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ABSTRACT

Despite its relatively short period of publication, Molla Nasreddin magazine left a lasting legacy as it provided a platform for sharp social and political commentary, openly criticizing autocratic regimes, corruption and social inequalities, inspiring similar satirical publications in countries neighbors and cementing your impact as a critical voice against oppression and a catalyst for social change. The magazine championed progressive ideas such as women's rights, education, modernization, and social justice, challenging conservative norms and traditions, always cleverly employing humor through cartoons, jokes, and articles. The use of the Azerbaijani language in Molla Nasreddin magazine has been widely cited as showing the strong national identity that grew in 20th-century Azerbaijan, although its visually appealing illustrations made the magazine reach a broader and more diverse audience in various communities. ethnic and linguistic. However, this critical stance came into conflict with various religious and political groups, notably the followers of the Bahá'í faith. Therefore, the objective of this article is to analyze the tensions that occurred between the followers of the Bahá'í faith and the members of the magazine Molla Nasreddin, their causes, different approaches and outcome.

Keywords: Baha'i faith, "Molla Nasreddin" magazine, Jalil Mammadguluzadeh, Aligulu Gamkusar, Gymnazist article.

RESUMEN

A pesar de su relativamente corto período de publicación, la revista Molla Nasreddin dejó un legado duradero, ya que brindó una plataforma para comentarios sociales y políticos agudos, criticando abiertamente los regímenes autocráticos, la corrupción y las desigualdades sociales, inspirando publicaciones satíricas similares en países vecinos y cimentando su impacto como una voz crítica contra la opresión y un catalizador para el cambio social. La revista defendió ideas progresistas, como los derechos de la mujer, la educación, la modernización y la justicia social, desafiando las normas y tradiciones conservadoras, siempre empleando ingeniosamente el humor a través de caricaturas, chistes y artículos. El uso del idioma azerbaiyano en la revista Molla Nasreddin ha sido ampliamente citado como muestra de la fuerte identidad nacional que creció en el Azerbaiyán del siglo XX, aunque sus ilustraciones visualmente atractivas hicieron que la revista llegara a una audiencia más amplia y diversa en varias comunidades étnicas y lingüísticas. Sin embargo, esta postura crítica entró en conflicto con diversos grupos religiosos y políticos, siendo notable el caso de los seguidores de la fe bahá'í. Por ello, el objetivo de este artículo es analizar las tensiones ocurridas entre los seguidores de la fe bahá'í y los miembros de la revista Molla Nasreddin, sus causas, diferentes enfoques y desenlace.

Palabras clave: Fe Bahá'í, revista "Molla Nasreddin", Jalil Mammadguluzadeh, Aligulu Gamkusar, artículo Gymnazist.

INTRODUCTION

The Baha'i Faith was officially established on May 23rd, 1844, when Bab (means "door" in Arabic) declared His Divine Mission in Shiraz, Iran. He claimed that the main reason of his coming was to prepare people for this momentous event and to herald coming of the One spoken in the Holy Book who will appear at the end of time. He wrote: "I am just a letter in this enormous book and a drop in the unending ocean. My true nature, my mysteries, secrets, and implications will be made clear and understood when He appears..." (Baha'i encyclopedia, 2023) Its History and Teachings. William Carey Publishing. According to Bab's opinions, the Babi movement in Iran, which shook up the Near and Middle East, was sparked by his fiery appeals for spiritual rejuvenation, justice and fraternity, and the emancipation of women from servitude and getting away from superstition. Numerous researchers concur that Bab's advanced social ideas outstripped 19th century European public opinion. However, the Shah regime and the confessors made the decision to put Bab out of way because of concern over the spread of the movement. For this, Bab was sent to Tabriz and executed in public on (Miller, 1974).

The diffusion of Bahá'í Faith continued through the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892) and his son Abdu'lBahá (1844–1921). Bahá'u'lláh's title translates from Arabic as the "Glory of God" and his followers are known as Bahá'ís, derived from the root word "Bahá" or glory. Over his lifetime, Bahá'u'lláh revealed hundreds of tablets and dozens of volumes, among which the Kitáb-i-Íqán (Book of Certitude) and Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Most Holy Book) are the core sources of religious doctrine and law, respectively. For Bahá'ís, the entirety of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation, along with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings and the guidance of his grandson Shoghi Effendi Rabbani (1897–1957), and, since 1963, the Universal House of Justice, constitute the body of authoritative texts that serve as guidance for individual and collective life (Tavangar & Palmer, 2023).

