On the Notion of a 'Conceptual Framework' in Education:

Part 1. The Harmony of Science and Religion

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

It is possible that I might be one of the very few Romanian Bahá'is writing in the area of Bahá'i Studies.[1] As such I feel a need to be transparent about what kind of Romanian Bahá'i intellectual I might be and what sort of vision animates this contribution. A word that is often used to describe the cultural zone to which I belong is 'liminality':

> Liminality is a key term of postcolonial theory, used by theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha to describe 'the in-between spaces' of cultural ambiguity where diasporic and migrant identities, hovering in the indecision of in-betweenness, are shaped. Postcolonial theorists re-valorize the threshold and the interstice, purging it of its negative connotations of hesitation and vacillation, and affirm it as a privileged space of cultural renewal. (Oțoiu 88)

The liminality I refer to is of a specific kind. It consists of having lived through disruptive transitions, under and between different empires, in-between the East and the West and the North and the South, and in and out of different socio-economic systems such as those of Fascism, Communism and Capitalism. Often on the periphery of the world-system, where the philosophies, systems and ideas of other more powerful nations are being experimented with, our world of ideas is associated not with periods of stability but with instability, flux and even chaos. In such a world, theories meet and mix in all sorts of ways, theoretical boundaries are not respected, and bricolage is allowed. Hierarchical intellectual structures are deconstructed, and everything is subject to the play of ideas and irony, which

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sometimes results in avantgarde works (see Tristan Tzara and Dadaism).[2] The fragmentary essay is the preferred form of intellectual production (when it is not a poem) because it is free flowing, allowing for a diversity of themes, and inviting an immediate conversation. All theories are experiments at best, they all hurt humanity in some way, and there could always be a better one. Writing and theorizing is not a precise, linear, calculated operation that operates sequentially, and which stems only from one perspective. The act of writing is a search in which the argument develops, more often than not, in a spiral. Rather than attempting to directly tackle a problem one navigates the unknown space around it from distance hoping to get closer and closer via a helical trajectory. It is not that one chooses the spiral but that this is how the gravity pull of knowledge works when no reliable map of its territory is yet available.

Sometimes, this also happens because none of the existing maps can be trusted, and one must rely on several of them at once. Such an investigation has no beginning and no end because knowledge is infinite. To such an intellectual, introductions and conclusions appear, therefore, as useless repetitions, attempts to have someone defend the indefensible, a formality that wastes time. Such artificial conventions hide the never-ending process of knowledge-formation and the constant presence of incertitude that slowly but surely dissolves it, the fact that the real truth of our existence is how much we do not know.

If I were to describe a Romanian intellectual along these lines, I would describe them as an intellectual on the run. The precarity that is beginning to characterize academic work in

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[2] "I destroy the drawers of the brain and of social organization: spread demoralization wherever I go and cast my hand from heaven to hell, my eyes from hell to heaven, restore the fecund wheel of a universal circus to objective forces and the imagination of every individual. … The dialectic is an amusing mechanism which guides us / in a banal kind of way / to the opinions we had in the first place. Does anyone think that, by a minute refinement of logic, he has demonstrated the truth and established the correctness of these opinions? Logic imprisoned by the senses is an organic disease. To this element philosophers always like to add: the power of observation. But actually this magnificent quality of the mind is the proof of its impotence. We observe, we regard from one or more points of view, we choose them among the millions that exist. … I am against systems, the most acceptable system is on principle to have none. … Like everything in life, Dada is useless. Perhaps you will understand me better when I tell you that Dada is a virgin microbe that penetrates with the insistence of air into all the spaces that reason has not been able to fill with words or conventions" (Tzara, "Dadaism.").

the West has always been the province of the Romanian intellectual, whether at home or abroad. On the other hand, if there are no boundaries to the terrain of knowledge, and no solid and stable local traditions to build on, how is one to cover some of that ground meaningfully? The question of how to engage with the West and catch up with modernity while understanding the global (and the interrelated global problems due to peak in the 2040-2050 decade) means there is very little time available to redesign everything we know as human culture and civilization. The process of disintegration is increasing in its intensity and spread, while the process of integration is too feeble and often sabotaged by even the last sectors of society enshrining our hopes for change.

And yet, this is just one side of the coin. The other side is the old Western ideal of the intellectual as a Renaisssance Man, working from within different fields of knowledge and treating knowledge as a path towards the fulfilment of our humanity. More than that, this is a journey towards a mathesis universalis, timeless truths, universal peace and the Divine. Here, elaborate theoretical constructions replace the fragmentary, and comparison, integration and synthesis take over. Mircea Eliade, Ioan-Petru Culianu, Matei Călinescu and Basarab Nicolescu are examples of Romanian intellectuals who have pursued this tradition to international acclaim.[3] A Romanian intellectual, it could thus be said, oscillates between liminality and synthesis while trying to conform to the Western ideal of specialization and to writing introductions and conclusions. Often our intellectual work is misjudged in the West for not having a structure. But there is always a structure, just not the linear one; a polycentric one, rather than one with a single center.

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[3] See their respective works: "A History of Religious Ideas", "Eros and Magic in the Renaissance", "Five Faces of Modernity. Modernism, Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism" and "From Modernity to Cosmodernity – Science, Culture and Spirituality".

Over time, I have come to realize that my city, Brașov, shares in that tradition of producing a particular type of intellectual or artist, one committed to authenticity, honesty of thought and critical thinking:

> Christianity has been most sophisticated and most open in its recognition of the nature of this conflict between the human need to know in order to live meaningfully, and the equally real human inability to know the human situation in any final sense. … man's life is a dark journey across a bridge thrown by reason and tradition across that void. The intellectual is the man who, in terms of his advancement of knowledge and his conserving functions with respect to the accumulated knowledge of the past, builds and preserves the bridge over that void. At the same time, in terms of the critical aspects of his role, he is the man who exposes the weaknesses of that very bridge - even showing that parts of it will not really hold us up. From this latter aspect of his role are derived both the suspicion and hostility accorded him by his fellow citizens and the interior anguish he suffers himself. (O'Dea 32-34)

I am referring here to Gheorghe Crăciun's academic study on modern poetry „Aisbergul poeziei moderne" ("The Iceberg of Modern Poetry"), Alexandru Mușina's critique of Romanian intellectuals in the literary/cultural field – of himself and of friends and foes alike - from his book of essays „Scrisorile unui fazan[4]. Epistolarul de la Olănești" ("Letters from a pheasant. The Chronicle from Olănești") and to Ciprian Șiulea's „Retorici, simulacre, imposturi. Cultură și ideologii în România" ("Rhetoric, Simulacra, Impostures.

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[4] In Romanian, ‚fazan' can also refer to a 'naive' man or one who is a dupe (‚fraier'). Commenting on this term, Igor Mocanu describes Mușina as an "intelligent farceur who loves cultural mischief" and employs it as a strategy to highlight critical points in ongoing cultural debates, points that would otherwise remain underground and not make it into the public sphere. (Source: https://igormocanu.wordpress.com/2012/10/06/cind-un-fazan-s-a-saturat-sa-aiba-dreptate/) However, the author is clearly also seriously engaging in self-critique.

Culture and ideologies in Romania") who applies a sociological critique to the main ideologies, intellectual groups and intellectual figures on the Romanian cultural scene (including those which the author had been closely associated with as part of his intellectual formation).

My main source of inspiration in this area, however, are the books and essays of Caius Dobrescu, especially „Modernitatea ultimă" ("The Ultimate Modernity") and „Inamicul impersonal" ("The Impersonal Enemy"), in which the author links culture, literature, politics, history, philosophy, sociology, poetry and film with a critique of Romanian post-communist society, thus establishing (in a manner only equalled at times by the literary critic Paul Cernat) the discipline of cultural studies in the Romanian cultural space.

Authenticity demands reflexivity from ourselves, and from others, as well as speaking the truth (about our social reality) to each other. In my view, the Bahá'í virtue of 'truthfulness' is not just an individual trait, but primarily a social virtue that applies to collectivities. The search for truth and its expression also has to do with justice and defending the values that safeguard us all. I could hardly deviate from this tradition of my city which also features prominently in the films of the "Romanian New Wave". I hope that this unusual emphasis on subjectivity, meant to temper the objective auctorial voice we have come to associate with writing in academic journals, provides enough insight into the cultural background of the author. Having made acquaintance in this manner, we can now proceed to the heart of the matter.

The particular contribution I want to make through this essay relates to the following proposition from the Universal House of Justice in 2013:

Central to the effort to advance the work of expansion and consolidation, social action, and the involvement in the discourses of society is the notion of an evolving conceptual framework, a matrix that organizes thought and gives shape to activities and which becomes more elaborate as experience accumulates. It would be fruitful if the elements of this framework most relevant to the work of the Associations for Bahá'í Studies can be consciously and progressively clarified. (24 Jul. 2013)

This essay starts by introducing two past attempts at devising a conceptual framework for Bahá'i education. This serves a two-fold purpose. The first aim is to lay a historical foundation for a meta-level discussion of how conceptual frameworks of this kind can be conceptualized or designed. The second rationale has to do with the fact that the two models presented offer a useful introduction into the theme of the harmony of science and religion. Each model emphasizes the integration of knowledge as a methodology geared at translating the Bahá'í Revelation into processes for building a world civilization. This stance ushers in a discussion about the epistemic transition currently experienced by the Bahá'í community. In the final part, recent developments regarding the issue of structural racism within the American Bahá'í community are taken to exemplify the challenges of this epistemic transition.

This essay is envisaged as only the first part of a larger contribution. A second article will consider the practical implications of the current epistemic transition for the field of Bahá'í inspired education. A third article will then expand and deepen this conversation about various attempts to formulate a conceptual framework by highlighting the importance of theory in education (here, a lot of the focus will be on the FUNDAEC model). Having followed the trajectory of the spiral in this manner, the focus will then finally turn towards the notion of a 'conceptual framework' and its underpinnings in current Bahá'í discourse.

For several decades now, Bahá'i educational discourse has emphasized the importance of the search for a 'conceptual framework' in the field of education. The term itself is significant. It signals an awareness that a comprehensive Bahá'i theory of education cannot be formulated at this point in time. Thus, Sona Farid-Arbab ("Advancing" 64) proposes an evolving framework for Bahá'i inspired education as the best medium for progressing towards this distant goal. Such a framework, she contends, would allow all Bahá'i inspired educational initiatives to function within the same general set of parameters, together advancing a collective process of learning. This would be achieved by feedback mechanisms with the central institutions of the Bahá'i Faith. The key elements of such a 'conceptual framework' for education are outlined in Farid-Arbab (*Moral Empowerment*).

Sona Farid-Arbab was the director of the Office of Social and Economic Development (OSED) between 2003 and 2013. While Farid-Arbab's thought has no doubt influenced the vision of the documents produced by the OSED in that period and beyond, her perspective would also have been influenced by that of the OSED and other institutions at the Bahá'i World Centre. As the wife of Farzam Arbab, member of the Universal House of Justice between 1993 and 2013, her outlook also has much in common with the FUNDAEC vision, which the writings and talks of her husband also outline. Although it could be ascertained that the FUNDAEC vision has played a central role in shaping the educational vision of the Bahá'i community during the last three decades, no analyses exist yet to verify such assertions or depict their possible complexities and nuances. Still, the influence of FUNDAEC and Farzam Arbab's thought on the current educational vision of the Bahá'i community cannot be denied.

This is important to mention because the "conceptual framework" that Farzam Arbab and Sona Farid-Arbab (*Moral Empowerment* x, 2-4) have proposed for FUNDAEC, or the one that the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (ISGP)[5], led first by Matthew Weinberg and then by Haleh Arbab, is currently exploring, are not exactly distinct from the "framework for action" outlined by the UHJ (*Turning Point* 35:1; 2 Mar. 2013, *Framework for Action*) and the OSED (*Social Action*) or, indeed, from the "evolving conceptual framework" which the Universal House of Justice (24 Jul. 2013) discusses in some detail in its 2013 letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada regarding the work of the Association for Bahá'i Studies. This is too essential and complex a theme to be pursued here but the contributions of Paul Lample ("A framework for action") and Haleh Arbab ("Generation of Knowledge") provide a solid introduction into the topic.

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF SABET'S INTEGRATIVE APPROACH TO KNOWLEDGE AND CURRICULUM BUILDING

While Sona and Farzam Arbab's perspective on a 'conceptual framework' for education is relatively new in the Bahá'i community, the concern with the concept is not. One such example is Behrooz Sabet's 1987 Ph.D. dissertation at the State University of New York at Buffalo entitled "Curriculum theory and the Bahá'í Faith: relationship between the phenomenal world and the spiritual reality". In this piece of work Sabet makes an unusual claim. He ascertains that the attempt to establish "a unifying frame of reference for curriculum" is undermined not only by the fragmentation of our societies and social institutions but also by that of our "cultural patterns of thinking, feeling and acting"

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[5] See, for example, this section on the ISGP website: https://www.globalprosperity.org/conceptual-framework/

("Abstract"). The implication is that a comprehensive theory of education cannot emerge as long as the current meta-level epistemological crisis, one causing the increased fragmentation of our selves and ways of seeing, is being ignored. Sabet, therefore, argues that prior to a comprehensive theory of education must come the search for a philosophy that could account for our current processes of cultural change (i.e., fragmentation, disintegration) (idem).

Ultimately, his efforts aim to show how such a unifying philosophical framework could be gradually derived from the teachings of the Bahá'i Faith through correlation with theories about cultural change, the development of scientific and religious thought, and evolution. What Sabet attempts to do, therefore, is to translate the language of the Bahá'i Revelation into a philosophical language able to integrate religious with scientific thought. This line of investigation is further developed in an article entitled "Integrative Approach to Knowledge and Action: A Bahá'i Perspective" and brought to fruition in an as of yet unpublished manuscript entitled "Bahá'i Education: A Conceptual Perspective". The first fruits of this endeavor are a set of incipient philosophical considerations regarding the key concepts and propositions that could organize the internal domain of a religion into the philosophical framework of a knowledge system, with the Bahá'i Faith as a case-study. A key insight here is Sabet's realization that the internal domain of a religion has to be linked with "a core of knowledge across (academic) disciplines in order to create an integrative paradigm of knowledge" ("Integrative Approach", Abstract), a historical process which, he argues, unfolds according to particular stages. While such considerations might seem ahead of their time, they already have important curricular applications in the present:

1) Based on this line of thinking, Sabet (*A Conceptual Perspective*) developed an adaptive integrative curriculum that could explore the emergence of "a new paradigm of knowledge" based on the union of "the spiritual and scientific traditions of humanity".

2) Subject areas correlating the teachings of the Bahá'i Faith with scientific and philosophical traditions of thought were highlighted that could form the background of a general education.

In summing up his contributions, we could say that Sabet ("Integrative Approach", *A Conceptual Perspective*) engaged with our current notion of a 'conceptual framework'[6] in three ways: as a "unified [philosophical] framework" describing the internal dimension (or contents) of religion, as the key philosophical features of the "current core of knowledge across disciplines" ("Integrative Approach", Abstract) and as a well-thought-out curriculum serving as an exploratory device to connect the two. Since 2006, a variant of this curriculum (first introduced at Landegg International University) has been in use at the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education (BIHE).

