it is acceptable to translate the basic writings into other languages. As the Qurʾān should not be translated, the Arabic language and the Arabic culture will always be of primary importance to the Islamic identity. The Persian background of Bahāʾī have been balanced by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā and Shoghi Effendi as they have emphasized the development of a Western Bahāʾī identity in North America, thus creating a parallel ethnic background. The believers that came from these different ethnic backgrounds were then trained to co-operate through the administrative system of the Bahāʾī community.

To be related to Muḥammad, to be a Siyyid, is in the Muslim world a source of pride and it could also be the base of a profession. In the Bahāʾī tradition the family name can show if a certain person is from the family of Bahā’u’llāh – Aghsan – or from the family of Bāb – Afnan. There are today no families in the Bahāʾī community with the family name Aghsan. The reason for this is that all the relatives of Bahā’u’llāh who could bear this name are either seen as “covenant-
breakers” or have passed away without heirs. There are, however, Bahāʾīs who bear the family name Afnān, and this name is generally respected. It does, however, not give its bearer a certain status automatically, like the Siyyids in Islam. It is also not displayed as a title, as in the case of the Siyyids.

Is it possible to go the other way around and create a new national identity based on the foundation of a religious identity? The question bears relevance to the example of the Pakistani identity, a non-Arabic nation that is primarily Sunni in its religious identity. Akbar S. Ahmad has discussed Islamic identity and the ethnic identity in Pakistan in his book *Pakistan and Islamic identity – The search for Saladin*. This book describes how Jinnah, the founder of the state of Pakistan, presented an Islamic identity that was not Arabic and not Indian. A problem that was very important to this new state was how to integrate the different minorities, without damaging the national identity. Jinnah had tried to find a solution in the history of the Mogul empire, using Shah Akbar as a model, as well as in Islam itself:

The tolerance and goodwill that great Emperor Akbar showed to all the non-Muslims is not of recent origin. It dates back thirteen centuries ago when our Prophet not only by words but by deeds treated the Jews and Christians, after he had conquered them, with the utmost tolerance and regard and respect for their faith and beliefs.88

This statement was, however, not easy to apply as basis of a new Pakistani identity. The ethnical relation of the inhabitants with different provinces like Sind, Punjab and Kashmir was much stronger than with the new country of Pakistan and the Islamic identity was not

strong enough to keep the country together, which later became obvious when East Pakistan became a separate nation.89

3.3 The Structure of Religious Identity in Bahā‘ī

Religious identity can perhaps be created in different ways, but in “revealed” religions it can hardly be done without creating a strong relationship with the founder of that religion, to the Prophet himself. In Bahā‘ī the name of the founder is Bahā’u’llāh and he is described as a manifestation of God, a spiritual king, like Jesus in his role of the Messiah. The ideal relationship between Bahā’u’llāh and the believer is given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā and the station of a servant, that he refers to in his talks, his writings and his life. A martyr in the Bahā‘ī tradition is thus a believer who has accepted the role of a servant to such a high degree that he or she is prepared to give his or her life. Therefore there is a difference between those Bahā’īs who are active in the Bahā‘ī administration or as teachers, and the martyrs, but it is not a difference in nature, but of degree. All are servants of Bahā’u’llāh and have ‘Abdu’l-Bahā as their ideal. All take part in the same cosmic drama where peace on earth, as promised in earlier religions, is created through the World Order of Bahā’u’llāh.90 Shoghi Effendi commented upon this matter in a letter to a believer in 1932:

The Cause at present does not need martyrs who would die for the faith, but servants who desire to teach and establish the Cause throughout the world. To live to teach in the present day is like being martyred in those early days. It is the spirit that moves us that counts, not the act through which that spirit

90 This servant ideology was not developed until ‘Abdu’l-Bahā was old enough to take on this role. This means that it cannot relate to the persecution of the early Bābīs.
expresses itself; and that spirit is to serve the Cause of God with our heart and soul.91

3.3.1 The ideal Bahá’í

...Bahá’í identity: the capacity to look upon the world and its condition from the point of view of the Teachings rather than from the standpoint of one’s nationality or non-Bahá’í background.92

In the introductory book Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era by J. E. Esslemont, there is a chapter with the title “What is a Bahá’í?”. In this chapter the requirements for a true Bahá’í are discussed and this is of special interest to this inquiry as it has been checked and approved by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.93 There are many introductory books to Bahá’í, but this book has a special station because of its connection to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. Shoghi Effendi posthumously gave J. E. Esslemont the rank of a Hand of the Cause.94

In the beginning of the chapter “Living the Life”, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is quoted in his answer to the question “what is a Bahá’í?”: “To be a Bahá’í simply means to love all the world; to love humanity and try to serve it; to work for universal peace and universal brotherhood.”95 In another quotation he underlines that it is important to live according to Bahá’i ideals and not only to call oneself a Bahá’í. A person who lives according to these ideals is in reality a Bahá’í even if that person has not recognized Bahá’u’lláh as a manifestation of God. Still that person

92 Universal House of Justice, Ridván Message to Europe, Ridván 153 (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1996).
93 J.E. Esslemont, Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era, p. xi.
94 Ibid., p. 283.
has to recognize the Messengers of God,\textsuperscript{96} as he or she is dependent upon God, like a plant that is growing in the shade but still is dependent upon the sun. The next heading is called “Devotion to God” and emphasizes the importance of love of God through the manifestation of God. A Bahá’í must therefore love God and love mankind in order to “attain the Bahá’í life \textit{in all its fullness}”.

This chapter continues to elaborate on this theme from different perspectives. Search after truth is one of the fundamental principles of Bahá’í and means that each individual has a responsibility to search for himself. Bahá’u’lláh defines this principle as such: “The freedom of man from superstition and imitation, so that he may discern the Manifestations of God with the eye of oneness, and consider all affairs with keen sight.”\textsuperscript{97} The individual is thus encouraged to freely search for the truth, which suggests that truth is relative, but is also absolute as there exists a divine truth that is absolute. Manfred Hutter has discussed these two aspects of truth in Bahá’í and has referred to them as the horizontal and vertical dimensions in religion.\textsuperscript{98} Other parts of this chapter dwell on the need of love of God, not only the manifestations of God, of severance from everything that is not of God, of obedience to the commands of God and serving God by serving ones neighbour. To be a Bahá’í also means to teach the word of God\textsuperscript{99} by presenting the message to other people or, if that is not

\textsuperscript{96} Messenger of God is here used as a synonym to Manifestation of God.
\textsuperscript{97} Bahá’u’lláh, Words of Wisdom, J.E. Esslemont, \textit{Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era}, p. 85.
\textsuperscript{99} In Bahá’í terminology the concept of teaching is used for activities with the aim of telling other people about the Bahá’í message with the ultimate goal that this person
possible, by “living the life”. “The people of Bahá must serve the Lord with wisdom, teach others by their lives, and manifest the light of God in their deeds. The effect of deeds is in truth more powerful than that of words.”

After this follow some ethical aspects on Bahá’í life: courtesy and reverence, the sin-covering eye, humility, truthfulness and honesty. They can be summarized in the following words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá from the *Diary of Mírzá Ahmad Sohrab*: “In the religion of Bahá’u’lláh all are servants and maidservants, brothers and sisters. As soon as one feels a little better than, a little superior to, the rest, he is in a dangerous position, and unless he cast away the seed of such an evil thought, he is not a fit instrument for the service of the Kingdom.” The last one, self-realisation, is to get to know and give full expression to the latent perfections within men. “O My Servant! Thou art even as a finely tempered sword concealed in the darkness of its sheath and its value hidden from the artificer’s knowledge. Wherefore come forth from the sheath of self and desire that thy worth may be made resplendent and manifest unto the world.”

3.3.2 Opposition in the Bahá’í community

Opposition in any organization could be on different levels. It could be on a level that could be described as a discussion rather than a genuine opposition and it could be on a level where the organization should accept Bahá’u’lláh as a manifestation of God. The word “missionise” is however not used, which has a background in that this goal must be balanced towards the principle in Bahá’í that each individual must search for the truth himself. This has the tendency to give this process a character of dialogue rather than direct proselytising.

101 Ibid., p. 95.
itself is threatened. Both these levels can be found in the history of Bahá’í. The milder opposition is handled in an institutional form, as it is possible for the individual to question the decision of a Bahá’í institution by appealing to the National Spiritual Assembly and later to the Universal House of Justice.

When the Local Spiritual Assembly has given its decision in the matter, you then have the right to appeal, if you wish, to the National Spiritual Assembly for further consideration of your case.

It is true, as you state, in your letter of 26th May 1975, that every Bahá’í may write direct to the Universal House of Justice but this does not apply in the case of appeals which should be submitted through the National Spiritual Assembly. Only if the Assembly fails to forward the appeal within reasonable time should the appellant take the case to the Universal House of Justice.103

What does, however, happen when the more serious form of opposition occurs? This might be described as a situation when a person accepts Bahá’u’lláh, but does not accept the Bahá’í identity that is offered. This was the situation when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá passed away and Shoghi Effendi was appointed Guardian in his Will and Testament. In Bahá’í terminology, this person is called a covenant-breaker, which means that the covenant with God that this person by an individual decision has accepted is broken. To be a covenant-breaker is not the same as leaving the Bahá’í community. It is also not the same as being an inactive member or breaking the Bahá’í law. It is rather to oppose the existing leadership and to try to create or support an alternative Bahá’í organization.104

In the history of religions there are many cases when new sects, schools, churches etc. have been created. This could even be seen as normal and a sign that a religion is alive and a discussion on

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102 Ibid., p. 97.
fundamental principles is going on. To the religion itself, however, this process is rarely seen as positive. The believers themselves would consider this being a matter of what is true and what is false, a question that is difficult, even impossible for the scholar to decide upon. Another aspect to consider is whether there is an explicit belief, a creed, that the members have to accept in order to be accepted as members. In the case of the Bahá’í religion it is to accept Bahá’u’lláh as a manifestation of God, which is connected to the general idea of the Covenant.

With the passing of time, Bahá’í has changed identity substantially during the time of its existence. In the time of the Báb it was a Mahdí movement, dominated by emphasizing the importance for the individual believer to be ready to sacrifice his or her life as a martyr. Since the mid-1960’s it can rather be described as an international organization, led by an elected institution, with international peace as the most important focus of interest. This change of identity has mainly been motivated by the internal development of Bahá’í, based on the Bahá’í writings, and not on external influence. For the members in the Bahá’í community it has, as a result of this development, always been important to be obedient to the leading institution, whether this has been a person or a group of persons, in order to have continuity in his or her religious identity. This development has, however, not been going on without opposition from individuals or groups within the Bahá’í community. This kind of opposition has existed for the whole period of the existence of Bahá’í and it has been directed towards its central leadership.

There have been processes going on to form different sects in Bahá’í, but no attempt to split the Bahá’í community in two or more parts has been really successful. There do exist minor groups even today, such as the followers of Mason Remey,\textsuperscript{105} but they can hardly be compared in organizational strength to the Bahá’í community. There did, however, exist such attempts in the past and at the times of change in the Bahá’í identity, these groups and individuals were possible to compare in strength to the mainstream Bahá’í community. Two such examples will be looked into that both concern the situation after the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: The opposition of Ahmad Sohrab and the opposition of Ruth White.

When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá passed away, the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá appointed Shoghi Effendi as leader of the Bahá’í community, the Guardian of the Cause of God. This raised problems for some Bahá’ís, who could not accept it. The two persons, mentioned above who were examples of this, both had problems accepting Shoghi Effendi but for different reasons. Ahmad Sohrab had created an organization of his own, the New History society, that functioned as a competing organization next to the Bahá’í community in North America. In his book *Abdul Baha’s Grandson – story of a Twentieth Century Excommunication*, he mentions the example of Ruhi Afnan, the cousin of Shoghi Effendi who had been expelled by Shoghi Effendi as a covenant-breaker 1950. Ruhi Afnan was a member of the family of Shoghi Effendi, who had problems accepting him as such a leader and who had joined the earlier dissenters of the family of Bahá’u’lláh. When Shoghi Effendi had excommunicated

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid, p. 410.
Ahmad Sohrab took this as a reason to discredit Shoghi Effendi in his book. Ahmad Sohrab did not question the authenticity of the *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahā*. He did, however, question the way Shoghi Effendi carried out his duties, as the Guardian and the expelling of Ruhi Afnan was to him an example of how Shoghi Effendi failed to exercise his office in a correct way.\(^{107}\)

The only Bahā‘ī who was declared covenant-breaker and who questioned the authenticity of the *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahā* was an American Bahā‘ī, Ruth White. According to her, this text was not written by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā and she even let an English specialist of handwriting test it with two other examples of the handwriting of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā.\(^{108}\) She describes this in her books *The Bahai Religion and its Enemy the Bahai Organization* and *Abdul Baha’s Questioned Will and Testament*. This expert came to the conclusion that Ruth White was right. In the book where she presents the result of this expert, there is, however, no information whether this specialist had any knowledge of Persian or Arabic handwriting or whether his expertise was in English handwriting only. All the other dissenters, who were Iranians themselves and had a solid knowledge of the handwriting and style of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā never expressed any doubts of the authenticity of the *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahā*.\(^{109}\) Her opposition was, however, primarily based on her objection to the idea that Bahā‘ī should be organized as a community. As she perceived

\(^{106}\) Ibid., pp. 359-360.


Bahá’í, it was based on the wisdom of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and to put this into an organization was to destroy it. The freedom of the individual should not be restricted, which would happen within an organization and she compares Shoghi Effendi with the Pope, Hitler, Lenin and Stalin respectively in her books.¹¹⁰

When this kind of opposition in Bahá’í is compared to a similar process in Islam, there are some parallel questions. One is whether the leadership should be kept within the family of the founder. This is what Shi’a Islam says and this thought has also existed in Bahá’í, as long as there have been individual leaders. One point of critique that was raised from some dissenters, like Ahmad Sohrab and Āvārih,¹¹¹ towards the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was that it did not anticipate the immediate election of the Universal House of Justice. If this had been done it would have had the effect that others than members of the family of Bahá’u’llāh, such as Ahmad Sohrab and Āvārih themselves, could have become members of the leading institution of the Bahá’í community. Instead ‘Abdu’l-Bahá appointed Shoghi Effendi, a member of the family of Bahá’u’llāh to be the leader of the Bahá’í community. In Shi’a Islam this is said to have been done in a speech, made by Muḥammad. A minority accepted this, while the majority accepted the Sunni version. What had been an oral statement in Islam was in Bahá’í written tablets and testaments. The documents have been the Kitāb-i-‘Aḥd (testament of Bahá’u’llāh) and the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. In both cases the

¹¹¹ A. Taherzadeh, The Covenant, p. 344.
believer had to accept that this document was of divine origin and that
the new leader would bring totally new development into the Bahá'í
community. In the case of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá it was the opening of a
totally new part of the world with new Bahá'ís from the Western
civilisation in contact with those Bahá’ís who were borne and raised
in the same culture as Bahá’u’lláh. In the case of Shoghi Effendi it
was the development of a new way of organizing the Bahá'í
community. The Mahdíst movement of the 19th century was turned into
a completely new organization that was theocratic in leadership and
democratic in its way of working. Both these changes had great
impacts on how Bahá’í identity was to be defined.

The opposition of Ruth White is more difficult to relate to the
development of Islam than other examples of opposition in Bahá’í. I
find it more fruitful to consider her background in American society,
as she stresses individual freedom and ideas that are against any kind
of organization, combined with her devotion to the person and
wisdom of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. This kind of individualistic religiosity that
is devoted to Eastern wisdom has more in common with other
movements that have been active in the American society since the
end of the 19th century. There has been a fascination in the West with
the wisdom of the East in the latest century or so and I see Ruth White
as an example of this. Her negative attitude to organized religion,
which could be considered a Western trait, supports this suggestion. It
must also be remembered that the most central part of being a Western
Bahá’í during the time of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was to be personally devoted
to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. What was later known as Bahá’í administration was,
however, not well developed in those days. Instead, individualism was still strong among the Western Bahā’īs.\textsuperscript{112}

3.4 Servant Ideology in Bahā’ī

In the 19\textsuperscript{th} century when Bahā’ī was focused on Iran it was no doubt been primarily a religion that was based on Islamic expectation of the coming of the Mahdi. As long as Bahā’ī was based in Islamic environment this situation contained. In the West Bahā’ī was presented as the answer to the expectations of the Gospel of the coming of Jesus Christ. It developed, however, to become a modern movement of thought in the West by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā. Contrary to modernity that was based in the enlightenment philosophy that was negative to religion, the Bahā’ī movement was motivated by religion.

The identity of the Bahā’īs in Iran during the 19\textsuperscript{th} century can probably not be described in any other way than as a traditional religion. In the West it is more complicated, as Bahā’ī had to relate to both religious expectations and to modern Western society and with time the aspect of modernity probably became more pressing than the other aspect. One such principle is the need for global peace, not only as a principle but combined with a suggestion that institutions should be created to enforce this principle. The goal is “The Most Great Peace”, involving the totality of society and offering an identity where this project of the society is combined with an individual project – a way of working that is common in the movement of modernity.

The Bahā’ī principles that can be found in the writings of Bahā’u’llāh have many similarities with Western modernity, in spite

\textsuperscript{112} R. Hollinger, “Introduction”, \textit{Community Histories, Studies in the Bābī and
of the fact that Iran was still a traditional country. Thus there is little
that would suggest that these principles had its roots in the culture of
the 19th century Iran. It is also difficult to see Bahá’í modernity as an
aspect of Western modernity, as it is motivated by religion and not by
rationality. I therefore suggest that this aspect of Bahá’í should be
seen as a special form of modernity, parallel with and not a part of
Western modernity. Western modernity has conquered the world by
successfully dominating the traditional societies inside as well as
outside European civilisation. Western modernity today is found all
over the world in different forms in different cultures, but still with the
same background and the same motivation – the enlightenment
movement in Europe that was motivated by rationality in contrast to
the traditional society that was religiously motivated. Bahá’í does not
seem to be a part of this Europeanisation in spite of its many similarities
to Western modern principles. When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá visited North
America and Europe he met many audiences and well-known
personalities and there are a great number of addresses that he held
that were written down and put together in books like Paris Talks, The
Promulgation of Universal Peace and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London. It is
not difficult to find themes in these addresses like universal peace,
racial amity, equality between men and women etc., themes that are
easily found in books and articles among thinkers in the West and
which are part of modern society. Some aspects were new, but many
more were well-known thoughts to the intellectual elite in the West,
which might suggest that the sources actually were Western

modernity. The sources of the principles that were presented by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā were, however, not the intellectual debate in the West, but the writings of Bahā’u’llāh and these writings are described as revealed writings and not writings that were a part of the academic discussion in the Western world. These writings are not described as revealed just in order to incline a certain literary style, but are believed to be divine revelation by Bahā’īs and must therefore be described as religiously motivated. There have been attempts to show that the modern ideas of Bahā’u’llāh actually have their roots in the West, but these attempts neglect the context in which these roots are re-planted, into a context of revelation.

The development of Bahāʾī has occurred through a number of discernible steps that include some aspects that are more obviously religious and others that have more similarities with modern society. The beginning was easily recognizable as a Mahdī movement that arose in a Shi’a environment that persecuted its members with a fervour that could well have been inspired by the collective memories of early persecution of Shi’a Islam itself. This description is especially valid for the first decade of the Bābī religion. From the time of the major persecutions that took place in 1852, which led to the banishment of Bahā’u’llāh to Baghdad, the situation changed and the national persecutions as well as the upheavals were discontinued. During the time of banishment, Bahāʾī became more obviously a separate religious movement. Bahāʾī in this way over time developed roots outside the soil of Iranian culture and the Shi’a Islam. When

\[\text{No doubt there was a discussion on these matters among the western Bahāʾīs, but the thoughts were introduced as a part of Bahāʾī by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā who had access to the writings of Bahāʾu’llāh.}\]
‘Abdu’l-Bahā sent Bahā’ī teachers to North America to preach the Bahā’ī message, the soil of Western Christianity was added.

The early Western Bahā’īs probably joined their fellow westerners in their suspiciousness towards the world of Islam, contrary to the Iranian Bahā’īs, as their acceptance of Bahāʾu’llāh rested primarily on Bahāʾu’llāh as the return of Christ in accordance with biblical prophecies. In this way there had arisen the situation with Bahāʾ consisting of two different parts: an Eastern part with the background in Shī’a Mahdi expectations and a Western part with the background in Protestant Christian messianic expectations. In the beginning they had different views in important matters such as their view on Islam. These two parts were kept together by their devotion to the central leader of Bahāʾ, who in those days was the person of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, who would explain the Bahāʾ view in important matters. During the period of leadership of Shoghi Effendi it was he personally who kept this organization together as the “Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith”, a position he had been appointed to by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā in his Will and Testament. Among the instruments at hand in order to keep the two parts of the Bahāʾ community together were pilgrimage to the World Centre of the Bahāʾ community, the special Bahāʾ administration that was developed, based on the writings of Bahāʾu’llāh and the systematic teaching plans, that had as their basic document the Tablets of the Divine Plan by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā. In this way there was a system to strengthen the personal ties of the believers with the leader or leading institution, a practical way to make the believers from different cultures co-operate and an international project for them to work on together. In this, there were great similarities.
between Bahā’ī, which had now developed to become what can be called a Bahā’ī modernity, and the Western modernity concerning the principle of the modern project that the individual could develop into a personal project. So the project was there, but how much did its principles relate to the situation of society at large?

The principles of modernity, the Centre of Bahā’ī modernity, have existed in Bahā’ī parallel to the more clearly religious aspects from early time. During his visit in Europe and North-America ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, however, put greater emphasise on these principles in his public talks. Especially he dwelt on the principles of universal peace, equality between men and women and the principle of racial amity. In his many talks he discussed the Bahā’ī principles in relation to the need of the society in the West and the world at large, which brought into existence a new stage in Bahā’ī history where the focus in the presentation to the public was not on the traditionally religious parts in Bahā’ī but rather on the principles of modernity, while the system of religious matters remained the driving force in the creation of a special Bahā’ī identity. These kinds of talks were of course nothing new to the pilgrims, but the situation as such was new such as the presence of media and the public meeting places used. Both the Bāb and Bahā’u’llāh had met the public in situations that in a way could be compared to these talks by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, like the meeting between Bahā’u’llāh and the British Professor E.G. Browne. The talks of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā were collected and published in volumes such as Paris Talks, The Promulgation of Universal Peace and ‘Abdu’l-Bahā in London. To this collection could be added the interviews that

Laura Clifford Barney did with ‘Abdu’l-Bahā in 1908. In this way the principles of modernity were discussed on a number of occasions and put into relationship with actualities.
CHAPTER 4
Two Waves of Religious Persecution

4.1 Persecuted and Persecutors

The two waves of persecutions referred to in the headline of this chapter are the persecutions during the period from the 1840’s to the beginning of the 1850’s, and the period that started with the Islamic revolution in Iran 1979. The persecutions that started with the Islamic revolution had a peak in the 1980’s and may be said to have ended at the time of writing even if there still seem to be imprisonments of Bahā’īs in Iran.

One important question in this study is why the Iranian Bahā’īs have accepted martyrdom, but before this question is discussed it must first be established that this is the correct way of describing their reaction to the persecution. Therefore it is important to start by studying the persecution itself, which will be done in this chapter. This will be done with the concept of martyr – shahīd – in Shi’ī Islam as a background, especially its relationship to the concept of jihād. Even if the Bahā’ī concept of martyrdom is not dependent on the concept of jihād it is important to establish whether the concept of martyrdom is related to passive acceptance of martyrdom or whether there is some other kind of active resistance. The very fact that the Bahā’ī community has tried to stop the persecution by contacting and co-operating with the international community suggests that the

115 As jihād means effort it implies some kind of active expression of will. This does not necessarily mean a holy war, but very often in Iran it has meant fighting a war with sword in hand.
Bahá'í attitude is not total endurance of persecution, although it might imply total acceptance by the persecuted individual.

Why has it been possible for the Bahá'í community to communicate so successfully with the Western powers during this persecution when it has been so difficult to communicate with the leaders in Iran? My suggestion is that it is not only due to a general righteousness among the Western powers but also the similarities of the basic values of the modernity of the Western powers and of the modernity of Bahá'í. These basic values have been emphasized as the Iranian Bahá'ís have done nothing to resist the persecution, which has resulted in a number of Bahá'í martyrs. This does not suggest that the Iranian Bahá'ís would not have received any help without these principles. It does, however, suggest that these principles have made communication with these countries much easier and the non-resistant attitude among the Iranian Bahá'ís has added to this. The Islamic government in Iran has, however, seen this situation in another light. From their viewpoint, it is no doubt possible to see the general policy of the international community as a persecution of Iran as a non-Western, Islamic country. Because of the connection between the Bahá'í International Community and the international community, the accusation of the ‘Ulamá’ in Iran that the Iranian Bahá'ís are foreign spies – agents of the forces that persecute Shi'a Islam in Iran – must then have become even more justified to the ‘Ulamá’. This has resulted in a locked situation for the Iranian Bahá'ís, who have been able to do very little to control their own situation. As Bahá'í does not

116 Bahá'í International Community is the name of a Bahá'í agency, functioning as representatives of the Universal House of Justice at the United Nations and other international and national agencies.
accept any reaction but non-violence from the Bahāʾīs in this situation, their only option has been to try to persevere and trust that their fellow believers outside Iran would continue to work for the end of the persecution. Their hope could only have been that the international pressure would stop the persecutions in the long term, although there was a risk that the persecution would increase in the short term. It has no doubt been a great test to their religious identity, as they have also known that they could easily leave the Bahāʾī community and instead join Shiʿa Islam, with the result that they would no longer be persecuted.

4.2 Background of the Persecution

To say that there have been and still is a tension between the Western world and the Islamic world is an understatement. The relationship has often been dominated by feelings of hate and suspicion among the peoples from both sides. Attempts to bridge the gap of these two different cultures in order to reach a balance may have happened occasionally, but normally it has been a case of submission and domination.

Under the general discussion of East and West involvement in Iran, there are two historical situations that must be dealt with. One situation is the 19th century political situation in Iran, dominated by two colonial powers – Great Britain and the Imperial Russia – and the growing political influence of Shiʿa ‘Ulamā’ that influenced the

117 There are situations where it is possible to use violence, according to Bahāʾī. The general rule, according to Bahāʾu’llāh, is: “It hath been forbidden you to carry arms unless essential…” Bahāʾu’llāh, Kitāb-i-Aqdas, pp. 239-240. Here is also discussed what is meant by “essential”.
118 The Bahāʾīs are persecuted because of their membership in the Bahāʾī community, which I try to establish further down in this chapter.
persecution of the Iranian Bábís and Bahá’ís. The other one is the political situation in Iran during the period after World War II. This has been dominated by the Cold War on the one hand and, on the other, the tension between the secular rule of the Pahlaví regime and the aspiration of the ‘Ulamá’ to rule in the absence of the Hidden Imam.

The monarchy during the Qajar dynasty (1794-1925) is often described as having become relatively weak as it was more and more dominated by two Western colonial powers on the one hand and the ‘Ulamá’ on the other. The strength of the colonial powers in Iran increased during the 19th century until the Persian revolution 1909, when it was halted. The strength of the ‘Ulamá’ also increased during the 19th century. An example of the increasing power of the ‘Ulamá’ can be seen in the Tobacco Régie in 1890, where it was Mírzá-yí-Shírāzí, the leading Shi’a divine, and not the Shah who resisted the Colonial powers. What happened was that tobacco was imported to Iran and a British man, Major Gerald F. Talbot, had won the concession to institute a monopoly of tobacco trade with Iran. As the Iranians often were heavy smokers, this situation had great symbolic implications. The reaction to the Tobacco Régie was that the leading representative of the ‘Ulamá’ published a *fatwā* where he totally interdicted the use of tobacco. The result of this was that almost everybody stopped smoking, making the monopoly of tobacco trade useless.119

The situation during the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979) was different from the situation during the Qajar dynasty. One new factor that was changed was the situation in Russia as the Russian revolution relieved the Iranians from the pressure of the northern Colonial power.120 Another new factor that was changed was the situation of the Shah as Reza121 Shâh Pahlavi was ruling his country in accordance with nationalistic principles that resembled the ways of Kemal Atatürk. Because of this he had no ideological reason to depend upon the ‘Ulamâ’, but he had every reason to fight them. Iran, in this way, developed from being a traditional society towards being a modern one.122 The third factor is economic. During this period oil became more important to the world economy and Iran became one of the oil-producing countries, dominated by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, but the money did not benefit the Iranian people in general during this period. It did, however, strengthen the situation of Reza Shâh, both in his relation to the British, who depended upon him, and in his relation to the ‘Ulamâ’.123

4.2.1 The Renewal of Shîa Islam in Iran

The growing strength of Shîa Islam in Iran that was expressed in the Islamic revolution in 1979 was, by no means, a quick development. It reached a peak in this revolution but had started in the 18th century, when one of two competing schools became the

120 The relation between Iran and its northern neighbour, the tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, did not change in such a way that Soviet Union did not try to increase its dominance but the very great dominance of tsarist Russia in northern Iran during the Qajar dynasty had been unique.
121 This spelling is in accordance with pronunciation. The spelling according to the system of transcription generally used in this study is Rîdâ.
victorious part. It was primarily the Usulī School that had defeated the Akhbārī School but the Usulī school was also dominating the Shaykhi School, the school that was born in the 18th century and later gave birth to the Bābī movement in 1844. As an effect of this domination, the Shaykhi School over time developed in the direction of Usulī theology. In the middle of the 20th century it was obvious that it had gone through, what Momen calls a “doctrinal drift”.124

4.2.2 The Attitude of the ‘Ulamā’ towards Bahā’ī

Behind the persecutions of Iranian Bahā’īs there have always seemed to be a representative of ‘Ulamā’, urging the people to take part in the persecutions. To the ‘Ulamā’ and the Shī’ī Muslims, the Bābī/Bahā’ī case was and is a clear case of apostasy and the claim of the Bāb and Bahā’u’llāh of the status of prophethood, without any doubts, a false claim. Muḥammad is the last prophet and the Bābīs and Bahā’īs should be punished by death, if they don’t return to Islam. This principle was made clear by a Shiraz judge, Ḥujjat u’l-Islām Qazā’ī in an interview, published 22 February 1983:

The Iranian Nation has risen in accordance with Koranic teachings and by the will of God has determined to establish the government of God on earth. Therefore, it cannot tolerate the perverted Bahā’īs who are the instruments of Satan and followers of the Devil and of the super-powers and their agents. It is absolutely certain that in the Islamic Republic of Iran there is no place whatsoever for Bahā’īs or Bahā’īsm. Before it is too late the Bahā’īs should recant Bahā’īsm, which is condemned by reason and logic. Otherwise, the day will come when the Islamic Nation will deal with the Bahā’īs in accordance with its religious obligations and will… God willing, fulfil the prayer of Noah, mentioned in the Qur’ān, ‘and Noah said, Lord, leave not one single family of infidels on earth.’125

124 Momen, An Introduction to Shi‘i Islam, pp. 230-231.
The situation is equally clear to the Bahā’īs. They believe that the prophecies of Islam have been fulfilled and that they, by accepting the Bāb and Bahā’u’llāh, have remained true to the teachings of Islam. To deny the Bāb and Bahā’u’llāh is to deny the truth of Islam and of Muhammad as a prophet of God. There is, however, an important difference between the attitude of the ‘Ulamā’ and the Bahā’īs. According to the Bahā’ī principles, each one has to freely search for the truth, which means that also the Muslims have a personal responsibility to look into the claims of Bahā’ī. If they were true Muslims they would then have accepted Bahā’u’llāh as a manifestation of God. The same principle, however, makes it impossible for the Bahā’īs to punish anyone who does not accept Bahā’u’llāh, even if they would have the practical possibilities to do so. If they did, they would deny those persons their right to freely search for the truth, a right that is given by God.126

The struggle between Akhbārī and Uṣulī in the 18th century and the victory of the Uṣulī is of major importance in order to understand the persecution. The development changed the future of twelver Shi’a in Iran, and laid the foundation of a development that would pave the way for the revolution in Iran 1979. Would the development in general have been different if the Uṣulī School and not Akhbārī had lost this struggle? This is possible as the Akhbārī school did not put such a strong emphasize on the role of the ‘Ulamā’. It could also have

126 This principle is universally accepted by the Bahā’ī community. As there does not exist and have never existed a country where the Bahā’īs have been in majority and other religious communities in minority, this principle has, however, not really been tested.
influenced the situation of the Bahá’ís, considering that the ‘Ulamá’ have been so important in the persecution of the Iranian Bahá’ís.