According to Makhani-Belkin (2023) the theological basis of the Bahá'í Faith is the unity of the revealed religions. According to this doctrine, each religion is based on God's revelation to man of ideas that man would not have arrived at by his natural reason alone. Bahá'u'lláh claimed that he embodied the messianic figures of the four religious traditions that predominated in nineteenth-century Iran: Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Islam. Followers believe that the founders of their religions, such as Moses, Zoroaster, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh, are human manifestations of God, and for the Bahá'ís, Bahá'u'lláh's revelations represent the culmination of the current prophetic cycle. Progressive revelation

is considered a circular and continuous process; in other words, Bahá'u'lláh did not declare himself to be the last prophet, and the Bahá'í Faith is not the "last" religion; they are just the most updated versions for this time.

As pointed out by Buck (2019) Bahá'í communities are established in every country in the world except for North Korea and the Vatican and as such, the Bahá'í Faith is said to be the second most widely diffused religion in the world today. The rapid spread (that is, "diffusion" in terms of world religious statistics) of the Bahá'í Faith is impressive by any measure, yet it is still emerging from its former obscurity. Therefore, as a multi-ethnic, transnational community whose core teachings include world citizenship and the abolition of religious, racial, ethnic, and national prejudice, and as a religious minority that is harshly persecuted in the country of its birth, the Bahá'í faith presents a case that is highly relevant to debates on pluralism (Palmer & Tavangar, 2021).

In the words of Mahmoudi (2020) Bahá'í Faith is first and foremost a religion of peace since at the heart of the Bahá'í Faith's teachings is the idea that each individual has to dedicate themselves to the task of gardening their inward to master his/her own well-being before moving on to the world's well-being being fully engaged in an active mission of love and care. This concept of spiritual education and development is the starting point in the peace process, and as so every Bahá'ís should maintain peaceful interactions within the societies they find themselves, so that they may live peacefully in a spirit of self-concern and concern for the community. However, this conservative attitude in some cases came into conflict with progressive and liberating movements, for which reason in some contexts they have been harshly criticized.

In Azerbaijan Baha'i communities have condemned religious fanaticism, superstition, and ignorance and promoted enlightenment, secular education for children, especially girls, the defense of women's rights in the family, and strived for interreligious and international dialogue and cooperation. In this sense Baha'is played a significant role in female education in Azerbaijan. This movement was led in Azerbaijan by Tahira Gurratulein, an Azerbaijani female poet, Bab's closest follower. As per the new laws introduced by Bab, she was the first Muslim woman in the Islamic East who took off her headscarf. While the movement was put down, Tahira Gurratulein was killed. In the second half of the 19th century, Baha'i communities operated in Baku, Balakhani, Ganja, Barda, Sheki and other parts of Northern Azerbaijan. The Baha'i communities in Baku and Balakhani were regarded as some of the world's oldest. The fact that the Bahai's were active in such a broad territory disturbed the clergy. There were consequently

significant pressures against Baha'is in those areas. In this sense, an important role was played by the magazine *Molla Nasreddin*. Then, the objective of this article is to analyze the tensions that occurred between the followers of the Bahá'í faith and the members of the magazine *Molla Nasreddin*, their causes, different approaches and outcome. (Brookshaw & Fazel, 2012).

DEVELOPMENT

Molla Nasreddin (Mollā Naṣr-al-Din) was a political and social weekly in Azeri Turkish, which was published from 7 April 1906 until 1917 in Tbilisi (340 issues), in 1921 in Tabriz (8 issues), and from 1922 to 1931 in Baku (400 issues). This eight-page weekly had a tremendous impact on the course of journalism and development of ideas not only in Southern Caucasus but also in Persia, Turkey, and Central Asia (Encyclopædia Iranica, 2023). According to Minkel (2011) *Molla Nasreddin* magazine was revolutionary in many ways. In an era and a region where free speech wasn't particularly encouraged, its authors boldly satirized politics, religion, colonialism, Westernization, and modernization, education (or lack thereof), and the oppression of women (Azerbaijan was surprisingly progressive on women's issues at the time, granting women the right to vote in 1919—a year before the United States). And with the majority of the population at the time illiterate, the magazine was a careful and clever blend of illustrations and text, and the text itself might be the most interesting of all since it was written in Azeri, rather than Russian, the language of their colonizers.

