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**Baha'i Faith and the Construction of Social Reality: How do Baha'is
Translate the Word of God into Practice?**

By:

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To My Fellow Stay-at-Home Bahá'í Scholars in Shiraz

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I focus attention on the Baha'i Process of community-building within its periodic context. Towards this aim, I answer the question of how Baha'is translate the word of God into practice to construct their social reality. This project takes a constructionist approach and applies Peter Berger's conceptual framework to interpret Baha'i scriptures. This study also takes an ethnographic methodology that includes semi-structured interviews as well as observations to study the lived experience of the Bahá'ís in Sheffield. I demonstrate that the stability of the Bahá'í community-building efforts was maintained from 1934 up until 1996. Nonetheless, since 1996, radical shifts have happened in the Bahá'í community, regarding the aims and the means of the community building. In this research I have identified the shifting period of the community-building among the Bahá'ís as deconstruction. The study verifies the changes in community-building have been radical enough to change the nature of the community from an international, institutionalized community into various, similar, local communities spread all around the world. Accordingly, an institutional community aiming to establish a New World Order through the institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order is turning into an individual-centred community aiming for the betterment of the world through starting from the neighbourhoods. The study adds to Berger's conceptual framework for the social construction of reality by introducing the notion of "deconstruction". Through this research, I will also enrich the literature of the sociology of religion regarding studying Baha'is constructing their desired community based on their interpretations of their holy writings.

Keywords: Constructionism, Bahá'í Faith, Community-building, Deconstruction

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, whose supreme mission is, none other but, the achievement of this organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations, should, if we be faithful to its implications, be regarded as signaling through its advent the coming of age of the entire human race. It should be viewed not merely as yet another spiritual revival in the ever-changing fortunes of mankind, not only as a further stage in a chain of progressive Revelations, nor even as the culmination of one of a series of recurrent prophetic cycles, but rather as marking the last and highest stage in the stupendous evolution of man's collective life on this planet. The emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture—all of which must synchronize with the initial stages in the unfoldment of the Golden Age of the Bahá'í Era—should, by their very nature, be regarded, as far as this planetary life is concerned, as the furthestmost limits in the organization of human society, though man, as an individual, will, nay must indeed as a result of such a consummation, continue indefinitely to progress and develop (Effendi, 1991, p. 163).

In this thesis, I study the Bahá'í¹ community-building activities in Sheffield. I study the evolution of the Faith² from the words in the scriptures into concrete social realities.

Community-building is a part of the efforts of the Bahá'ís to establish a new society based on Baha'u'llah's teachings. These teachings emphasise the oneness of humanity; independent, unfettered investigation of the truth; religion as the source of unity; harmony between science and religion; the equality of men and women; universal peace upheld by a world government guided by spiritual principles; universal compulsory education; and a universal auxiliary language (Esslemont, 1980). Community-building activities include attending the Feast as a part of the Bahá'ís contribution to the Bahá'í Administrative Order; voting for the members of the Local Spiritual Assembly; teaching the Faith; devotional sessions; study circles; children's classes; and junior youth classes.

Bahá'ís are a “sociologically interesting group” (McMullen, 2000, p. 2). Religious practice among the Bahá'ís is based on their perception of the scriptures (Bahá'u'lláh, 1862). There

¹ <http://www.bahai.org.uk/>

² In this thesis, whenever I mean the Baha'i Faith, I write it in capital letters and when it means faith in general, it will appear according to its place in the sentence.

are numerous scriptures in the Bahá'í Faith, which have constantly been released since its revelation in 1844. Bahá'ís read their scriptures individually, share their perceptions together, and put their final understandings and interpretations into practice. Hence, the scriptures, as well as Bahá'í individual and collective interpretations, are crucial for understanding their activities and behaviours. Paul Lample (2009) writes: “collectively, we receive the gift of the Word of God, and through its application we are to raise the Kingdom of God on earth; that is, we are to gradually contribute to the building of a new social order that is shaped by the truths of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh” (Lample, 2009, p. 3). Bahá'ís construct their community in accordance with their evolving understandings of the Bahá'í scriptures, which has been an ongoing process (Effendi, 1936). According to the evolving nature of the Bahá'í Faith and the Bahá'ís' community-building activities, this thesis builds on Peter Berger's theory of the social reality of religion by applying his conceptual framework to community-building within the Bahá'í community of Sheffield, both through their sacred scriptures and their activities. Peter Berger (1967) theorised the role of religion in community-building activities by introducing the process of nomization, which he defines as the establishment of a sacred order for a religious community. He also outlined the three stages of the process of nomization: externalization, objectivation, and internalization (Berger, 1967, pp. 3-4). This thesis will demonstrate the different stages of the establishment of the Bahá'í community based on the Bahá'ís' interpretations of their scriptures based on Berger's conceptual framework (1967).

Berger and Luckmann's work (1966) is amongst the most highly regarded texts in the social constructivist tradition (Collin, 1997). Despite the significance of Berger's research, there are few works in the field related to his theory, per se. On the contrary, Berger is mostly recognized for his notions of secularization and desecularization. By comparison, the number of works that draw upon his other notions is not considerable, neither theoretically nor

empirically. Berger (1967) suggests that religion is fundamental to world-building activities. “World-building” in sociological terminology means constructing a society. This definition is related to the social constructionist approach, which demonstrates how people accept rules as norms (Hacking, 2000), create their identities and beliefs in their everyday lives, take them for granted, and then find them natural and objective in reality (Burr, 2003; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). According to Berger (1967), religion brings new aims and meanings to the believers and begins to bring into being this desired community based on those goals and meanings, while at the same time providing society with the means and sacred order to achieve it. In short, religion provides a full spectrum of social order.

In his doctoral thesis, Berger argues that it is necessary for conceptual findings, through theories as well as history, to be examined and compared with real religious experience (Berger, 1954, p. 164). Berger and Luckmann’s theory (1966 & 1967) fails to link the conceptual reality to the practical reality, as do many other studies. In this thesis, I respond to an urgent need to address this two-fold function of religion by sociologists. Additionally, I aim to explore both conceptual and practical aspects of the constructive function of religion based on Berger's theory (1966, 1967). I also attempt to go further than Berger's study and shed light on the deconstructive role of religion in a given society.

