

## CONSTRUCTIVE RESILIENCE: THE BAHÁ'Í RESPONSE TO OPPRESSION

*by Michael Karlberg*

Against the backdrop of dramatic struggles for social change in the twentieth century, characterized by non-violent opposition and civil disobedience, the Bahá'í community of Iran has pursued a distinctively non-adversarial approach to social change under conditions of violent oppression. This non-adversarial model has received little attention in the literature on social change. This article therefore seeks to bring the model into focus by outlining the Bahá'í community's experience of oppression, by examining the principles that inform their collective response to oppression, by discussing the results of their response, and by deriving from this a set of heuristic insights that can guide further inquiry into the dynamics of peace and change.

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By the end of the twentieth century, a large body of literature had emerged exploring the theory and practice of non-violent resistance to oppression. This literature was derived from the writings and actions of influential figures such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, the movements they led and inspired, and the deeper ethical and spiritual traditions from which they drew their inspiration. Against the backdrop of these dramatic twentieth-century struggles, the Bahá'í community in Iran was pursuing a distinctively non-adversarial response to violent oppression that has received comparatively little attention—despite being “one of the few documented cases of a minority that has managed to resist peacefully” a sustained and systematic campaign of genocidal intent.<sup>1</sup>

For more than 160 years the Bahá'í community in Iran has been a target of recurrent waves of hostile propaganda and censorship, social ostracism and exclusion, denial of education, denial of employment, denial of due process before the law, property looting and destruction, government seizure of individual and collective assets, arson,

incitements to mob violence, arbitrary arrests and imprisonments, physical and psychological torture, death threats, executions, and disappearances—all calculated to extinguish the community.<sup>2</sup> Most Iranians harbor no animosity toward the Bahá'ís, and the teachings of Islam explicitly promote religious tolerance. However, powerful segments of the Shí'ah clerical establishment in Iran pursued a hostile agenda by inciting their more extreme followers to act against the Bahá'ís, by disseminating calumnies and misrepresentations from the pulpit and through the media that have resulted in widespread indifference to the plight of the Bahá'ís within Iranian society, and by intimidating those who might otherwise be moved to speak out on behalf of the Bahá'ís.<sup>3</sup>

Since 1979, a renewed wave of persecution and violence has attracted the attention and condemnation of the United Nations General Assembly and other U.N. agencies, international human rights organizations, diverse national governments, academics and journalists from numerous countries, progressive voices within Iranian society, Iranian expatriates living abroad, and Muslim human rights activists, who have all noted the innocence and long-suffering of the Bahá'ís in Iran and have urged the authorities there to end the current campaign of systematic repression.<sup>4</sup> As a result of this attention, outside observers are increasingly taking note of other aspects of this emerging global religion that originated within the conflict and turmoil of the contemporary Middle East. Its steady global expansion, its democratizing tendencies, and its commitments to peace and justice have all been closely examined and widely documented.<sup>5</sup> To date, however, the Bahá'í community's response to oppression has received little attention. This article seeks to bring the Bahá'í response to oppression into clearer focus as a distinctively non-adversarial model of social change in the face of violent persecution.

#### BACKGROUND: THE OPPRESSION OF BAHÁ'ÍS IN IRAN

The Bahá'í Faith was founded in the mid-nineteenth century by a young Persian, Mirza Husayn-'Ali, who is known by the name Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892). As a young man, Bahá'u'lláh turned his back on a life of wealth and privilege and refused a position in the court of the Shah in order to tend to the poor and needy in his country. From the age of 36 until his death, Bahá'u'lláh was a prisoner and an exile of the Persian and Ottoman authorities for his leadership

of a “heretical” religious movement dedicated to the peaceful construction of a new social order.<sup>6</sup> The movement derives from the belief that all of the world’s great religious systems spring from the same unknowable Divine Source, advance the same processes of spiritual evolution through successively unfolding stages, and differ only because of the cultural and historical contexts in which they emerged. Its social teachings include the full equality of men and women, the elimination of extremes of wealth and poverty, the harmony of science and religion, and the need for universal education. The religion’s most pivotal teachings, however, revolve around the promotion of unity and justice in the context of increasing global interdependence.<sup>7</sup>

The community that emerged in response to Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings is now a microcosm of the planet’s diverse human population. It has a current membership of more than five million people, drawn from more than 2,100 different indigenous tribes, races, and ethnic groups, representing all nations and socioeconomic classes on earth.<sup>8</sup> The Bahá’í Faith is now widely recognized as an independent world religion,<sup>9</sup> yet it has no ecclesiastical order or clergy of any kind. Rather, the community is organized through a system of locally elected governing assemblies in thousands of localities worldwide, nationally elected governing assemblies in 179 independent nations and territories, and a single internationally elected governing body that coordinates and guides its activities on a global scale.<sup>10</sup> It is, by these measures, one of the most diverse, globally distributed, democratically organized, and steadily growing communities of people—religious or otherwise—on the planet today.

Bahá’ís are required, by their faith, to avoid active involvement in partisan politics and to show loyalty and obedience to the laws of the land in which they live.<sup>11</sup> Bahá’ís are also exhorted to “consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship.”<sup>12</sup> Despite these commitments the Bahá’í community has, since its inception, been subjected to violent persecution by various religious and civil authorities in Iran and their followers or supporters.<sup>13</sup> The herald of the Bahá’í Faith, Siyyid ‘Alí-Muhammad, known as the Báb (1819–1850),<sup>14</sup> was executed at the age of 30 by a government firing squad of 750 riflemen.<sup>15</sup> In the campaign of extermination that followed, some twenty thousand early believers, including women and children, were put to death, often in the most brutal and inhumane ways, while many more were tortured, imprisoned, subjected to mob violence, and had their property plundered or destroyed.<sup>16</sup> European

eyewitnesses of this period left written accounts of the followers of the Báb being branded with red-hot irons; being stoned to death; having their skulls crushed; being blown in half by mortars; being hung upside down from trees for target practice; having their teeth torn out, their eyes gouged out, and being forced to eat amputated parts of their own bodies; having lighted candles inserted into their flesh while being led in chains, through the streets, behind military bands; and having the soles of their feet skinned, soaked in boiling oil, shoed like a horse, and then being forced to run before their execution was administered.<sup>17</sup>

Since the initial bloodbath that marked the birth of the community in the mid-nineteenth century, the Bahá'ís in Iran have lived as an oppressed and vulnerable minority, experiencing recurrent episodes of violent persecution. These episodes have been driven by incitements from the pulpit as well as media propaganda reflecting a calculated effort to poison public sentiment toward the Bahá'ís and to intimidate fair-minded and sympathetic Iranians who might be moved to come to their defense.<sup>18</sup> For the most part, Bahá'ís have been denied the basic civil protections granted to other religious minorities in the country—despite the fact that the Bahá'í Faith is the only one of Iran's non-Muslim minorities that bears witness to the station of Mohammad, recognizes the authenticity of the Qur'án, and upholds the divine origins of Islam.<sup>19</sup>

The social marginalization and legal exclusion of the Bahá'ís in Iran stands in stark contrast to the religious tolerance that characterized Islamic civilization at its peak<sup>20</sup>—and that moderate Muslims around the world and inside Iran still advocate. The security of the Bahá'í community, however, has been continually undermined by ongoing power struggles that have played out within and between the civil and religious authorities in Iran throughout most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>21</sup> In the context of these power struggles, the Bahá'ís have served as familiar targets and scapegoats—much like the role played by Jewish communities throughout parts of Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, culminating in the Holocaust.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, in general, when the power of the Shí'ah clerics has been in ascendance in Iran, relative to the power of secular authorities, the persecution of the Bahá'ís has been most pronounced.<sup>23</sup>

Against this backdrop, a number of radical Islamic groups emerged in the twentieth century with the goal of extinguishing the

Bahá'í Faith in Iran, despite the many Qur'anic teachings that extol tolerance, and despite Mohammad's clear statements in the Qur'an that "God loves not the aggressors" (2:190) and that there should be "no compulsion in religion" (2:257). These groups include the *Jam'iyat-i Madhhab-i Ja'fari* (Society of the Sect of the Twelve Imams), the *Jámí'a-yi Ta'límat-i Islámi* (Society for Islamic Education), and the *Anjumani-i-Tablighát-i-Islámi* (Society for the Promotion of Islam), which later became known by the more honest name *Anjumani-i didd-i Bahá'í* (the Anti-Bahá'í Society) as well as the name *Hujjatiyyih* (a reference to *Hujjat*, the expected Shi-ah messiah). In their harassment and intimidation of Bahá'ís, this latter group, whose principal aim was to combat the Bahá'í Faith, operated an extensive and well-organized network of over 12,000 members across Iran that enjoyed the patronage and financial support of the religious authorities while maintaining a collaborative relationship with the Shah's secret police, the SAVAK.<sup>24</sup>