As Garibova (1996) highlights the magazine played on certain critical themes over and over which included: (1) the precarious geographic location of Azerbaijan as a buffer between Russia and Iran; (2) the colonialist attitudes of Persian shahs and Russian tzars towards Azerbaijan; (3) the disdainful attitude of the intelligentsia towards anything "Azerbaijani" whether related to culture, the education system, or language; (4) the abusive treatment of women in a male-dominated society; (5) the lack of safety, health and financial well-being for the average worker and citizen; (6) the hypocrisy of fanatic clergy; (7) the corruption and abusiveness of people in high positions; (8) the ignorance and naiveté which made people vulnerable to being cheated and abused by all of these social ills because they refused to become educated; and finally (9) the advocacy for an alphabet that would foster literacy. Due to the above, the magazine was banned in Persia and at some moments in its history it was especially attacked as well as its editors and contributors.

The years of operation of "*Molla Nasreddin*" magazine, particularly 1913, have been documented as a time when

the magazine was subject to severe revulsion and censorship rules as well as persecution. The 16th and 21st of the magazine issues 1913 of that year were confiscated. The article published in the last issue of the magazine in 1913 provides information about this fact. The article notes that the government confiscated the 16th and 21st issues, and that they were also seriously hurt, damaged, and prosecuted. Then it is sarcastically stated that "Jamali-Mubarak hit us because we published a magazine in that unlucky and reverse year, and we were the target of protests, reprimands, and threats from all sides", were summoned to "district courts", all kinds of calamities have happened to us..." (Mammadguluzadeh, 1913)

The harsh criticism to Baha'ism and to one of founders of this religious movement, Abdu'lBahá, was one of the reasons for the misfortunes happening to the magazine. In the 20th issue of the magazine in 1913 a caricature by artist Rotter was printed on the 8th page (Mammadguluzadeh, 1913). On the left, Abdu'lBahá, Bab's son, Abbas Efendi, a head of the Baha'i Faith, a kid sitting on his knees, and he plays with that kid. A framed plaque with the word "God" is placed above his head. On the right, a well-dressed man points to the Malaika (angel) standing next to him and says to Abdu'lBahá: "Jamali-mubarak!" a tablet from Malakut (Realm of Dominion) is descended, and ruhul-quds (soul of purity) wants to be honored. The following words are written in Arabic on the "tablet" held by Malaika: "There will be a day when the people of light (i.e. Baha'is) will be united and the villains will be scattered. Tell the friends of God the good news".

The magazine also published several articles on critical topics related to Babism and Baha'ism. A feuilleton titled "Kufta" was written by "Molla Nasreddin" and published with the pseudonym "Babi" In the 28th issue of 1910: "Kufta is the same, but they call it "dolma". In other words, you speak with God in Arabic in both cases. But, in that case you say "qul hu allah hu ahad", and in this case "ashadu bevaḥdaniyatika" ... In that case you should fast in Ramadan, in this case in a different time. Then they invested a large amount of money to construct a place of worship that they named "Mashrigulkar". There, women would wear themselves with a burqa; today here they do so with two burqas and four veils. There, Sheikh Fazlullahs and Mir Hashims at least took money and helped in oppression, and these ones pray for free to Shahi-Adil Mammadali Shah, day and night. In brief, kofta is same, but is presented as "dolma" (Babi, 1910).

