Oppression and Universalism in Selected Palestinian and Baha'i Poetry: A Contrastive Analysis

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Abstract: This article stages a thematic analysis of two literatures in which a comparable experience of dispossession and the life-deranging intrusion of an oppressive Other are represented. They are read in the context of the semi-deterritorialised spaces Palestinians and Baha'is occupy within post-colonial matrices in the Middle East which determine the relationship of each to oppressive regimes of control. The literatures are in large part conditioned by their respective religious and national-secular formations and by the responses they raise to the imposition of othering. At the same time each offers nuanced emphases with regard to the value placed upon sacrifice, resistance and universalist aspirations. Two major poets are focused, one of Baha'i and one of Palestinian heritage. Their experiences fall on different sides of a major fault-line of Middle-Eastern and North American post-colonial cultural politics, but situational exigencies call for each poet to engage with complex evaluation of their backgrounds.

Keywords: resistance; sacrifice; nation; religion; humanism; universalism

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1. Introduction

For both Palestinians and Baha'is there is much that is contingent about their presence in the Middle East, most significantly the position of subordination in which each is placed with regard to the agency of more powerful state actors. Palestinian people existed hundreds of years before the *nakba* of 1948, as did the identifier 'Palestinian' as the designation for the indigenous Arab people of the territory known as Palestine (Kamel 2019, pp.194-8). Increasingly however, 'Palestine' and 'Palestinian' have become bound up with the Zionist creation of a Jewish state on the major part of this territory, and the ensuing emergence of a developed Palestinian national narrative in resistance to occupation (Khalidi 1997). In contrast, an altogether different provenance attaches to the presence of a small number of Baha'is in the State of Israel. The community traces its presence in the Holy Land to events that happened in mid- nineteenth-century Iran, where it remains the largest religious minority (Amanat 2017, p. 786). The Babi movement, started by Ali Muhammad Shirazi known as 'the Bab', was vigorously suppressed. Its founder was executed in 1850 and its leadership largely wiped out after an assassination attempt on Shah Nasir'ud-Din Qajar in 1852. The Ottomans took over responsibility for the remainder of the Babi leadership who arrived in Baghdad the following year. Now calling themselves Baha'is and led by Baha'ullah, they eventually arrived in Akka in 1868.

In both Baha'i and Palestinian dispossession imperial factors held sway. The Ottoman Empire lost its centuries-long possession of greater Syria and the Hijaz to Britain and allied Arab irregulars during the Great War. Control of Palestine was withheld from the indigenous, largely Arab population as a result of a policy decision promulgated by the British Government in the Balfour Declaration of November 1917. Jews were granted rights to settle and expand under the jurisdiction of a League of Nations Mandate for Palestine handed to Great Britain which came into effect in 1923.

Post- Second World War the United States replaced Britain as hegemonic power in the Middle East and assumed the position of the sponsor of Israel. United States' support for

Israel consisted of economic and military assistance including the export of "sophisticated weapons" ensuring her "absolute military superiority" over Arab states and deterrence to their going to war with Israel (Cleveland 2000, p. 345, 366-7). Needless to say this left Palestinians in a severely weakened position.

In the Baha'is case, Iran came to exercise the role of persecutor-in-chief. After the revolution of 1978-9 and the establishment of the Islamic Republic Iran acquired the status of the USA's chief antagonist in the region and intensified its policy of suppression of the Baha'is. The link between Iran-US antagonism and the persecution of the Baha'is in Iran may be said to reside in the argument that Iran's contravention of the human rights of this peaceful non-political religious group underlined Iran's moral and political bankruptcy and bolstered the orientalist association of Islam with intolerance and fanaticism (MacEoin 1988).

Confirming the principle that my enemy's enemy is my friend, Baha'is have often appealed to America on behalf of their brethren in Iran and have established cordial relations with the State of Israel (Geller 2019). However, Baha'is argue that this is no more than being consistent with their religious principle of showing obedience to the government of their country of residence. For their part Palestinians are victims of the proxy (Israel) of the power (USA) which (until recently) has exercised hegemony over the region as a whole. As victims to that hegemonic power's chief adversary in the region (Iran) Baha'is might aspire to be the USA's beneficiary.

There are also other significant differences between Palestinians and Baha'is. As members of a religious community Baha'is, notionally at least, possess a choice in belonging or not belonging. (According to Baha'i tenet individuals should elect to declare their faith at the age of fifteen). Baha'is' presence in Israel today is connected to the fact that historically the holy sites of their faith were located in Palestine. They visit or work in their world center in Haifa either as administrators or pilgrims: For none is Israel their homeland. Iran is the country of birth of hundreds of thousands of their co-believers. However, other than the small number of early exiles to Ottoman terrain, Baha'is have never been deported from Iran though many have felt the need to leave on account of religious persecution.

Far greater in number than Baha'is, nation and place of birth determine Palestinians' identity, a matter in which they had no choice. Historically, dispossession of their homeland affected initially hundreds of thousands, now millions of Palestinians. The international community has thus far failed to recognize their "right of return". For Baha'is, though they have other holy sites in the Middle East to which they at present do not have access, their position in the holy land has been resolved.

It should be added that a third narrative, an Israeli one, forces its way into this discussion of place, one focused symbolically, as Rashid Khalidi points out, around possession of the city of Jerusalem, "the geographical, spiritual, political and administrative center of Palestine" (Khalidi, pp. 13-14). Suffice to say, while Baha'i narrative subordinates that city to a future Haifa-Akka metropolis, the Baha'i holy figures recognized the incoming, or "return" of the varied Jewish peoples as a sign of the Last Day and as one fulfillment of the promise of the Baha'i Revelation (Effendi 1953, p. 52). Therefore Baha'i understanding would appear to align Baha'is and Israelis in that both are confirmed as having a place and therefore a condition of belonging within the holy land. No such dispensation is granted to the indigenous Palestinians despite their having lived in this land for a millennium.

2. The writers and critical analysis.

A few words need to be said about the contrasting beliefs and orientations of the Palestinian and Baha'i writers selected for review. Simply to observe that Palestinian writers comprise Muslims, Christians, Druze or other minorities who are involuntarily forced to adopt personal and political responses to displacement (internal or external) through the loss of their homeland does not exhaust the scope of this literature in my analysis. Palestinian literature is not limited to resistance writing. And while much Baha'i writing engages with expressing religious beliefs and ideas involved with the persecution of their faith, the work of the one major Baha'i writer I shall be analyzing is not limited to these concerns. Comparing

authors who self-identify variously as religious or secular and who articulate similar experiences according to different filtering grids is important, but it does not form the only concern of my article.

The question of "the cause" and its impact upon a writer's individuality is central to the work of Robert Hayden (1913-80) and Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008), the two poets, Baha'i and Palestinian respectively, whose work is specifically addressed in this article. Hayden is the older by more than a generation. His experience as an Afro-American writer involved him in a personal struggle around a developing Black nationalism and his role within it. Hayden's act of joining the Baha'i faith crucially disabled any political inclinations he might previously have entertained, thus presenting his work as an intriguing foil to the national and later transnational imaginings found in Darwish's writings. Darwish's early concern with Arab unity and the right of return developed later into a personal exilic consciousness (Joudah; Mena). The article probes the way each poet developed universalisms (religious and/or humanistic) operating as compensation for the disorderly reality they inhabited, and discusses articulation of goals of reconciliation and restitution of loss.

The critical analytical perspective I adopt in this article is one in which political consciousness and themes of exile in Darwish's work are read through the lens of Hayden's poetry. There are important reasons for so doing. I hope this method will both elucidate the political and humanist commitments of Darwish's poetry and provide a contrast to the religious framework that is strategically embedded in a key cluster of Hayden's poems. It will be apparent that the perspective I adopt is a critical humanist one, and that my argument focuses a potential disconnection between human rights and religion, where a belief system prioritizes a teleological narrative above the suffering of specific groups of human beings.

