

Nonpartisan Engagement in Public Affairs

**A Critical Analysis of the Bahá'í Approach to
Dialogue, Democracy, and Diplomatic Relations**

By Búi Tyril

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Science degree in Corporate Communication and Public Affairs

Robert Gordon University
Aberdeen Business School
Communication, Marketing and Media

October 2009

Abstract

The worldwide religious community of the Bahá'í Faith has long been faced with an issue of serious human rights abuses against its members in some countries, most particularly Iran. Dealing with the issue has presented the Bahá'í community with a dilemma: how to address the problem effectively at the political level by engaging with international organizations as well as national governments without compromising the Bahá'í tenet of political neutrality and nonpartisanship. The question of how the community has pursued its objective of defending the Bahá'ís in Iran—and whether this has been done successfully—raises a number of aspects related to public affairs theory and practice. To answer the question of whether the approach taken by the Bahá'ís has proved effective in view of the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran, issues related to social science and philosophy are considered, comparing the Bahá'í teachings with major contemporary ideas such as ethics and professionalism, dialogue, trust, equality, and democracy. The investigation is conducted as a think piece and the research methods applied consist of content analysis in combination with a case study. The evidence is drawn from a variety of literature sources with the support of selected interviews and direct observation. The conclusive findings suggest that the Bahá'ís have responded to the crisis effectively without jeopardizing their position of strength in the world of diplomatic relations and public information, which has largely been built on political neutrality and nonpartisanship. The achievements within the United Nations system have been remarkable with resolutions passed almost every year since 1980. Yet the crisis concerning the Bahá'ís in Iran—widely perceived as a test for international law—is far from over.

Contents

Acknowledgments	4
1.0 Introduction	5
1.1 Why this Project?	5
1.2 Question of Impartiality	7
1.3 Aims and Objectives	9
1.4 Methodology	11
1.5 References	13
2.0 Iran and Bahá'í Public Affairs: A Case Study	16
2.1 A Crucial Test for International Law	16
2.2 Ongoing Persecution	17
2.3 Historical Background	19
2.4 Changing Patterns of Persecution	21
2.5 Mahdism and the Hojjatieh Society	22
2.6 The Revolution and the Bahá'í Response	24
2.7 Recent Developments and Perspectives	27
2.8 References	31
3.0 Key Connections	36
3.1 Interrelated Ideas	36
3.2 Spirituality and the Nature of Man	38
3.3 Ethics and Professionalism	41
3.4 Consultation and the Idea of Dialogue	45
3.5 Mutualism	47
3.6 Trust and Trustworthiness	50
3.7 Social Capital	53
3.8 Equality and Justice	55
3.9 The Bahá'í Approach to Democracy	59
3.10 References	64
4.0 Conclusion	70
4.1 References	75
5.0 Bibliography	78

Acknowledgements

This research project has been greatly assisted by the supervision of Professor Justin Greenwood and the advice given at its outset by Dr. Robert Halsall. Literature sources have been supplemented through personal communication with Barney Leith, Douglas Moore, and Stephen Karnik. Also helpful in facilitating access to information have been Brad Pokorny, Dr. Kishan Manocha, Robert Weinberg, Daniel Wheatley, and Erica Leith.

Above all, Maria and little Maynard have been exceedingly patient for a very long time.

1.0 **Introduction**

The diplomatic activities of the Bahá'í International Community aim at influencing thought and action at the United Nations and among national governments, particularly with respect to human rights, the status of women, and global prosperity. As major channels for such activities, National Spiritual Assemblies engage in coordinated diplomatic efforts through their contacts with the appropriate agencies of their national governments. A further aim is to ensure the recognition and protection of the Bahá'í community everywhere. (Universal House of Justice, 1994, p. 5)

1.1 Why this Project?

In dealing with issues of human rights, how does a non-governmental organization reconcile its claim of nonpartisanship with its engagement in diplomatic measures vis-à-vis the government of a country—and if its claim of nonpartisanship be substantiated and justified, what does it signify for the profession of public affairs, and what are the wider implications for related philosophical and social ideas?

The author of this dissertation finds the notion of Bahá'í public affairs both challenging and promising: not only does it embody perspectives that are often missing in contemporary literature on topics ranging from public relations to representative democracy—it also offers something quite unique in the world of public policy and organizational communication.

At the core of these perspectives and this uniqueness lies a principled, systematically implemented approach to human relations that views humanity as more than a loosely interconnected entity: it is rather seen as a single organic unit, highly dependent on and largely governed by social systems and spiritual principles in interaction with individual and collective will while at the same time, importantly, requiring some degree of instruction for proper functioning.

This project is an attempt to examine aspects of public affairs that include crisis management at the international level along with key societal concepts such as dialogue, trust, and community, and relate these to the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith. In particular, it features an investigation into how Bahá'í

diplomatic relations are conducted in response to the human rights situation faced by Bahá'ís in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

As explained by the author in an earlier submitted Proposal:

“An occasion for a study of this topic is offered by the researcher’s prior knowledge of the Bahá’í Faith, his experience as a public relations practitioner, and his participation in this course [MSc Corporate Communication and Public Affairs] including the completion of a four-week placement at the UK Bahá’í community’s Office of External Affairs.

“The insights gained from personal experience and academic learning, and the direct observation of the Office of External Affairs in its work to generate political support in dealing with human rights issues—most particularly in regard to the situation facing the Bahá’ís of Iran—have given rise to the ideas expressed ...”

Thus, an investigation will be conducted into certain public affairs programs and activities carried out and coordinated by the Bahá’í International Community—an agency of the Universal House of Justice, the supreme administrative body of the Bahá’í Faith—and, at the national level, in conjunction with National Spiritual Assemblies around the world; in the UK, the NSA’s Office of External Affairs is responsible for diplomatic relations and public information. Questions to consider include e.g. the ethical values by which the activities are guided; to which extent spiritual principles are applied as inspired by specific Bahá’í concepts; and whether the methods used have proven effective.

To critically analyze the Bahá’í approach to public affairs, or anything else for that matter, it will be necessary to review some of the fundamental ideas and doctrines of the Bahá’í Faith. For example, the Bahá’í concept of consultation refers to a process of non-adversarial decision-making, arguably relevant to the debates on e.g. democracy, dialogue, social capital, and conflict resolution (Bahá’í Topics, 2009d; Momen, 2008; Hatcher, 2007; Bond, 1998).

First, a note on *spirituality*, as this is key to understanding the nature of the connections that the author attempts to establish throughout this paper. In the world of professional interest representation and organizational relations, spiritual values or principles—alongside biological and other physical requirements—constitute essential elements of any individual or group’s intellectual, moral, and mental capacity to operate and interact with others. That is, for example, a public affairs team’s ability to deliver quality service is largely linked to the degree to which it is governed by professionalism and integrity, which in turn necessitates the adherence to spiritual principles or disciplines—sometimes referred to as *cultural*, *ethical*, or *moral* values—such as honesty, fairness, reliability, and regard for others.

Arguably, the assertion that human beings are spiritual beings rather than merely sophisticated animals is as old as civilization. The Bahá'í Faith clearly promotes and further develops this idea, expressly stating that e.g. political and economic problems require spiritual solutions inasmuch as anything observed or created by humans in the material world is a reflection of a higher realm of reason. In this way, social and economic development is viewed from e.g. moral and ethical perspectives with a strong correlation between spiritual and social principles (Bahá'u'lláh, 1946, 1976, 1992; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982a, 1982b, 1982c; Effendi, 1990; Bahai.org, 2009a; BIC, 2003; Esslemont, 1980; Momen, 2008).

A few key overlaps between so-called religious and secular schools of thought, respectively, will be brought up in context. Importantly, the Bahá'í Faith's categorical emphasis on social coherence, collective evolution, and harmony between religious and scientific belief will be considered. Similarly, in looking at what spirituality means from a holistic viewpoint, the idea that socioeconomic conditions may significantly influence or indicate the spiritual level must be taken into account (Bahá'í Topics, 2009c; Hatcher and Martin, 2002; Hatcher, 2007; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009; Sen, 2009).

1.2 Question of Impartiality

As a longtime student of the Bahá'í Faith, the author is aware of the danger of partiality and bias accompanying a research project of this kind. Irrespective of the honor and privilege that may be associated with membership of the Bahá'í Faith, it can be argued that such affiliation could cause a conflict of interest and could, at least potentially, threaten scientific objectivity. While such precaution may be justified in principle, the substance of this particular research project can in itself—as will become clear in the following pages—be seen to suggest a quite opposite proposition: firsthand insights gained from personal identification with and practice of Bahá'í teachings can serve to 'qualify' rather than 'disqualify' the student.

One supporting argument would be that such affiliation may help a person relate to spiritual attributes encouraged and cultivated in the Bahá'í writings, such as intellectual independence and integrity, assisting that person in avoiding e.g. prejudice or unfair bias. From a similar point of view, it could be argued that the position of a Bahá'í should, theoretically, be at least as 'neutral' or credible as that of anybody else, who may or may not have well-formed ideas of what the Bahá'í Faith teaches, inasmuch as it takes more than superficial acquaintance to become truly familiar with the fundamentals of that religion.

The Bahá'í writings, indeed, stress the importance of independent investigation and scientific method, as can be gleaned from the following quotes by the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh, and the two authorized interpreters of his writings, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi:

The essence of all that We have revealed for thee is Justice, is for man to free himself from idle fancy and imitation, discern with the eye of oneness His glorious handiwork, and look into all things with a searching eye. (Bahá'u'lláh, 1988b, p. 157.)

Every religion which does not concern itself with Science is mere tradition... Therefore science, education and civilization are most important necessities for the full religious life. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982a, p. 29.)

There have issued, from His mighty Pen, various teachings for the prevention of war, and these have been scattered far and wide. The first is the independent investigation of truth; for blind imitation of the past will stunt the mind. But once every soul inquires into truth, society will be freed from the darkness of continually repeating the past. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982b, p. 248.)

The Revelation proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh, His followers believe, is divine in origin, all-embracing in scope, broad in its outlook, scientific in its method, humanitarian in its principles and dynamic in the influence it exerts on the hearts and minds of men. The mission of the Founder of their Faith, they conceive it to be, to proclaim that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is continuous and progressive, that the Founders of all past religions, though differing in the non-essential aspects of their teachings, "abide in the same Tabernacle, soar in the same heaven, are seated upon the same throne, utter the same speech and proclaim the same Faith". His Cause, they have already demonstrated, stands identified with, and revolves round, the principle of the organic unity of mankind as representing the consummation of the whole process of human evolution. (...) The Bahá'í Faith ... upholds the principle of an unfettered search after truth, condemns all forms of superstition and prejudice, teaches that the fundamental purpose of religion is to promote concord and harmony, that it must go hand-in-hand with science, and that it constitutes the sole and ultimate basis of a peaceful, an ordered and progressive society. It inculcates the principle of equal opportunity, rights and privileges for both sexes, advocates compulsory education, abolishes extremes of poverty and wealth, exalts work performed in the spirit of service to the rank of worship, recommends the

adoption of an auxiliary international language, and provides the necessary agencies for the establishment and safeguarding of a permanent and universal peace. (Effendi, 1933, p. XI.)

1.3 Aims and Objectives

This dissertation seeks to explore the theory behind the Bahá'í approach to public affairs, as generally explained by its underlying philosophy and by its overall practice in external affairs and, more specifically, as principally applied to a long standing crisis in Iran. What should emerge from the analyses, then, is a series of insights into linkages to core issues surrounding the practice of public affairs, deemed to be of value for academic and professional purposes—including ethics, dialogue, and trust, to name some.

As already alluded to, the elements of such a Bahá'í approach inevitably bring up questions directly related to the Bahá'í Faith and its teachings and history (Bahai.org, 2009a; Bahá'í Topics, 2009a, 2009b; Bahá'u'lláh, 1946, 1976, 1992; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982c; Effendi, 1933, 1950; BWNS, 2009d, 2009e; BIC, 2003; Nabil, 1932; Esslemont, 1980; Hatcher and Martin, 2002; Momen, 2008; BBC, 2009), to the political and human rights situation in Iran with special regard to the Bahá'ís (BWNS, 2009a; BIC, 2008; Ebadi, 2006), and to the business of public affairs from a generic viewpoint (ALL, 2009; Argenti, 2003; Cutlip, 2006; Doorley and Garcia, 2007; Thomson and John, 2007). Beyond looking at these subjects per se, a critical analysis will need to extend into the areas of ethics and professionalism, to include a discussion of the idea of dialogue and its links with collective decision-making processes, as well as considering the concepts of credibility and trust, the ideals of democratic governance, and other societal and spiritual themes such as justice and community.

The above will entail research into how such elements might interrelate with Bahá'í teachings, and whether and how the public affairs approach under investigation might be deemed appropriate or successful, particularly when considering the dilemma seen in the Bahá'í community's advocacy at the political level with nonpartisanship as a core principle. To appreciate not only the significance of moral and ethical dimensions here but namely also the centrality of nonpartisanship, it will be necessary to look into the basic teachings of the Bahá'í Faith as well as to examine actions undertaken by Bahá'í International Community (BIC) in response to the human rights situation facing the Bahá'ís in Iran, and place these in the wider context already indicated—a context that goes beyond the immediate boundaries of public affairs.

Clearly, “Bahá’í public affairs” implies something specific that calls for research into what it actually means, whether theoretically, practically, or historically. The meaning of a business term like “public affairs” is presumed to be somewhat more readily understood than that of a religious term such as “the Bahá’í approach”. The latter will certainly call for a closer look into what the Bahá’í Faith is, what it stands for, what its doctrines essentially are all about, and, importantly, how the Bahá’í community—in particular at the international and the UK national levels—practices public affairs. The profession of public affairs is primarily not seen to extend beyond the realm of business functions, government relations and organizational communication.

It should be noted that the terms “public affairs”, “diplomatic relations”, and “government relations” are used interchangeably throughout this text. The term “external affairs” is used to cover a similar meaning yet expressive of a broader sense, i.e. also including “public information” as the term is known from the world of public relations. Sometimes “public relations” is used to convey a similarly broad but perhaps slightly less related meaning, as it may or may not include public affairs along with various PR specialisms. The term “lobbying” is also used for public affairs but in a more narrow definition: as the actual activity of influencing legislators and policy makers; “advocacy” is another related term with a similar meaning, however sometimes used to signify public campaigning rather than e.g. closed-door diplomacy. Yet another term, with a related but highly specific meaning that goes beyond lobbying and advocacy, is “interest representation”. The term “public policy” alludes to both lobbying and policy making as opposed to, say, PR: whereas a PR consultant is seen as a *communication* professional often associated with e.g. the world of news or advertising in addition to taking part in developing corporate programs of action, a public policy person is generally seen as someone primarily involved in carrying out, forming, or influencing legislation or policies, i.e. is likely to be a *legal* expert, a government official, or a former elected representative, schooled either in the law profession or the political environment.

Clearly, one challenge will be to concentrate on a few threads of investigation in order to reach a core conclusion, the implications of which must likewise be outlined.

Given its universal claims, the Bahá’í Faith is in itself a vast topic, in some way or the other encompassing every other subject; it will therefore occupy a large portion of this dissertation. Examining the nature of the institutional Bahá’í approach to government relations and democracy, while at the same time exploring related social and spiritual dimensions may seem daunting, unless the purpose is limited to rendering an overview. Thus, the ambition is here to articulate the main issues involved, thereby offering something of relevance to academic studies of communication and public policy issues and for public affairs and business communication practice.

1.4 Methodology

As this dissertation is primarily intended as a think piece, the methodology can arguably be deemed secondary, relative to the analysis itself. Drawing from a number of sources—including literature on the Bahá'í Faith and the key subjects of public affairs, communication theory, democracy, trust and social capital, and supported by selected interviews and direct observation—the research methods applied consist of content analysis in combination with a case study. Of importance to note, is that establishing linkages between the elements involved is seen as the foremost function of a think piece of this kind.

The case study approach has been applied for one of the sections of the dissertation, in consideration of the nature of the more empirically inclined part of the inquiry—i.e. Bahá'í public affairs regarding Iran, including an outline of the historical background. Here, the challenge is less about connecting theoretical concepts than piecing together a plausible picture of what is taking place between whom and why, gathered from fairly well-documented events. With a variety of sources of evidence, large geographical distances involved, and the difficulty in obtaining firsthand relevant information from Iran, a case study approach was deemed appropriate and effective for this section.

Overall, to critically relate the Bahá'í Faith to the already mentioned contemporary ideas, a wide range of academic and topical literature is reviewed, complemented by selected interviews along with direct observation and artifacts made accessible through the student's four-week fieldwork placement at the UK Bahá'í community's Office of External Affairs in London during the spring of 2009.

By participating as an Assistant External Affairs Officer in meetings with members of Parliament, engaging in correspondence with members of the House of Lords, and carrying out various tasks related to building political support for the case of seven Bahá'í leaders in Iran held in prison without trial since May 2008, the author gained firsthand insights into the strategy used by the Bahá'ís in public affairs work, as well as receiving detailed documentation on the particulars of the problems faced by the Bahá'ís of Iran, backed by sources that included, e.g., UN officials (BIC, 2008; Ghanea, 2002; UN, 2008, 2009a, 2009c).

Among the artifacts gathered were documents about the human rights situation faced by the Bahá'ís in Iran (BIC, 2008), the Strategy on External Affairs formulated by the Universal House of Justice (1994), and a number of online updates about the situation in Iran and Egypt—another country where the human rights of Bahá'ís have been a source of anxiety (BWNS, 2009a). The focus remained centered, however, on Iran during the entire period of the placement and beyond, as the imprisoned Bahá'í leaders were expected to face trial shortly with charges more or less likely to result in their execution should they be convicted as feared—a cause of widespread concern not only on behalf of the prisoners and their families, but also in regard of all of Iran's 300,000 Bahá'ís (BIC, 2008; Cameron and Danesh, 2008; CNN, 2009).

The historical background is provided through key literature. Iran, the Bahá'í Faith's country of birth, is of particular interest here, especially with regard to the relationship between its religious establishment and the Bahá'í Faith—originally the Bábí movement—and the pattern of persecution witnessed since the 1840s (BIC, 2008; BWNS, 2009a; Bahai.org, 2009a; Bahá'í Topics, 2009a; Bahá'u'lláh, 1946; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982b; 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Browne, 1891; Browne, 1918; Nabil, 1932; Effendi, 1933, 1950; Esslemont, 1980; Hatcher and Martin, 2002; Momen, 1981).

In addition to the above historical background, the case study outlines the nature of Bahá'í public affairs concerning Iran, while considering key factors governing public affairs strategies and decisions involved. The sources of evidence are found in literature, artifacts and direct observations, complemented by interviews with representatives of the Bahá'í International Community and the UK Bahá'í community's Office of External Affairs.

The case study is critical to the theory and practice of public relations and public policy in the sense that it demonstrates a unique approach to the fundamental issue of credibility, which differs substantially from other well known approaches, while at the same time offering an array of alternative solutions to difficult problems—effectively questioning, on their own merits and with all clarity, the widespread practices of unilateralism and adversarialism in the world of interest representation. The distinction referred to here seems to be anchored in the idea of nonpartisanship as a direct outcome of the Bahá'í doctrine of unity, presenting what might prove to be surprising advantages in terms of ethical standards, political independence, and sustainable leverage in the world of diplomacy and publicity.

The criticality of the case is as such entirely unrelated to the level of general attention focused on the Islamic Republic of Iran since the 1979 revolution, whether occasioned by the country's alleged nuclear weapons program, its human rights record, or any number of issues linked to the geopolitical situation in the Middle East. Of interest, however, is the Bahá'í Faith's theological nullification of the notion of Islamic law, unwittingly raising, notably in the minds of senior members of the Iranian clergy, a highly politically charged issue. Yet the main point of interest for this study lies in the position of strength developed by the Bahá'í community in public diplomacy and public information—as, importantly, characterized by the centrality of an integrated belief system consistently applied to its programs, policies, and projects. Moreover, the coordinated response to the issue of human rights violations affecting the Bahá'ís of Iran—a case considered pivotal to international law by human rights experts (Ghanea, 2002)—unquestionably serves as the most prominent example of external affairs efforts undertaken by the Bahá'ís. The situation has been addressed on an ongoing basis through bilateral and multilateral measures that have resulted in resolutions being adopted by the United Nations' General Assembly virtually every year since 1980 to the present (BIC, 1986, 2008; UN, 2008, 2009a; 2009b).