Accordingly, this study constitutes two main parts: theoretical and fieldwork. Bahá’í scriptures are conceptualized in terms of the construction of the Bahá’í Administrative Order towards the Unity of Humankind³ using Berger and Luckmann’s concepts derived from *Social Construction of Reality* (1966) as well as Berger’s *Social Reality of Religion* (1967). In the fieldwork, I study Bahá’ís in two different ways, by observing them while participating in the Nineteen-Day Feast, as well as by interviewing them about their personal experiences contributing to the Unity of Humankind, their participation in the Bahá’í Administrative

³ When I generally use the term, I use it in lower letters and when I specifically mean the Baha’i teaching of the Unity of Humankind as the spiritual, universal order, I use capital letters.

Order, and in particular in the Feast. The Nineteen-Day Feast is a regular Bahá'í meeting and an essential part of the Bahá'í Administrative Order.

Studying the key scriptures of the Bahá'í Faith, regarding their relation to the establishment of the management system known as the Bahá'í Administrative Order, shows that it is rooted within the original writings of the founder, Baha'u'llah. This Order became further institutionalized through the writings of his successors. Their community-building goal prior to 1996 was the Unity of Humankind. This was supposed to be achieved on an international scale through efforts by Bahá'ís, via the institutions of their administrative order and the elective wing. However, since 1996, Bahá'ís have shifted their world-building efforts and aim to align with the purposes and activities of the new Ruhi Institute. This change effectively changed the Bahá'ís' aims. I consider this shift a deconstruction in the process of constructing a new community. This means that the current leadership of the Bahá'ís, the Universal House of Justice, consciously and purposefully discontinued the expansion of the Bahá'í Administrative Order (the nomos⁴) and altered the Unity of Humankind (the cosmic frame of reference⁵ for the Bahá'ís up until 1996) before recommencing community-building efforts from a foundational level. Their new cosmic frame of reference is a promotion of the “betterment of the world”, and their new nomos is the core activities of the Ruhi Institute.

The findings of the fieldwork demonstrate that the Bahá'ís in Sheffield have no conception of the Unity of Humankind that is based on Shoghi Effendi's writings. Unity of Humankind is a

⁴ According to Berger (1967), nomos is the path and social order towards the desired community and a meaningful world for each society. Nomos, in particular, is the system that consists of the norms and the set of established behavioural patterns that will lead towards the ultimate goal of society. Religion can offer society a sacred order that guides the members towards the ultimate goal of community building. Community--building in Berger's opinion (1967) is the process of nomization; an ongoing process of creation of a social order directed towards a desired ultimate order. Community-building, therefore, is in fact the process of nomization. This thesis suggests that according to the Baha'i scriptures, the Baha'i Administrative Order is the nomos for the Baha'i community and the Unity of Humankind is the cosmic frame of reference.

⁵ As Berger (1967) suggests, the community-building enterprise is directed towards an ultimate goal and a desired community, a divine order that is rooted in the members' cosmology. Religion provides society with this cosmic frame of reference based on their sacred cosmology as well as nomos that is a sacred order that leads towards the cosmic frame of reference.

vague concept for them, and they mainly relate it to love peace, and kindness to everybody, rather than considering it an entirely new international, spiritual civilization as appears to be the goal set out in the Bahá'í scriptures, in particular, Shoghi Effendi's writings.

Additionally, the interviewees have not noticed the shift between the overall goals of the Bahá'í administration and the change in the role of the Administrative Order; for them, the ultimate aim is "the betterment of the world", which is a balanced combination of material and spiritual prosperity for everybody. The Bahá'í community-building efforts shifted from constructing a highly institutionalized universal community into similar individualized local communities.

I am a registered member of the Bahá'í community. Therefore, I know the Faith, the scriptures, the Bahá'ís' terminology, the norms and values, and the motivations. I could feel the changes and differences in the community-building activities and sense the shifts from the very beginning in the letters of the Universal House of Justice. This helps me not only to know which scriptures among all the writings are relevant, but I also have already studied and taught them at an academic level. I also can attend Bahá'í events; in particular, the Feast that is only allowed for registered Bahá'ís to participate. I know the Bahá'í community of Sheffield, and they know me and trust me so that I can reach them very easily. Being a Bahá'í and living in the Bahá'í community of Sheffield makes it possible for me to conduct participant observation very effectively and much easier than a non-Bahá'í. As an insider, however, I must be very careful of bias. As I explain in the methodology chapter of this thesis, I make every effort to avoid insider bias as much as possible. However, it will always be there, in the language I use, in the choice of the scriptures, and in the interpretations of the scriptures. As a Bahá'í, I also have my own opinions about the subject matter, to objectify which, I have asked my supervisors to notify me whenever they would notice it. In the

methodology chapter, I also explain other ways and efforts to reduce different types of problems related to the insider researcher.

RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

In this project, I investigate the role of the Bahá'í Faith in the world-building activities of the Bahá'ís; that is, how Bahá'í teachings evolve into the tangible reality in a Bahá'í community. The Bahá'í community does not have a religious hierarchy, namely priests, rabbis, or imams (Effendi, 1934, p. 153; Effendi, 1980, p. v). Religious practice among Bahá'ís is, therefore, based on personal reflections on their scriptures (Esslemont, 1980). Bahá'ís read their scriptures individually and discuss their interpretations as a group, as a result of which they reach their final understanding and interpretation (Lample, 2009).

On the one hand, the scriptures are important in any study of Bahá'í activities. On the other, their individual and collective interpretations and understandings are crucial for understanding their actions and behaviours (Lample, 2009). Therefore, for this research, studying Bahá'í scriptures as well as their individual and collective interpretations are equally crucial.

The function of the Administrative Order and how it has been constructed through Bahá'í writings and practice can be understood through the creative use of the sociology of Peter Berger. A Bergerian analysis shows how in successive periods of Bahá'í history, the social world which Bahá'ís create moves through stages; this is analogous to Berger's theorising about social world construction. Moreover, it is evident, both to insiders and outsiders, that the attainment of the “unity of humanity” or even the building of Bahá'í social order is an ongoing process. In the fieldwork of this study, I demonstrate how Bahá'ís continue to take

part in that process. I attain my aim by answering this main question: How do Bahá'ís translate the Word of God into practice within their community-building enterprise?