3. Baha'is and Palestinians: A case of opposing politics?

A tiny religious community practicing political neutrality which had very good relations with the government of the British Mandate in Palestine, the Baha'is cannot be said to be entirely detached from the outcome of what Israelis would call their "War of Independence" (Britannica, "Arab-Israeli Wars"). Baha'ullah arrived in the territory of Palestine eighty years before the creation of the State of Israel. He had been forced to change his location of exile from Edirne in European Turkey to Akka to where he and his party were trans-shipped via Alexandria and Port Said, stopping off briefly for a few hours in Jaffa and Haifa. According to Baha'i historian, Hasan Balyuzi: "Akka's principle importance to the Turkish Empire was that it acted as a prison-city for criminals and political prisoners" (Balyuzi 1980, p.274). Baha'ullah was imprisoned together with his family and closest supporters in the citadel but was eventually emancipated and died in the mansion of Bahji near Akka in 1892. From the low point of their arrival in Palestine, by the time Allenby's Egyptian Army entered Jerusalem in late 1917 Baha'i prestige had risen, largely owing to the eminence of Baha'ullah's eldest son and successor Abbas Effendi, (Abdu'l-Baha) who developed good relations with the authorities in Akka and Haifa under both Ottoman and British administration. However, the fact that Muslim rulers and more to the point Muslim *mujtahids* in Iran had repressed the Baha'i leaders and persecuted their followers caused many Baha'is to believe that Muslims in general were enemies of their faith. Though not a view promoted by Abdu'l-Baha, this was amplified under the leadership of Shoghi Effendi Rabbani who as Guardian (*wali*) of the Baha'i faith succeeded his grandfather in 1921. He placed emphasis on wide acceptance of the faith as an independent religion separate from Islam (Effendi 1957, pp. 365-71).

This new orientation was crystallized in a situation in 1944 in which one of Abdu'l-Baha's grandsons, Munib Shahid, married according to Muslim rites into the al-Husayni family. The Guardian saw fit to denounce his marriage to "the daughter of a political exile who is nephew of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem" as "this treacherous act of alliance with *enemies of the Faith* [which] merits condemnation of [the] entire Baha'i world" (*Baha'i News* 1944; italics added). According to Shoghi Effendi's wife Ruhiyyih Khanum (née Mary Maxwell) the Grand Mufti Haj Amin al-Husayni "who was actively engaged in Arab politics

… [was] the avowed enemy of the Guardian", a judgment forcibly reiterated in her biography of her husband in the context of the Mufti being a friend of the Nazis. It is implied that he would have neutralized the Baha'i leader and destroyed the Baha'i presence in Palestine had Germany won the Second World War[1] (Khanum 1969, p. 180).

To be fair, among the al-Husaynis, one of the major Palestinian families of notables, some were initially well-disposed toward and had good relations with British officials and individuals sympathetic to the Arabs. Early in his career as Mufti Haj Amin had fostered close friendships with British political officer, artist and tile-maker George Richmond (Tonnies, forthcoming). Jamal al-Husayni, who led the Arab Party and played a prominent role in the Arab Revolt of 1936, was not initially anti-British either (Kanafani 1972). That his relative the Grand Mufti Haj Amin did become a vehement antagonist of Great Britain was to be expected of a leader who saw his country being delivered to an alien interloper movement with no redress. Ironically, in the late 1920s and 30s Shoghi Effendi had been an admirer of Reza Shah, the ruler of Iran, who together with many members of Iranian high society favored the Nazis (Nash 2022, ch.6). In other words, seen through the eyes of people in power at the Baha'i Center in Palestine the politics of the period pitted Baha'is and Arab Palestinians on different sides. In future years in retrospect this came to be symbolized by the public ceremony of 1920 in which Abdu'l-Baha was invested as Sir Abdu'l-Baha by the British.

Support for Palestine as the home of the Jews promised in the Bible emanated from Baha'i sources in piecemeal more than a decade before the Balfour Declaration. It was mentioned in talks Abdu'l-Baha gave to Christian and Jewish pilgrims to Akka who received the news enthusiastically. By the 1950s, according to Israeli historian R.S. Geller: "While Israel was threatened by its Arab neighbors with a new round of fighting to settle the score from the 1948 War in their favour, high-ranking Baha'i officials did everything they could to let state authorities know they supported and celebrated the birth of the Jewish state" (Geller 2019, p. 408. Geller singles out among others Shoghi Effendi's wife Mary Maxwell and Baha'i International Council member Lawrence Hautz).

According to Geller the most enthusiastic Baha'i support for Israel came from those of North American background occupying high positions at the Baha'i World Center in Haifa. Current in the 1950s this state of affairs continued well into the later twentieth century. On the opposite side, in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution the government of the Islamic Republic repeatedly charged Baha'is with being agents of Israel, and this appeared in the indictments of entirely innocent people executed in Iran. The hard-line faction that continues to control Iran's oft-proclaimed support for the cause of Palestine has purposely accentuated the notion of a conflicting ideology separating Baha'is and Palestinians. In short, on both sides unfortunate political and religious positioning has created an opposition between two movements that might otherwise be said to have life-changing oppressive treatment in common.

4. Baha'i poetics: the Beloved and the cult of martyrdom

Baha'is are by definition believers in the religion created by Baha'ullah; the existence of such a thing as "Baha'i literature" where this concerns writing governed by a literary aesthetic connected to Baha'i is officially considered premature though practice of the arts in general is encouraged. However, it is fair to say that writing by Baha'i individuals whether falling under the remit of what is more generally categorized as creative writing, or where its purpose may be purely expository in nature, is invariably viewed as subordinate to a faith-centered imperative. A Wikipedia entry under the heading "Baha'i literature", which has the stamp and tone of an official Baha'i source, states that it "covers a variety of topics and forms, including scripture and inspiration, interpretation, history and biography, introduction and study materials, and apologia. Sometimes considerable overlap between these forms can be observed in a particular text"[2] (Baha'i Literature; underlining in text). Writing issuing from Baha'is is therefore geared toward delivering the Baha'i message. It will be in tune with and expressive of the accepted notions concerning the faith's history, teachings, and proselytizing mission. Such a predication and delimiting of a corpus of writing seems to me to present a

priori difficulties on a number of fronts. Those readers who do not share its confessional orientations may find the didacticism unattractive. If they wish to adjudge it by some set of aesthetic criteria separate to religious doctrine they may feel frustrated. Nevertheless, as I shall show below, Baha'is do employ a specific poetics, even if it is a borrowed one which is not uniquely their own.

Baha'is popularly have valorized and attempted to write poetry in an idiom linked to mystical Persian literature, in mimicry of the forms of discourse they encounter in Baha'i scripture where the trope of love for the Beloved is ubiquitously employed and to which the motif of sacrifice is inextricably linked (Gail 1968). Following the example of Shoghi Effendi's histories of the faith exemplars are invoked who were prominent in the heroic age of the faith. For example, on the principle that appropriates Babism to the "Baha'i Revelation" (i.e. where the Babi religion is believed to be the forerunner to the Baha'i faith) Baha'is lay claim to the famed female Babi leader and poet Tahirih, otherwise known as Qurratul Ayn.[3] Her death by strangulation and the execution of Haji Sulayman Khan, known as one of the "Seven martyrs of Tehran" in the 1852 mass killing of Babis, embody ideals of sacrifice and martyrdom that historically underpin Baha'i attitudes toward nineteenth- and twentieth-century Iran. "Persian poetry was an ideal instrument for expressing religious ideas", as seen in Khan's death: "his body had been pierced with wounds into which lighted candles had been inserted, [he] was mockingly ordered by his executioners to dance. He immediately recited a verse from the great Persian mystic, Jalal ad-Din Rumi: 'In one hand the wine-cup, in the other, the tress of the Beloved… Such a dance in the midst of the market-place is my desire'" (Mottahadeh 1967, p.51).

A small number of celebrated poets writing in Persian were also Baha'is. Na'im, well known in the late- nineteenth/early- twentieth century was originally a pious Shi'i. "His greatest pleasure was in composing the short and often amatory poems of the kind called in Persian 'ghazal'." After accepting Baha'ullah as the "Return of [Imam] Husayn" he was imprisoned in Isfahan and had all his property confiscated (Mottaheddeh, pp. 48-49). Although he did not - to employ a formulaic expression much used in Baha'i literature - "quaff the cup of martyrdom", his poetry followed the pattern of expressing love of the Beloved and in his life he aspired to practice self-effacement and sacrifice. In his *Literary History of Persia* E.G. Browne printed a long poem by Na'im celebrating the appearance of Baha'ullah's faith and those willing to suffer and die for it.