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE ANISA MODEL

An even earlier example of a 'conceptual framework for education' can be found in the Anisa Model developed by Daniel Jordan during the 1960s and 1970s. Jordan also saw "extreme fragmentation" as the main condition affecting our educational systems ("Lethbridge Part 1" min.1):

> Why, then, with all this impressive wealth of information and technological support, is education in such trouble? Why do we have over a million annual dropouts each year? Why is there such unrest on the college campus? Why do the schools seem

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[6] Some of the terms Sabet uses are as follows: "conceptual perspective", "knowledge-based conceptual design", "unified framework" and "core of knowledge" (2002 title, Landegg abstract and headings).

unable to make a constructive response to the many critical issues facing the nation's

youth: alienation and the formation of non-constructive countercultures, violence,

racism, drug abuse, mental illness, crime and delinquency, and poverty? It appears

that all of the pieces to a number of basic solutions to these problems exist. But is also

seems to be true that there are far too many pieces to cope with. No one sees how to

fit them all together in a way that would enable the school, as one of the most

important social institutions of Western civilization, to restructure itself so that it can

be constructively responsive to the critical demands placed upon society at this

portentous juncture in history. (Jordan, "Putting the Pieces Together" 2)

In illustrating how the condition of 'extreme fragmentation' affects the inner life of an

educational institution, Jordan diagnoses this as a problem of knowledge:

People do not have a sense of how everything they do, ranging from administrative

activities to faculty meetings, to parent involvement, to what ought to be involved in

the curriculum, nobody sees how all of that ought to fit together, or could fit together.

And the reason they don't, is because nobody has done enough serious work to

articulate a philosophical frame of reference. ("Lethbridge Part 1" min.1)

As far as the Anisa Model is concerned, this 'philosophical frame of reference' is a

category of the same order with the current Bahá'i notion of a 'conceptual framework' in

education. To better explore this parallelism, two interrelated questions must be asked:

1) What type of conceptual structure did Jordan envisage 'a philosophical frame of reference'

to be?

2) What actual 'philosophical frame of reference' was identified as the foundation of the Anisa Model of education?

As it is very hard to address one of these questions in total separation from the other, I will attempt to answer both through the same narrative. On first impression, it could be said that Daniel Jordan starts with a standard view in curriculum development and education, namely, with asking what is the nature of the human being for which an educational institution or curriculum should be built. On an abstract level, this concerns a general question of the type 'What is the essential nature of human beings?' ("Lethbridge Part 1" mins. 9-10) On a more concrete level, this refers to the specific nature of any pupil or student and to their specific connections with their environment: "It makes me want to say, 'How dare we create a lesson plan for this child, [when] we don't even know him?'" (idem mins. 42-43) What differentiates Jordan from most other educationalists, it will become apparent, is the seriousness and commitment with which this double-edged question is being pursued.

Jordan envisages human nature in processual terms, as a notion of what all the sciences or academic fields can tell us about the wiring of human beings. Significantly, this includes an inquiry into what the best traditions of Western and Eastern thought have unveiled about the purpose of human existence and the process of human evolution:

> I'm faced with a delicious task that is impossible, namely, to acquaint you with twenty years of around the clock thinking and working to develop a comprehensive educational system that would be based on some ultimate unifying principle that connects man and his ultimate nature to the principles governing the order of the universe. ("Introduction to the Science of Education" mins. 4-6)

At the same time, however, Jordan is equally interested in the specific phases and changes which trigger or retard human development, as well as their precise timing. It would be more accurate to say, therefore, that Jordan is speaking about a theory of (human) development rather than about a theory of human nature.

One cannot understand Jordan's broad educational vision without an insight into his interdisciplinary formation as an intellectual and academic researcher concerned with the theme of 'human development'. [7] This formation enabled Jordan to realize early on that the question of human nature had to be addressed via the continual gathering of large amounts of information and insights from across the different academic disciplines. This process could not be complete if it could not organize all these findings into a meaningful whole. The issue, therefore, was not how to offer a static and fixed description of human nature from within one discipline or tradition of thought (be it religious or otherwise), but how to establish a process through which the latest developments in all disciplines could be constantly integrated into one scheme of thought. The answer to this problem was his theory of (human) development: "Its theory of development provides a conceptual scheme that enables one to integrate a vast amount of research data on how human beings grow and develop. The ANISA theories of curriculum and pedagogy are logical derivatives of this theory of development" (Streets and Jordan 30). This is a very powerful example of why theory is extremely important. Jordan also believed that this integrative mode of applying the scientific method would help education start constituting itself into a science. Without a serious unifying theory, Jordan feared, the field of education would continue to be primarily shaped by tradition and the following of externally devised administrative regulations, both acting

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[7] An essential reading on this topic is Bookwalter, "Who was Dr. Daniel C. Jordan? A Tribute" available at http://www.edpsycinteractive.org/anisa/)

from outside the province of education and its values, and from outside the domain of scientific and philosophical reason.

Jordan recognized the importance of theory. He earnestly acknowledged that an educational theory able to account for every item of human development and every item of educational experience could only be derived from a very broad and highly abstract scheme of thought. In other words, Jordan understood that the comprehensive theory of human development needed to underpin his educational theory would have to be rooted in a very solid philosophical foundation. Such a philosophical 'superordinate structure' was thus envisaged to originate a theory of development that could, in turn, establish a theory of curriculum, a theory of pedagogy, a theory of administration and a theory of evaluation. Essentially, this philosophical foundation was to be structured in a particular way by the operation of a single organizing principle or first principle.

This first principle, a complex and delicate matter, was masterfully explained by Daniel Jordan in one of his talks. Although the following fragment[8] is lengthy, it constitutes,

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[8] The full quote is this: "And Whitehead observed along with all of his predecessors, many of them, that the fundamental characteristic of the universe is change. When you think of change you are considering process. And when you entertain the idea of process you are presupposing potentiality, and that's a concept you need to keep in mind throughout the day. Because it is the actualization of potentiality that educational systems ought to be committed to. Whitehead says that the fundamental activity in the universe is the translation of potentiality into actuality. And he said: that, fundamentally, is what is meant by creativity, 'the universal of universals'. So, the first principle, the principle on which the organization of this philosophy [is based], and the science of education on which it is based, and the model, which is a reflection of that science, is based, is this fundamental principle: the translation of potentiality into actuality. It is the first principle underlining the organization of thought on which the model is based. Whitehead made the assertion that if you want action to be organized, the thought on which it is based must be organized. And if you want your thoughts to be organized, they have to have an organizing principle, a first principle. And the chief characteristic of clean good organization is coherence. And that incoherence arises out of incompatibility, disconnectedness, or absence of the first principle.

I was telling a group last night that I went around asking over the last ten years at least a thousand teachers what they considered to be the first principle that organizes the knowledge on which

their profession as teachers is based. I never ever found a single teacher who could say it. Well, I mean that's not as damaging as it might sound since we didn't even know what a first principle was ourselves, until we read all these books and came to understand this. But it does seem that of all the places that ought to exemplify clarity of thought, it ought to be those of us who are training other people to think. So that would be, of course, educators.

So, we have this basic idea, the translation of potentiality into actuality, and we now are faced with the job of creating a theory of human development that would explain the nature of human potentiality, what those potentialities look like when they're actualized, and what you have to do to promote their actualization at an optimum rate. And that was the next step, a theory of development. Then, from that theory of development we created a comprehensive theory of curriculum, and a theory on teaching, on pedagogy, which shows how those two are related.

You know, you often have curriculum theorists over here and you have pedagogues over here, and they never get themselves together. So as long as there's a raging argument about what the connection is between curriculum and teaching, you are not going to get a coherent relationship between the two if both are not deductively derived in their theoretical underpinnings from a superordinate theory, which we believe has to be a theory of development. In fact, the reason there are no comprehensive theories of pedagogy, or theories of curriculum, in our opinion, is because by their very nature they must be subordinate theories. Nobody has bothered to develop the superordinate theory from which these things are developed, you see. More about that later.

Then when we went to the field and started trying a loan of this out. We worked with teachers, very intensively, we got things changed around and so on. And then we found, lo and behold, administrators, who did not understand anything about what was going on, could with a stroke of a pen ruin everything. So, we created a comprehensive theory of administration, plus a theory of evaluation, so that administrators would in fact see that it is their function to serve the purpose of education. That's what the word 'administer' means, it means to serve. And to serve what? It means to serve the purpose of education, and in this case, it is helping children translate their potentialities into actuality at an optimum rate. And that would mean, [that] such an administrator in the Anisa system, before he signs anything would say: 'is what I am about to do going to safeguard resources, both material and time, and human, so on, such that the main purpose of the system, namely the actualization of the potentialities of children, is being supported as fully as possible?' Most administrators come to make decisions to reduce administrative headaches. Our thesis is that it is the job of administrators to take on the headaches and free up teachers to do this job, to make sure they have everything they need to do that job. Well, it requires the developing of a new breed of administrators. You can see, we haven't found too many people enrolling in the program because nobody can see his career organized around the notion of taking on headaches. Actually, there is something very thrilling and challenging, once you get the right orientation and you get a sense of thrill and commitment, because when an administrator actually sees that there is a connection between what he is doing and the development of children, then that is so reinforcing that it becomes very thrilling for the administrators, and in several sites, we managed to get that done. … So, you can see how once you begin to have a whole system organized

around a fundamental principle, where every action and every decision is related to that fundamental principle you get a new kind of coherence in the system, and actually people begin to forget about regulations because you are now like a jazz group, improvizing on a theme. And it's thrilling to be a part of a group, like a jazz group, where you are just playing and involving your whole being in what you are doing, but what you are doing is imaginative and creative. Of course, a jazz group, the members of the jazz group, they don't just play any note that comes to mind. Yet how is it that the notes they do decide to play fit together? You do realize the notes do fit together, yes? (Laughs) The reason is all of the members of the jazz combo are relating to a mutually agreed upon sequence of harmonies and a rhythmic pattern and they know that when they are on bar 5B8 that Platonic chord is what's called for, they all know what possible notes would fit with into that chord, and when they come to it they have a split second to decide which ones of those possible notes that will fit in they will chose to play, and whichever one decides to play, they will all fit together, because they are compatible with that harmonic structure, in one way, shape or form. But this means that you could have, and usually will have, when anybody will play, you'll never have the same conversation ever occuring twice because people are creating on the spot you see. And to create on the spot is to express one of our fundamental natures.

Now, I tie in the concept of spirituality to this idea of creativity, because one of the things that makes one spiritual in my view is the possibility, no, the ability, to entertain possibilites. Now, possibilities are unknown until they are actually actualized. The only way you can relate to an unknown is on the basis of faith, so that the pursuit of possibilities, or the pursuit of potentiality, requires the activation of faith, and the activation of faith is fundamentally a spiritual activity, and it is the essential dynamic in education. And I'm sure that must be one of the reasons why Whitehead says at its foundation education is religious. And he wasn't talking about a denominational thing, he was talking about a psychological phenomenon, in the sense that to move out and actualize potentialities requires an activation of faith. Therefore, we regarded as a fundamental characteristic of teachers that they can activate the faith of children, because if they can't, children will not invest in their own potentialities.

One of the chief distinctive features between a mechanistic view of the universe and an organismic view is that the organismic view regards potentiality as a form of reality whereas the mechanistic view does not. Last night I was explaining to the students using an analogy of the acorn: 'if you hold an acorn in your hand and you do not know or believe that the oak tree is potentially within the acorn, do you think you will be in touch with the reality of the acorn?' And the answer is 'No'. Otherwise, you might put this acorn under a lightbulb and hope to hatch a magpie out of it, right?

The possibility of the oak tree in the acorn is an essential feature of its reality but it is not actual, because that oak tree does not exist. Therefore, you can't burn it, you can't weigh it, you can't chop it up. It is not subject to the laws of gravitation or radiation; it has no actuality. But, from the organismic point of view, it has reality. And Whitehead said, if you deny that the possibility of the oak tree is an essential feature of reality, then because knowing the potentiality of the acorn determines what you will do with it, namely, plant it, you would be put into the impossible position of behaving

17

in my view, an absolutely essential description of the conceptual framework of the Anisa

Model:

And Whitehead observed along with all of his predecessors, many of them, that the fundamental characteristic of the universe is change. When you think of change you are considering process. And when you entertain the idea of process you are presupposing potentiality, and that's a concept you need to keep in mind throughout the day. Because it is the actualization of potentiality that educational systems ought to be committed to. Whitehead says that the fundamental activity in the universe is the translation of potentiality into actuality. And he said: that, fundamentally, is what is meant by creativity, 'the universal of universals'. So, the first principle, the principle on which the organization of this philosophy [is based], and the science of education on which it is based, and the model, which is a reflection of that science, is based, is this fundamental principle: the translation of potentiality into actuality. It is the first principle underlining the organization of thought on which

towards the acorn on the basis of something that was not real if you did not accept the idea that its potentiality is a part of its reality. Now, teachers have to bear the same relationship to their children as, say, a forrester would to the acorn, because the huge chunk of the reality of the child is what he is yet to become, and that's what teachers have to relate to. We found that teachers who could not relate to children on the basis of their potentiality didn't have a very good relationship to children. Because, after all, if our potentialities are an integral part of our realities, then if we want to be fully accepted, people have to accept us for what we are, what we've been and what we might become. And when you are accepted on the basis of what you might become, there is an activation of faith. That's why people say, 'well education really shouldn't get all tangled up in philosophy, it's relatively useless and there's nothing so impractical as a theory'. This is the sort of mentality which is destroying education. Actually, philosophy is absolutely essential because without it you don't get coherent theory, and if you don't have theories there is no coherent guide to practice, and if there is no guide to practice you don't have any framework by which to understand when something goes wrong why it goes wrong, nor do you have any framework by which to experiment, to try to improve what you're trying to do, which is one of the essential advantages of having a science". (Jordan, "Lethbridge Part 1" mins. 13-29).

the model is based. Whitehead made the assertion that if you want action to be organized, the thought on which it is based must be organized. And if you want your thoughts to be organized, they have to have an organizing principle, a first principle. And the chief characteristic of clean good organization is coherence. And that incoherence arises out of incompatibility, disconnectedness, or absence of the first principle.

I was telling a group last night that I went around asking over the last ten years at least a thousand teachers what they considered to be the first principle that organizes the knowledge on which their profession as teachers is based. I never ever found a single teacher who could say it. Well, I mean that's not as damaging as it might sound since we didn't even know what a first principle was ourselves, until we read all these books and came to understand this. But it does seem that of all the places that ought to exemplify clarity of thought, it ought to be those of us who are training other people to think. So that would be, of course, educators.

So, we have this basic idea, the translation of potentiality into actuality, and we now are faced with the job of creating a theory of human development that would explain the nature of human potentiality, what those potentialities look like when they're actualized, and what you have to do to promote their actualization at an optimum rate. And that was the next step, a theory of development. Then, from that theory of development we created a comprehensive theory of curriculum, and a theory on teaching, on pedagogy, which shows how those two are related.

You know, you often have curriculum theorists over here and you have pedagogues over here, and they never get themselves together. So as long as there's a raging argument about what the connection is between curriculum and teaching, you are not going to get a coherent relationship between the two if both are not

deductively derived in their theoretical underpinnings from a superordinate theory, which we believe has to be a theory of development. In fact, the reason there are no comprehensive theories of pedagogy, or theories of curriculum, in our opinion, is because by their very nature they must be subordinate theories. Nobody has bothered to develop the superordinate theory from which these things are developed, you see. More about that later.