Through this project, I contribute to knowledge in three ways. Firstly, this thesis covers the study of the construction of social reality, both as practical and conceptual reality. Secondly, this research improves Berger's theoretical framework and adds the concept of deconstruction to the theory of social reality of religion and enriches studies on the functional aspect of religion. Thirdly, this project captures a lived experience that takes the opportunity to examine the actual religious community-building activities among Bahá'ís in Sheffield.

THESIS PLAN

Chapter two outlines an introduction to the Bahá'í Administrative Order, including its complex structure. Chapter three contains a literature review, which outlines the emergence and progress of social constructionism in the sociology of religion. This is the primary approach of this study, which is derived from Berger's theory of social reality of religion (1967) and explores the process of the development of religion as a social reality. The next part of this chapter is concerned with sociological studies of the Bahá'í Faith and focuses on the concept of “routinization of charisma” in those studies. Chapter four provides the philosophical foundation for the methodology and methods used in this study. Data analysis and ethical considerations are the next parts of this chapter. Lastly, some potential criticisms of the methodology and methods employed are discussed along with the limitations of this research. The argument in chapter five interprets Bahá'í scriptures and concludes that for Bahá'ís, the promised heaven is a community based on the New World Order of Baha'u'llah and the Unity of Humankind, which is attainable through the sacred nomos of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. Chapter six demonstrates how conceptual externalization of the Bahá'í

Administrative Order is to be found in *The Most Holy Book* (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992)⁶. Chapter seven investigates Bahá'í scriptures concerning objectivation of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, the second stage of social construction of reality through 'Abdu'l-Bahá's⁷ *Will and Testament* ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990), and Shoghi Effendi's⁸ *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* (Collin, 1997). Chapter eight studies the letters from the Universal House of Justice while also exploring internalization, Berger's third stage of the construction of the social reality. In chapter nine, a noticeable shift in the goals and the means of the community-building activities of the Bahá'ís will be demonstrated which adds the concept of "deconstruction" to the role of religion in the world-building process. Chapter ten provides an analysis of the findings of fieldwork in relation to the Bahá'ís' contribution to the community-building and also concerns the main themes of the Unity of Humankind, the Bahá'í Administrative Order, and the Ruhi Institute. Chapter eleven is concerned with developing an integrated statement about the role of religion in the human world-building enterprise. In this chapter, the results of my analysis are considered about the current literature. Chapter twelve concludes the project and provides an answer to the abovementioned research question.

⁶ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/48907/Baha-Allah>

⁷ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/811/Abd-al-Baha>

⁸ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/541427/Shoghi-Effendi-Rabbani>

2. THE Bahá'í Administrative Order

INTRODUCTION

The Bahá'í community comprises more than 7.4 million followers around the world. They come from 2,112 ethnicities, racial, and tribal groups, who live in 116,000 locales, and 247 countries and territories. The Encyclopaedia Britannica Yearbook has recorded that the Bahá'í Faith is the second most extensive religion in the world, after Christianity (Britannica, 2002). It is also has been recognized as the fastest growing religion in the world, after Islam (Staff, 2007).

The Bahá'í Administrative Order is a channel and an instrument to manage and arrange Bahá'í community affairs, communications with world systems and organizations. The Bahá'í Administrative Order is regarded as an instrument of the Charter of the New World Order and the Child of the Covenant and the Faith (Effendi, 1934).

This passage will illustrate the foundations and the structure of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, via the writings of the significant figures within the Bahá'í Faith. The significant figures of the Faith are: Bahá'u'lláh, the founder; `Abdu'l-Bahá, the successor and the authorised interpreter of Bahá'u'lláh's writings, and the centre of the Covenant; Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian and the second interpreter of the Writings; and the Universal House of Justice, which governs all of the Bahá'í affairs as the supreme body of the Bahá'í Administrative Order.

1. FOUNDATIONS OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER

`Abdu'l-Bahá, states, “the differences among the religions of the world are due to the varying types of minds” (`Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982a, p. 63). Accordingly, since there are differences in the

minds and perspectives, there are differences in religions and religiosity. In accordance with `Abdu'l-Bahá's viewpoint, ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982a), this section tries to avoid any theological vocabulary that may reduce or restrict the Bahá'í thought.

Bahá'u'lláh says:

Therefore, no absolute knowledge of the cosmos being available to man, all descriptions, all schemata, all attempts to portray the metaphysical basis of the universe, are necessarily limited by the viewpoint of the particular person making them. They are limited, relative truths only: Thy verses of description are, while true, but a children's truth. (Bahá'u'lláh, 2002, p. 210)

As stated by Bahá'u'lláh, there is no absolute cosmology, and the attainable truth for a human is just a partial truth which is related to his efforts and maturity in mind and cognitive means.

The next sections will demonstrate the key elements of the Bahá'í mind-set, so the origins of the Bahá'í Administrative Order will be clearer to the audience.

1.1. THE ESSENCE OF GOD

As in Semitic religions, there is the concept of God in Bahá'í thought; however, Bahá'ís believe in such an unknowable and unachievable essence that can epistemologically be removed from the doctrine. Ontologically, there is an existing God, which is the Absolute Reality, and there is not any connection with his creatures, except that they are creatures and He is the Creator (Bahá'u'lláh, 1862).