> see a people contentedly suffering exile from their native land!
> Behold a party all slain eagerly and joyfully; behold a throng all
> imprisoned with alacrity and delight;
> A whole series [of victims] voluntarily enduring various torments;
> a whole class by natural inclination [involved] in afflictions of
> every kind;
> All intoxicated and singing songs, but not from wine; all self-
> effaced and dissipated, but not from opium! (Browne 1959, p. 213)

The period of Iranian history (1844-1852) in which Babi activism emerged has attracted various interpretations, too complex to rehearse here. Suffice to say for Baha'is, the entire episode in which Babi missionaries, raising the black standard to announce the expected Qa'im-Mahdi, crossed Iran on horseback to proclaim his presence, would be an authentic starting point of a narratology of Baha'i discourse. Shoghi Effendi attributed foundational significance to Babi theological-students to whom he awarded the sobriquet "God-intoxicated heroes" (Effendi, 1957, p. 3). Though armed, the Babis are believed to have sacrificed themselves in an ecstasy of heroic pacifism. Baha'i narrative describes their sacrifice in terms that strongly recall Shi'i devotional motifs mobilized in recounting the sacrificial death of Imam Husayn and his family. The idiom is also found in Persian mystical expression:

Arberry refers to the third-century Persian Bayazid (d. 261 A.H) as the "first of the 'intoxicated' Sufis" (Arberry 1979, p. 60).

Baha'is and Shi'a Muslims share the same idiom of martyrdom and sacrifice and it is important to emphasize the point that the former uphold the view that they have been persecuted by the latter because of their belief that the Bab and Baha'ullah constituted the fulfillment of the messianic promise of Shi'ism. The Bab in particular was the return of the Imam-Mahdi prophesied in Shi'i eschatology. In the period of renewed persecution which occurred early on under the Islamic Republic Baha'i literature giving expression to the poetics of sacrifice and martyrdom in the name of the Beloved acquired renewed resonance. "Tribute" is a short lyrical-narrative poem translated from Persian by Hushmand Fatheazam, and published in 1986 in a collection titled, *Abiding Silence: An Anthology of Poems in Honour of the Baha'is of Iran*. In the poem a fellow cell-mate writes about a Baha'i woman prisoner who had achieved her desired martyrdom:

You looked at the door of the cell
in a strange way, as though
someone called you from heaven.
I saw in your gaze the look of a
Fulfilled and proud lover.
…
How well you knew that to take wing
is the best way to go home.
…
You are a proud eagle. My heart is a captive bird. (Sabri 1986, pp.7-8)

Popular poetry written by Baha'i western converts which can be found in publications such as the anthology cited above, draws strongly on the Persian idioms of martyrdom. Few of these poets have achieved renown except perhaps the Canadian Roger White (1929-1993) (Weinberg 1997). In English language poems written by such converts these conventions, particularly the motif of heroic sacrifice frequently recur. The result can be an unhappy amalgam of dreamy anemic surrender in which faith is distilled into other-worldly absence. In "A Crimson Rain", a poem by White about an episode during the Babi insurgency when missionaries were besieged in the fort of Shaykh Tabarsi, north-west Iran, the speaker cradles his martyred "friend" who is no fighter but a religious scholar of self-sacrificial character. His paleness suggests both the deposed Christ and perhaps also an unintended allusion to Swinburne's "Galilean" conqueror:

How young, how pale he is!
This pallor is not earned by dissipation.
What had this sheltered scholar need know
of soldiering or death?
It was no feat to kill him.
What resistance might this frail vessel offer
or rage this bosom store? That delicate
shattered cage held no aptitude for hate. (White 1979, p.80)

Drawing on the classic precedent of Sulayman Khan and of the executed woman prisoner in "Tribute", the convention in such poetry is to adhere to the axiom that desire for the Beloved creates a form of intoxication that frees the subject from the pain of the material world and facilitates their journey to the next world and meeting with the Beloved. This could be compared to, though it predates, the recent vogue for Rumi's poetry, dubbed by one critic

"the Rumi Phenomenon" (El-Zein 2010). Baha'is, whether eastern or western, have however mainly remained inured to such trends.

In contrast to the modern poetry discussed above (which like all Baha'i literature had to pass through the Baha'i organization's process of internal review) an article entitled "Resistance, Resilience and the Role of Narrative: Lessons from the Experiences of Iranian Baha'i Women Prisoners" is presented in the format of an academic paper and employs a register accented somewhat differently to present the sufferings of Baha'i women imprisoned at the hands of the Islamic Republic. Constructed around interviews with former prisoners it also includes extracts from memoirs, and oral and written testimonies on personal suffering sometimes relating to the execution of male loved ones. These are prefaced by tributes to traditional Baha'i exemplars and heroines Quarratul Ayn and Bahiyyih Khanum (Abdu'l-Baha's sister). In addition, several forms of resistance are presented, such as courageous verbal addresses delivered to hostile authority figures within the jail, as well as ones taking an internalized form. These behaviors by Baha'i prisoners are perhaps not unusual in themselves; however, the emphasis on resistance provided by the commentary is something of a point of departure: "The fact that these women continued to hold fast to their beliefs in prison may be seen, in and of itself, as a form of resistance. This resistance did not end upon their release from prison" (Hakimian 2004, p.46). We might point out that response to persecution in terms of resistance is a departure from the usual in devotionally-oriented Baha'i literature, especially prayer, where the word "steadfastness" rather than resistance even of a non-violent kind is the norm.

5. Robert Hayden: the poet, racial politics, and the Baha'i faith

For a small community like the Baha'i community to produce noted literary figures is a challenge and thus far outside of Iran they have been able to lay claim to just one: Afro-American poet Robert Hayden, who after many years in obscurity rose to the position of poetry consultant to the Library of Congress and also filled the role of poetry editor of the Baha'i magazine *World Order*. His work explores his personal orientation toward the subjects of race, Black history and religious faith, and registers a struggle to retain his identity as a poet against demands that he align himself against American racial politics. On the other hand a Baha'i dimension has also been claimed for his poetry (Hatcher 1984; Smith 2010). While themes of sacrifice belonging to the discrete field of Baha'i literature with its Persian mystical tropes feature in a small number of Hayden's poems, on their own they barely register. If we are to assess the degree to which his poetry embodies a Baha'i orientation it will be seen in the underlying teleological order it brings to a highly personal vision of a world of disorder, violence and injustice.

Brought up by poor working-class foster parents in Detroit and officially registered blind, Hayden was socially conscious and sympathetic to ideas of Afro-American struggle. His foster mother "regaled Robert with Afro-American folktales, stories of Southern racial atrocities and her own Post-Civil War experiences, when she was a chambermaid on Ohio River steamers." However Hayden's birth mother Gladys Finn was of mixed racial ancestry and her influence led to him feeling a cut above the ghetto by showing him glimpses of culture and refinement which played a part in putting his life on a track that would later lead to a less ethnically-centered view of art than that espoused by many black artists.

> … Hayden was deeply affected by the fact that his real mother looked white. He was also impressed by her accounts of her marriage to a man who looked white. His concern with racial appearance was thus awakened. He asserted, for example, that he was almost as fair as his white playmates. One can imagine the effect of such preoccupations on a young boy (Williams 1981, pp.11-12).

At his most ideological in the 1930s while he was working as part of the Federal Writers Project, strains of socialistic commitment show through Hayden's first collection of poems, *Heart-Shape in the Dust*, "almost half [of which] acknowledge race in one form or another"

(Rampersad 2013, p.204). Although Hayden did not favor his early poetry he is recognized for inscribing a handful of later poems evincing a complex awareness of Black history "saturated in nationalistic lore…still maintain[ing] [an] independent vision" (Rampersad 2013, pp.199-200). Collectively "Middle Passage", "Ballad of Nat Turner", "Runagate Runagate", "O Daedulus, Fly Away Home", and "Frederick Douglass", form an epitome of the historical Black experience of slavery. The debate over Hayden's allegiances nonetheless continues to this day: whether he was most articulate as an Afro-American or "saw himself, in his central identity, as an American poet" (Rampersad, p. 212); and whether "his writing is an extension, fully and totally, of his commitment to the Baha'i faith" (Betts 2013, p. xvii).

Williams argues that at high school Hayden reacted against "black literary iconoclasm" and this eventuated later in "his acceptance of craftsmanship and artistic freedom, and his wish, in his own words, for 'acceptance as a writer . . . not as ... [a writer] with a particular racial identity'" (Williams, p.15). Though he read his poems to the John Reed Club he retained his independence from the party line (Hatcher 1984, p.13). Hayden's instinct to nurture himself in the role of individual poet and eschew pressure on him to represent a Black cause led him to move beyond politics toward commitment to art, aided by his wife, Erma Inez Morris, who came from a middle-class American family. It was Erma who introduced him to the Baha'i faith to which, leaving the Black southern Baptist religion of his childhood, he converted in 1940.Thereafter Hayden would distance himself from African-American cultural nationalism.