1.5 References

- ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, 1982a. *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London*. London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust.
- ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, 1982b. *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*. Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre.
- ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, 1982c. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust.
- ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ and E. G. BROWNE, 1891. *A Traveller’s Narrative—Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Báb*. Amsterdam: Philo Press.
- ALL, 2009. *The American League of Lobbyists*. [online] Washington DC: The American League of Lobbyists. Available from: <http://www.alldc.org> [Accessed 27 September 2009]
- ARGENTI, P. A., 2003. *Corporate Communication*, 3rd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill/Irwin.
- BAHAI.ORG, 2009a. *The Bahá’ís*. [online] Haifa: Bahá’í International Community. Available from: <http://www.bahai.org> [Accessed 24 March 2009]
- BAHÁ’Í TOPICS, 2009a. *Bahá’í Topics: An Information Resource of the Bahá’í International Community*. [online] Haifa: Bahá’í International Community. Available from: <http://info.bahai.org/> [Accessed 6 September 2009]
- BAHÁ’Í TOPICS, 2009b. Moral Development—Trustworthiness: A Cardinal Bahá’í Virtue. *Bahá’í Topics: An Information Resource of the Bahá’í International Community*. [online] Haifa: Bahá’í International Community. Available from: <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-8-2-2.html> [Accessed 16 September 2009]
- BAHÁ’Í TOPICS, 2009c. Social Action—Social and Economic Development. *Bahá’í Topics: An Information Resource of the Bahá’í International Community*. [online] Haifa: Bahá’í International Community. Available from: <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-8-0-1.html> [Accessed 16 September 2009]
- BAHÁ’U’LLÁH, 1946. *The Kitáb-i-Íqan: The Book of Certitude*. London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust.
- BAHÁ’U’LLÁH, 1976. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, 2nd ed. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust.
- BAHÁ’U’LLÁH, 1988b. *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust.
- BAHÁ’U’LLÁH, 1992. *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*. Haifa: The Universal House of Justice.
- BBC, 2009. *Religion and Ethics – Bahá’í*. [online] London: British Broadcasting Corporation. Available from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/bahai/> [Accessed 26 March 2009]

BIC, 2003. *For the Betterment of the World: the Worldwide Bahá'í Community's Approach to Social and Economic Development*. New York: Bahá'í International Community.

BIC, 2008. *The Bahá'í Question: Cultural Cleansing in Iran*. New York: Bahá'í International Community.

BWNS, 2009a. Human Rights in Iran and Egypt—Iran Update. *Bahá'í World News Service*. [online] Haifa: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://news.bahai.org/human-rights/iran/iran-update/> [Accessed 6 September 2009]

BWNS, 2009d. Media Information—Belief and Practice. *Bahá'í World News Service*. [online] Haifa: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://news.bahai.org/media-information/belief-and-practice/> [Accessed 6 September 2009]

BWNS, 2009e. Media Information—Brief History. *Bahá'í World News Service*. [online] Haifa: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://news.bahai.org/media-information/brief-history/> [Accessed 6 September 2009]

CAMERON, J. and T. DANESH, 2008. *A Revolution Without Rights? Women, Kurds and Bahá'ís Searching for Equality in Iran*. London: The Foreign Policy Centre.

CNN, 2009. *Lawyer: Iran Has No Evidence Against Baha'i Prisoners*. [online] Atlanta: Cable News Network. Available from: <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/08/16/iran.bahai.trial/index.html> [Accessed 3 October 2009]

CUTLIP, S. M. et al., 2006. *Effective Public Relations*, 9th ed. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education.

DOORLEY, J. and H. F. GARCIA, 2007. *Reputation Management: The Key to Successful Public Relations and Corporate Communication*. New York: Routledge.

EBADI, S., 2006. *Iran Awakening*. New York: Random House.

EFFENDI, S., 1933. The Bahá'í Faith—A Summary. From a letter to the High Commissioner for Palestine. In: S. Effendi, 1955. *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

EFFENDI, S., 1990. *The Advent of Divine Justice*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

ESSLEMONT, J. E., 1980. *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, 5th ed. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

GHANEA, N., 2002. *Human Rights, the UN, and the Bahá'ís in Iran*, pre-publication ed. Oxford: George Ronald/The Hague: Kluwer Law International.

HATCHER, J. S., 2007. *The Ascent of Society: The Social Imperative in Personal Salvation*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

HATCHER, W. S. and J. D. MARTIN, 2002. *The Bahá'í Faith: The Emerging Global Religion*. 4th ed. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

MOMEN, M., 1981. *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts*. Oxford: George Ronald.

MOMEN, M., 2008. *The Bahá'í Faith: A Beginner's Guide*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications.

NABÍL-I-A'ZAM, 1932. *The Dawnbreakers—Nabíl's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*. [online] Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. Available from: <http://bahai-library.com/books/dawnbreakers> [Accessed 31 August 2009]

SEN, A., 2009. *The Idea of Justice*. London: Allen Lane.

THOMSON, S. and S. JOHN, 2007. *Public Affairs in Practice: A Practical Guide to Lobbying*. London: Kogan Page.

UN, 2008. The United Nations Response [Summary of UN resolutions, reports and decisions relevant to the human rights situation of the Bahá'ís of Iran, every year from 1980 through 2007 except 2002]. In: BIC, 2008. *The Bahá'í Question: Cultural Cleansing in Iran*, Appendix II, pp. 64-73. New York: Bahá'í International Community.

UN, 2009a. *United Nations Human Rights*. [Index of resolutions adopted by the General Assembly from 1999 through 2008 regarding the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. [online] Geneva: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Available from: http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/sdpage_e.aspx?b=3&c=86&t=11 [Accessed 4 October 2009]

UN, 2009b. *Iran Fails to Halt UN Assembly Rights Resolution*. [online] Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/contact.html> [Accessed 4 October 2009]

UN, 2009c. *The Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Report of the Secretary General*. [online] New York: United Nations. Available from: <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/521/86/PDF/N0952186.pdf?OpenElement>

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, 1994. *Strategy on External Affairs*. Haifa: The Universal House of Justice.

WILKINSON, R. and K. PICKETT, 2009. *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*. London: Allen Lane.

2.0 Iran and Baha'i Public Affairs: A Case Study

2.1 A Crucial Test for International Law

Few contemporary human rights cases may have received such amount of official support from the United Nations and, indeed, been as extensively documented, as that of the Iranian Bahá'ís. Tragically, in spite of the substantial pressure that has been brought to bear, the human rights problems faced by Iran's minorities, most particularly the Bahá'ís, remain largely unsolved. On the other hand, indications are that international scrutiny and diplomatic pressure have had some effect on the intensity of the persecutions—which may justify the continued scrutiny and pressure in the hope of inducing the Iranian government to stop the ongoing persecution of its minorities and gradually achieve full compliance with international human rights.

The case is remarkable for several reasons. First, it is exceedingly difficult for anyone to succeed in raising an issue in the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (recently renamed the UN Human Rights Council), not to mention winning sufficient support from member states to see resolutions passed by the UN virtually every year for three decades (Ghanea, 2002; UN, 2008, 2009a). Second, the Islamic Republic of Iran has insisted on denying its largest religious minority basic human rights on the grounds that the Bahá'í Faith is not accepted as a religion in the Iranian Constitution (Ghanea, 2002)—notwithstanding that this may incur substantial costs for the Islamic Republic on behalf of its human rights record and, as a result, its diplomatic relations more generally, including any wider consequences in e.g. economic relations. Third, there seems to be a specific connection between the Hojjatieh Society—an organization closely linked to Iran's top political and clerical elite, openly dedicated to the goal of eliminating the Bahá'í community—and the revolution which saw the founding of the Islamic Republic and the drafting of a Constitution that was meticulously worded to ensure that the Bahá'ís would be given no civil rights (Sanasarian, 2000, 2008; Afshari, 2008; Ghanea, 2002; IHRDC, 2006; Cameron and Danesh, 2008).

Thus the items considered in this case study consist of a) the nature of religious persecution against the Bahá'ís in Iran including the historical background; b) the theological and sociopolitical factors that may have motivated the clergy to become the chief instigators of that persecution; c) the course of action taken by the Bahá'ís in response through external affairs efforts in the form of diplomatic relations and public information; and d) a brief discussion of possible future scenarios.

While the main focus will be on the period surrounding and subsequent to the 1979 Revolution, the earlier history i.e. from 1844 will likewise be taken into account to a certain extent for contextual reasons.

The case of the Iranian Bahá'ís has been called “probably ... the clearest case of religious persecution in the world today,” (Jones, 1984, p. 10) much because of the revolutionary steps taken against them, and because it “provides a particularly good test case for international human rights law owing to its clarity” (Ghanea, 2002, p. 10). The Bahá'ís do not make any demands of e.g. self-determination, they are obedient to the government as part of their religious beliefs, and do not use force nor take the law into their own hands. If the rights of a peaceful minority that poses no physical threat whatsoever, and has no political ambitions for e.g. territorial independence, cannot be protected by international law, then there are serious questions implied for other minorities as well. In other words, the case raises the specter of whether international human rights law, in its present institutional framework, is sufficiently effective in stopping if not rectifying the most obvious violations that can be presented.

However, what is investigated here is related to questions of public affairs—that is, how does the Bahá'í International Community as a non-governmental organization, representing a worldwide community of 5 to 6 million Bahá'ís, deal with the issue of the persecution of the Iranian believers? What may make the issue precarious is that it seems to force the Bahá'ís to engage at the political level, irrespective of the fact that nonpartisanship is one of the tenets of their faith.

2.2 Ongoing Persecution

Meanwhile, the sources of evidence gathered overwhelmingly support the fact that Iran, indeed, has been, and still is, in serious breach of international law as a signatory to the main human rights instruments i.e. the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ADL, 2006; Afshari, 2008; BIC, 2008; Ghanea, 2002; Human Rights Watch, 1997; MRG, 2009; UN, 2008; 2009a, 2009d; U.S. Department of State, 2009).

As research indicates, the Islamic Republic seems to have legal and social issues with the mere existence of religious minorities, which appear to present a challenge to “a society that is remarkably homogenous insofar as religion is concerned” (Ghanea, (2002, p. 10)—that is, homogenous according to the government’s own claims which state that 89 percent of the population are Shiites, 10 percent Sunnis, and the remaining 1 percent non-Muslims (Amor, 1996). So, for example, when the Islamic Republic’s representative reported to the UN in 1982 that the total population of its non-Muslim minority—other

than Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians—was only 59,585, it was clearly omitting reference to the Bahá'ís, whose total population in Iran has consistently been estimated between 300,000 and 350,000 (Ghanea, 2002).

At the UN, nonetheless, the Iranian government has stated repeatedly that all of Iran's religious minorities are fully protected under the Constitution of the Islamic Republic and afforded their human rights in accordance with international law. But the country's credibility is questioned as its representatives consistently deny the reality of the ill treatment of the Bahá'ís while time and again statements are offered that range from the inconsistent to the bizarre, undermining Iran's respectability and leverage in diplomatic circles (Ghanea, 2002).

As recently as in October 2009, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon expressed strong criticism of the Iranian human rights record, and voiced concerns about a number of issues including the use of excessive force to quench protests following the presidential election in June, harassment of women's rights activists, execution of juveniles, and continuing persecution of minorities including the Bahá'ís. In a report written specifically to address a request made by the UN General Assembly about human rights in Iran, the Secretary General referred to “negative developments” over the past year in terms of civil and political rights.

Since June 2008, there have been negative developments in the area of civil and political rights. (...) Members of various ethnic and minority groups faced harassment, violence and, in some cases, persecution. The independent media also experienced tightened restrictions, with publications suspended and websites blocked. The authorities also imposed restrictions on mobile telephone messaging and social networking websites, which became an important tool in opposition protests. (UN, 2009c, p. 6.)

OHCHR [Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights] continues to receive reports of human rights abuses against minorities in the Islamic Republic of Iran (...) including the Baha'i community, the Arab minority in Khuzestan, the Nematollahi Sufi Muslim community, the Kurdish community, the Sunni community, the Baluchi community and the Azeri-Turk community. (Ibid, p. 13.)

Reports continued to be received about members of the Baha'i community being subjected to arbitrary detention, confiscation of property and denial of employment, Government benefits and access to higher education. A number of communications have been sent by various Special Rapporteurs and the independent expert on minority issues to the Government regarding the

treatment of the Baha'i community. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights wrote on numerous occasions to express concern and seek clarification about the status of seven members of the Baha'i faith who had been detained for more than a year. (...) The seven have yet to be produced before a court and have been denied access to their lawyer. The High Commissioner and the Secretary-General remain concerned that the detention of those individuals may breach the obligations of the Islamic Republic of Iran under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, in particular freedom of religion and belief and freedom of expression and association. (Ibid, pp. 13-14.)

The persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran has been ongoing, with varying degrees of intensity, since the founding of the faith in the mid nineteenth century. The first and most violent phase of these persecutions was initiated in 1844 and lasted until a few years after the Báb's execution in 1850. When, in 1852, two Bábís, acting on their own in despair made an attempt on the Shah's life, they invited the unreserved retribution of the regime against the entire Bábi community and an unprecedented cycle of mob attacks and killings. This early period saw the most savage and horrifying forms of attacks with more than 20,000 believers put to death, often by angry mobs excited by the clergy's inflammatory rhetoric but also encouraged by active participation of the state ('Abdu'l-Bahá and Browne, 1891; Browne, 1918; Nabíl, 1932; Effendi, 1950; IHRDC, 2006; Momen, 1981).

2.3 Historical Background

Bahá'ís accept the claims of the Báb (1819-1850), a Persian whose name was Siyyid 'Alí Muhammad Shírázító, as both an independent prophet and the forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith. The Báb claimed to be the Qaim or Mahdi, the Messianic figure in Shiite Islam, and the religion he founded had its historical roots in Shaykhism, originally a Sufi school of Shiite Islam which became increasingly focused on the theme of the coming of the Mahdi. His writings provoked the clerical establishment of Persia to issue a death sentence even before the personal identity of the Báb was generally known (Rabbani, 2006, 2008).

Mírzá Husayn 'Alí, who took the title of Bahá'u'lláh, was born into a noble family in Tehran on 12 November 1817. In His mid-20s, He declined a life of privilege and became one of the leading disciples of the Báb. In the wake of the attempt on the Shah in 1852, he was arrested, beaten, and thrown into an

infamous dungeon in Tehran. After four months, he was released and banished from his native land, the beginning of 40 years of exile and imprisonment (Nabíl, 1932; Effendi, 1950; BBC, 2009).

Bahá'u'lláh was first sent to Baghdad, then part of Ottoman Turkey, where he and his companions stayed for 10 years. Here he took charge of guiding and revitalizing the dispersed and dispirited community of Bábís, the overwhelming majority of whom accepted his leadership. In 1863, on the eve of his departure to Constantinople (Istanbul), Bahá'u'lláh announced that he was indeed “He Whom God will make manifest” as foretold by the Báb. This announcement is now celebrated as the Ridvan Festival, the greatest religious festival in the Bahá'í Faith.

In spite of, or rather because of, Bahá'u'lláh's growing popularity in Bagdad, representatives of the Persian government, fearing his influence, succeeded in convincing the Ottomans to send him further away from the Persian border. As soon as he arrived in Constantinople, however, the Persians again took steps to have him moved further away, arguing that his presence in the capital of the Ottoman empire would be dangerous. Thus, he was hastily sent as a prisoner of the Ottomans to Adrianople (Edirne), where he stayed from 1863 to 1868, when—in result of a joint Persian and Ottoman plan to have him silenced forever without causing too much of an outcry by making him a martyr—he was finally sent to a remote and notorious penal colony of Ottoman Turkey: Acre, near Haifa in Palestine (now Israel), to remain a prisoner there for the rest of his life. Today, the Bahá'í World Centre is in Haifa, and the most holy places on earth for the Bahá'ís are the shrine of Bahá'u'lláh at Bahjí near Acre, and the shrine of the Báb on Mount Carmel, Haifa (Bahai.org, 2009a; BWNS, 2009e; BBC, 2009).

Of direct relevance to the question of religious persecution, Bahá'u'lláh in one of his major works, *Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude* (1946), explained the nature of such persecution as common to all religions: that the birth of a new faith has always been accompanied by fierce opposition from most of the clerical establishment (Bahá'u'lláh, 1946; Effendi, 1950).

Before he passed away in 1892, Bahá'u'lláh appointed his son ‘Abdu'l-Bahá as leader of the Bahá'í Faith and authorized interpreter of his writings—more than a hundred volumes of books, letters, epistles, and prayers. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá (1844-1921) later appointed his grandson, Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957) to succeed him. No successor was appointed by Shoghi Effendi and in 1963, after an interim period under the leadership of the appointed Hands of the Cause of God, the Universal House of Justice was elected for the first time, in accordance with the provisions laid out by Bahá'u'lláh. The Universal House of Justice is committed to e.g. “enact laws and ordinances not expressly recorded in the Sacred Texts; to abrogate, according to the changes and requirements of the time, its own enactments; to deliberate and decide upon all problems which have caused difference; to elucidate questions that are obscure; to safeguard the

personal rights, freedom and initiative of individuals; and to give attention to the preservation of human honour, to the development of countries and the stability of states” (Bahá’í Topics, 2009e).

2.4 Changing Patterns of Persecution

Serious upheavals took place into the early twentieth century, but overall the situation slightly improved as the state no longer supported the clergy with troops and often disapproved of the persecutions (Momen, 1981). On the other hand, the clergy continued to exercise a tremendous influence in Persian society and there is evidence to suggest that whenever they were well aligned with the political power, the persecutions increased (IHRDC, 2006). For some reason, the clerical establishment has an extremely hostile view of the Bahá’ís, possibly motivated by fears over losing their own, virtually absolute, religious authority and political power; but in spite of the Bahá’í tenet of lawfulness and obedience toward the government, in spite of the Bahá’í principle and practice of absolute nonpartisanship and political neutrality, and in spite of the fact that Bahá’ís are generally known as both friendly and trustworthy, they are viewed by the clerical establishment as a serious ideological threat, arguably because of their independence.

A certain pattern has continued from the early beginning to the present: clerical leaders spread defamatory and misleading information about the Bahá’ís on a regular basis, from the culprit as well as through the mass media, inciting people to fear and hatred against the Bahá’ís, who are reviled as traitors, spies, agents of colonial powers, or enemies of Iran. In result, violent attacks are frequently perpetrated against Bahá’ís and their families, their homes are vandalized, their possessions plundered, their means of livelihood destroyed, and their cemeteries desecrated (Sanasarian, 2000, 2008; Cameron and Danesh, 2008; BIC, 2008; Iran Press Watch 2009a, 2009b).

After the turn of the century, the persecution took on a somewhat less brutal character compared to earlier with less frequent killings, although cycles of deadly attacks would recur. After the 1953 overthrow of the Mossadegh government and the reinstatement of the Shah, the clergy seized the opportunity to reignite the somewhat dormant campaign against the Bahá’ís. Gaining the approval of the new government, which seemed eager to assert itself by appealing to nationalism and religious fanaticism, the clergy commenced a fresh round of attacks on the Bahá’ís and their institutions, culminating in the destruction of the Bahá’í National Center in 1955. A series of radical sermons were broadcast during the Ramadan, provoking mob violence against the Bahá’ís across the country (IHRDC, 2006, pp. 7-10). Spurred on by the widely publicized destruction of the National Bahá’í Center, aggressive mobs attacked Bahá’ís in the most brutal

manner, reminiscent of events that had occurred one century earlier. For example, in the village of Hurmuzdak in Yazd, a group of seven Bahá'ís, their age ranging from nineteen to eighty, were hacked to pieces by a large mob (Sears, 1982, p. 57).

A few months earlier, politicians had started holding inflammatory speeches on the subject of “the Bahá'í problem,” (IHRDC, 2006, p. 10) resulting in a so-called solution to the “problem” which was proposed in a bill to the Iranian parliament, declaring the Bahá'ís corrupt and illegal; banning membership and “any adherence to it in any way,” (ibid.) with perpetrators to receive sentences of 2 to 10 years in solitary confinement and deprivation of “all civil rights.” (ibid.) Likewise, properties, whether estate, land, or house, which are used for congregation and organization related to the Bahá'í Faith, “or revenue spent on issues related to this community” (ibid.) was simply to be transferred to the Ministry of Culture. As to Bahá'ís serving in government offices and related organizations, these should immediately be fired and not be entitled to have any other similar employment. While the proposed bill did not pass in its original form, the idea of confiscating all properties belonging to the Bahá'í community was put into practice at a later stage while banishing Bahá'ís from all public service employment was being implemented by 1991; nonetheless, it seems the urge to turn similar measures into legislation has continued as witnessed in radical proposals presented lately (BIC, 2008; Ghanea, 2009; ICI, 2009).

2.5 Mahdism and the Hojjatieh Society

The violence of 1955 eventually ebbed out however with the persecution continuing. Even though the clergy gradually lost much of its influence in the years that followed due to the Shah's efforts to modernize Iran, the seeds for the 1979 Revolution had been sown. The Hojjatieh Society, sometimes called the Anti-Bahá'í Society, had been formed by Sheikh Mahmoud Zikrziadih Tavalla'i, also known as Halabi, a clerical student. The society's principle aim was to combat the Bahá'í Faith and so it dedicated much time and energy to training cadres in “scientific defense” of Shiite Islam to meet the theological challenge posed by the Bahá'í Faith (IHRDC, 2006, p. 12).