   Then when we went to the field and started trying a loan of this out we worked with teachers, very intensively, we got things changed around and so on. And then we found, lo and behold, administrators, who did not understand anything about what was going on, could with a stroke of a pen ruin everything. So, we created a comprehensive theory of administration, plus a theory of evaluation, so that administrators would in fact see that it is their function to serve the purpose of education. … Actually, there is something very thrilling and challenging, once you get the right orientation and you get a sense of thrill and commitment, because when an administrator actually sees that there is a connection between what he is doing and the development of children, then that is so reinforcing that it becomes very thrilling for the administrators, and in several sites, we managed to get that done. … So, you can see how once you begin to have a whole system organized around a fundamental principle, where every action and every decision is related to that fundamental principle you get a new kind of coherence in the system, and actually people begin to forget about regulations because you are now like a jazz group, improvizing on a theme. And it's thrilling to be a part of a group, like a jazz group, where you are just playing and involving your whole being in what you are doing, but what you are doing is imaginative and creative. (Jordan, "Lethbridge Part 1" mins. 13-29)

Creativity, or the characteristic of entertaining unseen possibilities for the translation of potentiality into actuality is, for Jordan, the expression of spirituality. Because in teaching this requires the faith of the teacher in the unknown possibilities of the student (or their potential), Jordan identifies faith (in the psychological sense) as "the essential dynamic in education" (idem). For the same reason, like Whitehead, Jordan views education as religious in its foundation. The implications for teaching are considerable: "Therefore, we regarded as a fundamental characteristic of teachers that they can activate the faith of children, because if they can't, children will not invest in their own potentialities" (idem). To help make this point Jordan uses the analogy of the acorn:

… if you hold an acorn in your hand and you do not know or believe that the oak tree is potentially within the acorn, do you think you will be in touch with the reality of the acorn?' And the answer is 'No'. Otherwise, you might put this acorn under a lightbulb and hope to hatch a magpie out of it, right?

The possibility of the oak tree in the acorn is an essential feature of its reality but it is not actual, because that oak tree does not exist. Therefore, you can't burn it, you can't weigh it, you can't chop it up. It is not subject to the laws of gravitation or radiation; it has no actuality. But, from the organismic point of view, it has reality. And Whitehead said, if you deny that the possibility of the oak tree is an essential feature of reality, then because knowing the potentiality of the acorn determines what you will do with it, namely, plant it, you would be put into the impossible position of behaving towards the acorn on the basis of something that was not real if you did not accept the idea that its potentiality is a part of its reality. Now, teachers have to bear the same relationship to their children as, say, a forrester would to the acorn, because the huge chunk of the reality of the child is what he is yet to become, and that's what

teachers have to relate to. We found that teachers who could not relate to children on the basis of their potentiality didn't have a very good relationship to children. Because, after all, if our potentialities are an integral part of our realities, then if we want to be fully accepted, people have to accept us for what we are, what we've been and what we might become. And when you are accepted on the basis of what you might become, there is an activation of faith. (idem)

This entire discussion highlights the importance of theory, or philosophy, in education. During his lecture, Jordan puts forward this conclusion as a warning for us all:

That's why people say, 'well education really shouldn't get all tangled up in philosophy, it's relatively useless and there's nothing so impractical as a theory'. This is the sort of mentality which is destroying education. Actually, philosophy is absolutely essential because without it you don't get coherent theory, and if you don't have theories there is no coherent guide to practice, and if there is no guide to practice you don't have any framework by which to understand when something goes wrong why it goes wrong, nor do you have any framework by which to experiment, to try to improve what you're trying to do, which is one of the essential advantages of having a science. (idem)

The quotations above have provided us with both an intellectual and affective understanding of the 'conceptual framework' for education that underpins the Anisa Model. What transpires is that Jordan employs the speculative philosophy of Whitehead as a way of translating the cosmology of the Bahá'i Faith from a religious language into a philosophical one. This is made possible by the fact that a correspondence can be established between the

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two, an argument later developed in more detail by Ian Kluge in a paper entitled "Process Philosophy and the Bahá'i Writings: An Initial Exploration".[9] The resulting 'process cosmology' becomes, therefore, the philosophical foundation and language for the entire theoretical edifice of the Anisa model.

At the top of this structure lies the first principle – a principle around which the entire edifice is organized, and which every other part of the system reflects. As every Bahá'i would know, the principle of the transformation of actuality into potentiality corresponds to a key Bahá'i passage on education from Bahá'u'lláh: "Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom" (*Gleanings* CXXII). From this first principle, and the philosophical superordinate structure that supports it, a theory of human development is then allowed to emerge by recourse to the integrated knowledge fast developing across diverse academic fields, without separating this body of scientific knowledge from the philosophical, aesthetical, and religious traditions of humankind. A theory of curriculum, a theory of pedagogy, a theory of administration and a theory of evaluation are all then finally derived from this theory of human development.

Has this ambitious vision of a 'conceptual framework' for education delivered on its promise? Was this conceptual design, or rather, this theoretical edifice, successfully raised at both the level of theory and of implementation? Was this first principle (and the superordinate structure it represented) truly capable of giving enough conceptual power, unity, and coherence to all of the subordinate structures it helped engender? Or did it become an empty ideology or even a constricting and authoritarian concern with order resembling the excesses of scientism? Each of us can make our own assessment.[10] In my opinion, besides

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[9] Available here: https://bahai-library.com/kluge_process_philosophy
[10] A comprehensive list of materials about the Anisa Model can be found here: http://www.edpsycinteractive.org/anisa/.

some limitations regarding the theory of learning (Archibald 9-12) and the absence of studies on adult development, the model has proved largely viable, and we are lucky the entire archives have been acquired and made accessible by Stanford University[11] through the efforts of individual Bahá'is.

Although much invoked in the past as the necessary foundation of any social theory or social system, the theme of human nature has not been consciously pursued as the basis of such structures in decades. The Bahá'i community maintains the necessity of this pursuit but has not been able to yet construct such systems or theoretical models (although there is now great interest in experimenting with how to identify the key assumptions about human nature that structure our modern institutions and their theoretical underpinnings). The exception here is the Anisa model which has pursued, quite successfully, the theme of human nature as the foundation of its theoretical model and as the core element from which to derive an integrated system of curriculum, pedagogy and then administration. In that sense, for those Bahá'is interested in how to design or evaluate a system or processes primarily based on fundamental assumptions about human nature from the Bahá'i writings, the Anisa model offers a unique case-study. Besides such concerns, however, the model's theoretical significance might lie with how we come to conceptualize the very notion of a 'conceptual framework' for education: whether its first principle, in either substance (the translation of actuality into potentiality) or as category, and its conceptual structure resembling that of a classic philosophical system, are of any relevance to us.

The conceptual frameworks of Sabet and Jordan do invite several interesting conclusions. First of all, they both highlight the importance of the principle of the harmony of science and religion in generating knowledge about the Bahá'i Revelation and in building 'conceptual models' or theories. Secondly, they both remind us of the importance of theory in

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[11] https://library.stanford.edu/news/2016/03/stanford-libraries-acquires-historic-daniel-c-jordan-archives

the field of education (and in any other field of knowledge or practice). As these topics are too complex to be diligently pursued in a single article, I have decided to focus on one theme at a time. From here onward, therefore, this article will explore in cursory manner the importance of the principle of the harmony of science and religion in generating knowledge. As mentioned in the introduction, a third future article will then attempt to highlight the important role of theory in the field and practice of education. I feel it my duty to warn the reader that these successive articles should really be seen as one body of work, each continuing and completing the other.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRINCIPLE OF THE HARMONY OF SCIENCE AND RELIGION

In a letter from 1933 Shoghi Effendi defines the essence of the principle of independent investigation of truth (i.e., the methodology for studying the Bahá'í Revelation) as the analysis of the principles of the Bahá'í Faith by correlation with modern philosophy and science:

> It is hoped that all Bahá'í students will…be led to investigate and analyse the principles of the Faith and correlate them with the modern aspects of philosophy and science. Every intelligent and thoughtful young Bahá'í should always approach the Cause in this way, for therein lies the very essence of the principle of independent investigation of truth! (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated 6 August 1933, qtd. in Taylor, *One Reality* 65)

The question, then, is how this integration of knowledge is to be achieved. As our previous analysis has shown, the conceptual frameworks of Sabet and Jordan are deeply scientific and fundamentally concerned with designing processes for integrating knowledge from across the academic disciplines (the curricula they produce are the most obvious examples of this). The reason for this is that each of these conceptual frameworks represents the outcome of a methodology that has at its core the principles of the independent investigation of truth and of the harmony of science and religion. In other words, both models are based on correlating religion with modern philosophy and science. This is the engine of their entire intellectual enterprise. It is worth emphasizing this aspect again: it is this type of methodology that allows us to construct 'conceptual models' or theories operating at the junction of science, philosophy, and religion.

Intellectual Formation

Although distinct from each other, the models of Sabet and Jordan point to the necessity of a similar process of intellectual formation: that of an intellectual who can balance their speciality with a broad understanding of all the general domains of knowledge, being able to operate interdisciplinarily when and where required. As highlighted by FUNDAEC's curricula, the imperative of being able to translate theory into social action must be also added to these features. Producing knowledge, however, is time-consuming. This is so because to generate knowledge requires the formation of very capable intellectuals. This process is extremely slow (it can take several decades and more) and very costly even when the focus is just that of a narrow specialization. Those who administer the processes of education, intellectual formation, and research production tend to overlook such considerations. This is an easy thing to do if you are not yourself engaged in the processes of

generating knowledge and/or are part of a set-up and culture that obsesses about meeting targets. The consequence of such managerial obliviousness, common across different sectors of human society, is that everything speeds up as if individuals (in this case, intellectuals) are machines and not organic human beings. Filip Vostal has analyzed this phenomenon in depth in a book aptly entitled "Accelerating Academia". This is the general picture he paints in its preface:

> Turbulent changes with manifold, often 'toxic' implications, are everywhere in academia and the responsibilities which define intellectual and academic life (scholarly as well as administrative duties, meetings, conferences, deadlines) accumulate incessantly. Yet one thing does not change: the time they have at their disposal for pursuing such activities. Because of this, they compress their time frames and horizons, accelerate, push ahead, rush, skim, and, as a result, often become distracted, frustrated, burnt-out. The world of publishing is a litmus test for such shifts. As recently presented evidence indicates, scholars live in a world of steadily growing academic and scientific production. Canons evolve quickly, paradigms shift rapidly, disciplinary fields expand excessively, journals, articles and books abound, and academic texts proliferate exponentially. The publications that academics produce might, after a brief shelf life, be cast into programmatic obsolescence. (Vostal ix)

Since Western academia has become dominated by overspecialization and the need to maintain a high degree of publications and successful grant applications (we see here in action the imperative of speed but also an assessment and rankings culture mired in materialism), the processes that used to make possible the formation of intellectuals with an inter-disciplinary and/or broad foundation of knowledge have been eroded. As a result, those

academic traditions have been weakened, largely discontinued, or pushed to the edges of the Academia.

This poses a huge challenge for the Bahá'í community. If the Bahá'í community wishes to develop another "integrative generalist"[12] of the calibre of Daniel Jordan, integrative school and university curricula of the kind Jordan and Sabet have suggested would seem to be a requirement.[13] Without the ability to produce such thinkers it would be extremely difficult if not impossible to develop a conceptual framework complex enough to meet the needs of the age, namely, one that could bring order to an age characterized by fragmentation and disorder. The problem has been well summarized by Zachary Stein:

> According to this line of thought, it is no longer the single ideological meta-narrative of modernity that inhibits the moral evolution of the species (such as Capitalism, Communists, and the Church, etc.). It is now the absence of any explicitly shared meta-narrative or meta-theory that inhibits enlightenment. (Stein 26)

Alternative responses to that of curriculum-building might be to invest in academics that can develop integrative studies within their academic institutions by going against the grain, or to succeed in changing the fundamental assumptions of the current secondary and tertiary educational systems in our societies towards the ideal of the integration of knowledge. There is certainly a complex discussion to be had here. What I have presented are just some hypothetical ideas meant to indicate that advancement in the field of education depends very much on strategy and investment regarding processes of intellectual-formation

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[12] "How did Jordan describe himself? As a specialist he considered himself to be an authority on human development. But during one of his lectures, he used a term which is far more accurate. He referred to himself as an 'integrative generalist'" (Bookwalter 6).

[13] The matter is much more complex than stated here. Therefore, this argument has to be nuanced and account for alternatives and counterarguments. Some nuances will be added towards the end of this article, while alternatives and counterarguments will be considered in the next two articles.

and systems building (in particular, the building of a knowledge-system), which in their turn depend on curriculum-building and complex models of scholarship. Such a discussion must also bring in two other issues that are somewhat distinct from the process of intellectual formation, but which are equally important.

Holistic[14] Education

The first issue is that education, particularly in the Bahá'í perspective, must help develop the entire potential or the full personality of the learner: physical, social, and spiritual. Instead of early narrow specialization and a fragmented curriculum heavily focused on the technical side, or on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), such a goal requires a broad curriculum that integrates the key domains of knowledge (Humanities, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, Formal Sciences and Applied Sciences)[15] in a way that matches the organic development of the learners. A broad, integrative curriculum is thus the basis not only of a democratic society, but also of a moral or spiritual civilization.

Education for Civilization-Building

The Bahá'í community has been attempting to engage with community-building and societal renewal at global scale for the past thirty years. Complex processes have been put into place that build on a community's experience in their locality, connecting that local knowledge from all over the globe and translating that into a framework for future action. However, to

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[14] The more appropriate term would be 'integral education' but this label points to educational theories and institutions informed by 'integral thought', a perspective largely associated with the figures of Ken Wilber and William Irwin Thompson but with which Bahá'í educational scholarship has not yet engaged in dialogue, except for the 2003 unpublished paper of Daniel Araya entitled "Integral Religion: Uniting Eros and Logos".
[15] Please see the full outline of academic disciplines available under these five categories here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outline_of_academic_disciplines

understand, plan and participate effectively in civilization-building requires a similarly broad and interdisciplinary foundation of knowledge, one which our national educational systems and Bahá'í educational activities do not currently provide. Although current educational theory and practice is not overly concerned with processes of civilization-building, this theme appears frequently in the discourses of the Bahá'í community. For that reason, a review of the concept might be of some use here. Processes of civilization-building, I would tentatively argue, could be seen to consist of three dimensions.

Dimension 1

In a recent presentation, Sabet ("World Civilization" min. 20) argues that the decline or disintegration of civilization "begins with the deterioration of its central core". This core can be thought of as a nucleus comprised of "values and meanings" (idem). To make his philosophical terminology more accessible Sabet indicates that the term "values" refers to "the moral and ethical foundations of civilization" (min. 22). Once started, this deterioration caused by "the decline of the moral and ethical foundations of civilization" extends also "to the behavioral and material layers of civilization" (min. 20).