In contrast to Hayden's early-phase immersion in the work of poets of the Harlem Renaissance, particularly Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes, by intertextual emulation of the modernism of poets W.B. Yeats and T.E. Eliot and following advice personally given him by W.H. Auden, the maturing Hayden cultivated a modernist style. Befittingly the vernacular of Hayden's early poetry is replaced by a terse prosody employing often impenetrable symbols. When he continued to use Black vernacular speech this was more a mimetic tool than an invocation of Black identity. His assumed self-identity of connection to the elite of modern poetry should not be dissociated from his conversion to the Baha'i faith. On the contrary, in addition to affording consolation to the painful awareness of violence and discrimination registered in his own poetry, Baha'i religious teleology and aloofness from political issues of the day helped him construct a "universal" frame. In Rosey Pool's words, their religion "effectively prohibits Baha'is from aligning themselves with a divisive cause or in seeing their identity as being anything less than a 'world citizen'" (Hatcher, p.79). This standpoint strengthened Hayden's intellectual predilections and personal inclination to be recognized as an elite poet.

The analysis built up below will probe the significance of the Baha'i element in Hayden's poetry which is central to the main focus of this article. I certainly take seriously the argument set forth in John Hatcher's monograph, *From the Auroral Darkness: The Life and Poetry of Robert Hayden*, for a Baha'i frame of reference in his poetry, seeing the volumes he published over his lifetime as "separate … parts of one *magnus opus* whose structure and meaning takes its overall significance from Hayden's beliefs as a Baha'i" (Hatcher, pp.93-4). Following this up at a micro level I shall look at the select group of Hayden poems which contain obvious Baha'i tropes, reading these alongside others that also embrace the topoi of suffering, persecution, and the faith he entertained in a scheme of universal redemption.

From Hayden's mature poetry it is clear he was successful in assimilating the Afro-American heritage of slavery to Babi-Baha'i martyrdom and the Holocaust. In "Dawnbreaker", he invokes and pays homage to the Rumi-reciting Babi martyr of Tehran:

Ablaze
with candles sconced
in weeping eyes
of wounds,

He danced
through jeering streets
to death; oh sang…. (Hayden 2013, p. 8)

Evidence of Hayden's translation of the jeered at and mocked Babi saint into his canonical evocations of African slavery can be seen in the poem "Middle Passage". Here the exuberant image of the slaves bounding overboard embracing their deaths with joy in part dissolves the apocalyptic nightmare co-joining slaves and slaver,

"Lost this morning leaped with crazy laughter
to the waiting sharks, sang as they went under." (p.48)

The vision of evil widened to take in Hayden's assimilation of the victims of the Holocaust (making him one of a tiny number of Baha'is who comprehend the Shoah within the series of events set in train by the revelation of Baha'ullah.) His poem "Belsen, Liberation Day" is among a group of poems he contributed to Rosey Pool's anthology of Black American poets, *Beyond the Blues*. A Dutch Jewish concentration camp escapee "who used her position as a 'Caucasian' woman from the old continent to create more respect for Black poetry and thereby Black culture" (Geerlings 2020, p.117), Pool had once been a Leftist activist but like Hayden relinquished her politically oriented past and became a Baha'i. In "From the Corpse Woodpiles, from the Ashes" the mass murder of Jews evokes in him memories of childhood Jewish friends and is linked to Baha'ullah's suffering in the *Siyah Chal* (black pit) in Tehran where he was briefly incarcerated in 1852:

that cold cloacal cell
where He, who is man beatified
And Godly mystery
lies chained, His pain
our anguish and our anodyne. (p.46)

The poem's companion piece, "Baha'u'llah in the Garden of Ridwan" extends the image of the God-man, whose Passion extended across his adult lifetime, as the "Eternal exile, whose return/ epiphanies repeatedly foretell" creating "…Energies/like angels dance" and "Glorias of recognition". (p.47) According to Hatcher, referring to "images of evil" in Hayden's poems ranging across the Holocaust, apartheid in South Africa and the Korean War, "allusions to the suffering of Baha'u'llah and the incipience of the Baha'i Revelation give solace and meaning to these previous images"(Hatcher, p.120).

Further correspondence between Black history and Hayden's Baha'i axioms has been drawn from his portrayal of Frederick Douglass and the other figures in the Black history poems which Hatcher sees as part of a struggle for identity in which "figuratively these poems become a symbol of human progress towards an ever-more expansive understanding of the identity and purpose of humankind." (Hatcher, p.139) Rather than Hayden it may be the Baha'i critic here who is indulging in smoothing over the horrors of slavery whereby the "middle journey implies the middle or transitional stage in the progress of the speaker, of Afro-American people, and ultimately of mankind upon the shores of physical reality and history." (Hatcher, p.140) The same critic's reading of the cryptic and troubling poem about the leader of the first Black American slave revolt, "The Ballad of Nat Turner", recalls Baha'i revisionist readings of Babi "extremism". In comparison with Douglass' status as "a model for human transcendence", an exemplar of "that evolved condition", "the final symbol of a man grown beyond the bounds of a single culture to represent the limitless possibilities of human ascent", Turner is reproved for staging "a misguided aspiration toward freedom" that ends "in disastrous bloodshed". (Hatcher, pp.140-42)

To what extent the reader believes Hatcher's claim that Hayden bought into such teleological thinking may well affect their appraisal of some of his work. Hatcher summarized the Baha'i doctrine of "progressive revelation" as preordaining mankind's spiritual and material development through a series of "divinely guided Prophets…figures such as Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muhammad and, more recently, Baha'u'llah." Each figure brings teachings tailored to the age in which they appear. "In this sense history is cyclical; dispensations succeed as one day follows another." (Hatcher, p.160)

From an empiricist viewpoint Isaiah Berlin critiqued schemes of progress that posit the inevitable triumph of one predestined cause, where a "historical explanation, like every other form of explanation, must consist, above all, in the attribution to individuals, groups and nations, species, of their proper place in the universal pattern." (Berlin 1974, p.161) More specifically, Ernest Gellner questioned: "the attempt to base moral values on the alleged direction or destination of the historical process…just what timescale are we to employ to discern our winner?" (Gellner 1964, p.21)

Key to Hayden's distancing of himself from the calamities of the world of his time and of the age of modernity stretching back to the seventeenth century, especially the evils inflicted on his own people, was this "Baha'i concept of history as the purposeful education of man on this planet."(Hatcher p.160) In the painful decade for Americans that was the 1960s, when race wars raged in the country and its troops became deeply engaged in full-scale military action in Vietnam, Hayden turned to the Baha'i historical schema. Adopting a persona, "this Baha'i voice", enabled him to situate and console himself: "immersed in the throes of violent change, intellectually aware of the ultimately propitious direction of history, but feeling, nevertheless, the legitimacy of grief in this time of mankind's mourning," Hatcher, p. 161). The "Baha'i voice" is apparent in *Words in the Mourning Time* (1970), especially in the poem of the same name which is the collection's centerpiece. Beginning with the deaths of John Kennedy and Martin Luther King, the poem moves through an apocalyptic vision of the "brutalized killing" in Vietnam, from all the suffering straining out the message

> We must not be frightened nor cajoled
> into accepting evil as deliverance from evil.
> We must go on struggling to be human
> ….
> Reclaim now, now renew the vision of
> of a human world where godliness
> is possible…
> ….
> …man
> permitted to be man. (p.98)

The balance here is Baha'ullah, to whom Hayden addresses (in section x) a credo containing the phrase "I bear Him witness now" operating as refrain. The Baha'i prophet is acclaimed as "Logos, poet, cosmic hero, surgeon, architect/of our hope of peace" reiterating, perhaps more powerfully than in any of the poems by Baha'is discussed earlier, the poet's recognition of his Beloved (p.99).

Though committed and didactic, Hayden's high-register "Baha'i voice" is not altogether dissimilar to Eliot's at its most mandarin declaiming on the apocalypse of modern civilization. When a poet structures religion into his work as the ideal order that makes right all the disasters of the disorderly reality of the mundane world, he asks us once again to consider the recurring question of "the cause" and its function within art. Although Hayden's ostensible reason – the one he invariably gave in interviews - was that he did not wish to be associated with Black poetry because he wished to be judged as an American poet, Hayden's refusal to act as a spokesperson for the Black cause could equally have been due to its being subsumed by his commitment to the Baha'i Cause. Like the colorful Rosey Pool, who a friend

remembered as "in all matters, sceptical" (Geerlings, p.119), Hayden found it necessary to erase the limited and particular in order to place himself on the side of God's plan for universal history.