The relationship between the Akhbārī School and the Bábís is much less distinctive than the relationship between the two other schools and the Bábís. The clash between the Akhbārī and the Uṣuli School had taken place half a century before the declaration of the Báb and at the time of the Bábí movement this school had to a great extent seized to exist. One of the leading Bábís, Hujjat-i-Zanjānī,127 had been a mujtahid of the Akhbārī School. This should be compared to the major role of the Shaykhī School in its relation to Bábism.

4.3 The Bábí Persecutions

The two periods of very active persecutions of the Bahá’ís have their background in two Islamic revolutions: the one in the 19th century and the Islamic revolution of 1979. During both persecutions the Western world has reacted with horror, but in different ways and with differing intensity. There are obvious differences between these two periods of persecution. The situation of the ‘Ulamá’ is different and the governing institutions of the Western world and the international community have changed.

The first period started in 1844 or possibly 1845, which means that the persecution of the Bábí and Bahá’í religions has been going on practically from the beginning of their existence.128 It is, however, not clear when this first period of persecution ends, although the major wave took place during the 1840’s and the early 1850’s. This wave

128 According to Nabíl-i-Zarandi, the first martyr was Mullá Alíy-i-Bastámí. He was martyred either in 1844 or in 1845. Nabíl-i-Zarandi, *The Dawn Breakers*, p. 63.
was followed by a period when there were still persecutions going on, but not as intense as during the major wave and not on a national level. My suggestion is that the end of this period coincides with the birth of the Pahlavi regime, that is the end of the First World War. My reason for suggesting this is that the Qajar regime never had any real interest in stopping these persecutions as it depended on the support of the ‘Ulamâ’ to govern the country. The Pahlavi regime had, however, different interests. Reza Shâh Pahlavi, the founder of the Pahlavi regime, wanted to make a modern state of Iran, inspired by Kemal Atatürk in Turkey. This meant that he could not allow the ‘Ulamâ’ to persecute the Bahâ’ís, at least not in such a systematically way as was their habit during the Qajar regime.129

The persecution during this period should not be seen as one single organized national wave of persecution. It was more a matter of local or regional persecutions that were organized by leading representatives of the ‘Ulamâ’ of that area. Sometimes these persecutions spread to other places, as the influence of that representative of ‘Ulamâ’ spread beyond his local base of power. An exception to this pattern was the major persecution of 1852, when the ‘Ulamâ’ were not the main instigator to the persecution. Instead it was triggered by an attack on the shah, made by three individual Bábîs, who wanted revenge for the execution on the Báb in 1850. The attack was obviously badly planned and seems not to have been supported by the Bábî community in general. Still it became the sparkle that ignited this fire.130

130 Ibid., p. 51.
4.3.1 The Bābī Upheavels

During the 1840’s there were three major persecutions in Iran: in Māzandāran, Zanjān and Nayrīz. What they had in common was that a number of Bābīs were persecuted and, in order to protect themselves, they gathered at a certain place and fought their attacking enemies with sword in hand. This is in contrast to later persecutions, including the major persecution of the 1850’s, when the Bābīs and the Bahā’īs presented no physical resistance. I interpret this as an example that the first Bābīs were still thinking in a Muslim manner, hailing the concept of Jihād as central. The following story from Nayrīz can show the war-like circumstances of this part of the persecution, both how the Bābīs physically fought their enemies and, after they had been defeated, how the women and children were killed in revenge.

The Bābīs fought most gallantly and were always victorious, until at length, after a desperate resistance, they were overcome, and suffered martyrdom. Their persecutors, having captured and killed the men, seized and slew forty women and children in the following manner. They placed them in the midst of a cave, heaped up in the cave a vast quantity of firewood, poured naphtha over the faggots strewn around, and set fire to it. One of those who took part in this deed related as follows: -After two or three days I ascended that mountain and removed the door from the cave. I saw that the fire had sunk down into the ashes; but all those women when their children were seated, each in some corner, clasping their little ones to their bosoms, and sitting round in a circle, just as they were <when we left them>. Some, as though in despair or in mourning, had suffered their heads to sink down on their knees in grief, and all retained the posture they had assumed. I was filled with amazement, thinking that the fire had not burned them. Full of apprehension and awe I entered. Then I saw that all were burned and charred to a cinder, yet had they never made a movement that would cause the crumbling away of the bodies. As soon as I touched them with my hand, however, they crumbled away to ashes. And all of us, when we had seen this, repented what we had done. But of what avail was this?131

One aspect that seems to me to be important in this text is to notice that the behaviour of men and women in this text is quite
different. The men among the Bábís are active fighting and the men among the Muslims are active punishing. The Bábí women are totally submissive but trying to protect their children in the way that they could. The women have obviously no possibility to resist the men, but their general attitude seems to be in accordance with the female ethic of care and the behaviour of the men in accordance with the male ethic of justice.

4.3.1.1 The massacre at the shrine of Shaykh Tabarsí

One of the examples of persecution of the early Bábís was the Mazindāran upheaval, also known as the struggle at the shrine or fort of Shaykh Tabarsí. It took place in 1848-1849. Before these upheavals the Báb had been arrested and put in prison, but this did not stop the growth of the Bábí community. No doubt the shah and the ‘Ulamá’ saw this as a major problem that had to be solved. What happened was that a number of Bábís had gathered at this sanctuary to take protection against the shah’s trained soldiers and in order to do this they built a fort. The soldiers surrounded them and their situation was hopeless. Finally they were defeated and most of the defenders of the fort of Shaykh Tabarsí were killed.

Diplomats of different nationalities have described the Māzandāran upheaval. As the district of Māzandāran is situated in the north of Iran, it was within the sphere of interest of Russia and therefore the Russian Minister, Prince Dolgorukov, must be


132 A Shí‘a saint, Shaykh Ahmad ibn Tālib-i-Tabarsí, was buried here. During some periods it has been a goal of pilgrimage in Iran. E.G. Browne, “A Year amongst the Persians”, in *Selections from the Writings of E.G. Browne on the Bábí and Bahá’í Religions*. Edited by M, Momen (Oxford: Georg Ronald 1987), p. 141.
considered well informed in his reports. He described it in some letters to the Russian authorities:

Having made their way into Mazindaran, they occupied several villages in the environs of Barfurush and began to lure into their sect the inhabitants of Mazindaran. Their numbers from the very start began rapidly to increase. Their chief, Mulla Husayn of Bushruih, in whom fearlessness and enterprise are joined to cunning and efficiency, managed the affairs of the sectaries so successfully that in a short time their number increased to 1,500 men.\textsuperscript{133}

Possessing considerable amounts of money, and being favoured by the local inhabitants, the Babis fortified themselves in their abode, dug around their retreat a deep trench and stored food as well as everything else necessary for a siege of several months.\textsuperscript{134}

In a political report I may not paint a less gloomy picture. According to the information received from Mazindaran, Sulayman Khan Afshar, who was commissioned to subdue the Babis by peaceful means, has failed in his attempts. Attacked by Sardar Abbas-Quli Khan Larijani and Sulayman Khan, who wanted to take the fortifications by force, those fanatics, in spite of numerical inferiority to the attackers, repulsed them; and the Sardar himself received a bullet wound in his shoulder.\textsuperscript{135}

According to the latest news received by the Government of the Shah, the expedition against the Babis in Mazindaran has put an end to his worries. When, according to the Prime Minister, those fanatics risked leaving the little fortress where they had fortified themselves, the troops of Abbas-Quli Khan Larijani and Sulayman Khan Afshar engaged them in combat, as a result of which 1,300 men were left on the battlefield. Others maintain, and their stories sound less suspicious to me, that the Babis were invited to leave their fortification in order to come to a friendly agreement;\textsuperscript{136} and when they were coming out, they were attacked and pitilessly slaughtered by the troops of Sulayman Khan. Perhaps you, Your Excellency, will think that the success thus achieved are more worthy of pity than defeats, because the indignation

\textsuperscript{133} Momen considers this an exaggeration. According to him it is more probable that there were about 500 persons there. M. Momen, \textit{The Bábí and Bahá’í Religions, Some Contemporary Western Accounts} (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981), p. 95.


\textsuperscript{135} Dolgorukov to Nesselrode No. 32, 21 Apr. 1849 OS (3 May NS): Dossier No. 178, Tihrán 1849, pp. 53-54. ‘Excepts from Dispatches’ pp. 20, qv. Loc.cit.

\textsuperscript{136} According to Nabil-i-Zarandí, the reason that they accepted to leave the fortification was that the prince had sworn by the Qur‘án not to hurt the defenders of the fort. Nabil-i-Zarandí, p. 399.
which these successes arouse in questions where religious fanaticism is
supreme, excites the spirit of a new and even more dangerous resistance.\textsuperscript{137}

There are differences in this description of the massacre at the
shrine of Shaykh Tabarsī, compared to \textit{The Dawn Breakers}. One point
of difference is the purpose of its author. Nābīl-i-Zarandī, the author
of \textit{The Dawn Breakers}, has interviewed eyewitnesses and in this way
gives a picture from the inside of the fort of Shaykh Tabarsī. He has
written a chronicle that aims at showing the heroic deeds of the
defenders of the fort of Shaykh Tabarsī and the parallels of the battle
of Karbilā and he uses his material for this purpose. He describes the
dream of the guardian of the shrine, who had dreamt that Imam
Ḥusayn would arrive to the shrine with seventy-two warriors and
many companions to the shrine of Shaykh Tabarsī in order to fight a
most heroic battle. When Mullā Ḥusayn arrives with his men, the
guardian recognizes him from his dream and hails him as Imam
Ḥusayn.\textsuperscript{138} It is easy to see parallels with the battle of Karbilā. The
battle of Karbilā was seen as a model for the author of the \textit{Dawn
Breakers} and it was obviously seen as a form of \textit{jihād} by the partaking
Bābīs.\textsuperscript{139} They saw themselves as true Muslims, following the Black
Standard of the \textit{Qā'im}\textsuperscript{140} that were attacked by the enemies of the
True religion. Karbilā was also a model that made it easier to accept
martyrdom. The fact that the list of Bābīs that were killed in this battle
contains so many \textit{Letters of the Living}\textsuperscript{141} increased the importance of it

\textsuperscript{137} Dolgorukov to Nesselrode No. 36, 5 May. 1849 OS (17 May. NS): Dossier No.
178, Tihrān 1849, p. 93. ‘Excepts from Dispatches’ pp. 20-21 qv. M. Mojan, \textit{The
Bābī and Bahā’ī Religions, Some Contemporary Western Accounts}, pp. 94-95.
\textsuperscript{138} Nabil-i-Zarandi, \textit{The Dawn Breakers}, p. 344.
\textsuperscript{139} M. Momen, \textit{The Bābī and Bahā’ī religions, Some Contemporary Western
Accounts}, Note p.xi.
\textsuperscript{140} M. Momen, \textit{An Introduction to Shī‘ih Islam}, p. 168.
\textsuperscript{141} Half of them. Nabil-i-Zarandi, \textit{The Dawn Breakers}, pp. 413-427.
and made the parallel to the battle of Karbilā even more emphasized. There are, however, many details that have no relationship to the battle of Karbilā as they rather relate to the coming of the Qā’im. To E.G. Browne, there seems, however, to be no doubt of its likeness to the battle of Karbilā, as he writes, “the whole tragedy of Karbalā was re-enacted in a new horizon at Shaykh Tabarsi in Māzandarān.”

4.3.2 The Persecution of 1852

Contemporary scholars and diplomats reported the attack on the Shah and the large persecution in 1852 in Europe that was result of this attack. The first to write a book on this attack was Count de Gobineau in his book Les Religion et les Philosophies dans l’Asie Centrale from 1865. According to an article in the Morning Post the number of executed in Teheran was 400.143 There were also reported persecutions in Milān and Nūr, following the attack on the Shah.144 The manner this persecution was carried out can be exemplified by one report from an eyewitness, as E.G. Browne translated it:

…But follow me my friend, you who will lay claim to a heart and European ethics, follow me to the unhappy ones who, gouged-out eyes, who must eat, on the scene of the deed, without any sauce, their own amputated ears; or whose teeth are torn out with inhuman violence by the hand of the executioner; or whose bare skulls are simply crushed by blows from a hammer; or when the bāzār is illuminated with the unhappy victims, because on right and left the people dig deep holes in their breasts and shoulders and insert burning wicks in the wounds. I saw some dragged in chains through the bāzār, preceded by a military band, in whom these wicks had burned so deep

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143 The Morning Post, 1 November, p.5, published in The Bábí and Bahá’í Religions, 1844-1944, Some Contemporary Western Accounts, Edited by M. Momen, p. 134.

144 Ibid, pp. 145 – 146.
that now the flickered convulsively in the wound like a newly-extinguished
lamp.\textsuperscript{145}

The reports are not so much dominated by the number of Bābīs
being executed as the fierceness of these executions. A number of
articles were published in Europe covering this issue, thus making this
persecution known in far off Europe. It was not the first time that the
persecution of the Bābīs had been mentioned in reports to Europe, but
this time with the effect that it became more general known. Also in
Sweden this was made known in newspapers.\textsuperscript{146}

In this persecution there were no signs of any war-like activities,
like the one at the massacre at Shaykh Tabarsī and no parallels to the
battle of Karbilā are mentioned. Instead the Bābīs accepted the
persecution with total submission, according to the existing sources
from this persecution, without any attempts to defend themselves. To
me it seems to be a sign that there had been a major shift of pattern of
interpretation for the persecutions among the Bābīs, which, in turn,
must be seen as an important step away from Shī’ā Islam as a basis of
interpretation.

4.4 The Islamic Revolution and Bahā’ī

The second period of nation-wide persecution started in 1979, at
the outbreak of the Islamic revolution. The period between the two
waves of persecution could perhaps be described as a period of rest
from national persecutions for the Bahā’īs. There were, however,
numerous examples of local persecutions during this period, and one

\textsuperscript{145} A. Von Gumoens, Captain, Oesterreichischer Soldatenfreund, \textit{12 October 1852},
\textsuperscript{146} Aftonbladet (October 14 and November 9) and Stockholms Dagblad (November

5), F. Golmohammadi \textit{Svensk Bahā’ī historia – tryckt material tom 1961} (Fereidoun
Golmohammadi, 1986).
example of such a persecution came in 1955. In this year Shaykh Falsafi started to preach against the Bahá’ís on the national radio and in this way was about to start a national wave of persecution. This, however, never happened as Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá’í religion, contacted Dag Hammarskjöld, the Secretary General of the United Nations, who in his turn contacted the Iranian delegation at the United Nations. In this way the persecution was stopped. The best example of the local persecutions at that instance took place in the small village of Hurmuzak, not far from Yazd. Muhammad Labib, who visited that village, describes this in the book *The Seven Martyrs of Hurmuzak*. This persecution resembles the persecution after 1979 in this that modern media was used from the start of the persecution. This had the power to trigger a national persecution, something that was not possible in the 19th century. The method to resist this that Shoghi Effendi used was to turn to the International community. He did this by turning to the United Nations and by doing this he also showed for the future Universal House of Justice, how to try to prevent persecutions.

### 4.4.1 The First Years of the Islamic Revolution

During the first years of the Islamic revolution, the persecution of the Iranian Bahá’ís was started on a systematic scale and intensified over time. The normal strategy of the Shah had always been not to persecute the Bahá’ís in a systematic way, and at the same time not to

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accept the Bahá'í community as a legal organization. 149 The Bahá'ís were sometimes harassed by SAVAK, 150 but so were other organizations and individuals for different reasons. At times, however, the Shah accepted that the Bahá'ís were persecuted in a systematic way, such as the persecution of 1955. In this way, he could count on the loyalty of the ‘Ulamā’ and when this loyalty was weakened for some reason he could accept that Bahá'ís were persecuted to some extent, thus putting another focus in the minds of the ‘Ulamā’. 151

After the Islamic revolution, there was nobody that had any personal reason to control the intensity of the persecutions in a similar way: The Bahá'ís were considered apostates by all the ‘Ulamā’, although some members of ‘Ulamā’ were more motivated to take part in this process than others. There were attempts by the Bahá'í community to approach Āyātu’Ilāh Khomeini to stop the persecution, but these attempts had no effect. Ḥujjat u’l-Islām Qazā’ī, the chief religious judge and President of the Revolutionary Court of Shiraz issued a warning to the Bahá'ís that was quoted in the 22 February 1983 issue of the newspaper Khabar-i-Junub: “Before it is too late, the Bahá'ís should recant Baha’ism, which is condemn by reason and logic. Otherwise, the day will soon come when the Islamic nation will deal with the Baha’is in accordance with its religious obligations, as it has dealt with other hypocrites who have appeared in more dangerous

150 Sazman-i Etela’at va Amniyat-i Keshvar (Security and Information Organization). The secret police in Iran. It was created in 1957 with the help of USA. F. Halliday, Iran (Stockholm: utförlaget, 1980), p. 79.
151 P-O. Åkerdahl, Förföljelsen av Irans baha’ier 1844 – 1955, p.70.
garb and have satanic religious gatherings.”\textsuperscript{152} Marc Kravetz, a French journalist, describes one example of this attitude in the town Mahābād. A merchant was the defendant at a court, headed by Sādeq Khalkhālī. Terrified at the prospect of what could happen at such a feared tribunal, he asked a fellow merchant to testify to his integrity. When Khalkhālī discovered that the merchant, called as a witness, was a Bahā’ī, he ordered that merchant to convert to Islam or pay 500,000 tūmāns. The merchant would not do that and he could not pay such a large sum of money with the consequence that he was taken out and shot.\textsuperscript{153}

A group that has been of central importance to the persecution of the Bahā’īs in Iran is the \textit{Hujjatīyyih}. The group was started in the 1950’s under the name \textit{Anjuman-i-Tablighāt-i-Islami\textsuperscript{154}} and the persecution of the Bahā’īs was an important part of its aims.\textsuperscript{155} The vulnerable situation of the Bahā’ī community was emphasized by Dr. Mansour Farhang, the ambassador of Iran at the United Nations since 1979 who broke with his government and denounced the persecution of the Iranian Bahā’īs. In a letter to an academic colleague he describes this situation. A large part of that letter was published in February 27, 1982. He writes:

The truth is that not only have the Bahā’īs been persecuted for more than a century, but they have also been the most vulnerable of all the religious minorities in the country. This has been the case regardless of what

\textsuperscript{154} Society for Islamic Teaching.
\textsuperscript{155} The society was commonly known as \textit{Anjuman-i-Zedde-Bahā’īyyat} (Anti-Bahaist society). D. Martin, \textit{The persecution of the Bahá’ís of Iran 1844-1984}, p. 52. Kari Vogt compares it with local Ku Klux Clan groups in its persecution of the Bahā’īs. K. Vogt, \textit{Reise i Iran}, p. 79.
ideological or public orientation happened to be in power. .... Since the early
months of the revolutionary victory .... the Khomeini regime, just like the
Shah’s regime during the 1955-56 period of state-led persecution of the
Bahá’ís, has increasingly repressed its progressive political opponents and
used the Bahá’ís as scapegoats. .... Khomeini is far more brutal that the Shah
ever was.156

A few scholars have studied the situation of the Iranian Bahá’ís. One of these few is Margit Warburg, a specialist in Sociology of
Religion from Denmark157 who has published a number of documents
in a book called *Iranske dokumenter*, such as official documents,
letters and newspaper articles regarding the persecution and also
included an interview with a Bahá’í refugee. These documents are
examples of discrimination of the Iranian Bahá’ís presented under five
headings. 1. Bahá’ís losing their jobs and their pensions (15
documents), 2. Bahá’ís losing their possibility of education (5
documents), 3. Bahá’ís losing their possibility to be active in trade and
business (9 documents), 4. Bahá’ís being unable to practice their
religion (3 documents) and 5. Persecution from the cradle to the grave
(9 documents).

She has also included an interview with Mrs. Mihríh
Mavadat158, an Iranian Bahá’í, who had become a refugee. When
studied together with a more general article, like the one written by
Roger Cooper, this interview becomes an illustration of the theme of
the article. In this interview Mrs. Mavadat tells the story of how her
husband was arrested and finally executed, how their home was ruined
by the revolutionary guards and, after the execution of her husband,
how she left Iran as a refugee. One point is that her husband was the

156 Letter to Professor Richard Falk, Center for International Studies, Princeton, N.J.
The Nation, February 27 (1982).
chairman of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Karaj, the town in which they were living.\textsuperscript{159} This was in accordance with the policy of the Iranian authority to execute the leadership of the Bahāʾī community and work itself further down in the community. Roger Cooper has discussed this issue under the heading “Attacks on the leadership”. He draws the conclusion that the members of the National Spiritual Assembly and the Local Spiritual Assemblies are “the chief targets for what appears to be a campaign of arrest, execution and disappearance that has been going on since the Revolution.”\textsuperscript{160} The Bahāʾī administration is, however, not organized with a class of learned that can also act in individual positions, but on an administration that is based on elected groups of lay believers. The effect of the execution of the members of a Spiritual Assembly has therefore been that new members were elected to that Spiritual Assembly and therefore it has continued to function.\textsuperscript{161} This problem was dealt with when the Bahāʾī administration was totally forbidden by the Iranian Attorney General formally, on 29 August 1983, announcing a ban on all administrative and community activities of Bahāʾī in Iran and declaring membership in a Bahāʾī administrative institution to be a criminal offence.\textsuperscript{162}

Another important point that Mrs. Mavadat describes in the interview is the total lack of human rights that the Bahāʾīs have to accept, with respect to their personal dignity, their right to protect their property or personal security. The guards and the Mullā heavily insulted both herself and her husband without giving them any right to

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., pp. 28-32.
\textsuperscript{159} Loc. cit.
\textsuperscript{160} R. Cooper, \textit{The Baháʾís in Iran, A Minority Rights Group Report}, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{161} Some examples of this is given in \textit{The Baháʾí Question}, pp. 16-18.
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., p. 13.
answer the insults. One of these insults was that they were immoral. The background for this, according to Mrs. Mavadat, was that men and women among the Bahá’ís could go side by side on the street without being married. The guards broke into their home and stole and destroyed as much as possible and forced Mr. Mavadat to walk around the town with them in order to point out other Bahá’ís. He was also imprisoned and during his time in prison he was tortured.

In 1983 the Iranian leadership responded to the international reactions to the persecutions in the booklet *Bahaiism – its origins and role*. According to this booklet there were good reasons for the persecution. Bahá’í was originally created to serve the objectives of the Czarist Russian government. Here, the Bahá’ís are accused of being enemies of Islam\(^\text{163}\), a tool of imperialism\(^\text{164}\) and a Zionist movement.\(^\text{165}\) In spite of the statements from members of the ‘Ulamá’ regarding the future fate of the Bahá’ís it does, however, deny that Bahá’ís are executed in Iran for religious reasons.\(^\text{166}\) Thus, there seem to be two opposing statements from the ‘Ulamá’. There is the statement from some members of the ‘Ulamá’ given earlier that the Bahá’ís in Iran will all be killed because of their religion and there is also the statement from this booklet that there has never been any persecution for religious reason. The accusations regarding the nature and history of Bahá’í seem however rather to support the first statements from the ‘Ulamá’ than the statement given in the end of this booklet.

\(^\text{164}\) *Bahaiism – Its Origin and Role*, p. 6.
\(^\text{165}\) Ibid., pp. 11-12.
\(^\text{166}\) Ibid., p. 23.
The 1993 report from the Special Representative Reynaldo Galindo Pohl to the Commission on Human Rights under the United Nations included a secret memorandum regarding the treatment of the Bahá’ís in Iran. This memorandum was issued by the Supreme Revolutionary Council in 1991 and signed by the secretary of the Council Hujjatu’l Islam Siyyid Mohammad Gulpaygani and approved by Alí Khamenei, the Leader of the Islamic Republic. It starts with stating that the Bahá’ís should not be expelled from the country or arrested, imprisoned or penalised without reason. The reason needed for this is stated in heading B, paragraph 4: “Their political (espionage) activities must be dealt with according to appropriate Government laws and policies”. They are to be accepted in schools and universities (heading B paragraph 1 and 2) and to have employment (B: 3) provided that they do not identify themselves as Bahá’ís. However, “The Government’s dealing with them must be in such a way that their progress and development are blocked.” (A: 3) This should not only be done in Iran as “A plan must be devised to confront and destroy their cultural roots outside the country” (B: 6). The document itself must be seen as proof that the persecution of the Iranian Bahá’ís has been planned centrally, that it has neither been spontaneously coming from different individuals nor is it to be interpreted as local or regional outbursts. The Bahá’ís are, however, not directly described as heretics that ought to be killed in this document. They are described as a minority that should be oppressed in different ways. There is no mention of any kind of protection of the Bahá’ís.167

167 R. G. Pohl, Report from 1993 from Special Representative on Human Rights
4.4.2 The Persecution in Shiraz 1982 – 1983

The city of Shīrāz has a special importance to Bahā’īs as this is considered its place of birth. The house in which this birth took place was the house of the Bāb, which is holy to Bahā’īs and a place of pilgrimage. A precursor of this local wave of persecution was the destruction of the house of the Bāb, an act full of symbolic meaning.168 This was, however, not the first time it was destroyed and, like the other times, it might be rebuilt again. William Sears commented upon the destruction of a tree in the garden of that house in his book *A Cry from the Heart* as a parallel to the house:

I can’t help but wonder at the foolishness of such enemies. Don’t they know that they really haven’t cut down that orange tree at all? I, personally, have at least seven friends in North America who right now are eating oranges from the trees they have grown from the seeds of that orange tree planted by the Bāb in Shīrāz. There are hundreds more. Pilgrims from everywhere have taken home oranges and planted seeds from that tree. Don’t the authorities know that tomorrow, if access to Iran were permitted, black, yellow, red, brown and white Bahā’īs could fly in from all over the world, and plant a whole row of orange trees all round the city of Shīrāz. From the trees grown from the seeds of the tree they thought they had cut down. That is the real symbol.169

In 1983 there were 22 Bahā’īs executed in Shīrāz, among whom 6 men were executed June 16 and 10 women two days later. One prisoner, Olya Roohizadegan, was released from prison and managed to escape from Iran in 1983. She has documented this local wave of persecution in her book *Olya’s story – a survivor’s dramatic account of the persecution of Bahā’īs in revolutionary Iran*. She describes this experience, including prison life in the two Shiraz prisons she

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168 The house was destroyed in September 1979. *The Bahá’í Question*, p. 15.
experienced. Included in this description is also how the Bahā’īs were treated in prison and how they were tortured.

A similar, but shorter, source is a written speech, by Ruhī Jahanpour, given at a Bahā’ī youth conference in London, Canada, August 26 1984. Like Olya Roohizadegan she was imprisoned in the prison of Shiraz together with those Bahā’īs who were later executed. In this talk, she chose to talk about some of the martyrs who were also youth. The story of the imprisonment and execution of Mona Mahmūdnizhād, one of the 10 women, was later told in the music video *Mona’s story* that presented the song ‘Mona with the children’. Ruhi Jahanpour and Mihrīh Mavadat were both part of the production of this video.

The following poem could very well refer to the wave of persecution in Shīrāz 1982-83 as the book is published in 1984 and the poem refers to the recent persecutions. It is written by a Muslim woman who was a cell-mate with one of the women who was executed:

**Tribute**

Do you remember that you told me  
How tight is our cage!  
How difficult  
to breathe in this close and terrible place!  
You wanted to sacrifice172 yourself.  
I wanted to be freed from prison,  
but you wanted to sacrifice yourself.

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171 The word that is used in Persian is *Tajlīl*, meaning tribute.

172 The word that is used in Persian is *Fadā*, meaning sacrifice.
You looked at the door of the cell in such a strange way, as though someone called you from heaven. I saw in your gaze the look of a fulfilled and proud lover. I saw the desire for flight in your eyes, as though you were going back to the nest. At that moment you murmured into my ears ‘Life is vanity; why should we stay, till we rot?’ We both said the same thing, that life is meaningless, that at the end we have to go in any case. But behold how beautifully you spread your wings, broke you cage. Your umbrella was of flowers.

Now even Seven Heavens are not vast enough under you feet.

How well you knew that to take wing is the best way to go home. You had a power equal to the whole world; your heart was like an ocean.

It is my humiliation to see that you are up there. I am in this swamp of the earth and you are with your Beloved. I am still drowned in wonderment and you have arrived at your destiny.

Do you remember that you told me, ‘How tight is our cage! How difficult to breathe in this close and terrible place!’ Are you aware that I cannot erase your memory from my heart throughout eternity? You are a proud eagle. My heart is a captive bird.

Even if it were not imprisoned, it is captive in the world. You are not here but have taken to your wings.

I stay and I rot and I die.  