[The Shah] not only tolerated the activities of [Hojjatieh founder] Sheikh Mahmud Halabi and his fellow anti-Baha'i clergymen, but allowed the clergy's fight against the Baha'is to be aired from the government-controlled media. In an unprecedented move in 1955, Tehran Radio broadcast a series of anti-Baha'i sermons by Mohammad Taqi Falsafi, Iran's leading preacher. (Moin, 1999, p. 66.)

The Hojjatieh received support from key religious leaders including Ayatollah Borujerdi, Hojatolislam Falsafi, Ayatollah Mara'shi Najafi, Ayatollah Milani, Seyyed Abdullah Shirazi, and Ayatollah Baha'eddin Mahallati. Other alleged members of the society, who rose to power with the 1979 Revolution, were today's Supreme Leader Seyyed Ali Khamenei, Ali Akbar Velayati, International Affairs advisor to the Supreme Leader, and Mohammad Ali Raja'i, the second President of the Islamic Republic. It appears to be an established fact that the Hojjatieh Society was influential in training the leaders of the revolution as well as in organizing the Islamic Republic (Afshari, 2008; Cameron and Danesh, 2008; IHRDC, 2006).

In the years that followed the Revolution, the Iranian media frequently published articles quoting leading clerics explicitly encouraging violence against the Baha'is. One of those clerics, Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, has been a prominent member of the religious establishment since the 1979 Revolution. It has also been maintained that "the existent hostility towards Baha'is was fuelled by the revolution and its ideological elements" (Sanasarian, 2008, p. 158), including Jannati, a close advisor to President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who is also believed to have been heavily influenced by the Hojjatieh Society (Ahdiyyih, 2008; Cameron and Danesh, 2008).

Prior to the Revolution, in other words, the Hojjatieh Society played a major role in radicalizing Ahmadinejad and other so-called secular Muslim students, youth, teachers, bureaucrats, and even members of the armed forces. However, the society went underground after a rift between its leadership and Ayatollah Khomeini, the Supreme Leader, who saw a potential rival in the organization and banned it to consolidate his own autocracy (Ahdiyyih, 2008).

Since Ahmadinejad's rise to power, the Hojjatieh has surfaced again, under the leadership of Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi, a senior cleric who seems to have significant influence over President Ahmadinejad, his government, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp, and the security forces. Noteworthy is likewise that Mesbah-Yazdi is known as a top proponent of Mahdism (Ahdiyyih, 2008), the widespread, literary belief among radical Shiites in the Mahdi, or the Hidden Imam, the Messianic figure of Shi'ah Islam—a belief that Ahmadinejad more than any other leader of the Islamic Republic has expressed his allegiance to.

Closely linked to the hardline ideology of Ayatollah Khomeini and his vision for the Islamic Republic and its supremacy, Mahdism seems to have no tolerance of non-conforming religious views. As to its mission of ridding the world of the Bahá'í Faith, the theological motivation might be explainable in that in the Bahá'í Faith, the Mahdi has already come—not as a physical resurrection of someone who died long time ago but rather as a spiritual fulfillment, as succession in the line of such prophets as Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, in the person of first the Báb, and then Bahá'u'lláh (see previous chapter on historical background).

Thus the very existence of the Bahá'í perspective on the Mahdi seems to be entirely intolerable to the proponents of Mahdism. Its truth would arguably render the whole ideological platform of Mahdism obsolete: not only does the Bahá'í Faith radically reinterpret the meaning of the Mahdi at the cost of political investments in Mahdism; by extension, the idea of the 'Islamic State' is seen as not suitable for this day and age.

2.6 The Revolution and the Bahá'í Response

The 1979 Revolution marked a new phase in the persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran. A wave of attacks had started already two years earlier, in tandem with the surge of the opposition movement, led by one of the anti-Bahá'í campaigners from the 1950s and 1960s, Ayatollah Khomeini. The Shah regime's authority had gradually been undermined by the clerics throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and although Khomeini was exiled in 1964, he was able to lead the opposition from abroad. Whereas the main theme was the toppling of the monarchy, the "Westoxication" of Iranian society figured as a major part of the rhetoric, pitting Western interests and values in general, including equality between the sexes and a modern lifestyle, against the religious and cultural heritage of the Iranian nation. Again, the Bahá'ís easily became scapegoats, as they were regarded as friendly toward the West and had long been labeled as heretics and agents of foreign powers. As Khomeini's audiotaped speeches were being circulated across Iran by 1977, the Shah's regime was beginning to lose its legitimacy, while Khomeini's supporters started to agitate increasingly against anyone perceived as promoting Western values and the Bahá'ís were seen as prime targets (IHRDC, 2006).

By September 1978, alarmed by developments in Iran, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the US sent a message to the Iranian Ambassador in Washington DC, expressing the concern of the American Bahá'ís while stressing the non-involvement of Bahá'ís in political affairs, stating they were relying on the justice and ability of the authorities in Iran to protect the lives, properties, and rights of the Bahá'ís there. Two months later, the Bahá'í International Community issued a statement to news media about the disturbances in Iran involving members of the Bahá'í community (BIC, 1986).

A long, coordinated outreach campaign directed by the BIC was thereby started and carried out in coordination with NSAs around the world. The ongoing effort would, already in the first four years, see some 100 national Bahá'í communities mobilized, pleading repeatedly to the Iranian leadership both in Iran and through their foreign representations, while reaching out to political leaders around the world, the media, human rights organizations, and people of prominence (BIC, 1986).

In 1980, the BIC succeeded in raising the issue of the Iranian Bahá'ís in the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, which led to the passing of a resolution by the UN, expressing concern about the tragic situation of the Bahá'í religious minority in Iran. This was the first of a long series of such resolutions, passed every year since 1980 except 2002. As pointed out by Stephen Karnik, Chief Administrative Officer, of the United Nations Office of the BIC, the rather vague tone of the 1980s has gradually been replaced by a more specific language—this in spite of ongoing efforts by the Iranian government to block the diplomatic efforts (Ghanea, 2002; UN, 2009b).

Concerning the various UN General Assembly resolutions regarding human rights in Iran, you are correct that almost uniformly the United Nations General Assembly has passed resolutions condemning human rights abuses in Iran, which specifically references in varying degrees and strength of language, the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran. Upon reviewing the language you will note, particularly in recent years, the strong and clear language calling for the full emancipation of the Bahá'í community and detailing key elements of what that would entail. In this context the Bahá'í International Community has played a key role supporting the incorporation of specific language and encouraging UN member states to support passage of various resolutions. We feel that it is imperative that the member states understand the nature, extent and context of the persecution of the Bahá'í community in Iran, including the moral and legal responsibility of states to uphold the spirit and letter of international human rights law, as well as understanding the concern of Bahá'í coreligionists globally and within their own respective citizenries.
(KARNIK, S., personal communication. 16 October 2009.)

Mr. Karnik's statement also echoes some of the concerns raised by human rights experts like Nazila Ghanea (2002) that, regardless of the gravity of the issue itself, the case of the Iranian Bahá'ís has far wider implication than it might suggest.

As to the question of how the BIC carries out its diplomatic efforts, there are obvious reasons for the BIC not to disclose too many details, given the precarious situation with Iran. An outline of the principles involved, however, is offered by Douglas Moore, Director of the BIC's Office of Public Information (August 1999 to June 2009).

Typically, when we think of the role of the BIC, we are concerned with the functioning of the representation of the interests of the [Bahá'í] Cause to the United Nations, governments, the

news media, and non-governmental organizations. Broadly, such work has focused on two strategic thrusts:

- Influencing the discourses of society in several areas;*
- The advancement of women, human rights, moral education, and global prosperity; and*
- Defending the rights of the Bahá'ís in countries where they are not free to practice their teachings and to live their lives unmolested.*

Such work takes the form of testifying before relevant bodies, such as the Human Rights Council; presenting white papers to United Nations agencies and governments; meetings with representatives of governments and parliamentarians; collaboration with like-minded organizations; interviews with news media; development and distribution of content—web sites, literature, backgrounders; and the ongoing development of relationships with key officials and journalists.

The Bahá'í writings state that trustworthiness is the foundation of the functioning and progress of society. Thus, the distribution of information, the testimony of Bahá'í representatives before United Nations committees or governments, their diplomatic work, the work of their representatives in media relations—in all their activities, publications and relations, trustworthiness takes a preeminent guiding and operative role.

For example, we can cite the information out of Iran, difficult to verify at best. The news media often will report on things which the Bahá'ís themselves are not able to verify, and the Bahá'ís therefore hold off on the reports, even when the reports are put forward by others. Thus, over the years, information from the Bahá'ís is treated by receiving agencies as the most reliable, trustworthy basis for statements or actions that they might then undertake on behalf of the Bahá'ís in that country. (MOORE, D., personal communication. 28 September 2009.)

The issues dealt with in connection with the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran have varied over the years. Except the violence and the killings which have taken place, there are a number of other issues that have arisen. Examples include the Constitution of the Islamic Republic and its deliberate exclusion of the Bahá'ís, as already discussed (Ghanea, 2002; Sanasarian, 2008)—notwithstanding the BIC's forceful pleas to the Iranian government and its diplomatic representatives. Other examples are the socioeconomic challenges arising from the confiscation by the Iranian government of Bahá'í assets, whether financial, business, land, real estate, or other; the refusal of the Iranian government to issue identity papers to Bahá'ís including expatriates, students and others situated abroad; and the expulsion of

the Bahá'ís from schools, universities, and public employment (Ghanea, 2002; Cameron and Danesh, 2008; BIC, 1986, 2008; BWNS, 2009a).

All of the above required strenuous efforts in extending aid to those whose means of livelihoods had been confiscated or destroyed as well as negotiating with governments around the world to help Bahá'ís whose identity papers were expiring (BIC, 1986).

Simply put, the defense work [e.g. regarding the Bahá'ís of Iran] is organized, implemented and calibrated as evolutionary, allowing for learning and course correction as it develops. Meetings of key representatives from the National Spiritual Assemblies with BIC representatives take place in late August of each year, as the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council cycles are renewed. There are other meetings that allow for review of—and a more specific drawing up of—strategic and tactical efforts. Out of these meetings, the initiatives to connect with key UN officials and government ministries are decided, as are the support materials and ongoing efforts to publicize the ill treatment of the Baha'is in Iran. All along, the work is constantly reviewed and encouraged by the Universal House of Justice. (MOORE, D., personal communication. 8 October 2009.)

The Universal House of Justice (1994) some fifteen years ago issued a paper to NSAs around the world, outlining basic requirements for sustainable public information and diplomatic relations. Although there has been talk of an updated policy paper, the content of the 1994 document is still used as a major guideline. The paper offers practical and spiritual recommendations with emphasis placed on e.g. ethical and professional behavior based on the Bahá'í teachings on honesty, trustworthiness, moderation, courtesy, and unity (Universal House of Justice, 1994).

2.7 Recent Developments and Perspectives

By December 1978, the situation in Iran had become alarming with hundreds of Bahá'í homes torched and thousands of Bahá'ís made homeless. Around the country, in over fifty cities, Bahá'ís reported incidents of arson, looting, mob attacks, forced recantations of faith, and suspicious deaths. The attacks on Bahá'ís seemed to escalate and the Army of the Shah's government not only turned a blind eye on

atrocities committed—most notably the virtually simultaneous torching of houses and buildings belonging to Bahá'ís—but apparently played a key part in encouraging arsonists and distributing names and addresses of Bahá'ís and their properties. The attacks continued without any intervention from law enforcement in spite of the state of martial law that had been announced (IHRDC, 2006).

With the Shah fleeing the country in January 1979, and his government capitulating less than two weeks later, the way been paved for the arrival of Ayatollah Khomeini and his Revolutionary Council. A new form of theocratic government was installed and consolidated, enabling the conservative clergy to wield unprecedented power, with the most prominent anti-Bahá'ís at center stage.

In February 1979, armed members of the Hojjatiyeh Society forced their way into the Bahá'í national headquarters in Tehran and other Bahá'í centers in provincial capitals, expelled the staff, seized all membership lists, personal files, and confidential documents, and took over the buildings. It turned out the stolen information would be used later to locate Bahá'ís, their institutions, and their assets.

It became clear that the government of the Islamic Republic intended to eliminate the Bahá'í community as a social entity. The strategy applied seemed to be to cripple the community by bereaving it of its leaders. In August 1980, the entire membership of the National Spiritual Assembly disappeared never to be seen again, with no information provided by the government, which at first said the persons were being held for interrogation but later said they knew nothing about their whereabouts. The Iranian Bahá'ís soon afterwards elected a new NSA to replace the nine who had been abducted and presumably killed. But eight of these nine members were arrested in December 1981 and summarily executed. The Bahá'ís again elected a new NSA but in 1983 the Islamic Republic outlawed all Bahá'í institutions, which led to the dissolution of the Iranian Bahá'í administration. Those who had served on the last Iranian NSA continued to experience harassment and persecution, and the majority of them were killed in 1984 and 1986, as were believers who had served on Local Spiritual Assemblies. In the early stages of the Islamic Republic, more than 200 Bahá'ís have been killed and 1,000 imprisoned, solely for their beliefs (IHRDC, 2006; Cameron and Danesh, 2008; BIC, 2008).

After having experienced the inconvenience of diplomatic pressures and decreasing international goodwill in result of bad publicity resulting from the efforts of the BIC, Iran—still refusing to change its goal of persecuting the Bahá'ís—changed tactics during the 1990s to avoid international scrutiny and began applying a more subtle plan by which to economically and socially suffocate its Bahá'í community (Ghanea, 2002; Iran Press Watch, 2009b). Likewise, under the Khatami presidency, from 1997 to 2005, a more moderate tone was adopted by Iranian diplomats and the country's image seemed to improve. Yet the so-called reform movement was a disappointment to those who initially supported it (Ebadi, 2006).

Those who were more cautious of the Iranian government's intentions were affirmed in 1993, when a secret memorandum concerning "the Bahá'í Question"—also known as the 1991 directive—was leaked from the Iranian government and came to the attention of the UN (Ghanea, 2002; Cameron and Danesh, 2008; BIC 2008, pp. 22-2g3). This "most significant and damning indicator of governmental policy on the Bahá'ís" (Ghanea, 2002, p. 69) demonstrated that the persecution of the Bahá'ís was being systematically implemented in "an official policy of persecution" (Human Rights Watch, 1997).

With the express aim to deal with the Bahá'ís in such a way "that their progress and development will be blocked"; whereas they can be allowed to earn a "modest livelihood," the state should "deny them employment if they identify themselves as Bahá'ís," and generally, the policy should be to "deny them any position of influence such as in the educational sector etc." Moreover, "they must be expelled from universities" while the children "should be enrolled in schools which have a strong and imposing religious ideology" (Cameron and Danesh, 2008, p. 28; BIC, 2008, pp. 22-23). Accordingly, the Iranian government is not content with destroying its own largest religious minority at home but appears keen to deal with 'The Bahá'í Question' abroad as well—or, as the memorandum states: "A plan must be devised to confront and destroy their cultural roots outside the country" (BIC, 2008, p. 23).

In fact, according to UN observers, the human rights situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran has been deteriorating since the beginning of the Ahmadinejad presidency, as manifested in a sharply growing number of attacks on Bahá'ís and arbitrary arrests, including the arrest of the informal seven-member Yaran ("Friends"), who have been overseeing the affairs of the national Bahá'í community of Iran (Goodstein, 2006; BIC, 2008; BWNS, 2009a; UN, 2009c).

Of particular concern to human rights observers has been the ongoing introduction of legislation and directives expressive of an escalating intolerance toward minorities. Examples of such policies include a recent proposal to make the death sentence mandatory for apostasy (ICI, 2009), and an announcement by Iran's Prosecutor General, Ayatollah Qorban-Ali Dorri-Najafabadi, declaring "that the very expression of affiliation to the Bahá'í faith is illegal" (Ghanea, 2009). In March 2006, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief, Asma Jahangir, revealed a letter that had been issued to police and a number of other agencies in Iran with instructions to meticulously "identify" and "monitor" the movement of all Bahá'ís around the country. The "highly confidential" letter, dated 29 October 2005, was made public by Amnesty International on 24 July 2006, and was "reminiscent of the steps taken against Jews in Europe and a dangerous step toward the institutions of Nuremberg-type laws" (ADL, 2006; Amnesty International, 2006; BIC, 2008, pp. 10-11).

The public affairs activities of the BIC and national Bahá'í communities, including that of the UK, have lately focused on the fate of the imprisoned seven Bahá'í leaders in Iran. This case has won substantial

publicity as well as statements of support from government officials, human rights organizations, and people of prominence (BWNS, 2009g, 2009h; Bahá'í News UK, 2009; CNN, 2009; Blair, 2009; USCIRF, 2009).

In the UK, for example, a delegation of Bahá'ís met with Prime Minister Gordon Brown on 15 July 2009, a historic meeting during which Mr. Brown underlined his concern for Iran's Bahá'ís—"the first ever meeting between a UK Prime Minister and representatives of the Bahá'í community" (Bahá'í News UK, 2009).

With the underlying fear being that the government of Iran is capable of doing the worst thinkable against the Iranian Bahá'ís, diplomatic pressure and widespread publicity are seen as instruments that can be critical in saving human lives as well as possibly, in the long run, aid processes of improvement in Iran. The fact that the trial of the seven prisoners has been delayed several times may indicate that the efforts could be making a difference.

As to the viability and ultimate future of the Islamic Republic, the evidence seems to suggest that it is faced with a serious challenge with the specter of radical change not distant—despite, or perhaps because of, the regimes' problems with alternative views and minorities (Brookings, 2009; Ebadi, 2006; Menashri, 2009; UN, 2009c). Meanwhile, the danger for the Bahá'í community of Iran may likewise be linked to time: the more time that passes under the current situation, the more the Islamic Republic could theoretically become able to realize its goal of eliminating it as a social entity; that may, however, be highly questionable considering the proven resilience of the Bahá'ís and the BICs powerful position within the UN system and more generally in public affairs (Bahá'í Topics, 2009f; BWNS, 2009g).

2.8 References

- ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ and E. G. BROWNE, 1891. *A Traveller’s Narrative—Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Báb*. Amsterdam: Philo Press.
- ADL, 2006. *ADL Says Iranian Attempt to Monitor Bahais Sets ‘Dangerous Precedent’*. [online] New York: The Anti-Defamation League. Available from: <http://www.adl.org/NR/exeres/6D76431B-A665-4CE0-9AF7-4CF07D733D31.htm> [Accessed 4 October 2009]
- AFSHARI, R., 2008. The Discourse and Practice of Human Rights Violations of Iranian Baha’is in the Islamic Republic of Iran. In: D. P. Brookshaw and S. B. Fazel, eds. *The Baha’is of Iran: Socio-Historical Studies*. London: Routledge.
- AHDIYYIH, M., 2008. Ahmadinejad and the Mahdi. *The Middle East Quarterly*, Fall 2008, XV (4), pp. 27-36. [online] Available from: <http://www.meforum.org/1985/ahmadinejad-and-the-mahdi> [Accessed 8 October 2009]
- AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, 2006. *Iran: Amnesty International seeking clarification of official letter about Baha’i minority*. [online] London: Amnesty International. Available from: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE13/082/2006/en> [Accessed 18 September 2009]
- AMOR, A., 1996. From the report of Mr. Abdelfattah Amor, Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance, on his visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran in December 1995. Cited in: N. Ghanea, 2002. *Human Rights, the UN, and the Bahá’is in Iran*, pre-publication ed. Oxford: George Ronald/The Hague: Kluwer Law International.
- BAHAI.ORG, 2009a. *The Bahá’is*. [online] Haifa: Bahá’í International Community. Available from: <http://www.bahai.org> [Accessed 24 March 2009]
- BAHÁ’Í NEWS UK, 2009. *PM underlines concern for Iran’s Bahá’is at historic meeting with Bahá’i delegation*. [online] London: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’is of the United Kingdom. Available from: <http://bahainews-uk.info/2009/07/15/pm-underlines-concern-for-iran%E2%80%99s-bahais-at-historic-meeting-with-bahai-delegation/> [Accessed 1 October 2009]
- BAHÁ’Í TOPICS, 2009e. Central Figures & Institutions—The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice. *Bahá’í Topics: An Information Resource of the Bahá’í International Community*. [online] Haifa: Bahá’í International Community. Available from: <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-3-6-1.html> [Accessed 19 September 2009]
- BAHÁ’U’LLÁH, 1946. *The Kitáb-i-Íqan: The Book of Certitude*. London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust.
- BBC, 2009. *Religion and Ethics—Bahá’i*. [online] London: British Broadcasting Corporation. Available from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/bahai/> [Accessed 26 March 2009]
- BIC, 1986. *The Bahá’i World 1979-1993*, Vol. XVIII. Haifa: World Centre Publications.