1.2. MANIFESTATIONS OF GOD

The only interaction that humans may have with this exalted being is through the founders of the religions. Even though they appear in the human body and manner, they are, in fact, mediators relating to God and humanity. It is believed that only through them can humans hope to know anything about God, if at all (Bahá'u'lláh, 1990). Bahá'u'lláh calls them “the Manifestations of the Sun of Truth” (Bahá'u'lláh, 1862, p. 14), and they reflect, like a pure

and clear mirror, the lights of the Sun of Truth to the realm of humanity and make it bright and brilliant. Bahá'ís claim that the prophets are the representatives and manifestations of God among the people and prefer to call them “the Manifestations of God” instead of the prophets, accepting the metaphor of the mirror and the “Sun of Truth”. Bahá'u'lláh argues that whatever has been said by the Manifestations of God are proper, but only partial and relative truths, which are correlated to the maturity and perception of the people of their era (Bahá'u'lláh, 1990). He also says that the Manifestations can claim that they are God, due to the metaphor of the mirror and the Sun of Truth (Bahá'u'lláh, 1862). The manifestations of God reflect, as Bahá'u'lláh (1862) explains, the light of God's glory, and are expressions of the “Invisible of the Invisibles”. They reveal and manifest all the “names and attributes of God”, such as knowledge, power, authority, compassion, wisdom, and glory (Bahá'u'lláh, 1862).

According to Bahá'u'lláh, the Manifestations have two stations. One is the aspect of their Divine existence and pure unity. In this respect, they can be called by one name. For example, they all can be named Mohammad, Moses, or Jesus. They are all the same reality and truth, the glorious light of the Sun of Truth, which is reflected from the invisible realm to the realm of humanity. The other is the status of distinction through which they appear at different ages via different physical bodies. They have different functions and missions, with different names and affairs (Bahá'u'lláh, 1862, pp. 180-181).

1.3. CREATURES

Bahá'ís believe that there are three realms of existence: “the world of God, the world of the Kingdom, and the world of Creation” (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, 1908, p. 295). God is regarded as the Real Existent and Real Unity that manifests his absolute being in the realm of the Kingdom, which is also the realm of attributes. The world of the Kingdom, God is reflected in the reality of the creatures. It can be very similar to the light that spreads out from the sun to

the creatures; this light is reflected in endless appearances on the reality of the creatures and identifies and personalizes itself along with the potentiality and the essential merit of things ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1908). Therefore, according to the Bahá'í point of view, the first creature is manifested through the mirror of the realm of the Kingdom and then via the world of the Kingdom. This results in the emanation of attribution to all creatures. God is still transcendent from the creatures and the world of creation. Creatures are his radiance of existence reflected through the mirror of the world of manifestation. There is absolutely no other relationship between him and his creatures. The Sun of Truth does not come down to the world of creatures; it shines its glory towards them through the reflecting world of the Kingdom. The Real Unity reflects God into the infinite forms of creatures through the mirror of the Kingdom.

Ontologically, the creatures are from the one essence of the Real Existent. Epistemologically, the Kingdom reflects all the attributes towards the world of creatures, and each creature receives its portion of these attributes in accordance with its capacity and merits. Among all the creatures, humans have the most capacity and hence, reflect the most radiance. These attributes include knowledge, mercy, wisdom, creativity, and power. Therefore, God is unknowable because he does not have any attributes through which he could not be known, and while humans cannot know the absolute being via their cognitive means, they can merely be aware of attributes and characters.

1.4. UNITY

“Unity” is one of the most important concepts in the Bahá'í doctrine. It refers to the real and pure Unity, which is the realm of Unknowable God; the relative unity of the world of the Kingdom, which is the realm of Manifestations; and the unity of the world of creatures that is essentially the radiance of the Glory of God, divided in countless forms and types, which unites diversity.

Since the human race was immature and started to fight and quarrel, it needed to be educated about the unity. Hence, manifestations came to teach humans about unity and peace. “The purpose of these Educators, in all they said and taught, was to preserve man’s exalted station”. (Bahá’u’lláh, 1890, p. 139). Accordingly, for Bahá’ís, the main purpose of the manifestations of God is the establishment of unity among humans.

Each Manifestation came to teach a lesson of unity in humans’ social life, which was relevant to their era. The unity of family, tribe, and city-nation are successfully established, and now it is time for the unity of the world. This is the goal of this age of human life. The world, which is now growing to maturity, has to recognize the unity and oneness of the human race and establish a global society in accordance with this recognition (Effendi, 1991).

In the first step, Bahá’ís have to practise their faith through a specified channel, which leads the spiritual power of the Kingdom for their efforts that is the Bahá’í Administrative Order. It is regarded as an embryo for the world order (Effendi, 1934). Therefore, the Unity of Humankind is considered a social achievement for this era.

1.5. THE COVENANT

The totality of the Administrative Order is maintained by faithfulness to the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh. While unity is the attribute of Bahá’u’lláh’s message, the function of the Covenant is to keep the Bahá’í Faith protected from the division and to guarantee that its principles are systematically understood as the foundation for the New World Order. The Covenant is a central belief, by which the Bahá’í community members accept the position and authority of Bahá’u’lláh as the leader of a new spiritual revolution in which the unity of humanity is the ultimate goal and essential belief (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1990).

Additionally, there are two types of the Covenant in the Bahá’í literature. The first is the Covenant that each manifestation makes with his followers. The other is related to the

hierarchy of authority within the Bahá'í community. Bahá'u'lláh has established a covenant with his followers to take his elder son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the “Interpreter and exemplar of his teachings”. In the same category 'Abdu'l-Bahá made the Covenant with the Bahá'ís to accept his administration after him (Effendi, 1944).

THE GUARDIANSHIP AND THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

The Guardianship is anticipated by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992) and established in the *Will and Testament* of 'Abdu'l-Bahá ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990). Bahá'u'lláh appointed the Universal House of Justice in his writings, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá in his *Will and Testament* explained the method of its establishment. Eventually, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian, planned its foundations.

Concerning the Guardianship, 'Abdu'l-Bahá expresses that, after him, Bahá'ís should refer to Shoghi Effendi—“the sign of God, the chosen branch, the Guardian of the Cause of God” and “the expounder of the words of God”—and, after Shoghi Effendi, to “the first-born of his lineal descendants” ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990, p. 11).

According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Universal House of Justice, “which God hath ordained as the source of all good and freed from all error”, has to be “elected by universal suffrage” among the Bahá'ís. Its members are to be knowledgeable, steadfast, and “the well-wishers of all mankind”. The Universal House of Justice is supposed to enact “all ordinances and regulations that are not to be found in the explicit Holy Text” ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990, p. 14).