\textsuperscript{173} Āsemūnhā, meaning heavens. Probably the poet is referring to the concept of the Seven Heavens. The same word is used further down, where Āsemūnhā is translated to Seven Heavens.

\textsuperscript{174} My calamity is My providence. An anthology of Poetry in Response to the Persecution to the Persecution of the Bahá’ís in Iran. A translation from Persian into English by a Muslim woman who was a cell-mate of one of the then recent
The perspective of this Muslim woman is the perspective of a martyr ideology. To be a martyr is an ideal in itself, contrasted with her own situation of just being a victim. The motivation for martyrdom in this poem is to reach the seventh heaven or even further but it has no relation to service. It is rather the ideology of a mystic that is longing for an eternal bliss than the ideology of an obedient servant.

4.4.3 Mona Mahmūdnizhād

Mona Mahmūdnizhād was the youngest of the Bahā’ī women who were executed in Shīrāz 18 June 1983. She was arrested together with her father 23 October 1982, who was the secretary of the Local Spiritual Assemblies. According to her own statement her mother protested to the guards that arrested them: ‘If you want to take my husband, OK, but where are you taking this little seventeen-year-old girl at this hour of the night? One of the guard replied angrily, ‘Don’t say “the little seventeen-year-old”, you should say “the little Bahā’ī teacher”. With what we have read of her writings today, we are sure she will be a Bahā’ī teacher in the future.’ At her arrest she was however already a Bahā’ī teacher, as she was teaching Bahā’ī children.

After being imprisoned, Mona was interrogated and her case was taken up in a series of trials in the prison Shari’a court. Mona herself has given a description of the final trial:

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176 O. Roohizadegan, Olya’s Story, p. 129.
177 Ibid., p. 128.
The prosecutor insulted and humiliated me, saying, ‘Your parents have deceived and misled you. They have forced you to imitate them in following the Bahá’í Faith.’ ‘Your honour,’ I replied, ‘it is true that I was born into a Bahá’í family and initially learned the Faith from them, but I want to assure you that I have exercised my own reason and accepted the Faith after my own investigation. One doesn’t become a Bahá’í by imitation, only by individual investigation of the truth. You have access to several of our books, you can read them for yourself to confirm this. My parents never insisted on my becoming a Bahá’í.’ The prosecutor looked at me astounded and said, ‘Young girl, what do you know about religion?’ ‘Is there a better proof of my faith than the fact that I was taken out of school to be brought here and undergo long hours of trials? Can’t you see that it is my belief that has given me my confidence to stand in your presence and answer your questions?’ Then he asked me to say a prayer. I put away the file and quietly and respectfully recited ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s prayer:

O God! Refresh and gladden my spirit. Purify my heart. Illumine my mind. I lay all my affairs in Thy hand. Thou art my Guide and my Refuge. I will no longer be sorrowful and grieved; I will be a happy and joyful being. O God! I will no longer be full of anxiety, nor will I let trouble harass me. I will not dwell on the unpleasant things of life…

The prosecutor stopped me in the middle of the prayer with a wave of his hand, and remained silent for a little while. I felt that he was affected by the prayer, but his prejudice had blinded him. ‘Why didn’t you chant the prayer?’ he asked. ‘On the night you were arrested, the guards found many tapes of your chanting. Your crime is quite obvious: you were misleading young people by making recordings of prayers in your beautiful voice.’ ‘Your honour, in your opinion is the chanting of prayers a crime?’ ‘Yes. What harm did you find in Islam that made you turn to the Bahá’í Faith?’ ‘But I do believe in Islam, your honour – because the basis of all religion is the same. However, I also believe that, according to the needs of human beings in different ages, God sends us different messengers and laws to guide us.’ The prosecutor said, ‘We must obey the Qur’án. You must either accept Islam or face execution.’ ‘I kiss the order of execution,’ I answered without a moment’s hesitation.178

Close to her execution she told her mother, who was also a Bahá’í prisoner, what she was planning to do at the moment of execution. Mona’s mother could not accept this as any possible future for her daughter, so she could only say that it was a beautiful story. Mona’s mother continues:

Mona looked at me, tears in her eyes, and said softly, ‘It wasn’t a story, Mama. Why can’t you accept it?’ Then she left me and for a long time

178 Ibid., pp. 132-133.
continued to pace up and down the corridor. My beautiful Mona knew that she was going. She knew how she was going, and I couldn’t believe her. Ten days later she was killed. It was five days after my release.

The day I received the news was such a difficult day. I kept going over in my mind what Mona told me that day in the prison. I was numb. People were talking to me and I couldn’t hear. I thought to myself, ‘My God, how can I bear this? But God gave me the strength. I remember that when the Bahá’í prisoners were told they had four chances to recant or they would be hanged, Mona had had a dream. She had dreamed that as she was standing in the cell saying her obligatory prayer, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had entered the cell and sat on the bed where I was sleeping, and put his hand on my head. Táhirih179 was also sleeping by the bed. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá raised his both hands towards Mona. Mona thought to herself that if she continued with the obligatory prayer, he might leave, so she stopped praying and sat on her knees before him, and held his hand in hers. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asked her, ‘Mona what do you want?’ and she answered ‘Perseverance’. He asked again, ‘What do you want from me?’ She replied, ‘Perseverance for all Bahá’ís.’ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asked her for the third time, ‘Mona, what do you want for yourself from me? Mona said again, ‘Perseverance.’ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá then repeated, ‘it is granted, it is granted.’

I was released on 13 June. … My beloved Mona was the last person to say goodbye. She kissed me and as she was holding my hand in hers, said to me, ‘Mama, you supported everyone and warmed all hearts here. Continue to do the same for the ones outside; encourage them to be firm and strong.’ I kissed her again and said goodbye, but it wasn’t the last time that I kissed her lovely face. The last time was in the morgue where I kissed her beautiful, cold cheeks and returned the treasure to its original owner. On the last visiting day Mona had said to me, ‘Mother, we will be guests of Bahá’u’lláh tomorrow’.

There were two eyewitnesses to the execution.

The bus driver who transferred them from Adelabad181 to the execution site was greatly affected by the bravery and strength of the women, and he recalled the moment as follows: ‘I thought they were going to be released until we came up to the gate for the security check. That was where we found out that the ladies were going to be executed. All the way they were chanting; they were all cheerful and proud.’ Another witness was one of the executioners who put the rope around their necks. He told the mother of one of the girls, ‘We gave them the opportunity to recant up to the last minute. First we hanged the older women, and then it was the turn of the young girls, one by one in front of the rest. The youngest was last. We thought they would

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179 One of the names of the executed women was Táhirih Sīyávushī. There is no indication in the text that Mona refers to her, but I find that probable.
180 O. Roohizadegan, Olya’s Story, pp. 221-222.
181 The prison in Shíráz where the Bahá’í women were imprisoned close to their execution.
be so frightened that they would recant. We said to them, ‘Just say once that you are not a Bahá’í and we will let you go.’ But none of them did. They all preferred to die.182

What has this text to say regarding Bahá’í identity? The courage of the young girl is presented as an ideal, but is it an ideal of martyrdom or servanthood? The last part, the comment of the driver, might be seen to point towards a martyr ideology as the group of women is hailed as having a lot of courage, but the word “martyr” itself is not mentioned. There is, actually, nowhere in the text where a discernible martyr ideology is referred to. In her dream Mona gives the ideal ‘Perseverance’ as an ideal but nowhere is there mention of longing for a reward in the next world. The only comment about her fate in the afterlife is that she expects to be the guest of Bahá’u’lláh after her departure. She can however be seen as a servant as some text refer to her services as a teacher and the tapes where she was recorded when singing prayers. When she refers to a dream it is a dream where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is the main character and the object of identification. The object of identification is not a well-known martyr, like Imam Ḥusayn or the Báb.

4.4.4 The Afterlife of the Martyrs

Life after death is described as a parallel to the birth of a child into an unknown world – before this birth there is a preparation for the new stage of life. There is no physical hell or paradise, but the soul will experience the new stage of life in accordance with how it is prepared. If it has developed the necessary spiritual qualities such as love, life after death will be experienced as paradise and an important way to do this is service to his or her fellow human beings. To live in

182 O. Roohizadegan, Olya’s Story, p. 225.
accordance with the servant ideology of Bahá’í is in this way a preparation for life after death. There are some descriptions in the Bahá’í writings of the afterlife in general but there is nothing that gives any detailed description of the afterlife for the martyrs. As the martyrs primarily are seen as servants who have carried out servanthood in the extreme, their reward in the afterlife must be seen in this perspective.

Blessed is the soul which, at the hour of its separation from the body, is sanctified from the vain imaginings of the peoples of the world. Such a soul liveth and moveth in accordance with the Will of its Creator, and entereth the all-highest Paradise. The Maids of Heaven, inmates of the loftiest mansions, will circle around it, and the Prophets of God and His chosen ones will seek its companionship. With them that soul will freely converse, and will recount unto them that which it hath been made to endure in the path of God, the Lord of all worlds. If any man be told that which hath been ordained for such a soul in the worlds of God, the Lord of the throne on high and of earth below, his whole being will instantly blaze out in his great longing to attain that most exalted, that sanctified and resplendent station...\(^\text{183}^\)

The following description is given in a tablet to Zainu’l-Muqarrabin,\(^\text{184}\) one of those Bahá’ís who were close to Bahá’u’lláh, being together with him during his years in prison.

And now concerning thy question whether human souls continue to be conscious one of another after their separation from the body. Know thou that the souls of the people of Bahá, who have entered and been established within the Crimson Ark,\(^\text{185}\) shall associate and commune intimately one with another, and shall be so closely associated in their lives, their aspirations, their aims and strivings as to be even as one soul. They are indeed the ones who are well-informed, who are keen-sighted and who are endued with understanding. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

The people of Bahá, who are the inmates of the Ark of God, are one and all, well aware of one another’s state and condition, and are united in the bonds of intimacy and fellowship. Such a state, however, must depend upon their

\(^{183}\) Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 156.


\(^{185}\) The Bahá’í religion. *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 216.
faith and their conduct. They that are of the same grade and station are fully aware of one another’s capacity, character, accomplishments and merits. They that are of a lower grade, however, are incapable of comprehending adequately the station, or of estimating the merits, of those that rank above them. Each shall receive his share from thy Lord. Blessed is the man that hath turned his face towards God, and walked steadfastly in His love, until his soul hath winged its flight unto God, the Sovereign Lord of all, the Most Powerful, the Ever-Forgiving, the All-Merciful.

The souls of the infidels, however, shall – and to this I bear witness – when breathing their last be made aware of the good things that have escaped them, and shall bemoan their plight, and shall humble themselves before God. They shall continue doing so after the separation of their souls from their bodies.

It is clear and evident that all men shall, after their physical death, estimate the worth of their deeds, and realize all that their hands have wrought. I swear by the Day Star that shineth above the horizon of Divine power! They that are the followers of the one true God shall, the moment they depart out of this life, experience such joy and gladness as would be impossible to describe, while they that live in error shall be seized with such fear and trembling, and shall be filled with such consternation, as nothing can exceed. Well is it with him that hath quaffed the choice and incorruptible wine of faith through the gracious favour and the manifold bounties of Him Who is the Lord of all Faiths…

It is difficult to find any detailed descriptions to what will happen to martyrs after death. ‘Abdu’l-Bahā has written a letter where the concept of martyrdom has been included, but even that letter must be considered more of a spiritual encouragement than descriptive information of what will happen after death for the martyr:

Until a being setteth his foot in the plane of sacrifice, he is bereft of every favour and grace; and this plane of sacrifice is the realm of dying to the self, that the radiance of the living God may then shine forth. The martyr’s field is the place of detachment from self, that the anthems of eternity may be upraised. Do all ye can to become wholly weary of self, and bind yourselves to that Countenance of Splendours; and once ye have reached such heights of servitude, ye will find gathered within you shadow, all created things.187

The importance in this quotation is rather in sacrifice than in martyrdom. As in many other places in the Bahā’i writings,

186 Bahā’u’lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahā’u’lláh, pp. 169-171.
martyrdom is hailed as an example of servitude rather than an action that is praiseworthy in itself.

4.4.5 The Reactions of the Bahá'ís in the West to the Persecutions

As long as Bahá'í was based in Iran and other Muslim states only, it was very difficult, almost impossible, to oppose the persecutions of the Bahá'ís in Iran. It was possible to turn to Western governments but there were no Bahá'í communities in those countries that could explain the Bahá'í view of the persecution. As Bahá'í was established in the West during the 1890’s it was possible to formulate protests against the persecutions on the Bahá'ís in Iran. Such early activities were done by Lua Getsinger and Hippolyte Dreyfus in Paris at the initiative of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, presenting a petition to the shah of Iran in the autumn 1902. The main theme was to ask for the protection of the Bahá'ís in Iran. A second petition was given to the shah later the same year with the same theme, but this time it was the fresh persecutions in Yazd, Isfahan and other places that were the background.  

In 1925 the Bahá'í community established an office in Geneva as a contact with the League of Nations called the International Bahá'í Bureau. This Bureau was important in contacts with governments and international organizations, such as the League of Nations. It did, however, not deal with persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran. In order to deal with this issue, Shoghi Effendi rather used the help of certain National Spiritual Assemblies and certain trusted individuals. One such individual was Keith Ransom-Kehler who was

asked by Shoghi Effendi in 1932 to convince the shah to permit the publication and distribution of Bahā’ī books in Iran. She managed to get such permission by the shah, but this promise later was proved to have no practical value.190

4.4.6 Bahā’ī International Community and the Persecutions

The work of the International Bahā’ī Bureau has been continued in the contacts with United Nations, now under the name of Bahā’ī International Community. The main office is situated in New York, close to the United Nations building, but there are other Bahā’ī offices around the world, related to different United Nations offices. In Geneva the office of the Bahā’ī International Community is primarily related to the United Nation’s Commission of Human Rights, which makes this office of central importance to the question of the persecution of the Iranian Bahā’īs.

An important task of this office is to provide the Commission of Human Rights with reliable information on the persecution of the Iranian Bahā’īs, hoping that this information will be included in the resolution of the Commission of Human Rights. The resolution of the Commission of Human Rights will later be discussed by the General Assembly of the United Nations and information from the Bahā’ī International Community office in Geneva is therefore to be included in the General Assembly resolution. If this happens it will mean that the persecutions of the Bahā’īs in Iran, an obvious violation of the Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations, is put in focus by the United Nations. Such a resolution would be an embarrassment to

any government that aspires to be a respected member of the international community.\textsuperscript{191} It is difficult to state that this policy has given any proven effects, but it is a fact that the massive persecutions of the Iranian Bahā’īs that some members of the Iranian ‘Ulamā’ threatened to instigate in the beginning of the Islamic revolution have never taken place. According to information given by Amnesty International in their report on Iran from 1995, the total number of executed Bahā’īs up till that year was at least 200.\textsuperscript{192} The information given by the Bahā’ī International Community is more detailed and presents the number of executions or killings of Bahā’īs during the period 1979-1993 as follows:

\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
Year & Killed & Year & Killed & Year & Killed & Year & Killed\textsuperscript{193} \\
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\end{tabular}

\textbf{Figure 3: The number of Bahā’īs being executed after the Islamic revolution in Iran}

In 1985 the General Assembly had the issue of the persecutions of the Iranian Bahā’īs on the agenda for the first time and continued to have it during the above period, except for 1991.\textsuperscript{194} Considering the

\textsuperscript{191} \textit{The Bahá’í Question}, pp. 27-30.
\textsuperscript{193} \textit{The Bahá’í Question}, pp. 44-47.
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., pp. 48-49.
number of executions and killings in 1985 and the following years, it seems that the policy of the Bahāʾī International Community has been effective. This will however not be possible to state for sure until there is material from the internal discussion of the Iranian ‘Ulamāʾ to support this theory.

Basic for this policy of the Bahāʾī International Community is that the members of the General Assembly are generally familiar with the situation of the Bahāʾīs in Iran. In order to accomplish this, the offices of the Bahāʾī International Community in Geneva and New York have needed the co-operation of national Bahāʾī communities. Therefore the national Bahāʾī communities are seen as part of Bahāʾī International Community and the national concerns mentioned in The Bahāʾī Question are also the result of the work of these national Bahāʾī communities.195 Because of this it is not only necessary to ask why the Iranian Bahāʾīs accept martyrdom. It is also important to look into the background and basis of the Bahāʾī community in general, its way of functioning as an organization on local, national and international levels as well as to understand its way to motivating the individual believers to work in this organization.

4.5 Conclusion

During the period of persecution there seems to have been a development regarding the attitude of the Bābīs and the Bahāʾīs about their attitudes to martyrdom. During the 1840’s, which form the first period, there is the tendency to fight back, which resembles the pattern of Shīʿa Islam. There are references to the battle of Karbilā as well as

195 Ibid., pp. 29-30.
references to the expectations of the coming of the Qā’im, who would come back from his seclusion in the mythical cities of Jābulṣā and Jābulqā. At the battle at the fort of Shaykh Tabarsī there is also reference to the tradition that the Imam Mahdī would raise a Black Standard in Khurasān, which was done by Mullā Ḥusayn.

In the second period, starting in the 1850’s, the Bābīs did not fight back. They accepted martyrdom passively in a way that makes it possible to call them witnesses or perhaps it is better to call them blood-witnesses. Their primary aim of accepting martyrdom seems to be nothing but to witness the truth of their religion and in this way they are a parallel to the Christian martyrs during the early martyr period of the Church. They can also be seen as a parallel to the Jewish martyrs in the second book of Maccabee, for example the seven brothers being tortured and killed with their mother (2 Macc. 7). This change of attitude is what M.S. Ivanov in the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia describes as a development of the revolutionary Bābī movement to the bourgeois movement under the influence of Bahā’u’llāh.

There is also a difference in the situation of martyrs during the time of the Islamic revolution, the third period, in this that the Bahā’īs during that period have been part of an international organization. The Bahā’ī administration in Iran was well developed during that time and those Bahā’īs who were martyred were often members of the National Spiritual Assembly or a Local Spiritual Assembly, like in the case of

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196 One of the titles of Imam Mahdī, meaning “the one who will arise”. M. Momen, *An Introduction to Shīṭ‘ih Islam*, p. 45.
197 Ibid, p. 165.
Mr. Mavadat. The policy of the ‘Ulamā’ was to start executing the leaders of the Bahá’í community, which meant executing the members of the Bahá’í institutions. Although they still are martyrs, they are primarily servants as they are elected to serve in the Bahá’í administration. During the second period they were no doubt serving their religion in the way they could, but the Bahá’í administration did not exist and therefore there were not so many possibilities to serve in a systematic way.

Mona Mahmūdnizhād was not old enough to serve on a Local Spiritual Assembly, but she was on the other hand not arrested for just being a Bahá’í. The reason for her arrest was that the guards feared that she would become a Bahá’í teacher, which is another kind of service. In the poem ‘Tribute’ the Bahá’í woman has been described as a martyr but not as a servant. This might be in accordance with the martyr ideology of Shi’a Islam, but it is not in accordance with the servant ideology of Bahá’í. The reason for a martyr to give up his or her life is to witness to the truth but the reason for a servant to give up the life is to serve someone or to serve some cause. This was what Mona Mahmūdnizhād was doing but this is not how the author of ‘Tribute’ has seen the situation.

199 Martyein (Greek).
CHAPTER 5
Bahá’í Identity in the Perspective of East and West

5.1 The East – West Dimension

The East – West dimension exists in relation to the persecution of the Iranian Bahá’ís, as I see it, in three different situations, which are also three different levels. The first level is the political situation, where Iran has been a traditional Muslim country, ruled by an autocratic ruler that was confronted by the Western powers. The second level is the cultural and religious reactions in Iran towards the growing Western influence, where the individual was in the situation where he or she had to make a choice of whether to welcome it or not. The third level is related to the internal situation of the Bahá’í community and the development of Bahá’í identity. The concepts of martyrdom and heroism in the Bahá’í tradition are dependent upon the struggle for Bahá’í identity as it was developed in Iran and in the Western world during the period studied.

Although the most central aspect of Bahá’í identity is servanthood, personified by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the “servant of Bahá”, this is not the only aspect. Before this concept had been put into practice in an organized way in the Bahá’í community, there was a period where each ethnical, national or local community was to a higher or lower degree a part of its own ethnical or cultural surroundings. The theme of this part of the study, the East-West dimension, meaning the separate Bahá’í identities of the Iranian Bahá’ís and the Western Bahá’ís, was the most important aspect that
separated the Bahá’í community. In this discussion on religious identity, it is even possible to look upon the present international Bahá’í community as the end result of the development of not one, but two separate messianic movements with separate identities. One of them was a Mahdí movement in Iran, the ideas of which were founded on Shi’a expectations, and the other one a Christian Messianic movement in North America.

Up till the 1890’s the centre of the Bahá’í community had been placed either in Iran or outside Iran, but still in Muslim surroundings. Westerners who visited Iran or were visiting the Bahá’í prisoners in Acre had studied Bahá’, but there were no Bahá’í communities in Europe and North America. During the 1890’s this came to a change as Bahá’í was established in the Western world and a Western Bahá’í community was created with a background in Western culture and Christian religion. It was ‘Abdu’l-Bahá who took this initiative and it was he and later Shoghi Effendi who were the driving forces in keeping these two separate communities together and in developing a common feeling of Bahá’í identity. This meant that Bahá’í identity developed in both communities. It could no longer be taken for granted that Islam formed the background of the Bahá’í identity. Christianity now became a much more important part of this background, but it also meant that, over time, Bahá’í identity was more related to institutions developed within the Bahá’í community itself and less dependent upon its background.

In the writings of Bahá’u’lláh the themes are mostly directed towards the world of Islam, dealing with matters that are raised by Muslims or Bahá’ís of Muslim background. There are, however, also
that are directed towards representatives of the Christian world such as *Lawh-i-Aqdas*, the Tablet to the Christians. The recipient of this tablet was probably a Christian of an Eastern Church. When ‘Abdu’l-Bahā sent Eastern believers to the United States to spread the Bahā’ī message, there came questions from Western Bahā’īs with a Christian background and the collections of his talks all have this background.

The two languages that Bahā’u’llāh used were Arabic and Persian. When writing in Persian, he would use a form of Persian that is heavily mixed with Arabic. This would be similar to the Persian spoken in those days and also today. He did also use Persian without any Arabic words at all, directed towards Zoroastrians. The languages in Western Europe came into use when Bahā’ī was established in the West. In the writings of Shoghi Effendi, the English language became very important.

The language question in Bahā’ī is also related to the principle of the need to choose an international auxiliary language. Esperanto has been mentioned as one such possibility. At times the relationship between the Bahā’ī community and the Esperanto movement has been very close. This language has been praised by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā and there was correspondence between ‘Abdu’l-Bahā and Dr. Zamenhof, the founder of Esperanto. One of his daughters, Lidia Zamenhof, became a member of the Bahā’ī community and was an important link.

200 The way to designate letters of Bahā’u’llāh. The Persian name for it would most common be *Lawḥ*, while books are called by the Arabic name, *Kitāb*.

between these two movements. Another such link was Martha Root. Being a journalist, she travelled extensively and wrote many articles on Esperanto and Bahá’í. She also wrote a book on Tahirih.

5.2 Development of a Bahá’í Identity

Central to Western modern society is the role of the individual and his or her right to make individual decisions, including choice of religious belief. Contrary to this stands traditional Iranian society where the identity of the individual primarily is defined by a membership of a group. To leave this group means to break with society.

The Bábís and the Bahá’ís in Iran had in this way left their group identity behind, as they had done something forbidden by leaving Islam. They had not joined a recognized religious community, but they had joined a community that was considered an enemy to Islam by the majority community in Iran. They had, however, not accepted a Western identity, as they had not become Christians or agnostics. They had remained Iranians by identity and the community they had entered had many similarities with Islam, such as acceptance of Muḥammad as a Prophet of God, reverence to the Qur’án as a holy book, obedience to religious laws as a central part of religion etc. Their religious identity had little to do with the

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developments in the West, such as acceptance of or reactions to the ideas of the Enlightenment philosophy. Their identity was deeply rooted in the soil of Iranian culture and the Shi’a community, although they were no longer members of the majority community.

5.2.1 Aspects of Bahá’í Identity in an East – West Dimension

There has existed a pure Bahá’í identity as a potential possibility from the birth of Bahá’í but in practical life this identity had been applied to a higher or lower extent. No doubt, the Iranian Bahá’ís had brought their Shi’a identity as a basis for their Bahá’í identity, but that was not contradictory to the Bahá’í identity, as Bahá’í to a high degree is based upon the Mahdí expectations of Shi’a Islam. To the Western Bahá’ís the situation was more complicated. Not only was it a problem for their Christian background to accept any part of Islam as being a religion of God. It was also a problem for their identity as westerners who have based their identity on the Enlightenment philosophy.

The concept of a prophet is much used in the Bahá’í writings, also in the writings of Bahá’u’lláh. Bahá’u’lláh has used the expression anbiyá’át, translated by Shoghi Effendi to prophethood, when referring to himself, thus accepting the designation nabí from Islam. The Islamic designation rasul is also used, but the most commonly used designation is “Manifestation of God” (mázar iláhi). The most important way for the Báb to designate the

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206 Not all Bahá’ís were ethnic Iranians. Some belonged to different ethnic minorities in Iran.

207 Mazár (per.) from Zuhár (appearance). Zuhár is used in Shi’a literature when describing the coming of the twelfth imam. The reason for this is that this word is not used for a person who died and the belief of the Shi’a is that the twelfth imam never did die. M. Momen, An introduction to Shi’i Islam, p.166.
Promised one was as “Him whom God will make Manifest”, *Man yuzhiruhu’llāh*, and it was often to this expectation Bahā’u’llāh referred in his writings concerning his own station.

One of the most important of the books of Bahā’u’llāh is *Kitāb-i-Iqān*, written in 1862 in answer to a number of questions by one of the uncles of the Bāb.208 At that time Bahā’u’llāh made no claim of prophet-hood, as it was not until 1863 that he proclaimed himself as “Him whom God will make Manifest”.209 In his study of *Kitāb-i-Iqān*, Taherzadeh has found 10 major themes, which relate to these questions. They all have the basic aim of proving the truth of the Bābs revelation to this uncle. This was successful and finally all of the relatives of the Bāb accepted this.210 One theme that is closely related to the aspect of identity is that part of *Kitāb-i-Iqān* that describes “the true seeker”. Bahā’u’llāh has described the true seeker as an ideal for the believer who wants to “take the step of search in the path leading to the knowledge of the Ancient of Days”. The true seeker must “cleanse and purify his heart… purge his breast…” He must “sanctify his soul…” He must “never seek to exalt himself above any one, must wash away from the tablet of his heart every trace of pride and vainglory, must cling unto patience and resignation, observe silence, and refrain from idle talk.”211 This list of ethical advice, has been of especially great importance to the Bahā’ī identity of the Iranian Bahā’īs. The reason for this is that *Kitāb-i-Iqān* has been a central

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209 Ibid., p. 280.
210 Ibid., p. 159.
book for the Iranian Bahá’í community for such a long time and because it has been important in the formation of a distinct Bahá’í identity in Iran due to the persecutions. In a situation where a certain group is persecuted it is necessary to develop a strong line of continuity and thereby create a distinct identity. This is what Kitáb-i-Iqán has done for the Bahá’ís. If such a line of continuity can not be created it will be difficult to motivate people to accept persecution and as time passes there is a risk that the persecuted group will be dissolved.

Bahá’í identity among many of the Western Bahá’ís was based on Biblical expectations and the acceptance of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as a charismatic prophet. Among the first generation of Western Bahá’ís he was, according to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá himself, wrongly considered the Second Coming of Christ, which was due to the effect of the teachings of Dr. Khayru’lláh. This can be seen in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s repeated statements to the American Bahá’ís that he was not a prophet. The most well known one is the one cited by Shoghi Effendi:

You have written that there is a difference among the believers concerning the ‘Second Coming of Christ’. …. what is meant in the prophecies by the ‘Lord of Hosts’ and the ‘Promised Christ’ is the Blessed Perfection (Bahá’u’lláh) and His holiness the Exalted One (the Báb). … Thraldom to the Blessed Perfection is my glorious and refulgent diadem, and servitude to all the human race my perpetual religion.

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212 I here refer to the way the concept of “prophet” is normally used in studies in History of religion. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá basically functions in this way and his personality is often described as highly charismatic. When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá himself denies that he is a prophet he is referring to the Bahá’í definition of prophets of God, who receive independent revelations from God and are founders of separate religions in accordance with the concept of Progressive Revelation.


214 Shoghi Effendi, World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 139.
This Western Bahā’ī identity was, to a certain extent, different from the identity of the Eastern Bahā’īs and it was a major task for ‘Abdu’l-Bahā and after him Shoghi Effendi to merge these two identities into one single identity. This was done with particular intensity during a period starting 1912 with the visit of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā in North America and ending in 1953 when Shoghi Effendi initiated an international plan of development, called the “Ten Year Crusade”. As a preparation for that plan there had been a series of national plans, starting with the first Seven year plan of the North American Bahā’ī communities in 1937.215 The task of putting the concept “World Order of Bahā’u’llāh” into practice must be seen as an important way of developing a common Bahā’ī identity. Working together in the Bahā’ī administration and going on pilgrimage to the same place have, no doubt, effected the development of a common identity.

The great difference between the Eastern and the Western Bahā’īs must be seen with the background of their acceptance of Bahā’u’llāh from the separate aspects of Shi’ā Islam in Iran and protestant churches in Europe and North America. The basic beliefs of Shi’ā Muslims that there is only one God, that Mohammed is His prophet and that Alī is the first imam is accepted by the Bahā’īs. What differs from Shi’ā is the belief that the prophecies of the return of Imam Mahdī and other such prophecies have been fulfilled.

The background of the faith of the Western Bahā’īs is the basic teachings of the Christian Churches, exposed in the Apostles’ Creed. To them, Bahā’u’llāh fulfilled the prophecies of the Bible and it is important to note that he also accepted the basic believees of

Christianity. In the interview that Laura Clifford Barney held with ‘Abdu’l-Bahā 1906, *Some Answered Questions*, she asked a number of questions, related to this confession. Of special interest for the purpose of this study is to see what ‘Abdu’l-Bahā said regarding following subjects that are central in this creed: 1) The Trinity 2) the Virgin birth 3) The resurrection of Christ 4) The basis of the Church.