- BIC, 2008. *The Bahá'í Question: Cultural Cleansing in Iran*. New York: Bahá'í International Community.
- BLAIR, C., 2009. It is not just democracy that is illegal in Iran. *The Times*, 9 July 2009. [online] London: News International. Available from: http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest_contributors/article6669920.ece [Accessed 18 September 2009]
- BROOKINGS, 2009. *After the Iranian Uprising*. [online] Washington DC: The Brookings Institution. Available from: http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/0629_iran_salehi_isfahani.aspx [Accessed 12 October 2009]
- BROWNE, E. G., ed., 1918. *Materials for the Study of the Bábí Religion—Compiled by Edward G. Brown*. Cambridge: At the University Press.
- BWNS, 2009a. Human Rights in Iran and Egypt—Iran Update. *Bahá'í World News Service*. [online] Haifa: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://news.bahai.org/human-rights/iran/iran-update/> [Accessed 6 September 2009]
- BWNS, 2009c. Media Information—Statistics. *Bahá'í World News Service*. [online] Haifa: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://news.bahai.org/media-information/statistics/> [Accessed 6 September 2009]
- BWNS, 2009e. Media Information—Brief History. *Bahá'í World News Service*. [online] Haifa: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://news.bahai.org/media-information/brief-history/> [Accessed 6 September 2009]
- BWNS, 2009g. Human Rights in Iran and Egypt: Iran Update—Responses from governments, NGOs, and prominent individuals. *Bahá'í World News Service*. [online] Haifa: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://news.bahai.org/human-rights/iran/iran-update/international-reaction.html> [Accessed 6 September 2009]
- BWNS, 2009h. Prominent Iranians Call for Religious Liberty. *Bahá'í World News Service*. [online] Haifa: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://news.bahai.org/story/731> [Accessed 6 September 2009]
- CAMERON, J. and T. DANESH, 2008. *A Revolution Without Rights? Women, Kurds and Bahá'is Searching for Equality in Iran*. London: The Foreign Policy Centre.
- CNN, 2009. *Lawyer: Iran Has No Evidence Against Baha'i Prisoners*. [online] Atlanta: Cable News Network. Available from: <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/08/16/iran.bahai.trial/index.html> [Accessed 3 October 2009]
- EBADI, S., 2006. *Iran Awakening*. New York: Random House.
- EFFENDI, S., 1950. *God Passes By*. 3rd ed. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- GHANEA, N., 2002. *Human Rights, the UN, and the Bahá'is in Iran*, pre-publication ed. Oxford: George Ronald/The Hague: Kluwer Law International.

- GHANEA, N., 2009. Iran's Persecution of Bahá'is Is Devastating. *Telegraph.co.uk*, 12 March 2009. [online] London: Telegraph Media Group. Available from: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/4979875/Irans-persecution-of-Bahais-devastating.html> [Accessed 8 October 2009]
- GOODSTEIN, L. 2006. Iran's Bahai Religious Minority Says It Faces Raids and Arrests. *The New York Times*, 1 June 2006. [online] New York: The New York Times Company. Available from: http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/01/world/middleeast/01bahai.html?_r=1 [Accessed 18 September 2009]
- HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 1997. *Iran: Religious and Ethnic Minorities: Discrimination in Law and Practice*. [online] Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/publisher,HRW,,IRN,3ae6a8240,0.html> [Accessed 4 October 2009]
- ICI, 2009. *Iranian Death Penalty Legislation for Apostasy*. [online] Colorado Springs: Iranian Christians International. Available from: <http://www.iranchristians.org/conference.shtml> [Accessed 8 October 2009]
- IHRDC, 2006. *A Faith Denied: The Persecution of the Bahá'is of Iran*. [online] New Haven: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. Available from: http://iranhrdc.org/httpdocs/English/pdfs/Reports/A-Faith-Denied_Dec06.pdf [Accessed 30 September 2009]
- IRAN PRESS WATCH, 2009a. *Timeline*. [online] Available from: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/timeline> [Accessed 8 October 2009]
- IRAN PRESS WATCH, 2009b. *Economic Strangulation of the Baha'i Community*. [online] Available from: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/1578> [Accessed 4 October 2009]
- JONES, A. K. (US COMMITTEE FOR REFUGEES), 1984. Quoted in N. Ghanea, 2002. *Human Rights, the UN, and the Bahá'is in Iran*, pre-publication ed. Oxford: George Ronald/The Hague: Kluwer Law International.
- MENASHRI, D., 2009. *Contest for the New Iran: Nothing Is the Same Since the Hot Summer of 2009*. [online] Berlin: German Council of Foreign Relations (DGAP). Available from: <http://www.ip-global.org/archiv/exclusive/view/1253533196.html> [Accessed 10 October 2009]
- MOIN, B., 2000. *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books.
- MOMEN, M., 1981. *The Bábi and Bahá'í Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts*. Oxford: George Ronald.
- MRG, 2009. *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples—Iran: Bahá'is*. [online] London: Minority Rights Group International. Available from: <http://www.minorityrights.org/5107/iran/bahs.html> [Accessed 10 October 2009]

NABÍL-I-A'ZAM, 1932. *The Dawnbreakers—Nabíl's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*. [online] Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. Available from: <http://bahai-library.com/books/dawnbreakers> [Accessed 31 August 2009]

RABBANI, A., 2006. *Messianic Expectations in Nineteenth Century Christian and Islamic Communities*. [online] Available from: <http://ahang.rabbani.googlepages.com/MessianicExpectationspartiallistAustinFeb2006.ppt> [Accessed 5 September 2009]

RABBANI, A., 2008. *The Claims of the Báb*. [online] Available from: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/04/the-claims-of-the-bab-12.pdf> [Accessed 5 September 2009]

SANASARIAN, E., 2000. *Religious Minorities in Iran*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

SANASARIAN, E., 2008. The Comparative Dimension of the Baha'i Case and Prospects for Change in the Future. In: D. P. Brookshaw and S. B. Fazel, eds. *The Baha'is of Iran: Socio-Historical Studies*. London: Routledge.

SEARS, W., 1982. *A Cry from the Heart: The Bahá'ís in Iran*. Oxford: George Ronald.

UN, 2008. The United Nations Response [Summary of UN resolutions, reports and decisions relevant to the human rights situation of the Bahá'ís of Iran, every year from 1980 through 2007 except 2002]. In: BIC, 2008. *The Bahá'í Question: Cultural Cleansing in Iran*, Appendix II, pp. 64-73. New York: Bahá'í International Community.

UN, 2009a. *United Nations Human Rights*. [Index of resolutions adopted by the General Assembly from 1999 through 2008 regarding the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. [online] Geneva: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Available from: http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/sdpage_e.aspx?b=3&c=86&t=11 [Accessed 4 October 2009]

UN, 2009b. *Iran Fails to Halt UN Assembly Rights Resolution*. [online] Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/contact.html> [Accessed 4 October 2009]

UN, 2009c. *The Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Report of the Secretary General*. [online] New York: United Nations. Available from: <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/521/86/PDF/N0952186.pdf?OpenElement>

UN, 2009d. *United Nations Treaties Collection*. [online] New York: United Nations. Available from: http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-4&chapter=4&lang=en [Accessed 10 October 2009]

UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE, 1994. *Strategy on External Affairs*. Haifa: The Universal House of Justice.

USCIRF, 2009. Roxana Saberi and USCIRF Call for Release of Iranian Baha'is. *The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom*, 9 July 2009. [online] Washington: The U.S. Commission on International

Religious Freedom (USCIRF). Available from: http://www.uscirtf.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2587&Itemid=1 [Accessed 18 September 2009]

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, 2009. 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices—2008 Human Rights Report: Iran. *Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor*, 25 February 2009. [online] Washington DC: The U.S. Department of State. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/nea/119115.htm> [Accessed 18 September 2009]

3.0 Key Connections

3.1 Interrelated Ideas

One of the problems identified during the preparation of this dissertation has to do with the all-encompassing spectrum of subjects which surface by the analysis of the highly interrelated ideas mentioned earlier, such as ethics, dialogue, trust, and so forth. Looking at ethics and professionalism, for example, can hardly be done in isolation. Such a discussion entails a review of both moral and dialogic considerations, and such considerations also include the issues of trust and credibility. This leads naturally and unavoidably to questions related to justice, democracy, and community—especially when considering the heavy emphasis placed by the Bahá'í Faith on social and moral development.

The first chapter of this section considers how the Bahá'í Faith explains the relationship between *human nature* and *spirituality*, including the question of good and evil. This is followed by a chapter on the related subject of *ethics and professionalism*. Here, a growing body of literature—including widely adopted guidelines and codes on ethical and professional conduct—accentuates a serious gap between good intentions and shortcomings in practice (ALL, 2009; Global Alliance, 2003; ICCO, 2003; Woodstock Theological Center, 2002). More fundamentally, the reciprocal principle, or the golden rule, is seen as a cross-cultural commonality that presents an element of what could be the basis of a global ethic—an idea that resonates with central Bahá'í teachings.

The idea of *dialogue* as put forward by Jürgen Habermas (1990; 1996) has been explicitly linked to public relations by Ron Pearson (1989), who placed it in a context of ethics and rhetoric while applying epistemological and historical perspectives. Other authorities on public relations, notably James E. Grunig (1984, 2006) and Scott M. Cutlip (2006) have made the argument that the most effective ways of practicing public relations, including government relations, involve a high degree of so-called dialogic communication. In essence, this is much about open, two-way communication as opposed to one-way messaging; that the voice of all participants be equally heard and all arguments treated fairly and without prejudice.

There are obvious overlaps between the idea of dialogue and the Bahá'í concept of *consultation*, a decision-making method that utilizes a principle of non-adversarial deliberations. Advocated by Bahá'ís and used by their institutions at all levels—as well as more generally by e.g. committees, families, and informal groups, (Hatcher, 2007) “consultation seeks to build consensus in a manner that unites various constituencies instead of dividing them. It encourages diversity of opinion and acts to control the struggle

for power that is otherwise so common in traditional decision-making systems” (Bahá’í Topics, 2009d). Questions may remain, however, as to the real-life compatibility between the idea of dialogue and the concept of consultation, inasmuch as some tend to see dialogue as a purpose in itself whereas others see it chiefly as a tool for action.

Noteworthy here is Michael Karlberg’s discussion on the question of adversarialism and how the Bahá’í doctrine of unity fundamentally challenges its paradigmatic basis (2004) by promoting the principles of *mutualism*. Crucial for the analysis of Bahá’í public affairs, a number of underlying structures are highlighted, including how interest representation in the broadest sense is arguably practiced in most societies—whether in politics, law, economics, or science.

One may argue that *trust* is clearly relevant to key aspects of ethics and professionalism in addition to largely defining long-term success in government affairs, as well as in any area of business or life. Accordingly, few may dispute the assertion that a sustained climate of trust must depend on *trustworthiness*, “a cardinal Bahá’í virtue” (Bahá’í Topics, 2009b). Linked by the Bahá’í International Community to moral development, the idea of trust and credibility is given special significance and is considered to play a highly important role in Bahá’í public affairs.

As an example of the business literature on trust, Stephen M. R. Covey (2006) develops a detailed conceptual overview of the “hidden variable” (pp. 19-21). According to the relative level of trust enjoyed by the organization, this hidden variable will inevitably translate into either ‘trust dividends’ or ‘trust taxes’. There seems to be little doubt that trust and credibility are seen as serious issues for societies, organizations and individuals. The public relations and public affairs industry, for example, functions largely to build trust through the use of tools such as reputation management and lobbying. On the other hand, a linkage between trust and moral development or capacity is not always clearly stated in the literature.

Beyond what can be related to the business of trust-building, Francis Fukuyama’s detailed analysis of the significance of trust features cultural, historical, socioeconomic, and political dimensions that vastly enlarge the scope of this subject (1995). Recognizing religion as one important agent for building trust in society, Fukuyama offers a framework that may serve to consolidate the connection that the Bahá’ís seek to establish between trust and religion.

Highly relevant to the subject of trust, with alarming note of the decomposition of traditional structures in societies, complementary observations of Robert D. Putnam (2000, 2002, 2003) and David Halpern (2005) bring up the aspects of *social capital*. The relationship between psycho-social health and socioeconomic *equality* is taken into account by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (2009). All these are concepts that resonate with Bahá’í tenets like the oneness of humanity, universal education, the

abolishment of extremes of poverty and wealth, empowerment of women, moral development, the protection of human rights, and global prosperity (BIC, 1995; BIC, 2003; Bahai.org, 2009a; Bahá'í Topics, 2009c; BWNS, 2009d).

Much of the above is related to the idea of *justice*, which, in Amartya Sen's analysis (2009), should be considered one of the essential pillars of democracy and human decency (see subsequent chapter on the Bahá'í approach to democracy). However, institutional justice should generally not be executed under the illusion that a perfectly just society is possible; rather, Sen argues, its main purpose should be to reduce realistically adjustable inequities. With some of Sen's nonwestern perspectives, a more holistic and pragmatic ideal of justice is presented—here, for example, several mutually contradictory solutions to a given problem are theoretically possible, abandoning the absolutist view that there can only be one just solution to any legal problem.

In the general sense of the word, justice has a prominent place in numerous belief systems and the Bahá'í Faith is no exception to the rule, making it a major idea in both spiritual and social teachings (Bahai.org, 2009b). It follows that for an assessment of how Bahá'í institutions are expected to conduct their affairs whether internally or externally, some apprehension of the nature and purpose of justice is essential.

Finally in this section, the Bahá'í approach to the idea of democracy is outlined, an approach that is closely interconnected with the principles of consultation, mutualism, and dignity.

3.2 Spirituality and Human Nature

Anthropologists Signe Howell and Roy Willis (1989) note that in Western societies human nature is much associated with aggression, suggesting that the establishment of this assumption owes much to biased scientists influencing the general populace toward such views, as well as to other influences, notably from the idea of sinfulness.

But perhaps this tells us more about western society than about human nature. We wish to suggest that we cannot assume an a priori aggressive drive in humans. The presence of innate sociality, on the other hand, has much evidence in its favour. Humans are a priori sociable beings; it is their cooperativeness that has enabled them to survive, not their aggressive impulses. (Howell and Willis, 1989, p. 2.)

The belief in the innate good of man is embedded in the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith. With the exception of small children, this should not, on the other hand, be confused with belief in the good of a 'natural' as opposed to a 'cultivated' state of being; quite the contrary, the writings make clear that education is key and that man has the potential for both good and evil. Evil, however, is not believed to have any existence as such and is rather seen as the lack of good, much in a similar way as darkness does not constitute any existence in itself other than a reflection of the lack of light ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982a, 1990).

The Bahá'í Faith does not support the idea that the physical needs and desires of humans should be seen as something evil or blameworthy—rather, the creation is good as it is. The problems in this area have to do with inordinate and uncontrolled desires through lack of spiritual discipline. The purpose of the human body and its physical faculties is “to serve as a proper vehicle for the development of the soul,” and bringing the body gradually “under the conscious control of the soul” turns these faculties into “instruments for the expression of spiritual qualities,” whereas “undisciplined physical passions become causes of harm, and hinder spiritual progress.” (Bahá'í Topics, 2009a)

Thus, neither the utilitarian view that humans are essentially driven by animalistic and selfish motives nor the deterministic view of 'original sin,' i.e. that humanity is somehow flawed, are accepted in the Bahá'í teachings. Instead, the nature of man is explained as a twofold combination: spirit, also known as rational soul, living in the body of what is biologically an animal. With endless possibilities of conditioning, this translates into an extremely high degree of flexibility or, in other words: man is essentially capable of developing into anything ranging from the most angelic and virtuous characteristics to the most vile and savage creature.

The complex dynamics of human development in this respect has arguably always been a source of mystery and fascination for thinkers and artists and may well remain so. The simple version, however, from a Bahá'í perspective, is that humanity needs guidance and training—without it the baser, animalistic inclinations will become dominant at the expense of the human qualities of the mind and spirit. This was often compared by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the world of gardening—without cultivation, weeds and thorns will thrive at the expense of beautiful flowers and fruitful trees (1982c).

Indeed, Bahá'u'lláh referred to man as essentially “rich” and “noble” (1998, p. 7) and likewise stressed the importance of education with a reference to the nature of man and the powers inherently possessed by humans.

Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom. (Bahá'u'lláh, 1976, p. 260.)

Clearly, the subject of the nature of man ties into the question of good and evil. Whereas it can be argued that the Bahá'í writings pay all respect to the implications of the theme of good and evil, there is clearly also a holistic perspective which grounds such terms in relativity. That is to say, good and evil can be valid considerations or practical ways of making moral judgment, but can nonetheless also be seen as cultural phenomena in the sense that they seem to be applied to a large extent in some traditions while much less in others. In other words, while the nature of man is compared to the world of gardening, in need of cultivation for good results to be achieved, there is essentially only good—evil has no existence in itself ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982c, 1990).

In creation there is no evil, all is good. Certain qualities and natures innate in some men and apparently blameworthy are not so in reality. For example, from the beginning of his life you can see in a nursing child the signs of greed, of anger, and of temper. Then, it may be said, good and evil are innate in the reality of man, and this is contrary to the pure goodness of nature and creation. The answer to this is that greed, which is to ask for something more, is a praiseworthy quality provided that it is used suitably. So, if a man is greedy to acquire science and knowledge, or to become compassionate, generous, and just, it is most praiseworthy. If he exercises his anger and wrath against the bloodthirsty tyrants who are like ferocious beasts, it is very praiseworthy; but if he does not use these qualities in a right way, they are blameworthy.... It is the same with all the natural qualities of man, which constitute the capital of life; if they be used and displayed in an unlawful way, they become blameworthy. Therefore, it is clear that creation is purely good. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990, p. 215.)

The gardens bring forth fruits and flowers in proportion to the care and tillage bestowed upon them by the gardener. Therefore, it is not intended that the world of humanity should be left to its natural state. It is in need of the education divinely provided for it. (...) There is no lower degree nor greater debasement for man than this natural condition of animalism. The battlefield is the acme of human degradation, the cause of the wrath of God, the destruction of the divine foundation of man. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982c, p. 353.)

3.3 *Ethics and Professionalism*

Ethics and professionalism seems to be something that commands attention and spurs debate mostly in connection with indications of deplorable conditions in terms of standards. As evidenced by public scandals too numerous to recount here, problems related to ethical and professional shortcomings have been widely broadcast during the past decade. Whether involving leaders of business or government, occasions for condemnation have featured, for example, corporate fraud, inappropriate executive pay, excessive bankers' bonuses, and MPs questionable expenses claims.

Highlighted in e.g. information issued by the UN (2000), the issue of ethics and professionalism in the public service is widely recognized. All of the above, however, has clearly raised the issue in business, politics and beyond, sometimes in the guise of e.g. corporate social responsibility, crisis communication, and reputation management (Regeer and Larkin, 2008; Doorley and Garcia, 2007). Stuart Thomson and Steve John (2007) stress the importance of maintaining a good reputation and strong media relations as well as briefing government officials early for achieving results in public affairs.

As Paul Argenti (2003) points out, the public's trust in big corporations, banks, and governments has diminished because of such scandals and negative coverage in the media, paving the way for increased political intervention.

Anti-corporate campaigns range from boycotts and demonstrations to support of legislation to restrict corporate influence on Capitol Hill. When Congress responded to scandals at Enron, Tyco, and WorldCom in 2002 with a wave of reform aimed at curbing corporate misdeeds and enforcing tougher standards on transparency of reporting, the government appeared to take the protestors' side. (Argenti, 2003, p. 168.)

In such an environment, ethics and professionalism become crucially important for organizations, as reflected in e.g. education efforts in lobbying ethics and the formulation of ethical guidelines for the public relations and lobbying industries (ALL, 2009; Global Alliance, 2003; ICCO, 2003; Woodstock Theological Center, 2002).

While such documents as the *Global Protocol on Ethics in Public Relations* (Global Alliance, 2003) and the *Stockholm Charter* (ICCO, 2003) may offer useful frameworks for industrywide promotion of ethical standards and best practices, much more is arguably needed to achieve such goals as can truly transform organizations and their public image. An assessment of the current state of affairs in this regard might be

relevant for this discussion, as would the question of whether indeed such declarations and protocols are proving effective in the efforts to secure sound ethical standards; both fall, however, beyond the scope of this project.

Some would argue that, fundamentally, the problem of how to secure good ethical and professional standards in public affairs lies beyond the realm of the profession itself; in other words, it points to the absence of a more comprehensive and universally accepted standard of ethics. Complications in this perspective are seen to consist largely of the cultural diversity of an increasingly interconnected world; yet addressing this particular challenge has become a major theme of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century as witnessed by a host of programs and activities associated with supranational bodies, government agencies at various levels, and charities from around the world, as well as corporations and non-governmental organizations. The rise of such institutions and movements in itself suggests strongly that there are ongoing processes which seem to promote such ends as are compatible with the purpose of raising and safeguarding ethical and professional standards. Examples include the fight against corruption; against the abuse of women; against child labor; against torture and mistreatment of prisoners; for justice; for democracy; for equal opportunities; for education.

The very articulation and adoption of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* by the United Nations General Assembly shortly after the end of World War II remains a powerful signifier of these processes. Forty-four years later, a *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic* was signed by representatives of the world's religions at a historic gathering in Chicago. That declaration affirmed the astounding commonality across the spectrum of the world's cultural traditions in the *reciprocal principle*—also known as the *golden rule* of treating others as one would like to be treated oneself (Küng and Kuschel, 1993). Clearly alluded to likewise in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948), the reciprocal principle could be viewed as one of the essential elements of a universal ethic.