According to Sabet, the role of the Bahá'í community in such a scenario is to infuse new meanings and values into the core of a world civilization. I would refer to this perspective as constituting the first dimension of the process of civilization-building. Sabet describes this process as constituting of several stages centered around the development of a broad, integrative curriculum:

> Briefly, this would take place gradually and in stages. First, all students would need to explore the integration of knowledge and be engaged in discourse on relationships

between scientific progress, technological innovation, and ethical values. The modern curriculum is suffering from over-specialization and too much emphasis on material tools and techniques of civilization. In response, we need a new vista in the horizon of education, transcending the piecemeal and mechanical function of education into a holistic understanding of the multiplicity of human experiences throughout history and providing students with diverse manifestations of humanity's spiritual, moral, and social transformation over time. Second, we need to cultivate interdisciplinary perspectives so that students can examine how different branches of knowledge, fields of human experience, and cultural patterns of thought have contributed to an ever-advancing global civilization through the dynamic impulse of human evolution and social progress. (Sabet, Personal communication 4 Mar. 2021)

It makes sense to suggest a broad, integrative curriculum because, as Sabet ("World Civilization" min. 24) remarks, "the definition of civilization is inherently interdisciplinary and requires references to political economy, religion and ethics, arts and sciences, psychology and history". For Sabet (min. 46) this notion of a "world civilization" constitutes not only "a vision or emerging reality but also a conceptual framework beyond and above any geographical borders or the politics of the nation-state". This framework, he maintains, can be used as a "method to perceive and evaluate world events":

I assume that the emerging global civilization is an objective reality (or gradually becoming an objective reality). Its emergence may be likened to the emergence of the nation-state. The same way that the nation-state overruled regional kingdoms of the past, viewing the world as a network of interrelated and interdependent nations, inevitably cemented by the forces of history, will become the only plausible political

model to perceive and evaluate the world events. For example, though different in perspective, Samuel Huntington and Francis Fukuyama also used the unit of civilization to forecast the future. (Sabet, Personal communication 12 Apr. 2021)

A 'value-oriented' theoretical construct that could measure and evaluate "empirical claims" (idem) is a surprising but potentially useful definition of "world civilization". Developing a strong construct of this kind, however, would clearly require a very solid and broad, global integrative curriculum. This entire argument leads us to observe that a processual understanding of education would seem to correspond well with the need to account for the historical development of science and religion and their effect on the development of human civilization. This allows us to better appreciate another key element of the conceptual frameworks of Jordan and Sabet: their intense concern with the historical development of civilization and with processes of civilization-building.

Dimension 2

The second dimension, in my view, concerns the development of the Administrative Order "not only as the nucleus but the very pattern of the New World Order destined to embrace in the fullness of time the whole of mankind" (Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order* 144). Roshan Danesh ("Hegemony" 67-68) singles out revelation as 'the centrifugal force in the evolution of humanity's progress" and as a force affecting "the course of human development and progress in myriad ways dissociated from any particular actions that may be carried out by the community of Bahá'ís". Nevertheless, this revelation is also expressed in the Bahá'í Writings as a nucleus of divine knowledge that must be gradually understood and translated

into action. This allows us to assume that scholarship has a role to play in how this nucleus of knowledge might develop into a future civilization.

What the developmental stages of this process might imply is a theme we will soon briefly examine. For now, however, let us observe that the term 'Administrative Order" implies many other elements besides that of scholarship: laws, institutions, policies, administration, management, leadership, community-building, budgeting, economic planning, taxation, the welfare of the global population, knowledge systems, infrastructure, governance and so on. These are areas of endeavour we tend to associate primarily with our governing institutions. It is, therefore, instructive to see how 'Abdu'l-Bahá (*Secret of Divine Civilization* 35, 39) describes the necessary characteristics of a member of Parliament – a legislative body he believed should consist primarily of a group of scholars for as long as expert knowledge remained the province of a few:

> The first attribute of perfection is learning and the cultural attainments of the mind, and this eminent station is achieved when the individual combines in himself a thorough knowledge of those complex and transcendental realities pertaining to God, of the fundamental truths of Qur'ánic political and religious law, of the contents of the sacred Scriptures of other faiths, and of those regulations and procedures which would contribute to the progress and civilization of this distinguished country. He should in addition be informed as to the laws and principles, the customs, conditions and manners, and the material and moral virtues characterizing the statecraft of other nations, and should be well versed in all the useful branches of learning of the day, and study the historical records of bygone governments and peoples. For if a learned individual has no knowledge of the sacred Scriptures and the entire field of divine and natural science, of religious jurisprudence and the arts of government and the varied

learning of the time and the great events of history, he might prove unequal to an

emergency, and this is inconsistent with the necessary qualification of comprehensive

knowledge. …The third requirement of perfection is to arise with complete sincerity

and purity of purpose to educate the masses: to exert the utmost effort to instruct them

in the various branches of learning and useful sciences, to encourage the development

of modern progress, to widen the scope of commerce, industry and the arts, to further

such measures as will increase the people's wealth. For the mass of the population is

uninformed as to these vital agencies which would constitute an immediate remedy

for society's chronic ills.

Notably, these are characteristics 'Abdu'l-Bahá specifies in addition to that of

expertise "in one of the aforementioned branches of knowledge" (38). It is hard to imagine

the same type of requirements (and more) would not also apply to those serving the Bahá'í

Faith in an administrative role. Again, this would seem to necessitate a type of education that

a broad and integrative global curriculum could provide. Why? Because any Bahá'í, but more

so those in leadership positions, have to engage with the complex task of translating the

Bahá'í Revelation into processes of civilization-building, namely, with interdisciplinary

knowledge and the design of educational, research, and other knowledge-based systems.

Dimension 3

Finally, the third dimension concerns the fact that the Bahá'í community must learn about the

process of civilization building from the wider society by establishing complex forms of

global dialogue and intricate patterns of global collaboration with other organizations of all

kinds. This, again, would seem to require an education based on a broad and integrative

global curriculum. Seeing as Bahá'ís will always have a mediating role to play within any society and globally, this seems even more of an imperative. After all, to play a mediating role one must understand all sides extremely well.

HOW DOES RELIGION UNFOLD INTO A WORLD CIVILIZATION? THE THREE STAGES OF SABET'S MODEL

As previously alluded to, the conceptual frameworks of Jordan and Sabet share another characteristic. They both rely on process philosophy and organicist versus mechanistic models. Their holistic view of education and reality is the reason why the integration of knowledge is ascertained at the level of curriculum. In this, they both follow the dictum of Whitehead (6-7): "There is only one subject matter for education, and that is Life in all its manifestations". This similarity also derives from the fact that both are rooted in the traditions of thought developed by Plato and Aristotle. Both models rely on thinkers that draw on these very traditions, the most obvious example being that of Alfred North Whitehead. Arguments can be made that such identifications are not at all extraneous to the Bahá'í Writings (Kluge, "The Aristotelean Substratum" 20-21). According to Kluge (28-29), for example, the Bahá'í Writings indicate that a "Bahá'í cosmology, metaphysic and epistemology", and a common conceptual matrix for science and religion, should be derived from Greek philosophy (Aristotelianism and Neo-Platonism). That several Bahá'í educational curricula have developed, through either process philosophy, virtue ethics, or a revised version of Nussbaum's concept of capabilities, on similar neo-Aristotelian lines (including the FUNDAEC programs: SAT, RUHI, JYSEP) would seem to reinforce this theoretical possibility.

Besides implying that Bahá'ís should become more familiar with the Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian terminology widely employed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá,[16] Kluge's observation has clear implications for a conceptual framework for education and for curriculum development. A consequence of this is that the Anisa Model's use of Whitehead's philosophy is, indirectly, also justified. Nevertheless, the fact that the Bahá'í Writings incorporate Aristotelean and Neo-Platonic categories and terminology does not necessarily mean our investigations should end with such identifications. Future advances and other 'readings' might confirm the existence of more complex philosophical perspectives and of other cultural cosmologies in the Bahá'í Writings. But Kluge's observation still suggests a possible starting point (if not an endpoint) for the process of linking up the nucleus of the Bahá'í revelation with "a core of knowledge across (academic) disciplines in order to create an integrative paradigm of knowledge" ("Integrative Approach", Abstract). And it is important, here, to acknowledge that this formulation reflects Sabet's conceptual terms and his model for how religions unfold into a world civilization.

Religions, Sabet (*A Conceptual Perspective* 107) claims, follow particular stages in their interaction with existing scholarship. They begin, characteristically, with a period of self-focus, in which the believers strive to understand what is contained in the nucleus of the new revelation ("the essential subject matters of education at this stage are the teachings of the religion") (idem). This is followed by a phase that opens this nucleus of new knowledge to dialogue with the outside world and existing branches of knowledge (here the nucleus of Revelation eventually engages with the core of knowledge structuring our societies). The third and final stage is one in which the new revelation can reinterpret the outside world and interact with its branches of knowledge to the point of producing a new system of knowledge

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[16] An argument Ian Kluge advances in his splendid manuscript "Some Answered Questions: A Philosophical Perspective" available here: https://bahai-library.com/kluge_saq_philosophical_perspective

(idem). In other words, the synthesis between the nucleus of the Revelation and the core of existent knowledge results, in this third phase, in a new system of knowledge that can support a world civilization.

THE PROBLEMATICS OF TRANSITION

It could be said that the Bahá'í community is now initializing the transition from the first stage to the second stage; that is, opening lines of communication with the academic disciplines (and fields of practice) and with the other religions, a process from which advancement in the arena of public discourses could be expected to also proceed. Within this process, the Bahá'í Review Teams play an invisible but crucial role as institutions that currently regulate this transition, when and how it might take place, or whether it takes place at all. Models are just models, however, and the linearity they suggest can be easily superseded by the complex nature of reality, particularly in moments of transition or in-betweenness. Looking at the Bahá'í contributions in the field of education one senses a dilemma. While generally located in the first phase of the model, the contributions in that phase do not seem strong or comprehensive enough to support the transition to the second phase. Still, advanced and comprehensive contributions have already been made in the second phase of the model. In other words, there is unequal development, fragmentation, and disconnection between the different contributions in the field. There is also little awareness of all the contributions in the field and no sense of ordering them. Different theoretical orientations, educational institutions, and educational curricular experiments do not seem to talk to each other.

Beyond this present level of disconnection lies an even more pronounced discontinuity between educational efforts from different decades and centuries, signalling the need for an initial mapping and for a comprehensive account of the historical contributions made by the Bahá'ís in the field of education. Part of the reason for this situation must be ascribed to a general lack of effort to gather and organize all the existent contributions in this field of knowledge and its connected fields. The relatively recent reorganization of the Association for Bahá'í Studies – North America and the resumption of the Association for Bahá'í Studies– UK, together with the formation of the Office of Public Discourse at the Bahá'í World Centre in 2013, and since then, of Offices of Public Affairs under the aegis of National Spiritual Assemblies in different countries, signal a renewed interest in a research agenda with particular themes, characteristics and goals that would complement already existing activities. Even in such exciting times, however, a particular question deserves to be asked. To what extent do scholars, educationalists, and those who think about or are involved in education, operate according to an organized structure of knowledge that would resemble an incipient field of Bahá'í inspired education? If some find it premature to talk about an inchoate field of Bahá'í inspired education, the question can be posed in another way. To what extent are the efforts of those who think about or are involved in education grounded in educational theory and in the traditions of knowledge/practice and the principles of education continuing those established by the key Figures of the Faith during Their time?

It is of concern that such disciplinary challenges affect in different measure not only the field of education but also those academic disciplines that should inform and guide it: philosophy, history, sociology, psychology, anthropology, politics, law, economics, organizational studies etc. Why, for example, are there no histories of Bahá'í contributions in particular areas of inquiry, such as education etc.? The real issue here, I feel impelled to conclude, is the inadequate development of diverse fields of Bahá'í inquiry and the loss of

historical perspective which potentially erases the role of tradition and of past scientific contributions. In many such fields, Bahá'í scholarship seems to have been primarily an individual lone pursuit, not the structured activity of a global community of scholars developing a domain of knowledge. In others, waves or phases of localized efflorescence grew out of a project associated with an intellectual or a leadership figure only to become forgotten a decade or two later. Knowledge seems to be born, develop and then fade away generationally, even though different generations of Bahá'ís live together in the same communities. Despite many types of educational experiments all over the world and for all ages, the essential lessons of their successes and failures have not been integrated into a common body of academic knowledge. The field of Bahá'í inspired education, in other words, does not know itself, which is the same with saying it has not yet constituted itself into a field.

I would venture to suggest that the inadequate development of Bahá'í inspired fields of study is in itself an indication that we are in the first stage of the religious developmental model described by Sabet. Danesh, for example, assesses the field of Bahá'í law (a type of evaluation that is still missing for the field of Bahá'í inspired education) as follows: "Very little has been written about Bahá'í law, and even less about how it may be understood, expanded, and applied in the future. In the Bahá'í Faith, a discussion of the principles of legal interpretation and methodology has yet to begin" ("Imagining Bahá'í Law 195). In another place, he further adds:

It is perhaps surprising that in a quarter century, the central written work of the Bahá'í religious system has not garnered broader scholarly attention outside the Bahá'í community. From one perspective, this lack of attention might be considered

39

symptomatic of the fact that the study of the Bahá'í Faith generally remains in its

infancy. ("Themes in the Study of Bahá'u'lláh's Kitáb-i-Aqdas" 17)

We also notice, in more recent times, a tendency to produce encomiastic contributions

that "remain somewhat descriptive of the teachings instead of being analytical and conceptual

in nature", to borrow a phrase from Danesh (20), or which are ideologically laden but

theoretically vulnerable, both of which could undermine effective participation in social

discourses. Could these be signals that the key epistemological task of constituting and

strengthening Bahá'í inspired fields of study has been neglected? What are we anchoring

social discourses in, if not in academic discourses and other expert forms of knowledge?

Such challenges impact greatly on the field of education which, more than any other,

relies on contributions from other fields of study. How can a Bahá'í inspired theory of

education develop without a comprehensive philosophy or theory of human development?

How can a Bahá'í inspired theory of pedagogy ever be formulated without a Bahá'í inspired

theory of education or theory of psychology? How could a Bahá'í philosophy of cultural

change be formulated without considerable aid from the disciplines of sociology, politics,

history, and anthropology? And how could all these disciplines develop without a model of

scholarship and an educational system geared to support them? The problem, it seems, is

somewhat circular.

Could it be that, apart from the study of the early history of the Bahá'í Faith and

incipient hermeneutical explorations of the Sacred Texts, developing different domains of

knowledge through well-devised research structures and educational curricula has not really

featured as a strong priority (or aspiration) within the Bahá'í community (or between Bahá'í

scholars)? That would go a long way towards explaining why Bahá'í scholarship does not

seem to have made a marked contribution in any field of study. But would it be fair to say

that Bahá'í inspired ideas or approaches have not yet had a noticeable impact on any academic discipline? Current Bahá'í culture and current Bahá'í scholarship do give this impression. Paradoxically, while the notion of "global governance" advocated for by Andy W. Knight[17] and the "The Clinic to Improve University Teaching" model[18] by Dwight Allen and Michael Melnik have had a significant influence on their respective academic fields (IR and education as teacher-training, respectively), this is not usually acknowledged in the Bahá'í community, which suggests other cases might exist that have passed unnoticed because such achievements do not constitute a priority.