The Trinity: ‘Abdu’l-Bahā begins by stating that “Divine Reality is sanctified from singleness, then how much more from plurality”. Then he goes on comparing God with the sun, Christ with a mirror and the Holy Spirit with the rays of the sun that is reflected in the mirror. The sun reflects itself in the mirror, while, at the same time, it is far away from this mirror. In this way it is possible, both to say that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are separate and that they are one.216 ‘Abdu’l-Bahā also uses this image to explain the introductory verse of the Gospel of St John.217

Virgin birth: While accepting that Jesus came into existence through the Holy Spirit, he underlines that “the honor and greatness of Christ is not due to the fact that he did not have a human father, but to His perfections, bounties and divine glory.”218

The resurrection of Christ: ‘Abdu’l-Bahā starts by stating that the resurrection of Christ was not of the body. “And as it has become evident that Christ came from the spiritual heaven of Divine Kingdom, therefore His disappearance under the earth for three days has an inner signification and is not an outward fact. In the same way,

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217 Ibid., p. 193.
218 Ibid., pp. 82-83.
His resurrection from the interior of the earth is also symbolic; it is a spiritual and divine fact, and not material; and likewise His ascension to heaven is a spiritual and not material ascension.”

The fundament of the Church: ‘Abdu’l-Bahā commented upon Jesus’ statement that Peter was the rock “and upon this rock I will build my church”. He did it in the following way: “…meaning thy belief that Christ is the son of the living God, will be the foundation of the Religion of God; and upon this belief the foundation of the church of God – which is the Law of God – shall be established.”

How controversial would these statements be if uttered within a Christian Church by a professional Theologist or by any Christian? No doubt they would not be accepted everywhere, but to many Christians these statements would be acceptable as basic Christian beliefs in terms with the spirit of the Gospel. In this way the Western Bahā’īs could accept Bahā’ī as a continuation of their Christian religious beliefs and in this way easily integrate Bahā’ī identity into their Christian identity.

5.2.2 Rituals as a Background to Bahā’ī Identity

Shoghi Effendi has described those few rituals that he recognized in a letter to a national spiritual assembly. In this way he has also described rituals as a small number of strictly defined activities, which all are prescribed as religious laws in the Kitāb-i-Aqdas. This definition that Shoghi Effendi is referring to is a minimal definition that is probably the most common way of looking upon

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219 Ibid., pp. 96-97.
220 Ibid., p. 124.
rituals but it is not in accordance with the definition that is used in religious studies. In this context the discussion of the background and function of rituals have been developed far beyond this minimal definition, and is rather considered as a method of studying outer actions that can point towards religious beliefs. Such actions are explained in the Bahá’í writings, but not with the terminology of rituals. Michael McMullen has, in his book on the Bahá’í community in Atlanta, discussed Bahá’í rituals in accordance with that way of looking upon rituals and states that “Ritual not only reflects the community’s ideology, but it shapes social relationships and religious actions in accordance with that ideology.”

The most dominating ritual according to this definition in Bahá’í is the reading of prayers, written by the Báb, Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. They are written in Arabic and Persian and translated into English. There are also texts, written by Shoghi Effendi in Persian and Arabic that are used as prayers, but few are translated into English. Most important as an identity-building activity is the daily reading of obligatory prayers of Bahá’u’lláh of which there are three, the short, the medium and the long obligatory prayer, and one of these should be chosen. These are, however, never read at meetings. The short obligatory prayer that should be read once in twenty-four hours, at noon, has the following text:

I bear witness, o my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee. I testify, at this moment, to my powerlessness and to Thy

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223 The total number of languages that the Bahá’í Writings are translated into is more than 800. The translations into English are, however, of special importance as a number of them have been made personally by Shoghi.
might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth. There is none other God but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.\footnote{Bahá’í Prayers, p. 117.}

Its character of declaration of faith and the fact that it should not be read in meetings gives it a special function as a personal bridge between God and the individual believer. Because of this it is of special importance to the building of a Bahá’í identity that is accentuated as a personal identity.

Bahá’í meetings are normally started by the reading of a few prayers, often in the form of prayer rounds where each or some of the partakers in the meeting will read one or more prayers. Administrative meetings form a special group, as they are partly decision-making meetings and partly religious rituals. What could merit them to be called religious meetings is that they are always started with prayers and that a special method for decision making in Bahá’í administration, called consultation,\footnote{This method has been discussed upon by John E. Kolstoe in his book on consultation. John E. Kolstoe, Consultation – A Universal lamp of guidance (Oxford: George Ronald, 1985).} is used. “The prime requisites for them that take counsel together are purity of motive, radiance of spirit, detachment from all else save God, attraction to His Divine Fragrance, humility and lowliness amongst His loved ones, patience and long-suffering in difficulties and servitude to His exalted Threshold. Should they be graciously aided to acquire these attributes, victory from the unseen Kingdom of Bahá shall be vouchsafed to them.”\footnote{‘Abdu’l-Bahá, quoted in Shoghi Effendis letter, dated March 5, 1922, to the Friends in America, Principles of Bahá’í Administration – A Compilation, second edition 1963 (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1950). p. 42.}
There are few passage rites in Bahá’í. The newly born child can be welcomed in a prayer meeting, but this is not compulsory and not generally practised. The youth can become a member of the Bahá’í community at the age of 15 by affirming his or her belief in Bahá’u’lláh, but this can also be done later. There is a special marriage ceremony to be followed and other laws regarding wedding, but this ceremony is very short. The bride and groom each say in front of two witnesses: “We will all, verily, abide by the will of God.” There are also wedding prayers to be read, but none of them is compulsory. Regarding burial, there are some laws, like not accepting cremation of the body and that the body must not be moved a longer distance than one hour’s travel to the place of burial. There is also a special prayer for the dead that is to be read at burial.

5.2.3 Rituals in the Bahá’í Community

An important part of Bahá’í identity, as a part of the life of the Bahá’í community, is attendance in the Nineteen Day Feast. To arrange Nineteen Day Feasts is a law given in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas by Bahá’u’lláh: “Verily, it is enjoined upon you to offer a feast, once in every month, though only water be served; for God hath purposed to bind hearts together, albeit through both earthly and heavenly means.” To attend it is not obligatory, but Shoghi Effendi wanted every believer to “consider it a duty and privilege to be present at such occasions”.

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228 Bahá’u’lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 105.
229 Ibid., p. 229.
230 Ibid., p. 22.
231 Ibid., p. 40.
Number nineteen has a special impotace, together with number nine, in the symbolic thinking in the Bahá’í tradition. Its background is in Persian and Arabic thinking and the relation between a letter as an instrument to form words and its numerical value. In the case of the word vâhid, the sum of the letter is nineteen. Each year, which is a solar year, starts at Naw-Rúz, the 21st of March, and the year consists of 19 months with 19 days in each month plus 4 or 5 intercalary days. In this way the year has 365 or 366 days. The names of these months are qualities of God, such as Bahá, Jalāl, Jamāl. These qualities of God are all found in the prayer Du’a sahar by Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqīr. The word vâhid is used in a number of ways. Historically it signifies the first eighteen followers of the Báb, the Letters of the Living, who together with Bâb himself makes up the first vâhid.

The Nineteen Day Feast was endorsed upon the believers already in the Arabic Bayân, one of the writings of the Báb. Bahá’u’lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas later accepted it. This means that Nineteen Day Feasts must have been held in Iran from the 1840’s. In North America it has been celebrated since 23 May 1905, after the pilgrimage of Howard and Mary MacNutt and Julia Grundy. They had taken part in a feast in Acre together with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and were

233 The word means “one”.
234 In Islam, the word tawhîd is the common way to signify the unity of God as this is its meaning in Arabic.
235 This is according to the traditional Islamic abjad-system.
237 This prayer, that is read by Shi’a Muslims during the month of Ramadan, has been translated to English by Stephen Lambden.
238 Shoghi Effendi, God Passes by, p. 8.
encouraged by him to start holding similar feasts at home.\textsuperscript{239}

Regarding its importance in the life of the Bahá’í community, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote:

\begin{quote}
You must continue to keep the Nineteen Day Feast. It is very important; it is very good. But when you present yourself in the meetings, before entering them, free yourselves from all that you have in your heart, free your thoughts and your minds from all else save God, and speak to your heart. That all may make this a gathering of love, make it a cause of illumination, make it an attraction of the hearts, surround this gathering with the Lights of the Supreme Concourse, so that you may be gathered with the utmost love.\textsuperscript{240}
\end{quote}

The three parts of the Nineteen Day Feast are all important for the building of a common Bahá’í identity, as they are all the same in all countries. They cannot be separated, although they were not introduced in the Nineteen Day Feast at the same time. In the first part, the spiritual part, prayers and other parts from the Bahá’í writings are read. It is also possible to read from the Holy writings of other religions. The second part, the administrative part, means consultation about current issues and giving suggestions to the Local Spiritual Assemblies. The third part, the social part, is a material feast.\textsuperscript{241} Thus, the believer will, if the Nineteen Day Feast is seen as a religious ritual, experience a broad confirmation of his or her religious identity. The believer will turn directly to God in the first part. He or she will turn to and be a part of the divinely appointed administration in the second part and finally will, together with the other believers, take part in a feast that has parallels with religious rituals in a great number of religious traditions. Thus ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has related the

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\textsuperscript{239} R. Stockman, \textit{The Bahá’í Faith in America}, Vol. 2, pp. 244-245.
\textsuperscript{240} ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, \textit{Star of the West}, Vol. IV, No 7, p. 120.
\textsuperscript{241} Ö. Widegren, \textit{Bahá’í för en enad värld} (Uppsala: Bahá’í Förlaget AB, 1990), p. 59.
\end{footnotesize}
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Nineteen Day Feast to the Lord’s supper in his contact with Western Bahá’ís. 242

There are some similarities between Islam and Bahá’í in rituals. One such similarity is the obligatory prayer, where the believer turns towards qiblah while reading the prayer with the performance of certain movements of the body. In Bahá’í the believer can choose between three such prayers and two of them have certain movements. Two of them should be recited once a day and the third shall be recited three times a day. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas there is also an admonition of daily recitation: “Recite ye the verses of God every morn and eventide. Whoso faileth to recite them hath not been faithful to the Covenant of God and His Testament, and whoso turneth away from these holy verses in this Day is of those who throughout eternity have turned away from God.” 243 The period of fasting and the obligatory pilgrimage also exist in Bahá’í, although the time is different and the place of pilgrimage is different.

One must also separate the importance of rituals for religious identity in Bahá’í as an organized religion and Bahá’í as a general humanitarian ideology. This humanitarian aspect of Bahá’í is especially based on the collection of the 10-12 principles that form the nucleus of Bahá’í ideas as they have been presented in the West in pamphlets and introductory literature. The introduction to Bahá’í has rarely been based on the presentation of Bahá’u’lláh as the return of Jesus Christ, although this is more central to Bahá’í itself. It is therefore possible to say that Bahá’í in the West has preferred to relate

242 ʻAbdu’l-Bahá, Star of the West, Vol. IV, no 7, p. 120.
243 Bahá’u’lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 73.
primarily to the humanistic principles in modernity than to adventistic expectations, in spite of the fact that these expectations would deserve to be called the roots of Bahá’í in the West. This is probably the reason to why there are many in the West who rather would see Bahá’í as a set of humanitarian ideas that have many similarities to the humanitarian ideas in the modern society, than a traditional religion.

The Bahá’í rituals described above are all related to the religious life in the Bahá’í community and even here there are few rituals that are compulsory, especially among the passage rites. The ritual that is most important for the individual is probably the reading of prayers, written by the central figures in Bahá’í. This ritual is very common. A great many such prayers exist, which makes this ritual an even more important part of the religious life of the individual. The Nineteen Day Feast is the most central ritual in the local Bahá’í community and it forms the basis of the Bahá’í administration. Because of this it also forms the functional basis of Bahá’í theocracy and to take part in a Nineteen Day Feast is for the believer to take part in a process that will ultimately create a divine order on earth: the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh.

5.3 Bahá’í as a Messianic Movement in the West

Bábism and Bahá’í in Iran are rightly described as Mahdí movements. In this way, they are a part of the Islamic tradition and they are treated as such. Based on the writings of Bahá’u’lláh, Bahá’í by time developed more and more in the direction of a separate religion, something that was especially important when it started to missionize in the Western world. There, the Islamic roots of Bahá’í were not considered an asset and whatever proofs of the station of
Bahá’u’lláh that could be found in the holy writings of Islam, was of little help. It was rather proofs from the Bible that people in this part of the world were looking for. Therefore Bahá’í had to be presented with this as a background. Among the teachings that Kháyru’lláh had spread in America in the 1890’s, the dominating ones were the fulfilment of Biblical prophecies.244

There have been a number of books, written by the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh in order to present proofs that they fulfilled prophecies. Probably the most important book in Bahá’í that takes up this theme is the Kitáb-i-Iqán, where Bahá’u’lláh treats the question from both the Christian and the Islamic perspectives. This book could be said to form the nucleus of the writings of Bahá’u’lláh on this theme and it is probably that book by Bahá’u’lláh that has been most widely read.245 This book was published in English translation in 1904 in United States and simultaneously translated into French and published in France.246 For the early Western Bahá’ís, Some Answered Questions by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was probably even more important.

There is another important difference between the Bahá’ís in Iran and the Bahá’ís in the West in that there has been no organized persecution in the West, although isolated examples can be found. The knowledge of the persecution has existed in the West and the Western Bahá’ís have been involved in Bahá’í administration where this issue in some periods has been dominant either in contact with the

persecution or when integrating the Iranian Bahāʾī refugees into the community.

5.3.1 The Biblical Background of the Bahāʾī Identity

According to the Islamic calendar, the Bābī movement started in 1260. This year there were great expectation among the Shīʿa Muslims that Imam Mahdī would appear, as it was 1000 years after he went into the lesser occultation.247 The Iranian Bābīs accepted the Bāb as an answer to this expectation. This background was of course very important in Iran, but in Europe and North America it had little meaning to people. What was more important in the West was that the starting year of Bahāʾī was 1844 AD,248 which related to the expectation among adventistic movements, such as the Millerites, that Jesus would come back in 1844.249 When Bahāʾī was introduced in North America in the 1890’s, these expectations might have had changed into disappointments, but they could hardly have been forgotten. Considering the importance that Khayru’llāh had given the Biblical subjects and the success he had, these expectations, based upon the Book of Daniel, must still have been a living part of the thought among religious seekers in North America. As Bahāʾī started in 1844 with a prophet that claimed to be the answer to Biblical prophesies, this probably became an important foundation for a Bahāʾī identity for those westerners who joined Bahāʾī. The fact that the year 1844 AD and 1260 A.H. were the same year must have broadened this

248 Even if 1844 was the starting point for the Bābī religion and not Bahāʾī, this year has been counted as the year when it started by the Bahāʾīs themselves.
foundation to become an understanding of Bahāʾī also as a Mahdī movement in Iran, due to some verses in the Book of Revelation.  

After 1909 the Western Bahāʾīs received more detailed information in Some Answered Questions. In this book, the two witnesses, mentioned in the Book of Revelation (11:3), were identified as Muhammad and  and the year 1260 became that year when the Qurʾān was no longer the latest book of God. Some of the symbols in the Book of Revelation are explained in an Islamic context. In these explanations one can see a picture of Islam as a spiritually dead religion from the disappearance of the last Imam, a religion which was recreated on a spiritual level with the emergence of the Bāb. The effect of this teaching was that the Western Bahāʾīs gained that reverence for Muhammad and the Qurʾān that was necessary for them in order to take part in the building of bridges between Islamic and Western way of thinking. This was done without the Western Bahāʾīs having to deal with any aspect of the problematic parts of the history of the relationship between Islam and the Western world.

250 These verses mention the number 1260 (Rev. 11:2-14) as 1260 days, 42 months (42 x 30 = 1260) and 3 1/2 days (if counting these days as years: 3 1/2 x 360 = 1260), which to the Bahāʾīs became a prophecy about the coming of the Bāb. “Abdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 63. To my knowledge these numbers have been of little relevance to the religious history in Europe and North America in the 19th century. The writings of Joachim de Fiore show, however, that there existed expectations in Europe in the years ahead of the year 1260 AD. S-E. Liedman, I skuggan av framtiden (Stockholm: Bonnier Alba, 1997), pp. 405-406.

251 This is not the only book that served this purpose, but it is by far the most important.

252 Abdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 46. This means that to Bahāʾī the two witnesses are related to two personalities in history and not, like Islam, to a theme that is repeated in the history of the religions of God.

253 Ibid., p. 49.
5.3.2 The Martyrdom of the Báb in the Eyes of the Western Bahá’ís

There is a part of Bahá’í history that is of special importance, both to the identities of the Iranian Bahá’ís and the Western Bahá’ís, and that is the story of the martyrdom of the Báb. There are different accounts of the execution of the Báb, starting with an account of the Russian consul in Tabriz, Anitchkov, from 15 July 1850, written less than a week after the execution.254 The account, mostly used in the Bahá’í community is the one in the Dawn Breakers, which was made available by Shoghi Effendi who translated it into English. This account was written almost four decades after the execution,255 but it is based on interviews with eyewitnesses.

For Bahá’ís of Christian background the martyrdom of the Báb, as described in the Dawn Breakers, has often been of special interest because of its parallel with the crucifixion of Christ. The trial he was given, his acceptance of the treatment and the miracle that the shots of the first regiment did not kill him have probably all been reasons for this special interest. Shoghi Effendi commented upon this in his book God Passes By. “It would indeed be no exaggeration to say that nowhere in the whole compass of the world’s religious literature, except in the Gospel, do we find any record relating to the death of any of the religion-founder of the past comparable to the martyrdom suffered by the Prophet of Shiraz.”256

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254 M. Momen, The Báb and Bahá’í religions, Some Contemporary Western Accounts, p. 77.
255 A. Amanat, Resurrection and Renewal, p 425.
256 Shoghi Effendi, God Passes by, p. 56.
5.4 Bahá’í Principles and Identity

In Europe and North America, Bahá’í is probably best known through a set of 10-12 principles. These principles are part of the picture of Bahá’í as a general humanistic ideology. They can each be found in the writings of Bahá’u’lláh, but they are not presented there as a list of principles. There have been discussions on these principles, such as the one on the principle on economic equality, made by Juan Cole in his article Bahá’u’lláh and the liberation theology. In this article he has studied the writings of Bahá’u’lláh on the social question. One of the points he is making, which can be of interest in this study, is how the local spiritual assemblies in the Bahá’í administration can be a tool for the villagers to strengthen their own position. The reason for this is, according to Juan Cole, that they themselves can elect these assemblies, without the need for a clergyman from the urban middle class and that the members of the assemblies are elected irrespectively of their position in society.257

Some of these principles have special interest in a study of Bahá’í identity, as they are related to role taking. Especially two of these principles can be said to have this function in a very clear way: the issue of peace and the principle of equality between men and women. The issue of peace is founded on role taking through Bahá’u’lláh’s letter to the kings as well as the talks and writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, who in Europe and North-America constantly talked about the need for peace and international reconciliation. The

principle of equality between men and women is founded on role taking through Tahirih, who came to personalize this principle.

The vision that can be seen as the fundament of these principles is the vision of the “Most Great Peace”. This vision has been described in different parts of the Bahā’ī writings, also in this prayer by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā:

O Thou kind Lord! Thou hast created all humanity from the same stock. Thou hast decreed that all shall belong to the same household. In Thy Holy Presence they are all Thy servants, and all mankind are sheltered beneath Thy Tabernacle; all have gathered together at Thy Table of Bounty; all are illumined through the light of Thy Providence. O God! Thou art kind to all. Thou hast provided for all, dost shelter all, conferrest life upon all. Thou hast endowed each and all with talents and faculties, and all are submerged in the Ocean of Thy Mercy. O Thou kind Lord! Unite all. Let the religions agree and make the nations one, so that they may see each other as one family and the whole earth as one home. May they all live together in perfect harmony. O God! Rise aloft the banner of the oneness of mankind. O God! Establish the Most Great Peace. Cement Thou, O God, the hearts together. O Thou kind Father, God! Gladden our hearts through the fragrance of Thy love. Brighten our eyes through the Light of Thy Guidance. Delight our ears with the melody of Thy Word, and shelter us all in the Stronghold of Thy Providence. Thou art the Mighty and Powerful. Thou art the Forgiving and Thou art the One Who overlooketh the shortcomings of all mankind.\(^{258}\)

5.4.1 The Cosmic Drama as a Vision of World Peace

The cosmic drama in Bahā’ī can be seen as the march of mankind towards the “Most Great Peace”, ruled through the “World Order of Bahā’u’llāh”. The task of the individual believer in Bahā’ī is, to a large extent, to take part in the building of this world order. Bahā’u’llāh has described this concept in his meeting with E.G. Browne in 1890.

That all nations should become one in faith, and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened;

\(^{258}\) Bahā’ī Prayers, pp. 45-46.
that the diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled – what harm is there in this?... Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strives, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the ‘Most Great Peace’ shall come. ... Do not you in Europe need this also? Is not this that which Christ foretold? ... Yet do we see your kings and rulers lavishing their treasures more freely on means for the destruction of the human race than on that which would conduce to the happiness of mankind. ... These strives and this bloodshed and discord must cease, and all men be as one kindred and one family. ... Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind...

As a step towards the vision of the “Most Great Peace” stands the vision of the “Lesser Peace”, a political peace, which is seen as a step towards the “Most Great Peace”. This step became necessary because of the negligence of those contemporary rulers that received the message of Bahá'u'lláh.

Now that ye have refused the Most Great Peace, hold ye fast unto this, the Lesser Peace, that haply ye may in some degree better your own condition and that of your dependents. O rulers of the earth! Be reconciled among yourselves, that ye may need no more armaments save in a measure to safeguard your territories and dominions.

The vision of the “Lesser Peace” has allowed the Bahá'ís to cooperate with the League of Nations as well as the United Nations, where the Bahá'í community has been recognized as a Non-Governmental Organization although its vision of the Most Great Peace has not been accepted as a common goal. To be an active supporter of the United Nations falls within the framework of Bahá'í identity and it is not uncommon for local Bahá'í communities to celebrate United Nations day and other days, related to the United Nations. This relation to the UN idea has, no doubt, been helpful in

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259 This could be interpreted as a fundamentalist approach to the question of religious plurality. In Bahá’í this has, however, rather been interpreted with the aspect of unity of religions as a general humanistic principle.


261 Bahá’u’lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 254.
the contacts with the United Nations concerning the issue of the persecution of the Iranian Bahá’ís.

5.4.2 The Role of Women in Bahá’í

In the Bahá’í writings, there is a much-used picture that shows the relationship between men and women in the Bahá’í vision. The two sexes are pictured as two wings of a bird that have to be equally strong for the bird to be able to fly.262 The roles of men and women are in this picture seen as equally important, but not necessarily identical.263 According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the role of women is especially connected with the principle of peace, which in turn is connected to education. These connections are central to the concept of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh:

Equality between men and women is conducive to the abolition of warfare for the reason that women will never be willing to sanction it. Mothers will not give their sons as sacrifices upon the battlefield after twenty years of anxiety and loving devotion in rearing them from infancy, no matter what cause they are called upon to defend. There is no doubt that when women will obtain equality of rights, war will entirely cease among mankind.264

To my understanding, this could be described as an effect of the female “ethics of care” in the Bahá’í vision, contrasted to what was earlier described as the male “ethic of justice”. The stronger the female identity of the women is, the less willing the mothers will be to send their sons as soldiers to war. The female identity of their daughters is strengthened by the special importance given to the education of the girls, a law in Bahá’í that will be discussed further down. This in turn will have as a result that the next generation of

262 It is also used to illustrate the principle of harmony between science and religion.
mothers will be even stronger in their reluctance to accept that their sons become soldiers. For each generation of women, this identity will be strengthened and this will have the result in that the reluctance of the mothers to sanction that their sons are sent to war will grow stronger and stronger.

The striving of equality between men and women in Europe and North America has been going on since the middle or the end of the 19th century and the early Bahá’ís in the West were part of that society. The Bahá’ís in Iran have had a different situation. The matter might have existed also in some circles of the society of Iran, but the issue of equality was not by far as developed as in the West. Because of this, the principle of equality between men and women has made a greater difference to the rest of the community in Iran than in the West.

The principle of equality between men and women can be seen already in the writings of Bahá’u’lláh. Often in these texts he has not used the words “men” and “women”, but “servants” and “handmaidens”, like in the following text.265

Exalted, immensely exalted is He Who hath removed differences and established harmony. Glorified, infinitely glorified is He Who hath caused

Ey farzand kanīz-i-man. Agar saltanat baqī bīnī albateh bekamāl jad az molk fānī dar gozari valaken satrēr onra hekmāthā ast va jelvehe in ra ramazhā. Joz afadī pāk edrak nanemayad. This is translated by Shoghi Effendi into English as follows: “O son of my handmaid! Didst thou behold immortal sovereignty, thou woulds strive to pass from this fleeting world. But to conceal the one from thee and to reveal the other is a mystery which none but the pure in heart can comprehend.” Bahá’u’lláh has used the word pesār for “son” in other parts of the “Hidden Words”. Here he uses farzand, which would commonly be translated into “child”, as it can signify both boy and girl.

265 The Persian words that he has used are “bandeh ”and “kanīz”, meaning male and female servant, respectively. Another such example of Bahá’u’lláh using the word handmaid instead of woman is no 41, Persian part in Hidden Words, a very early book. Ey farzand kanīz-i-man. Agar saltanat baqī bīnī albateh bekamāl jad az molk fānī dar gozari valaken satrēr onra hekmāthā ast va jelvehe in ra ramazhā. Joz afadī pāk edrak nanemayad. This is translated by Shoghi Effendi into English as follows: “O son of my handmaid! Didst thou behold immortal sovereignty, thou woulds strive to pass from this fleeting world. But to conceal the one from thee and to reveal the other is a mystery which none but the pure in heart can comprehend.” Bahá’u’lláh has used the word pesār for “son” in other parts of the “Hidden Words”. Here he uses farzand, which would commonly be translated into “child”, as it can signify both boy and girl.
To cease, and decreed solidarity and unity. Praise be God, the Pen of the Most High hath lifted distinctions from between His servants and handmaidens and, through His consummate favours and all-encompassing mercy, hath conferred upon all a station and rank on the same plane. He hath broken the back of vain imaginings with the sword of utterance and hath obliterated the perils of idle fancies through the pervasive power of His might.266

Zarrin-Tāj, in Bahā’ī known as Tahirih,267 has come to stand as a symbol of equality between men and women to the Bahā’īs. She belonged to that first group of believers that accepted the Bāb, called the Letters of the Living268 and she was killed in the extensive wave of persecution that took place in 1852.269 She is pictured as a woman of great theological knowledge in a world dominated by men. Abbas Amanat describes her as the leader of a Shi’a school of her own until she accepted the Bāb.270 At the conference in Badashṭ271 she appeared in public without a veil and in this way took part in moving the Bābī community one important step away from Islam.272 At her martyrdom some years later, she was strangled to death.

In the Dawn Breakers this conference has been described as being led by Bahā’u’llāh. The role of Bahā’u’llāh in the conference in Badashṭ was to organize the conference and, according to Nabil-i-Zarandī in the Dawn Breakers, to function as the protector of Tahirih. This conference was a breaking point in the development of the Bābī

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267 This name was designated for her by the Bāb. Amanat, Resurrection and Renewal, p. 307.
269 A. Amanat, Resurrection and Renewal, p. 329.
270 Ibid., p. 300.
271 1848.
272 Nabil-i-Zarandi, Dawn Breakers, p. 294.
religion. Bahā’u’llāh had rented three gardens, one for Tahirih, one for Quddus and one for himself.

Each day of that memorable gathering witnessed the abrogation of a new law and the repudiation of a long-established tradition. The veils that guarded the sanctity of the ordinances of Islam were sternly rent asunder, and the idols that had so long claimed the adoration of their blind worshippers were rudely demolished.273

According to Nabil-i- Zaranī this instance was very dramatic, considering the reactions of the Bābis present. She arrived to the tent of Bahā’u’llāh, who happened to be ill that day, and in this tent Quddus was also present. As this story is told, she was silently supported by Bahā’u’llāh and also by Quddus. It seems, however, in the text that Quddus was opposing her violently, but according to a footnote he and Tahirih in advance had decided about this reaction of Quddus.

…suddenly the figure of Táhirih, adorned and unveiled, appeared before the eyes of the assembled companions. Consternation immediately seized the entire gathering. All stood aghast before this sudden and most unexpected apparition. To behold her face unveiled was to them inconceivable. Even to gaze at her shadow was a thing which they deemed improper, inasmuch as they regarded her as the very incarnation of Fátimih, the noblest emblem of chastity in their eyes.

Quietly, silently, and with the utmost dignity, Táhirih stepped forward and, advancing towards Quddús, seated herself on his right-hand side. Her unruffled serenity sharply contrasted with the affrighted countenances of those who were gazing upon her face. Fear, anger, and bewilderment stirred the depths of their souls. That sudden revelation seemed to have stunned their faculties. ’Abdu’l-Khāliq-i-Isfahání was so gravely shaken that he cut his throat with his own hands. Covered with blood and shrieking with excitement, he fled away from the face of Táhirih. A few, following his example, abandoned their companions and forsook their Faith. A number were seen standing speechless before her, confounded with wonder. Quddús, meanwhile, had remained seated in his place, holding the unsheated sword in his hand, his face betraying a feeling of inexpressible anger. It seemed as if he were waiting for the moment when he could strike his fatal blow at Táhirih.274

273 Ibid., p. 293.
274 Ibid., pp. 293–296.
There have been women in leading positions in the Bahá'í organization. The most important example is the sister of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Bahíyyih Khánum, who took care of the practical leadership of the Bahá’í community during the periods when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was travelling. She was also the leader of the Bahá’í community for a period after the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá when Shoghi Effendi had been appointed leader, but was unable to resume this responsibility.275 The other period when there were women in a leading position was the period from the passing of Shoghi Effendi in 1957 to the election of the Universal House of Justice in 1963. During this period the leadership of the Bahá’í community was in the hands of a collective leadership, the Hands of the Cause of God. This was a group of 27 Bahá’ís appointed by Shoghi Effendi and among them were five women: Amelia E. Collins, Clara Dunn, Corinne True, Rúhíyyih Rabbani276 and Agnes B. Alexander. After the election of the Universal House of Justice 1963, this group remained important to the development of the Bahá’í community but the official leadership had been handed over to the Universal House of Justice.