Although the validity of the reciprocal principle has been questioned on the basis of a difficulty, or even impossibility, for anyone to know how another person would prefer to be treated, it appears to have a universal appeal. Indeed, one may argue that the issue of not knowing exactly the likes and dislikes of someone else has some justification to it; on the other hand, such an argument could also be seen as a rhetorical device that misses the point or *spirit* of the reciprocal principle.

Formulating guidelines and codes of ethical and professional conduct—and promoting effective implementation of such recommendations and codes of conduct—may well result in at least incremental progress. The question remains, however, whether and how a fuller appreciation of the content of such texts can be effectively disseminated by industry associations or, on a more sociocultural level, through other means.

While the principle of reciprocity seems to be embedded in most systematic approaches to managing ethical and professional conduct, the question lingers whether any other universal principle could be added with success to help build a more convincing case.

Again here the Bahá'í contribution towards an ethical framework could be worth noting, as it seems to lend a fresh impulse by reiterating some of the classic virtues known from older religions while at the same time addressing modern issues in no uncertain language. The principle of reciprocity has a prominent place and is reinforced by the main doctrine of unity (Bahá'u'lláh, 1946, 1976; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982a; Effendi, 1933; Bahai.org, 2009a; Bahá'í Topics, 2009a; Esslemont, 1980; Bowers, 2002; Hatcher and Martin, 2004; Momen, 2008). As this is at the very heart of Bahá'í philosophy, there are numerous emphatic references—both in the authoritative writings and in other literature—to elements and factors seen to unite the various religions. One recent example of such literature dedicated specifically to this theme is Brian D. Lepard's *Hope for a Global Ethic: Shared Principles in Religious Scriptures* (2005), where important teachings of Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá'í Faith—notably the golden rule—are compared to establish common ground. Furthermore, linking globalization with ethics, the BIC issued a statement titled *World Citizenship: A Global Ethic for Sustainable Development* (1993).

As to ethics and professionalism, the Bahá'í teaching are unequivocal on a number of points that together seem to constitute a coherent whole: every person has a moral obligation to behave responsibly in all circumstances and according to the highest ethical standards, i.e., for example, be trustworthy, honest, helpful, and courteous. Work carried out in a spirit of service to humanity is elevated to the status of worship and thereby integral to the purpose of life; engagement in professions, sciences, arts, crafts, and trades is encouraged, whereas “idleness and sloth” is discouraged with non-engagement in work, not to mention begging, strictly prohibited (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992, 1988b; 1998; Effendi, 1933, Bahá'í Library Online, 1990).

Waste not your time in idleness and sloth. Occupy yourselves with that which profiteth yourselves and others. (Bahá'u'lláh, 1988b, p. 26.)

Thus it is incumbent on every one to engage in crafts and professions, for therein lies the secret of wealth, O men of understanding! For results depend upon means, and the grace of God shall be all-sufficient unto you. (Bahá'u'lláh, 1998, p. 59.)

Such principles, regarded as ethical values in common parlance, include, among others, truthfulness, courtesy, respect for the opinions of others, honesty, uprightness, compassion, justice

and equity, and so on. The [Bahá'í] teachings provide an ethical framework for one to act in society. In fact, an individual's salvation, to make use of a Christian term, is not to be found in asceticism or a self-focused enlightenment or walking one's personal pathway to God. Such redemption, or salvation or spiritual growth, in the Bahá'í view, is bound up in one's service to humanity. This is the aim and process of Bahá'í life: to serve society, to participate in the creation a global, just civilization. Such action, motivated by the highest ideals, has the force of integrity and selflessness by which change is produced. Thus, the ethical framework provided by the Bahá'í teachings is plain and unmistakable. The Bahá'ís do not have an 'agenda,' they do not take sides, they do not contend with others, they seek to unify society through unified action. They adhere scrupulously to principle, even when it means that short-term gains are given up or expediency suffers. (MOORE, D., personal communication. 25 September 2009)

Ethics is known as a practical version of philosophy, and a normative rather than a positive discipline, dealing with morality; whereas religious ethics is directly founded on the sacred writings of a religion, philosophical ethics places more emphasis on methodological and logical independence from any such 'revealed' text (Schaefer, 2007).

One of the leading philosophers of the modern era, Immanuel Kant, has for centuries had a profound influence on the debate on ethics and epistemology (Scruton, 2001). While a full discussion of Kant's philosophy is not possible within the scope given here, mention could justifiably be made of e.g. his *categorical imperative* which states:

"Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law." (Kant, 1785.)

Of interest is, for example, Kant's elaborate point on rationality as related to experience rather than sensory impressions (1780, 1781, 1785), which can be compared with the Bahá'í teachings on such themes as reason, reality, and harmony of science and religion. In addition, Kant's rebuttal of the utilitarian view of man as essentially selfish by nature is likewise of relevance for a discussion of the philosophy of ethics as related to the nature of man.

Kant's observations on e.g. subjectivity versus empiricism could provide basis for a closer examination of how his thoughts could be placed into a Bahá'í context. For example, inter-subjectivism, the equivalent of

which could arguably have been a position sometimes taken by Kant (1781)—although the term may not have been used before much later—holds that reality is a product of consensus. Depending on what exactly is meant by a “product of consensus,” this may or may not be supported by the teachings of the Bahá’í Faith or other religions for that matter. However, it is asserted in the Bahá’í Faith as well as in e.g. Christianity that religion, with its origin identified in the revealed “Word of God” as issuing from a divine source through the intermediary of the founder of the religion, in some sense establishes reality (Bahá’u’lláh, 1946, 1976, 1978; John 1:1-9, 2009)—arguably through the facilitation of superior reference points, i.e. the creation of meta-consensus whether by the conscious or unconscious choice of people.

One inherent danger attributed to inter-subjectivism, on the other hand, lies in its perceived kinship with total relativism, a state in which everything from ethical values to simple facts becomes fluid.

In his advocacy of “The Autonomy of the Will as the Supreme Principle of Morality” (1785), Kant strongly refutes the idea of man as a slave to the dictates of nature and his sensory pleasures. A similar view on this subject is expressed in the Bahá’í writings (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1982a, 1982b, 1982c), where the essential distinction of humans in relation to animals is explained in the spiritual dimension i.e. the faculty of reason. This linkage between reason and religion is likewise of central importance in Bahá’í doctrine, as seen in the principle of harmony of science and religion (BWNS, 2009d).

3.4 Consultation and the Idea of Dialogue

The argument can be made that the world is unnecessarily plagued by hordes of problems that share the common denominator of being rooted in avoidable or at least solvable conflicts, and are characterized by gaps of communication. Often the answer to such problems is assumed to be found in *dialogue*; yet the question remains why so many conflicts nonetheless are allowed to linger and continue to cause damage and harm rather than being resolved.

The idea of dialogue has had a profound influence on contemporary philosophy and communication. With its origins known from classical Greek philosophy, today’s dialectic method of argument is derived from Socrates’ dialogues as recorded by Plato. However, contemporary use of the term dialogue often refers less to logical analysis than to communication practices, consensus building, or conflict resolution. In public relations literature, meanwhile, dialogue is associated with communication ethics and generally presented as the hallmark of good practice, as in James E. Grunig’s widely accepted *two-way symmetrical model* (Grunig and Hunt, 1984; Grunig, 2006; Cutlip, 2006; Pearson, 1989). Here, dialogue essentially

means respecting the rights, hearing the views, and inviting the participation of those who may become affected by a proposed decision and, accordingly, considering their contributions before making final decisions.

Notably, the debate on dialogue and ethics in communication literature features references to the *Theory of Communicative Action*, developed by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas (Pearson, 1989; Yuthas et al. 2002). In his works, Habermas, a highly influential figure in social and political theory, seeks to bridge the disciplines of philosophy, language, culture, psychology, sociology, and political science, focusing on a wide range of modern problems including alienation and cultural fatigue (Outhwaite, 1996; Finlayson, 2005; Skidelsky, 2005).

Providing detailed analysis of problems related to dialogue and rationality in public debate and as a function of democracy, the Theory of Communicative Action distinguishes between *communicative action* and *instrumental communication*, the former referring to principles of open dialogue and the latter to a more manipulative or exploitative form of communication. As criteria for the validation of dialogic communication Habermas identifies the following: equal opportunity for all to participate, openness with regard to challenging and discussing the ideas presented, the condition that the participants should be true to themselves, and that they should have equal power to influence the discussion; in addition, four so-called validity claims are asserted as universally applicable to communicative action: *comprehensibility*—what is said has to be understandable; *truth*—what the speaker says must be true and independently verifiable; *sincerity*—the speaker must be sincere in the representation of his/her motives; and *legitimacy*—the speaker can be justified in making the specific utterance (Habermas, 1990; Habermas, 1996; Pearson, 1989; Finlayson, 2005; Yuthas et al. 2002).

There are obvious similarities between this idea of dialogue and the Bahá'í concept of *consultation*, as both methods seek consensus and place emphasis on openness, mutuality, equality, truthfulness, sincerity, and rationality. One may argue, however, that Bahá'í consultation offers a distinct framework that seems to be designed for practical application: consultation defined as a useful exercise for making decisions and solving problems rather than, for example, encouraging dialogue for the sake of dialogue; importantly, consultation is placed in a spiritual context, stressing the dignity of every human being on the basis of not only freedom and equality but also innate nobility (Bahá'í Topics, 2009d; Abizadeh, 2005; Hatcher, 2007).

Viewed in the light of citizen rights, freedom of expression, and ethical behavior, Bahá'í consultation has a societal and community-building dimension in common with the idea of dialogue, yet more distinctly with the express purpose of fostering love, promoting unity, and bringing enlightenment for sound decision making.

The heaven of divine wisdom is illumined with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion. Take ye counsel together in all matters, inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding. (Bahá'u'lláh, 1988b, p. 168.)

The honoured members must with all freedom express their own thoughts, and it is in no wise permissible for one to belittle the thought of another, nay, he must with moderation set forth the truth, and should differences of opinion arise a majority of voices must prevail, and all must obey and submit to the majority. ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1982b, p. 88.)

Let us remember that at the very root ... lies the principle of the undoubted right of the individual to self-expression, his freedom to declare his conscience and set forth his views... Let us also bear in mind that the keynote ... is not dictatorial authority but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation. (Effendi 1974, p. 63.)

Encouraged throughout the writings of the Bahá'í Faith, the consultative method is generally applied where group decision making is involved, whether in institutions, committees, informal groups, or in families. The main principles involved are outlined as follows: proper gathering of all relevant information; frank and candid however courteous and respectful discussion among participants; once put forth, ideas become property of the group; unanimity is sought, however majority vote is taken if necessary, and when a decision has been made all are expected to act unitedly on it (Bahá'í Topics, 2009d; Bond, 1998; Hatcher and Martin, 2002; Karlberg, 2004; Momen, 2008).

In the formal decision making processes of elected Bahá'í administrative bodies, a further distinctive feature is the absence of responsibility toward the electorate for decisions (the Bahá'í approach to democracy is considered in a subsequent chapter). Whereas some may find this to run counter to Western ideals of transparency, Bahá'ís would argue that lack of transparency is, for a variety of reasons, rarely an issue surrounding Bahá'í consultation, partly because of an overall spirit of openness together with principles that go against all secretive behavior and exclusivism (Effendi, 1974).

3.5 Mutualism

The argument has been made that adversarialism rather than mutualism is historically responsible for most of the progress achieved in human affairs. Other viewpoints, however, including some of those presented by Michael Karlberg (2004), in line with the Bahá'í teachings, seem to suggest otherwise. Karlberg seeks to challenge a long standing paradigm of adversarialism, which in his view permeates most institutions of modern society—a “culture of contest” that shapes everything from political reality through economic life to the legal system and the academia. He traces the anatomy of discourse associated with e.g. culture and power, pointing out the contingent nature of such structures. The prevalent adversarial order of things, he posits, is grossly unfair and ultimately unsustainable, and will have to give way to a new paradigm of cooperation and mutualism.

As an example, Karlberg (2004) analyzes the notion of power around which ongoing academic debate has focused on two different interpretations: power *over* and power *to*, respectively—the first one, implying the ability of one social entity to impose its will over others, having gained prominence as the only category of power worthy of serious attention; whereas the latter, signifying the capacity to achieve something (e.g. earning a degree or building a bridge) has largely been relegated to some sort of idealism devoid of real substance or consequence. To offer an alternative, Karlberg puts forward a model in which the overarching interpretation of power is capacity, encompassing the capacity to exert control over others along with three additional categories of capacity. Under this umbrella, which can be seen as a comprehensive illustration of power relations, there are two columns and two rows: under the heading of adversarial relations, the two positions of inequality i.e. “power against” or “power over” and equality i.e. “competition” or “balance of power” and under the heading of mutualistic relations likewise the two possibilities of inequality i.e. “power with” or “assisted empowerment” and equality i.e. “cooperation” or “mutual empowerment” (pp. 27-35). Admittedly, such a model, as Karlberg points out, does not reflect the fluid and dynamic nature of real-life power relationships—it is a dialectical schema which provides a framework for analysis.

For the initiated, characteristics of a Bahá'í-inspired world view can often, directly or indirectly, be detected in works that highlight or promote either some distinct tenet of the Bahá'í teachings or a holistic approach to e.g. science, economics, or culture. Certainly this would apply in the case of Karlberg, as he himself confessedly is a member of the Bahá'í Faith. His emphasis should be duly noted, however, that his academic research—mostly focusing on the relationship between communication, culture and conflict—is not intended to serve as information on the Bahá'í Faith.

Still, Karlberg's analysis may further explain key aspects of the Bahá'í approach to societal issues. What he questions is the entrenched habit of seeking unilateral action or protest, institutionalized in the

political, legal, academic, and economic establishments, and unwittingly reinforced by marginalized social change movements. The argument is, largely, that widely held assumptions about the benefits and inevitability of adversarial approaches are overlooking the possibility of existing alternatives—alternatives that might prove more effective and sustainable. While the point is clearly not to advocate the complete abolition of all forms of contest and confrontation, the question is raised whether the culture of adversarialism is worth its costs.

The ways we think and talk tend to influence the ways we act. Competitive and conflictual discourses of power provide a clear example of this as they translate into competitive and conflictual models of social practice. This should come as little surprise. If conflict and competition appear to be inevitable states of human interaction, because this is what our popular as well as academic discourses tend to highlight, it makes sense to structure our collective affairs as contests in order to harness those competitive and conflictual forces for the maximum social good. However even if conflict and competition have been the primary driving forces of history, which is a questionable assumption in itself, it is easy to confuse human affairs as-they-have-been or as-they-are with human affairs as-they-could-be or as-they-ought-to-be. This is the problem of naturalization. By naturalizing competitive and conflictual relations, we become relatively blind to the significant role that cooperative and mutualistic relations can and do play in human affairs. Non-adversarial models of social organization therefore remain under-theorized, under-researched and under-prescribed. In their place, we accept and prescribe contest models as a social norm. The culture of contest, in other words, rests upon a premise of normative adversarialism. (Karlberg, 2004, p. 34.)

Linking ethics, dialogue, and communication to sociology and political science, Karlberg goes on to assert that the paradigm of contest works like a self-fulfilling prophecy—practiced in the political arena, exercised in the courts, trained in the academic world, and applied to most aspects of economic life—preventing the consideration of alternatives. Reinforced by cultural institutions—for instance, in belief systems that view man as essentially aggressive and selfish, thereby justifying adversarial behavior as “natural”—the adversarial approach tends to reduce or minimize the option, including the potential benefits, of mutualism and cooperation.

A short mention should also be made of Gordon Fellman (1998) who, predating Karlberg with similar arguments, likewise offers a rebuttal of the idea that human relations are essentially based on conflicts and wars. He questions e.g. the news media’s often dramatic portrayal of events and politicians and the

accompanying culture of spectacle, or what some might call the widespread suppression of reasoned argument, while presenting globalism and contemporary “exponents of nonviolence” (p. 202)—notably Nelson Mandela, the Dalai Lama, and Aung San Suu Kyias—as symbols of hope for mutualism.

3.6 Trust and Trustworthiness

In terms of overall importance—and timeliness considering what is taking place in today’s world of finance—few if any issues may prove as uncontested as the question of *trust*. Whether viewed from organizational or societal perspectives, the underlying argument is that, ultimately, no government or corporation can afford to lose the trust of its constituencies—and vice versa: nobody can afford to deal with institutions or individuals which cannot be trusted. That is, the complete absence of trust would spell the end of any moral, political, judicial, or economic authority, and destroy the viability of any relationship. By this logic, people will not obey the laws of a state that is perceived to be too weak to enforce its orders, somewhat in the same way as people will not trade with anyone whom they suspect of wanting to defraud them, nor take the advice of anyone known to be an incompetent fool or a lying deceiver.

Therefore, as nothing can be sustained in human relations without a certain level of trust, governments and organizations are keen to convey to the world the message that they can and should be trusted, that their decisions are well considered, their projects properly planned, their arrangements based on good judgment.

In business communication, the question of trust is often identified by the term of credibility and the related quality of reliability, whereas from a religious or ethical viewpoint, trust is largely concerned with personal character and the elevation of the attributes of trustworthiness, truthfulness, and honesty.

Not surprisingly, all of the world’s civilizations and religious traditions have featured trust as an important principle, as pointed out by Lepard in his outline of the world’s globally shared ethical principles (2005). Corresponding to cultural and geographic variables, however, and arguably the extent to which the significance of trust is appreciated or recognized, there seem to be substantial differences in the general level of trust reflected in various societies (Fukuyama, 1995).

Nonetheless, as demonstrated in Francis Fukuyama’s analysis (1995), trust is not only paramount for building national wealth but is also a key indicator of the sociocultural aspects with which modern

economies are increasingly integrated. Trust, Fukuyama posits, is the most important element among the building blocks that together form the complex spectrum of socioeconomic and cultural life.

Thus, economic activity represents a crucial part of social life and is knit together by a wide variety of norms, rules, moral obligations, and other habits that together shape the society. ... [O]ne of the most important lessons we can learn from an examination of economic life is that a nation's well-being, as well as its ability to compete, is conditioned by a single, pervasive cultural characteristic: the level of trust inherent in the society. (Fukuyama, 1995, p. 7)

In the school of thought thus presented by Fukuyama, the issue of trust is largely viewed in the light of social capital, which refers to the connections between individuals, organizations and informal groups in societies (social capital is considered in the following chapter).

Meanwhile Stephen M. R. Covey (2006) relates trust more directly to the world of business and, using empirical data, demonstrates how companies that enjoy high levels of trust are consistently and substantially rewarded by “trust dividends” whereas, by contrast, those who suffer from low levels of trust are penalized by “trust taxes.” Looking at the principle of credibility, for example, Covey refers to a certain combination of ethics and professionalism that has to be in place at the personal level for those looking to build trust in business: integrity, intent, capabilities, and results. In other words, the person has to be trustworthy as well as competent with a proven track record. Covey’s main points, however, concern social behavior in business and the financial results that high levels of trust bring through e.g. exceedingly quick acceptance of proposed deals or programs of actions, smooth decision making processes and effective operations—with a reversed effect taking place in the opposite event i.e. when trust is lacking people become more suspicious, less willing to work effectively, and more prone to create obstacles.

Justin Greenwood (2003) presents trust in a context of business associations within the European Union, from two different viewpoints: as a fundamental determinant for growth and survival and, on the other hand, as a potential source of problems if emphasized at the expense of efficiency—with Ian Locks (2003) asserting that trust is an essential requirement for success, and Wyn Grant (2003) maintaining that too much reliance on trust can lead to a form of complacency and ineffectiveness. It can be argued that both positions are justifiable, depending on the actual situation in question—in other words, a “one size fits all” approach can be dangerous, even in such a convincing case as that of building trust: considerations should be based on a comprehensive picture that brings the unique characteristics of the situation into relief.

Notwithstanding the variety of exigencies, the differences in the specific aspects of trust, or the perceived confusion in the literature on trust (Freitag and Traunmüller, 2009), the weightiness of trust as a crucial measure of cultural, social, and economic substance remains uncontested.

Trustworthiness is extolled throughout the Bahá'í writings as one of the most desirable and important human qualities and a source of stability, well-being, and wealth (Bahá'u'lláh, 1976, 1988a, 1988b; Bahá'í Topics, 2009b). A recognition of the emphasis placed on trustworthiness and truthfulness as moral imperatives seems to be reflected in the public affairs work coordinated and carried out by the BIC and the Office of External Affairs of the NSA of the UK (MOORE, D., personal communication. 25, 28 September; LEITH, B., personal communication. 20 September 2009).