This is exactly what we would expect to happen in circumstances in which the development of different domains of knowledge is not prioritized. Still, I would argue that one of the most important contributions that can be made through Bahá'í scholarship and social discourses is precisely this: to open access to the universe of the Bahá'í teachings to those engaged in the global knowledge system of the world. This, however, cannot be done without Bahá'í scholars building bridges between the Revelation and this global knowledge system through the advancement of Bahá'í fields of study and practice. This item deserves special emphasis: it is these inchoate Bahá'í fields of study and practice that represent the potential bridges linking the two. However, the nature and magnitude of this epistemological task is not what it used to be. The nature of knowledge itself has changed in essential ways in the last ten years. As a result of recent developments in digital technology knowledge

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[17] Professor Knight was a co-editor of the "Global Governance" journal from 2000 to 2005 and has published alongside James N. Rosenau on the topic of "global governance" (see, for example, the 2009 book *Global Governance* edited by Jim Whitman).

[18] As the website of the Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education (POD) states: "The Clinic Process used microteaching, confidential one-on-one consultations, consultant-led analysis of student evaluations, classroom observations, and videotaped classroom teaching examples. The process was disseminated through publications by the Clinic staff, by this videotape, by the Clinic staff's participation in POD, and through publication of Bergquist & Phillips' *A Handbook for Faculty Development* (1975), which could be found in most of the teaching centers of the 1970s. Through the success of POD [The Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education], the Clinic Process became the key model for faculty development at thousands of teaching centers around the U.S. and informed the practice of teaching centers around the world" [POD, "The Clinic to Improve University Teaching (Video)]

formation has moved away from the quasi-public realm of higher educational systems and towards behemoth private companies, management consulting firms, security and defence corporations, and hedge-funds, all of which establish knowledge as a secretive and non-transparent private good. Whatever knowledge systems the Bahá'í Faith develops will have to straddle this divide if it is to retain a degree of control and freedom over its own global affairs and its capacity to read reality from local to national to global. For the time being, however, even the most advanced systems of higher education are struggling with this challenge.

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL DANGERS OF THE FIRST PHASE OF SABET'S MODEL

These issues are not a light matter because each phase of the model, as well as the transitions between phases, carry specific epistemological dangers (with particular time-limits) in terms of accurately reflecting, at higher levels of complexity, the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. The concern is acute also because the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh cannot be adequately represented by one or even several domains of knowledge. This is not only because the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is transdisciplinary, infinite in meanings, and transcends human knowledge, but also, because all domains of knowledge depend organically on each other. An adequate interpretation of the Word of God can only hope to be a faithful one if based on the interrelated insights of all domains of knowledge and if grounded in the guidance provided through the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh.

Here, another observation should be made. It is impossible for ordinary human beings to derive an understanding of the Bahá'í Revelation only from within the totality of the Bahá'í writings. The fundamental reason for this is that ordinary human beings, being

cultural beings, approach the Revelation with prior frames of reference generally shaped by their national culture and their intellectual formation. These frames of reference rely on a mix between unexamined habits and tradition on the one hand, and prior academic theories and models on the other, which have been, most often than not, inaccurately reflected into the realm of public discourses and general culture. In general, we tend to be oblivious to the cultures that shape us. This is the horizon in which the entire struggle of being a Bahá'í takes place. Therefore, the idea that one could develop a somewhat objective interpretation of the Bahá'í Writings, either directly through recourse to the totality of the Writings, or indirectly, through a neutral use of particular academic theories, is illusory. Whatever interpretation is produced will always be the result of prior frames of reference.

What is problematic about such assumptions, however, is that they contain within them the foundation of anti-intellectualism; and the "anti-intellectual", as O'Dea (32) reminds us in the context of American Catholicism, "has very little tolerance for ambiguity and divergence" and tends "to identify critical analysis of Catholic affairs with disloyalty" (25). It is instructive to read O'Dea's account of how such a seemingly small epistemological shift has produced over time, through the central agencies of the clergy and of the educational seminary, an American Catholicism considered "exceptionally unproductive in all areas of scholarship" (25). The "failure to develop intellectual life", which O'Dea attributes to his own Faith, is strongly linked by him with the institution of the seminary: "the attitude cultivated in the seminarian appears at times to be characterized to a high degree by a kind of passive receptivity; the impression is given that Christian learning is something 'finished,' and that education is a formation to be accepted from established authority with a minimum of individual initiative and critical activity on the part of the student" (65). Here we encounter a very interesting thought, that for religious believers it is religious education that should

develop their intellectual life of the mind and their love for other fields of knowledge. As O'Dea (64) puts it:

> The religion teacher alive to his problem is concerned with these difficulties because they cause him to fail genuinely to communicate religious knowledge in such a way that it becomes part of the student's very being. … If we fail to engage our students in such a central intellectual quest as religion, how can they develop a genuinely open attitude toward other fields of knowledge?

If I refer here to the historical case of American Catholicism, it is only so that we can better visualize the future epistemological dangers associated with being stuck in the first stage of Sabet's scholarship model and so as to learn to avoid them. We can now describe the danger of the first phase of Sabet's model: the rise of anti-intellectualism leading to a narrow and frozen interpretation of the Sacred Writings of a religion, eventually crystallizing into man-made ideology and dogma. As often is the case, the criterion of reflexivity offers a wonderful correction to such tendencies. I use this notion here in a limited sense, as stating that a theoretical model or interpretation displays "a failure of reflexivity" if it is "unable to question the ground upon which it stands" (Usher and Edwards 46). Interpretations of the Bahá'í Writings could and should always attempt to make their theoretical assumptions explicit, rather than relying only on selective quotations and a type of individual hermeneutics presented as totally internal to the Writings. Furthermore, since reflexivity is a capacity which different people or institutions manifest in various degrees, open dialogue about the epistemological orientations underpinning different theoretical models, methodologies and interpretative approaches should be encouraged. Reflexivity can also be thought of in a different way. Drawing on Derrida, Usher and Edwards (153) propose "a

framework for foregrounding reflexivity" in the "writing" and "reading of research texts" alongside three dimensions.

The first dimension, then, is concerned with "that which is 'with' the text", meaning, "the situatedness of the researcher/reader – e.g. gender, ethnicity, class, biography" (Idem). I have attempted to partially cover this dimension in the introduction to this article.

The second dimension focuses on "that which is 'before' the text": "language and signification, binary oppositions, writing and textual strategies, culture and interpretive traditions" (Idem). An example here would be the successive layers of review usually conducted by the Editorial Board of an academic journal and then by a Bahá'í Review Team, the first judging the academic merits of the paper (according to particular academic criteria and a specific editorial culture), the second the degree to which the paper represents in dignified language an adequate representation of the Bahá'í Faith (according to particular Bahá'í criteria, the national Bahá'í culture, and the degree of experience with the process). These processes of review or manner of editing can have a considerable impact on the structure, size, themes, organization, and arguments of the final product, a reality of which the reader will almost never become aware, thus being unable to distinguish between what constitutes the original written work of the author and what constitutes the editing that has been applied to it. It is for such reasons that much reading takes things for granted, the assumption being that all the credit, good or bad, goes only to the author, that there is only one author (or set of authors if more than one author), and that there is no real tension between what has been said and what has not been said.

Finally, the third dimension seeks to account for "that which is 'beneath' the text", namely, "professional paradigms and discourses, power-knowledge formations". It will be easily noticed that I have not explicitly discussed any 'power-knowledge formations" in this essay. For a Foucaldian, an example of a current 'power-knowledge formation' in the Bahá'í

Faith would be "the culture of learning". More importantly, it should be noticed here that I have attempted to constantly make the sources that have informed my thinking (and sometimes the sources that have informed their thinking) and the succession of my arguments visible to the reader. Similarly, I have allowed my sources to 'speak' through their own words and concepts whenever possible. The understanding of the principle of the harmony of science and religion as the issue of the integration of knowledge comes, for example, in this paper, from Shoghi Effendi (this is an interpretation of several passages and not an exhaustive study), Alfred North Whitehead, Pitimir Sorokin, Daniel Jordan and Behrooz Sabet. Another important source not mentioned in this paper but ever present in the background of this discussion is the four-fold taxonomy (conflict, independence, dialogue, and integration) introduced by Ian Barbour in *When Science Meets Religion*. The theme of an epistemological transition, which is the key theme of this article, is clearly taken from Sabet's model of the developmental stages of religions. This does not mean, of course, that Behrooz Sabet would agree with how I have made use of this concept. As for 'discourses', "the culture of learning" can be also thought of as a 'discourse', and this receives some brief mention in the conclusion of this article. You will notice that much of the current Bahá'í language assumes that you are familiar with this discourse. I have not made that assumption here, but neither have I done justice to this concept. The conclusion highlights some of the key sources that would allow the reader to become more familiar with this theme.

Another epistemological danger is that, because of the intense time pressures within the Academia and their Bahá'í administrative and community life, Bahá'í scholars might be unable to:

1) develop a broad foundation of knowledge outside their own specialty (particularly in the absence of a broad and integrative global curriculum that could support their intellectual formation), and

2) balance their academic development with their study of the Bahá'í Writings through the prism of the totality of the Writings and the careful exploration of the hermeneutical principles they put forward, in light of the principle of the Covenant.

We can foresee here some of the limitations and dangers that would characterize the second stage of Sabet's developmental model for religions. Firstly, a fragmented and narrow understanding of the Bahá'í Revelation that impedes the building of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Secondly, struggling to maintain the purity of the mission and message of Bahá'u'lláh once lines of communication with the academic disciplines and other fields of expertise or practice have been opened. The solution here, however, is not to attempt to relate only to those theories or fields of study that seem to largely confirm our current Bahá'í views, while discarding the rest. Nothing is that black and white, especially not complex items such as theories, theorists, or academic fields and subdisciplines. These must be first understood intimately and in their historical context, and then critically assessed with a high degree of sophistication and ability to distinguish and compare key assumptions and historical

outcomes. In this sense, a nuanced and flexible type of understanding that constantly challenges itself and evolves (the fact of the matter is that some assumptions, judgments, or experiments we hold dear at some point in time will likely prove wrong and outdated later in the process), is a mature type of understanding. Moreover, as explained before, our usually unexamined starting assumptions, and our tendency to prioritize one aspect of the Writings over another, can quickly make any attempt to divide knowledge between what is permissible and what should be discarded extremely problematic. Rather, the solution is to fire up the love of knowledge of God and the love of science and philosophy simultaneously. The trick is not only to do this in one or several continents, or in the most developed countries or powerful nations, but to do this in all the countries with a Bahá'í population so that there is universal participation and diversity of epistemic perspectives.

Because we have a clearly established corpus of Bahá'í Writings covering a huge array of topics and the Covenant, the danger of diluting the message of religion and its unity of vision to a fragmented field of techno-scientific and materialistic philosophies is rather limited. This pure nucleus of knowledge will always be there, and the comprehensive nature of the Bahá'í Revelation will always be manifest to anyone that connects to it. This sort of danger does not seem to have greatly afflicted previous religions. When religions decay, they tend to depart from scientific reasoning altogether and not to become scientific in their metaphysical orientations.

The more likely threat is a more banal one: that, because of the immediate priorities in our academic and Bahá'í lives, we will not put the necessary effort to delve deep enough into the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh through use of the scientific method and of the academic disciplines. Such a scenario would impede our ability to break away from the manifold forms in which our nationalistic, materialistic, and consumerist cultures control our character-formation and the building of our communities. This would happen despite the best of our

intentions and our avowed commitment to the principles of the Bahá'í Faith. For acceptance of the importance of a religious teaching is not the same with grasping its significance in the context of our lives and of society at large. The link between acceptance of a spiritual principle and the transformation it requires is the depth of understanding of that spiritual principle and of the social reality (in our case, global) to which it applies. Both faith and moral transformation, therefore, rely on the strength and depth of our process of knowledge. Failure in these areas can be easily recognized because their consequences are easy to spot. At the individual level a failure to grasp the deep meaning of Bahá'í principles would likely lead to flaws in human character, the weakening of moral values, and/or a closed mindset. At the collective level of culture and institutions, the general effects are well summarized in a statement from Payam Akhavan:

> …we're grappling in the darkness, we're trying to understand what spirituality is when the two prevalent models are either crass materialism or religious fanaticism, and we're neither here nor there, although in our own community very often we borrow a bit from the fanatics – and we start speaking, you know, sort of jargon laden Bahá'í talk, in a way which I find sometimes totally detached from reality, a very kind of bad idea of what it means to belong to a religious community, a very insular, dogmatic idea of what it means to be a Bahá'í, or we pay lip service to the Bahá'í principles while living in effect materialistic lives. And that's why once again we need to exercise our imagination and realize that we are building something which is unprecedented. We can't look back to the idea of religion as it existed in the past and project it into the future. (Mahmoudi et al mins. 57-59)

Here, an important cultural trend can be distinguished in the last decade, and more so since the pandemic. What we are beginning to see is that the imperative of growth which has

dominated the functioning of Bahá'í communities for decades has begun to be accompanied by increasing concerns that Bahá'í communities, institutions, and individuals might not be living up to the divine principles of their Faith, particularly in relation to issues of social justice. The more critical voices assert that while we publicly advocate principles like the oneness of humankind and the equality of men and women (and the living of a spiritual and holy life) and we invite the outside world to study the implementation of such principles in our own communities, we are not in fact capable of acknowledging the issues of race, class and gender inequality and the materialistic forces that structure our own communities in ways not too dissimilar from the wider society. A good example of such a critical voice is Arta Monjazeb. In his candid talk, Monjazeb (mins 35-37) identifies racism as the reason why growth has not occurred in the American Bahá'í Community:

> Shoghi Effendi said to Sadie Oglesby: 'My charge to you is this: go back to America, tell the friends to look within themselves and find there the reason of so few Coloured people being in the Cause. Until this is removed, the Cause cannot grow'. For me there is no doubt that what has held back the American Bahá'í community is racism. We were told it very clearly by Shoghi Effendi, we were told this very clearly when 'Abdu'l-Bahá came to visit our communities. Because we have not properly dealt with this problem our community has stagnated. We have deprived ourselves from the *intangible influences* which are *indispensable* for our *spiritual triumph.* [I have highlighted in Italics the terms Monjazeb references from paragraph 51 in *The Advent of Divine Justice* by Shoghi Effendi].

Similar voices point out that key institutions in their community at times espouse the vision and values characteristic of the elite classes in that society, judging all other Bahá'ís

against such standards, and assuming that issues of class, race, gender inequality are naturally resolved for people when they become Bahá'ís. They point out that such communities seem to operate implicitly on a set of interrelated assumptions. The first is a subconscious notion that because of the Bahá'í Faith and its activities and teachings everyone who is poor or working class but an active Bahá'í will automatically turn middle-class (both economically and culturally). A corollary here is that the Bahá'í Faith and its activities and teachings will divest everyone of racism and of class, gender, national, ethnic, and religious-based forms of prejudice. The second more explicit assumption is that entering the Bahá'í community acts as an instant purifier of all social ills, for the Bahá'í community does not mirror patterns of oppression, power, hierarchy, or unequal forms of social reproduction. This ties in with a third assumption, that racism, class and gender inequality, and so on, are not structural issues within the Bahá'í community, but rather, issues at the individual level of attitudes and behaviour, which it then falls on those Bahá'í individuals who have such problems to correct them in their private and public lives, and not on the institutions. The voices who highlight these concerns then contrast this situation with the words addressed by Shoghi Effendi to Sadie Oglesby in 1927:

> The world is looking to see what the Bahá'ís of America are going to do for the colored man, and the peace and tranquility of the world depend on that one thing. In this great hour of turmoil, when everybody and every group of people are talking about universal brotherhood and justice, we, Bahá'ís must be that centre that is not living in the realm of thinking about it, but the ones who actually have it in practice. (Oglesby 3)

While such critiques are valid and must be answered, the reality of the Bahá'í community is much more complex, layered, and the conversations ongoing. At least three epistemological issues are at play here.