After 1979, following the Islamic revolution led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a renewed wave of persecution engulfed the Bahá'í community. Before Ayatollah Khomeini came to power he was already a self-declared adversary of the Bahá'í Faith and he made it clear that the Bahá'í community, which constituted the largest religious minority in Iran with more than 300,000 members, would be denied the basic human rights that would be afforded to other religious minorities in the country.<sup>25</sup> In addition, leaders of the Anti-Bahá'í Society assumed many of the most influential positions within the newly declared republic.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, immediately following the revolution, it became clear that the Bahá'ís were in great danger as, indeed, the Islamic regime began to pursue a program of "implacable hostility toward the Bahá'ís."<sup>27</sup> Segments of the population were immediately incited to violence against the Bahá'ís, who could be attacked with impunity because the new Islamic constitution (echoing the 1906 constitution before it) intentionally denied the Bahá'ís any legal recognition or civil protections and "effectively criminalized the faith."<sup>28</sup> Courts of the new Islamic regime in turn denied Bahá'ís the right to seek justice, redress, or protection against killings, assaults, or property theft by ruling that Iranians who commit such acts against Bahá'ís are not liable for their actions because Bahá'ís are classified as "unprotected infidels," "heretics," and "those whose blood may be shed with impunity."<sup>29</sup>

In addition to encouraging, and then turning a blind eye to, heinous acts committed by some Iranian citizens against Bahá'ís,

the Iranian authorities pursued their own systematic and well-documented campaign designed to deal with “the Bahá’í question” by ensuring “that their progress and development are blocked” by the state.<sup>30</sup> Toward this end, after 1979 Iran saw “the full range of state coercive force deployed against the Bahá’ís.”<sup>31</sup> Within this ongoing campaign, over two hundred Bahá’ís—including a significant portion of the democratically elected leaders of the Bahá’í community—have been executed; roughly a thousand more have been imprisoned, and many thousands more have lost their jobs, been denied their pensions, been forced to repay past pensions and salaries, been expelled from schools and universities, been denied health care, had their personal property plundered, and had their grave sites defiled.<sup>32</sup> So depraved has been the treatment of many Bahá’ís that in some cases the family members of executed victims have been forced to repay the government the cost of the bullets used in the executions, while women as young as 17 years old have been hanged for the crime of educating Bahá’í children in their homes.<sup>33</sup> In addition, Bahá’í holy places and historical sites have been razed throughout the country. Most recently, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic regime, Ayatollah Khamenei, also “instructed military and law enforcement agencies to identify and monitor all Bahá’ís living within their areas of responsibility,” and there is evidence that this instruction is being carried out.<sup>34</sup> This act has been a familiar precursor to genocidal campaigns carried out by authoritarian regimes in other countries.

The Bahá’ís in Iran are therefore “a people within a state, yet legally without a state (in terms of state protection), while being the target of that state.”<sup>35</sup> Indeed, for the first two decades following the Islamic revolution, the government even denied Bahá’ís the right to leave Iran—a policy that was reminiscent of the nineteenth-century pogroms against Bahá’ís when the gates to an Iranian city would be guarded so that Bahá’ís could not escape as they were hunted down from house to house.<sup>36</sup>

The authorities defend their actions against the Bahá’ís through baseless and often self-contradictory claims that the Bahá’í Faith is a seditious political movement rather than a religion; that Bahá’ís are agents of Zionism and spies for Israel; that Bahá’ís are agents and spies for American, British, or Russian imperialism; that the Bahá’ís are anti-Islamic and satanic; that Bahá’ís are enemies of the state; that Bahá’ís are spreading injustice and oppression throughout the world and are allied with communism; that Bahá’ís are spreading

sexual immorality, prostitution, and other vices; and that Bahá'ís were former collaborators with SAVAK, the Shah's secret police. Such claims have all been proven to be entirely without merit and have been rejected by the United Nations, by human rights agencies, and by objective scholars.<sup>37</sup> For instance, the allegation of immorality and prostitution derives from the fact that the Shí'ah authorities deny the validity of Bahá'í marriage, thus rendering all Bahá'í marriages a form of immorality and prostitution. Likewise, the charge that Bahá'ís are agents of Zionism and spies for Israel derives from the fact that the spiritual and administrative center of the worldwide Bahá'í community is located in Akka and Haifa, Israel. Yet the sole reason for this is that Bahá'u'lláh was exiled and imprisoned there by the Iranian and Ottoman authorities from 1868 until his death in 1892.

The fraudulent nature of the Iranian accusations against the Bahá'ís is further revealed by the fact that the Iranian authorities consistently offer their Bahá'í victims freedom from imprisonment and torture, or reprieve from execution, on the sole condition that they recant their religious beliefs—a demand that is a violation of the basic human right to freedom of belief that has been articulated by the United Nations and various human rights organizations. This demand provides clear evidence that “religious persecution was the primary motive” for actions by the regime against the Bahá'ís.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center has described these attempts at forced conversion as “reminiscent of the methods of the Spanish Inquisition.”<sup>39</sup>

The reasons that some Shí'ah clerics—or 'ulamá—are bent on extinguishing the Bahá'í Faith appear to be both theological and material. In general terms, many 'ulamá are theologically unwilling to accept the possibility of a post-Islamic religion, since that would defy the interpretive logic by which they understand Islam (and their privileged position within it).<sup>40</sup> More specifically, many 'ulamá appear unwilling to tolerate the challenging claim, advanced by the Báb and elaborated by Bahá'u'lláh, that the promise and aspirations of the major religious systems of the past will gradually be fulfilled in coming centuries as humanity enters into an era of justice and enlightenment in which the 'ulamá will eventually have no place.<sup>41</sup> The Bahá'í Faith is thus perceived as a conceptual menace that threatens to undermine the theological, social, and economic position of the 'ulamá, including their extensive system of religious endowments,

fees, and benefits, which can be preserved only as long as they retain their privileged status within the Iranian psyche.<sup>42</sup> This alignment of theological interpretations and material interests has provided a powerful incentive for the persecution of Bahá'ís for one hundred and sixty years.

As the history of many countries has demonstrated, small but powerful segments of society, like the more intolerant and ambitious Shí'ah clerics within Iran, are often capable of orchestrating large-scale campaigns of persecution and violence against vulnerable minorities by manipulating public perceptions and sentiments, by inciting mob actions, by cultivating a climate of indifference within the wider population, and by intimidating or silencing sympathetic segments of society who might otherwise speak out in defense of the persecuted minority. Such has been the case in Iran. Significantly, in recent years, sympathetic segments of Iranian society have begun to speak out again in defense of the Bahá'ís, often at considerable personal risk.<sup>43</sup>

#### THE BAHÁ'Í RESPONSE TO OPPRESSION

The Bahá'í community's response to the oppression outlined above derives directly from the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and his appointed successors. Before his death in 1892, Bahá'u'lláh left written instructions appointing his eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844–1921), to succeed him as the Center of his Covenant and the ultimate source of guidance and authority in the nascent Bahá'í community. 'Abdu'l-Bahá served in this capacity until his own death. In his will and testament he appointed the twin successors of the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice. His grandson Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957) guided the affairs of the Bahá'í community as Guardian until his passing. Six years after his death the Bahá'í community had grown to the point that it could elect its international governing body, as envisioned in Bahá'u'lláh's writings. The Universal House of Justice was thus elected for the first time in 1963 and now directs and coordinates the work of the Bahá'í community worldwide, serving as the permanent center of guidance and authority within the community.<sup>44</sup> The writings of Bahá'u'lláh, along with the elaborations provided by these three covenantal sources of authority, articulate the vision and principles that guide the Bahá'í response to oppression, which are outlined below.



*The Bahá'í Vision*

The fundamental teaching of the Bahá'í Faith is the imperative of unity in this age of global interdependence. The goal of our collective social evolution, Bahá'u'lláh wrote, is to see “the entire human race as one soul and one body.”<sup>45</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that in the past, “owing to the absence of means, the unity of all mankind could not have been achieved;” “in this day, however, means of communication have multiplied, and the five continents of the earth have virtually merged into one... all the members of the human family, whether peoples or governments, cities or villages, have become increasingly interdependent... Hence the unity of all mankind can in this day be achieved.”<sup>46</sup> Elaborating upon this theme, Shoghi Effendi wrote that “the oneness of the entire human race” is “the pivotal principle” of the Bahá'í Faith.<sup>47</sup> “Unity,” the Universal House of Justice reiterated, “is the alpha and omega of all Bahá'í objectives.”<sup>48</sup> Within this context, the Bahá'í response to oppression is informed by a vision of unity and interdependence that is seen as the next stage in humanity's collective social evolution—a stage representing the collective maturation of humanity. As Shoghi Effendi explains,

The principle of the Oneness of Mankind – the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve... is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family... It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced... It represents the consummation of human evolution.<sup>49</sup>

For Bahá'ís, unity is not only one of the primary goals of social evolution, it is also “the power through which these goals will be progressively realized.”<sup>50</sup> “So powerful is the light of unity,” Bahá'u'lláh asserts, “that it can illuminate the whole earth.”<sup>51</sup> The Bahá'í approach to social change thus avoids all forms of divisive or antagonistic action. This includes, most obviously, a rejection of all forms of violent resistance or violent revolution.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, the Bahá'í community does not align itself with the theory and practice of non-violent opposition and civil disobedience that characterized many twentieth-century social and political movements. “Conflict and contention are

categorically forbidden,” Bahá’u’lláh explains.<sup>53</sup> The Bahá’í approach is thus completely non-adversarial or non-oppositional. In pursuing this approach, Bahá’ís call into question some of the twentieth century’s most deeply entrenched assumptions. Foremost among these

is the conviction that unity is a distant, almost unattainable ideal to be addressed only after a host of political conflicts have been somehow resolved, material needs somehow satisfied, and injustices somehow corrected. The opposite, Bahá’u’lláh asserts, is the case. The primary disease that afflicts society and generates the ills that cripple it, he says, is the disunity of a human race that is distinguished by its capacity for collaboration and whose progress to date has depended on the extent to which unified action has, at various times and in various societies, been achieved.<sup>54</sup>

This vision of unity as both the means and the end of social change is so fundamental to Bahá’í belief that it characterizes the work of the community even in the face of violent oppression, as the collective experience of the Bahá’ís in Iran demonstrates. Of course, pursuing this vision under such conditions has tested the will and commitment of individual Bahá’ís in Iran and has resulted in personal suffering and loss for many. In each generation, some individuals have fallen away from the Bahá’í Faith; small numbers have grown indifferent to the Bahá’í teachings or resentful of Bahá’í authority; and a few have compromised Bahá’í standards of conduct while continuing to identify nominally as Bahá’ís. Most of the Bahá’ís in Iran, however, have remained firm in their faith, the community as a whole has proven remarkably resilient, and the institutions of the Bahá’í community have guided its development in a manner that is consistent with the long-term vision articulated in Bahá’u’lláh’s writings. In this regard, the collective historical experience of the Iranian Bahá’í community provides a glimpse into the efficacy of a distinctively non-adversarial approach to social change. This experience will be examined after some of the underlying concepts and principles that define this approach are discussed.