Though he only sparely articulated the Beloved and cult of martyrdom topoi found typically in popular Baha'i devotional poetry, Hayden drew on and extrapolated from contexts of African slavery, Babi martyrdom, Baha'ullah's vicariously sacrificial messianic role, the Holocaust, and other atrocities of the time as subjects by which to embody themes of suffering, sacrifice and redemption. Not all of his poems are historicized via a religious schema however. "Hayden's poetry passionately evokes the historic plight of the black man in America" (Williams, p.18). In aesthetic terms the voice that interrogates oppression most effectively does so by adopting the standpoint of its victims rather than pulling off into the realm of theology. This can most movingly be heard in the mourning incremental refrain to "O Daedulus, Fly Away Home":

> Night is an African juju man
> weaving a wish and a weariness together
> to make two wings
> *O fly away home fly away.* (Hayden, p.55)

The affect may partially account for Reginald Dwayne Betts' pained riposte: "reducing Hayden to the poet of the Baha'i faith, ignores his significant contributions to the idea of what it means to be human and all the historical pains we have gone through to understand it." (Betts, p.xvii) And yet during his advancing, ultimately terminal cancer the Baha'i narrative seeped almost literally into Hayden's bones, when he wrote: "As my blood was drawn,/as my bones were scanned,/the People of Bahá/were savaged were slain;" (Hayden, p.176).

6. Writing Palestinian experience

The direction taken by Robert Hayden in dissociating himself from the Black movement by whose radical members he was confronted on university platforms in the 1960s, was doubtless necessary for him to evolve as the poet he wanted to be. In Israel during this period Palestinians were referred to not as Palestinians but "Arabs". "Palestinian identity… never…enjoyed such success [as the Zionist political project]…even for recognition as a category of being [as evidenced by] Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir's widely disseminated dismissive remark that 'There was no such thing as Palestinians'." (Khalidi, p. 147) For obvious reasons the freedom to develop as an "Arab writer" in Israel was more complex and pressured than being a black one in America.

Writing about the effect of the *Nakba* on the Arab writer of prose fiction, Edward Said argued:

> …nothing in his history, that is, in the repertory or vocabulary provided for him by his historical experience, gave him an adequate method for representing the drama to himself. Arab nationalism, Islamic traditionalism, regional creeds, small-scale communal or village solidarities – all these stopped short of the general result of Zionist success and the particular experience of Arab defeat (Said 2001, p.46).

The impact of this defeat fell heaviest, of course, on the ones whose homeland had been occupied and who in many cases had been forced to leave it. "Stricken by their incredible losses, stunned by the failure of the Arab armies, the Palestinians found themselves transformed from a sixty-nine per cent majority in their own country into a series of minorities scattered through several states, separated from one another, and from Israeli-held Palestine" (Sayigh 1979, pp. 98-9). Such was the predicament Palestinian writing was forced to address as a result of the events of 1948. "Understanding the forces that informed

Palestinian writers" is vital because "Palestinian literature is at the heart of the Palestinian struggle" (Mir 2013, p.110).

In contrast to Baha'is, Palestinians are not persecuted for religious reasons, but because they exist in a specific geographical location at a specific point of political time. Palestinians writers were writing inside Israel as well as in exile in Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Egypt. Writing in the 1970s political activist Ghassan Kanafani coined the term "resistance literature" (*adab al-muqawama*), his own contribution to the genre is seen in his novella *Men in the Sun* (rijal fi'l shams). Other Palestinian novelists of this period such as Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Emile Habibi and Sahar Khalifa continued to write the complexity of Palestinian's lives both in exile and in Israel and the occupied territories of Gaza and the West Bank (Allen, 1995, pp.69-78).

The encoding of themes of resistance and sacrifice in terms of a national struggle can be encountered most directly in early Palestine poetry. "Palestinian poets in Israel were among the leading poets to launch a literature committed to the reality of their colonial condition. They articulate a heroic resistance and personal sacrifice in great simplicity, both tragic and lyrical at the same time" (Mir, p.117). These themes are embedded within the work of Mahmoud Darwish and Samih al-Qasim (1939- 2014) poets who established direct lines of contact with the ordinary people through the vernacular force of their address forming a contrast to the stance of elitist Arab modernist poets, "practitioners of the symbolist mode, … in their ivory towers, [who] failed to respond to the turmoil the Arab (and Palestinian) masses felt in their struggle for liberation…" Darwish and al-Qasim "opted for the language of simple folk [i.e. popular as opposed to literary] to render a realistic picture of Palestinian lives and desires under Israeli rule." (Mir, p.117)

Directness and authenticity feature famously in Darwish's oft-declaimed 1964 poem "Identity Card": "Write down, I am an Arab/You usurped my grandfather's vineyards/and the plot of land I used to plough" (Darwish 1973, p.25) The popularity of the poem stretched beyond Palestine to wider Arab audiences. A similar defiant mode is found in al-Qasim's "Excerpt from an Inquest":

- And what do you call this country?
- My country
- So you admit it.
- Yes, sir. I admit it.
  I'm not a professional tourist.
- Do you say 'my country'?
- I say 'my country'.
- And where is my country?
- Your country.
- And where is your country?
- My country. (al-Qasim 2008, p.112)

In erudite critical circles considerations of art and politics conflict when Palestinian writing is related to the larger corpus of Arabic literature. Rephrasing Salma al-Jayyusi's statement: "while all Arabic Literature nowadays is involved in the political and social struggle of the Arab people, politics nevertheless places a great strain on the Palestinian writer". S. Hasan reaffirmed: "because of their immediacy, political factors tend to interfere in the artistic process."(Jayyusi 1992, p. 2; S. Hasan, 1994) Robert Irwin broadens the issue by pointing out in the last quarter of the twentieth century: "the Arab literary world [was] riven by debate about whether it is better to use the demotic (*amiyya*) or literary Arabic (*fusha*)". According to Irwin, "Palestinan writers like Kanafani, Habibi, and Darwish… have chosen to write in the demotic, seeking thereby to preserve the specially regional heritage of Palestine" (Irwin 1996, p. 24).

Over time, according to Mourid Barghouti, Palestinian poetry started to focus the land of Palestine differently:

> no longer "the beloved" in the poetry of the resistance, or an item on a political program, it is not an argument or a metaphor…It is a land, like any land. We sing for it only so that we may remember the humiliation of having it taken from us. Our song is not for some sacred thing of the past but for our current self-respect that is violated anew every day by the Occupation (Barghouti 2005, p.7; Mattar 2014).

In the case of his later poetry, it has been argued, Darwish developed a sophisticated aesthetic and expanded consciousness that moved beyond the "local" or "national" *milieux* of Palestinian literature. (Mena 2009; Joudah, 2009)

Writers of Palestinian/Arab ethnicity living in Israel such as the novelist Anton Shammas have composed their work about Palestinian life in Hebrew. He and Salman Masalha have translated Hebrew poetry into English. Israeli scholar of Arabic Ami Elad-Bouskila argues in his study *Modern Palestinian Literature and Culture*: "there are three Palestine literatures, produced by people in Israel itself, in the Occupied Territories, and in the great Palestinan dispora" (Clark 2001, p. 26). A further widening of the Palestinian diasporic consciousness has occurred through its connection to non-Arabophone literatures written by Palestinians both in Israel and beyond the Middle East in Europe and North and South America. All of which makes it important to recognize that themes of Paestinian writing and Palestinian identity have become more diffuse than formerly (Mattar 2014; Ebileeni 2017, 2022).

6. Out of Palestine: Mahmoud Darwish's exilic journey to universal humanism

"Darwish's career began and ended under occupation" (Mattawa 2017, p. 1).