THREE EPISTEMOLOGICAL ISSUES OF THE PERIOD OF TRANSITION

The first issue is that despite it being taken for granted that the principle of the oneness of humankind means the same thing for everyone in the Bahá'í community, different partial interpretations of it are present, oftentimes in ways that are incompatible with each-other or the wider principle they seek to reflect. The history of the American Bahá'í community in relation to the issue of race testifies to such contrasting dynamics. This should make us wonder: is the principle well understood even at a basic level in the Bahá'í community? As this is the key social principle of the Faith, and directly linked to issues of race, class, nationality, religion and gender inequality, the question is why we have seemingly failed to comprehend its deep implications and live up to its requirements in most parts of our Bahá'í community. How can we hope to extend the applications of such principles into the wider society and at the global level, if we haven't been able to successfully apply them to our own community?

There is a thirst here, manifested in the world at large, for having a much more complex understanding of the themes highlighted as the divine principles of the Bahá'í Faith, one that far transcends the perceptiveness of previous generations. Shoghi Effendi has warned us about this back in 1949:

It seems what we need now is a more profound and co-ordinated Bahá'í scholarship in order to attract such men as you are contacting. The world has - at least the thinking

52

world - caught up by now with all the great and universal principles enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh over 70 years ago, and so of course it does not sound 'new' to them. But we know that the deeper teachings, the capacity of His projected World Order to re-create society, are new and dynamic. It is these we must learn to present intelligently and enticingly to such men. (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi dated 3 July 1949, qtd. in *A Compilation on Scholarship* nr.75)

This thirst constitutes the second epistemological issue, and it has to do with sensing the needs of the age and almost subconsciously feeling the yearning to connect with the Revelation in a deeper way. This thirst comes with the need to see these divine principles applied in our lives and the expectation is that our institutions and the Bahá'ís serving in leadership roles will lead the way in setting an example. To describe it as a thirst is in fact inappropriate, as for many this is not just a philosophical need, but an issue of basic human dignity, of engaging with oppression, injustice, and exploitation, and frankly, of ensuring the survival and advancement of their people and of the entire planet. And still, we constantly find ourselves asking the same types of questions as Jamey Heath:

And I wonder like okay so we're Bahá'ís and we believe in this principle that we know the world cannot transform until we elevate women, then why is it we preach it but is not in practice as much? … I know they believe in their hearts, we believe it in our hearts, but if we are not practicing it how can we demonstrate it to the rest of the world? (Mahmoudi et al mins. 14-16)

The third epistemological issue has to do with the Bahá'í methodology for social change, with the roles of the individual, institutions, and the community within the framework of the current plan of the Universal House of Justice, and with how this

methodology, those roles, and that framework are all evolving. Probably one of the most interesting angles into this discussion is the side by side reading of two documents: The compilation on Race Unity (1996-2020) by the Universal House of Justice and the "Pilot Project: The Elimination of Racial Prejudice and the Community Building Process". The crux of the guidance from the Universal House of Justice can be traced back to the following statement to the participants of the Black Men's Gathering:

> The experience of the last five years and the recent guidance of the House of Justice should make it evident that in the instruments of the Plan you now have within your grasp everything that is necessary to raise up a new people and eliminate racial prejudice as a force within your society, though the path ahead remains long and arduous. The institute process is the primary vehicle by which you can transform and empower your people, indeed all the peoples of your nation. (UHJ Letter dated 28 August 2011 to the participants of the Black Men's Gathering, qtd. in "Pilot Project" 48)

The same idea is expressed again in letters from 10 April 2011 and 6 August 2018:

> Only if the efforts to eradicate the bane of prejudice are coherent with the full range of the community's affairs, only if they arise naturally within the systematic pattern of expansion, community building, and involvement with society, will the American believers expand their capacity, year after year and decade after decade, to make their mark on their community and society and contribute to the high aim set for the Bahá'ís by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to eliminate racial prejudice from the face of the earth. (UHJ, *Race Unity* 7)

Rather, the capabilities of the believers to address the issues of racism afflicting themselves, their families, their communities, and the wider society will be cultivated hand in hand with other capabilities needed to advance the process of entry by troops as they learn to systematically pursue their efforts of community building, social action, and involvement in the discourses of society. (Idem 12)

The problem, of course, is how to do this. This is the issue the "Pilot Project: The Elimination of Racial Prejudice and the Community Building Process" explored in the Milestone 3 communities of Charlotte NC, Nashville TN and Washington DC, between December 2018 and August 2020. This initiative was likely the result of earlier developments in the American Bahá'i community for in its letter from 6 August 2018 to an American believer, the Universal House of Justice mentions that it is "pleased with the initiative your National Assembly has undertaken to assist friends to understand how the framework for action of the Plan enables individuals, communities, and institutions to address, profoundly, the fragmentation in your nation that has been steadily intensifying in recent years, including on matters of race" (Idem 13). In the same letter, the UHJ then re-affirms the Guardian's injunction of adopting "freedom from racial prejudice" as "the watchword of the entire body of American believers" (*Advent* 54) in relation to the activities of the Plan:

Here, the Guardian is calling for the friends to address the question of race unity as a part of life in all of the social spaces in which they are engaged, and, similarly, the House of Justice is now saying that freedom from racial prejudice must be the watchword of Bahá'ís in the social spaces in which they are engaged for the activities of the Plan. (UHJ, *Race Unity* 12)

These are significant developments, the dynamics of which will have to be explained and analyzed by historians of the Faith. What should interest us here, however, is the knowledge process involved. How did one of the participants in the pilot, for example, experience such a radical change in perspective as the one documented below?

Core activities - White female respondent

June 2019: I am feeling very discouraged by a lack of understanding on my part about the Institute process and social justice work. There seems to me to be a false dichotomy like never the twain shall meet. Is it correct that we have to keep separate the core activities and social justice or social discourse activities? ... Can Ruhi not coexist with work on bridging this divide caused by the most challenging issue?

March 2021 update: I am now seeing more clearly how the Institute process melds or blends perfectly with social justice work. Ruhi can not only coexist with the most vital and challenging issue, but it also provides a healing space among friends to address it in a very powerful way. I now see this to be true of the whole framework for action. I am thankful for the Pilot Project on Race because it brought these issues to the fore and encouraged deep examination and thought. It has taken me years but I finally see that it is through the grassroots efforts and the relationships that we build where they can be worked through in a natural way like a family would do. Still painful, still a thorny road beset with pitfalls but less so due to the love that we build in our hearts for each other. It will continue increasingly so to be the watchword for any service that the Blessed Beauty allows me to offer. ("Pilot Project" 58)

In my opinion, this transformation can be attributed to two processes of learning simultaneously affecting the heart and mind. The first has to do with the continuous and painful efforts (particularly, since the US presidential election campaign of 2016) of Black,

indigenous, and other people of colour associating themselves with the Bahá'í Faith to raise

the awareness of their Bahá'í friends about the issues of racism, class, and sexism. The

second has to do with "the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and so

many others" (NSA, "Forging a Path" 1), the Black Lives Matter protests and the policy

brutality against them, the clear manifestations of white supremacy culminating in the 6th of

January 2021 storming of the United States Capitol, and the racial and social inequality

highlighted by the pandemic. These continuous and overlapping events that shaped the global

consciousness and the consciousness of the American nation also converged and intersected

with the first process of learning. Together, these processes were enough to convince a

considerable number of the White and Persian believers who constitute the majority of the

Bahá'í believers in the United States that racism exists and is very real. This increase in

awareness allowed then for a process of learning and transformation to be initiated around the

topic of anti-black racism in the United States (within the community and at the institutional

and individual level), which was then transferred to the activities of the current Plan.

How far can this process go and where it will lead it remains to be seen, but this already

represents a significant shift. It should be noted here that this explanatory account is limited.

It does not cover all angles, it does not offer a historical analysis, and does not tell us much

about the essential leadership role of different institutions. What interests us here, however,

are the precise forms of knowledge and practice involved in this learning process.

     Here, at least three developments can be distinguished with a relative degree of

confidence. The first concerns the attempts at partially opening the Bahá'í Faith to the

subordinate and marginalized epistemologies or bodies of knowledge of African American

and Indigenous people. These subordinate bodies of knowledge are embedded in the

communities of Black and Indigenous people as lived culture expressed in every-day

experiences and are, to various degrees, present in all the members of that community. The problem is described by Scheurich and Young (141):

> Different social groups, races, cultures and societies, or civilizations evolve different epistemologies, each of which reflects the social history of that group, race, culture, society, or civilization; that is, no epistemology is context-free. Yet, all of the epistemologies currently legitimized in education arise exclusively out of the social history of the dominant White race. They do not arise out of the social history of African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, or other racial/cultural groups – social histories that are much different than that of the dominant race (a difference due at least partially to the historical experience of racism itself [see, for example, Collins, 1991].

Constantly framing institutional decision-making in light of questions such as "What are the racial, cultural, class, and gender implications of this decision?" and "[How can] our decisions promote the nobility of African Americans and draw on their experience?" (Washington LSA, "Addressing Race, Class and Culture" 2), making sure that people of colour can contribute openly to different topics, participate in administrative life, and advance their own solutions to the problems of the community from positions of leadership, are some of the approaches used, not without complete freedom from racism, to create avenues for the sharing of knowledge.

Most important, however, have been the incipient attempts to expand the format of the Ruhi study circle, home-visits, devotionals, Feasts, cluster reflection meetings and the junior-youth programme to allow for the open discussion of social justice concerns, and in particular, of racism. Through such initial efforts a partial opening was created for the sharing

of the Black experience. When understood, accounts of the Black experience immediately led the White and Persian believers to realize that fighting racism would require each of them to constantly identify, analyze, measure and remove the racist tendencies within their own selves, their social contexts, their institutions, and society. The complexity of this new task daunted them, and some even started feeling that this sort of effort required a type of expertise they did not possess and did not know how to access:

> Another reflection is that I feel I have experienced cycles of grief over my own perceptions of myself in a sense. As a White person who desires to be free of prejudice and makes a daily effort to try to see my own subconscious sense of superiority and address it, who wants to grow and learn and tries to educate myself — but then to inevitably have experiences that show me yet again how I still have so much work to do is hard on the ego. I think it's important for me to remember that removing the prejudices takes time and is a life-long process, and it's important to continue working to have a humble attitude of learning, move past any shame which hinders us, and recommit to action rather than feeling embarrassed or guilty and then retreating. I think accepting the discomfort White people like myself feel when encountering areas where we feel ignorant or that we still have to work on is important, and truthfully, is a small discomfort compared to the challenges our friends who are Black, Indigenous and other People of Color often face daily. … We are all trying to learn how to create environments that allow for voices to be heard and making adaptations based on the views of people of color. Learning how to ensure the spaces we co-create are not dictated by White/Persian cultural expectations is also a challenge. ("Pilot Project" 17-18)

Feast – White female respondent

When our LSA asked us to share our reflections at the Feast following the killing of George Floyd, I realized I didn't feel comfortable in that discussion to talk about how overwhelmed I felt or that although I was willing to act, I had no idea what to do. A few nights later a group of friends got together for a neighborhood study of the compilation on race. Everyone who attended was white and the conversation included a lot of things that hadn't come up at Feast. Folks talked about feeling lost, embarrassed, guilty, overwhelmed, unsure of what to do, and I had the feeling there were probably other people in the same boat. Of course, addressing racial injustice is uncomfortable and dealing with that discomfort is definitely just part of it. … In the months that followed, I immersed myself in the discourse and reflections on racial justice, attending multiple events every week, learning from scholars and activists like Ibram X. Kendi, Robin DiAngelo, and Bryan Stevenson, and friends and community members across the country. (Idem 54-55)

Education – Iranian-American female respondent

My main reflection was that I felt engaged but also ill-equipped. Despite decades of academic and community involvement in racism discussions, repeated readings of the Advent of Divine Justice and whatever other efforts I've made in my life to stay engaged on this most vital and challenging issue, I didn't feel confident leading such a discussion, so [name omitted] led the way. And if I feel ill-equipped, then how do others feel? How scary it must feel to enter this arena if you're brand new to it. It will take nudging and creating a warm environment so folks will feel welcome to come and discuss and feel inept and confused and angry and whatever feelings need to come up to get through it. (Idem 56)

With their knowledge of the dynamics of racism, African American believers were able to anticipate the difficulties their White and Persian friends would encounter. At this point, something remarkable happened. Despite the knowledge that they would face further instances of racism, African American believers prepared to accompany them not only with intimate knowledge about their lives and experiences, but also, with more specialized forms of knowledge.

The second development involves a specialized form of practitioner knowledge widely referred to as 'anti-racism training' or 'anti-racist education'. While focusing on racism such initiatives are very sensitive to issues of social justice in general. One of the key examples here are the daily activities listed on the Foundation Hall University website[19] and the many types of activities that have emerged because of the ARISE Pupil of the Eye Conferences (Barbara Talley has played a key role in establishing FHU and initiating the ARISE conferences). These activities have trained facilitators (African American, White, Persian, and so on) which help guide conversations focused on eliminating racial prejudice, from within the framework of the Bahá'í Teachings. There are a multiplicity of spaces and activities which are independent, but which also support each other. The terrain is constantly changing and shifting according to the lessons learned, the growth of each space, and the new type of participants or facilitators joining them. From an educational point of view, it is of extreme importance that someone can capture the history, development, and challenges of these new educational social justice Zoom spaces being created. Patience is needed, as these are terrains for experimentation with new forms of Bahá'í identity that seek to be more in alignment with the Bahá'í Writings. These spaces are also places where innovative processes of horizontal collective consultation are being forged that could challenge the hierarchical,

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[19] Their schedule of activities is available at: https://worldembracing.net/

asymmetrical, and very imperfect modes of decision-making currently structuring all our social spaces in the wider society.

Building on a daily Prayer Call[20] that had been running continuously for 12 years (since April 2009), the Foundation Hall University initially had its daily sessions structured as joint sessions (usually, the majority of them), as sessions in which only the POTE (– pupil of the eye) people could speak (usually two sessions) but which the SOTE (-white sclera of the eye) people could attend to learn and listen, and sessions in which only the SOTE people could speak (usually one session) but which POTE people could attend to learn and listen. Each day had two types of activities: a prayer call which combined devotionals with themes relating to the elimination of racial prejudice and the study of the Bahá'í Writings, and Zoom calls where large and smaller group discussions or study groups took place on the theme of "removing the anti-black systemic racism infecting humanity, through the transformative message of Bahá'u'lláh" (FHU, LA Call Information).

In more recent times, due to recognizing an essential need, FHU seems to have become more focused on the POTEs and on creating spaces where a dialogue between people of African descent and the Indigenous or Native Americans, two historically oppressed groups in America, could be nurtured (with other groups still allowed to attend but, in a listening and learning mode only). Paradoxically, this change in emphasis has also led to the establishment or growth of more independent spaces catering for both POTEs and SOTEs (for example, "The LA Call"), focusing primarily on SOTEs (for example, "Copper to Gold"), or even just on Persian Baha'is (see, for example, the Facebook group "Iranian Baha'is for Racial Justice"[21]).[22] It is instructive, I believe, to consider the manner in which

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[20] See James Williams Founders Story at https://worldembracing.net/resources#6b6f925e-832a-4447-83fb-0c034ada9b4d
[21] https://www.facebook.com/groups/bahaisforracialjustice/
[22] Many other groups exist (I wouldn't know how to try to account for them all and I would be very grateful if anyone could create an overall list), and if I happen to mention certain groups here, this is only for two reasons. The first reason is that as my friend Aaron Crossley has introduced me to some of these spaces ("The LA Call",

these initiatives describe their purpose. Although such purpose statements are likely to change over time it is useful in my view to examine them now and observe the ways in which they connect with and complement each-other while maintaining their distinctive status.