Shoghi Effendi describes these “twin institutions of the House of Justice and the Guardianship” as Bahá'u'lláh's “chosen successors”. They are supposed to apply the Bahá'í principles and organize and specify the necessary institutions to establish the unity and the Most Great Peace globally, and according to the requirements and characteristics of the new era (Effendi, 1938, pp. 19-20).

Since Shoghi Effendi, the only Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith passed away childless in 1957; the Guardianship practically ended during the Bahá'í period. There was no eligible heir to succeed his ministry, and six years later (UHJ, 1963), when The Universal House of Justice was established, it officially announced, “that there is no way to appoint or to legislate to make it possible to appoint a second Guardian to succeed Shoghi Effendi” (UHJ, 1963). Accordingly, the institution of the Universal House of Justice is the only reference centre for the Bahá'ís. It is the top of the Administrative Order as well as the head of the Bahá'í community.

2. FEATURES OF THE BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER

The Bahá'í Administrative Order is a universal organization, initiated in Bahá'í scripture, and manages the concerns of the Bahá'í Faith. There is no clergy, religious missionaries, nor class of professional faith experts in the Bahá'í international community. The Bahá'í Administrative Order is a construction based on elected assemblies, which possess legislative, executive, and judicial authority. This is also shared with selected individuals whose responsibility is to shelter, counsel, and inspire the Bahá'í community. It is also regarded as the embryonic form of the future world order proposed by Bahá'u'lláh (Effendi, 1934).

2.1. IMPORTANCE AND PURPOSE OF THE BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER

Shoghi Effendi (16 June 1945) refers to the Bahá'í Administrative Order as “the ideal instrument to make spiritual laws function properly in the material affairs of this world” (Hornby, 1994, p. 1). Therefore, it seems to be important for individual Bahá'ís to spend their time, as much as possible, to serve in the different parts of the Bahá'í Administrative Order.

According to the Universal House of Justice (12 November 1973), the functional purpose of the Administrative Order is, above all, to provide “strength and directive to the teaching work” and to improve “the establishment of the Faith”. However, it is not regarded as an aim per se, but as a channel, which gives directions and efficiency to the spiritual energy engendered by the “Word of God” towards the believers (Hornby, 1994, p. 2).

2.2. RELATIONSHIP OF THE CAUSE TO THE ADMINISTRATION

Shoghi Effendi (May 30, 1930) calls the Administrative Order one of the undeniable principles of the Cause and asserts “The administration is the social order of Bahá'u'lláh. Without it, all the principles of the Cause will remain abortive. To take exception to this, therefore, is to take exception to the fabric that Bahá'u'lláh has prescribed; it is to disobey His law” (Hornby, 1994, p. 2). However, it is not regarded as the Cause and an end unto itself, but a means to realize its goals and ideas. Shoghi Effendi (19 April 1939) explains that the Cause and the Administrative Order are inseparable, and their relationship is, metaphorically speaking, like the soul and the body (Hornby, 1994).

2.3. THE “RULERS” AND THE “LEARNED”

Bahá'u'lláh, in his *Book of Covenant*, identifies two components of his Administrative Order: “Blessed are the Rulers and Learned among the people of Bahá” (Bahá'u'lláh, 1890, p. 245). Referring to these two components, Shoghi Effendi (1931) explains that the “Learned” are the Hands of the Cause of God, and on the other hand, are the teachers who make efforts to carry out the work of teaching, and the “Rulers” are the members of Local, National and Universal houses of justice. Their duties are separated, but complementary (UHJ, 1996). The Hands of the Cause of God were individually appointed by Bahá'u'lláh, and their main duties were protecting and propagating his Faith. Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi have also appointed some of the believers as the Hands of the Cause of God; these people were selected

among all Bahá'ís from all continents to fulfil these duties. They have been appointed as the Hands of the Cause of God for their whole lifetime.

In November 1964, the Universal House of Justice verified that it was not eligible to appoint Hands of the Cause. As an alternative, in 1968 it was decided that the responsibilities of the Hands of the Cause, as they related to protecting and propagating the Faith, could be fulfilled by the innovation of the Continental Boards of Counsellors. Since 1973, this has been carried out through the institution of the International Teaching Centre.

The Universal House of Justice assigns the Counsellor members of the International Teaching Centre and the Continental Counsellors. The Continental Counsellors select members of Auxiliary Boards. All of these individuals are regarded as the “Learned”, as explained by Shoghi Effendi (UHJ, 1996).

The “Rulers” include the administrative and leading authority, which resides at the local level with the Local Spiritual Assembly, under the Universal House of Justice. These institutions, at all levels (local, national, international), are democratically elected, and have their own prescribed terms of office (Effendi, 1938).

2.4. ELECTIONS

In the Bahá'í elections, campaigning and nominations are strictly avoided. Electors cast their votes completely independently and confidentially by secret ballot. Except for the Hands of the Cause (until 2007, when the last of the Hands of the Cause died) and Counsellors, all adult Bahá'ís over the age of 21 are qualified to stand for election to Local and National Assemblies. However, eligibility for being elected as a member of the Universal House of Justice is restricted to adult men (Hornby, 1994).

2.5. CONSULTATION

In the Bahá'í administration, authority is not personal. Bahá'u'lláh states that it is necessary to consult on all things (UHJ, 1991). Shoghi Effendi asserts, “Consultation, frank and unfettered, is the bedrock of this unique Order”. He also mentions that consultation is an essential principle of Bahá'í administration and applies to all Bahá'í performances that concern the collective activities of the Bahá'í community and the Faith (UHJ, 1991). When there is no consultation, there is no authority.