Crucial to everything we do in the external affairs field is building trust with our interlocutors and partners. Trustworthiness is fundamental to our credibility as a source of information and advice, whether about the human rights of the Bahá'ís in Iran and elsewhere or relating to our interfaith work, our engagement in social action and in social discourses. We build trustworthiness by ensuring that the information we present to Government departments, such as the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, is accurate and timely. Building good working relationships is also facilitated by generosity of spirit, humility and a willingness to listen and engage in mutual learning. The place where trustworthiness counts most of all is in our work in defense of the human rights of the Bahá'ís in Iran. We do our very best to ensure that the information we present to Foreign Office officials, and to parliamentarians and minister, is accurate, up-to-date and not in any way exaggerated. We never make demands of those we interact with and we do not criticize. In fact, we express our gratitude for the work that public servants undertake in human rights defense and to assist us in our work and we praise them and the government for its long term commitment to human rights in general. We take a principled approach to our work; in other words, we don't act ethically because we hope it will bring the results we want, we act ethically because we know it is the right thing to do. Happily, it happens to bring good results in many cases.

When we present information to officials and the Foreign & Commonwealth Office they will almost always trust that information and act on it immediately, without feeling the need to double-check it through other sources. Over the years, we have made strenuous efforts to ensure that our information is accurate, truthful and timely and we do not make claims beyond what is justified by the information we receive and pass on. As you know, the Bahá'í International Community collects, sifts and evaluates information from the Bahá'ís in Iran. They don't pass the information on to us unless they can be sure that it is accurate. So we trust our sources, and the FCO trusts what we

share with them and they act on it. Immediate action by the Government can be crucial in certain situations, so we don't want the government to have to spend days checking something before acting. Hence, being trustworthy brings good results. We are trustworthy because it is the right thing to be and we would be trustworthy even if we feared that the outcome might not be immediately helpful. This is the notable thing about ethical behavior—one has to be ethical for the sake of being ethical, not because one hopes that something good will come out of it. To use ethical behavior as an instrument of policy is to undermine ethical principles. (LEITH, B., personal communication. 20 September 2009)

3.7 Social Capital

With the increasing signs of globalization observed across the world, accompanied by sweeping changes in the fabric of societies, a growing body of literature dedicated to the issue of *social capital* has surfaced in recent years. Inspired by the emergence of new trends in socioeconomics, culture, and political affairs, including advances in technology—and driven by fears of the consequences of decreasing social cohesion and the breakdown of traditional structures—the notion of social capital has caught the attention of large audiences as a beacon of new thinking.

While social capital as a term may have been used for more than a century in isolated instances, it first developed during the 1970s and 1980s as a distinct field of study in social sciences, with its popularity increasing during the 1990s. American sociologist Robert D. Putnam's influential "Bowling Alone" (2000) dramatically extended the reach of the debate, drawing focus to a serious decline in social engagement among Americans since the 1960s. Much of the discussion, however, has resonated with social scientists outside the United States, and the geographical context has accordingly grown to become more global (Bourdieu, 1983; Halpern, 2005).

In brief, social capital theory seeks to explain how the workings of social networks contribute to economic growth or, in some cases, may have a neutral or even a negative effect. Consisting of any groups with which and through which people associate and interact—whether related to paid or voluntary work, social activities, hobbies, sports, or anything else—social networks are seen as highly important in that they interlink industries, civil society, government, and private individuals. In other words, with high levels of social capital business and administration tend to run smoothly and efficiently—with less barriers and less

time and effort spent on making transactions, much like the logic discussed in the literature on trust—in contrast with low levels of social capital which tend to accompany an opposite effect.

Social capital is applied at all levels, from the individual as a measure of e.g. career opportunities, to the macroeconomic for e.g. national or international policy making. However, definitions of social capital vary in tandem with e.g. political focus. According to Pierre Bourdieu, social capital is “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (1983, p. 249). In this analysis social capital is not necessarily a source of good, as it can also be utilized by e.g. criminal gangs or for disproportionate concentration of wealth or other privileges in exclusive networks.

According to the World Bank, there are “five key dimensions” of social capital: groups and networks, trust and solidarity, collective action and cooperation, social cohesion and inclusion, and information and communication (World Bank, 2009).

Putnam offers the following definition of social capital:

Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called “civic virtue.” The difference is that “social capital” calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital. (Putnam, 2000, p. 19.)

The implications of the above statement—or of the general literature on social capital and trust for that matter—extend to a range of interrelated factors that contribute to determining the state of affairs in question for any given societal context. Along with the level of social capital and trust such determinants include the nature of the social networks, the level of justice and equality, ethical standards, transparency and the rule of law, human rights, and any number of cultural characteristics. Overall, this tends to broaden the meaning of social capital as an idea.

When thus related to social capital, the Bahá’í approach to social and economic development will ring familiar for at least two reasons. First, social cohesion and inclusiveness, community relations, universal welfare, trust and ethical behavior, are all pivotal themes in the Bahá’í Faith, as are voluntary social

action and moral development. Second, the idea of civil society taking charge in community development—rather than, for example, viewing such matters as the sole responsibility of government—has always been at the heart of the Bahá'í approach (BIC, 1995, 2003, 2009b; Bahá'í Topics, 2009b, 2009c).

What distinguishes the Bahá'í approach is that, aside from making use of any sources of relevant information for decision making—including social science literature where appropriate—Bahá'í communities are systematically guided by the principles laid out in the Bahá'í writings, as the following quotes clearly point out.

The Bahá'í community's commitment to social and economic development is rooted in its sacred scriptures, which state that all human beings "have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization." Bahá'u'lláh wrote, "Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements." Fundamental to Bahá'í belief is the conviction that every person, every people, every nation has a part to play in building a peaceful and prosperous global society. (BIC, 2003, p. 2.)

Bahá'ís view development as a global enterprise whose purpose is to bring prosperity to all peoples, an enterprise that must pursue its aim in the context of an emerging world civilization. Humanity, the Bahá'í writings explain, is experiencing an age of transition best described as a passage from collective childhood to collective maturity. The revolutionary changes that are occurring with bewildering swiftness in every department of life assume their real meaning in this light. During this period, the barriers raised by the thoughts, attitudes, and habits of the childhood of humankind are gradually being uprooted, and the structures of a new civilization that can reflect the powers of adulthood are taking shape. (Ibid., p. 4.)

3.8 Equality and Justice

According to research presented by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (2009), a clear correlation is discernible between trust and *equality*, as alluded to in the literature on social capital. The research indicates that the more equal a society is, the higher its level of trust tends to be and correspondingly, the more unequal the society, the lower the level of trust. From this logic, establishing equality is a

prerequisite for raising the level of trust or vice versa. At first glance, however, this might be a controversial proposition inasmuch as “equality” is fraught with political overtones, traditionally one of the rallying cries of socialism. On the other hand, with the cause of socialism largely discredited for various reasons in the post-communist age, equality does not necessarily refer to a leftist agenda, nor has it historically always done so. In this text, accordingly, equality is treated entirely independently of the traditional left-right political spectrum, and is rather viewed in the light of the principles of equality as known from the world of *justice* and, importantly, in the socioeconomic and spiritual sense conveyed in the Bahá’í writings, which again here place the oneness of humanity at center stage.

Interestingly, Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) reveal a much-overlooked fact associated with the question of economic equality: that the effects of inequality are much more severe on a population as a whole than earlier assumed. In other words, the impact on mental health, crime, and other key indicators extends far beyond the immediate victims of social ills.

The assumption is that greater equality helps those at the bottom. As well as being only a minor part of the proper explanation, it is an assumption which reflects our failure to recognize very important processes affecting our lives and the societies we are part of. The truth is that the vast majority of the population is harmed by greater inequality. (...) Across whole populations, rates of mental illness are five times higher in the most unequal compared to the least unequal societies. Similarly, in more unequal societies people are five times as likely to be imprisoned, six times as likely to be clinically obese, and murder rates may be many times higher. The reason why these differences are so big is, quite simply, because the effects of inequality are not confined just to the least well-off: instead they affect the vast majority of the population. (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009, p. 181.)

[G]reater equality brings substantial gains even among the top occupational class and among the richest or best-educated quarter or third of the population, which include the small minority of the seriously rich. In short, whether we look at states or countries, the benefits of greater equality seem to be shared across the vast majority of the population. Only because the benefits of greater equality are so widely shared can the differences in the rates of problems between societies be as large as it is. (Ibid., p.186.)

Irrespective of its fundamental social and spiritual significance, the notion of *justice* in Western legal systems has become subject to what arguably amounts to a confusing array of approaches, linked to three

different basic theories: utilitarianism, positivism, and realism or critical theory (Bond, 1998). Problems associated with utilitarianism, which emphasizes the interests of majority over minority, are seen in that it tends to disrespect the rights of minorities, failing to accommodate major principles of human rights. Emerging as a response to utilitarianism, and credited for having largely shaped Western legal systems, positivism appears to be heavily influenced by nineteenth century ideas of objective science as an integral part of justice theory, dismissing subjectivity and sidestepping morals in the name of rationality—with problems appearing to the extent that claims of objectivity become challenged. Realism or critical theory on the other hand, with its acknowledgement of the interplay between subjective values and rationality, constitutes a reaction to positivism, rebutting the separation of science from morals, and law from politics—the essential argument being that law and justice cannot be value neutral.

Although equality is not necessarily synonymous with the idea of justice as such, the two concepts are closely intertwined, as amply demonstrated by the Indian economist and philosopher Amartya Sen (2009), who presents a convincing argument for justice in a holistic and pragmatic sense. Unlike the ‘social contract’ principle advocated by justice theorist John Rawls, which tends to uphold a more singular view of justice with morality as an implicit agreement between the members of society, Sen posits that there can be multiple possibilities of a just solution. Sen may arguably be associated with the realist school but he seems to represent a more modern and multicultural approach. Scrutinized reason and social principles including human rights play a key part in his analysis, which effectively recognizes the relative nature of justice. While embracing reason and rationality, Sen strongly questions an offspring of positivism known as ‘rational choice theory’ and its premise of self-interest, adding his voice to those who advocate the view of humans as fundamentally social beings rather than selfish individuals.

What exactly are the demands of rational choice? One answer that has gained popularity in economics, and more recently in politics and law, is that people choose rationally if and only if they intelligently pursue their self-interest, and nothing else. This exceedingly narrow approach to rational choice goes under the ambitious—and oddly non-denominational—name of the ‘Rational Choice Theory’ (it is called just that, somewhat amazingly, with no further qualification). Indeed, the brand-named Rational Choice Theory, or RCT for short, characterizes rationality of choice simply as smart maximization of self-interest. It is somehow taken for granted in this approach that people would fail to be rational if they did not intelligently pursue only their own self-interest, without taking note of anything else (except to the extent that ‘the something else’ might—directly or indirectly—facilitate the promotion of their self-interest). Since human beings can easily have good reason also to pay some attention to objectives other than the single-minded pursuit of self-interest, and can see arguments in favor of taking cognizance of broader values or

of normative rules of decent behavior, RCT does reflect an extremely limited understanding of reason and rationality. (Sen, 2009, p. 179.)

On the question of human rights and democracy, Sen criticizes the widespread tendency to proclaim these to be exclusively Western phenomena, emphasizing their universality. He likewise dismisses the rhetorical division of cultural differences along geographical and other such generic and simplified lines.

To conclude, the so-called “Western values of freedom and liberty,” sometimes seen as an ancient Western inheritance, are not particularly ancient, nor exclusively Western in their antecedence. Many of these values have taken their full form only over the last few centuries. While we do find some anticipatory components in parts of the ancient Western traditions, there are other such anticipatory components in parts of non-Western ancient traditions as well. On the particular subject of toleration, Plato and Confucius may be on a somewhat similar side, just as Aristotle and Ashoka maybe on another side.

The need to acknowledge diversity applies not only between nations and cultures, but also within each nation and culture. In the anxiety to take adequate note of international diversity and cultural divergences, and the so-called differences between “Western civilization,” “Asian values,” “African culture,” and so on, there is often a dramatic neglect of heterogeneity within each country and culture. “Nations” and “cultures” are not particularly good units to understand and analyze intellectual and political differences. Lines of division in commitments and skepticism do not run along international boundaries—they criss-cross at many different levels. The rhetoric of cultures, with each “culture” seen in largely homogenized terms, can confound us politically as well as intellectually. (Sen, 1998, p. 43.)

The Bahá’í view of justice as an essential virtue and equality as a social imperative is in several ways compatible with the analysis offered by Sen, with the key multicultural and global perspective expressly embedded in the Bahá’í teachings. It reaffirms the principle of obligations and rights, and the emphasis found in earlier religions on justice as a fundamental element of ethical behavior, of sound judgment, and of good governance, and specifically outlines the principles of equality, whether in terms of cultural or religious identity, race or ethnicity, social status or gender, ultimately subordinating all differences under the umbrella of the oneness of humanity (Bahai.org, 2009b).

Bahá'u'lláh distinctly declares justice as a primary requirement for an individual's ability to think independently. At the individual and family levels, justice is related to both virtue and human rights and, in the larger picture of values, figures as integral to the process of the unification of the world. Likewise, justice is identified in the Bahá'í writings as the most fundamental of all social principles.

The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes. (Bahá'u'lláh, 1998, p. 4.)

The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered, and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed. The rights of the son, the father, the mother—none of them must be transgressed, none of them must be arbitrary. Just as the son has certain obligations to his father, the father, likewise, has certain obligations to his son. The mother, the sister and other members of the household have their certain prerogatives. All these rights and prerogatives must be conserved, yet the unity of the family must be sustained. The injury of one shall be considered the injury of all; the comfort of each, the comfort of all; the honor of one, the honor of all. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982c, p. 168.)

The hallmark of the age of maturity will be the unification of the human race, which, in turn, requires the establishment of the principles of justice. The current disparity between rich and poor cannot be permitted to persist. All of the earth's inhabitants should be able to enjoy the fruits of a materially and spiritually prosperous global society. (BIC, 2003, p. 4.)

3.9 The Bahá'í Approach to Democracy

While the Bahá'í Faith clearly supports the idea of representative democracy and is correspondingly opposed to all dictatorial forms of governance, it is important to note that the Bahá'í approach is distinct for a number of reasons. Strongly committed to nonpartisanship and non-electioneering, and based not

only on the principles of equality and freedom but likewise on the spiritual principle of dignity, the approach contrasts starkly with well-known characteristics of so-called liberal democracy (Effendi, 1974, 1977, 1990; Abizadeh, 2005).

As already implied in the previous chapters, it seems largely uncontested that a crisis of confidence is facing contemporary democracy as manifested in, for example, decreasing trust in societal institutions and the breakdown of social capital (BIC, 2009b; Effendi, 1977; Fukuyama, 1995; Putnam, 2000, 2002; Putnam and Feldstein, 2003; Halpern, 2005).

The crisis of modern day society is featured in both the authoritative writings of the Bahá'í Faith and in various texts written on the Bahá'í subject. It is fundamentally explained as a spiritual crisis with social issues prominently involved—related to ethical behavior, inspired vision, and mutualism or, rather, lack thereof (Bahá'u'lláh, 1976; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982c; Effendi, 1974; One Country, 2001; BIC, 2003, 2009b; Esslemont, 1980; Karlberg, 2004; Abizadeh, 2005).

From a Bahá'í point of view, however, a “viable alternative” can be found in the Bahá'í electoral system, as explained by political scientist Arash Abizadeh (2005), who offers an analysis of the Bahá'í approach to representative democracy and the electoral process.

Many critics bemoan the apparent shortcomings of multiparty democratic electoral politics. That such elections yield corrupt and morally bankrupt leaders; that they are meaningless without certain social or economic rights and conditions; that they fail to provide the electorate with any real political say or choice; that they are captured by powerful interest groups; or that modern electoral campaigns are too easily bought by money—these are all common worries. What is less common are viable alternatives to the competitive multiparty model of democratic elections.

The Bahá'í community claims to practice such an alternative. Because there are no clergy in the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'í communities are governed by regularly elected representative institutions at local, regional (in some areas), national, and international levels. For most students of democratic politics, the most surprising feature of Bahá'í elections is that they are conducted without nominations, competitive campaigns, voting coalitions, or parties. Indeed, Bahá'í elections are governed by formal institutional rules and informal norms that specifically prohibit such familiar features of the political landscape. The question is why Bahá'í elections are governed by these rules and norms. The answer lies in the distinctive values that are the foundation for the rules and norms. (Abizadeh, 2005, pp. 7-8.)

In Abizadeh's analysis, these distinctive, interrelated values that govern the functioning of Bahá'í institutions are: nobility i.e. respect for the inherent dignity of human beings, the spirit of collective unity and solidarity, and the level of justice and fairness associated with the institutions. The performance of the institutions is thus linked to "selecting the most desirable representatives; legitimating Bahá'í administrative institutions; fostering virtues among individual participants; and fostering unity and solidarity in the community as a whole." (Abizadeh, 2005, p. 8.)

Integral to the Bahá'í approach to democracy are likewise the principle of mutualism and the consultative process used in decision making, both subjects discussed in preceding chapters.

As to the accountability of Bahá'í administrative bodies, one distinctive feature here is the absence of responsibility toward the electorate for decisions arrived at. In other words, each elected representative is expected to vote on the basis of his or her own conscience as a human being and as a Bahá'í, not as a member of any specific party, voting bloc, or interest group. On the other hand, Local and National Spiritual Assemblies are elected every year through the Bahá'í election mechanism, which allows for the electability of any eligible individual.

At the local level, another important arrangement is that the elected representatives must associate directly with the members of their communities once every Bahá'í month at the so-called 19-Day Feast, which means personally facing the electorate on a regular basis in a devotional spirit and to socialize as well as to take notice of community or individual concerns for the Assembly to consider.

While the elected institutions operate under the guidance of those above them and within the context of the authoritative laws and ordinances already established by Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice, the elected representatives are not responsible to the electorate for decisions, nor are the electorate privy to how individual members of an institution vote on any given matter or whether a decision was unanimous or passed by a single vote. A decision has the same weight and authority regardless of what rigorous discussion may have gone into the consideration of a course of action and regardless of how immediately or uniformly it was endorsed at first hearing. The minutes of the meeting, therefore, will reflect subjects discussed and decisions made, but not comments attributed to individual members nor the number of votes for and against a decision. Of crucial importance, in other words, is the freedom of expression of each member to express his or her heartfelt opinion, though even the manner of such opinions is ordained to be unembellished, unimpassioned, and rendered only after thoughtful consideration. This [consultative] process, this tool of decision

making, is employed at every level of governance and by all Bahá'í institutions, appointed committees, families, or simply an informal group. (Hatcher, 2007, pp. 240-241)

Whether or not the Bahá'í election system might prove superior from a democratic viewpoint to the multiparty system, the latter has been questioned on the basis of its perceived performance, while the former is still relatively new. Perhaps the notion of a system with neither nominations for candidacy, nor election campaigns, nor even political parties may represent too radical change for some; the fact remains, however, that the Bahá'í alternative has been used for decades throughout the Bahá'í world with high degree of overall success—having “proved eminently practical, leading to a stable, peaceful, and corruption-resistant system of administration that draws the best into the community’s public life” (One Country, 2001).

A Local Spiritual Assembly (LSA) is responsible for overseeing the affairs of a Bahá'í community in a local area such as a city or village. Composed of nine adult local residents, the LSA is elected once every April in a simple process: The local Bahá'ís gather and, before the ballots are cast, recite prayers and passages from the holy writings to create an atmosphere of reflection and spirituality; the ballots are then cast by secret voting—with each individual having written down in private the names of nine persons from the community whom he or she deems as best qualified to serve as elected representatives. With tellers chosen by the gathered electors, the tallying takes place on the spot and the nine individuals receiving a plurality of votes are thereby elected members of the LSA.

The same basic principles are applied at the national level. Here, a national convention is held annually with the electorate consisting of delegates sent from all LSAs of the country and any of whom can be elected to serve on the National Spiritual Assembly; the nine who receive a plurality of votes are elected members of the NSA.

As to the international level, the supreme administrative body of the Bahá'í world, the Universal House of Justice, is elected by delegates of all NSAs in a similar process every five years at an international convention held at the Bahá'í World Centre, in Haifa, Israel.

Overall, a system of governance that encompasses the global level without losing touch with the national or even the local level, is likely to attract growing attention and is justifiably a subject of interest for students of democracy. Further research into its philosophical foundations could offer a basis for rethinking entrenched assumptions about democracy and elections (Abizadeh, 2005; BWNS, 2009f).

The apparent benefits associated with the system include the following: The absence of nominations or so-called candidates gives the electorate full freedom to vote for those perceived as best qualified; with

the absence of campaign promises, party affiliation, and constituency demands, the elected representatives retain freedom of conscience in decision-making; the absence of corrupting financial influences in the form of e.g. campaign money; the absence of electioneering and nominations reinforces the emphasis placed by the voters on spiritual attributes and moral leadership, effectively blocking those who seek a political career for personal gain or privilege; power by arbitrary will or personality is made obsolete as decision-making rests with corporate bodies, and with the spirit of continuous learning and the centrality of the principles of the Bahá'í Faith (BWNS, 2005; One Country, 2001).