The following is the statement of purpose from the Foundation Hall University Home page:

> A consultative discussion on the elimination of racial prejudice (The Most Vital and Challenging issue) will immediately follow the prayer call each day. The goal is for the discussion to last approximately 90 minutes, although it may go longer. The primary purpose is raise consciousness about our innate nobility and to restore dignity to people of African descent designated in the Bahai Faith as "the pupil of the eye."

> "Freedom from racial prejudice, in any of its forms, should, at such a time as this when an increasingly large section of the human race is falling a victim to its devastating ferocity, be adopted as the watchword of the entire body of the American believers, in whichever state they reside, in whatever circles they move, whatever their age, traditions, tastes, and habits." Advent of Divine Justice

It is interesting to observe how the LA Race Consultation Space[23] (or "The LA Call") intention statement is both similar and different from that of FHU, showing in fact an amazing degree of complementarity:

> Following all available guidance from the Bahá'í institutions, the LA Race Consultation Space is an individual initiative designed to deal with the issue of racial

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"Copper to Gold", and "Open Conversations"), these are the spaces I am more familiar with and which I have been able to explore in more depth. The second reason has to do with the need for examples of how such initiatives see their purpose. In general, I owe a debt of gratitude to a very large number of American and Canadian Bahá'ís, with whom I have spent a lot of hours since the beginning of the pandemic exploring topics (and verifying information) that this paper touches on.

[23] "The LA Call" can be contacted at this email address: laraceconsult.participants@gmail.com

injustice and anti-blackness directly and forthrightly, and to educate, inspire and support efforts to advance the promise of the oneness of humanity by creating an environment within the Bahá'í Community that is genuine, warm, friendly and embracing of the "Pupil of the Eye" believers, thereby resulting in an increase in their numbers—which according to the guidance, is essential to bringing about world unity.

Bahá'u'lláh designates people of African descent as the "Pupil of the Eye". This space is intended to center the "Pupil of the Eye," (POTE) resulting in our Bahá'í community having clearer vision moving forward.

This space is also for SOTE, "Sclera of the Eye" (a designation not given by Bahá'u'lláh), for those not of African descent who are here to engage while maintaining a humble posture of learning, and to learn new ways of supporting the POTE.

We are confident in the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that, "When a gathering of these two races is brought about that assemblage will become the magnet of the Concourse on high and the confirmation of the Blessed Beauty will surround it."

While similar in its overall vision, "Copper to Gold"[24] is clearly primarily addressed to SOTE Bahá'ís, recognizing a specific need to contain the learning process to a particular audience in terms of the dynamics that can be triggered:

From Copper to Gold (CTG) is a Bahá'í-inspired white-centered initiative founded to assist white Bahá'ís to deepen their understanding of anti-Blackness and address

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[24] "Copper to Gold" can be contacted via this email address: copper2gold1@gmail.com .

their behaviors that cause harm to the Pupil of the Eye (people of African descent). While we address the effects on POTE (Pupil of the Eye), the consequences can be adapted to address prejudice towards Indigenous people and people of color (IPOC). Although the Guardian spoke directly to white Bahá'ís in North America, some of the behaviors addressed in this program are too often replicated by others who are under the influence of the conceptual framework of whiteness.

It is our hope that this program be used to cultivate an environment conducive to promoting "intimate, spontaneous and informal association" with the POTE members of your community, to root out the behaviors that support a culture of anti-Blackness, and put into action Shoghi Effendi's message in The Advent of Divine Justice, "to abandon once and for all their usually inherent and at times subconscious sense of superiority, to correct their tendency towards revealing a patronizing attitude towards the members of the other race, to persuade them through their intimate, spontaneous and informal association with them of the genuineness of their friendship and the sincerity of their intentions, and to master their impatience of any lack of responsiveness on the part of a people who have received, for so long a period, such grievous and slow-healing wounds".

It is important to note here that the language, concepts, and thinking of the FHU ("The LA Call", "Copper to Gold" etc.) have received serious theoretical grounding in the academic paper of Derik Smith, "Centering 'the Pupil of the Eye': Blackness, Modernity and the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh"[25] and have inspired other academic efforts such as the ABS

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[25] https://bahai-library.com/smith_centering_pupil_eye

presentation of Masud Ashley Olufani entitled "Power to the pupil: towards a new Black liberation theology within the framework of the Bahá'í Faith"[26].

Because it is important to show that social justice Zoom Bahá'í spaces are also focused on other interrelated key themes (Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of 'intersectionality' is well known in these spaces) I want to also give here the wonderful example of "Open Conversations"[27]. The following is their statement of purpose:

Open Conversations

The purpose of Open Conversations is to provide an environment for individuals to re-imagine the relationship between sexuality, the life of the spirit, and the equality of women and men though the lens of the Baha'i Writings in an open, nonjudgmental, and supportive environment. We seek to better understand the meaning and implications of the Baha'i teachings on sexuality and equality, conscious that in our small way, we are collaborators in the creation of an entirely new culture. There are no requirements for participating in these conversations other than a desire to reflect on how spiritual principles can help us address the challenges of our lives and a willingness to abide by Open Conversation guidelines.

Space Intentions

i think it would be useful for us, in our conversations about sexuality and homosexuality in particular, to learn to hold two separate, but related, truths in our heads simultaneously. truth #1 is, that for each individual person, sexuality is an

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[26] https://2021.bahaistudies.ca/watch/power-to-the-pupil

[27] "Open Conversations" can be contacted via Erika Batdorf at erika@batdorf.org and Aaron Crossley at crossley9@gmail.com .

aspect of personality and therefore can exist within us in many different ways and manifest in various forms. the terms "homosexual" and "heterosexual" in the way that we casually use them, may not have strict validity in the sense that all the nooks and crannies, and wrinkles and kinks and corners and curves of people's interior architectures don't always shake out into clear categories. so when we're looking at our own specific sexual and romantic thoughts, feelings, and experiences, it might be more just and accurate to learn to speak of them in terms of particular individual characters, rather than in terms of something which does or does not fit into a predefined box.

truth #2 is this - there are people for whom some part of their sexual or romantic constitution includes attraction to people of their own sex, and these people are and have been subject to oppression.

at the same time that we practice integrating truth #1 into our relationships and our discussions, it is important we continue to acknowledge the reality of truth #2. in adopting truth #1, we must be careful not to minimize the gravity of truth #2.

to distill it down - a lot of us are kinda queer in meaningful and profound ways and it's vital to be able to speak to that honestly. but some of us suffer for it in meaningful and profound ways, and it is vital to be able to speak to that honestly, and to do our best to remedy it.

The third development, a second type of specialized knowledge that African Americans, Indigenous people and other activists or intellectuals have brought into the Bahá'í community, is academic knowledge. Here, several of the contributions of scholars of colour, meaning, of scholarship and traditions of knowledge based on the social histories of people of

colour (and not on the social history of Whites), have received particular attention. It should be noticed here that, except for a new course entitled "Anti-Black Racism in the U.S. and Building a Unified Society" and offered since February 2021 by the Wilmette Institute,[28] most of such knowledge has not been presented in a systematic or organized fashion and remains largely inaccessible. It remains unavailable also because it is not included in our activities and in our educational processes. For most Bahá'ís, the possibility of an encounter with academic knowledge on the topic of racism has been made possible primarily through individual conversations or online Bahá'í talks that might reference a handful of such sources. Although the Offices for Public Affairs and the Associations for Bahá'í Studies[29] in several countries have begun to focus on the themes of racial justice and racial unity, and papers have begun to be published on the topic in the Journal of Bahá'í Studies, the process of engaging research and academic knowledge on such themes in a way that would both inform and impact thinking in the Bahá'í Community and in the wider society is in its very early stages. It is interesting to note that this very fact is acknowledged in the Pilot Project in a number of ways, besides comments from White and Persian believers about how essential sources such as Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility*, Joy de Gruy's *Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome* and Ibram X. Kendi's *How to be an Antiracist* have been:

> Individuals, institutions, and agencies are encouraged to continue pursuing education about racism and race relations, acknowledging that while this education is critical for everyone, the documentation suggests that it is particularly applicable to White and Persian Bahá'ís. ("Pilot Project" 19)

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[28] You can find a brief course description at: https://wilmetteinstitute.org/courses/anti-black-racism/
[29] See for example the recents presentations at the 2021 ABS Conference: https://2021.bahaistudies.ca/

Education - White female respondent

Through the study and attendance of many workshops, books, articles and media available on the subject, and through the close and intimate relationships I have formed with my Baha'i Brothers and Sisters of color in my community, it is my firm opinion that we cannot address the issue of race in our community building processes effectively in the US without first considering the education of White and Persian believers about their designed place in the very systems we are trying to eradicate. ... I believe that along with our study of the writings there needs to be a very deliberate undertaking to provide White and Persian Bahá'ís with some basic training in the historical basis of White superiority. (Idem 56)

Education – Persian male respondent

… The recent letter from the NSA says: 'An essential element of the process will be honest and truthful discourse about the current conditions and their causes, and understanding, in particular, the deeply entrenched notions of anti-Blackness that pervade our society.' If we really want our community to truly understand the history and roots of structural and institutional racism in this country, it's impact on the Black population, on American society in general, and how it permeates everything we do, I don't believe the kinds of discussions we are having are sufficient. In the context of these two concerns, I'm wondering if it may be more effective to arrange sessions given by professionals who truly understand the history and dynamics of racism in this country and have the community go through a more in-depth training that creates a much deeper level of understanding that can help them articulate the issues more effectively in discourses that they have separately on the issue of racism. It doesn't even have to be a live training. It could be a collection of pre-recorded trainings, such

as the one given by Joy DeGruy on Post-Traumatic Slave syndrome, and others. This

type of more formalized program can help arm the community with the tools they

need to more effectively enter into discourse on these issues. Otherwise, I think most

community members, although well-intentioned, have too basic of an understanding

of these issues. (Idem 55)

The same need for specialized knowledge on the topic of structural racism (meaning,

both the subordinate knowledge of Black and Indigenous people and the academic

knowledge that builds on that experience) and for specialized knowledge that would help

with the exploration of our internal biases (meaning, the practitioner knowledge known as

anti-racism training[30]) are also highlighted in a separate report of the The Spiritual Assembly

of the Bahá'ís of Washington, DC:

One action cited in the report came soon after the killings of Mr. Floyd and Ms.

Taylor. The Assembly [DC LSA] prepared a statement 'acknowledging the pain and

heartbreak' connected with these deaths. That statement was read at the next two

community Feast gatherings, and consultation followed on what members are 'doing

and learning about advancing freedom from racial prejudice'. 'These Feasts generated

insight, experiences, questions, and desires from the community at large,' the report

states. This raised awareness, says Assembly member Nura Sadeghpour, of an urgent

need for community members to educate themselves on structural racism and explore

internal biases, so they can more deeply understand the writings of the Faith and the

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[30] It is interesting to note here that the United States Bahá'í community has always had quite a number of very capable anti-racist education and trainers, but as Barbara Talley explains, their expertise has not always been valued: "Here's the thing. I've been doing diversity training and working on race, you know, since the late 1980's, so I have never stopped talking about it. What's different now is people have started to listen to me" (Talley and Talley mins. 6-7).

framework for its growth and development. ("DC Bahá'ís Review a Decade of Efforts to Foster Racial Equality")

There is an acknowledgment here that if, by our notion of spirituality, we understand to engage racism only through recourse to the Bahá'í texts and a masterpiece like "The Advent of Divine Justice", it might not be enough to start dismantling the racial barriers between the different races, and the patterns of thinking, feeling and acting that we have internalized:

> Let's look at interracial fellowship. In many communities we come together and we pray together, we will have a devotional, we may be in a study circle together, we may be in a Feast, we may be in a LSA meeting, but from what I have been hearing from many pupil of the eye [POTE], and it's definitely clear in my circumstances, that's where it ends. We don't hang out together, we're not part of each others' lives, we might as well call it the Bahá'í Association in many spaces. (Talley and Talley 1:04:00-1:05:00)

How can we move from segregation to authentic interracial fellowship and spiritual brotherhood? One thing we would need in addition to the Bahá'í texts is to understand history, politics, economics, social policy, urbanization, legal structures, educational policy, culture, religion, movements aiming at social change and so on, so that we can learn to read our own reality. Such a notion of spirituality would seek to correlate the Bahá'í Writings with the academic disciplines and with other religions, cultures, and approaches for social change, all of which also imply forms of practitioner knowledge. However, if our own existence is intimately tied in via diverse patterns of oppression and interdependence with the realities of others, how can we make sense of our own reality without acknowledging such connections and the realities of others? And how is one to transcend the physical, social, economic, and

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cultural (which center around a dominant epistemology) barriers that oppression raises in the face of such an epistemological journey? How can we see ourselves and our society from the standpoint of the underprivileged when we ourselves are amongst the privileged?

It would seem that such an evolving notion of spirituality would have to allow for the knowledge of oppressed and subordinate cultures to participate in the investigation of the Bahá'í Writings and their application to social problems. For without such contributions, we might never learn how an oppressive social structure functions and, therefore, we might never understand how to deliver the healing message of Bahá'u'lláh. Without such contributions we might not even really understand what the healing message of Bahá'u'lláh is. Can one understand the principle of the oneness of humankind without understanding racism? Would understanding racism not contribute to our understanding of the principle of the oneness of humankind? What is more, to understand the insidious nature of racism one must allow the selves of those it has targeted and their histories to become an intimate part of oneself. But such intimate connection requires the deepest spiritual relation and the deepest trust. How can that develop if our internal biases, our behaviour, thinking, feeling and action, and even our discourses and institutions, are covertly and overtly oppressive, or in this case, shaped by racism?