Writing in 1986, Edward Said observed: "no single Palestinian can be said to feel what most other Palestinians feel: Ours has been too various and scattered a fate for that sort of correspondence. But there is no doubt that we do form a community, if at heart a community built on suffering and exile." (Said 1986, p.5) Almost every biographical description of Mahmoud Darwish's umbilical connection to Palestine begins in 1948, when as a young child with his family he left Al-Birweh, the village of his birth located in the district of Akka. A year later, having smuggled his way back from Lebanon as one of the "returnees…or so called 'infiltrators'", Darwish began his life as a "present-absentee", that is, "an internal refugee with no civil rights."(Abu Eid 2017, pp. 16-8, p. 52) In the 1960s he was repeatedly arrested by the Israeli authorities on account of his poetry. (Abu Eid, pp. 31-2) Writing out of house arrest and from an Israeli jail, Darwish was exercised by "two major themes": faith in Arabism and the success of rebellion against injustice. (Mir, pp. 118-19) Eventually, sent by the Communist Party to study in Moscow in 1970, he made the decision not to return to Israel, because as he wrote in a poem "he was no longer able to 'dance' the rhythm of the party" ,but also because he needed space to develop as a poet and help the Palestinian cause from Cairo where he now settled (Abu Eid, p. 32, pp. 36-37, p. 39). In a public statement at the time he asserted: "I am advancing from a place of restriction and imprisonment to a place of work…my ability to tolerate, …be patient, is now exhausted…I no longer belong to a people that asks for mercy…but to a people that fights." (Shaheen, 2009, p. viii)

Darwish's early poetry conveys a message that "the physical connection to the land shapes identity" and Palestine features as the beloved from whom he is both at the same time connected and separated (Mukattash 2016, p.18). Membership of the Israeli Communist Party allowed him to cut his teeth as a writer in an environment which otherwise offered no other avenues for Palestinian writers. Thus far his place at the forefront of a literature of resistance was made for him. Maintaining this stance, however "was hard on him, and he tried more than once to free himself from the shackles of the narrow Palestinian niche that other Arab poets, envious of his success, designated for him."(Masalha, 2008)

Have first suffered external exile in 1948, and internal exile between 1949 and 1970, Darwish experienced "a 'rolling exile' (*manfa mutadahrij*), meaning one that repeats itself and changes form and direction."(Abu Eid, p. 43) Departing Cairo in 1972 he spent a decade in

Beirut before being forced to leave by the Israeli invasion of summer 1982. Between 1983 and 1995 he settled in Paris where he wrote the collections "Fewer Roses" (1986) and "Eleven Planets for the end of the Andalusian Vision" (1992). In 1995 he returned to a second internal exile in his homeland, now at Ramallah under the Palestinian Authority. On his death in 2008, Mahmoud Darwish was acclaimed as "the poet of the occupied territories". However, significantly for the purpose of this comparison, he was not comfortable with the sobriquet "poet of the resistance", but like Robert Hayden is on record (1996) as stating: "I don't want to be a poet with a label."(Abu Eid, p. 56)

If we can stage a discerning reading of Darwish's later poetry stretching over the last two decades or so of his life, it not difficult to see why he refused the label. I have chosen to analyze the well known poem أنا من هناك/"I Am From There" from the collection "Fewer Roses".[4] Like many of his poems it builds on the raw material of personal exile, distilling loss of home into an anonymity that extends the speaker's sense of isolation to all human beings. In this last aspect the poem powerfully articulates Darwish's universal humanism while it is at the same time engraved out of a specific Palestinian situatedness.

I am from there and I have memories. Like any other
Man I was born. I have a mother,
A house with several windows, friends and brothers. (Darwish, "I Am")

In the lines that follow the lean details of the speaker's predicament are disclosed: a solitary prisoner condemned to isolation he can claim ownership only of objects in nature outside his cell, but even the wave has been taken from him,

I have a prison cell's cold window, a wave
Snatched by seagulls, my own view, an extra blade
Of grass, a moon at the world's end, a supply
Of birds, an olive tree that cannot die

Still in possession of his dreams ("moon at the world's end") there is also the consolation of "an olive tree that cannot die", an emblem of Palestine found almost ubiquitously in Darwish's poetry gesturing to the mystic symbol found in the Quran that is placeless, "a blessed olive tree, neither of the east nor the west" (24:35).

I walked and crossed the land before the crossing
Or swords made a banquet-table of a body

The land the speaker knew before has been taken away by "the crossing of swords"; verbs of the finite past tense pronounce it irretrievably lost. The second line invests the bountiful land with darkly ironic undertones: its body is made into a banquet-table that is fought over, an act that is implicitly condemned. This is a charged metaphor since *al-ma'ida* (banquet table), the title of a Quranic surah, contains the lines: 'Whenever they kindle the fire for war, Allah puts it out; but they strive to make mischief in the land' (6:64). At the same time as it enacts the speaker's mourning over his loss the poem stages low-key resistance against the seizure of the land.

However, in the closing stanza a cluster of lexical items to do with language assays to produce a new definition of homeland:

I have learned all the words to take
The lexicon apart for one noun's sake
The compound I must make
Homeland.

As a stateless exile Darwish broadens his subject so that it discloses deeper awareness of his condition as poet and human being. Summing up this phase, he writes in the poem "Another Road in the Road", "I am from here, I am from there, yet am neither here nor there". (Darwish 2004, p.4) Born out of this exile his work reaches across the boundaries of language and nation to "inscribe the national within the universal, for Palestine is not limited to Palestine…" (Darwish 2004, p.xix)

This journey beyond the nation has inspired poststructuralist, postcolonial and "postnational" readings of Darwish's later poetry foregrounding its wordplay and the identities it constructs. Of the last stanza of أنا من هناك/"I am from There" (in an English version) Erica Mena has written:

> …as pure in its elegance as it is in its raw desperation, [this statement] … speaks to a commonality of suffering… yielding a richer understanding of the relationship between words and place. It is not the physical location but the word "Home" that the poet has created, and the word has been created only through the destruction of all words. Paradoxically, one assumes the word "Home" was among "all the words," and was therefore learned and dismantled. (Mena 2009, p. 112)

According to this critic Darwish's later poetry through the necessity of his dislocation assembles "a postnational community". However, because this community "is without national borders", and on the basis that exilic literature stands associated with post-colonial literature which retains links with borders and national homes, Darwish's position as an exilic writer is disallowed. (Mena, p.113)

Important as these insights are, and similar ones adopting cognate approaches, they risk detaching the poet from his Palestinian roots entirely with the result that his continual interrogation of statelessness as a political as well as a personal condition is downplayed. While endorsing similar views on Darwish's developing subjectivity, Rehnuma Sazzad has a broader story to tell, one that valorizes his life and literary work as part of a universal humanist orientation he shared with his fellow-compatriot Edward Said, which turned on Said's concept of exile.[5] For Said the exilic Arab intellectual is privileged to the role of "upholding critical consciousness…stand[ing] against ideas and beliefs supported by established authorities…By believing in the inalienable rights of citizens…prov[ing] their universal humanism" (Sazzad 2017, p. 97). Theirs was not so much a project of nationalist resistance, though resistance certainly lay at its heart; disbelieving in nationalism "as an end in itself", but recognizing the perilous condition Palestinians endured, it assayed to "assert the voice of the voiceless…advanc[ing] our understanding of the peripheral societies [of the postcolonial world]... [and through] the exilic quality named universal humanism …transcending the narrow nationalist enclosure." (Sazzad 2017, p.76)

To the end of his life suffering and exile continued to exercise Darwish's poetic imaginary, moving beyond modern Palestine to his probing of the history of connections between Semitic peoples and non Semitic peoples, specifically in the Arab lands of *al-mashreq* and *al-garb* of the east and the west. He drew comparisons between European colonization of the Middle East and of the native Indian territories of North America. Different times and places are overlaid in individual poems which also range across ancient Mediterranean spaces invoking the names of Greek savants (Joudah 2009; Sazzad, pp. 170-78). Speakers or personas may represent multiple selves or aspects of the same self in one poem, but their voices invariably belong to exiles or members of a dispossessed nation. Darwish "prefers a polyglot subjectivity that views history, memory as plural, complex". (Sazzad, p.71) According to Sazzad, "Darwish's yearning for classical Andalusia symbolizes his dream about an independent, secular and pluralistic homeland in historic Palestine". (p.87) This is seen this in his identification with the Spanish poet Lorca who helped cement Darwish's interest in Andalusia by incorporating pre-Islamic Bedouin melancholia for the lost past via an Arab Andalusian poet of the ninth century, Abu Tamman (p.173).