Taken all together, the Bahá'í system inherently seeks to draw into community service a new type of leader, one who has won the notice of his or her fellow community members because of his or her humility, penchant for quiet service, and moral and intellectual strength. (One Country, 2001)

3.10 References

- ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, 1982a. *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London*. London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust.
- ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, 1982b. *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*. Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre.
- ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, 1982c. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust.
- ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, 1990. The Causes of the Differences in the Characters of Men. In: *Some Answered Questions*. [online] Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust. Available from: <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/SAQ/saq-57.html> [Accessed 14 September 2009]
- ABIZADEH, A., 2005. Democratic Elections without Campaigns? Normative Foundations of National Bahá’í Elections. *World Order*, 37 (1), pp. 7-49. [online] Wilmette: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States. Available from: <http://profs-polisci.mcgill.ca/abizadeh/PDFs/Bahai-Elections.pdf> [Accessed 4 October 2009]
- ALL, 2009. *The American League of Lobbyists*. [online] Washington DC: The American League of Lobbyists. Available from: <http://www.alldc.org> [Accessed 27 September 2009]
- ARGENTI, P. A., 2003. *Corporate Communication*, 3rd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill/Irwin.
- BAHAI.ORG, 2009a. *The Bahá’ís*. [online] Haifa: Bahá’í International Community. Available from: <http://www.bahai.org> [Accessed 24 March 2009]
- BAHÁ’Í LIBRARY ONLINE, 1990. *Extracts from the Writings on Arts and Crafts*. [online] Available from: <http://bahai-library.com/compilations/arts.html> [Accessed 1 October 2009]
- BAHÁ’Í TOPICS, 2009a. *Bahá’í Topics: An Information Resource of the Bahá’í International Community*. [online] Haifa: Bahá’í International Community. Available from: <http://info.bahai.org/> [Accessed 6 September 2009]
- BAHÁ’Í TOPICS, 2009b. Moral Development—Trustworthiness: A Cardinal Bahá’í Virtue. *Bahá’í Topics: An Information Resource of the Bahá’í International Community*. [online] Haifa: Bahá’í International Community. Available from: <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-8-2-2.html> [Accessed 16 September 2009]
- BAHÁ’Í TOPICS, 2009c. Social Action—Social and Economic Development. *Bahá’í Topics: An Information Resource of the Bahá’í International Community*. [online] Haifa: Bahá’í International Community. Available from: <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-8-0-1.html> [Accessed 16 September 2009]
- BAHÁ’Í TOPICS, 2009d. Central Figures & Institutions—Consultation. *Bahá’í Topics: An Information Resource of the Bahá’í International Community*. [online] Haifa: Bahá’í International Community. Available from: <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-3-6-3.html> [Accessed 19 September 2009]
- BAHÁ’U’LLÁH, 1946. *The Kitáb-i-Íqan: The Book of Certitude*. London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust.

- BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, 1976. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, 2nd ed. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, 1978. *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, 1988a. *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, 1988b. *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, 1992. *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*. Haifa: The Universal House of Justice.
- BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, 1998. *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, 7th ed. New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- BIC, 1993. *World Citizenship: A Global Ethic for Sustainable Development*. New York: Bahá'í International Community.
- BIC, 1995. *The Prosperity of Humankind*. [online] Haifa: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://statements.bahai.org/95-0303.htm> [Accessed 27 September 2009]
- BIC, 2003. *For the Betterment of the World: the Worldwide Bahá'í Community's Approach to Social and Economic Development*. New York: Bahá'í International Community.
- BIC, 2009b. *Bahá'í International Community United Nations Office: Statements and Reports*. [online] New York: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://bic.org/statements-and-reports> [Accessed 25 March 2009]
- BOND, M., 1998. *Bahá'í Consultation and Alternative Dispute Resolution*. Wienacht: Landegg International University.
- BOURDIEU, P., 1983. Forms of capital. In: J. C. Richards, ed. *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- BOWERS, K. E., 2004. *God Speaks Again: An Introduction to the Bahá'í Faith*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- BWNS, 2005. Bahá'is Hold Unique Democratic Elections. *Bahá'í World News Service*. [online] Haifa: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://news.bahai.org/story/372> [Accessed 4 October 2009]
- BWNS, 2009d. Media Information—Belief and Practice. *Bahá'í World News Service*. [online] Haifa: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://news.bahai.org/media-information/belief-and-practice/> [Accessed 6 September 2009]
- BWNS, 2009f. Media Information—Administration. *Bahá'í World News Service*. [online] Haifa: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://news.bahai.org/media-information/administration/> [Accessed 6 September 2009]

- COVEY, S. M. R., 2006. *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing that Changes Everything*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- CUTLIP, S. M. et al., 2006. *Effective Public Relations*, 9th ed. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education.
- DOORLEY, J. and H. F. GARCIA, 2007. *Reputation Management: The Key to Successful Public Relations and Corporate Communication*. New York: Routledge.
- EFFENDI, S., 1933. The Bahá'í Faith—A Summary. From a letter to the High Commissioner for Palestine. In: S. Effendi, 1955. *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- EFFENDI, S., 1974. *Bahá'í Administration*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- EFFENDI, S., 1977. *Call to the Nations: Extracts from the Writings of Shoghi Effendi*. Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre.
- EFFENDI, S., 1990. *The Advent of Divine Justice*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- ESSLEMONT, J. E., 1980. *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, 5th ed. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- FELLMAN, G., 1998. *Rambo and the Dalai Lama: The Compulsion to Win and Its Threat to Human Survival*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- FINLAYSON, J. G., 2005. *Habermas: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- FREITAG, M. and R. TRAUNMÜLLER, 2009. Spjeres of Trust: An Empirical Analysis of the Foundations of Particularised and Generalised Trust. *European Journal of Political Research*, 48, pp. 783-803. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- FUKUYAMA, F., 1995. *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- GLOBAL ALLIANCE, 2003. *Global Protocol on Ethics in Public Relations*. [online] Lugano: Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communications Management. Available from: http://www.globalalliancepr.usi.ch/download.php?filename=Global+Protocol+on+Ethics+in+Public+Relations&file=%2Fuploads%2Fdocs%2F02_Global+Standards%2FEGA_Global_Ethics_Protocol.pdf [Accessed 6 September 2009]
- GRANT, W., 2003. Trust: A Skeptical View. In: J. Greenwood, ed., *The Challenge of Change in Business Associations*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- GREENWOOD, J., ed., 2003. *The Challenge of Change in EU Business Associations*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- GRUNIG, J. E. and T. HUNT, 1984. *Managing Public Relations*. Austin: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

- GRUNIG, J. E., 2006. Furnishing the Edifice: Ongoing Research on Public Relations As a Strategic Management Function. *Journal of Public Relations Research*. 18 (2), pp. 151-176 London: Routledge.
- HABERMAS, J., 1990. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*. Maldon: Polity Press.
- HABERMAS, J., 1996. The Theory of Communicative Action, vol. I, excerpted in: W. Outhwaite, ed., *The Habermas Reader*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- HALPERN, D., 2005. *Social Capital*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- HATCHER, J. S., 2007. *The Ascent of Society: The Social Imperative in Personal Salvation*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- HATCHER, W. S. and J. D. MARTIN, 2002. *The Bahá'í Faith: The Emerging Global Religion*. 4th ed. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- HOWELL, S. and R. WILLIS, eds., 1989. *Societies at Peace: Anthropological Perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- ICCO, 2003. *Stockholm Charter*. [online] London: International Communications Consultancy Organisation. Available from: <http://www.precis.se/pdf/stockholm%20charter.pdf> [Accessed 27 September 2009]
- JOHN, GOSPEL OF, 2009. John 1. New Testament. *The Holy Bible*. King James Version [online] Available from: <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+1&version=KJV> [Accessed 18 September 2009]
- KANT, I., 1780. *The Metaphysical Elements of Ethics*. [online] Available from: <http://philosophy.eserver.org/kant/metaphys-elements-of-ethics.txt> [Accessed 1 October 2009]
- KANT, I., 1781. *The Critique of Pure Reason*. [online] Available from: <http://philosophy.eserver.org/kant/critique-of-pure-reason.txt> [Accessed 1 October 2009]
- KANT, I., 1785. *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*. [online] Available from: <http://philosophy.eserver.org/kant/metaphys-of-morals.txt> [Accessed 1 October 2009]
- KARLBERG, M., 2004. *Beyond the Culture of Contest*. Oxford: George Ronald.
- KÜNG, H. and K.-J. KUSCHEL, eds., 1993. Council for the Parliament of the World's Religions. *A Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- LEPARD, B. D., 2005. *Hope for a Global Ethic: Shared Principles in Religious Scriptures*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- LOCKS, I., 2003. In the End the Only Thing that Matters—Is Trust. In: J. Greenwood, ed., *The Challenge of Change in Business Associations*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

- MOMEN, M., 2008. *The Bahá'í Faith: A Beginner's Guide*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications.
- ONE COUNTRY, 2001. Perspective: Some Thoughts on Elections, *One Country*, 12 (4), January-March 2001. [online] New York: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: http://www.onecountry.org/e124/e12402as_Perspective_thoughts_on_elections.htm [Accessed 4 October 2009]
- OUTHWAITE, W., 1996, ed. *The Habermas Reader*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- PEARSON, R., 1989. Business Ethics as Communication Ethics: Public Relations Practice and the Idea of Dialogue. In: Botan, C. and V. Hazleton, *Public Relations Theory*. pp. 111-131. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- PUTNAM, R. D., 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- PUTNAM, R. D., 2002. *Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- PUTNAM, R. D., and L. M. FELDSTEIN, 2003. *Better Together: Restoring the American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- REGESTER, M. and J. LARKIN, 2008. *Risk Issues and Crisis Management in Public Relations: A Casebook of Best Practice*, 4th ed.. London: Kogan Page.
- SCHAEFER, U., 2007. *Bahá'í Ethics in Light of Scripture: An Introduction* (v. 1). Oxford: George Ronald.
- SCRUTON, R., 2001. *Kant: A Very Short Introduction*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- SEN, A., 1998. Universal Truths: Human Rights and the Westernizing Illusion. *Harvard International Review*, 20 (3), 22 June 1998, pp. 40-43. Cambridge: Harvard International Relations Council.
- SEN, A., 2009. *The Idea of Justice*. London: Allen Lane.
- SKIDELSKY, E., 2005. Habermas vs. the Pope: The Darling of the 68ers and Benedict XVI Find a Surprising Amount to Agree on. *Prospect Magazine*, 116, 20 November 2005. [online] London: Prospect Publishing. Available from: <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/2005/11/habermasvsthepope/> [Accessed 1 July 2009]
- THOMSON, S. and S. JOHN, 2007. *Public Affairs in Practice: A Practical Guide to Lobbying*. London: Kogan Page.
- UN, 1948. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. [online] New York: United Nations. Available from: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/> [Accessed 30 September 2009]
- WILKINSON, R. and K. PICKETT, 2009. *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*. London: Allen Lane.

WOODSTOCK THEOLOGICAL CENTER, 2002. *The Ethics of Lobbying: Organized Interests, Political Power, and the Common Good*. Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002.

WORLD BANK, 2009. *Social Capital*. [online] Washington DC: World Bank Group. Available from: <http://go.worldbank.org/VEN7OUW280> [Accessed 4 October 2009]

YUTHAS, K. et al., 2002. Communicative Action and Corporate Annual Reports. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 41 (2002), pp. 141–157.

4.0 Conclusion

As demonstrated in this analysis, there are features in the Bahá'í approach to public affairs which, uniquely identified with the Bahá'í community, clearly warrant the attention of researchers. These features, derived from a principled approach to professional, spiritual, and social life, can be summarized in the following factors.

The first is the complete absence of a partisan agenda, notwithstanding the community's comprehensive, well-defined, and systematically implemented set of programs in e.g. moral development, social and economic development, protection of minority rights, and the empowerment of women—and despite the persistence, over the past 165 years, of a severely hostile campaign leveled against it by the religious establishment of Iran, with state backing during the bulk of the time (Bahai.org, 2009a; BIC, 2008; Ghanea, 2002).

Second, communicative coherence has largely been achieved and credibility generally established through the consistent application of the doctrine of unity, the imperative of trustworthiness, and other Bahá'í principles that include ethical behavior and moral conduct; this has generated long-term gains in reputation and—crucial in the work to protect the Iranian Bahá'is—trust earned with e.g. high-ranking government officials and international news organizations (LEITH, B., personal communication. 20 September 2009; MOORE, D., personal communication. 25, 28 September 2009; Bahá'í Topics, 2009b).

Third, the reconciliation of traditional incompatibilities and hostilities, through such tenets as the abandonment of all forms of prejudice, can help redefine assumptions that may otherwise hinder the flow of information and progress. Such processes are likewise promoted and underpinned by e.g. the principles of harmony of science and religion, and agreement between cultures, economic interests, and between the sexes (BWNS, 2009d ; LEITH, B., personal communication. 20 September 2009; MOORE, D., personal communication. 25, 28 September 2009). To the extent that such principles can be assumed to influence the lives of people in a generic sense, they will probably have an impact on e.g. diplomatic relations and media relations.

Fourth, the Bahá'í Faith has outlined and, importantly, the Bahá'í community has in fact quite convincingly demonstrated a viable model that makes the abolition of war and the revitalization of communities top priorities. Also embedded in the model is the restoration of classic virtues in contemporary society through the establishment and empowerment of specific institutions along with the promotion of spiritual principles. The emphasis is firmly placed on practicing the ideas of mutualism,

inclusiveness, justice, equal opportunities, universal education, global prosperity, and a world order based on collective security (Bahá'í Topics, 2009f; BIC, 1993, 1995, 2003, 2009a, 2009b; Effendi, 1933).

Fifth, alternative ways in which to look at representative democracy and decision making at all levels have been highlighted through the nonpartisan election processes and non-adversarial principle of consultation offered in the Bahá'í Faith. This is much in line with the tenet of unity, which stresses the oneness of the human race, includes the obligation to serve the interests of humanity and communicate with openness and dignity (Abizadeh, 2005; One Country, 2001; BIC, 2003; BWNS, 2005, 2009f.; Bahai.org, 2009b).

Regarding the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran, meanwhile, there are obvious concerns. The experience of relentless persecution in the birthplace of its religion has clearly challenged the Bahá'í community in that country, with wasted lives and resources, and derailed programs and activities. An assessment of the total cost of the persecution may not be possible to undertake but the price paid by the Iranian Bahá'ís can hardly be overestimated with more than 200 believers killed since the 1979 Revolution, and well over 20,000 since the founding of the religion in 1844 (Effendi, 1950; IHRDC, 2006; Nabil, 1932). At the same time, the costs unwittingly incurred by the Islamic Republic can reasonably be presumed to be considerable, both internally, in lost socioeconomic and cultural value, and externally, in lost international goodwill as a result of damaged reputation with whatever that may entail.

The persecution issue raises further questions, such as what might be the motivating reason behind such irrational behavior by an established clergy and its followers? Beyond the present analysis, it could be assumed, for example, that socioeconomic, sociocultural, and socio-psychological research would be likely to provide some answers.

What seems clear from this investigation, however, is that grip of political power through the lure of religious zeal and nationalistic rhetoric constitutes a key driving force. With its position of disproportionate power, the clerical establishment has a vested interest in preventing liberalizing ideas to spread, with the Bahá'ís somehow embodying the essence of what seems to be feared: a threat to religious authority, arguably because Bahá'í theology effectively renders any clergy redundant. The theocracy's fear of such a scenario might at least partly explain the exceeding intolerance it has demonstrated. What may both have enabled the persecution in the first place and then further consolidated it seems to be linked to entrenched prejudice and distorted views about the Bahá'ís, deliberately created by the clerical establishment through ongoing slander, conspiracy theories, and defamatory propaganda, often openly targeting the Bahá'ís (BIC, 2008; Cameron and Danesh, 2008; IHRDC, 2006; Iran Press Watch, 2009a, 2009b).

Persecution as part of the history of every religion is a well-expounded theme in the Bahá'í world: Bahá'u'lláh explained that the birth of every religion has been met with fierce opposition led by the clerical establishment (Bahá'u'lláh, 1946; Effendi, 1950). Considering that Bahá'ís already have a long history of sustaining persecution, what may partly explain the resilience of the Bahá'í community could be the believers' devotion to their faith, and their associated willingness to make sacrifices. It seems they have a confidence in the ultimate outcome of their hardships—all of which is deeply embedded in the history as well as the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith (Effendi, 1950; Momen, 1981; Nabíl, 1932). After all, the religion was founded in a highly hostile environment, yet soon became firmly established and widely spread, with its global structure of democratically elected administration raised in 1963, on the centennial anniversary of the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh (BWNS, 2009e; Effendi, 1950; Nabíl, 1932). Against this backdrop—and again, in the light of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, which project a glorious future for the world despite the gloom that may prevail temporarily (Bahai.org, 2009a)—the spirit of hope found among the Iranian Bahá'ís, despite their misfortunes, becomes comprehensible.

Notwithstanding the issues that remain concerning the human rights situation faced by the Iranian Bahá'í community, the dilemma of reconciling effective public affairs engagement in a politically charged environment with the Bahá'í tenet of nonpartisanship appears to have been solved in the BIC's response. The remarkable number of UN resolutions made in favor of the Bahá'í case, backed by public statements from governments, non-governmental organizations, and prominent individuals—all of this seems to indicate both skillful handling and a just cause (UN, 2008, 2009a). As to the case of the seven Bahá'í leaders in Iran, jailed without trial since May 2008, the amount of support has been considerable, coming from, e.g., the European Union, U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, the UK government, the German government, the Australian Parliament, the Canadian Foreign Minister, the Dutch government, the Norwegian government, Brazil's Human Rights Commission of the Federal Chamber of Deputies, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Wiesenthal Center, and a number of others including the Archbishop of Canterbury, a group of 32 prominent citizens of India, and more than 240 Iranian artists, writers, and intellectuals (BWNS, 2009g).

This could make Bahá'í public affairs practice relevant for future research concerning a number of organizational and professional issues; for example, which procedural principles are applied and how such principles might be compared by socioeconomic, cultural, or geographic variables. The same may apply to theoretical aspects, which brings up the interesting question of how some of the links between interrelated spiritual and social ideas touched upon in these pages might be analyzed in more detail. This could be expressed as, for instance, whether and how the level of ethical behavior and trust may determine the impact of public affairs campaigns, or to which extent the Bahá'í principle of consultation can improve the decision-making processes of public affairs teams.

Hardly surprising for Bahá'ís were the findings of comparative research into equality as a general parameter of societal health and well-being (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009), neither the growing literature that interconnects trust and social capital (Fukuyama, 1995; Putnam, 2000). As to the closely related ideas of mutualism, justice and democracy (Sen, 2009), the Bahá'í approach seems to favor a coherent view and an electoral model that connects grassroots-level democracy with global governance. Again, bridging the gap between widely assumed incompatibilities seems to be a characteristic that permeates Bahá'í philosophy (Abizadeh, 2005; Bond, 1998; BWNS, 2005; Karlberg, 2004; One Country, 2001).

It is clear from this analysis that the ideas of dialogue and democracy—as well as those of e.g. justice, equality, and trust—can be interconnected through Bahá'í principles of the spiritual nature of man, mutualism, consultation, and unity (Abizadeh, 2005; Effendi, 1977; Karlberg, 2004). Accordingly, an integrated system of belief and administration has been laid out in the Bahá'í writings, although it may seem that the system is not widely known or applied. However, considering the totality of problems related to adversarialism, strife, egotism, and corruption—deplored in an immense body of literature—such a belief system clearly deserves closer examination.

Regarding diplomatic relations, one implied question is how organizations looking to develop a politically neutral and nonpartisan profile may learn from the experience of the BIC. In other words, to which extent can Bahá'í principles be applied outside the context of the Bahá'í Faith itself? As such questions have hardly been answered by this investigation, more detailed research may be warranted for further studies in public affairs.

The uncertainty of how events in Iran may unfold in the future is yet another dimension that surfaces from this study. The argument could be made that the government of the Islamic Republic is looking to win time and, as the months and years pass, might be able to advance its objectives at the expense of the Bahá'í community, which may thus suffer “economic strangulation” (Iran Press Watch, 2009b). On the other hand, the political legitimacy of the theocratic regime could be questioned on the grounds of its human rights record as well as its socioeconomic policies, increasing the likelihood of regime change (Brookings, 2009; Ebadi, 2006; Menashri, 2009). At the same time, as already has been alluded to, the Iranian Bahá'í community has proved more resilient than its opponents might have expected.

Pushing for regime change would not be compatible with the Bahá'í approach to political neutrality and nonpartisanship (BIC, 2008, 2009b); such a move could arguably jeopardize a well established Bahá'í position of credibility and trust. Instead, in recognition of its duty to protect the believers in countries where their basic human rights are systematically violated, as notably in the case of Iran, the BIC has pursued a path of carefully worded diplomacy and trustworthy information, aimed at making the Iranian authorities aware that the plight of the Bahá'ís in Iran is being noted by foreign governments and

international institutions including the UN. In this way, repeated pleas to the Iranian government together with condemnations of e.g. the current imprisonment of the seven Bahá'í leaders in Iran may provide a critical shield against more serious atrocities, as recent history might suggest—the perception being that the Iranian government is relatively sensitive to the sentiment of foreign leaders of state, parliamentarians, and UN officials (Menashri, 2009).