5.4.3 Two Exceptions to Equality between Men and Women

The equality between men and women in Bahá’í is, however, not without exceptions. The two most important exceptions are what I would like to call the administrative exception and the educational exception. The administrative exception is that women cannot be

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275 Bahíyyih Khánum (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1982), pp. 28-29.
276 The wife of Shoghi Effendi, born Mary Sutherland Maxwell.
elected as members of the Universal House of Justice. 277 Women can, however, become elected to all other institutions and work in all administrative capacities in the Bahá’í administration. To the question why this exception exists, the only answer given in the Bahá’í writings is that the wisdom of this will be obvious in the future. 278

In the early years of the Bahá’í community of the United States, women could sit as members of Bahá’í institutions as equals with men. This was changed when Persian teachers were sent to the American Bahá’í community by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, as they informed the American believers that in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas Bahá’u’lláh had designated membership of the House of Justice to men only. 279 After that, women formed separate institutions but after a few years the situation changed once more, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá changed the names of the local and national institutions to mahfil-i-rawhání280 – spiritual assembly. Later he pointed out that the law in Kitáb-i-Aqdas was applicable to the Universal House of Justice only. 281

It could be seen as common pattern among religious organizations, churches, communities etc. to be ruled by elderly men. These men are sometimes elected on a lifetime basis and normally at the peak of a clerical career. The law that only men can be members of the Universal House of Justice will naturally form a background to the question if this is the situation in the Bahá’í community as well.

277 Bahá’u’lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 201. Bahá’u’lláh turns to the members of the Universal House of Justice, “O ye Men of Justice”, in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. The sentence in Arabic reads “rejâlh ’ul’ beladh”, which signifies men only.
278 Lights of Guidance, p. 613.
280 Ibid., pp. 67-68.
281 Ibid., p. 75.
The years that have passed since the election of the Universal House of Justice for the first time in 1963 have seen some experiences that can be discussed in order to get a possible answer to this question. The members of this institution are elected for a period of five years.

The first experience that can be seen is that members that are elected to the Universal House of Justice for the first time have been well known and much respected among the Bahá’ís. This must be seen as natural, as they are elected as members of the leading institution of the community. There are two factors that will emphasize this tendency. The members of the Universal House of Justice are elected as individual members without any special education or clerical ordination for membership of this institution. There are therefore no principles for the individual delegates at the International convention to limit the number of possible candidates. The principle of not having any prepared list of candidates among whom the delegates can elect the members, underlines the conclusion that the members of the Universal House of Justice must generally be known for their services to the Bahá’í community. This has as a result in that even if the members of the Universal House of Justice have not necessarily been old when they have been elected the first time, they have generally not been very young men. The second experience is that the members of the Universal House of Justice have tended to be reelected until they retired from the Universal House of Justice for health reasons or due to old age.

If these experiences alone should be allowed to form a parallel to the traditional religious leadership, this might be possible, but there is an important difference in this that the leadership in the Bahá’í
community is non-clerical. Another important difference is that this parallel has to be limited to the institution of the Universal House of Justice as both men and women can serve on all other institutions of Bahá’í administration. Also there is nothing else in the structure of Bahá’í administration or the principles of decision-making that discriminates between men and women.

What I have called the educational exception is a law in Bahá’í that states that both boys and girls all should be given education, but if the parents cannot afford to give both the son and the daughter an education, priority should be given to the daughter. The reason for this is that the girl is a future mother and the role of the mother is crucial for the very young child, more important than that of the father.282 As the motivation is the development of the child and not to establish a traditional relationship between men and women, this law is not seen in the Bahá’í community as parallel to traditional religious leadership, but rather as a way of taking the first steps for the education of the child.

The function of education is central in the Bahá’í writings. Bahá’u’lláh pictured in many places in his writings the role of the manifestation of God as the divine educator that will educate mankind to continue to the next step of its development. The divine covenant is in itself a plan for education of mankind and God is responsible for this plan.283 Also ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has stated that the “reason of the mission of the Prophets is to educate men, so that this piece of coal may become a diamond, and this fruitless tree may become engrafted

282 Bahá’u’lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, pp. 199-200.
283 Ibid., p. 36.
and yield the sweetest, most delicious fruits.”\textsuperscript{284} Education is emphasized by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā as being “among the greatest of all services that can possibly be rendered by man to Almighty God.” Also he says that “each child is potentially the light of the world – and at the same time its darkness; wherefore must the question of education be accounted as of primary importance. From his infancy, the child must be nursed at the breast of God’s love, and nurtured in the embrace of His knowledge, that he may radiate light, grow in spirituality, be filled with wisdom and learning, and take on the characteristics of the angelic host.”\textsuperscript{285}

How will these two exceptions influence the situation of Bahā’ī women on a local level? The upbringing of children is a part of the traditional role of the women and the organizational leadership a part of the traditional role of men. Does not this suggest that these two exceptions will have as a result strengthening of the traditional gender roles on a local level? This could very well be the result, but the existence of the principle of equality between men and women might also lead the development in another direction. These two exceptions to the principle of equality between men and women are not limited in time, which means that they will both remain as an integrate part of Bahā’ī. Because of this I can see a connection between them in this that the leading institution of the Bahā’ī community would be the first to support the vision of the female “ethic of care” because of the importance of education in Bahā’ī. The effect of this could be that this institution, with male members only, would become instrumental in forming a new identity among the male Bahā’īs where an aspect of

“ethic of care” is of central importance. On the other hand, if the educational exception rather leads to a strengthening of the traditional role of women, this development will probably not happen. To my knowledge there have been no scholarly study on the development on the situation of women in local Bahá’í communities and therefore it is too early to state whether this possible development has taken place or not.

5.4.4 The Racial Issue

The matter of racial equality is very clear in the Bahá’í writings and can be summarized in the statement by Bahá’u’lláh: “The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens”. Universal House of Justice has formulated the Bahá’í view of racism in the following words:

Race is of no importance and where there are differences between people that can be called racial, it is important that people learn to co-operate with other races. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá made a point out of this matter during his travels in North America, especially in the Southern States. He even encouraged two Bahá’ís to marry, Mr. Louis G. Gregory and Miss Louisa Mathew, in an inter-racial marriage. Louis Gregory is today remembered as a pioneer among American Bahá’ís in presenting Bahá’í to the African-American population and

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working for inter-racial co-operation.\textsuperscript{287} The study by Michael McMullen on Bahá’í-identity among the Bahá’ís in Atlanta deals to a great extent with the racial issue and how this community has worked to create a social situation in accordance with the wishes of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Another place where the racial issue has been crucial is South Africa where apartheid has been the rule. Obviously, this way of making racism a part of the society has created huge problems for the functioning of the Bahá’í community, as well as other organizations that could not accept racism. The present writer was present at a summer school in Namibia, December 1999 where two senior Bahá’ís were talking about their memories from the history of Bahá’í in Namibia. Of the two, one was a native African from northern Namibia and one a German pioneer, who in his youth, before becoming a Bahá’í believer, had been a soldier in the German army under General Rommel in North Africa. When the first local spiritual assembly of Windhoek was to be formed, apartheid was the ruling principle in Namibia and there was a problem for the white and the black group to meet. They were not allowed to meet and not even allowed to talk to each other. According to the memories of these two persons, who were the contact persons for the white and the black believers, they met before a shopping window in town where they could talk without facing each other and in this way decide the place where the meeting would take place, a cave outside Windhoek.

5.5 The Bahá’í World Centre in the East-West Perspective.

In the Bahá’í World Centre on the slopes of Mount Carmel it is possible to see the effort to balance East and West in the style of the architecture. This is not possible in that part of the Bahá’í World Centre that is situated in Acre and the vicinity of Acre, as these buildings are all historical buildings that were not constructed with this idea in mind. There are also buildings, owned by the Bahá’í community in the lower part of Haifa (Hadad area) but they are also not built with this idea in mind.

The tomb of the Báb was built by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as a rectangular house with six rooms, that later was extended to a square building with additional three rooms, without any architectural ambitions. It was not until the plan of the superstructure was presented and built during the ministry of Shoghi Effendi, that the idea of the architectural style of the mausoleum became obvious. The tomb of the Báb received a golden dome and architectonic details that were not totally related either to East or West. The gardens that surrounded these buildings were extended with a plan in 1990 with a series of terraces, connected by steps, starting from the top of Mount Carmel, passing through 9 terraces above the shrine and continuing with 9 terraces below the shrine. The last terrace is situated at the foot of Mount Carmel and functions as the entrance gate to the terraces and the shrine from Ben Gurion Avenue. According to oral information, given to this author, the nine upper terraces and the nine lower terraces together with the shrine of the Báb, symbolize the first vāhid of the Bábí religion: the Letters of the Living. As the shrine in this way is
connected to the oriental *abjad* system\(^{288}\) as well as to the history of Bahá’í in Iran, it must be seen as symbolizing the Eastern aspect of human culture.

The Archives building was designed by Shoghi Effendi and was finished after his passing away. It was the first building on that part of the Mount Carmel slopes that is called the Arc and the building that set the style of the whole Arc project. It is built in the style of a classical Greek temple with Ionic\(^{289}\) capitals of the columns. The detail in its architecture that makes it a special Bahá’í building is the sign “Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá” on the pediment. The next building on the Arc was the seat of the Universal House of Justice, which was built in Corinthian style. This building was built to become the central building on the Arc. In 1990 a plan was presented by the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’í world on how to complete the Arc and the surroundings of the shrine of the Báb. In this plan the Arc was completed with two more houses: the Centre of the study of the texts and the House of the International teaching centre, both in the style that was set by Shoghi Effendi. Between the Archives building and the Centre of the study of the texts was also planned an extension of the Archives, a building that is mostly subterranean and has a modern functional style. Another building on the Arc, the International library, will later be built adjacent to the Archives building, looking almost identical. These five buildings in Greek style have completed the Arc project, symbolizing the culture of the West.\(^{290}\)

\(^{288}\) This is the traditional system whereby each letter gets a number and the sum of the letters in a word have a symbolic value.


5.6 Conclusion

The relationship between East and West is much more balanced than would be natural for a religion that was born in the Muslim world and exported by missionaries to the West. The main motivation for joining Bahá’í was in the East that the promises of Islam were fulfilled and, in the West, that Bahá’u’lláh was accepted as the return of Christ. In this way Bahá’í became the natural continuation of Christianity for the Western believers just as it had become the natural continuation of Islam for the Eastern believers and because of this it was possible to build a Bahá’í identity that appealed to Western as well as Eastern bahá’ís. In this religious identity the concept of servanthood was integrated through the central writings of Bahá’í and the example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. During the periods of persecution in Iran the servant ideology motivated the Iranian bahá’ís to accept martyrdom if necessary. The same ideology motived the Western bahá’ís to serve in the Bahá’í administration in order to create a well-trimmed international organization that could influence the Iranian authorities as well as international organizations and governments outside Iran to intervene on behalf of the Iranian bahá’ís.
CHAPTER 6
Bahá’í Identity in the Perspective of Centre and Periphery

6.1 The Importance of Pilgrimage in Bahá’í

There are a number of ways to build religious identity, but in “revealed” religions it could hardly be done without creating a strong bond with the founder of that religion, the prophet himself. There is not one single way of accomplishing this and in this chapter one of these means, the pilgrimage, will be studied. I will start with a general discussion on pilgrimage as such and on different kinds of places of pilgrimage. I will then continue with a discussion of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh as the worldview in Bahá’í and how this takes its expression in the international centre of the Bahá’í community in Haifa and the Acre area in Israel.

Building on the relationship between willingness to accept martyrdom and the creation of the strong bond between the believer and the prophet, I will come to the nature of the concept of martyrdom. In Bahá’í the willingness to accept martyrdom is strongly related to the relationship of the believer as a servant and Bahá’u’lláh as the manifestation of God, a spiritual king paralleling Christ as the Messiah. The ideal relationship between Bahá’u’lláh and the believer is given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and the position he points toward in his talks, his writings and his life was the role of a servant. The martyr in the Bahá’í tradition is thus a believer who accepts the role of a servant to such a degree that he or she gives up life itself. The
difference between the individual that works with the Bahá’í administration and the martyr is a matter of degree, not of principle. Both are servants of Bahá’u’lláh and both have ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as their ideal.

The general discussion of the relationship between East and West, that is so important in order to understand the persecution of the Iranian Bahá’ís, must be supplemented with another discussion. To understand the context of the persecutions, the East and West relationship must be discussed. To understand the reaction of the Bahá’ís however, the discussion of the relationship between the centre and the periphery is more important, as the foundation of Bahá’í identity is an individual acceptance of Bahá’u’lláh as a prophet of God. This makes the dimension of centre-periphery crucial, as the believers have not been encouraged to physically gather around the leader of the community, but have been encouraged to spread to as many places as possible in order to spread the message of Bahá’u’lláh to as many places as possible.

The East-West dimension within the Bahá’í tradition has given a special role to the Bahá’í communities in Iran and the United States. The Bahá’í communities in other countries have had their own role, but these two countries have had a special importance and have formed separate platforms for spreading the Bahá’í message to other countries. The East-West dimension has no doubt existed as a problem within the Bahá’í community. This problem has, however, never resulted in a split in two or more separate communities as it has been balanced by an active effort to bridge this difference and to create a

291 In the meaning that Messiah (the anointed one) refers to the king.
united global Bahá’í community, based on a common religious identity: the ideal of the servant. The Bahá’í pilgrimage has, as an institution, been central to this solution.

6.1.1 Pilgrimage and Religious Identity

To go on pilgrimage is a common way of expressing religious belief and to create and strengthen religious identity. In the prophetic religions it is common to go on pilgrimage to places related to the prophet, most notably the prophet’s grave. This is, however, far from the only kind of place for pilgrimage. Every place for pilgrimage has its own theophany and is a point of attraction of its own to the believers. The strongest position that pilgrimage has as a religious institution is probably within Islam, where pilgrimage is a religious law. In this way pilgrimage becomes closely connected to religious identity among Muslims.

Islam is probably also the best example of the revitalizing power of pilgrimage. This came about with the increased possibility of Muslims to go on pilgrimage to Mecca, due to renewed possibilities with modern transportation. What had happened before was that the distance to Mecca was a major factor in deciding whether a person could go on pilgrimage. Today there are increasing numbers of Muslims coming from all over the world on pilgrimage and returning home as committed upholders of the cause of Islam. This modern trend is an important part of the background of the awakening of the Muslim world in the latter part of the 20th century.
6.1.2 The Concept of Pilgrimage

The word pilgrimage comes from *peregrinus* (lat.), which means stranger or foreigner. The pilgrim is travelling to a place that is holy to his or her religion. Travelling for religious reasons has been connected with a number of different religious movements all through history, although not with all. In Indian context pilgrimage is very well established and has been practised by many of the existing religious traditions. In Christian context pilgrimage has often been made to the Holy Sepulchre of Jesus Christ or to places in Europe that were holy to them, especially to the tombs of the saints.

In many religions it has been considered meritorious to make pilgrimages, but it has not been compulsory. In Islam pilgrimage – *hajj* – was emphasized by making it a law and thereby also defining it. By giving the *hajj* such a special station, other kinds of pilgrimage have been discouraged. Another kind of pilgrimage did, however, come into being and this kind of pilgrimage, the *zārārat* – became especially important to twelver Shi’a. The word itself is an Arabic word and means visit. In the Shi’a context it was used especially for visits to the holy graves of the twelve Imāms. After visiting such a grave the Shi’a believer is given a title, parallel to *hajjī*, depending on which Imām shrine that was visited, such as *Karbilā’ī*, *Najafī* and *Mashhādī*.

In Bahā’ī both of these concepts are found. The *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* mentions two places of pilgrimage; the house of the Bāb in Shirāz and the house of Bahā’u’llāh in Baghdad, and in the Arabic original, the word being used is *hajj*. When the believers go on pilgrimage to the Bahā’ī World Centre to visit the tombs of Bahā’u’llāh, the Bāb and
‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the word zíārat is used and at these shrines a tablet of visitation is read – zíārat-námeh⁹² (the tombs of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh) and munájät-i-laqā⁹³ (the tomb of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá). Zíārat-nameh is written by Bahá’u’lláh and munájät-i-laqā by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.²⁹⁴

Is it possible to go on a pilgrimage to a living person? The definition of pilgrimage is to visit a place that is holy to one’s religion, and not to visit a person. Often the goal of the pilgrimage is a shrine of a holy person or a place that is connected with divine revelation. Traditionally the zíārat is made to a shrine and it is connected with such a ritual. When the Bahá’ís visited Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá they did it as a way of showing a great respect and reverence. Even when it was not possible for the Bahá’ís to see Bahá’u’lláh in person during those periods when he was held in very strict imprisonment in Acre, they would still travel the long way from Iran in order to stand outside the prison, only to see a quick glimpse of the face of Bahá’u’lláh.²⁹⁵ These visits should, however, also be seen as a way of showing a willingness to serve and it was not uncommon for the pilgrims to actually be asked to perform a certain act of service. One such example is Badī, who was asked to deliver a letter to the shah, which he did. After delivering that letter, he was killed and he is one of the well-known martyrs in Bahá’í history.²⁹⁶

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²⁹² This can be translated to “letter of visitation”.
²⁹³ This can be translated as “prayer of visitation”.
²⁹⁴ The words zíārat and the less common word laqā both mean visit and are also used in a more general sense, meaning to visit a person that one has a great respect for. Both words are Arabic but zíārat has been more integrated in the Persian language.
²⁹⁵ Shoghi Effendi, God Passes by, p. 187.
²⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 199.
6.1.3 Places of Pilgrimage

In Israel there are a number of places of pilgrimage that are visited by Jews, Christians and Muslims. If the area of discussion is extended to the other countries in that region, the most central places of pilgrimage all these religions will be included. These places have been the focus of these religions for centuries and the source of renewal of the personal faith of generations of believers. In the following discussion regarding the role of pilgrimage in the process of the creation and development of a religious identity, these places of pilgrimage will be grouped under three headings: prophet-grave, axis mundi and symbol of theocracy. My suggestion is, however, not that all places of pilgrimage can be put under these headings. It is simply helpful for a comparative discussion regarding these three different kinds of pilgrimage places. The main purpose of this discussion is, however, to form a background to the discussion about the importance of pilgrimage in the Bahá’í tradition for the development of a Bahá’í identity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Judaism</th>
<th>Prophet grave</th>
<th>Axis mundi</th>
<th>Symbol of theocracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shrine of Abraham</td>
<td>Temple</td>
<td>Temple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>Shrine of Jesus</td>
<td>Place of crucifixion</td>
<td>Different places, depending on the theology of each church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>Shrine of Muhammad in Medina</td>
<td>Mecca</td>
<td>Different places, depending upon which school and time intended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahá’í</td>
<td>Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh</td>
<td>Shrine of the Báb</td>
<td>Universal House of Justice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. In the above table the different places of pilgrimage are marked and the places of special importance have been underlined.
Are these places comparable? Yes, but certain comments have to be added. Abraham is a legendary person and there is little archaeological or historical material that can make it probable that he ever lived. There is, however, a holy place called the shrine of Abraham and it is recognized as such by a number of authorities within different religions. It is, however, not underlined. There is no grave of Moses at hand and even if the grave of Abraham in Hebron is important to Judaism, it can in no way be compared in importance to the Temple in Jerusalem or rather what remains of it. The Jewish Temple is a part of an ideal past and was replaced by the Scrolls of the Law in the synagogue as a symbol of theocracy during the time of the Diaspora. The formation of the state of Israel and its control of the city of Jerusalem has, however, again put the focus more on the remains of the Temple.

To Christian pilgrims, there are two places of pilgrimage that are of major importance: the church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. To the Christian pilgrim to Jerusalem who walks through Golgata and passes all its stations, pilgrimage would probably include the system of stations and not only the Sepulchre itself. Although there are traditions that point towards the place of the crucifixion being the axis mundi, there is no such place that is accepted by all Christians or even the majority. Regarding symbols of theocracy the situation is similar. To Catholics the Pope or the Vatican would be a common answer. To many Protestant churches

\footnote{This is the place referred to in the table as the Shrine of Jesus. As it is central to Christian Faith that the Tomb of Jesus was empty, it can be seen as disrespectful to call it the Shrine of Jesus. It is, however, not my intention to discuss this dogma. I simply use this term in order to be able to discuss pilgrimage as a phenomenon.}
it would rather be the Bible itself and the geographical places related to it, and in other Protestant churches it would be the king that symbolized theocracy.

To Christianity, the pattern given in the table might not be seen as very suitable. In Christianity there is a long tradition of pilgrimage to the shrines of martyrs and saints and, in the history of Christian churches, there are periods when these kinds of pilgrimages have been very common. With this as a background, it seems that this typology is not a tool that can be used in all religions. Pilgrimage has been of great importance in Christian history, which can be exemplified by the Crusades. Today however, the importance of pilgrimage to Palestine is not so important, although there are important differences between different churches.

In Islam, both Mecca and Medina have been underlined, as they are a part of the same pilgrimage. There is a difference between Sunni and Shi‘a in the relationship to the tomb itself. Believers from both schools visit the mosque that includes the tomb. It is, however, not possible to find an outer symbol of theocracy that can be visited during pilgrimage and that is universally accepted today.

6.2 Pilgrimage in Bahá‘í

Just like Islam pilgrimage is a religious law in Bahá‘í and this pilgrimage is referred to as the hajj. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas it is stated: “The Lord hath ordained that those of you who are able shall make pilgrimage to the sacred House, and from this He hath exempted women as a mercy on His part. He, of a truth, is the All-Bountiful, the
Most Generous.” Regarding the “sacred House”, there are two places that are referred to: the house of the Báb in Shiraz and the house of Bahá’u’lláh in Baghdad. After the passing of Bahá’u’lláh, his shrine at Bahjí, outside Acre, was designated as a place of pilgrimage by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Regarding the exemption of women from pilgrimage, it was a part of the Bayáñ, written by the Báb, and Bahá’u’lláh kept this principle. The comment from the Universal House of Justice to this law is that it “has clarified that this exemption is not a prohibition, and that women are free to perform the pilgrimage.” When referring to pilgrimage as a way of creating a Bahá’í identity today, it is zíárat that is intended. Belief in Bahá’u’lláh as a manifestation of God is the most central part of Bahá’í and by making a zíárat, the believer strengthens his/her personal tie with the prophet. It is not possible to perform the hajj today for reason of security. The house of the Báb in Shírāz is destroyed, which makes this pilgrimage impossible. There does, however, exist detailed information about the planning of this house, which means that it could be rebuilt, should the situation permit it.

Regarding the spirit, in which such a pilgrimage should be made, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá talked about this for the pilgrims on 27 October 1914, as reported by Mu’ayyad in his book Khátirát-i-Ḥabíb:

Pilgrimage should be carried out in a state of utter humbleness and devotion. Otherwise it is not true pilgrimage; it is a form of sightseeing. … Many

299 These two places are the only places where the term hajj is used in the Bahá’í writings. In English speaking Bahá’í literature there is no difference made between hajj and zíárat.
300 The Most Holy Shrine is Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh in Bahji, outside Acre in Israel. Bahá’u’lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 191.
301 Bahá’u’lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, pp. 191-192.
people used to come and attain the presence of Bahá’u’lláh. They saw His virtuous character, His blessed smile, His magnetic attraction and His infinite bounties, yet they remained unaffected by Him. Some others were instantly transformed by attaining His presence. Jamál-i-Burújirdí attained the presence of Bahá’u’lláh in Adrianople. With him were two men from Burújird. One of them was called Mirzá ‘Abdu’r-Rahím. He was so influenced by the magnetic person of Bahá’u’lláh that he was completely transformed. The Blessed Beauty stated that this man within ten minutes took one step from this mortal world and placed it in the realms of eternity. It is therefore necessary to acquire spiritual receptiveness. A deaf ear will not enjoy the melody of a beautiful song, and a diseased nostril will be insensible to the perfume of the rose. The sun shines, the breeze is wafted, and the rain falls, but where the land is a salt marsh nothing grows but weeds.

6.2.1 Bahá’í Pilgrimage at the Time of Bahá’u’lláh

When Bahá’u’lláh was imprisoned and banished to Baghdad he was one of the leading Bábís in Iran. It was in Baghdad he proclaimed himself as “Him whom God will make manifest”, which was done just before he was sent to Istanbul, and later banished to Adrianople and Acre. Although it is not correct to technically call it a pilgrimage, still to Bahá’ís there was only one proper pilgrimage (zīārat) to make: to visit Bahá’u’lláh, wherever he happened to live. As he was a prisoner, it was not easy to see him and at periods it was very difficult. The majority of the Bahá’ís lived in Iran and they had to travel to Acre without indicating in their hometown what they were doing. One way of hiding this was to give the impression that they were going on a business trip to Bombay. Another way was to first travel to Mecca and from there to continue to Acre.

The personal meeting with Bahá’u’lláh during pilgrimage was very important in order to create the Bahá’í identity among the Iranian Bahá’ís. The lack of descriptions from the Iranian Bahá’ís probably

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302 Bahá’u’lláh.
says more about their extreme reverence for him than the description that E.G. Browne has left to posterity, important as it is. To a certain degree it can, perhaps, be understood if one studies the reaction of the early Western Bahāʾīs to ‘Abdu’l-Bahā.

6.2.2 Bahāʾī Pilgrimage at the Time of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā

Pilgrimage was, at the time of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, properly defined in the Kitāb-i-Aqdas and ‘Abdu’l-Bahā added a statement that the shrine of Bahāʾu’llāh should be included in this list. The pilgrimages from Iran continued and going on pilgrimage to Bahji outside Acre became just as much a part of Bahāʾī identity as it had been in the time of Bahāʾu’llāh. The major change came as Bahāʾī was spread to the Western world and the Western pilgrims started to come. To this pilgrimage was now added the visit to ‘Abdu’l-Bahā in his function as the pronounced leader of Bahāʾī.

6.2.2.1 Early Bahāʾīs in the West

The first Bahāʾīs in the West became initiated by Dr. Khayru’llāh,304 who was sent by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā to North America to spread the Bahāʾī teaching. He did this in a very effective way, but the teachings were not entirely those teachings that ‘Abdu’l-Bahā was teaching. He was a part of the first pilgrim group from the West. At this pilgrimage the difference became obvious to other Bahāʾīs in this group. Some years after this pilgrimage, the early Western Bahāʾīs found out that they had to choose between him and ‘Abdu’l-Bahā as he did not accept ‘Abdu’l-Bahā as a religious authority any more. In

304 A former Christian Arab who came from Lebanon. The idea of initiation is not common in Bahāʾī. It seems that he did not get this idea from ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, but included it himself.
contact with the Western Bahā‘īs, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā was not very strict in dogmatic matters and the fact that Dr. Khayru’llāh had been teaching reincarnation seems not to have been a major problem to ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, although this teaching is not a part of Bahā‘ī doctrines. The problem was rather that of authority. All the Bahā‘īs had to accept the authority of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, as the Centre of the Covenant, and this also included Dr. Khayru’llāh. This personal acceptance of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā was central to their identity as Bahā‘īs and it was showed outwardly by the writing of a personal letter to ‘Abdu’l-Bahā.

6.2.2.2 First pilgrims from the West

The first pilgrim group from the West left the United States in September 22, 1898 and arrived in Haifa, Israel, about three months later. One of the members of this group, Lua Getsinger, had an overwhelming experience during that pilgrimage in such a way that her acceptance of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā as the Centre of the Covenant became not only a mere acceptance but a central part of her religious identity. She describes a meeting with ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, her last in this pilgrimage, in one of her letters:

It was nearly dark, so we went to the apartment of the Holy Leaf, where we had tea and then sat talking, waiting for the “King” to come. At last a servant announced that He was coming, so the two youngest daughters and myself ran out in the court to meet Him. I reached Him first and knelt down before Him, kissing the hem of His robe. He thereupon took my hand, and, saying in Persian “Daughter, welcome” helped me to my feet, and keeping my hand, walked with me into the house, where I sat down beside Him while He drank some tea, – and asked me if I was “well, happy and content”. To

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307 Bahā’u’llāh’s eldest daughter. Her name was Bahīyyih Khānum but she is also known by her title, the Greatest Holy Leaf, which she received for being the daughter of Bahā’u’llāh. According to the practice of Bahā’u’llāh she was designated as a leaf and the sons of Bahā’u’llāh as branches.
which I could only reply that to be in His presence was health, happiness and contentment itself.308

This extremely devotional behaviour of Lua Getsinger towards ‘Abdu’l-Bahā was not shared by all the Western Bahā’īs. It would however, be common to show him great respect and devotion, although there is no indication that he demanded this behaviour among the Bahā’īs. Her behaviour was, however, not only devotional. For a Westerner to behave like this for devotional reason could hardly have been natural, considering the socially accepted behaviour of devoted Christians in North America. The role she had accepted was rather the role of a servant, and it shows her complete readiness to serve in whatever way he wished.

6.2.2.3 ‘Abdu’l-Bahā’s visit to North America

In 1912 ‘Abdu’l-Bahā visited the growing numbers of Bahā’īs in North America. Before this period it had not been possible, as he was still a prisoner. On this journey he also visited Bahā’īs in Europe, and he spent some time especially in Paris where he held the speeches that were later published as Paris Talks. There were other collections of talks by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā that came out from this journey, but no other collection of talks has been used by the Bahā’ī community as much as Paris Talks.

The Bahā’īs in North America and Europe were converts from different Christian churches and brought this identity with them into Bahā’ī. They depended upon this Christian identity, which, for example, can be seen in the correspondence of Lua Getsinger. Their development of a Bahā’ī identity came gradually and is much related

308 V. Piff Mettelman, Lua Getsinger – Herald of the Covenant, pp. 24-25.
to their personal contact with ‘Abdu’l-Bahā. In North America ‘Abdu’l-Bahā had a wider field of contact with these Bahā’īs and had the possibility to continue this development. He had also contact with news media and other non-Bahā’īs. The themes around which he was concentrating could well be summarized in some headlines: *New York City Evening Mail*: “BANISHED FIFTY YEARS, LEADER OF BAHAI HERE: PERSIAN PHILOSOPHER FAVORS WOMAN SUFFRAGE AND WILL TALK PEACE…” *New York Evening World*: “PERSIAN TEACHER OF WORLD-PEACE IS HERE,” *New York Herald*: “ABDUL BAHA HERE TO CONVERT AMERICA TO HIS PEACE DOCTRINE.” These contacts had more than one function and, among other things, they were related to how the American Bahā’īs looked upon their own religion. In this respect, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā did what was expected by an international leader of a religious community. The American Bahā’īs, who no doubt were the ones informing news media, could see their leader in a position where he was welcomed with open arms by different institutions in North America. This was perhaps not so important for the Bahā’ī identity of Bahā’īs such as Lua Getsinger and other deepened Bahā’īs, but to the Bahā’ī identity of the North American Bahā’ī community at large it was probably crucial. Even more important was obviously meeting ‘Abdu’l-Bahā in person and hearing his explanation of the Bahā’ī teachings.