*Concepts and Principles Informing the Bahá’í Response to Oppression*

Bahá’u’lláh, like the founders of the major religious systems of the past, affirms that there are both spiritual and material dimensions to

human nature. The human soul, according to his teachings, develops within a matrix of mutually interacting spiritual and material forces that affect both our inner and outer lives. As Shoghi Effendi explains,

We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions.<sup>55</sup>

Bahá'ís therefore believe that strategies for achieving lasting social change—including strategies for overcoming violent oppression—must pay attention to both the material and spiritual dimensions of change, including the transformation of hearts among both the oppressors and the oppressed. In this regard, oppositional strategies that pit one group against another, whether violently or non-violently, are not considered conducive to spiritual transformation and lasting change. Bahá'ís thus refrain from all divisive forms of social action, including involvement in partisan political organizing and opposition. As the Universal House of Justice counsels the Bahá'í community,

because of our refusal to become involved in politics, Bahá'ís are often accused of holding aloof from the “real problems” of their fellowmen. But when we hear this accusation let us not forget that those who make it are usually idealistic materialists to whom material good is the only “real” good, whereas we know that the working of the material world is merely a reflection of spiritual conditions and until the spiritual conditions can be changed there can be no lasting change for the better in material affairs.<sup>56</sup>

In addition to this focus on the spiritual requisites of change, including the transformation of human hearts, Bahá'u'lláh places great emphasis on processes of collective social and institutional development. Humanity, the Bahá'í writings explain, has passed through conditions that are analogous to the stages of infancy and childhood in the individual, and we have entered into a condition analogous to collective adolescence in which we are realizing our full physical powers as a species, but we have not yet learned to temper these powers through the wisdom and discretion that comes with maturity.<sup>57</sup>

Among the lessons that we need to learn at this stage in our collective development, in order to attain the long-awaited age of maturity, is how to live together and organize our collective affairs in a just and sustainable manner. Of course, Bahá'ís do not anticipate that this transition to a more mature social order will be easy. Indeed, they believe it will be driven in large part by the increasingly desperate conditions humanity encounters as it clings to immature patterns of behavior.<sup>58</sup> As Shoghi Effendi wrote,

The world is, in truth, moving on towards its destiny. The interdependence of the peoples and nations of the earth, whatever the leaders of the divisive forces of the world may say or do, is already an accomplished fact. Its unity in the economic sphere is now understood and recognized. The welfare of the part means the welfare of the whole, and the distress of the part brings distress to the whole... The fires lit by this great ordeal are the consequences of men's failure to recognize it. They are, moreover, hastening its consummation. Adversity, prolonged, worldwide, afflictive, allied to chaos and universal destruction, must needs convulse the nations, stir the conscience of the world, disillusion the masses, precipitate a radical change in the very conception of society, and coalesce ultimately the disjointed, the bleeding limbs of mankind into one body, single, organically united, and indivisible.<sup>59</sup>

Bahá'ís anticipate that this difficult transitional process will span many generations, as anachronistic institutions and inherited patterns of behavior are only reluctantly abandoned, and new ones gradually adopted, in response to the mounting pressures brought about by our reproductive and technological success as a species. The Bahá'í approach to social change, including the Bahá'í response to oppression, is thus pursued within a time frame that spans many generations. This entails perseverance, faith, a long-term perspective, and a recognition that “the patience required in the usually slow processes of social evolution is painful” at times.<sup>60</sup>

Within this context, the Bahá'í writings also describe two contrasting processes playing out across the planet during the current age of transition to a more harmonious global society. Shoghi Effendi describes these processes as the simultaneous processes of “integration and of disintegration, of order and chaos.”<sup>61</sup> From a Bahá'í perspective,

the forces of disintegration and chaos require no assistance, as failing institutions and anachronistic social norms are steadily collapsing under the weight of their own dysfunction and maladaptation to current global conditions. What is needed are functional alternatives that are well adapted to conditions of heightened interdependence.

Bahá'ís are therefore encouraged to devote their time and energy to the integrative processes associated with the construction of a viable social order. This is yet another reason that Bahá'ís generally refrain from engaging in the divisive political processes that surround them. Instead, they are working to construct a new model of democratic governance<sup>62</sup> and new patterns of social interaction that they believe will gradually prove themselves as viable alternatives to the inherited sociopolitical order. As the Universal House of Justice explains,

the Bahá'ís are following a completely different path from that usually followed by those who wish to reform society. They eschew political methods towards the achievement of their aims, and concentrate on revitalizing the hearts, minds and behaviour of people and on presenting a working model as evidence of the reality and practicality of the way of life they propound.<sup>63</sup>

Bahá'ís do not, however, seek to impose their ideas regarding governance, or any other aspect of Bahá'í community life, on others. Rather, they believe that the model of governance they are developing, and the patterns of social interaction they are learning, can only be viable if they are embraced through a “supremely voluntary” process.<sup>64</sup> In this regard, Bahá'ís reject all forms of force, coercion, compulsion, pressure, or proselytization as means of social change. Their strategy is one of *construction* and *attraction*: construct a viable alternative and, to the extent that it proves itself and stands in contrast with the unjust and unsustainable systems of the old social order, it will gradually attract more and more people.<sup>65</sup>

This strategy takes on a specific quality in the face of violent oppression. For Bahá'ís, as the Universal House of Justice explains, “The proper response to oppression is neither to succumb in resignation nor to take on the characteristics of the oppressor. The victim of oppression can transcend it through an inner strength that shields the soul from bitterness and hatred and which sustains consistent, principled action.”<sup>66</sup> In this context, the Universal House of Justice has described the Bahá'í response to oppression as an expression of

*constructive resilience*. Elaborating on this theme, the Universal House of Justice wrote to the Bahá'í youth in Iran, who had been deceived about their prospects of entering colleges and universities by authorities bent on demoralizing them and inhibiting their progress:

Recent events call to mind heart-rending episodes in the history of the Faith, of cruel deceptions wrought against your forebears. It is only appropriate that you strive to transcend the opposition against you with that same *constructive resilience* that characterized their response to the duplicity of their detractors. Peering beyond the distress of the difficulties assailing them, those heroic souls attempted to translate the teachings of the new Faith into actions of spiritual and social development. That, too, is your work. Their objective was to build, to strengthen, to refine the tissues of society wherever they might find themselves; and thus, they set up schools, equally educating girls and boys; introduced progressive principles; promoted the sciences; contributed significantly to diverse fields such as agriculture, health, and industry – all of which accrued to the benefit of the nation. You, too, seek to render service to your homeland and to contribute to the renewal of civilization. They responded to the inhumanity of their enemies with patience, calm, resignation, and contentment, choosing to meet deception with truthfulness and cruelty with good will towards all. You, too, demonstrate such noble qualities and, holding fast to these same principles, you belie the slander purveyed against your Faith, evoking the admiration of the fair-minded.<sup>67</sup>

These principles of constructive resilience and of obedience to laws of the land do not mean, however, that Bahá'ís are forbidden from appealing for justice for themselves and other oppressed minorities through proper legal channels.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, Bahá'ís are directed to pursue “every principled means” to defend themselves and others against oppression<sup>69</sup> and to work toward the empowerment of oppressed people everywhere, and they have an established history of advocacy and social action in this regard.<sup>70</sup> Yet, when justice is not forthcoming in relation to their own community, Bahá'ís are encouraged to manifest a “spirit of resourcefulness and practicality” in their efforts to maintain a “vibrant community life” even “under the most arduous conditions.”<sup>71</sup>

While pursuing the path of justice through non-adversarial means, and striving to maintain a posture of constructive resilience along the way, the Bahá'í response to oppression is also guided by other principles alluded to in the letter quoted above and elaborated elsewhere throughout the Bahá'í writings. These include the principle of meeting hatred and persecution with love and kindness;<sup>72</sup> the principle that we can gain strength through adversity and hardship, and that we can attain higher spiritual values and goals by sacrificing lower material comforts and needs;<sup>73</sup> the principle of cultivating spiritual qualities and virtues within oneself and relying on the power of personal example in order to attract and reform the hearts of others;<sup>74</sup> and the principle of active service to humanity to improve the conditions of all people without regard to distinctions based on religious belief or other categories of identity.<sup>75</sup> As the Universal House of Justice exhorted the Bahá'í students in Iran:

With an illumined conscience, with a world-embracing vision, with no partisan political agenda, and with due regard for law and order, strive for the regeneration of your country. By your deeds and services, attract the hearts of those around you, even win the esteem of your avowed enemies, so that you may vindicate the innocence of, and gain the ever-increasing respect and acceptance for, your community in the land of its birth... Opposition to a newly revealed truth is a common matter of human history; it repeats itself in every age. But of equal historical consistency is the fact that nothing can prevail against an idea whose time has come. The time has arrived for freedom of belief, for harmony between science and religion, faith and reason, for the advancement of women, for freedom from prejudice of every kind, for mutual respect between the diverse peoples and nations, indeed, for the unity of the entire human race... Service to others is the way... Strive to work hand-in-hand, shoulder-to-shoulder, with your fellow citizens in your efforts to promote the common good.<sup>76</sup>

Bahá'ís are thus encouraged to constantly focus on their common humanity with others and not to see “otherness.” As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá exhorted the Bahá'ís: “Cleanse ye your eyes, so that ye behold no man as different from yourselves. See ye no strangers; rather see all men as friends, for love and unity come hard when ye fix your gaze on otherness.”<sup>77</sup>

In sum, the Bahá'í approach to social change is characterized by the following ideals: collective commitment to the oneness of humanity; recognition of the spiritual and material dimensions of human reality; a long-term perspective accompanied by faith, patience, and perseverance; rejection of all divisive and adversarial forms of social or political action; a pledge of loyalty and obedience to the laws of the land within which Bahá'ís live; the cultivation of spiritual qualities and reliance on the power of personal example; the peaceful construction of viable, alternative institutional models; the steady attraction of others who are invited to voluntarily embrace these patterns of individual and collective life; a posture of constructive resilience in the face of violent oppression; a commitment to meet hatred and persecution with love and kindness; acceptance of the role that hardship and adversity can play in processes of personal as well as collective growth and development; and the principle of active service to the welfare of others, regardless of their backgrounds or beliefs, even under oppressive conditions.

In practice, of course, individual Bahá'ís sometimes fall short of these ideals. Within any community, it is natural that the level of commitment to, internalization of, and successful application of the community's professed ideals will vary among individuals—as the following discussion of the experience of the Bahá'í community acknowledges. However, history has demonstrated that commitment to ideals can be a powerful force of motivation, change, and personal sacrifice for the common good. In this regard, the power of the ideals outlined above has been demonstrated, perhaps most clearly, by the willingness of thousands of Bahá'í martyrs, over the course of years of violent persecution, to accept even the sacrifice of their lives on the path of commitment to these ideals and the faith that underlies them.<sup>78</sup>

### *The Experience of the Bahá'í Community*

The experience of the Bahá'í community in the pursuit of a constructive and non-adversarial response to oppression has been complex and multifaceted. Small numbers of Bahá'ís have been unable or unwilling to commit to the ideals outlined above or sustain the sacrifices those ideals can entail, and they have drifted away from the community or recanted their faith. In each generation, a few individuals have knowingly violated principles such as non-involvement in



partisan politics, and as a result have had their membership rights removed within the Bahá'í community by its elected institutions. Some individuals have engaged in other activities that are inconsistent with the Bahá'í teachings and have thus aggravated the plight of the Bahá'í community by providing antagonists with a pretext to launch campaigns of calumny or assault against the entire community. For instance, during periods of relative calm when Bahá'ís have had opportunities to pursue their education and careers in a largely unimpeded manner inside Iran, some individuals have ignored Bahá'í teachings pertaining to the avoidance of extremes of wealth and poverty, and the need for moderation in all things, and they have instead amassed great personal wealth that attracted the suspicions, envies, and animosities of some Iranians, which in turn created fertile ground for assaults against the entire community. On the whole, however, Bahá'ís have demonstrated a strong collective commitment to the ideals embodied in the Bahá'í teachings, including the ideals of constructive resilience in the face of oppression.

Inside Iran, the Bahá'í community has made great progress toward the implementation of Bahá'u'lláh's vision. For instance, in a society with patriarchal currents that continue to deny women many of the freedoms, rights, and opportunities available to men, Bahá'ís were the first to reject the veiling of women, to declare the full equality of men and women, and to begin translating this principle into practice in every arena of family and community life. Among other things, Bahá'ís established the first schools for girls in Iran. These schools were open not only to Bahá'ís but to people of all faiths and backgrounds. Indeed, they trained the first generation of professional women ever in Iran and their influence has been felt throughout the entire society.<sup>79</sup>

Within the Bahá'í community itself, the advancement of women was especially pronounced. As the Bahá'í community learned to translate Bahá'u'lláh's teachings into practice, which often required them to transcend deeply entrenched cultural norms, women were increasingly integrated with men in all Bahá'í community functions. In the space of a few generations women and men were working side by side as full partners in elected Bahá'í institutions and committees. In the process, women gained valuable skills as well as an invaluable sense of dignity and self-worth. This does not mean, of course, that the Bahá'í community has successfully resolved every internal issue related to gender equality, or that individual Bahá'ís and individual Bahá'í families do

not continue to struggle with the legacies of sexism in various ways. Yet the accomplishments of the Iranian Bahá'í community, as a whole, have been impressive when it comes to the advancement of women. For instance, by 1974, Bahá'í women in Iran under the age of 40 had achieved 100 percent literacy, in comparison to the national average of only 15 percent.<sup>80</sup> In turn, these commitments to the advancement of women, combined with equally deep commitments to educational excellence and a strong work ethic, propelled the rapid social and economic development of the entire Iranian Bahá'í community which, by the mid-twentieth century, occupied leading positions across all professional sectors within Iran.

Following the Islamic revolution in 1979, many Bahá'ís were fired from the high positions they had attained,<sup>81</sup> thousands were reduced to poverty as the authorities imposed a number of measures “designed to suffocate the economic life of the Bahá'í community,”<sup>82</sup> and thousands of Bahá'í children and youth across the country were denied access to education.<sup>83</sup> However, rather than organize politically against the authorities, or resign themselves as victims of forces beyond their control, the Bahá'ís began mobilizing their limited resources and setting up creative systems to ensure their survival. Some Bahá'í entrepreneurs, despite attempts by various antagonists to force them out of business, have been able to quietly maintain modest businesses. In the process, many have also been able to hire Bahá'ís who had lost their own employment. Iranian Bahá'ís have also established systems to care for elderly Bahá'ís who have lost their pensions, and to educate Bahá'í children who have been expelled from schools.

The Bahá'ís established their own “open university” in a process that was described in the *New York Times* as “an elaborate act of self-preservation.”<sup>84</sup> The *Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education* (BIHE) was created in 1987 to provide for the educational needs of Bahá'í youth and young adults after they were denied access to Iranian colleges and universities.<sup>85</sup> The BIHE now operates via online courses, supplemented by seminars and labs in Bahá'í homes and offices throughout Iran. Despite efforts by the Iranian authorities to disrupt the university's operation by raiding hundreds of Bahá'í homes and offices associated with it, by confiscating BIHE materials and property, and by arresting and imprisoning dozens of faculty, the university has grown to the point that it now offers 14 undergraduate degree programs and 3 graduate degree programs in the sciences, social sciences, and arts. Over 700 courses are offered through the services and

support of approximately 275 faculty and staff. The university relies in part upon the services of Iranian Bahá'í academics and professionals, many of whom were fired from their jobs by the Iranian authorities following the Islamic revolution. It also relies on a network of affiliated global faculty that support the university through online courses, curriculum development, and other services. Its reputation for academic excellence has led twenty-five respected universities in North America, Europe, and Australia to accept BIHE graduates directly into programs of graduate study at the masters and doctoral levels. The BIHE is, in short, a clear illustration of the constructive resilience of the Iranian Bahá'ís.

While Bahá'ís inside Iran have adopted a posture of constructive resilience in response to oppression, the worldwide Bahá'í community has pursued a strategy of shining a light on the situation in Iran to raise global awareness and appeal for justice within the emerging international framework of moral and legal norms. This campaign to educate governments, human rights organizations, and journalists around the world about the situation in Iran has been remarkably successful. Scores of resolutions in support of the Iranian Bahá'ís have been passed by the United Nations General Assembly and other UN agencies; similar resolutions have been passed by parliaments and congresses around the world; appeals for justice have been articulated by diverse human rights organizations; and considerable attention has been given to the situation by the international media.<sup>86</sup>

These efforts have curbed some of the violence directed against the Bahá'ís because the Iranian authorities recognize Iran's social and economic interdependence within the larger community of nations.<sup>87</sup> The desire of some authorities to extinguish the Bahá'í community is thus tempered by the desire among most for more favorable perceptions in the court of global opinion. The exemplary conduct of the Bahá'ís inside Iran also has mitigated, to some degree, the campaign against Bahá'ís, as many Muslim friends, neighbors, co-workers, and employers inside Iran have taken measures to shield and defend the Bahá'ís—often at great personal risk. Even some moderate clerics have risked their lives by shielding Bahá'í homes against violent mobs.<sup>88</sup> Meanwhile, a growing number of Iranian journalists, intellectuals, and organizations of civil society are beginning to openly register their concern regarding the treatment of Bahá'ís and some Iranian political parties are beginning to advocate official recognition of the Bahá'ís.<sup>89</sup> Thus the emerging international framework of moral and legal norms

has its counterpart within Iran which, like all contemporary nations, is characterized by a complex interplay of progressive and regressive forces. In this regard, as the experience of the Bahá'í community suggests, progressive forces emerging within many societies provide an increasingly powerful national conscience to which oppressed minorities can appeal, if their innocence and political neutrality are recognized.