In contrast to Hayden's teleological Baha'i voice,[6] in Darwish's later poetry the speaking-I consciously interrogates teleological schemes from the standpoint of the displaced. For example in the lines from "A Canaanite Rock at the Dead Sea":

> And all the prophets are my kin, but the sky is distant
> from its land, and I am distant from what I speak.
> (Darwish 2009, p.78)

"Ironically, if Palestine had not been as 'holy' for the Abrahamic religions…the present clash would not have taken place on the land. Having all the prophets as kin has not guaranteed a heavenly situation for a Palestinian on this earth." (Sazzad, p.135) In Darwish's secular consciousness religion is relativized according to time and place, denied privilege and exemption from power, and not allowed exoneration from the injustice perpetrated by those who bear its name. For instance surah Al-Ikhlas, read in a relativistic way, is embedded within these lines from "The Red Indians' Penultimate Speech to the White Man":

> You have your faith and we have ours.
> So do not bury God in books that promised you a land in our land
> as you claim, and do not make your god a chamberlain in the royal court.
> (Darwish 2009, p. 71)

An ironic depiction of "an abrupt and arrogant entrance of the white colonizer into the natives' life", Darwish is making associations here with America and Palestine and the Christian and Jewish "settlers' justification (being God's people and bringing civilization to the natives)". (Sazzad, p. 125)

Concerning the humanism that accrues to Darwish's non-partisan presentation of the exilic predicament, his personal generosity to the "enemy" is found in poems about relationships, brief and transitory though they may be, with Israelis such as the girlfriend in "Rita and the Rifle", and with an Israeli soldier in the 1969 poem "A Soldier Dreams of White Lilies" (جندي يحلم بالزنابق البيضاء). Much written about, both poems are often cited to demonstrate how the speaker derives a universal humanistic meaning from such contacts - though in the second poem the last line is plainly ironic:

> He told me about the moment of departure, how his mother
> silently wept when they led him to the front,
> how her anguished voice gave birth to a new hope in his flesh
> that doves might flock though the Ministry of War. (Darwish 2007, p. 166)

The Holocaust is not distant and monumentalized, but in "A State of Siege" pressed into service to indict present-day othering, where the speaker addresses an armed Israeli soldier:

> [To a killer] If you'd contemplated the victim's face
> And thought, you would have remembered your mother in the gas
> chamber, you would have liberated yourself from the
> Rifle's wisdom
> And changed your mind… (Darwish 2007, p.131)

Integral to Darwish's humanism, we cannot fail to note, is that he never lets up on "the Palestinan demand for being equal to the Israelis as humans" and is spare in his augury of future Utopias. (Sazzad, p. 129)

In summary, this brief overview of Darwish's poetry, which is not intended to present a startlingly new analysis of an already well-traversed path, has discussed the way categories

of resistance and exile function from a comparative critical perspective. It closes at the point of addressing a universal humanism and self-awareness devolving from his experience of Palestinian struggle. This has been arrived at with a view to situating Darwish's writing alongside Hayden's – an American poet writing in varied tones about Black history, and demonstrating a Baha'i universalism in his understanding of a modern apocalypse. The aim has not been to claim for Darwish the role of quintessential, representative Palestinian poet, anymore than the section preceding it claimed for Hayden a similar status as Baha'i poet. (Although Darwish is not the only Palestinian of significance, Hayden is the only one from among Baha'is). Both, as we saw, were averse to being labeled, and I have tried not to lose sight of the aesthetic value of their work. However, the significance of the development of the personal Palestinian and Baha'i dimensions of their respective consciousnesses now needs to be weighed against the prospect of reconciliation and restitution of loss below.

8. Conclusion

At its base level, resistance to a second party for deporting me, or excluding or removing me from my rights in my homeland, or threatening the house of my holy religion, often merits personifying and designating him as my "enemy". We have seen this articulated in both Palestinian and Baha'i discourses. Situations of conflict arise according to political exigencies when actors are set against one another across notions of a single, God-created human race, or universal humanity. In the depths of World War Two when he condemned the al-Husaynis as "enemies of the faith" Shoghi Effendi was placed in such a position. For his part, Mahmoud Darwish, though he held no personal grudge against Jews, knew that Israel's exaggerated exertions of force in Beirut in 1982 and Ramallah in 2002, which directly impacted on himself, could not be materially resisted but had still to be called out. As an outstanding Palestinian intellectual this he did continually, condemning most notably the Israeli military's Beirut assault in *Memory for Forgetfulness* and their investment of Ramallah in "State of Siege". Palestinians continue to fight back against hopeless odds and in the same way Baha'is all over the world continue to mobilize to denounce the persecution of their co-believers in Iran and occasionally to write about how they sacrificed their lives without demur. Response to life-changing oppressive treatment takes different forms: one person's sacrifice is another's resistance; the title of martyr may be claimed by anyone. Admittedly in terms of numbers the scale may not be the same; but on a moral, human rights scale the two cases are equable.

Hayden and Darwish at the outset of both their careers experienced the need to identify with and articulate the predicament of their respective African-American and Palestinian compatriots. Each wrote standout poems that appear to epitomize their oppression, Hayden's "Middle Crossing" and Darwish's "Identity Card" come to mind. In maturity each sought to broaden the scope of their work both in terms of subject matter and their subjectivity as poets. Darwish effected transformations as a result of the need to cope as an exile and to craft his own poetic identity. Hayden's urge to obtain personal space and status as an American poet caused him to experiment and diversify as he introduced and valorized the subject of Babi-Baha'i martyrdom. In the mature verse of both, some argue, victim-hood is absorbed into forms of universalism and can be extended to a common humanity. If this be so, to what extent does it equate with goals of reconciliation and restitution of loss? Could it also mean the specificities of suffering and oppression experience by Afro-Americans or Palestinians in their particular struggles are transcended or elided?

In re-defining Hayden's poetic status Baha'i critic John Hatcher, as we saw, argued for the major significance of the Baha'i faith to his *oeuvre*. He ground-marked Hayden's life and achievement as an American poet claiming for it a Baha'i underpinning, dissociating him from playing a role in African-American political contestation of continuing racial othering in the United States. Hayden's later stance on Black activism strongly tended to support Hatcher's view. Alongside his anatomizing of the century's travesties in his later poetry even to imagining them invasively present in his body's pathology ("As My Blood Was Drawn") Hayden incorporated a scopic view of human history framed by Baha'i teleology which

presents as a divinely-led process or entelechy, with world unity as the culmination of human history. This involved incorporating aspirational Baha'i axioms of world unity and peace that implicitly write contestation of power-political imbalance out of the script leaving no space other than the ideal universalism proposed by Baha'ullah to challenge the status quo. Hatcher's view is at least in part a fair assessment of Hayden's placement of Baha'i belief within individual poems, though as we suggested many of his poems, including some of his best, can be read minus a Baha'i dimension.

The matter of conquest is of course unavoidably central to Darwish's poetry, impacting in immediate terms on Palestinians, and later more widely in human history. We see a refusal on his part to overwrite the sacrifice of oppressed groups by subsuming them into a diversified humanity. Indigenous peoples such as Red Indians and Palestinians are given a voice to articulate their human right not to have been dispossessed of their land, though in both cases their losses are recognized as *faits accomplis*. Although he aspired to a rebirth of the *Convivencia* of Andalusia in the Middle East with Jews and Arabs living together in a secular state in the former Palestine, Darwish took a realistic attitude towards this desirable outcome ever becoming a reality. The business of History remains unfinished business.

Western colonization, which extended throughout the globe, is scarcely mentioned in any Baha'i narrative and certain details as to how Baha'is arrived where they are now are avoided (i.e. not merely passing from Persian exiles in an originally Ottoman domain but functioning today under the de facto protection of the State of Israel). Moreover, in the officially unvoiced preference many Baha'is hold for Israel there is also a silence about Palestinian rights where it is understood that their dispossession is part of "God's plan".[7] By endorsing such a plan *a priori* - though not directly addressing the modern Middle East in his poetry - a part of Hayden's work is situated on the opposite side of post-colonial cultural politics to that occupied by Darwish's.

The *oeuvres* of Robert Hayden and Mahmoud Darwish are partially emblematic of defining narratives embedded in Baha'i and Palestinian literatures. Each narrative is alternative to the other in applying different estimations of the effects of colonization (on the Baha'i side not at all) and of future human destinations. In their respective secular, religious and post-colonial positionings Hayden and Darwish clearly diverge. Nevertheless, the readings of their poetry that I have made also suggest their work shares a more then theoretic, humanistic care for mankind that amounts to an implicit endorsement of human rights as defined in the United Nations Charter,[8] specifically rights relating to freedom of religion, and more generally, international law relating to appropriation of land, forcible transfer of people, freedom of movement of people and goods, the right to peaceful protest.[9] We would wish to uphold the principle that human dignity transcends any "cause", and this belief is expressed throughout Hayden and Darwish's poetry. That "man is permitted to be man" (and woman likewise) is an aspiration both poets inherently share.