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6.2.3 The Pilgrim Program

The aim of a pilgrimage is to make a visit to a holy place – to travel from the profane to the holy. This journey is a spiritual journey as well as a physical journey and this aspect of holiness takes different forms in different religions. In Bahá’í the dimension of time is important also in the pilgrimage and a part of this travel. The Bahá’í World Centre is, to the pilgrim, also a symbol of the future vision of Bahá’í – the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh.

Bahá’u’lláh was a prisoner in the Acre area between 1868, when he arrived from Edirne in Turkey until he passed away in Bahjí, outside Acre city in 1892. Because of this there are a number of places for the pilgrims to visit. The most important place is the shrine of Bahá’u’lláh in Bahjí and the residential area beside the shrine. Around this a large area of gardens has been developed. The shrine of Bahá’u’lláh is the Qiblih\(^{310}\) (qiblah) of the Bahá’í world, its spiritual centre, as well as a very important historical place in Bahá’í history.

When the Báb had been executed in 1850 his body was hidden by the Bábís for many years and then transported to Acre for burial. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá started to build a shrine on the slopes of Mount Carmel, which was completed with a superstructure by Shoghi Effendi. It was Bahá’u’lláh who in 1891 pointed out the place for that shrine to be built.\(^{311}\) The remains of the Báb were buried in the shrine in 1909 and the superstructure was completed in 1953.\(^{312}\) In the same shrine ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also rests.

\(^{310}\) This is how it is written by Shoghi Effendi.
\(^{312}\) D. Ruhe, Door of Hope, p. 143
When going on pilgrimage to the Bahá’í World Centre, the believer is made a member of a pilgrim group at his/her arrival in Haifa and this group takes part in a special program with guided visits to a number of holy places in the Acre-Haifa area. The pilgrim program has shifted over the years, depending upon which holy places that have been purchased and owned by the Bahá’í community and made ready for pilgrimage. The pilgrim program that is presented below is thus only one example of possible pilgrim programs, but it is possible to get an idea of the main parts of a Bahá’í pilgrimage.

The program that the pilgrims normally take part in is today organized in such a way that they are able to see most of the interesting parts of the Bahá’í holy places in the area in and around Haifa and Acre. In the following example from 1982 where the present writer took part there were four groups. Before the Iranian revolution there could be two groups, one Persian-speaking coming from Iran and one English-speaking with Bahá’ís from the rest of the World. The system with an Eastern pilgrim group that was Persian speaking and a Western pilgrim group that was English speaking had been the normal situation since the time of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. At the Bahá’í World Centre there is a house called the pilgrim house close to the shrine of the Báb. This used to be an Eastern pilgrim house, used as residence for the Bahá’ís from Iran and downtown there was a Western pilgrim house for the European and North American Bahá’ís. The pilgrims do not use the Western pilgrim house today. Today the

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313 Program of Pilgrimage (Haifa: Bahá’í World Center, no year of publication). This booklet is undated and no author is given. Each pilgrim receives a copy at the time of confirmation of the pilgrimage.
pilgrims live in hotels in Haifa and the Eastern pilgrim house is used by the pilgrim office and as a general Bahāʾī pilgrim centre.314

The pilgrim program was a nine-day program in 1982. The first day all four groups visited the shrine of the Bāb and ‘Abdu’l-Bahā for prayer and meditation. The second day the pilgrims visited the shrine of Bahāʾu’llāh in Bahjī, outside Acre. The program here was a guided tour in the mansion building as well as prayer and meditation in the shrine of Bahāʾu’llāh. In the afternoon the pilgrims met the Universal House of Justice in the Western pilgrim house, which was then its seat. On the third day, the pilgrims met the members of the International Teaching Centre. On the fourth day, two groups visited the International Archives building, where the original writings of Bahāʾī are kept, together with Bahāʾu’llāh’s clothes, personal utensils etc. Here are also three portraits of Bahāʾu’llāh, two paintings and a photo, and a painting of the Bāb. These portraits should be the only ones existing in the Bahāʾī community,315 which means that the only possibility for a Bahāʾī to see these portraits is to go on pilgrimage. The other two groups visited the prison cell of Bahāʾu’llāh in Acre and the house of Abbūd where Bahāʾu’llāh was imprisoned for some time, also in Acre. The tour continued to Mazra’ih, a place outside Acre where Bahāʾu’llāh lived for some time, after leaving the house of Abbūd. The fifth day was similar to the fourth day, but the four pilgrim groups took part in that part of the program that they had not taken part in the fourth day. Back in Haifa the pilgrims saw a slide

314 The facilities that can be used by pilgrims have been expanded as an additional house now is used for this purpose.
315 It is possible that portraits exist in private homes as well, but if so, they are not available to the Bahāʾī community.
show. The seventh day the pilgrims visited the Monument Gardens and the Temple Land, the site of a future Bahá’í Temple. The eighth day they visited Bahjí once more and the ninth day they visited the house of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Haifa. Today the pilgrims visit the seat of the Universal House of Justice close to the Monument Gardens that was finished at the end of 1982 but was not ready when this pilgrimage was performed. They also visit other houses in Acre, which were not prepared in 1982.

The pilgrim program is centred upon the life of Bahá’u’lláh as a prisoner in the Acre area and the visit to the shrine of Bahá’u’lláh and the shrine of the Báb. At each place there is time for prayer and meditation.

6.2.4 The Holy Land

In the Bahá’í writings, Israel is referred to as the Holy Land, but without any aspect of exclusiveness. According to Shoghi Effendi the holiness of Israel is related to its long and diversified religious history, the birthplace of Judaism and Christianity, the birthplace of Jesus Christ, the place where Bahá’u’lláh stayed for 34 years and where he rests today and also where the remains of the Báb rest. Thus it is not the Holy Land, promised by God. It is rather holy in another sense, as it is considered the centre of the world. I will expand on this theme in the chapter called “Axis mundi”.

In the Bahá’í writings, also Iran has a special place. It is the place where three manifestations of God were born and it is also the birthplace of three religions. There is a number of writings, related to

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Iran, by Bahá’u’lláh. The following passage, addressed to Teheran,318 can be seen as a typical example: “O Land of Tá! Thou art still, through the grace of God, a centre around which His beloved ones have gathered. Happy are they; happy every refugee that seeketh thy shelter, in his sufferings in the path of God, the Lord of this wondrous day!”319

The history of Bahá’í in Iran has also left many places of interest and the persecution of the Iranian Bahá’ís has always put Iran in focus for the Bahá’ís around the world. This has a special dimension through the Dawn Breakers and other martyrologies. Iran is, however, not the Promised Land that could serve as a refuge from persecution. It has rather been the place where persecutions have been most intense.

6.3 The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh

The public perception of Bahá’í tends to emphasize either of two perspectives: a broadly humanistic movement or an international religious organization that has a high moral expectation from its members with a well defined membership.

Neither of these perspectives is completely wrong. There are some broad humanistic traits in Bahá’í and these traits were emphasized especially by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and especially in contact with Westerners. The same version of Bahá’í is presented in E.G. Browne’s interview. The other perspective is equally true. It was emphasized in Iran and must be seen as especially related to how the Iranian Bahá’ís

317 Zarathustra, the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh
318 According to the Bahá’í transcription system, the spelling is Tihrán.
319 Bahá’u’lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 109, 110.
reacted to the persecution and their readiness to accept martyrdom. This perspective was more and more emphasized also in the West, as the Bahāʾī administration took its form and demanded that those, who would work within that administration, accepted the discipline that was necessary to keep the organization together. The first step for the individual to accept this second perspective is to accept Bahāʾu’l-Ḥādī as a manifestation of God with all that it signifies in following the laws and principles of Bahāʾī.

These two perspectives are not usually parallel, at least not today. The perspective of Bahāʾī as a general humanistic movement is usually what a person first meets before he or she gains a deeper understanding of Bahāʾī and perhaps becomes a member. When a person investigates Bahāʾī more closely, he/she will meet an organized religion, which includes active participation in the Bahāʾī administration. As there are no personal leaders in Bahāʾī but a form of collective leadership on local, national and international level, most active members take part in the administration. They will often be involved in this work to such an extent that it will be a part, perhaps a large part, of their identity as Bahāʾīs.

6.3.1 The Nature of Bahāʾī Administration

If the Bahāʾī community was to co-operate in a practical way in trying to stop the persecution of the Iranian Bahāʾīs, this obviously had to be done through the Bahāʾī administrative system, which is the means of practical co-operation in the Bahāʾī organization. The ‘Ulamāʾ seem to have taken for granted that this organization is a clerical organization that can be compared to other clerical organizations, whether Islamic, Christian or from other religions, and
that it should start to execute the members of the institution of the Bahá’í administration in order to destroy this organization. This must be a logical conclusion for representatives of traditional theocratic organizations.

To the Western student it is natural to ask the question whether the Bahá’í administrative system should be considered a democratic system or not. Regarding this question, Shoghi Effendi has written: “The Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh must in no wise be regarded as purely democratic in character inasmuch as the basic assumption which requires all democracies to depend fundamentally upon getting their mandate from the people is altogether lacking in this Dispensation.”320

The Bahá’í administration should, according to Shoghi Effendi, rather be described as a theocratic system. “What the Guardian was referring to was the Theocratic systems, such as the Catholic Church and the Caliphate, which are not divinely given as systems, but man-made and yet, having partly derived from the teachings of Christ and Muḥammad are, in a sense, theocracies. The Bahá’í theocracy, on the contrary, is both divinely ordained as a system and, of course, based on the teachings of the Prophet Himself.”321

6.3.2 Bahá’í Theocracy

When Shoghi Effendi describes Bahá’í administration as a theocracy, he obviously already has some kind of theocracy in mind, but how should this kind of theocracy be described? In order to get a

perspective on this question, I will start by searching for different kinds of theocracies.

In his article on theocracy,322 Dewey D. Wallece Jr. has made an overview of different kinds of theocracies and he describes four main types: hierocracies, royal theocracies, general theocracies and eschatological theocracies. Of these four types, it is possible to omit the eschatological theocracy immediately, as this kind of theocracy is “centring on visions of an ideal future, in which God will rule.” It is true that this kind of vision exists in Bahā’ī in the concept of the “Most Great Peace”, but in Bahā’ī theocracy God is ruling already and has done so from the moment the Bāb appeared in May 23, 1844. Seen from the Bahā’ī perspective, it is rather mankind that has failed to accept this divine rule.

Hierocracy has been described as “pure” theocracy and Wallece finds a distinction between two kinds of hierocracies: one kind that is priestly and another that is prophetic-charismatic. During the time in Bahā’ī history which Shoghi Effendi calls “the Heroic age”, 1844-1921, there is no doubt that Bahā’ī is best described as a prophetic-charismatic theocracy. During the time of the Bāb and Bahā’u’llāh, Bahā’ī was led by two prophets that functioned in a charismatic way. ‘Abdu’l-Bahā did not accept being described as a prophet, but he was promised direct divine guidance in Kitāb-i-’Ahd323 and his way of exercising his task must be seen as charismatic in character. Therefore he must also be described as a prophetic-charismatic leader.

Still, this period is probably not what Shoghi Effendi was referring to. He was concerned with describing the nature of the administrative system in the Bahá’í community, the system that he himself was building up and which was based on the teachings of the prophet himself. This administrative system is not a prophetic-charismatic theocracy, as there is no person who can be described as a prophetic-charismatic leader. Whether the period of the leadership of Shoghi Effendi (1921-1957) should be considered prophetic-charismatic is a matter of how this term is defined, but this period was a period of transition, as was the period 1957-1963. It is rather the period from 1963 onwards that should be studied, from the year of the first election of the Universal House of Justice.

The second version of hierocracy is one ruled by priestly functionaries. This could hardly have been the kind of theocracy that Shoghi Effendi was referring to, as there exists no priesthood in Bahá’í. Naturally this depends on how the term “priesthood” is defined, but it is very difficult to apply it to Bahá’í administration, as the members in its institutions have no priestly functions. Bahá’í administration is characterized by the existence of elected assemblies with nine members. These members have no special education that could characterize them as priestly functionaries and they have no special initiation that separates them from other Bahá’ís. They are elected individually with secret ballots and there are no guarantees that the members of the assemblies will be re-elected.

323Bahá’u’lláh, Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh, Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1978), p. 221. In this tablet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is referred to with the title, given by Bahá’u’lláh: the Most Mighty Branch.
The next type of theocracy is what Wallace calls royal theocracy. Dewey Wallace mentions a number of examples of this kind of theocracy, but the most important of these examples are from ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. The most important feature of this kind of theocracy is that the king has a sacral role in the society. It is also taken for granted that the nation is the base. In the Bahá’í administration there exists no king and it is of a global extension. In Egypt the king was a god himself and in Mesopotamia the king was a representative of the god. In this there is a parallel to the Universal House of Justice. As the Bahá’í administration is a theocratic system, the leading institution represents God and its members are considered being chosen by God in a process of election where the voting delegates turn to God in prayers and are guided by God when casting their votes. The Universal House of Justice is also promised infallibility in its decisions as an institution, which gives it a high degree of authority. The individual members in the Universal House of Justice have, however, no formal authority.

Considering this discussion, it might still be the royal theocracy that Shoghi Effendi was referring to, but it would be a royal theocracy cast in a new mould. If this background is what Shoghi Effendi was referring to, it would probably be the royal theocracy in the version of ancient Iran, as it is rather the Iranian culture that forms a background to Bahá’í than the culture of Mesopotamia or ancient Egypt.

The description of general theocracy is also applicable to Bahá’í. The Báb and Bahá’u’lláh are manifestations of God, who left a vast number of revealed writings. Also the life and writings of

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324 I use “Royal theocracy” and “sacral kingship” as synonyms.
‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi are to a certain degree considered to be revelations, as they are believed to be inspired by God. Other examples of general theocracy are connected to divine law, like the Sharia law in Islam. The center of Bahá’í law, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, is called the “Most Holy Book” and to follow the Bahá’í law is an important aspect of being a Bahá’í. It is a duty of Bahá’í institution to make sure that the members of the Bahá’í community respect and obey these laws. If a certain individual has broken one of these laws in a way that it affects the Bahá’í community and has been warned a number of times, the Bahá’í institution can give some kind of punishment to that individual. One such punishment is loss of voting right.325

The judicial duties of the Bahá’í administration are, however, not its most central function. When Shoghi Effendi called the Bahá’í administration a theocracy, he was probably not primarily thinking of its possibility to uphold a divine law, but more on its possibility to lead the Bahá’í community in accordance with the will of God. The Universal House of Justice is bound by the Bahá’í law and the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, but it is still the Universal House of Justice that must apply this law and, if necessary, make additional law. The judicial aspect of general theocracy is, no doubt, a part of the Bahá’í theocracy, but it does not cover the total meaning of theocracy in Bahá’í. It only explains in what ways the divine law affects the life of the Bahá’í community. It does not explain the development that has taken place. The question that has to be answered is how Bahá’í could develop into an international organization that could become part of the

325 Lights of Guidance, pp. 50-51. This punishment means that this person cannot
international community and affect different parts of the international community with the effect that the issue of the Iranian Bahá’ís was taken up by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

6.3.3 God is King

A central concept in Bahá’í is bahá’ – glory – and Bahá’u’lláh – the glory of God. The word bahá’ carries the name of the religion itself – Bahá’í – meaning the religion of Bahá’u’lláh and a follower of Bahá’u’lláh. It is connected to Bahá’í administration as well: “The Lord hath ordained that in every city a House of Justice be established wherein shall gather counselors to the number of bahá’,

326The Arabic word being used by Bahá’u’lláh for city is Medíneh, which does not imply that the meaning of the word should be connected to a certain size of the city or any special definition of a city as opposed to a village. There are today a number of villages around the world with such an assembly.

327The numerical value of Bahá in the abjad system is 9.

328Bahá’u’lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 30.

329The meaning of khvarenah is light, glory in the meaning of farr-i-Izadí, which is the glory of God, the same as the meaning of the title Bahá’u’lláh
pureness of body, and breadth of intellect and knowledge, as well as
the dominion which has long been in their family.”

This pattern has its parallel in the administrative system of Bahá’í. There are a number of passages where God is described as
king or king of kings. The promise to the Universal House of Justice
that it will have divine support in its decisions also implies that God
rules through the Universal House of Justice: “And now, concerning
the House of Justice which God hath ordained as the source of all
good and freed from all error, it must be elected by universal suffrage,
that is, by the believers. Its members must be manifestations of the
fear of God and daysprings of knowledge and understanding, must be
steadfast in God’s faith and the well-wishers of all mankind.”

In the tablet of Ahmad, Bahá’u’lláh refers to the idea of God as
the king, as it starts with the words: “He is the King, the All-knowing,
the Wise!” It continues further on: “…informing the severed ones of
the message which hath been revealed by God, the King, the
Glorious…” “O Ahmad! Bear thou witness that verily He is God and
there is no God but Him, the King, the Protector, the Incomparable,
the Omnipotent.” In the tablet of Ishrāqāt he refers to God as “the
King of Eternity”, in the tablet of Tajallīyāt as “King of everlasting
days”, in Lawh-i-Burhān as “King of all Names”, these being
only a few examples.

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330 U. Ohlsson, Vem är hjälte? (Göteborg: Göteborgs Universitet, Institutionen för
Religionsvetenskap, nr. 17, 1995), pp. 95-96.
332 Bahá’í Prayers, pp. 129-130.
333 Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh, revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 123.
334 Ibid., p. 50.
335 Ibid., p. 206.
6.3.4 A Global Perspective

The geographical perspective of Kingship is the nation and therefore there is a connection between Kingship and nationalism. The relationship between nationalism and Bahāʾī is expressed in the much-used quotation of Bahāʾu’llāh: “The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.” When the concept of nation is used in Bahāʾī, like in the national spiritual assembly, it is primarily a level between the local town or village and the global perspective. It does however also relate to the concept of nation, as normally understood. In the words of Shoghi Effendi regarding the “world-wide law of Bahāʾu’llāh”: “It can conflict with no legitimate allegiances, nor can it undermine essential loyalties. Its purpose is neither to stifle the flame of a sane and intelligent patriotism in men’s hearts, nor to abolish the system of national autonomy so essential if the evils of excessive centralisation are to be avoided.”

This global aspect is one reason why it is not possible to call Bahāʾī a “sacral kingship” or in the words of Wallace, “royal theocracy”. The other one is that there is no king in Bahāʾī. The theocracy in Bahāʾī can, however, not be separated from the concept of the covenant, a concept that in the Bible exists parallel to sacral Kingship. In the Bible these two concepts are combined in the covenant of David, which in the New Testament is developed into the belief of a messiah. The covenant of David is in this way developed from a concept with a national focus to a concept with a universal focus.

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336 Bahāʾu’llāh, Gleanings from the Writings of Baháʾu’lláh, p. xvi.
337 Shoghi Effendi, World Order of Baháʾu’lláh, p. 41.
The global perspective, in this way, already exists in Abrahamitic tradition as both Christianity and Islam go beyond the perspective of nation and turn to the whole of mankind. The basis of this is that God had created all mankind and offered a covenant to all peoples – hence the striving to missionize.

6.3.5 The Bahá’í Covenant

The covenant in Bahá’í is a relationship between God and humanity, running through the history of mankind up to the present age. This concept is inherited from the Bible and the Qur’án and in this way Bahá’í stands in the tradition of the Abrahamitic religions. In the covenant of Bahá’í names are mentioned from the Bible and the Qur’án, such as Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad. Also Buddha and Zoroaster are mentioned. In Hinduism there is no prophet mentioned. Instead Shoghi Effendi refers to “the Bhagavad Gita of the Hindus”. The covenant is based on seven religions: Sabeism, Hinduism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. To these are added Bábism and Bahá’í, making the list of nine complete.

The idea of reconciliation that has to occur through sacrifice does not exist as a central idea. The history of mankind is instead seen as a long period of development through a number of manifestations of God and not as a primordial state of order that was brought into chaos and that has to be brought back to order through reconciliation.

339 Shoghi Effendi writes that Bahá’u’lláh derived His descent, on the one hand, from Abraham through his wife Katurah, and on the other hand from Zoroaster, as well as from Yazdigird, the last king of the Sásániyán dynasty. God Passes by, p. 94.
340 Shoghi Effendi, God Passes by, p. 95
341 Shoghi Effendi, Directives from the Guardian, p. 52.
The order is brought to men through the manifestations of God and chaos comes into being when men deviate from this order. Order is restored when God sends a new manifestation with a new message. The covenant between man and God describes this balance, but it is not only a balance. It is also a development where humankind grows and matures like a child becoming a youth and finally an adult.342

This covenant is extended to a minor covenant, as Bahā’u’llāh in his will appointed ‘Abdu’l-Bahā as the centre of the covenant. To be a Bahā’ī is to accept also this part of the covenant. In the will of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, Shoghi Effendi is named as the “Guardian of the Bahā’ī Faith”, thus making it a part of the minor covenant. Finally, the authority of the Universal House of Justice is established as part of the covenant.

6.3.6 Kingship and Servanthood

A special aspect of sacral kingship is the idea of the faithful slave or helper. Ulla Ohlsson has touched upon this theme in her study on princely mirrors. The example that she dwells upon from the Iranian tradition is the example of the relationship between the king and the servant with Sultan Mahmoud and Ayāz. This is pictured as the ideal example of servanthood, which is of great value to the king.343

In the Bible, this is not a central theme. The king, especially king David, is called the servant of God, but also others are given this epithet.344 These are, however, not examples of kingship and

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344H. Ringgren, Israels religion, p. 155.
servanthood as a relationship between two persons, as in the case of Sultan Mahmoud and Ayāz. When studying the special relationship between Bahā’u’llāh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, the personal relationship is very important and so the best parallel to study is probably this Iranian example, in order to gain more insight and understanding of the theme. In *Masnavi*, Rumi dwells on this theme. Rumi describes Ayāz as being the most appreciated person of all, close to the king. He was richly rewarded and the others envied him.

There are a number of stories, showing Ayāz’ faithfulness to Sultan Mahmoud. One example is when Sultan Mahmoud has a priceless pearl that he asks his vasīr to evaluate. When he had done this, Sultan Mahmoud asked him to smash the pearl. The vasīr could not make himself do that, as the pearl was much too valuable. The same question was put to other ministers with the same result. When finally Ayāz was asked that question, he also estimated the pearl as priceless. When asked to destroy it, he took two stones and crushed it. When receiving the reaction of the others, he said: “O renowned princes, is the King’s command more precious or the pearl? In your eyes is the command of the sovereign or this goodly pearl superior…” There is more to this story, but the message that is most interesting to this study for the exemplary obedience of Ayāz.

6.3.7 The Relationship between Bahā’u’llāh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahā

The relationship between the lord and the true servant, as described in the story about Sultan Mahmoud and Ayaz is mirrored in the relationship between Bahā’u’llāh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahā. ‘Abdu’l-Bahā acted as the representative of Bahā’u’llāh in his contact with the
authorities of Acre. Shoghi Effendi describes him as “the Centre and Pivot of Bahá’u’lláh’s peerless and all-enfolding Covenant” but in his relation to Bahá’u’lláh he describes himself as a servant.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá was born on May 23, 1844. The family of Bahá’u’lláh belonged to a wealthy family and was economically very well off. This was changed for the close family of Bahá’u’lláh when he was put imprisoned and later exiled to the Ottoman Empire. It is from this time that one is able to see this kind of relationship between Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. During his lifetime, Bahá’u’lláh often used the services of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Taherzadeh mentions ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as one of the transcribers of the revelation writings of Bahá’u’lláh and Balyuzi dwells on the role of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Acre, where he took care of the affairs of the Bahá’í community, in contacts with officials and other external contacts. At the passing of Bahá’u’lláh, the will of Bahá’u’lláh made ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the leader of the Bahá’í community. It was after this that he took the title ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He emphasized this in the following letter:

You have written that there is a difference among the believers concerning the ‘Second Coming of Christ.’ Gracious God! Time and again this question hath arisen, and its answer hath emanated in a clear and irrefutable statement from the pen of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, that what is meant in the prophecies by the ‘Lord of Hosts’ and the ‘Promised Christ’ is the Blessed Perfection (Bahá’u’lláh) and His holiness the Exalted One (the Báb). My name is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. My qualification is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. My reality is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. My praise is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Thraldom to the Blessed Perfection is my glorious and refulgent diadem and servitude to the entire human race my perpetual religion... No name, no title, no mention, no commendation have I, nor will I ever have, except ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. This is my longing. This is my greatest yearning. This is my eternal life. This is my everlasting glory.

345 U. Ohlsson, Vem är hjälte?, p. 188
348 Bahá’u’lláh.
349 Shoghi Effendi, World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 139.
6.3.8 Authority and Servanthood

The example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā has emphasized the principle of servanthood for the individual and the guiding authority of the elected institution. “… the local assemblies should inspire confidence in the individual believers, and these in their turn should express their readiness to fully abide by the decisions and directions of the local assembly.”350 In the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, the basis of Bahā’ī administration, the relationship between the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice is explained. In the years that followed, the holder of the institution of guardianship, Shoghi Effendi, developed both institutions.

6.3.9 The Fundaments of Bahā’ī Administration

When Shoghi Effendi described Bahā’ī as a theocracy, he was describing a kind of theocracy that does not fit perfectly into the pattern given in the article on theocracy. It was a system, based upon a divine government with some similarities of sacral kingship but without a king and without a nation. It is moreover a system, based on a prophet, but without a charismatic leader after the formation of the first Universal House of Justice in 1963 and without a system of priestly functionaries.

This theocracy is led by an assembly of nine, elected through a process that has many similarities with democracy. According to Shoghi Effendi it is, however, not a democracy because it is not responsible to its voters, but to God. At the time of election the members of the institutions in Bahā’ī administration still have to give

the initiative to the members of the Bahá’í community, who give their ballots in secret elections. In this way the elections are carried out according to the same basic principles as elections in democratic systems.

The way of working in the Bahá’í administrative system can be described in terms of the basic pattern of both the theocratic and the democratic systems. Its fundaments are equally complex. The Bahá’í administrative system is built on three fundaments and two have been described in this chapter: theocracy and the Biblical concept of the covenant. These two systems were not always compatible even in the Bible. In order to get a more complete picture of Bahá’í administrative system it is, however, necessary to continue with the third fundament, which is also an instrument to integrate the other two fundaments: the Bahá’í World Centre.

6.4 Mount Carmel as Axis Mundi

The holy mountain as a symbol in the history of religions is a well-known motive, as for example Mount Ararat to the Armenians and Mount Zion in Jewish and Christian traditions. In the latter case it even serves as the name of a political ideology. To the Bahá’ís, Mount Carmel in Israel has the same function.

In the Tablet of Carmel, Bahá’u’lláh has related Carmel and Zion to the following words: “Call out to Zion, oh Carmel, and announce the joyful tidings: He that was hidden from mortal eyes is come! His all-conquering sovereignty is manifest; His all-encompassing splendour is revealed”.351 In this way he proclaims that

351 Bahá’u’lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 16.
the prophecies of the Bible have been fulfilled. He does not say exactly which prophecies, but his aim is obviously to connect his claims to biblical tradition. In the same letter he refers to a number of religious traditions. The tradition of sacral kingship is referred to with the following words. “Rejoice, for God hath in this Day established upon thee His throne, hath made thee the dawning-place of His signs and the day spring of the evidences of His Revelation.”352 Islamic tradition: “…the celestial Kaaba…”353 Jewish tradition: “…the Burning Bush…”354

The status of the Tablet of Carmel is the foundation of the Bahá’í World Centre on Mount Carmel, its charter. The other two texts that are called charters are Tablets of the Divine Plan by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.355

To a visitor to the city of Haifa, Israel, it is obvious that Mount Carmel is of central importance to Bahá’ís. On this mountain the Bahá’ís have erected an international administrative centre, a shrine for the remains of the Báb and a centre of pilgrimage. Surrounding these edifices there are gardens to such an extent, that a citizen of that city once expressed to this author, that when she was a child, growing up in Haifa, she thought the Bahá’ís worshipped gardening. To the numerically small Bahá’í community, the building of this has been a major undertaking and a proportionally large part of the economic resources have been invested in this project.

352 Ibid, p. 15.
353 Ibid, p. 16.
354 Loc. cit.
‘Abdu’l-Bahā started the development of the area, owned by the Bahā’īs by transporting soil to the barren land of Carmel and building the first part of the shrine of the Bāb. This work was continued by Shoghi Effendi and by the Universal House of Justice. This project is described by Shoghi Effendi in the following vision:

The opening of a series of terraces which, as designed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, are to provide a direct approach to the Bāb’s Tomb from the city lying under its shadow; the beautification of its precincts through the laying out of parks and gardens, open daily to the public, and attracting tourists and residents alike to its gates – these may be regarded as the initial evidences of the marvellous expansion of the international institutions and endowments of the Faith at its world centre.

6.4.1 Axis Mundi

Mircea Eliade has in his book, Patterns in Comparative Religion, discussed holy mountains as *axis mundi*, the centre of the world, standing in the middle of the world, binding it together with heaven. This theme can be found in many religions. Also in Iranian religion, there are references to holy mountains.

Shoghi Effendi has described the importance of Mount Carmel and the shrine of the Bāb in the following text:

The outermost circle in this vast system, the visible counterpart of the pivotal position conferred on the Herald of our Faith, is none other than the entire planet. Within the heart of this planet lies the ‘Most Holy Land’, acclaimed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā as ‘the Nest of the Prophets’ and which must be regarded as the centre of the world and the Qiblih of the nations. Within this Most Holy Land rises the Mountain of God of immemorial sanctity, the Vineyard of the Lord, the Retreat of Elijah, Whose Return the Bāb Himself symbolizes. Reposing on the breast of this Holy Mountain are the extensive properties permanently dedicated to, and constituting the sacred precincts of, the Bāb’s holy Sepulcher. In the midst of these properties, recognized as the international endowments of the Faith, is situated the Most Holy Court, an enclosure comprising gardens and terraces which at once embellish, and lend

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peculiar charm to these Sacred Precincts. Embossed in these lovely and verdant surroundings stands in all its exquisite beauty the Mausoleum of the Báb, the Shell designed to preserve and adorn the original structure raised by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the Tomb of the Martyr-Herald of our Faith. Within this Shell is enshrined that Pearl of Great Price, the Holy of Holies, those chambers which constitute the Tomb itself, and which were constructed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Within the heart of these Holy of Holies is the Tabernacle, the Vault wherein reposes the Most Holy Casket. Within this Vault rests the alabaster Sarcophagus in which is deposited that inestimable Jewel, the Báb’s Holy Dust. So precious is this Dust that the very earth surrounding the Edifice enshrining this Dust has been extolled by the Centre of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant, in one of His Tablets in which He named the five doors belonging to the six chambers which He originally erected after five of the believers associated with the construction of the Shrine, as being endowed with such potency as to have inspired Him in bestowing these names, whilst the Tomb itself housing the Dust He acclaimed as the Spot round which the Concourse on high circles in adoration.₃₆₀

Does this necessarily mean that it is the shrine of the Báb that should be considered the Axis mundi of Bahá’í? In Islam it is the Ka’ba that is considered the Axis mundi and the Ka’ba is also the qiblah in Islam. This function is bound to the shrine of Bahá’u’lláh in Bahá’í. The cited text by Shoghi Effendi is, however, central to this question and this means that in Bahá’í the Axis mundi and the qiblah (Qiblih) are separated from each other.