The Babi column issued under the pseudonym "Sarsaqqulu" in the 6th issue of "*Molla Nasreddin*" in 1913, clearly shows critical attitude of the magazine toward Babis. In the column is stated that now it is a world

of “freedom and conscience”. Hussein, Ali, Jafar want to be not a Shia, but a Babi, a dahri, a freemason, or do not accept any religion, they do, whatever want to do. In the column it is noted that in that moment, whoever “is open-minded and sane”, akhunds, mullahs with red beards and black hundreds immediately start shouting that “don’t let someone accepts Babism”. On the other hand, the Baha’is also “heard of his openness” and started rumouring everywhere that “that man is also a babi”. The magazine wrote that it is a style of the Baha’is that “someone who is well-known educated, and understanding is introduced as a babi to the public in order to quickly deceive the ignorant people. Even if this poor man doesn’t know about anything, and you see that pious Muslims get together and say “you are a babi, a renegade and damned one... This is the benefit of Babism to humanity in the present century!”. (Babi, 1910).

The Baha’is were referred to as ignorant and illiterate people by the magazine “Molla Nasreddin”, and they were accused of misleading people into joining the Baha’i movement: “Why do not you keep off people’s back? Why do you immediately say, “Be a babi”, whenever you see a Muslim porter or a hungry and poor man?” The column stated that the Baha’i sect preachers “clinged to people like a leech”, and when they met someone, they started to say: “Jamali-mubarak”, “Abdulhasan” made such a speech, Sarkar agha commanded, all Americans in this picture believed in Sarkar Agha, and etc.”

Aziz Mirahmadvov writes: “The leader of the Baha’is in America was Mrs. Isabella Britinkham. Most of American Baha’is had direct communication with Abbas Efendi; they visited him in Acre city and received instructions from him and came back. In Iran, the origin of Baha’ism movement met great resistance. Many Baha’is were forced to leave the country at the end of the 19th century because they opposed the armed rebellion of the people and infuriated the progressive forces. A number of Baha’is settled in Ashgabat, Merv, and other Central Asian cities and continued their political and religious activities at the end of the 19th century and the first ten years of the 20th century. They were particularly supported in Baku (Mirahmadvov, 1980).

In addition, the magazine addressed how Americans accepted the Baha’i sect, and noted that their actions were nothing more than a cover-up and a fraud: “The only thing that really interests and wonders me is how Americans have been lived for five hundred years and have been so pampered that they have never passed under any yoke. How will they perform salah nineteen rakats a day and will say ya baha, or ya jamal, or ya jalal, or ya kudrat, or ya shawkat, or ya malakut in each rakat nineteen times...”

(Mirahmadvov, 1980). In our opinion, the fact that the Baha’is supported the governing circles, the shah regime, and its reactionary forces during the revolution of 1906-1911, is one of the major reasons “Molla Nasreddin” had a negative attitude against Baha’is.

When the Baha’is of Tabriz asked Abbas Effendi’s opinion about whether he would participate in the elections to the Majlis, they received a response via telegram from him in which he specified he would not try to get into the assembly. Abbas Efendi publicly confessed his hatred for the Iranian constitution and the “mischievous democrats” in the assembly when he met with the Russian Ambassador von Klemm in Alexandria. He believed that with Russia’s assistance the tyranny by council organized by people from the Caucasus, as well as Taghizade and other propagandists will continue to dominate in Azerbaijan. The “Molla Nasreddin” magazine, being aware of the situation and following these political processes, disagreed with views of the Baha’is and harshly criticized them on its pages. The “Molla Nasreddin” magazine stated and informed the readers that the clergies who oppose any progressive movement try to introduce it as Babi, which created a feeling of hatred for that movement in people, discrediting it. (Baha’i encyclopedia, 2023)

The magazine also drew attention to the fact that during the Iranian revolution in 1905-1911, Tabriz scientists attempted to spread the message to the people that “Hey people, know and be aware that all those who appear under the name of this mashruta (Persian Constitutional Revolution) are Babis. They want to take you away from religion, so they’ll say that you must be a babi, as if they subdue you. In addition to all of this, the “Molla Nasreddin” magazine also satirically exposed the inhumane attitudes of the perpetrators of injustice against those who had accepted the Baha’i Faith, the ruthless tyrants, and the ones who started these tragedies. The destruction of Baha’is homes, the strangling of kids, and the stealing of their wives by Muslim akhunds were satirically exposed in the “Sheikh Muhammad” column, which was published in the 8th issue of the magazine in 1910. Here is written that “Hey stupid, have you ever seen an innocent child killed? They did not commit such atrocities even during the inquisition of Spanish Catholic “akhunds”. (Baha’i encyclopedia, 2023)

Also, it is known that a group of Baha’is living in Ashgabat wrote an application letter to the prosecutor of the Tiflis district court and complained about the publication of a caricature of Abdu’lBahá in the 20th issue of the “Molla Nasreddin” magazine in 1913. They complained that the magazine had unfairly disparaged the Baha’i faith and their Prophet Abdu’lBahá. The Baha’is stated in the

application letter that they were very “honest and hard-working” people, praising their lifestyle and moral standards. They are “useful citizens” for the Russian state and “loyal servants” for the Russian tsar.