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Endnotes:

1. However, "Haj Amin al-Husseini's enmity did not translate into violent attacks on the Baha'i community" (Geller 2019, p. 406).
2. At the time of consultation, a caveat was attached at the top of the article raising the issue of its limited range of sources and questioning their "verifiable and neutral" character.
3. For a non-Baha'i, Muslim view of Quarratul Ayn, see Kamaly (2019).
4. Publication of English translations of Darwish's poetry in the form of individual collections and also in anthologies accelerated in the 2000s, especially after his death. See bibliographical entries under 'Darwish'. They are of varying quality; I have for example preferred A.Z. Foreman's translation of the poem **أنا من هناك** ("I Am From There") because it translates a key word المائدة/al-ma'ida (banquet-table) which is omitted in other versions.
5. In this article, following Sazzad's example, I do not intend to problematize the Saidian notion of exile which Anna Bernard has rejected as one of Said's "abstract, universalizing notions", any more than I

take sides in the argument as to whether Darwish was qualified to write "resistance literature". See Mattar (2014).

6. The "Baha'i voice" is nonetheless absent from much of Hayden's poetry. For instance, from his evocations of Mexican landscape and mythology in "'An Inference of Mexico'", and from "A Ballad of Remembrance" which stages a lurid performance of personal aversion from New Orleans Mardi Gras. Rampersad sees an assertion at the close of "Ballad of Remembrance" of a "ringing declaration of humanistic values" in contrast to the "dazzling array of images of chaos and corruption, the peculiar horrors of New Orleans in history" that makes up most of the poem. (Rampersad, p. 206)
7. In addition to Palestinians, Baha'i theology possesses potential ramifications for Israeli and non-Israeli Jews, and as such complicates any efforts at conversion - which for the present for undisclosed reasons the Baha'i governing body strictly prohibits in Israel. As regards how Palestinians view Baha'is, this is likely to be similar to broader Arab views. One journal presenting a series of articles on the Baha'i faith in an editorial heading states: "A faith that bases itself in Israel, allows its leaders to be decorated with high awards from the British empire, wins converts from communities from all over the world, and regularly applies pressure through a UN council can hardly claim to be non-political. The Baha'is do just that. This file…exposes an unfortunate mixture of religious naivete and survivors' expedience." (*Arabia: The Islamic World Review*, p.37)
8. "Recognition of the inherent dignity and …equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world". (Bushrui 1998, p.5.)
9. See www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/israel/palestine

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NOTE:

The above paper in an earlier version was turned in as a commissioned article by a journal, but although it received a very positive review from one reviewer it was rejected for publication based on the report of a second reviewer.

First Reader Comments and Suggestions for Author

This is a very interesting paper in premise, and the theme is very original. This paper has potential to make a good contribution to knowledge.
It would be helpful to know from which critical analytical perspective you are reading each work - so if you are reading themes of exile on Darwish's work through the lens of Hayden's poetry, please make this clearer earlier on in your paper (introduction; poetry analysis, rather than in the conclusion). Please explain the rationale of taking your critical perspectives - why read Darwish through the lens of Hayden, not vice versa?
Please do not assume that the reader has prior knowledge of all of the fields of study you cover. Many readers will not have heard of the Babi or Bahai Faith. Some may be unclear on the dynamics of Israel-Palestine post- 1948. Please reframe some of your more complex ideas as if writing for an interested, yet uninformed audience who has heard of neither poet.
The paper, in particular its premise and conclusions would have more critical impact if the linkages between the work of Hayden and Darwish were made more explicit earlier on in the paper, i.e. in the analysis before the conclusion.
In terms of citations of poetry, please cite using each poet's original language of writing where possible, so for Hayden, English and Darwish, Arabic and stating whether the English version is your own translation, or that of another scholar's. If you have the Farsi versions of the earlier Bahai poems you cite in the sections preceding the discussion on Hayden, that would be fantastic. In terms of analysis of Darwish's work, interweave more relating to Arabic, and the possible problematics of interpreting his work via English/translation.
Please double-check some statements/arguments concerning the histories of the Babi Faith and the Bahai Faith. It read at times as if you were working to condense much information in tight sentences (perhaps for word count i). This makes some of the events and ideas difficult to follow, particularly for readers new to the fields of study you cover (Bahai Studies, Palestinian literary studies). (I have highlighted issues, on your paper via sticky notes). You may find it helpful to add additional sentences/paragraphs to this end.
Some of your statements on the respective histories of the Bahai Faith and those of Palestinians also need much more scholarly corroboration, and widened use of sources. I have highlighted these instances (via the sticky notes) on your paper.
Please keep your sentences to 3 lines, 4 lines max. I found that you were working to situate many complex ideas alongside each other in one sentence at times. As a start-off, I have

suggested where you could 'cut' and 'unpack' particular sentences as if writing for someone completely new to the field.

Many thanks for writing such an interesting and thought-provoking paper.

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Submission Date

01 August 2021

Comments and Suggestions for Authors

Second Reader Comments.

The title does not fit the paper which studies the poetry of two people, one a Bahá'í and one a Palestinian. The title currently suggests a broader study, which I was expecting. Hayden and Darwish ought to feature in the title as they are the substance of the paper. Hayden is a broadly based poet who happens to have become a Bahá'í, which is not the same as Bahá'í poet. The issues he has spent his lifetime addressing happen for fit in with Bahá'í values (since they champion social justice and civil rights). Focussing on Hayden is not focussing on Bahá'í poetry on a larger scale. Say the article is about Hayden's poetry, that is fine. Saying it sums up Bahá'í poetry is wrong. Bernard Leech threw pots. He was a Bahá'í but this doesn't mean he threw Bahá'í pots.

I take a different view of the militancy of the Babis, who were persecuted to the point of execution. Criticising militancy in self defence without criticising the persecution is a serious lapse of power differentials. The so-called 'cult of martyrdom' in this context is ambigious. A number of Bahá'ís / Babis were executed or killed and it might be a comfort to regard these deaths in retrospect as martyrdom, but this is not to suggest that people set out to become martyrs.

'A Wikipedia entry' reference is always bad practice and the claim that it "has the stamp and tone of an official Baha'i source" is untenable. If the writer wants to find an official source, go and find it. Wikipedia is changeable daily and is a mix of hands, some unreliable.

There is a referencing/punctuation problem where references are given after a full-stop and without a full stop. They should be before the full stop. An example: prisoners". (Balyuzi 1980, p.274) should read prisoners" (Balyuzi 1980, p.274). This needs applying to every instance.

Therefore there are significant issues with this paper, that suggest that significant revisions are needed, as well as a change of title.

Submission Date

01 August 2021

Author Response to Reader 2 Report

I am grateful to the reader for the attention they have given to my article. I wholly respect the views stated; on two key points I beg to disagree while several others I have taken on board and incorporated in my re-write.

The title currently suggests a broader study, which I was expecting. Hayden and Darwish ought to feature in the title as they are the substance of the paper. [The title has now been altered from the original one which was "Alternative Narratives: resistance, sacrifice and universalism in Palestinian and Bahai literatures"]

The two poets were chosen as representative literary figures. The article analyses their poetry in terms of the situation of Baha'is and Palestinians as oppressed parties and draws evidence from their poetry as writers who articulate Baha'i and Palestinian points of view. It is therefore not just about them as individual writers.

Hayden is a broadly based poet who happens to have become a Bahá'í, which is not the same as Bahá'í poet…
Focussing on Hayden is not focussing on Bahá'í poetry on a larger scale.

The argument that Hayden is a Baha'i poet is made by Baha'i academic and Hayden specialist John Hatcher in his monograph on Hayden. (Hayden was poetry editor for *World Order* magazine.) Section 3 of the article discusses other Baha'i poets including Na'im and Roger White.

I take a different view of the militancy of the Babis, who were persecuted to the point of execution.

The application of the qualifier 'militant' to Babis was also taken up by the Ist reviewer. I respect the view of both and have removed all references to militancy.

'A Wikipedia entry' reference is always bad practice and the claim that it "has the stamp and tone of an official Baha'i source" is untenable

The source in my judgement as a discourse analyst is largely of Baha'i provenance. Baha'is tend to exercise micro management on such sources. It does not matter that the material is taken from Wikipedia since it illustrates a tenable view of how Baha'i writing tends to function.

There is a referencing/punctuation problem where references are given after a full-stop and without a full stop.

I thank the reviewer for noting the inconsistency and have rectified it in the corrected version of my article.

Final Outcome

The Editors turned down the revised paper, which is the version reproduced above, on the grounds stated by the Second Reviewer, rather than on the report of the First Reviewer. I wonder why?