6.4.2 Dedicated by Bahá’u’lláh

When revealing the Tablet of Carmel, Bahá’u’lláh was standing on the top of Mount Carmel, reading out the tablet in a loud voice as a proclamation. The place he chose for this proclamation was close to the Carmelite monastery, which in that moment came to symbolize the religions of old and the prophecy of the Bible that is interpreted as Mount Carmel being the place where Jesus would return. Mircea

₃₅₉ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.
₃₆₁ Shoghi Effendi, God Passes by, p. 194.
Eliade\textsuperscript{363} has written about this kind of consecration of holy places. He points out that those holy places were often known earlier as holy places.

Mount Carmel is connected in the Old Testament to the prophet Elijah,\textsuperscript{364} who in the New Testament is recognized as John the Baptist. This could be seen as a background to the spiritual centre on Mount Carmel, the shrine of the Bāb, parallel to John the Baptist for Bahā’ī. His remains have been placed on that spot by ‘Abdu’l-Bahā under the instruction of Bahā’u’llāh. The shrine of Bahā’u’llāh is situated across the Bay of Acre. During pilgrimage it is a part of the program to visit both shrines.

6.4.3 A Microcosm

In Bahā’ī teaching the number nine symbolizes totality: “The number nine, which in itself is the number of perfection, is considered by the Bahā’īs as sacred, because it is symbolic of the perfection of the Bahā’ī Revelation which constitutes the ninth in the line of existing religions...”\textsuperscript{365} In Persian/Arabic thinking a number could be expressed by adding the numeric value of the letters in a word. The word for nine is bahā’ in the abjad system. When Bahā’u’llāh instructs in the Kitāb-i-Aqdas, that “in every city a House of Justice be established wherein shall gather counsellors to the number of Bahā’”,\textsuperscript{366} it is obvious to the reader how many persons that should be elected to that assembly. He is, however, not only giving a number.

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\textsuperscript{362} See chapter 6.3.5 The Bahā’ī Covenant.
\textsuperscript{363} Eliade, \textit{Patterns in Comparative religion}, p. 369.
\textsuperscript{364} 1.\textit{Book of Kings}, 18:16-46.
\textsuperscript{366} Bahā’u’llāh, \textit{Kitāb-i-Aqdas}, p. 30
He is also relating that assembly to the complete number in the Bahā’ī tradition. In this way He gives this assembly a role as a microcosm, representing the whole world. An expression to this is that every assembly should, in its decisions, try to serve not only the group that has elected its members, but the totality of mankind.\textsuperscript{367}

Another number that has a symbolic meaning in Bahā’ī is nineteen. The Bahā’ī calendar has nineteen months with nineteen days in each month. The most important religious service is the Nineteen Day Feast. The number of delegates in a National convention is nineteen, two times nineteen, three times nineteen etc. depending on the size of the community. This relationship with number nineteen started with the first group of believers in the Bābī religion – the \textit{Letters of the Living}. Considering the dramatic end of the lives of most of the members of this group, it must be seen as symbolic for the concept of martyrdom in Bahā’ī, and the shrine of the Bāb together with the eighteen terraces a monument to memories of these first martyrs.

The word vāhid comes from Arabic, meaning “one”. In the abjad system the sum of vāhid is nineteen. Vāhid can also mean unity and is used in Bahā’ī to mean the unity of God. Number nineteen of Bahā’ī has a parallel in Manicheism where number nineteen has a relationship to \textit{Daēnā}, the maiden that waited to accompany the soul into paradise.\textsuperscript{368} The \textit{Daēnā} motive is also referred to in the writings of the Bāb and Bahā’u’llāh, as the “Maids from Heaven” speak to the

Báb in *Muntakhabát-i Ayāt* and to Bahá’u’lláh in the Tablet of Ishráqát.

### 6.4.4 Mount Carmel as a Universal Symbol

In his description of the holy mountain, Mircea Eliade, also emphasizes the need to rebuild the holy mountain in the local village and even in the homes of people. There is no example of this that is described in the Bahá’í writings. There are, however, some traits that relate to this idea in the Bahá’í House of Worship. Mircea Eliade has described the holy mountain as the place where earth and heaven meet and that this is repeated in the local temple. The Bahá’í Houses of Worship reflect this by their dome structure, resembling the canopy of heaven. The House of Worship itself has nine entrances, nine pathways leading up to each entrance and nine gardens surrounding it. The idea is that each village, town and city should be built around a House of Worship, which would emphasize the idea of each temple being a symbol of the holy mountain, the centre of the world. Around the House of Worship will be built “dependencies” like schools, libraries etc. making the institution of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár complete.

The first part to be built is the central edifice which is the spiritual heart of the community. Then, gradually, as the outward expression of this spiritual heart, the various dependencies, those ‘institutions of social service as shall afford relief to the suffering, sustenance to the poor, shelter to the wayfarer, solace to the bereaved, and education to the ignorant’ are erected and function. This process begins in an embryonic way long before a Bahá’í

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369 Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 54.
370 Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh, revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 122.
community reaches the stage of building its own Mashriqu’l-Adhkár, for even the first local centre that a Bahá’í community erects can begin to serve not only as the spiritual and administrative centre and gathering place of the community, but also as the site of a tutorial school and the heart of other aspects of community life.  

6.4.5 The Spiritual Centre

The most holy place is, however, not Mount Carmel. It is the shrine of Bahá’u’lláh, outside the city of Acre, and especially where his remains are resting. During pilgrimage the Bahá’ís always will visit this place at least on one occasion and to most pilgrims it is the highlight of their pilgrimage each time they can visit this spot. At the time of larger gatherings, like at international conventions, there will be too many to enter the shrine of Bahá’u’lláh. Instead the delegates will circumambulate this building, following a pathway that goes in a circle with the shrine of Bahá’u’lláh in its centre.

In this way there might seem to be a tension between Mount Carmel as the centre of the world and the shrine of Bahá’u’lláh. This is, however, not the case. The two places have separate roles for the Bahá’ís. They are better thought of as complementary rather than competing. The shrine of Bahá’u’lláh is the most holy spot and mount Carmel could be seen more as an outward symbol of the world order of Bahá’u’lláh.

373 David S. Ruhe, Door of Hope, p. 118.
374 International conventions are held once every fifth year. The number of delegates present might be more than 1000 persons. The delegates are the members of each national spiritual assembly and during the ‘90s up to 175 national spiritual assemblies have been established. (Homepage of the Bahá’í world center on the Internet).
6.5 Conclusion

Pilgrimage is a way for the individual believer to strengthen his/her religious belief and to form a religious identity. This is true in many religions and also in Bahá'í. By strengthening the ties with the founder of religion, for Bahá’ís to strengthen the ties with Bahá’u’lláh as a manifestation of God, makes the believer ready to take on different kinds of religious services. For the Bahá’ís this would be to work in the Bahá’í administration. In extreme situations, like religious persecutions, this religious identity will be tested to its utmost and this has happened to the Bahá’ís in Iran.

The Bahá’í administration is founded on two concepts, well known in the history of religions: sacral kingship and the covenant. The Bahá’í World Centre makes the means for the weaving together of the idea of sacral kingship and the idea of the covenant has been made.

The kingship of God is represented by the Bahá’í administration, headed by the Universal House of Justice. The outer symbol of this institution is the seat of the Universal House of Justice, surrounded by complementary buildings. The symbol of the covenant is the shrine of Bahá’u’lláh, as this institution is first and foremost connected to Bahá’u’lláh himself. The binding together of the idea of these two concepts is done through the idea of Mount Carmel as axis mundi, which is represented by the shrine of the Báb.

These three aspects of Bahá’í are crucial parts of Bahá’í identity and the servant ideology of Bahá’í. The function of pilgrimage in creating Bahá’í identity is to create strong bonds to the centre of
Bahá’í – to Bahá’u’lláh as a manifestation of God – and to create a balance between Eastern and Western Bahá’í identity. The function of Bahá’í administration in this context is to create an instrument of service with ties to history through the concept of the sacral kingship, and to create a personal relationship between God and the believers through the concept of the covenant. The strength of the servant ideology has been tested at different times throughout Bahá’í history, but the main test has come during the periods of persecution. Experience from Bahá’í history has been that the servant ideology has given a situation where the believers in Iran have been ready to give up their life if necessary, but have not been searching for death in the name of religion. It has also been the major instrument to adapt Bahá’í to different cultures and, at the same time, to build an international organization that could integrate believers with different backgrounds. An Iranian martyr ideology would probably have been difficult to adapt to other cultures and a possible lack of both a martyr ideology and a servant ideology would probably have made it difficult to motivate the Iranian bahá’ís not to return to Shí’á Islam during the periods of persecution.
CHAPTER 7
Martyrs, Heroes and Victims.

One of the most well known heroes, described in Western mythology is Heracles from Greek mythology. His heroism was expressed in a number of extraordinary deeds that were performed at the demand of the gods. When these deeds were accomplished, Heracles himself was elevated to become one of the gods. This story from Greek mythology is well known but what is the real message of the story? One point seems to be the importance of obedience to the gods and that the obedient is rewarded. This is, however, not the complete message. Heracles did not only obey the gods. With the help of his amazing strength he stood up as the defender of the right of the gods to demand miracles from men and thus he stood up as a defender of the cosmic order of Greek culture and Greek ways of thinking. My suggestion is therefore to define the hero as the defender of a cosmic order. When comparing this definition with a more traditional definition it is possible to see similarities but also differences.

A hero can be defined as a person who possesses powers superior to those of ordinary men and who displays them courageously, at the risk of his own life but to advantage and benefit of others. His essential characteristic is best expressed by the Latin term virtus, which embraces both valour and nobility. He is the opposite of an ogre.375

In the classical definition the hero is primarily an individual and in the identity definition he is a symbol of the totality of the people and its ideals. When a martyr ideology is created there will be martyrs and especially the primordial martyr, but there will also be heroes that defend the existing cosmic order against the threatening martyr
ideology. It could perhaps also be possible to find heroes that are defending the martyr ideology, but they will be at risk of becoming martyrs themselves. From this situation arises the question whether it is possible that a person can become both a martyr and a hero. This question will be included in the discussion on whether there are any classical heroes within Bahā’ī.

As soon as any kind of violence arises, there is a great risk that some people will become victims of this violence, whether this means that they are killed, injured, made homeless or made to suffer in some other way. This does not mean that they are either heroes or martyrs. In order for the victim to become a hero or a martyr there must be someone, a person or an institution, that makes him or her a hero or a martyr by pronouncing him or her as such. A hero is basically a defender, using violence, and a martyr basically a witness, not involved in violence, someone who is witnessing the truth of a cause by giving his or her own life. Both the hero and martyr also show a personal bravery, as they are ready to risk their own lives in order to reach a higher goal for the group, the hero by showing an outward bravery and the martyr by showing an internalized bravery. The internal group must accept this bravery as such. If there is nobody to accept that a victim is either a hero or a martyr, that person will remain a victim and nothing else.

7.1 The Function of Martyrdom and Heroism.

During the earlier years of Bābism there were many similarities between the Bābī community and the Shī’a community. The Bābīs

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were however not members of the Shī’ā community so there were also differences. The Bāb had given new laws that were different from the Shī’ā, like forbidding the holy war and by doing this he also changed the concept of martyrdom. The upheavals in Māzandarān (Shaykh Tabarsī), Nayrīz and Zanjān bear close similarities to holy war and the persons that took part in these battles are described as heroes and martyrs. To the leader of the Bābīs in these upheavals they were, however, not holy wars. These new laws were not introduced immediately and to the majority of the Bābīs the break with Shī’ā Islam was probably not as obvious as to the leaders. The conference at Badashht could be seen as the start of a new development. In this conference the break with Shī’ā Islam became more visible, symbolically represented by Tahirih when she introduced herself to the Bābīs without a veil. The main character was, according to the author of the Dawn Breakers, Bahā’u’llāh, who became increasingly important to the Bābī movement. There was also a change of attitude among the Bābīs regarding the persecution. This change has made it possible to talk about martyrdom in the Bābī movement without relating it to the concept of jihād – a sign that Bābīsm was separated from the Shī’ā community – and during the persecution of 1852 there seem to have been no attempts by the Bābīs to fight back.

7.1.1 The Importance of Martyr Ideology

The resurrection of Jesus is to Christians the greatest miracle ever performed. Jesus Christ is considered to be the prototype for martyrs, but this makes the Crucifixion something far more than a

martyr death. To the individual Christian it might be the focus of interest and an important part of his or her religious identity. It is hardly possible to find anything similar in Judaism and Islam and it explains the importance of the concept of Golgata to Christian pilgrims.

Also in Bahá’í it is difficult to find anything similar, at least in importance for religious identity. There is a miracle described in the *Dawn Breakers* at the martyrdom of the Báb, but this miracle is not nearly as important to Bahá’í identity as the resurrection of Jesus Christ is to Christian identity. Still it is not seen as just any event. This martyrdom of the Báb, as described by Nabíl-i-Zarandí,\(^{378}\) is appreciated as a very important hierophany and this story can be included as a natural part of any deepening programme in the Bahá’í community.

The question of what happens after death is perhaps the most important existential question and by accepting martyrdom Jesus and the Báb have both given an answer to this question. The miracle that was performed in their deaths has become a gate for the believers to a new life after the physical death. Descriptions of life after death in holy writings and oral tradition are naturally important to the believers, but when someone is showing the way by giving up his or her own life, that will obviously add to the strength and this seems to be what happens when a martyr ideology is created.

\(^{378}\) This is discussed in my paper "Förföljelsen av Irans bahaier 1844 – 1955", p. 8, 22-23.
7.1.2 The Different Martyr Types in Bahā’ī History

In order to discuss a certain phenomena it is of great help to find a pattern that can be used as a means of comparing. A useful pattern for the discussion of martyrs should be able to include martyrs from different historical contexts, like the first Christians that were martyred in the Roman empire as well as the Jewish martyr that were killed by the Nazi regime in Germany. It should also be able to include Shī’a Muslims from Lebanon who die as suicide bombers in jihād as well as Mani, the founder of Manicheism, who probably died in prison under the weight of heavy chains.379

In his article on martyrdom in Encyclopaedia of Religions, Samuel Z. Klausner gives a pattern for analysing different martyr types. He has found three periods of development, crescive in a developing society, a self-determining society that has “achieved political control of its life” and a decaying society that is “losing its ability to self-determining”. I have followed this pattern to study the Bahā’ī community and its relation to persecutions in different stages of its development.

7.1.2.1 A crescive community

During the first years of the Bābī movement, the community was and was not a new religion. Even if Bābism from the beginning should be classified as a separate religion with special holy writings, new religious laws etc. the Bābīs themselves behaved very much like Shī’a Muslims. In an attempt to classify the different types of martyrs, the early Bābīs could therefore very well be seen as Shī’a Muslims

and be classified as a self-determining community, that is a part of the Iranian Shi’a Muslim tradition.

According to the author of the *Dawn Breakers* it was Bahā’u’llāh who started to influence the Bābī community in a new direction at the Badāsht conference. Considering the development in the period 1848-1852, this may be correct. The Badasht conference was held in 1848 before the Māzandarān upheaval, followed by the Nayrīz and Zanjan upheavals and during this period the Karbilā pattern, emphasizing *jihād*, grew increasingly weaker. During the persecution of 1852, the Bābī community had already entered into a new phase and started to behave like a crescive community. The martyrdom of the Bāb also gave an ideal of acceptance of martyrdom without any relation to holy war.

In his article on martyrdom, Klausner defines a crescive community as “politically powerless but beginning to stir perhaps reascent.” The Bābīs were no doubt powerless, as they could do nothing to stop the persecution. Primarily Western diplomats gave the information about the persecution to the world. After the end of this persecution there was little information about the Bābīs, coming from the Bābīs or the Bahā’īs themselves. E.G. Browne has described in *A Year amongst the Persians* that in the beginning of his visit to Iran, it was practically impossible to find any traces of the Bābīs. After some time he was contacted very cautiously by one of the Bābīs, who led him to Haji Mīrza Haydar Alī, a well known personality among

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380 E.G. Browe, “A Year amongst the Persians”, *Selections from the Writings of E.G. Browne on the Bábí and Bahá’í Religions*, Edited by M. Momen, p. 29.
the Bahā’īs, 381 who told him of the martyrdom of Mīrza Ḥasan and Mīrza Ḥusayn. 382 He also told E.G. Browne that there had been a change in the Bābī community as Bahā’u’llāh had been accepted by most of the Bābis as the fulfilment of Bāb’s prophecy of the coming of “Him whom God will make manifest”.

During the decades following the death of the Bāb the geographical focus of Bahā’ī had shifted as Bahā’u’llāh had been imprisoned in Acre. This had no direct effect on the persecutions of the Bahā’īs as the Ottoman Empire also was a Muslim state and the Ottoman authorities had no reason to do anything to stop the persecutions of the Bahā’īs.

7.1.2.2 First step towards protection

There was another change taking place during these years, as a number of Iranian Bahā’īs became refugees in Russia, which must be considered a Western country, at least in its relation to Iran. In that country their situation became different, as the Iranian Shi’a Muslims had no power to persecute the Bahā’īs without being punished. 383 This was the first example that pointed towards a new and safer situation for the Bahā’īs. It was still a crescive society, without any political power, but this was still something new.

In Iran the persecution continued locally until the beginning of the second period 384. During this period there was no change in martyr

381 Those Bābis that had accepted Bahā’u’llāh as “Him whom God has made manifest”.
382 In Bahā’ī writings the are known as King of martyrs (sultānush-shuhadā) and Beloved of martyrs (mahbubush-shuhadā).
383 Shoghi Effendi, God Passes by, pp. 202-203.
384 With the secon period I am refering to the period of the reign of the Pahlavī dynasty.
types, but the outer situation changed in such a way that even if the persecution was still a cruel reality, it did not dominate the life of the Iranian Bahā’ī community. The everyday discrimination towards the Bahā’īs was, however, prevalent also in this period, although it shifted with time as well as with locality and personal relationship.

7.1.2.3 The next step

The situation continued until the persecution of 1955. The situation for the Bahā’ī community as a crescive community was that it became more and more accepted on an informal level, but it was never accepted as an official community. Thus it was easy for the shah in 1955 to allow the ‘Ulamā’ to start persecuting, “following the period of uncertainty after the coup against Mossadeg in 1953”. 385 No doubt the involvement of Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld came as a surprise for the Shah. As it was Shoghi Effendi who was the one to take the first initiative, this must be seen as the first glimmering that the crescive Bahā’ī community was about to enter a new stage. The rest of the period of the reign of the Shah, the open persecution was almost non-existent.

During the first years of the Islamic revolution there were no human rights for the Bahā’īs and there were many signs pointing towards the situation of 1852 again. There were, however, differences and the most important difference for the Bahā’ī community was that there now existed an international Bahā’ī administration that could be used in contacts with different national and international agencies.

385 G. Nash, Iran’s Secret Pogrom (Suffolk: Neville Spearman Limited, 1982), p. 44.
7.1.2.4 Towards a self-determining community

During the first years of the Islamic revolution in Iran it was possible for the International Bahá’í Community to train its organization to become a smoothly running network that could give information to national governments about the persecution. When these same governments brought up the issue on the international arena, there was an international Bahá’í agency that could support these governments with more information. Partly because of this way of functioning of the Bahá’í community the matter was finally brought up, not only in the Commission on Human Rights and the Economic and Social Council, but in the General Assembly of the United Nations, and was recorded in their final resolution 1985.386

As this development has become dependent upon the Bahá’í International Community being able to spread information at the right time to the right persons, this is a sign that Bahá’í is approaching the status of a self-determining community – a community that is able to defend its own right to exist. It does, however, not mean that the Bahá’ís are ready to defend themselves with weapon in hand. It rather means that the Bahá’ís are able to use the network of different national and international Bahá’í institutions and in this way influence the International community, which might be the most important protection towards open persecution. In this context that Klausner uses it is taken for granted that the persecuted group does not have any outer support but is protecting itself by its own strength. In the case of the Iranian Bahá’ís the close relationship with the International Bahá’í community is essential and therefore the Iranian Bahá’í community is

386 *The Bahá’í Question*, p. 49.
self-determining only because of its international relations and not because of its own political strength. The fact that the Bahāʾī institutions in Iran have been dissolved does not seem to have stopped the development of this community to function as a self-determining society, and this seems to be because of its close relationship to the International Bahāʾī community. Therefore it must be seen as self-determining in Iranian society at large but not in relation to the International Bahāʾī community.

### 7.1.3 Martyrs and Their Ideals

Samuel Z. Klausner defines martyrdom in his article in Encyclopedia of Religions in the following way: “The badge of martyrdom is awarded by the leadership of a community to men and women who offer their lives voluntarily in solidarity with their group in conflict with another, ideologically contrasting group. The martyr and his or her slayer are delegates, champions or defenders of their society. The societies of the slayer and the slain struggle to control the meaning of the slaying: is it to be understood by the world as martyrdom or as judicial retribution.” 387 The most important part of this discussion is that (1) he or she has given up his or her life as a sign of faith and (2) that the society of this ideology has accepted the martyrdom. Seen from the perspective of Bahāʾī, both these requirements are fulfilled in a clear way. When an Iranian Bahāʾī is executed for being a Bahāʾī, this information is sent to the Universal House of Justice. If it is found correct, it is sent to the Bahāʾī communities around the world and in the letter this person is presented as a martyr. What I have called the “defenders of the cosmic

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“order” can here be compared to what Klausner calls “the society of the slayer”. What I see as important is that the Bahá’í martyr is a martyr to the Bahá’í community, but not necessarily to others. The concept of martyr is relative because it is related to a certain group. The same can be said about the concept of hero. A Shí’a muslim who kills a Bahá’í is a slayer to the Bahá’í community but a hero to the Shí’a, as he or she has defended the Cosmic Order of Shí’a Islam by killing someone who has threatened that Order. The basis of the Cosmic Order of the Shí’a community is that the Hidden Imam is still hidden, but Bahá’í claims that the coming of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh has fulfilled all such promises. Thus Bahá’í is seen as a threat to the Cosmic Order of Shí’a Islam.

7.1.4 A Bábí Hero

There are a few examples in Bahá’í history that correspond with the classical definition of heroes, as given in the article of Theodor H. Gastner on heroism. The definition that the heroes possess unusual power and display them courageously at the risk of their own lives but to the advantage and benefits of others could be applied on Mullá Ḥusayn at the battle at the fort of Shaykh Tabarsí. It is also possible to see other aspects of classical heroes, like the notion that the classical hero has broken a rule and the heroic deed is a repayment for this violation with a strong feeling of guilt. This is a part of the Heracles myth, but I cannot find this motive in the story about Mullá Ḥusayn. I also do not find it necessary to delve deeper into the discussion on classical heroism than comparing the case of Mullá Ḥusayn with this article of Gastner. In order to do this I will primarily use the Dawn
*Breakers*, which means that I will base this discussion on one source only.

**Heroes are abandoned and exposed at birth:** The parents of Mullā Ḥusayn are known and he was not abandoned at birth. This pattern therefore does not become meaningful unless Mullā Ḥusayn is seen as representing an aspect of the Báb, who, during the battle at the fort of Shaykh Tabarsī was imprisoned in Chirīq. The Báb himself is described as having lost his father at an early age and being brought up by his maternal uncle. Shoghi Effendi has described the Báb as a hero in *God Passes by*: “We behold, as we survey the episodes of this first act of sublime drama, the figure of its Master Hero, the Báb, arise meteor-like above the horizon of Shīrāz, traverse the sombre sky of Persia from south to north, decline with tragic swiftness and perish in a blaze of glory.”

**The hero vanquishes a dragon or a monster:** There is a story in the *Dawn Breakers* that happened shortly before the battle at the fort of Shaykh Tabarsī in the village of Bārfurūsh. According to Nabil-i-Zarandī, Mullā Ḥusayn was leading the Bábís who were attacked by the soldiers of the Shah and some Bábís were killed. When one of the Bábís who were standing close to Mullā Ḥusayn was killed, this became a sign to him to attack: “Unsheathing his sword and spurring on his charger into the midst of the enemy, Mullā Ḥusayn pursued, with marvellous intrepidity, the assailant of his fallen companion. His opponent, who was afraid to face him, took refuge behind a tree and, holding aloft his musket, sought to shield himself. Mullā Ḥusayn immediately recognized him, rushed forward, and with a single stroke
of his sword, cut across the trunk of the tree, the barrel of the musket, and the body of his adversary.”

The hero acquires his status by passing certain tests: After the passing away of Siyyid Kāzim, the Shaykhis were staying in Karbilā, but were not searching for the Promised One. Mullā Ḥusayn urged them to start searching, as they were told by Siyyid Kāzim to do. They agreed that they had failed and that they were trusting Mullā Ḥusayn to do the right thing. They could even accept him as the Promised One, should he make that claim. Mullā Ḥusayn denied any such claim and left for Najaf, where he spent forty days of prayers and fasting in a mosque together with his brother and his nephew. After a few days one of the foremost disciplines of Siyyid Kazim arrived with a group of twelve companions. When the forty days ended, the group went to Būshir, the home-town of Mullā Ḥusayn, and from there to Shīrāz. In Shīrāz Mullā Ḥusayn left the other disciples of Siyyid Kāzim and, by divine assistance, was the first to recognize the Bāb. The other disciples in the group by themselves recognized the Bāb and they all, together with Tāhirih and Quddus, became the Letters of the Living. The Bāb gave special tasks to all these persons and Mullā Ḥusayn was given the task to deliver a letter into the hands of Bahā’u’llāh, which he also did, at the same time recognizing the special station of Bahā’u’llāh. Thus he became the first to accept the Bāb, and in this way also Bahā’u’llāh.

Heroes are sometimes distinguished by physical features: By this is meant that the hero is tall and handsome or bare special marks.

388 Shoghi Effendi, God Passes by, p.3.
389 Ibid., p. 239.
Mullā Ḥusayn does not fit into this pattern. The author of the *Dawn Breakers* refers to another book – *Tārikh-i-Nāsiri* – that pictures Mullā Ḥusayn as trained in swordsmanship and as being very strong but he also writes that this is not correct. An interview with a friend from his childhood describes him as not very strong and that his hand trembled as he wrote. “The moment he unsheathed his sword, however, to repulse that savage attack, a mysterious power seemed to have suddenly transformed him.” In this way he instead became an instrument of a divine power.\(^{391}\)

Heroes go to a special place when they die: I have not found any special references to this aspect. Life after death is, however, pictured as the development of the souls through endless stages of existence.\(^{392}\) This is also described as the movement of the soul from one heaven to another. The development of the individual soul is dependent upon the life and services in this world, which means that the station of a person like Mullā Ḥusayn must be considered being a mystery.

Great heroes do not die a natural death, but are transported alive to Heaven: The death of Mullā Ḥusayn at the shrine of Shaykh Tabarsī, as described in the *Dawn Breakers*, is mysterious.\(^{393}\) After being deadly wounded at an outbreak towards the barricades of the enemies, he was taken back to the fort. The dying and unconscious Mullā Ḥusayn was brought to a room and Quddūs asked to be left alone with him, because he wanted to talk to him. After being left alone, he was talking with Mullā Ḥusayn, who answered him and this

\(^{390}\) Nabil-i-Zarandi, *The Dawn Breakers*, p. 73.

\(^{391}\) Ibid., pp. 333-334.


\(^{393}\) Nabil-i-Zarandi, *The Dawn Breakers*, p. 274.
conversation went on for two hours. The behaviour of Mullā Ḥusayn was very humble, according to Muḥammad-i-Bāqir, the witness the *Dawn Breakers* refers to. Mullā Ḥusayn was sitting at the feet of Quddūs and during the conversation Mullā Ḥusayn uttered the following words: “May my life be a ransom for you. Are you pleased with me?” After this the others were allowed to come into the room and prepare for the burial, which was performed in the fort. It seems that Mullā Ḥusayn is not just any follower of the Bāb, but has shown divine powers and it seems that he received these powers from the Bāb. His station becomes that of a classical hero through the amalgamation of the personage of Mullā Ḥusayn and the Bāb himself. In the end, however, his role is shifted as he treats Quddūs with great reverence, as Quddūs seems to take on the role of the Bāb in relation to Mullā Ḥusayn.

The deceased will return in the hour of his peoples need: This is obviously not the role of Mullā Ḥusayn. To the author of the *Dawn Breakers* this was, however, fulfilled in another way. It was Mullā Ḥusayn who opened the road to Bahā’u’llāh by delivering the message from the Bāb that established the contact between them. To Nabīl it was Bahā’u’llāh who was “He whom God will make manifest”.

It seems that it is possible to sometimes describe Mullā Ḥusayn as a classical hero, but not in the same way as Heracles of Greek mythology. Sometimes he receives extraordinary strength, but this strength does not come from himself, as described in the *Dawn

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394 Ibid., p. 381. This shift of relationship is first mentioned in the Dawn Breakers when Mulla Husayn met Quddūs in Bārfurūsh on his way from Māh-Kū where he had met the Bāb to Mashhad. Ibid., pp. 262-263.
395 Ibid., p. 51
Breakers, but he receives it in a mysterious way from an outer source. Therefore it is meaningful to describe him as a classical hero only when he is also described as a hero within the frames of identity studies – a defender of the Cosmic Order. He can, however, also be described as a martyr but then it must be taken into consideration that he was a martyr according to the definition of the early Bābis in those years when jihād was still an accepted concept. The mystical relationship between Mullā Ḥusayn and the Bāb in this aspect gives the question of heroism a different perspective. It implies that the Bāb could be seen as a classical hero and his shrine in Haifa as a tribute to his heroism. As described earlier, his remains are considered as an axis mundi. His station as a manifestation of God is perhaps support enough for this function, but it is difficult to see why this is not the function of the shrine of Bahā’u’llāh, which would make the axis mundi and the qiblah being one place as it is in Islam. If, however, the Bāb is the “Master Hero”, seen as a classical hero, as described in the Dawn Breakers, he will, unlike Bahā’u’llāh, fall into this pattern where the concept of the cosmic order is of major importance and the axis mundi is the centre of that order. Considering that he is not only described as the Master Hero but also as the Martyr-Prophet, the extraordinary station of his remains as axis mundi can be easier to understand.