3. INSTITUTIONS OF BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATION

3.1. THE RULERS

3.1.1. LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES (LSA)

Any Bahá'í community with nine or more adult Bahá'ís establishes its Local Spiritual Assembly. Elections take place during Ridván (21 April-1 May), which is one of the most important Bahá'í holidays. At this time, nine adults are elected to launch the Local Spiritual Assembly. The Local Spiritual Assembly has full authority and responsibilities over all Bahá'í activities and affairs inside its region, in accordance with the constitution of the Local Spiritual Assembly. Some of its responsibilities are managing the development and maintenance of the community using teaching the Faith, spiritual tuition, supporting the poor, education, organizing Bahá'í meetings such as the Nineteen-Day Feasts, and celebrations of Bahá'í events. The Assembly concerns itself with the personal difficulties of community members and settles arguments. It can also organize assistant committees to help it in different areas of activity. Although empowered with “an authority rendering them unanswerable for their acts and decisions to those who elect them” (Effendi, 1944, p. 331), the Assemblies have to assure the members of the communities of their loyalty. They report

their plans and activities to them and welcome any suggestions or proposals the members might have. There are local Funds to which the believers voluntarily contribute. These donations support the plans and activities of the Local Spiritual Assemblies. The Spiritual Assembly opens its meetings with prayer. It makes its decisions through the process of consultation. The Assembly frequently communicates with the members of its community, mostly through newsletters, bulletins, and through organizing the Nineteen-Day Feast (Effendi, 1934).

3.1.2. THE NINETEEN-DAY FEAST

The Nineteen-Day Feast is a crucial activity of Bahá'í life, and one of the most important responsibilities of the Local Spiritual Assembly is to organize it. The arrangement of the Feast includes “three distinct but related parts: the devotional, the administrative, and the social”. The devotional includes prayers and readings from the Holy Texts. The administrative portion is “a general meeting where the Local Spiritual Assembly (LSA) reports its activities, plans and problems to the community, shares news and messages from the World Centre and the National Assembly, and receives the thoughts and recommendations of the friends through a process of consultation”. The social part of the Feast is the “partaking of refreshments and engaging in other activities meant to foster fellowship in a culturally determined diversity of forms which do not violate principles of the Faith or the essential character of the Feast”. The Feast takes place on the first day of each Bahá'í month (UHJ, 1991, pp. 417-458). Each Bahá'í month consists of nineteen days.

3.1.3. NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLIES (NSA)

In every country, there is one National Spiritual Assembly (NSA), and they assume administrative authority for their region. The responsibilities of the National Spiritual Assembly include motivating, unifying, and coordinating, through “frequent personal consultations”, the activities and performances of individual and the Local Assemblies. The

National Spiritual Assemblies are also in direct contact with the Bahá'í World Centre. There is a constitution for the National Spiritual Assembly, which outlines its rights and responsibilities (Effendi, 1934).

The members of the National Spiritual Assembly are elected through a two-stage election: first, the Bahá'ís of a country or designated region vote for their delegates. Then, delegates vote for nine adult Bahá'ís residents in that country. This election takes place at a national convention, held annually during the Ridván holidays. Consultations on Bahá'í activities, plans, and policies take place during the conventions. Proposals and recommendations are then made to the new National Spiritual Assembly (UHJ, 1991).

3.1.4. THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Above the Bahá'í Administrative Order is the Institute of the Universal House of Justice. Its membership is elected through a three-stage election whereby nine men are elected for a five-year period. The election takes place during the international Bahá'í convention, which is held at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel, during the Ridván holidays. Bahá'ís believe that the Universal House of Justice is one of the infallible⁹ proponents of the Faith and they have to obey all its decisions without any questions. The Universal House of Justice approved its constitution on 26th of November 1972, which defines the present components of the Bahá'í Administrative Order and describes their functions (UHJ, 1972). The most significant duty of the Universal House of Justice is to approve the laws and rules that are not mentioned in Baha'u'llah's writings. This means it has to universally determine, lead, manage, arrange, organize, and harmonize all Bahá'í affairs and activities.

⁹ Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi are the other ones.

3.2. THE LEARNED

THE INSTITUTION OF THE COUNSELLORS

The Hands of the Cause of God appointed by Shoghi Effendi had two significant responsibilities: protection and propagation of the Bahá'í Faith. To carry out their functions, they consulted with and advised the National Spiritual Assemblies. They travelled all around the world to educate Bahá'í communities about the Faith and inspired their members to be active.

The members of the International Teaching Centre, and the Continental Boards of Counsellors established by the Universal House of Justice, collectively comprise the institution of the Counsellors. Their purpose is “to extend into the future the specific functions of protection and propagation conferred upon the Hands of the Cause” (UHJ, 1972).

The Universal House of Justice appoints a Counsellor for five years. Since the Counsellors have a high administrative rank, they are not eligible for the election to local or national administrative institutes (UHJ, 1972).

There are two types of Auxiliary Boards in each continent; one for protection and another for propagation, to carry out the responsibilities of the Counsellors. Their period of responsibility is five years as well. The Auxiliary Board members usually appoint assistants at the local level for a one-year period of service. The Counsellors and the Auxiliary Board members must avoid becoming involved in any administrative responsibilities. They are merely “responsible for stimulating, counselling and assisting National Spiritual Assemblies, and also work with individuals, groups, and Local Assemblies” (UHJ, 1996).

CONCLUSION

Bahá'ís individually and collectively work as volunteers in different organizations within the administration system. Even if they are not members of any other institutes, as individual Bahá'ís they are supposed to attend the Nineteen-Day Feasts and contribute to the affairs and activities of the Bahá'í International Community.

The developing system of the administration is a religious-rational construction which was founded at the very beginning of Bahá'í history by the founder of the Faith and is regarded as a channel through which the Manifestation of this era plan both to educate and empower his followers and reveal his authority. It is still under construction, and all the Bahá'ís around the world are welcome to contribute in developing its institutes and approaches to the ultimate goal of the Faith.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

The present study explores the role of the Bahá'í Faith in the community-building activities of the Sheffield Bahá'ís according to Peter Berger's theory of social reality of religion (1967). Berger's approach to *Social Reality of Religion* (1967) is firmly related to the idea of the social construction of reality delivered by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). While the correlation between religion and community has received some scholarly consideration, community-building has been far less well studied (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2009). Instead, there are studies on the role of religion and the lives of new immigrants, though few of them are related to their community-building activities in their situation as migrants (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2009; Downey, 2009; Friesen, 2013). There are also very few studies on the role of the religion and spirituality in community-building regarding the psychological influence of religion on the spiritual and individual virtues that contribute to the building and maintaining a community (Jason & Moritsugu, 2004). Political philosophy and religion are also the subjects of a series of research that is concerned with the role of Christianity in changing the world and well-being of the community (Hunter, 2010; Gaventa, 2012; Stiltner, 1999). Since those studies are not directly relevant to inform this research, the review of literature initially explores the sociology of religion, in the context of the UK, and then links it to the foundation of Berger's social reality of religion and the social construction of reality. Eventually, sociological studies of the Bahá'í Faith will be reviewed to find the pathway towards the impact of the Faith on the community-building activities.

1. SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

Sociology of religion is concerned with religion-related patterns through which people individually and collectively arrange their lives (Davie, 2008). According to Davie (2004 b), regarding religiosity, the universal condition is changing, and it is becoming increasingly hard to disregard the “presence of religion in the modern world”. Therefore, sociologists have recently begun to study the phenomenon of religion in modern society after a period of ignoring it (Bruce, 2005). Davie distinguishes three different traditions in the sociology of religion (2008; 2013). The first tradition in sociology of religion according to Davie (2008; 2013) is the American tradition, which is widely Weberian, but this tradition has been influenced by Parsons’s functionalism interpretation of it (Parsons, 1937) and a secular-plural tradition. The second tradition in sociology of religion is the European tradition, which was influenced by the French founders of the sociology, and in particular, Durkheim. Lastly, the British sociology of religion is a hybrid field because incorporates and extrapolates from American secular-plural texts and the European secular context “(i.e. one of low levels of religious activity)” (Davie, 2013, pp. 36-37).

The next section will explore the British context of religiosity in accordance with the sociological theorists. Additionally, the social construction of reality of Berger and Luckmann (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) that has influenced this thesis will be discussed later.

1.1. THE BRITISH CONTEXT

Regarding religiosity, the United Kingdom is labelled as super-diversity, which is the result of new patterns of migration in a globalized world (Aldridge, 2013). In 2005, Steve Bruce suggested that Britain had seen very little immigration in the modern period. Therefore, the diversity of religions in Britain is the result of the evolution and disintegration of the traditional religion (Bruce, 2005). In 2013, on the other hand, Alan Aldridge (2013) stressed

that more people are emigrating from countries that do not have a link to the British Commonwealth or the former British Empire, and they bring with them a greater linguistic diversity. People migrate in small groups, each group has its exclusive characteristics, regarding gender and age, and they embrace a vast range of migration statuses. Also, migrants have various connections to their country of origin and maintaining a religious identity is one of the main issues in the multifaceted character of super diverse societies (Aldridge, 2013). In fact, the status of religiosity in Britain has changed from a dualism of secularism-Christianity during the twentieth century (Brown, 2006; Sherkat & Ellison, 1999) and the very beginning of the twenty-first century (Davie, 2015) into a super-diversity in the second decade of the twenty-first century (Aldridge, 2013).

As a result of this change, the attitudes towards religion have changed in the academic world. Scholars have started studying different aspects of religion and religiosity as an inevitable aspect of European communities. Aldridge (2000) highlights the importance of justifying religion as a subject of importance towards the end of the twentieth century. However, he further expresses that it is no longer necessary to rationalize religion, as it is practically an influential and commanding force in the modern world, even in theoretically secular societies (Aldridge, 2013). It seems that eventually, sociologists are open to trying to comprehend religious activities instead of considering them as absurd, irrational, or unreasonable (Stark & R.Finke, 2000).

This chapter identifies three seminal works representing the current outlooks on the sociology of religion in the early twenty-first century, all of which relate to the status of religiosity in Europe. They will be discussed as an overview on firstly, believing without belonging; the impression of Grace Davie (1990); secondly, a self-selected set of belief, the proposal of David Voas (2007); and finally, secularism, the argument of Steve Bruce (2000) and Peter Berger (2001).

1.1.1. GRACE DAVIE BELIEVING WITHOUT BELONGING:

Davie (1990) claims Britain is quite a religious country in which people believe in God and hold some beliefs in different kinds of religions other than just Christianity. Davie also suggests that individuals tend not to relate their religiosity to the Church. Hence, if being religious merely means churchgoing, they are prepared to declare that they are not religious (Davie, 1990).

Correspondingly, regarding secular-religious dualism, Davie (1994) outlines the notion of “believing without belonging”. She further (Davie, 2000) explains that from the viewpoints of recent studies, secularization, in its thorough meaning, is not the issue of the Western world. On the contrary, she points out that the issue is that people believe in religious concepts, but they are tired of church, religious organizations, and being controlled by religious systems. Davie (2000) further emphasises that there are two exceptions in the Western world, which change the mean and statistical results: Central and Eastern Europe and the United States of America. She proposes that Eastern Europe before 1989 consciously used mass attendance as one way of expressing disapproval of an unpopular regime. This movement was less because of belief in religion and more a way of protesting against the regime. Moreover, according to Davie (2000), forty per cent of Americans still declare that they both believe and belong to a particular religion.

Davie (1994) argues that the statistics showing declining church membership and the broader phenomena of British religious life do not add up. Davie seeks “to describe and give a meaningful explanation of the religious situation in contemporary Britain” (1994, p. xii). She compares the model of British religiosity within the framework of Western Europe, which regarding religion, seems similar to the pattern in Britain. She noticed that in Wales, Scotland, and particularly in Northern Ireland, people have higher degrees of both believing

and belonging to religion than they do in England. Furthermore, she maintains that secularization has not happened in Britain. Her notion is that Britain is “un-churched rather than simply secular” (Davie, 2013). This means that not only Britain is not considered to be a Christian society, but it is also not a secular society. Additionally, Davie (1990) emphasises the high level of belief and low level of practice for both Western Europe and Britain. In her new edition of *Religion in Britain* (Davie, 2015) she demonstrates how the term “un-churched” has been rapidly popularized by both Christian leaders and scholars alike, who prefer this term over “secular”, to describe British society.