The experience of, and response to, oppression by Iranian Bahá'ís has had other effects as well. Within Iran, it has galvanized the commitment and resolve of many Bahá'ís. It has also led thousands of Iranian Bahá'í refugees into the field of international service, where their influence on the growth and development of Bahá'í communities in many parts of the world, and their services to humanity through diverse trades and professions, has been substantial. The example of the Iranian Bahá'ís, both inside Iran and throughout their global diaspora, has prompted Bahá'ís from diverse backgrounds in all parts of the world to new levels of inspiration and commitment, including heightened attention to constructive processes of social and economic development within other oppressed and disadvantaged populations.

Of course, the experience and impacts of this global diaspora should not be oversimplified or romanticized. Many Bahá'í refugees suffered significant personal loss and trauma as they fled Iran and attempted to start new lives in foreign lands. The faith and commitment of a few has been weakened. Some have been drawn, to varying degrees, into the materialistic consumer cultures of the countries in which they have resettled. Some have resettled near one another in such large numbers that they have momentarily overwhelmed the smaller Bahá'í communities that attempted to absorb them, creating new challenges and cultural conflicts that these communities have had to work through. On the whole, however, the dispersal of Iranian Bahá'ís around the world has lent a powerful impulse to the growth and development of the worldwide Bahá'í community, including its outreach efforts to serve other oppressed or needy populations.

Around the world, the global campaign to shine a light on the situation in Iran has forged new institutional capacities for coordinated global action within the Bahá'í community, marking a new stage in the internal maturation of the community. This, in turn, has aided the emergence of the community from relative obscurity on the world stage, where the Bahá'í Faith is now widely recognized as an

independent world religion and its basic tenets are more widely and more favorably understood.

In short, by persevering with a principled and constructive approach, even in the face of violent oppression, Bahá'ís are demonstrating the potential of a purely non-adversarial model of social change. Granted, the personal costs have been high for many Bahá'ís. It is likely, however, that the costs would have been much higher if the Bahá'ís had pursued a path of political resistance, opposition, and civil disobedience, thereby alienating large segments of Iranian society by their own actions, providing the authorities with a pretext for a full-scale assault, and confusing global perceptions regarding their innocence. Moreover, the emotional and psychological resilience of Bahá'ís who have experienced extreme trauma in Iran has been exceptional, as a number of recent studies have demonstrated.<sup>90</sup> According to these studies, this resilience appears to be due, at least in part, to the strength and coherence of their inner beliefs; to the meaning, vision, and moral purpose their faith provides them; and to their ability to maintain an internal locus of control over their moral and spiritual fate. For the most part, the Bahá'ís of Iran have never let their oppressors establish the terms of the encounter. They have generally refused to play the role of victim; refused to be dehumanized; refused to forfeit their sense of constructive agency; and refused to compromise their principles or forsake their beliefs.

#### AN INVITATION TO FURTHER INQUIRY

In 1889, Edward Granville Browne, an Oxford scholar who observed the Bábí and Bahá'í movements closely, wrote that “it is not a small or easy thing to endure what these have endured, and surely what they deemed worth life itself is worth trying to understand.”<sup>91</sup> Over a century later, the vision and beliefs of the Bahá'í community are beginning to attract the sustained attention of outside observers. Yet the Bahá'í approach to social change, including their response to oppression, has received comparatively little attention.

In this context, the preceding analysis constitutes an invitation into a field of inquiry that may shed new light on the dynamics of social change in an era of heightened global interdependence. The Bahá'í teachings assert, in essence, that oppositional strategies of social change, whether violent or non-violent, have reached a point of diminishing returns at this stage in human history because they do not

address the underlying cause of injustice and oppression. The underlying cause, according to Bahá'u'lláh, is a widespread reluctance to accept, on a spiritual and intellectual level, the organic unity and interdependence—or common identity and interests—of all human beings. Given this interpretation of reality, Bahá'ís in turn believe that, although positive social change may have been achieved in the past by divisive and oppositional strategies, these strategies are ultimately incapable of addressing the contemporary challenges of a rapidly integrating global society. These interpretations, along with the overall historical experience of the Bahá'í community that derives from them, suggest a set of heuristic insights that can open new lines of inquiry into the dynamics of social change in the twenty-first century.

First, the theory and collective practice of the Bahá'í community suggest that as long as underlying identities and interests remain in conflict, strategies of non-violent opposition may simply be countered by increasingly sophisticated strategies of non-violent oppression because they do not address the root causes of social injustice and oppression. Thus one could argue that escalating cycles of violent conflict and oppression are now, as a result of movements toward non-violent opposition, being replaced by escalating cycles of non-violent conflict and oppression. Indeed, one could argue that two centuries of non-violent partisan-political conflict in the most “enlightened” western democracies has resulted in exactly this outcome, as powerful interest groups have systematically learned how to manipulate these oppositional systems to their own advantage, resulting, among other things, in massive and steadily growing disparities between the richest and poorest populations within and between contemporary states. Or consider the history of racism in the United States: when a violent civil war brought the formal institution of slavery to an end in the 1860s, racism quickly reasserted itself in the form of discriminatory laws and overtly racist practices that emerged during the reconstruction period that followed. When these discriminatory laws and practices were challenged through largely non-violent means by the U.S. civil rights movement that gathered momentum a century later, overt and legal forms of racism were in turn replaced with more subtle forms of institutionalized and unspoken racism that continue to perpetuate racial disparities and injustices in the U.S. today—notwithstanding the fact that a majority of voters in the United States recently elected the first African-American president. Therefore, even though significant historical progress has been achieved through these methods, it appears that

racism may continue to reassert itself as long as interests and identities are understood by significant segments of the population in racial terms. It may continue, in other words, as long as people refuse to fully accept the oneness of humanity, in both theory and practice.

Second, the theory and collective practice of the Bahá'í community suggest that as long as underlying identities and interests remain in conflict, even relatively successful strategies of non-violent opposition may only result in the reversal or transference of oppressive relations. This is, again, because the underlying paradigms of identity conflict and interest-group competition are not altered by strategies of non-violent conflict. For instance, after labor union movements within many western nations secured various benefits for their workers through hard-fought yet largely non-violent oppositional struggles, many of these unions began advocating trade policies and labor laws that advanced their narrow self-interests at the expense of their non-unionized fellow citizens as well as workers in more impoverished parts of the world. The intent of this illustration, of course, is not to belittle the significant accomplishments of labor movements. Rather, the intent is to suggest that the underlying paradigms of identity conflict and interest-group competition, and the violent or non-violent oppositional strategies of change they engender, may not ultimately lead to the just world that many social reformers seek.

Third, the theory and collective practice of the Bahá'í community suggest that non-violent opposition to unjust and oppressive institutions diverts valuable time and energy away from the construction of alternative institutional forms derived from the principles of unity and interdependence. In this regard, when oppressive systems are thrown off by non-violent opposition movements, the vacuum that is left appears to create a rush to power among competing interest groups that merely invites new forms of oppression. For instance, Gandhi's non-violent independence movement successfully threw off the oppressive yoke of the British empire. However, since the movement had not constructed a viable, just, and unifying model for the governance of India, the vacuum that was created allowed a rush to power that resulted in half a million deaths from sectarian violence, the forced migration and resettlement of over 12 million Hindu and Muslim refugees, the partitioning of the Indian sub-continent into two hostile states, and a half-century of ongoing sectarian conflict within and between each of these states that now live under the mutual threat of nuclear warfare. Again, the intent of this illustration is not to diminish

Gandhi's stature, belittle his accomplishments, overlook his enlightened views on ethnic and religious diversity, or ignore his tireless and laudable efforts to effect social harmony. Rather, the intent is to explore possible limitations of his approach and to raise the question of whether more refined approaches to social change that minimize or eliminate these unintended aftereffects are possible.

Fourth, the theory and collective practice of the Bahá'í community suggest that oppositional models of social change, however non-violent, may ultimately be self-defeating within the expanding Western-liberal "culture of contest" wherein almost every major social institution is structured as a formalized contest of power. Thus we see partisan contests in the political arena, advocacy contests in the legal arena, contests of capital accumulation in the economic arena, grade-based contests in the educational arena, physical contests in the arena of sport, and so on—in which various expressions of power determine the winners and losers. This is a theme that has been explored in much greater depth elsewhere.<sup>92</sup> In this context, oppositional models of social change may be self-defeating because contests of power tend, ultimately, to privilege dominant social groups who have the most power. The injustices that result from this arrangement are, in part, what lead people to engage in adversarial forms of social protest and political opposition directed against those injustices. Ironically, no matter how non-violent these oppositional responses are, they can still be understood as extensions of the culture of contest. In this regard, they arguably tend to perpetuate the privileges of the most powerful segments of society through the escalating cycles of non-violent oppression alluded to above. Even more fundamentally, they reflect and reinforce the assumptions about human nature and social order that underlie and perpetuate the culture of contest. In the process, they legitimize the foundational assumptions from which the institutions of the culture of contest are constructed and by which a culture of injustice is often perpetuated—hence "the paradox of protest in a culture of contest."<sup>93</sup>

Of course, the heuristic insights suggested above will undoubtedly be met with much skepticism, since they challenge deeply held assumptions about human nature and social order that are prevalent in many contemporary societies. This article therefore serves as an invitation to dialogue and further inquiry regarding these vital subjects, which should be of growing concern in the decades ahead, as humanity grapples with the challenges of global interdependence. The



purpose of this article is not to suggest that Bahá'ís have all the answers or that they are pursuing the only valid path of social change. Rather, its purpose is to point out that the Bahá'í community is accumulating experience within a unique conceptual framework that raises new questions about, and may offer new insights into, processes of social change.