The process required must clearly be one of deep introspection in light of all the knowledge available by combining religion with the three forms of specialized knowledge mentioned above. The effort in this direction will not lead to immediate successes but it would help develop a basis from which that deep, intimate connection with others might proceed:

Colored people are not prejudiced against the White, but they don't like to be treated other than as brothers; when you are ready to treat him like a brother, and he knows

it— you have to prove it to him, because he has lost confidence— but, when you

prove it to him, you will find he will love you like a brother. (Oglesby 7)

This is work on the self, of learning of one's limitations, weaknesses and moral

failures and removing them; it is the work of purifying one's heart. One does not purify their

heart in a spiritual realm suspended above our existence but in the arena of daily interactions

with others. The feedback of others is, thus, essential. Connection, friendship, love are

processes of deep feedback. We notice here something of interest. The process of overcoming

racism is very similar with the process of moral and spiritual development. They require

"constant scrutiny, continual self-examination and heart-searching" (*Advent* 21), escaping our

prior conditioning, and reconstructing a better self. But these are also processes of deep

connection to everything and everyone around us. Might they be so similar because they are

in fact the same process? I believe so and I would argue that this is the enhanced notion of

spirituality we need to operate with and from which to develop processes of social

transformation. To be anti-racist is to be spiritual once spirituality is understood in the current

sphere of the social. That the Guardian described a "complete freedom from prejudice in …

dealings with peoples of a different race, class, creed or color" as a "key spiritual

prerequisite", a "dynamic virtue" and a "lofty standard" (65) seems to validate such an

interpretation. The following passage clearly implies that moral development, spiritual

development and "complete freedom from prejudice" imply the same type of work on the

self:

I direct my appeal with all the earnestness and urgency that the pressing problem calls

for to every conscientious upholder of the universal principles of Bahá'u'lláh to face

this extremely delicate situation with the boldness, the decisiveness and wisdom it

demands. I cannot believe that those whose hearts have been touched by the

regenerating influence of God's creative Faith in His day will find it difficult to cleanse their souls from every lingering trace of racial animosity so subversive of the Faith they profess. How can hearts that throb with the love of God fail to respond to all the implications of this supreme injunction of Bahá'u'lláh, the unreserved acceptance of which, under the circumstances now prevailing in America, constitutes the hallmark of a true Bahá'í character? (Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 4/12/27 to National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, qtd. in Taylor, *The Power of Unity* 34)

What I am trying to suggest here is that if we correlate religion with specialized forms of knowledge we expand our notion of spirituality. Although a most vital and challenging issue on which the attainment of global unity and universal peace depends, racism is just one of the many complex issues blocking the development of humanity and the growth of the Faith. An ever-expanding notion of spirituality would have to consider all others. This notion of spirituality is, nevertheless, the same type of spirituality described by Bahá'u'lláh in "The Seven Valleys", if we learn to think of it not just mystically, but as expressed in the social contexts of our lives.

All the issues I have examined in relation to racism highlight deficiencies in the platforms of knowledge relating to the transition from phase one to phase two of Sabet's model of the developmental stages of religions. All these epistemological issues highlight the need for platforms of knowledge that can engage in connecting the Revelation with deep knowledge about society, namely, the need to correlate the Baha'i Writings with specialized forms of knowledge such as academic disciplines, practitioner knowledge and the subordinate knowledge of marginalized cultures etc. In other words, these epistemological issues require platforms of knowledge that would correspond to the second phase of Sabet's

model. This problem is not a simple one because phase one has not been completed to the point in which it can support a transition to phase two, while phase two has already been activated. The choices involved in designing phase two platforms of knowledge are also extremely complex. These issues will be explored in more details in a follow-up article, which as mentioned before, will look at some of the current challenges of Bahá'í inspired education.

CONCLUSION

This essay[31] represents the first part of a larger investigation into the notion of a conceptual framework for Bahá'í education. The essay begins by introducing two past attempts at devising such a conceptual framework. On the one hand, this initiates a meta-level discussion of how conceptual frameworks of this kind can be conceptualized or designed. On the other hand, the two models presented offer a useful introduction into the theme of the harmony of science and religion. Each model emphasizes the integration of knowledge as a methodology geared at translating the Bahá'í Revelation into processes for building a world civilization. The harmony of science and religion is then discussed as the issue of the integration of knowledge. An argument is put forward that the integration of knowledge must be expressed at the level of the curriculum, as intellectual formation, and as the methodology for engaging with the historical development of civilization and with processes of civilization-building. This stance allows for a discussion about how religions unfold into a world civilization and about the epistemic transition currently experienced by the Bahá'í community.

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[31] It should be remembered that this article is a personal essay that should not be misconstrued as an objective analysis of the Bahá'í worldwide community.

The Bahá'í community is assumed to be transitioning from a first phase in which the believers strive to understand and transmit what is contained in the nucleus of their new revelation without outside epistemic help ('the essential subject matters of education at this stage are the teachings of the religion'), to a second phase in which dialogue with the outside world and existing branches of knowledge becomes a dominant feature that continues and deepens the processes of phase one. Some of the dangers of each phase are briefly examined and three epistemological challenges of this period of transition are highlighted. The need for a deeper understanding of the principle of the oneness of humankind constitutes the first challenge. The second challenge is particular to our time. It requires us to go beyond what we think are the established principles and knowledge of the Bahá'í Faith so as to identify the 'deeper teachings' concealed in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. Finally, the complex task of understanding, contributing to, and re-envisioning the current Bahá'í methodology for social change constitutes the third challenge.

To exemplify the fluid nature of the Bahá'í methodology for social change this article reviews some of the recent developments regarding the issue of structural racism within the American Bahá'í community. All the issues I have discussed in relation to racism highlight deficiencies in the platforms of knowledge that have to do with the transition from phase one to phase two of Sabet's model. The epistemological challenges associated with racism highlight the need for platforms of knowledge that can engage in connecting the Revelation with deep knowledge about society, namely, the need to correlate the Bahá'í Writings with specialized forms of knowledge such as academic disciplines, practitioner knowledge, and the subordinate knowledge of marginalized cultures. In conclusion, these epistemological issues, and this likely applies to all the major issues now facing humanity, require platforms of knowledge that would correspond to phase two of Sabet's model.

As Haleh Arbab has shown, the Bahá'í community has already developed a remarkable knowledge architecture that stretches from the local to the global alongside three dimensions. Learning about growth, entry by troops and how to build and expand Bahá'í communities [which, according to Haleh Arbab (4), represents the "first priority" of the Bahá'í community] gives us the first dimension. The second dimension is one of learning about social and economic development through a process of increasing universal participation in which "the people themselves" … "promote and systematize their own learning" (6). Finally, the third dimension consists of learning how to influence contemporary discourses and how to participate in social discourses through "the use of rigorous and formal methodologies appropriate to the fields [of study or practice] themselves" (10). The learning in these three areas is described by both Haleh Arbab and Paul Lample (*Revelation & Social Reality* 153) as constituting a "culture of learning" currently being developed in the Bahá'í community.

The question is how to clarify, strengthen and elevate the substance, the spirit, the knowledge that flows through this knowledge architecture, or through this "culture of learning", or otherwise put, how to develop its overall conceptual framework that guides all operations: "a matrix that organizes thought and gives shape to activities and which becomes more elaborate as experience accumulates" (UHJ, 24 Jul. 2013 2). "It would be fruitful" the Universal House of Justice tells us "if the elements of this framework most relevant to the work of the Associations for Bahá'í Studies can be consciously and progressively clarified". It is clear here that those involved in Bahá'í scholarship or ABS activities are invited to connect this overall conceptual framework with their discipline of study or area of expertise. However, it must be noted that the overall conceptual framework discussed here has always been very much connected with the notion of a conceptual framework for the field of Bahá'í inspired education, for the field of Bahá'í inspired development, and for the domain of

religion as a force for civilization-building. This is normal because a conceptual framework cannot materialize from the thin air, it must have a foundation in several, and eventually, in all, of the academic disciplines, even when derived from the nucleus of a divine Revelation. While this poses a demanding challenge for any type of researcher - that of connecting the overall conceptual framework that guides the current Bahá'í platform (or architecture) of knowledge with the conceptual framework of their Bahá'í inspired field of study - this challenge is paramount for educationalists (since it is partly from within the fields of education and education for development that much of the current overall conceptual framework has risen).

For any Bahá'í scholar or knowledge participant, the nature of their academic field becomes, therefore, of huge concern. Through this challenge or new objective, therefore, academic discourses become one of the key engines propelling the "culture of learning" and the advancement of civilization. Paul Lample seems to describe this process when he states the following:

Bahá'í scholarly activity is vital to the progress of the Faith and its engagement with the wider society. The fruits, however, will only be abundantly realized as the culture of learning that is beginning to emerge in the fields of teaching and development also takes root in such efforts. … This culture of learning will be characterized by error and achievement and by periods of ambiguity or of a consensus punctuated by valuable new insights. In a culture of learning, Bahá'í specialists will find personal fulfillment in their chosen discipline and will contribute their share to the progress of the Cause and society. (*Revelation & Social Reality* 153)

This article has argued that a degree of ambiguity is present in our current activities because of being caught up in a transition from phase one to phase two. However, I would like to suggest that another current area of ambiguity (maybe derived from the first) is that of the relationship between academic discourses and social discourses. This is a theme that I think is likely to receive much consideration in the immediate future, but also, an area that I hope we will be able to clarify very soon.

One potentially valuable way of thinking about participation between these (and other) significant discourses of society has been highlighted to me by Ismael Velasco. He observed that Ruhi Book 14 Unit 1 describes participation in the prevalent discourses of society as the extension of that "capacity to enter into uplifting and meaningful conversations with others", which Ruhi participants have to gradually develop through the sequence of the Ruhi books. What I personally take from this is a much simpler vision. Each one of us has the potential to identify unique meanings in the Writings. Bahá'ís are expected to study their own Writings and expand that process of learning to those around that might have a genuine interest in the messages conveyed. This can happen at different levels of complexity, in different types of activities, and in different social spaces. While one might start with only the Sacred Writings, or only the Ruhi books (which are the more accessible platform), once the function of conversation is applied to a social space, that space can become one of collective learning. Initially, that space might be one of sharing our different personal understandings of spirituality or religion and/or a basic induction into what the key Bahá'í principles are and what is expected of a Bahá'í participating in Bahá'í community life. As often is the case, those spaces might become spaces in which individual and direct mass teaching are being explored in various ways. Or, they might primarily become spaces engaged with how to resolve particular social-economic issues (social development), address issues of social justice, or develop participation in academic and public discourses. At the most basic level,

all such spaces require developing trustworthy relationships and friendships across diverse social markers (class, gender, race, nationality, religion, political orientation, sexual orientation etc.) What is significant is that in all such conversations the need to go at a deeper level in order to find answers to more complex questions eventually manifests itself.

It can also happen that, in particular moments, the issue of how to apply the Bahá'í teachings to the current issues of society might become a fundamental concern that transcends the collective knowledge we have at our immediate disposal. At such points in our educational journey, we either expand our knowledge by ourselves (with whatever inquiry or research tools and virtues we have) and/or we call on the experts, the learned, the intellectuals, the elderly and the wise (songs, books, articles, presentations, documentaries, etc.) – whoever and whatever we think might be of assistance. When and if we choose to respond in this manner, the study of the Bahá'í Revelation begins to be grounded in Bahá'í scholarship and in the academic disciplines, in practitioner knowledge and in the subordinated knowledges of marginalized groups.

Every Bahá'í (or independent investigator of the Bahá'í Revelation) is a truth-seeker on this path of knowledge, and in this sense, every Bahá'í (or seeker) reaches at some point the need to anchor their spirituality and discourse at a deeper level, that is, within the study of the academic disciplines[32]. However, this process is a contingent process solely shaped by the gaps in our former education and in our previous collective insights. Science and religion could walk together from the very beginning of the process of search, and not meet each other somewhere in the later phases of the process, or at the very end. But until the

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[32] "His secretary wrote, on another occasion, that: Shoghi Effendi has for years urged the Bahá'ís (who asked his advice, and in general also) to study history, economics, sociology, etc., in order to be au courant with all the progressive movements and thoughts being put forth today, and so that they could correlate these to the Bahá'í teachings. What he wants the Bahá'ís to do is to study more, not to study less. The more general knowledge, scientific and otherwise, they possess, the better. Likewise he is constantly urging them to really study the Bahá'í teachings more deeply". (Shoghi Effendi, qtd. in UHJ, 19 Oct. 1993 1-2)

fundamental fragmentation of our educational cultures and the divide between science and religion are not addressed at a deeper level, we cannnot progress enough to envisage the future knowledge platforms that could meet such a task.

At the same time, however, we cannot simply wait for expertise to develop only from action at the grassroots level. The strength of conceptual frameworks also relies on theory. The moment we say 'conceptual framework', we step into the realm of theory, the building of models, and the design of systems, and it is here that the academic disciplines have most to offer, in addition to the many lessons on what works, what does not, and what limitations any choice of model entails. Obviously, it wouldn't be extremely useful to have Bahá'í social discourses that are not anchored[33] in academic discourses, Bahá'í scholarship, practitioner knowledge, and the subordinated knowledges of marginalized groups (although I am not denying that such a phase might for a short time be necessary in the early stages). It is also clear that there is more to social discourses than academic discourses, and that every Bahá'í is a truth-seeker that has something unique to offer and which must be allowed the opportunity to participate in the generation of knowledge. There is also great potential in activating a learning community in which all are engaged in more and more complex conversations and in exploring their spirituality. The spiritualization of a community is one of the most complex tasks in the arena of knowledge. The progress of a learning community, however, depends on two elements:

1) on how deep the knowledge of the Revelation and of the academic disciplines that gets inserted into this common space is, and

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[33] It is important here to remark that I have used the word 'anchored' and not 'centered'. Anybody can attempt to anchor their discourse in academic knowledge; to center it within academic knowledge is too complex and prohibitive a task for the transitional phase we are in as a learning community. An argument can also be made that the academic disciplines also have to undergo transformation and re-assessment in light of the Revelation and of an integrated perspective on all knowledge, before our social discourses can be centered in them.

2) on how inducive of creativity, experimentation, and innovation in both thought and practice such a common learning space is allowed to be.

For the future, then, the question would seem to be not so much one of how to develop spirituality and a Bahá'í identity and then ground it in academic knowledge once more complex needs arise, but rather, one of how to develop spirituality and knowledge of the academic disciplines at the same time in every truth-seeker and then exponentially increase that capacity through the complex interactions of a global learning community in action. Although this is truly a problem for the lifelong curricula of the future, certain innovations can be done now so that knowledge from the academic fields is gradually allowed to circulate more and more through the knowledge architecture of the Bahá'í community without overwhelming any of the participants. At the institutional level, the expansion of the Associations for Bahá'í Studies in both number and membership, alongside the support given to such institutions to act independently and to pursue research that is focused on the nature of the academic fields and their internal dilemmas, constitutes such a key step. At the individual level, every Bahá'í has an essential role to play in infusing relevant academic or expert knowledge (including practitioner knowledge or the subordinated knowledges of marginalized communities) in all the social spaces or processes we have come to associate with Bahá'í activities and the current 'culture of learning'.

Although we now have in place an architecture or a platform that has set us up as a global learning community, a considerable number of our Bahá'í experts or intellectuals (and also, of practitioners and members of marginalized communities) are still currently disengaged from its processes. It is time to re-connect, re-engage, and bring that experience back into these spaces. At this point in time, even a small contribution in a minimal space or activity (like a question) can connect with and flow through the whole architecture. The issue

that currently hangs in the balance is how we will choose to engage with our current epistemological transition from the phase one to the phase two of Sabet's model (the context is also that of learning how to engage issues of social justice and formulate a global civilization). Transitions are usually painful, and they contain dangers. This is a moment of great importance in the development of any religion. It is my hope, therefore, that those who love the Bahá'í Faith will find it in themselves to overcome any limitations or disappointments and any experience of marginalization they might have previously encountered and that they will return to sharing their creative and authentic understanding of the Bahá'í Revelation in all the social spaces of the Bahá'í community.

    If this article is well-received, the second article in this series will emphasize the complex choices involved in designing phase two platforms of knowledge. This second article will also seek to highlight the current challenges the field of Bahá'í inspired education faces in its transition from the phase one to the phase two of Sabet's model.[34]

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[34] If you want to offer any (positive or negative) feedback to this article, the author can be reached at filipboi@gmail.com .

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