In accordance with the application the Press Committee, the Tbilisi District Court, and the Caucasus Viceroy's office first began a secret correspondence. The editor-in-chief of the magazine, Jalil Mammadguluzade, and the second editor, Aligulu Gamkusal, were taken to court shortly after the publication of the 21st issue. After the investigation, the court presented to Jalil Mammadguluzade and Aligulu Gamkusal the indictment. They both write the court pertinent explanation. The explanation by J. Mammadguluzade draws interest in many different aspects. He requests that Kocharli, a teacher of the Gori seminary and well-known literary critic, as well as Poladzade, a member of the Tbilisi Shia clerical council, be invited as experts to the court session. Then J. Mammadguluzade writes to divert the court: “...they can determine that the accused article published in the 21st issue of “Molla Nasreddin” magazine, dated August 14, edited by me does not aim to violate the morals of the readers... This article is an imitation of the works by many Eastern poets who praise their lovers and whose printed works are popular among readers”. He asks the court to allow him to bring one of these books and present it to the judges in the court. In his explanation, Jalil Mammadguluzade concluded by stating, “I will defend myself in court,” indicating that he did not need any lawyer. Jamalov, K. (2020).

A number of documents related to Aligulu Gamkusal are kept in the archives. Gamkusal also supports the action of the magazine in his explanation presented to the court and asks the court that “Nobleman” Eynali Bey Sultanov have to be invited as his lawyer, Firidun Bey Kocherli, “connoisseur of Muslim literature and well-versed in the Russian language” as an expert, Mirza Mohammad Khan, Vice-Consul of Iran in Tbilisi, and Sheikh-Islam Akhund Pishnamazzade, Prince Kazim Mirza Qajar and Majidus-Saltana Afshar as witnesses. In his explanation, A. Gamkusal characterizes the last four people as those who “have a high social position among Muslims and are well acquainted with the direction of the magazine”. (Oglu, 2016).

The closed court session was held in Tbilisi on March 19th, 1914. The “defendants”, the mentioned witnesses and the experts are interrogated in the hearing attended by the chairman N.A.Tarsaidze, honorary judicial conciliator G. N. Alikhanov, deputy prosecutor B. A. Nazarov, court member A. A. Karasyov among others.

“Molla Nasreddin” was mainly accused of breaking the law, inciting strife among Muslims, insulting the Babi prophet, and disseminating pornographic materials. However, Mollanasreddinists are acquitted. The court protocol made it evident that the editors of “Molla Nasreddin” received great support from their close and like-minded friends, Eynali bey Sultanov and Firidun bey Kocharli. These two writers, like Jalil Mammadguluzadeh, made a logical point and mentioned that the caricature and the poem “Gymnazist” were allegedly not directed at Baha’ism or Abdul Baha, but in general against the negative qualities, superstition and ignorance of some Muslim sects. After the defendants, the censor Mirza Sharif Mirzayev was the first to be interrogated. He disagreed with the court's assessment on the 20th issue. And F. Kocharli, after analyzing the poem “Gymnazist”, noted that “Molla Nasreddin” magazine “...laughs at the flaws of Muslims in general and helps the society”. Unlike all those interrogated, Sheikhul-Islam notes that poems like “Gymnazist” “...do not harm, but benefit”. Baha’i encyclopedia, 2023)

Other witnesses also defend Molla Nasreddin. However, although the magazine was acquitted, not long after, deputy prosecutor B. A. Nazarov wrote a protest to the chamber of the court, requiring a reconsideration of this case. Tiflis district court reconsidered the case again on October 10th, 1915, reversed a judgment and made a judgement that J.Mammadguluzade and A.Gamkusal were fined 200 manats each. The confiscation and burning of the 20th and 21st issues of the magazine (after one year and two months) are entrusted to the relevant circles in the most recent judgement by the court. Although A. Gamkusal submitted an application letter to the court and asked for cancellation of fine, his request was rejected on April 16th, 1916. (Oglu, 2016).