In this context, the Bahá'í community can be understood as a vast social experiment in which non-adversarial strategies of social change are being tested and explored. The Bahá'í community, ultimately, is attempting to reconcile conflicting identities and interests within the framework of a common human identity and shared collective interests through peaceful, unifying, and constructive methods. Such a strategy may appear naïve when one looks back on the behavior of many social groups throughout human history. Indeed, the Bahá'í strategy would likely not have been viable in the past, when human populations were relatively isolated and independent, when they could afford to ignore their essential oneness, and when there was no emerging global framework of moral and legal norms to which an oppressed population could appeal. However, such a strategy may prove to be essential in the future, as increased interdependence becomes an inescapable reality that humanity can no longer afford to deny because the social and ecological costs of denial are becoming too high.

Furthermore, a unifying and non-adversarial strategy of social change may now be viable, on a global scale, for two reasons. First, the emergence of integrative and efficient technologies of global communication and transportation have created the potential, for the first time in human history, for distant people to see themselves as one human family, and thus to recognize and operationalize the principle of oneness. Second, the emergence of progressive global discourses regarding peace, social justice, and human rights (among others) are creating new opportunities for constructive social change and coordinated global action that are consistent with the principle of oneness. In other words, for the first time in human history, a global framework of moral and legal norms is emerging, to which an oppressed population can appeal. Indeed, it has been the combination of these two factors that has enabled the worldwide Bahá'í community to appeal, on behalf of their beleaguered brothers and sisters in Iran, to the conscience of fair-minded people around the planet, who in turn have taken effective actions to mitigate the suffering of Bahá'ís in Iran.

The Bahá'í community is thus pioneering a radical new model of social change—entirely non-adversarial in nature—that appears initially to be viable even in the face of violent oppression. All interested observers can study and learn from the accumulating experience of the Bahá'í community in this regard, as a test of the hypothesis that peace and justice can be effected through unifying and constructive, rather than divisive or destructive, strategies of social change.<sup>94</sup>

## NOTES

1. Friedrich Affolter, “The Specter of Ideological Genocide: The Bahá'ís of Iran,” *War Crimes, Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity*, 1 (2005): 76–77. For further discussion of the genocidal nature and intent of this campaign, refer to Bill Frelick, “Iranian Bahá'ís and Genocide Early Warning,” *Social Science Record*, 24:2 (1987): 35–37; Bill Frelick, “Refugees: Contemporary Witnesses to Genocide,” in *Genocide Watch*, ed. Helen Fein (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 45–58. Moojan Momen, “The Bábí and Bahá'í Community of Iran: A Case of ‘Suspended Genocide?’” *Journal of Genocide Research*, 7:2, (2005): 221–241; Paul Allen, “The Bahá'ís of Iran: A Proposal for Enforcement of International Human Rights Standards,” *Cornell International Law Reports* 20 (1987): 337–361; Katharine Bigelow, “A Campaign to Deter Genocide: The Bahá'í Experience,” in *Genocide Watch*, ed. Helen Fein (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992); Christopher Buck, “Islam and Minorities: The Case of the Bahá'ís,” *Studies in Contemporary Islam*, 5:1 (2003): 83–106; Helen Fein, *Genocide: A Sociological Perspective* (London: Sage, 1993), 86.

2. Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, *A Faith Denied: The Persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran* (New Haven, CT: IHRDC, 2006); Roger Cooper, “The Bahá'ís of Iran: The Minority Rights Group Report 51,” (London: The Minority Rights Group LTD, 1985); Geoffrey Nash, *Iran's Secret Pogrom: The Conspiracy to Wipe out the Bahá'ís* (Suffolk: Neville Spearman, 1982); Bahá'í International Community, *The Bahá'í Question: Cultural Cleansing in Iran* (New York: Bahá'í International Community, 2005); Dominic Parviz Brookshaw and Seena B. Fazel, *The Bahá'ís of Iran: Socio-Historical Studies* (Oxford: Routledge 2007); Geoffrey Cameron and Tahirih Danesh, *A Revolution Without Rights? Women, Kurds and Bahá'ís Searching for Equality in Iran* (London: The Foreign Policy Centre, 2008); Firuz Kazemzadeh, “The Bahá'ís in Iran: Twenty Years of Oppression,” *Social Research*, 67:2 (2000): 537–558.

3. The effectiveness of these intimidation tactics has begun to diminish in recent years as a growing number of prominent Iranians, such as Shirin Ebadi

(Iran's only winner of the Nobel Peace Prize and the first Muslim woman awarded that prize), have begun to speak out on behalf of the Bahá'ís, often at great personal risk. For historical overviews of the means used to cultivate prejudice and animosity against the Bahá'ís in Iran, refer to Dominic Parviz Brookshaw and Seena B. Fazel, *The Bahá'ís of Iran: Socio-Historical Studies* (Oxford: Routledge 2007); refer especially to chapters by Abbas Amanat ("The Historical Roots of the Persecution of Babis and Bahá'ís in Iran"), H. E. Chehabi ("Anatomy of Prejudice: Reflections on Secular anti-Bahá'ism in Iran"), Mohamad Tavakoli-Targh ("Anti-Bahá'ism and Islamism in Iran"), and Reza Afshari ("The Discourse and Practice of Human Rights Violations of the Iranian Bahá'ís in the Islamic Republic of Iran").

4. For examples of the attention that is being paid to the plight of Iranian Bahá'ís from observers outside of Iran, refer to Human Rights Watch, "Iran: Scores Arrested in Anti-Bahá'í Campaign," *Human Rights News* (June 6, 2006); Amnesty International, "Iran: New Government Fails to Address Dire Human Rights Situation" (London, February 16, 2006); International Federation of Human Rights, "Discrimination against Religious Minorities in Iran" (Paris, August 2003); Nazila Ghanea, *Human Rights, the UN and the Bahá'ís in Iran* (Oxford: George Ronald and Kluwer Law International, 2002); Dominic Parviz Brookshaw and Seena B. Fazel, *The Bahá'ís of Iran: Socio-Historical Studies* (Oxford: Routledge, 2007). Progressive individuals within Iranian society who have recently spoken out on behalf of, or sought to defend the rights of, Iranian Bahá'ís include Nobel Laureate Shirin Ebadi, her legal partner Abdolfattah Soltani, and their organization the Defenders of Human Rights Center in Tehran; Grand Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri; and Professor Saeed Hanaee Kashani. Prominent Iranian expatriates who have spoken out publicly on behalf of the Bahá'ís in Iran include prominent academics, writers, journalists, activists, and artists such as Abbas Milani, Bahram Choubine, Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi, Iqbal Latif, Ahmad Betabi, Behrooz Setoodeh, Soheila Vahdati, Amil Imani, Majid Naficy, Farhang Farahi, Hossein Bagher-Zadeh, Khosro Shemiranie, Reza Fani, Jahanshah Rashidian, Hasan Zerehi, Azar Nafisi, Ali Kheshtgar, and Shohreh Aghdashloo. In addition, an open letter of apology entitled "We Are Ashamed" was recently drafted by a group of 42 expatriate professionals, and over 260 additional Iranian expatriates have since added their names to the letter (<http://www.we-are-ashamed.com>). Iranian human rights organizations, political parties, and scholarly associations that have recently published statements advocating for the rights of the Bahá'ís in Iran include the Human Rights Activists of Iran, the Iranian Minorities Human Rights Organization, the International Campaign

for Human Rights in Iran, the United Republicans of Iran, the Constitutionalist Party of Iran, the Organization of the Iranian People's Majority, the Organization of Iranian Socialists, the National Salvation Movement of Iran, and the Association of Iranian Researchers. In addition, a human rights organization called the Muslim Network for Bahá'í Rights recently formed for the specific purpose of speaking out on behalf of Bahá'ís who are persecuted within the Middle East generally, and Iran in particular.

5. William Collins, "The Bahá'í Faith in the Eyes of the World: What the Print Media Report About the Bahá'í Faith," in *The Bahá'í World 1992–93: An International Record* (Haifa, Israel: Bahá'í World Centre, 1993), 147–167; William Collins, *Bibliography of English-Language Works on the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths: 1844–1985* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1990); Seena Fazel and John Danesh, "Bahá'í Scholarship: An Examination Using Citation Analysis," *Bahá'í Studies Review*, 5:1 (1995):13–26.

6. For historical overviews of Bahá'u'lláh's life, refer to H. M. Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1980); David Ruhe, *Robe of Light: The Persian Years of the Supreme Prophet Bahá'u'lláh, 1817–1853* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1994); Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, IL: US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1944).

7. For overviews of the Bahá'í teachings, refer to Peter Smith, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions: From Messianic Shi'ism to a World Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); William Hatcher and Douglas Martin, *The Bahá'í Faith: The Emerging Global Religion* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1998).