The concept “hero” is, however, not often used in Bahā’i literature. One example of when it is used by Shoghi Effendi is when he describes Martha Root after her passing as “that distinguished hero

396 Shoghi Effendi, God Passes by, p.276.
of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh”.397 It is not used in the writings of Bahá’u’lláh. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has used it in his talks in a negative way, like “If a man steals one dollar, he is called a thief and put in prison; if he rapes and pillages an innocent country by military invasion, he is called a hero.”398 These two examples of usage of the concept are closer to an every day way of defining the word that the classical definition. They could also fit into the way of defining “hero” in an identity setting, as Martha Root can be called a promoter and defender of the cosmic order of Bahá’í and the military hero, described by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, a defender of the cosmic order of the nationalism of that country.

7.2 Orientalism and Bahá’í

It is natural to discuss the concepts martyrdom and servanthood in the light of the relationship between the Iranian Bahá’ís and Iranian society. The Western world of thinking, however, has been dominated by modernity since the breakthrough of Enlightenment philosophy and although the colonial powers of the West sometimes could be very violent, it is difficult to see the concepts of martyrdom and servanthood as a natural part of this philosophy. Modern Western society was characterized by rationality, which did not include any explicit martyr ideology or servant ideology. It is also difficult to find any ideology that is obviously characterized by the ideals of classical heroism. The aspect of rationality that is so important to take into consideration is however not enough in order to explain why the Westerners started to look upon the Orientals as inferior or even as

397 Shoghi Effendi, Dawn of a New Day (New Dehli: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, no year of publication.), p. 82.

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evil, an ideology that is referred to as Orientalism. Whatever the original reason for travelling outside Europe had been in the beginning there seems to have arisen among the Europeans a need to explain their presence in these countries outside Europe in rational terms. When the urge to spread Christianity and to win as much gold as possible was not enough to explain their presence, there arose a need for a more rational answer, like the spread of a superior Western culture, expressed in the words of Rudyard Kipling as “the white man’s burden”. Once this aspect of Orientalism was formulated it became a heroic deed to spread Western modernity and to dominate the traditional society of the non-Europeans and therefore it also became a heroic deed to defend the Cosmic Order of Western modernity. By doing this, the Western powers have also been actively protecting the persecuted Bahá’ís in Iran and, to my understanding Orientalism might have been the motivating ideology.

7.2.1 Religious Persecution as a Cultural Reaction

The persecution of the Iranian Bahá’ís has a cultural, a political and a religious background and the relationship between Iran and the Western world is very much a part of this background. It includes the perpetrators and the victims but also the westerners, who have been present in Iran or who have followed the development from abroad. It also includes the general debate of Western influence that has been going on in Iran, as this has helped creating an atmosphere where persecution has been a culturally accepted act.

When the Western world met the Islamic world in Iran, it was not only a political and economic meeting. It was also an example of

acculturation. The result of this acculturation was that elements from Western culture were accepted in the Iranian society, but there was also a reaction from the Iranian population. The tobacco Régie was one such example.

The Bābī religion in Iran, being a Mahdī movement based on Islamic expectation, was itself not a result of this acculturation, but to many this has not been obvious. Although there are also other aspects of this persecution, the reaction to the cultural acculturation must also be taken into consideration. No doubt the Islamic ‘Ulamā’ were among the first to notice this acculturation of the Western world and the Islamic world in Iran. It was also the ‘Ulamā’ that were leading the rest of the population in the persecution of the Bābīs and the Bahā’īs.

In the cultural debate in Iran during the last decades, the relationship with the West has been of crucial importance and this situation was also current in the 19th century. There were basically three kinds of reaction: 1) to accept everything, coming from West as good. Its opponents have sometimes called this attitude gharbzādegīh or Westoxication. 2) To look towards pre-Islamic Iran with a strong sense of Persian chauvinism. 3) To see Islam as the only solution to the negative influence from the West, “Islamicism”.

399 The most natural way to classify the Bābī religion is probably to see it as a Mahdī movement that has developed to become a separate religion. Mahdī expectations are an integrated part of Islam and cannot be seen as an example of acculturation in the 19th century Iran.

To Bahá’í the clash between East and West was, in itself, not a separate problem. It was rather seen as an aspect of a spiritual problem that would find its solution within Bahá’í itself, seen in an expression such as “The Earth is but one country and Mankind its Citizens”. The problem arose from people’s misunderstanding of the aim of Bahá’í. The solution that for example Bahá’u’lláh presented to E.G. Browne was to achieve “the good of the world and the happiness of the nations…” and “That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers…” This could not be interpreted as neither Persian chauvinism nor Islamicism. Therefore it was probably natural for many Iranians to see the message of Bahá’u’lláh as gharbzadegih, the only possibility left. Read in the light of history it was obviously not a correct way of describing Bahá’í, but to many Iranians it was probably natural to interpret the universal approach of Bahá’í as gharbzādegīh.

7.2.2 The Persecution of the Iranian Bahá’ís and the Reactions of the Western World

The involvement of the Western world in the 19th century Iran can be studied from at least three perspectives that are all central to the discussion of this study: political involvement, scholarly involvement and involvement of missionaries. The political involvement includes diplomatic activities to further the political interests of primarily Russia and Britain. Another kind of involvement is activities by scholars that tried to influence the development in Iran. This kind of involvement should be separated from their function as scholars, when they try to analyse a certain document or a certain situation. It is, however, not always easy to see whether they are

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functioning in a political way or in a scholarly way. One example of this problem is that the studies of these scholars gave different kinds of information that could be used by political and diplomatic agencies. Another example is the involvement of E.G. Browne in the constitutional movement where he, himself, as a scholar took active part in Iranian political development.\footnote{H.M. Balyuzi, \textit{Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá’í Faith}, p. 89.}

The third kind of involvement is the activities of the Christian missionaries from Europe and North America. These different ways of involvement were related to each other, but that does not mean that they were equals in this situation or that they always cooperated in a harmonious way. The goal of the missionaries was to convert as many Iranians as possible to their respective church, and this activity sometimes resulted in serious tension, not only between the missionaries and the Muslim community, but also between the Embassy and the Mission.

When searching for how the Western world looked upon the Bábís, one must turn to the diplomatic society. There are a number of descriptions of the Bábís in reports, written by diplomats to their governments. These reports are rarely anything else but descriptions of the latest news with some short background information, with a few exceptions. These sources must be seen in the background that two foreign countries dominated Iran during the 19th century, Britain and Russia. There were also diplomats from other countries that were active observers, and the French ambassador, Count de Goubineau, is a very good example. This interest is raised during the time of the persecution of 1852.
In Iran in the Qajar period, there existed a Christian community that was not of European origin. This community consisted mainly of members of the Armenian Orthodox Church.\footnote{C. Hedin, “Religiösa minoriteter i Iran”, \textit{Inte bara Shi’a – En bok om Iran och dess minoriteter}, Edited by H. Bäckman (Stockholm: Gidlunds, 1992.), p. 169.} Very often when people talked about Christians in everyday life, they would not say Christian but instead say Armenians. This is also common today. There also exist minorities from the East Syrian tradition. The contacts between the Babi and the Bahai community and the Armenian community have often been described as friendly. One of the Persian Bahais being interviewed in my paper on the persecution of the Bahais in Iran referred to the Armenian neighbours as being very kind.\footnote{P-O. Åkerdahl, \textit{Förföljelsen av Irans baha’ier 1844 – 1955}, p. 83.} The presence of the Western missionaries gave this community a special contact with the West, based on their common religion. When some of the Armenians started to leave their traditional church and join the churches of the Western missionaries, this contact was even more emphasized.

During the first period of persecutions, the Christian missionaries from the West looked upon the Bahais as a group somewhere between Islam and Christianity. Some of these missionaries worked with the Bahais, hoping that the Bahais would choose to join the Christian fold. This hope failed in most cases, which was a source of disappointment to them. During the second period, the situation of the Christian missionaries was quite different, as they had little possibility to influence the situation in Iran. In cases when it has been possible, the missionaries seem to have had no interest in the Bahais as a group.
7.2.3 Bahāʾī and the Orientalists

Parallel to this Western interest of Bahāʾī studies, an internal tradition of Bahāʾī studies developed, in accordance with the principles of Bahāʾī hermeneutics. This tradition has continued without any periods of interruption. Since there is no clergy all Bābīs and Bahāʾīs are universally encouraged to deepen in their faith. Because of this, there has developed a tradition of lay learning in Bahāʾī. In the Middle Eastern Bahāʾī communities there have been such persons as Mīrzā Abu’l-Fadl and Ishrāq Khāvarī.405 This tradition has been followed up in English by such authors as Ḥasan Balyuzi, Adib Taherzadeh and Mojan Momen. Because of this there has been a general study of the Bahāʾī history and the Bahāʾī writings, including the background of this history and writings. An important part of this background, including the background of the persecution of the Bahāʾīs of Iran, is the relation between Iran and the Western world in general as it has developed during the 19th and 20th centuries. Therefore the orientalist issue is relevant to discuss, as this must be seen as a way of understanding the general relationship between the East and the West.

7.2.3.1 The orientalist debate in the West

The meeting between East and West has never been unproblematic and the dialogue that has existed has always been a project under development rather than a completely developed system. The Western specialists on the East – the orientalists – have been at

405 Many names could of course be given here, but these two will have to serve as examples. Mīrzā Abu’l Fadl lived in the end of 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, and Ishrāq Khāvarī was active in Iran during the 1930s until his death 1972.
the centre of this dialogue, representing the stronger part. In the 18th
century they were primarily specialists in the languages of the Bible,
but as the contact between Europe and the Middle East, India and
China increased, these areas were included in the research of the
orientalists.

The process of development of Orientalism made the underlying
ideology increasingly important. This had as a result in that the
general opinion of the Orient and the people of the Orient could
permeate the fundamental views of Orientalism and the ideas of the
West; its level of material development and culture became the
standard, when discussing the Eastern cultures. Because of that, a
number of disparaging judgements could be spread by the orientalists,
such as racial opinions by Gobineau and national socialists, while the
European colonial powers were considered ideals, worthy of copying.

The present debate on Orientalism was, however, not raised as a
discussion between specialists on oriental languages. It was Edward
Said, who is not an Orientalist himself by profession, who started it
with his book “Orientalism”. The main field of interest of Edward
Said is the relationship between the Western countries and the Middle
East. Wilhelm Halbfass, another scholar, is more interested in the
relationship between the West and India. He is an Indologist, who also
has a background as a specialist on Western philosophy. Because of
this, he has an ideal background for the field of study that he calls
“comparative philosophy”. He differs from Said in two ways: when he
writes about the Orient, he is referring to something else than Said and
he uses another way of measuring when discussing it. Still they both
discuss the problem of orientalism and therefore both are interesting for this discussion.

What makes a person Oriental? One of the aspects that Edward Said points towards in his criticism is the tendency in the West to see the oriental as inferior, not only from a cultural perspective but also purely racial. This makes it impossible for the Oriental to rise himself above this inferior position. Thus the oriental remains in a condition of infantility compared to the westerners.407 In European history it has been the role of the Jews to symbolize these Orientals and the persecution of the Jews can be seen as a way of representatives of Orientalism to describe Orientals. In this way, the holocaust during the Second World War becomes a part of Orientalism, or rather the peak of Orientalism as a movement within the history of Europe.

Orientalism reflects how the West looks upon the culture of the Orient, which according to Said primarily has been a question of the attempts of the West to dominate the East. Halbfass, however, describes this as a dialogue or at least the beginning of a dialogue. He also points out the situation of the representatives of neo-Hinduism, being in a middle position between the Orient and the West. They do not have the same deep knowledge of the classic Writings of Hinduism as the Indian pandits but they also do not have any deep knowledge of Western philosophy.408

Halbfass, who represents another way of describing Orientalism, is critical towards the way of Said to describe the views of Western authors on the Orient. He specifically points towards the tendency of Said to be unclear in his statements. Said has criticised Goethe’s way of picturing the Orient in his book *West-Östliche Diwan*. He considers Goethe to be using a romanticised and eroticised way of looking upon the Orient, which Said considers to be a common tendency among Western authors. This does, however, Halbfass not accept, as it is unfair to Goethe. He points out that this was not an invention of Goethe, as it is also used by al-Biruni, an author from the Islamic culture.\(^{409}\)

Halbfass also does not like the tendency of Said to see Orientalism as an unbroken chain from the classical times until the present time. Said likes to see relationships between what the classical Greek philosophers wrote about the Orient, with what the authors in the 16\(^{th}\) century wrote and what Goethe wrote in the 18\(^{th}\) century. According to Halbfass there is no such relationship. Moreover, there has not been so much exchange of ideas in the area that he has studied. The philosophers of the West have influenced India to a very small degree during most if its history and the cultural influx from India has not been very much greater. Therefore the Orientalism in West in modern time cannot relate to what authors of ancient times wrote about the Orient.\(^{410}\)


\(^{410}\) W. Halbfass, “Research and Reflection: responses to my respondents”, p. 5.
Halbfass has written a number of books on the relationship between India and Europe. In *India and Europe* he discusses different forms of misunderstandings and misjudgements made by Europeans as well as by Indians themselves. He brings up many different sources: Arabic travellers, Christian missionaries, enlightenment, romanticism, Hegel, Schelling and Schopenhauer. He also brings up neo-Hindus like Rammoham Roy, who were strongly influenced by the West.

The question that is so central in the Oriental debate, if Europeasation was inevitable or not is answered in the affirmative by Halbfass. Western “modernity” has proved to be so powerful that it can defeat “tradition” in Europe and the rest of the world and this process continues. In India this has the effect that the Indian philosophers, especially the ones with a Neo-Hindu background, have to accept that they are in a subordinate position.

So what is Orientalism as a movement? According to Said one can talk about Orientalism with three different meanings: 1) an academic discipline. 2) A way of thinking where difference is made between the “Orient” and the “Occident”. 3) A way of treating the issue through institutions by making statements about it, by describing it, by teaching about it, that is dominating it. With this as a background it is possible to ask whether Orientalism exist today or if we have entered a post-orientalistic era, parallel to the post-colonial one. The orientalistic institutions have more or less been disassembled and instead a number of institutions have been created that are not founded on the difference between the East and the West.
7.2.3.2 Mírzá Abu’l Fadl on the orientalist issue

There have been some early Bahá’ís from the East who have had enough knowledge about the West to be able to make comments about it, although they might not have been specialists on Western philosophy. One such person was Mírzá Abu’l Fadl (1844 – 1914). He was borne in Iran in a Muslim family with a clerical tradition, and he followed this tradition also. At the peak of his career as the head of a theological college in Teheran, he left Islam and joined Bahá’í.412 He then became, in the words of Shoghi Effendi, the “learned apologist”.413 I will discuss two examples of his reflections on Western culture: one article on Christian criticism of the Qur’án and one meeting he had with a protestant priest in Iran. In the article, named “A refutation of Christian Criticism of the Qur’án” he has given comments that are not strictly theological, but are broadened to come into the issue of Orientalism.

The two meetings with the British clergyman Rev. Bruce in Isfahān do not lead to discussion on Orientalism. They are, however, conversations on religion between the Persian theologian, who is in constant danger because of his religious beliefs and economically very poor, almost starving,414 and the British clergyman with a certain power and economic resources. The issue of the discussions was religious, but from the perspective of Orientalism there are other interesting points. The discussion in the first meeting reveals two interesting points: the great difference of resources of the two and the

fact that Rev. Bruce had given a certain sum of money to reduce starvation going on and was ready to give much more.415

What are the implications of these meetings from an orientalistic viewpoint? Do they reflect the colonial and racial image, described by Edward Said or are they better described as a dialogue, in accordance with the opinion of Wilhelm Halbfass? Although Rev. Bruce is pictured as a person who was not able to defeat Mīrzā Abu’l Faḍl in a theological discussion, he is pictured as a person who is ready for discussion and a listener. This is hardly the arrogant colonial representative, described by Edward Said. It is, however, quite possible to recognize the weak, but existing, discussion described by Wilhelm Halbfass. The discussions are not held between two equal partners in resources, but it is still a discussion and the partners are basically treating each other as equals.

In the article “A refutation of Christian criticism of the Qur’ān”, Mīrzā Abu’l Faḍl is commenting on the work of George Sales: “Discourse on Islam”.416 The point that Sales had made was that the language of the Qur’ān is poetic and eloquent, which has been the reason for Arabs to accept Islam. The content in the Qur’ān is however primarily borrowed from the Bible. Mīrzā Abu’l Faḍl does not accept this point. He opposes the idea that the language of the Qur’ān is more eloquent than what was common among Arabs at the time of Muḥammad. He also opposes that the content from the Qur’ān had merely been borrowed from the Bible, without saying anything new. He emphasize that it takes more than a single book with a fluent

language to create a new religion and to lift up a number of people from having a pagan religion to accept monotheism and a new level of civilisation. Regarding the eloquence of the language in the Qur’an, he gives the name of some Arabs who did not accept Muḥammad, but who were known for their skill of oration. He also refers to a contemporary priest in the Syrian Orthodox Church, who points out a number of places in the Qur’an that lack eloquence. Regarding the accusation that Muḥammad had borrowed the content of the Qur’an from the Bible, he compares the image of God in the Bible and the Qur’an and especially refers to the anthropomorphic image in the Bible that does not exist in the Qur’an.

The Jews according to Mīrzā Abu’l Fadl also used similar accusations for the New Testament and the Zoroastrians for the Old Testament.

Mīrzā Abu’l Faḍl goes on in this article to discuss the Western churches and Western civilisation. The Western churches in the East, he claims, rest on three pillars: “the machinations of ambassadors, the artillery of soldiers, and the gifts of supporters.” With this statement he has left the defence of Islam and the Qur’an and starts a discussion with Sales as a representative of Western powers – the orientalist debate. His point is that any attack by Western scholars on other religions will only cause damage to their own. The Christian church in the West has become very weak and has difficulties functioning by its own strength, as European culture today rests upon rationality and not on religious beliefs. In order to emphasize the little interest in

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417 Mīrzā Abu’l Fadl, Miracles & Metaphores, p. 176.
418 Ibid., p. 172.
religious beliefs in Europe, he gives the example of the religion of the French revolution that existed for only a few years, although it rested on thoughts of the best of the philosophers of the Enlightenment movement.

In this article Mīrzā Abu’l Faḍl does not only enter a discussion with a single scholar, but with a representative of the Orientalist institution. Although the article concerns a purely religious subject, parts of it concern the relationship between the Western colonial powers and the Islamic world. It is not correct to state that he is giving the exact views that Edward Said later presented, but in this article he is not only saying that the difference between East and West is primarily a lack of discussion. Instead he discusses a more fundamental critique of Western society and it has deeper implications.

7.2.4 The Orientalist Issue from the Identity Perspective

Religious identity in a traditional society is strongly related to ethnic identity and they have often grown to become one common identity. The reincarnation concept in India shows that it is possible for a religious identity to survive within different traditional ethnic identities and bind them together in a system that can exist for a very long time if the binding ideology is strongly related to the existential questions. The breakdown of Christian identity in the Western world since the time of the Enlightenment philosophers, on the other hand, shows that a religious identity can be eroded within a short time and is not something that can be taken for granted. There must be a solid foundation that it can rest upon, and as long as Western society has been successful, it has also been possible to go on living without a
common religious identity. It is, however, interesting to see that the success of Western society is related to existential questions, as Western medical science has been able to cure a number of diseases and managed to prolong people’s life. The defenders of the cosmic order could here find a successful order to defend, as diseases were defeated and secular ideologies created political systems that seemed to have a genuine interest in creating justice, which solved an existential question. As the reason for different diseases were found, a number of existential questions were answered by science, which, to the individual, could be seen as proof that science by time would be able to answer all of those questions. It is, however, also possible to see movements, such as the Nazi movement, as an answer to collective identity crises that were created when justice was not created or other existential question was left unanswered. Adolph Hitler was portrayed as a classical hero in the Nazi propaganda and the answers to the existential questions were provided by the Nazi ideology. The identity provided by the Nazi ideology, had all the ingredients needed to arouse the activities of the defenders of the cosmic order. It even had the ability to start the largest and probably the most carefully prepared persecution the world has ever known.

Another problem has developed as the Western countries have met the Oriental countries, which continued to rest upon a traditional identity instead of accepting the Western national identity. In this way they have questioned Western development concerning its very existence. How should the Western countries relate to this? The answer was to build up different kinds of institutions that were given the task to solve the problem. For the individual westerners who met
the religious identity of the traditional societies, the situation could
become like an identity crisis\textsuperscript{419} as their own religious identity was not
clearly defined. Some of the existential questions that the westerners
asked were answered by science, but the most central question, “who
am I?” was not. There was no clear idea based identity to answer this
question and also no clear role that could be accepted by everybody.
The result of this was that the westerners could only rely on their
ethnic identity, which would often not be an ideal background to help
the individual westerner to handle new situations. The Western
missionaries, however, were in a different situation. Their reason for
leaving their homeland rested on a strong religious identity. This
religious identity was often combined with an ethnic identity that
sometimes made them partners with the colonial civil servants and
sometimes their opponents.

The debate on Orientalism concerns the relationship between
Europe and the Orient or, rather, how Europe has looked at the Orient.
It can also be described as the spreading of the concept of a cosmic
order that was created in Europe and spread to the rest of the world by
colonial powers. One explanation in this debate has been that Europe
has turned towards the Orient in a giant plan of conquest on every
level, be it economic, cultural, political etc. The other explanation has
been that the European conquest of the Orient has not been supervised
by any such master plan. Instead the different examples of conquest
have their background in a larger measure of power on these different

\textsuperscript{419} A. Jacobsson-Widding, “Introduction”, \textit{Identity, Personal and Socio-Cultural, A
symposium}, Edited by A. Jacobsson-Widding (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell
levels and that this should be seen as an Europeasation of the rest of the world, which is natural considering its greater cultural power.

The problem for the individual to accept a role in either scenario is obvious, be it an Oriental or Westerner. To the Iranian Bahá’ís there has been an additional problem in this that they have been Iranians – Orientals – that have been persecuted as heretics and at the same time have been carrying ideas that to many have been Western, parallel to parts of Enlightenment philosophy. The common accusation of the Iranian ‘Ulamá’ that Bahá’í should be considered a political movement rather than a religious must be interpreted as meaning that the reason that the members of this movement are persecuted is that they are regarded as representatives of the West by the ‘Ulamá’.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has commented on the relationship between Iran and the West in his book *The secret of Divine Civilisation*, that was published 1875. The book is written as a call to the Iranian people to “Awake from your drunken sleep!”


422 Ibid., pp. 10, 93-94.
‘Abdu’l-Bahā. He especially underlines the importance of education: “The primary, the most urgent requirement is the promotion of education.”\textsuperscript{423} He points towards the European civilisation as being ahead of the Iranians, but he does not consider the Europeans as good moral examples and he discusses the European arms race of those days and the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 where 600,000 men died on the battlefield. The solution he suggests to solve this problem is the establishing of an international pact where different problems between governments can be solved.\textsuperscript{424} When commenting upon the progress of the West, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā points towards the glorious history of Iran but he does not stop at this which means that he does not fall into the pattern of Persian chauvinism. Also he does not praise everything coming from the West as good, which means that he cannot be accused of \textit{gharbzadegih} and he does not propagate Islamicism. The solution he gives is to take into consideration the knowledge and experience of both Iran and the West, which must be seen as a Bahā’ī solution to the problem, from experience of how the Bahā’ī community has functioned in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, although this book was written long before he himself started the process of developing a Western Bahā’ī community in the United States.

A problem that arises from this situation is how much this debate has influenced ‘Abdu’l-Bahā in his decision to send missionaries to Europe and North America. Considering that the message of Bahā’u’llāh is world embracing in nature it must have been natural for ‘Abdu’l-Bahā to take this step, whether he would have taken interest in the Orientalist debate or not. It seems rather

\textsuperscript{423}Ibid., pp. 18, 109.
natural to me to see the global message in Bahā’ī as the motivation for ‘Abdu’l-Bahā to take part in the Orientalist debate, especially considering the conclusion that he reaches.

Another problem that arises is whether Orientalism itself has served as a source of inspiration to persecuting the Bābīs and the Bahā’īs. It is probably not possible to find such a direct example of inspiration but there is no doubt that Orientalism has helped widening the gap between Western culture and Iranian culture with the Bahā’īs being in the middle of these two cultures. The basic theological reason of the ‘Ulamā’ to encourage people to persecute the Bahā’īs is the claims of the Bāb and Bahā’u’llāh, but the middle situation of the Bahā’īs between the Iranian ‘Ulamā’ and the Western Orientalists has, no doubt, increased the hatred of the ‘Ulamā’ towards the Bahā’īs. According to the booklet *Bahaism – its origin and role* that was discussed earlier, Bahā’ī was created to serve the Russian regime. This must be seen as a reaction towards the Orientalists.

7.3 Conclusion

There seems to exist a pattern of thesis, antithesis and synthesis in Christian history in the relationship between the Christian martyr ideology, the Roman reaction of a type that I have called the “defender of the cosmic order” and the final creation of a servant ideology. As this pattern can be seen also in Bahā’ī, I draw the conclusion that this interplay might be the normal pattern that sometimes is not put into reality, due to historical reasons. At a certain stage the Christian Church developed a servant ideology from the martyr ideology. This did not necessarily mean that the martyr

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424Ibid., pp. 61-65.
ideology ceased to exist within the Church but the Church used the same material that was reinterpreted to become a servant ideology and this process had its background in this, that the Church found itself in the position of being the majority religion and the state religion. I have discussed the development of the persecution of the Christian earlier and the background to the persecution in this that the Christians did not accept the worship of the Roman emperor. The worship of the Roman emperor seems to have its background in another martyr ideology, or rather the defenders of the cosmic order, as it had commenced after the murder of Julius Caesar, who had been declared a God by the Roman senate. Antonius, who had exposed the blood-stained cloths of Caesar to the people, pointed towards every one of the holes from the daggers and read his testament aloud. The reaction of the people was to insist that his body should be burnt at Forum Romanum, not outside Rome as was planned. They gathered all that was possible to burn, started the funeral pyre, and threw in jewellery, weapons and other things in exaltation.\textsuperscript{425} In this way a martyr ideology was created, and by declaring him a god and building a temple for Caesar at the Forum Romanum, the Senate created a servant ideology. As the Christians were threatening this ideology by refusing to worship the Roman emperor, they became a threat and were therefore persecuted.

It is possible also to see Socrates as a martyr as he was falsely accused of seducing the youth of Athens, and the story of the death of Socrates as the foundation of a martyr ideology. This could be one part of the answer to why it has been so difficult to integrate the Greek

philosophy into the Christian church. The Church would not accept integrating the heathen philosophies, but it has also not been possible to integrate a second martyr ideology in the theological system of the Church. The basis of creation of a martyr ideology is that a primordial martyr will combine a spiritual leadership in theory – an idea based leadership that is the carrier of solutions to existential questions – with the willingness to accept this even to the point of giving up his life. The combination of these two aspects of spiritual leadership will give life to the search for an answer to the existential questions for his followers to such a high degree that they themselves are ready to become martyrs. Those who have not become martyrs will hail the martyrs of that ideology, especially when they will learn the history behind the martyrdom of that person. The martyrdom of Socrates, as described by Plato, and its influence as a witness to the moral superiority of the European philosophic tradition shows that it is not necessary that the martyr ideology is expressly religious in character. It is, however, important that its relation to existential questions is firm and the calm acceptance of Socrates of his fate together with his moral teachings was indeed related to existential questions.426

Another example of a Martyr Ideology is Shi‘a Islam, where the martyr ideology is related to the death of Imam  Husayn at the battle of Karbilā. Shi‘a Islam itself has not developed a servant ideology as there has been a competition between the Shi‘a Islam and the Oriental

426 Where did Socrates get his teachings? The source given by Plato points towards the genius of Socrates himself. According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the source was rather the Jewish prophets. Socrates had traveled to Israel and listened to these prophets and after that returned to Athens. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Some Answered Questions, p.14. In the Bahá’í writings it is therefore not a separation in historical background between the
Royal theocracy where the King and his subjects relate as the representative of God and His servants. So there has been a servant ideology, but in contrast to the martyr ideology of Shi‘a Islam. One example of a developed servant ideology can be found in Bahá‘í. This servant ideology is related to an object of identification, to a person that can be the Central point in the creation of the servant ideology. This person is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the oldest son of Bahá’u’lláh.

Regarding the role of the West in the persecution of the Bahá‘ís in Iran, one can reflect. One reflection that might come naturally is that the West is not involved in the persecution, as it does not take part in the persecution itself. It is of course correct that westerners do not perform any persecution, but the Orientalist issue has showed that the encounter of East and West is not one-sided and the interplay between the different cultures is not simple. The creation of martyr ideologies and servant ideologies has existed for a long time in the Christian and the Islamic cultures and when two such ideologies meet there are such powers released that religious persecution can be started easily. It is in those situations that the “defenders of the cosmic order” will arise and start the persecution or whatever is needed to defend their own identity.

When the Western countries arise to defend the persecuted Bahá‘ís they use the best instrument at hand, which is mostly the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, and this declaration has proved to be fairly efficient as long as is it followed by a resolution by the General Assembly. It is, however, problematic when this

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Christian tradition and the Greek philosophic tradition but rather the separate development in time by two traditions that stem from the same religious root.
declaration, that in itself does not answer any existential questions, has to compete with a martyr ideology that started at the Karbilā plain and produced one of the most well-known martyrs in world history – Imam Ḥusayn. The Bahāʾīs could therefore most probably remain a scapegoat until the Iranian majority and the governmental system will include them as one of the respected minorities in Iran.
Conclusion

In this study I have found a difference between religions that are focused on an idea based identity and religions that are focused on an ethnic identity. I have found that Bahā’ī is focused on an idea based identity to such a high degree that it has managed to bring together a Mahdī movement with an Iranian Shi’a background and a Messianic movement with roots in North American Protestant Christianity. This does not imply that Bahā’ī should be seen as an idea based movement from the beginning. Bābism and early Bahā’ī could rather be described as from the beginning having an ethnic character with strong roots in Shi’a Islam as it was expressed in its Iranian tradition with a strong emphasize in martyr ideology. By time, however, these ties grew weaker as Bahā’ī developed special characteristics of its own. When Bahā’ī started to develop in North America it must also here be described as a religion that had an ethnic background, differing from its Eastern cousin by for example the lack of a clear martyr ideology. What finally brought these two branches together was a servant ideology that was developed out of the basic Bahā’ī writings. This shift could be made by focusing on an object of identification, ‘Abdu’l-Bahā, who was the centre of the servant ideology.
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