Measuring to which extent the Bahá'í efforts in response to the human rights situation in Iran have proved effective may be next to impossible. What seems clear though is that without the efforts, the Bahá'ís in Iran would have been surrendered to their fate, potentially affording the clerical establishment free reign to do as they please, with the Bahá'ís possibly facing cultural elimination if not something worse. The reality of this specter—and the implications for other minorities whether in Iran or elsewhere—is what seems to alarm those who advocate international law to secure the human rights of minorities and, indeed, is what makes the unusually clear Bahá'í case a test for international law (Ghanea, 2002). For the Bahá'ís this specter is likewise of paramount importance in view of their core teachings, and may in part explain their contribution toward the process of developing human rights discourse and policy-making at the UN level (BIC, 2009a, 2009b; KARNIK, S., personal communication. 16 October 2009).

4.1 References

- ABIZADEH, A., 2005. Democratic Elections without Campaigns? Normative Foundations of National Bahá'í Elections. *World Order*, 37 (1), pp. 7-49. [online] Wilmette: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States. Available from: <http://profs-polisci.mcgill.ca/abizadeh/PDFs/Bahai-Elections.pdf> [Accessed 4 October 2009]
- BAHAI.ORG, 2009a. *The Bahá'ís*. [online] Haifa: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://www.bahai.org> [Accessed 24 March 2009]
- BAHÁ'Í TOPICS, 2009b. Moral Development—Trustworthiness: A Cardinal Bahá'í Virtue. *Bahá'í Topics: An Information Resource of the Bahá'í International Community*. [online] Haifa: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-8-2-2.html> [Accessed 16 September 2009]
- BAHÁ'Í TOPICS, 2009f. A Global Community—The Bahá'í International Community and the United Nations. *Bahá'í Topics: An Information Resource of the Bahá'í International Community*. [online] Haifa: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-6-0-6.html> [Accessed 19 September 2009]
- BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, 1946. *The Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude*. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- BIC, 1993. *World Citizenship: A Global Ethic for Sustainable Development*. New York: Bahá'í International Community.
- BIC, 1995. *The Prosperity of Humankind*. [online] Haifa: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://statements.bahai.org/95-0303.htm> [Accessed 27 September 2009]
- BIC, 2003. *For the Betterment of the World: the Worldwide Bahá'í Community's Approach to Social and Economic Development*. New York: Bahá'í International Community.
- BIC, 2008. *The Bahá'í Question: Cultural Cleansing in Iran*. New York: Bahá'í International Community.
- BIC, 2009a. *Bahá'í International Community United Nations Office*. [online] New York: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://www.bic.org/> [Accessed 25 March 2009]
- BIC, 2009b. *Bahá'í International Community United Nations Office: Statements and Reports*. [online] New York: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://bic.org/statements-and-reports> [Accessed 25 March 2009]
- BOND, M., 1998. *Bahá'í Consultation and Alternative Dispute Resolution*. Wienacht: Landegg International University.
- BROOKINGS, 2009. *After the Iranian Uprising*. [online] Washington DC: The Brookings Institution. Available from: http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/0629_iran_salehi_isfahani.aspx [Accessed 12 October 2009]
- BWNS, 2005. Bahá'ís Hold Unique Democratic Elections. *Bahá'í World News Service*. [online] Haifa: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://news.bahai.org/story/372> [Accessed 4 October 2009]

BWNS, 2009d. Media Information—Belief and Practice. *Bahá'í World News Service*. [online] Haifa: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://news.bahai.org/media-information/belief-and-practice/> [Accessed 6 September 2009]

BWNS, 2009e. Media Information—Brief History. *Bahá'í World News Service*. [online] Haifa: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://news.bahai.org/media-information/brief-history/> [Accessed 6 September 2009]

BWNS, 2009f. Media Information—Administration. *Bahá'í World News Service*. [online] Haifa: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://news.bahai.org/media-information/administration/> [Accessed 6 September 2009]

BWNS, 2009g. Human Rights in Iran and Egypt: Iran Update—Responses from governments, NGOs, and prominent individuals. *Bahá'í World News Service*. [online] Haifa: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://news.bahai.org/human-rights/iran/iran-update/international-reaction.html> [Accessed 6 September 2009]

CAMERON, J. and T. DANESH, 2008. *A Revolution Without Rights? Women, Kurds and Bahá'is Searching for Equality in Iran*. London: The Foreign Policy Centre.

EBADI, S., 2006. *Iran Awakening*. New York: Random House.

EFFENDI, S., 1933. The Bahá'í Faith—A Summary. From a letter to the High Commissioner for Palestine. In: S. Effendi, 1955. *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

EFFENDI, S., 1950. *God Passes By*. 3rd ed. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

EFFENDI, S., 1974. *Bahá'í Administration*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

EFFENDI, S., 1977. *Call to the Nations: Extracts from the Writings of Shoghi Effendi*. Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre.

FUKUYAMA, F., 1995. *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

GHANEA, N., 2002. *Human Rights, the UN, and the Bahá'is in Iran*, pre-publication ed. Oxford: George Ronald/The Hague: Kluwer Law International.

IHRDC, 2006. *A Faith Denied: The Persecution of the Bahá'is of Iran*. [online] New Haven: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. Available from: http://iranhrdc.org/httpdocs/English/pdfs/Reports/A-Faith-Denied_Dec06.pdf [Accessed 30 September 2009]

IRAN PRESS WATCH, 2009a. *Timeline*. [online] Available from: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/timeline> [Accessed 8 October 2009]

IRAN PRESS WATCH, 2009b. *Economic Strangulation of the Baha'i Community*. [online] Available from: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org/post/1578> [Accessed 4 October 2009]

KARLBERG, M., 2004. *Beyond the Culture of Contest*. Oxford: George Ronald.

MENASHRI, D., 2009. *Contest for the New Iran: Nothing Is the Same Since the Hot Summer of 2009*. [online] Berlin: German Council of Foreign Relations (DGAP). Available from: <http://www.ip-global.org/archiv/exclusive/view/1253533196.html> [Accessed 10 October 2009]

MOMEN, M., 1981. *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts*. Oxford: George Ronald.

NABÍL-I-A'ZAM, 1932. *The Dawnbreakers—Nabíl's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*. [online] Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. Available from: <http://bahai-library.com/books/dawnbreakers> [Accessed 31 August 2009]

ONE COUNTRY, 2001. Perspective: Some Thoughts on Elections, One Country, 12 (4), January-March 2001. [online] New York: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: http://www.onecountry.org/e124/e12402as_Perspective_thoughts_on_elections.htm [Accessed 4 October 2009]

PUTNAM, R. D., 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

SEN, A., 2009. *The Idea of Justice*. London: Allen Lane.

UN, 2008. The United Nations Response [Summary of UN resolutions, reports and decisions relevant to the human rights situation of the Bahá'ís of Iran, every year from 1980 through 2007 except 2002]. In: BIC, 2008. *The Bahá'í Question: Cultural Cleansing in Iran*, Appendix II, pp. 64-73. New York: Bahá'í International Community.

UN, 2009a. *United Nations Human Rights*. [Index of resolutions adopted by the General Assembly from 1999 through 2008 regarding the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. [online] Geneva: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Available from: http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/sdpage_e.aspx?b=3&c=86&t=11 [Accessed 4 October 2009]

WILKINSON, R. and K. PICKETT, 2009. *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*. London: Allen Lane.

5.0 Bibliography

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, 1982a. *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London*. London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, 1982b. *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*. Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, 1982c. *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ, 1990. *Some Answered Questions*. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust.

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ and E. G. BROWNE, 1891. *A Traveller’s Narrative—Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Báb*. Amsterdam: Philo Press.

ABIZADEH, A., 2005. Democratic Elections without Campaigns? Normative Foundations of National Bahá’í Elections. *World Order*, 37 (1), pp. 7-49. [online] Wilmette: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States. Available from: <http://profs-polisci.mcgill.ca/abizadeh/PDFs/Bahai-Elections.pdf>

ADL, 2006. *ADL Says Iranian Attempt to Monitor Bahais Sets ‘Dangerous Precedent’*. [online] New York: The Anti-Defamation League. Available from: <http://www.adl.org/NR/exeres/6D76431B-A665-4CE0-9AF7-4CF07D733D31.htm>

AHDIYYIH, M., 2008. Ahmadinejad and the Mahdi. *The Middle East Quarterly*, Fall 2008, XV (4), pp. 27-36. [online] Available from: <http://www.meforum.org/1985/ahmadinejad-and-the-mahdi>

ALL, 2009. *The American League of Lobbyists*. [online] Washington DC: The American League of Lobbyists. Available from: <http://www.alldc.org>

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, 2006. *Iran: Amnesty International seeking clarification of official letter about Baha’i minority*. [online] London: Amnesty International. Available from: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE13/082/2006/en>

ARGENTI, P. A., 2003. *Corporate Communication*, 3rd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill/Irwin.

BAHAI.ORG, 2009. *The Bahá’ís*. [online] Haifa: Bahá’í International Community. Available from: <http://www.bahai.org>

BAHÁ’Í FAITH US, 2009. Quick Facts and Statistics. *Bahá’í Faith: Religion Renewed for a Changing World*. [online] Evanston: National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’ís of the United States. Available from: <http://www.bahai.us/bahai-statistics>

BAHÁ'Í TOPICS, 2009. *Bahá'í Topics: An Information Resource of the Bahá'í International Community*. [online] Haifa: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://info.bahai.org/>

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, 1946. *The Kitáb-i-Íqan: The Book of Certitude*. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, 1976. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, 2nd ed. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, 1978. *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, 1988a. *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, 1988b. *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, 1992. *The Kitab-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*. Haifa: The Universal House of Justice.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, 1998. *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, 7th ed. New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, 2002. *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts: Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*. Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre.

BIC, 1986. *The Bahá'í World 1979-1993*, Vol. XVIII. Haifa: World Centre Publications.

BIC, 1993. *World Citizenship: A Global Ethic for Sustainable Development*. New York: Bahá'í International Community.

BIC, 1995. *The Prosperity of Humankind*. [online] Haifa: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://statements.bahai.org/95-0303.htm>

BIC, 2003. *For the Betterment of the World: the Worldwide Bahá'í Community's Approach to Social and Economic Development*. New York: Bahá'í International Community.

BIC, 2008. *The Bahá'í Question: Cultural Cleansing in Iran*. New York: Bahá'í International Community.

BIC, 2009a. *Bahá'í International Community United Nations Office*. [online] New York: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://www.bic.org/>

BIC, 2009b. *Bahá'í International Community United Nations Office: Statements and Reports*. [online] New York: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://bic.org/statements-and-reports>

BLAIR, C., 2009. It is not just democracy that is illegal in Iran. *The Times*, 9 July 2009. [online] London: News International. Available from: http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest_contributors/article6669920.ece

BOND, M., 1998. *Bahá'í Consultation and Alternative Dispute Resolution*. Wienacht: Landegg International University.

- BOWERS, K. E., 2004. *God Speaks Again: An Introduction to the Bahá'í Faith*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- BROOKINGS, 2009. *After the Iranian Uprising*. [online] Washington DC: The Brookings Institution. Available from: http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2009/0629_iran_salehi_isfahani.aspx [Accessed 12 October 2009]
- BROOKSHAW, D. P, and S. B. Fazel, eds., 2008. *The Baha'is of Iran: Socio-Historical Studies*. London: Routledge.
- BROWNE, E. G., ed., 1918. *Materials for the Study of the Bábí Religion—Compiled by Edward G. Brown*. Cambridge: At the University Press.
- BWNS, 2009. *Bahá'í World News Service*. [online] Haifa: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://news.bahai.org>
- CAMERON, J. and T. DANESH, 2008. *A Revolution Without Rights? Women, Kurds and Bahá'is Searching for Equality in Iran*. London: The Foreign Policy Centre.
- COLEMAN, J. S., 1988. Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 94. Supplement: Organizations and Institutions: Sociological and Economic Approaches to the Analysis of Social Structure, pp. S95-S120. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- COVEY, S. M. R., 2006. *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing that Changes Everything*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- CUTLIP, S. M. et al., 2006. *Effective Public Relations*, 9th ed. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education.
- DABASHI, H., 2009. *Commentary: When Baha'is Are Free, Then All Iranian Will Be*. [online] Atlanta: Cable News Network. Available from: <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/09/16/dabashi.iran.tolerance/> [Accessed 27 September 2009]
- DOORLEY, J. and H. F. GARCIA, 2007. *Reputation Management: The Key to Successful Public Relations and Corporate Communication*. New York: Routledge.
- EBADI, S., 2006. *Iran Awakening*. New York: Random House.
- EFFENDI, S., 1955. *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- HORNBY, H., 1983. *Lights of Guidance*. New Delhi, India: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1983, #146.
- EFFENDI, S., 1947. The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh—A World Religion. In: *World Order*, 7 (2), 1972-73. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- EFFENDI, S., 1950. *God Passes By*. 3rd ed. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- EFFENDI, S., 1974. *Bahá'í Administration*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

- EFFENDI, S., 1977. *Call to the Nations: Extracts from the Writings of Shoghi Effendi*. Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre.
- EFFENDI, S., 1990. *The Advent of Divine Justice*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- ESSLEMONT, J. E., 1980. *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, 5th ed. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- FELLMAN, G., 1998. *Rambo and the Dalai Lama: The Compulsion to Win and Its Threat to Human Survival*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- FINLAYSON, J. G., 2005. *Habermas: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- FREITAG, M. and R. TRAUNMÜLLER, 2009. Spjeres of Trust: An Empirical Analysis of the Foundations of Particularised and Generalised Trust. *European Journal of Political Research*, 48, pp. 783-803. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- FUKUYAMA, F., 1995. *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- GHANEA, N., 2002. *Human Rights, the UN, and the Bahá'ís in Iran*. Oxford: George Ronald/The Hague: Kluwer Law International.
- GLOBAL ALLIANCE, 2003. *Global Protocol on Ethics in Public Relations*. [online] Lugano: Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communications Management. Available from: http://www.globalalliancepr.usi.ch/download.php?filename=Global+Protocol+on+Ethics+in+Public+Relations&file=%2Fuploads%2Fdocs%2F02_Global+Standards%2FGA_Global_Ethics_Protocol.pdf
- GREENWOOD, J., ed., 2003. *The Challenge of Change in EU Business Associations*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- GRUNIG, J. E. and T. HUNT, 1984. *Managing Public Relations*. Austin: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- GRUNIG, J. E., 2006. Furnishing the Edifice: Ongoing Research on Public Relations As a Strategic Management Function. *Journal of Public Relations Research*. 18 (2), pp. 151-176 London: Routledge.
- HABERMAS, J., 1990. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*. Maldon: Polity Press.
- HALPERN, D., 2005. *Social Capital*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- HATCHER, J. S., 2007. *The Ascent of Society: The Social Imperative in Personal Salvation*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- HATCHER, W. S. and J. D. MARTIN, 2002. *The Bahá'í Faith: The Emerging Global Religion*. 4th ed. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.
- HOWELL, S. and R. WILLIS, eds., 1989. *Societies at Peace: Anthropological Perspectives*. London: Routledge.

ICCO, 2003. *Stockholm Charter*. [online] London: International Communications Consultancy Organisation. Available from: <http://www.precis.se/pdf/stockholm%20charter.pdf>

IHRDC, 2006. *A Faith Denied: The Persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran*. [online] New Haven: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. Available from: http://iranhrdc.org/httpdocs/English/pdfs/Reports/A-Faith-Denied_Dec06.pdf

IHRDC, 2007. *Community Under Siege: The Ordeal of the Bahá'ís of Shiraz*. [online] New Haven: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. Available from: http://iranhrdc.org/httpdocs/English/pdfs/Reports/Community-Under-Siege_Sep07.pdf

IHRDC, 2008. *Crimes Against Humanity: The Islamic Republic's Attacks on the Bahá'ís*. [online] New Haven: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. Available from: http://iranhrdc.org/httpdocs/English/pdfs/Reports/Crimes-against-Humanity_Nov08.pdf

IRAN PRESS WATCH [online]. *Documenting the Persecution of the Baha'i Community in Iran*. Available from: <http://www.iranpresswatch.org>

KANT, I., 1780. *The Metaphysical Elements of Ethics*. [online] Available from: <http://philosophy.eserver.org/kant/metaphys-elements-of-ethics.txt>

KANT, I., 1781. *The Critique of Pure Reason*. [online] Available from: <http://philosophy.eserver.org/kant/critique-of-pure-reason.txt>

KANT, I., 1785. *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*. [online] Available from: <http://philosophy.eserver.org/kant/metaphys-of-morals.txt>

KARLBERG, M., 2004. *Beyond the Culture of Contest*. Oxford: George Ronald.

KÜNG, H. and K.-J. KUSCHEL, eds., 1993. Council for the Parliament of the World's Religions. *A Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.

LEPARD, B. D., 2005. *Hope for a Global Ethic: Shared Principles in Religious Scriptures*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

MENASHRI, D., 2009. *Contest for the New Iran: Nothing Is the Same Since the Hot Summer of 2009*. [online] Berlin: German Council of Foreign Relations (DGAP). Available from: <http://www.ip-global.org/archiv/exclusive/view/1253533196.html>

MOIN, B., 2000. *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books.

MOMEN, M., 1981. *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts*. Oxford: George Ronald.

MOMEN, M., 1998. *The Bahá'í Faith in the United Kingdom-A Brief History*. [online] London: Bahá'í Community of the UK. Available from: <http://www.btinternet.com/~iain.s.palin/heritage/ukhist.htm#Official>

MOMEN, M., 2007. *Marginality and Apostasy in the Baha'i Community*. [online] Available from: <http://www.northill.demon.co.uk/relstud/apostasy.html>

MOMEN, M., 2008. *The Bahá'í Faith: A Beginner's Guide*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications.

NABÍL-I-A'ZAM, 1932. *The Dawnbreakers—Nabíl's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*. [online] Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. Available from: <http://bahai-library.com/books/dawnbreakers>

NAKHJÁVÁNÍ, 'A., 2006. *Shoghi Effendi: The Range and Power of His Pen*. Rome: Casa Editrice Bahá'í.

ONE COUNTRY, 2009. *The Online Newsletter of the Baha'i International Community*. [online] New York: Bahá'í International Community. Available from: <http://www.onecountry.org>

OUTHWAITE, W., 1996, ed. *The Habermas Reader*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

PEARSON, R., 1989. Business Ethics as Communication Ethics: Public Relations Practice and the Idea of Dialogue. In: Botan, C. and V. Hazleton, *Public Relations Theory*. pp. 111-131. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum.

PUTNAM, R. D., 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

PUTNAM, R. D., 2002. *Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society*. New York: Oxford University Press.

PUTNAM, R. D., and L. M. FELDSTEIN, 2003. *Better Together: Restoring the American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

RAWLS, J., 1971. *A Theory of Justice*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

REGESTER, M. and J. LARKIN, 2008. *Risk Issues and Crisis Management in Public Relations: A Casebook of Best Practice*, 4th ed. London: Kogan Page.

RICHARDS, J. C., ed., 1983. *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York: Greenwood Press.

SANASARIAN, E., 2000. *Religious Minorities in Iran*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

SCHAEFER, U., 2007. *Bahá'í Ethics in Light of Scripture: An Introduction* (v. 1). Oxford: George Ronald.

SCHAEFER, U., 2007. *Bahá'í Ethics in Light of Scripture: Virtues and Divine Commandments* (v. 2). Oxford: George Ronald.

- SCRUTON, R., 2001. *Kant: A Very Short Introduction*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- SEARS, W., 1982. *A Cry from the Heart: The Bahá'is in Iran*. Oxford: George Ronald.
- SEN, A., 2009. *The Idea of Justice*. London: Allen Lane.
- THOMSON, S. and S. JOHN, 2007. *Public Affairs in Practice: A Practical Guide to Lobbying*. London: Kogan Page.
- UN, 1948. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. [online] New York: United Nations. Available from: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>
- UN, 2000. *Professionalism and Ethics in the Public Service: Issues and Practices in Selected Regions*. New York: United Nations.
- UN [online]. *United Nations Human Rights*. [Index of resolutions adopted by the General Assembly from 1999 through 2008 regarding the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Geneva: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Available from: http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/sdpage_e.aspx?b=3&c=86&t=11
- UN [online]. *United Nations Treaties Collection*. New York: United Nations. Available from: http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-4&chapter=4&lang=en
- UN [online]. *International Law*. [online] Geneva: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Available from: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law>
- WILKINSON, R. and K. PICKETT, 2009. *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*. London: Allen Lane.
- WOODSTOCK THEOLOGICAL CENTER, 2002. *The Ethics of Lobbying: Organized Interests, Political Power, and the Common Good*. Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002.
- YUTHAS, K. et al., 2002. Communicative Action and Corporate Annual Reports. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 41 (2002), pp. 141–157.