The governor of the Zakaspi province allegedly sent a letter to the Caucasian Viceroy's office in response to the complaint of Baha'is saying: “I want to state that this complaint is completely legitimate that the representatives of the Baha'i (babi) community of Ashgabat and Merv, their religious feelings were insulted and ridiculed in regular articles and caricatures in the Azerbaijan magazine “Molla Nasreddin”. I ask Viceroy's office to order to take punitive measures against the “Molla Nasreddin” magazine and the issue of the magazine dated July 23 of this year, which is sent with this application letter, be removed from sale and confiscated due to the extremely offensive caricature of the revered and holy head of the Babis”. In the media, several contradictory opinions on this issue were expressed. In the newspaper “Turkestanskiye vedomosti” (“Turkmen magazine”) a person with the pseudonym

Torchinsky defended the Baha'is and made insulting attacks against the magazine. (Oglu, 2016; Melikova, L. 2007).

On the contrary, a group of readers from Ganja claimed that Torchinsky's article was biased and they protested him. The protest letter stated that "Turkestanskiye vedomosti" and its biased author slander "Molla Nasreddin" and do not understand its significance for Muslim life. "Molla Nasreddin" has been faithfully serving the growth of Muslims for eight years and no religion or sect is important for it; it is the enemy of religious superstition. Molla Nasreddin's weapon of struggle is irony... As for the attitude towards Abdu'lBahá's prophecy and his movement claiming domination over the world, we should note that in a century when European culture flourished, we cannot reconcile with such a movement that is anti-Muslim and denies the political freedom of peoples". In the letter, it is stated that the negative attitude of the Baha'is toward the revolutionary movement in Iran and Turkey and the struggle against tyranny revealed their reactionary and conservative side. (Leyla, 2007).

"Mr. Torchinsky, tell us, is it possible to call the gnostic ideas mixed with pythagoreanism, literal combinations, and the literary meaning of letters, the ideas constituting the essence of the Baha'ism in the cultural age – the "holy doctrine"? No, let's not be offended by this sarcasm of the innocent and wise Molla Nasreddin (Torchinsky, 1913).

The Tbilisi Committee on Press Affairs also demonstrated a dual attitude to the caricature describing the leader of the Baha'is, Abdu'lBahá. On the one hand, the poem "Gymnazist" published under the pseudonym "Dastanchi" (Mammadali Manafzadeh) in the 21st issue of the magazine infuriated them. "Oh divine light of my eyes, Malay gymnasist, your skin is like the Sun, your face is like the Moon, gymnasist" – in the satire that begins with the mentioned lines, a pious Muslim is exposed as a filthy creature. The Baha'is and those who supported them assaulted "Molla Nasreddin" once more when they saw Abdu'lBahá having fun with a child sitting on his knee described in the 20th issue. Two days after the 21st issue, on August 19, Tbilisi district court, Tbilisi police chief, Press committee, Transcaucasian railway gendarmerie-police department, Tbilisi Address department, and other Tsarist circles clashed, and it was mandated that the entire circulation of that issue would promptly seize and sent to the Press Committee. Jamalov, K. (2020).

The press committee defended the magazine in some way, but at the same time also suggested that all copies of those issues be seized since such caricatures and satirical articles are against moral standards. According to

a letter from the Tbilisi Committee on Press Affairs, the publication of the caricature is just irrelevant; however, the rumors about it are exaggerated and widespread. The committee also noted that it is clear from the words of the complainants that the magazine "Molla Nasreddin" regularly published articles dispraising the followers of Bahá'u'lláh on its pages, thereby causing mass massacres and bloodshed among Shias. The Press Council also mentioned in the letter that the problem is not what the complainants claimed and the "Molla Nasreddin" magazine does not pay special attention to the exposure of Baha'ism. The publication of that caricature in a magazine is an exception. The committee stated that a number of Muslims in Transcaucasia, Iran, and the Volga area get the "Molla Nasreddin" magazine, and a small part of its circulation spread in Zakaspi province. Therefore, there were any sign of crime in the law to fine the magazine as requested by the head of Zakaspi province, to confiscate all copies of those issues and to include it in the list of prohibited literature. Grant, B. 2020; Sakal, 2017).