8. Robert Weinberg, ed., *The Bahá'í World: 2005–2006* (Haifa, Israel: World Center Publications, 2007), 249.

9. Seena Fazel, "Is the Bahá'í Faith a World Religion?" *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 6:1 (1994), 1–16; D. Barrett, "World Religious Statistics," *Britannica Book of the Year* (1992).

10. Weinberg, ed., *The Bahá'í World: 2005–2006*, 249.

11. There are, of course, limits to the Bahá'í principle of obedience to government. In general, Bahá'ís are encouraged to remain obedient to their respective government up to the point of being forced to violate a fundamental spiritual principle, such as denial of one's faith. For an examination of the Bahá'í guidance on loyalty and obedience to government, refer to Peter Khan, ed., *Political Non-Involvement and Obedience to Government: A Compilation* (Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1979).

12. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1939), 94.

13. For moving accounts of these persecutions, from the birth of the faith to the present day, refer to Olya Roohizadegan, *Olya's Story: A Survivor's Dramatic Account of the Persecution of Bahá'ís in Revolutionary Iran* (London: One World Publications, 1993); Baharieh Rouhani Ma'ani, *Against Incredible Odds: Life of a 20th Century Iranian Bahá'í Family* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2006); Muhammad Labib, *The Seven Martyrs of Hurmuzak* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981); Shaykh Muhammad Nabil Zarandi, *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1932); William Sears, *A Cry from the Heart* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1982); Christine Hakim-Samandari, "Victory over Violence: A Personal Testimony," *World Order*, 20:1 (1985), 9–29.

14. For an overview of the life and teachings of the Báb, refer to H. M. Balyuzi, *The Báb: The Herald of the Day of Days* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1973); Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Bábí Movement in Iran, 1844–1850* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).

15. Sir Justin Shiel, Queen Victoria's "Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary" in Tehran, wrote to Lord Palmerston, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, on July 22, 1850, regarding this execution. This letter can be found in its original form as document F.O. 60/152/88 in the archives of the Foreign Office at the Public Records Office in London.

16. Moojan Momen, ed., *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 1844–1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981); Nabil Zarandi, *The Dawn-Breakers*.

17. Momen, ed., *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*, 133–134.

18. Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, *A Faith Denied*; Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi, "Anti-Bahá'ism and Islamism in Iran," in *The Bahá'ís of Iran: Socio-Historical Studies*, ed. Dominic Parviz Brookshaw and Seena B. Fazel (Oxford: Routledge 2007), 200–231; Douglas Martin, *The Persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran, 1844–1984* (Ottawa: Association for Bahá'í Studies, 1984).

19. Cooper, "The Bahá'ís of Iran: The Minority Rights Group Report 51"; Martin, *The Persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran*.

20. Boris Handal, "From Moorish Cordova to the Bahá'ís of Iran: Islamic Tolerance and Intolerance." *IDEA Journal of Social Sciences*, 12:1 (2002), <http://www.ideajournal.com/articles.php?id=45>.

21. Shahrough Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran: Clergy-State Relations in the Pahlavi Period* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980); Bahram Choubine, "Suppression of Bahá'ís of Iran in 1955," (2008), <http://www.iranian.com/main/2008/sacrificing-innocent>.

22. Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi, “Anti-Bahá’ism and Islamism in Iran,” in *The Bahá’is of Iran: Socio-Historical Studies*, ed. Dominic Parviz Brookshaw and Seena B. Fazel (Oxford: Routledge 2007), 200–231; Affolter, “The Specter of Ideological Genocide: The Bahá’is of Iran”; Reza Afshari, *Human Rights in Iran: The Abuse of Cultural Relativism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 158.

23. Tavakoli-Targhi, “Anti-Bahá’ism and Islamism in Iran”; Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, *A Faith Denied*.

24. Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, *A Faith Denied*; Martin, *The Persecution of the Bahá’is of Iran*, 32–39.

25. Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, *A Faith Denied*; Martin, *The Persecution of the Bahá’is of Iran*, 32.

26. Tavakoli-Targhi, “Anti-Bahá’ism and Islamism in Iran.”

27. Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, *A Faith Denied*, 53.

28. *Ibid.*, 22.

29. International Federation of Human Rights, “Discrimination against Religious Minorities in Iran”; Bahá’í International Community, *The Bahá’í Question: Cultural Cleansing in Iran*, 50; Cooper, “The Bahá’is of Iran: The Minority Rights Group Report 51.”

30. These phrases are taken from a secret memorandum written by the Iranian Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council in 1991, at the request of the Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and the President of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. This document outlines a strategy to quietly suffocate the Bahá’í community in Iran in a manner that would not attract international attention. It came to light in a 1993 report by U.N. Special Representative Reynaldo Galindo Pohl on the situation in Iran, and has been reprinted in its entirety in numerous sources, including the International Federation of Human Rights, “Discrimination against Religious Minorities in Iran.”

31. Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, *A Faith Denied*, 2.

32. Bahá’í International Community, *The Bahá’í Question: Cultural Cleansing in Iran*; International Federation of Human Rights, “Discrimination against Religious Minorities in Iran”; Cooper, “The Bahá’is of Iran: The Minority Rights Group Report 51.”

33. Bahá’í International Community, *The Bahá’í Question: Cultural Cleansing in Iran*, 14.

34. Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, *A Faith Denied*, 2.

35. Buck, “Islam and Minorities: The Case of the Bahá’is,” 92.

36. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*.

37. Nazila Ghanea, *Human Rights, the UN and the Bahá'ís in Iran* (Oxford: George Ronald and Kluwer Law International, 2002); Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, *A Faith Denied*; Tavakoli-Targhi, "Anti-Bahá'ism and Islamism in Iran.>"; Cooper, "The Bahá'ís of Iran: The Minority Rights Group Report 51"; H. E. Chehabi, "Anatomy of Prejudice: Reflections on Secular Anti-Bahá'ism in Iran," in *The Bahá'ís of Iran: Socio-Historical Studies*, ed. Dominic Parviz Brookshaw and Seena B. Fazel (Oxford: Routledge, 2007), 184–199.

38. Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, *Community under Siege*, 2; Bahá'í International Community, *The Bahá'í Question: Cultural Cleansing in Iran*; Ghanea, *Human Rights, the UN and the Bahá'ís in Iran*; International Federation of Human Rights, "Discrimination against Religious Minorities in Iran."

39. *Community under Siege*, 3.

40. Tavakoli-Targhi, "Anti-Bahá'ism and Islamism in Iran"; Affolter, "The Specter of Ideological Genocide: The Bahá'ís of Iran"; Nash, *Iran's Secret Pogrom: The Conspiracy to Wipe out the Bahá'ís*; Buck, "Islam and Minorities: The Case of the Bahá'ís"; Eliz Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

41. Shahrough Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran*; Cooper, "The Bahá'ís of Iran: The Minority Rights Group Report 51"; The Universal House of Justice, Letter to the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in the Cradle of the Faith, dated November 16, 2003.

42. Martin, *The Persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran*; Abbas Amanat, "The Historical Roots of the Persecution of Bábís in Iran," in *The Bahá'ís of Iran: Socio-Historical Studies*, ed. Dominic Parviz Brookshaw and Seena B. Fazel (Oxford: Routledge, 2007), 173; Payam Akhavan. "Implications of Twelver Shí'ih Mihdism of Religious Tolerance: The Case of the Bahá'í Minority in the Islamic Republic of Iran," in *Islamic Law Reform and Human Rights: Challenges and Rejoinders*, ed. Tore Lindholm and Kari Vogt. Oslo: Nordic Human Rights Publications, 1993, 197–218.

43. Refer to endnotes 3 and 4 for a discussion of prominent Iranian individuals and organizations who have spoken out on behalf of the Bahá'ís of Iran.

44. For a discussion of this covenantal line of authority and its function in preserving the unity and integrity of the worldwide Bahá'í community, refer to Adib Taherzadeh, *The Child of the Covenant* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2000).

45. *Gleanings*, 213.

46. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Haifa, Israel: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), 31–32.

47. *God Passes By*, 281.
48. Letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, dated May 19, 1994, 29.
49. *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1938), 42–43.
50. *One Common Faith*, commissioned by The Universal House of Justice (Haifa, Israel: Bahá'í World Centre, 2005), 54.
51. *Gleanings*, 288.
52. It should be noted that Bahá'ís are not pacifists in the strict sense of the word, as they advocate an international collective security framework backed up by the just use of military force if needed. However, they do not condone violence as a method of social change, nor do they respond to religious persecution with violence. For a discussion of the Bahá'í view on collective security and the just use of military force, refer to Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 249, 254; Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 40, 191–192; Sovaída Ma'ani Ewing, *Collective Security within Reach* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2007).
53. *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1978), 220.
54. Bahá'í International Community, *Who Is Writing the Future? Reflections on the Twentieth Century* (New York: Bahá'í International Community, 1999), 7.
55. Letter to an individual, dated February 17, 1933.
56. *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963–1986: The Third Epoch of the Formative Age* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996), 283.
57. Refer, for example, to a discussion of this theme by The Universal House of Justice, *To the Peoples of the World*, October 1985.
58. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America: Selected Letters and Cablegrams Addressed to the Bahá'ís of North America, 1932–46* (Wilmette, IL: US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1947), 15; Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1938), 42, 170.
59. *The Promised Day Is Come* (Wilmette, IL: US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1941), 122–123.
60. The Universal House of Justice, Letter to the Bahá'í students deprived of access to higher education in Iran, dated September 9, 2007.
61. *The Advent of Divine Justice*, 2nd ed. (Wilmette, IL: US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1939), 72.
62. A detailed examination of the Bahá'í model of governance is beyond the scope of this paper. For a close examination of this model, refer to Ali



Nakhjavani, *Towards World Order* (Ariccia, Italy: Casa Editrice Bahá'í, 2005) or Michael Karlberg, "Governance, Democracy, and Social Change: A Bahá'í Perspective," presented to the *Lectures in Bahá'í Studies Series* at the University of Haifa, March 13, 2008.