In the sent letter it is stated that the second editor of the magazine, Aligulu Najafov, has been summoned to the committee on September 17 of that year and made a vow not to publish any material disparaging Baha'is in order to stop such complaints. In order to confirm its opinion, the committee attached the article by "Molla Nasreddin" readers published in the "Zakavkazy" newspaper to that letter and submitted it to the office of the Caucasus Viceroy. (Oglu, 2016).

Atakhan Pashayev emphasizes two points to focus on this letter from the Tbilisi committee on Press Affairs: "The first is that the committee informs the office of the Caucasus Viceroy that only 1,209 copies of the 16th issue of "Molla Nasreddin" magazine were circulated in that year, despite the Tbilisi police chief confiscating 3,505 copies of that issue. Therefore, the magazine's circulation was so obviously concealed. The second is that despite the fact that the Tbilisi Committee on Press Affairs raised issues not only in this letter but also repeatedly about the magazine, it was prosecuted, confiscated its separate issues, removed many of its writings and caricatures, made its cover black, but at the same time the "Molla Nasreddin" magazine was defended from the accusations of other departments and individuals. All related to numbers 16, 20 and 21 of the magazine published in 1913 prove this fact. While the press committee filed a criminal case regarding the 16th and 21st issues, they were defending the magazine in the issue raised by the Baha'is of Ashgabat regarding the 20th issue. Of course, it's not out of sympathy for the magazine; it was due to the intention of the

committee to defend itself, which allowed the publication of those materials (Pashayev, 1982, p. 88).

Thus, due to the caricature describing the religious leader of Baha'is Abdu'lBahá and the poem "Gymnazist" in the 20th and 21st issues of "Molla Nasreddin" magazine, the editors of the magazine were convened, and until 1916, there was a lot of correspondence between the tsar administrative authorities on this". Professor Nazim Akhundov writes: In the years that followed, the Baha'is of Ashgabat and Marv expressed their hatred against the "Molla Nasreddin" magazine and its editors J.Mammadguluzade and A.Gamkusal. It is known that in 1916, J. Mammadguluzade and A. Gamkusal visited Central Asia and the Volga, and then Dagestan, in order to stage the play "The Dead". First, they traveled to Ashgabat, and with the aid of local young people, they prepared the play for the performance. However, the play was canceled as a result of sedition by a group of reactionaries" (Akhundov, 1968, p. 311).

CONCLUSIONS

As has been analyzed in the paper, there were significant tensions between the Molla Nasreddin magazine and the followers of the Bahá'í faith. It is worth noting that the criticisms in Molla Nasreddin were not directed solely at the Bahá'í Faith, but also encompassed other religious and political entities, however, tensions between the magazine and the Bahá'í community were notable due to the strong sense of identity of Bahá'í followers who perceived the satirical approach as disrespectful, feeling that their faith was being unfairly attacked and/or misrepresented. Tensions were further fueled by the general progressive and anti-establishment stance as well as the satirical and critical tone used in Molla Nasreddin magazine which was in direct conflict with the conservative stance of the Bahá'í Faith, with its emphasis on unity, peace and social harmony.

Thus, despite the fact that "Molla Nasreddin" magazine criticized some liars, fraudsters, and fanatic mullahs who damaged the Baha'i Faith, it did not affect its status, development, and huge spread throughout the world. In this sense, this association is currently heavily active in many countries over the world and organizes significant projects. The Baha'i International Union cooperates with a number of UN bodies - ECOSOC, UNICEF, UN Environment Program, World Health Organization, etc., to protect the peace, global ecology, and human rights on the planet, and to achieve the economic, social, and cultural development of peoples. The Union implements thousands of projects in the field of education, ecology, human rights, and healthcare in various countries of the

world, and in spite of being considered a religious minority its labor and voice cannot be dismissed.

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