63. Letter to an individual, dated April 27, 1995.

64. Ibid.

65. For a more extensive elaboration of this theme, refer to Michael Karlberg, *Beyond the Culture of Contest: From Adversarialism to Mutualism in an Age of Interdependence* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2004).

66. Letter to the Bahá'ís of Iran, dated June 23, 2009.

67. Italics have been added. Letter to the Bahá'í students deprived of access to higher education in Iran, dated September 9, 2007.

68. The Universal House of Justice, Letter to the Bahá'ís of Egypt, dated December 21, 2006.

69. The Universal House of Justice, Letter to the Bahá'í students deprived of access to higher education in Iran, dated September 9, 2007.

70. Bahá'ís have been addressing the oppression of diverse populations through a range of constructive, non-adversarial strategies for many years. These strategies are pursued in three broad domains: (1) formal Bahá'í community engagement with institutions such as the United Nations, national governments, or non-governmental organizations, (2) Bahá'í-inspired social action initiatives ranging from small individual initiatives to complex collaborative projects of social and economic development, and (3) individual Bahá'ís working through their chosen professions in fields such as education, health care, media, and public policy. In the first domain, the offices of the Bahá'í International Community at the United Nations have been a leading voice on the international stage regarding the emancipation of women in all countries. A particularly noteworthy contribution Bahá'ís have made in this regard has been a decades-long campaign to focus global attention on the priority of educating female children—a practice that the international development community is now recognizing as one of the single most effective measures that can be taken to raise the living standards of impoverished or oppressed communities in all parts of the world. In addition, Bahá'ís have been a leading presence in the field of human rights advocacy within the United Nations system and other international venues, dating back to the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. National Bahá'í communities have also taken leadership roles in advocating that their governments ratify human rights treaties such as the U.N. Convention to Eliminate Racial Discrimination, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on the Prevention and

Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and the International Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Current ratification efforts are focused on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In the second domain referred to above, Bahá'ís are engaged in thousands of social action projects around the world, focusing on a wide range of contemporary issues and needs. An overview of the Bahá'í approach and accomplishments in the field of social action can be found in *For the Betterment of the World: The Worldwide Bahá'í Community's Approach to Social and Economic Development* (United Nations Plaza, New York: Bahá'í International Community Office of Social and Economic Development, 2008).

71. The Universal House of Justice, Letter to the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in the Cradle of the Faith, dated November 26, 2003.

72. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, 21, 24, 258; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, 12th ed. (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), 24, 29; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971), 13.

73. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1932), Arabic #50, #51; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, 238–239, 45–46, 61–64; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, 178. It should be noted, however, that the Bahá'í Faith rejects asceticism. Refer, for instance, to *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, 71.

74. The Universal House of Justice, Message to Iranian Bahá'ís throughout the world, dated February 10, 1980.

75. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections*, 141; 'Abdu'l-Bahá; *Paris Talks*, 38, 177.

76. Letter to the Bahá'í students deprived of access to higher education in Iran, dated September 9, 2007.

77. *Selections*, 24.

78. Bahá'ís do not actively seek martyrdom. Rather, they accept martyrdom only when it is brought about by circumstances beyond their control. For a discussion of the Bahá'í teachings related to martyrdom, refer to Abdu'l-Missagh Ghadirian, “Psychological and Spiritual Dimensions of Persecution and Suffering,” *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 6:3 (1994), 1–26.

79. Ann Boyles, “Towards the Goal of Full Partnership: One Hundred and Fifty Years of the Advancement of Women,” in *The Bahá'í World: 1993–1994*, ed. Bahá'í World Centre (Haifa, Israel: 1994), 237–275; Moojan Momen, “Bahá'í Schools in Iran,” in *The Bahá'ís of Iran: Socio-Historical Studies*, ed. Dominic Parviz Brookshaw and Seena B. Fazel (Oxford: Routledge, 2007), 94–121.

80. *Ibid.*

81. For instance, by 1987 over 11,000 Bahá'í government employees had been dismissed from their jobs as a result of anti-Bahá'í legislation, as Bahá'ís

were purged from all levels of public administration and dismissed from many private companies as well (Fergus Bordewich, "Holy Terror: Moslem Zealots Wage a Deadly War Against Bahá'í Heresies," *The Atlantic Monthly*, 259, April 1987).

82. Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, *A Faith Denied: The Persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran* (New Haven, CT: IHRDC, 2006), 40. Measures taken by the Iranian authorities to reduce Bahá'ís to poverty include denial of education, denial of public employment, revocation of many business licenses, pressure on many employers to dismiss Bahá'í employees, denial of previously earned pensions, requirements to pay back already received pensions, confiscation of homes and other personal property, and denial of inheritance rights. Documentation of these economically repressive measures can be found in a number of sources, including in the *A Faith Denied* report referred to above; in the International Federation of Human Rights' "Discrimination against Religious Minorities in Iran" (Paris: August 2003); and in Reza Afshari, "The Discourse and Practice of Human Rights Violations of Iranian Bahá'ís in the Islamic Republic of Iran," in Dominic Parviz Brookshaw and Seena B. Fazel, *The Bahá'ís of Iran: Socio-Historical Studies* (Oxford: Routledge, 2007), 232–277. The oppressive measures documented in these sources are, in turn, consistent with the 1991 Iranian government's internal memorandum on "The Bahá'í Question" referred to earlier in this article, which prescribes that the government deal with Bahá'ís "in such a way that their progress and development are blocked."

83. Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, *A Faith Denied*, 46. See also Tahirih Danesh, "The Rights to Education: The Case of the Bahá'ís in Iran," in *Bahá'í-Inspired Perspectives on Human Rights*, ed. Tahirih Danesh (Hong Kong: Juxta Publishing, 2001), 216–230; Bahá'í International Community, *Closed Doors: Iran's Campaign to Deny Higher Education to Bahá'ís* (New York: BIC, United Nations Plaza, 2005).

84. Ethan Bronner, "Iran Closes 'University' Run Covertly by the Bahá'ís," *New York Times*, October 29, 1998.

85. For more information about the BIHE, refer to Friedrich Affolter, "Resisting Educational Exclusion: The Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education in Iran," in *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education*, 1:1 (2007): 65–77; R. Bollag, "Thirty-Six Professors Arrested in Iranian Crackdown on Underground Bahá'í University," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 45 (1998); or refer to the BIHE website at <http://www.bihe.org>.

86. Refer, for example, to Nazila Ghanea, *Human Rights, the UN and the Bahá'ís in Iran*; Amnesty International, "Iran: New Government Fails to Address Dire Human Rights Situation"; International Federation of Human

Rights, “Discrimination against Religious Minorities in Iran”; Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, *Community under Siege*; Human Rights Watch, “Iran: Scores Arrested in Anti-Bahá’í Campaign,” *Human Rights News* (June 6, 2006); International Federation of Human Rights, “Discrimination against Religious Minorities in Iran”; Collins, “In the Eyes of the World.”

87. Momen, “The Bábí and Bahá’í Community of Iran: A Case Of ‘Suspended Genocide?’”; Bigelow, “A Campaign to Deter Genocide: The Bahá’í Experience”; Affolter, “The Specter of Ideological Genocide: The Bahá’ís of Iran.”

88. Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi, “Oneself as Another: Iranian Subjectivity and the De/Recognition of Bahá’ís,” paper presented to the *33rd Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association* (Washington, DC: 1999).

89. Refer to endnotes 3 and 4.

90. Marjan Davoudi, “Spiritual Dimension of Adaptation to Persecution and Torture among Iranian Bahá’í Women” (The Chicago School of Professional Psychology, 2003); Abdu’l-Missagh Ghadirian, “Intergenerational Responses to the Persecution of the Bahá’ís of Iran,” in *Intergenerational Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*, ed. Yael Danieli (New York: Plenum Press, 1998), 513–532; Abdu’l-Missagh Ghadirian, “Psychological and Spiritual Dimensions of Persecution and Suffering”; Abdu’l-Missagh Ghadirian, “Human Responses to Life Stress and Suffering,” *Bahá’í Studies Notebook* 3 (1983), 49–62; Fereshteh Bethel, “A Psychological Theory of Martyrdom,” *World Order*, 20:3/4 (1986), 5–25.

91. Excerpt from an address by Edward Granville Browne, published in *Religious Systems of the World: A Contribution to the Study of Comparative Religion*, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1892), 352–353.

92. For a more fully theorized and empirically supported treatment of this theme, refer to Karlberg, *Beyond the Culture of Contest*, and Karlberg, “The Paradox of Protest in a Culture of Contest,” *Peace and Change*, 28:3, (2003): 319–347.

93. Karlberg, “The Paradox of Protest in a Culture of Contest.”

94. The Universal House of Justice, *To the Peoples of the World*, October 1985, 56.