Nonetheless, Aldridge (2013) criticises Davie’s (2002) notion of “believing without belonging”. He argues that secularization theorists typically make two crucial assumptions: that there is a sharp division between the public and private spheres and that in comparison, the private sphere is less important than the public sphere. Therefore, they can distinguish between believing and belonging. Aldridge suggests that both their assumptions are questionable. Voas (2005) suggests that there is no mismatch between the statistical rates of believing and belonging, and he claims that both are falling at a similar percentage.

According to Aldridge, Voas argues that the term ‘believing without belonging’ was an interesting idea, but it is time to be honourably retired (Aldridge, 2013, p. 185). Aldridge has proposed an alternative phrase “vicarious religion” (Aldridge, 2013, p. 186) which means that an active minority carry out religion in the best interests of and with the implicit confirmation of the majority (Aldridge, 2013).

Similarly, Michael Winter and Christopher Short (1993) do not agree with the concept of “believing without belonging” as a means of understanding the religious situation in Britain. They point out that in Davie’s survey (1990), church attendance as an indicator of belonging is misleading. In their study, Winter and Short (1993) describe that it is clear that, at least in

rural areas, British people are categorized as both believing and belonging. This is based on the series of questions that they have been asked about belonging to a church and its ministry.

Voas and Day (2007) declare that altogether one-fifth of people seemingly do not consider themselves as belonging to a religion unless they are persuaded to maintain one. Even an intentional attachment to religion has different levels and similar to the phenomenon of “believing without believing”, there are numerous ways of “belonging without belonging”. Relatively few people practise their expected religion; “there is much more notional than actual belonging” (Voas & Day, 2007). Moreover, Voas and Day (2007) suggest that opinion polls in Britain demonstrate high levels of belief in almost everything. These include reincarnation (a quarter of respondents), horoscopes (also a quarter), clairvoyance (almost half), to ghosts (nearly a third), and so on. Davie (1996) suggests that changes in the patterns of religiosity have to lead sociologists to argue that it is time to reject conventional sociological theories of religiosity and secularization, and to improve new “sociological ground rules” for understanding religious life.

Thomas William Heyck (1996) describes how Davie (1994) argues that the patterns of religious life in Britain have changed, but not declined. Heyck (1996) writes that the decline of religion in Britain can be explained by the “gap theory”, which posits that the role of religion, in the absence of scientific or otherwise reasonable explanations, is in explaining the world. He continues to state that the considerable sets of cultural and social changes, which are considered “modernization”, tend to create situations in which it becomes a progressively coherent worldwide view without an option for religious hypotheses. It is likely that in Heyck’s (1996) point of view, secularization is the cause for modernization and not the other way around.

Finally, regarding the relationship between modernity and secularization, Davie has argued that modernity and secularization are correlated and have come together exclusively in the

Western world. Modernity started in Europe by removing religion from social and political life to release people's minds from the shackles of religious ideologies, as well as from religious structures, in order to move forward. However, modernity in other countries, especially in the developing world, has adopted and adapted, and therefore, does not necessarily lead to secularism (Davie, 2004 a). Davie (2004 a) suggests that to modern people religion is still a source of inspiration for their entire life and not merely for the sake of being religious. It is undeniable that in much of the Western world, national institutions have segregated religion from other dimensions of life which encourage historical inspiration (education, health, welfare, and to a considerable extent, politics). In short, Davie argues that it is not easy to overlook the presence of religion in the modern world (Davie, 2013).

1.1.2. SELF-SELECTED SET OF BELIEFS; DAVID VOAS:

Voas (2007) suggests that in contrast with Americans, Britons have adopted the concept of state-supported religious education, religious broadcasting on network television, bishops, the legislature, and so on. Differently than many continental Europeans, Britons do not feel that they need shelter from religious organizations. Additionally, regarding believing in supernatural powers and its relation to religiosity, Voas (2007) asserts that some people who claim that they are Atheists regularly claim to see ghosts or have similar experiences.

Voas (2007) further illustrates how the European Social Surveys present sufficient and valuable data in three key areas of religiosity, which are affiliation, practice, and belief:

- Belonging: current or past identification (Affiliation)
- Belief: self-rated religiosity; the importance of religion
- Behaviour: attendance at religious services (Practice) prayer participation/support.

Voas's (2007) view is different from Davie's (2007) on the criterion of belonging. Davie (2007) suggests church-going as a symbol of belonging, while Voas and Day (2007) prefer

the idea of self-identification as a sign of belonging. In his view, going to Church is simply a religious behaviour, and individuals should introduce themselves as a believer in a particular religion. Regarding behaviour, Voas and Day (2007) argue that at best, ten per cent of Britons go to church regularly (e.g. monthly or more often).

Voas and Day (2007) also mention a self-selected set of beliefs about supernatural power, hell, and the afterlife, which is well-known among sociologists of religion as *Sheilaism*. Voas and Day (2007) claim many believers of organized religions are not aware of the meanings of their beliefs and opinions, nor are they aware of the level of spirituality that they can attain through their religious beliefs and practices. On the contrary, the *Sheilaists* are more conscious of their spiritual findings. *Sheilaism* was the description used by a participant (“Sheila Larson”, a young nurse) in “*Habits of the Heart*”: “I believe in God”, Sheila says. “I am not a religious fanatic. I cannot remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. Sheilaism is just my own little voice” (Wilcox, 2013, p. 10). In this respect, Voas and Day (2007) are aligned with “gap theory” (Heyck, 1996) regarding believing in some aspects of religion and being uncertain about other aspects and parts of the Holy Book.

Finally, Voas and Day (2007) conclude that Great Britain is a complex society of religious and unreligious people, whose goals and behaviours are quite similar. Religion does not affect people’s desires and goals in Great Britain. The religious and unreligious both aspire to have better educations, better jobs, and a better quality of life. To get to this goal, they may choose different political parties in elections, but their desires for society are quite the same (Voas & Day, 2007).

1.1.3. STEVE BRUCE & PETER BERGER'S SECULARIZATION

Steve Bruce: Bruce (2000) believes in individualism in all aspects of life, including religiosity. In his opinion, individualism means “the right to do what we wanted, providing it did not harm others” (Bruce, 2000, p. 5). Using data from the survey, as well as other data gathered on Britons' religiosity, Bruce (1995) infers that there has been a shift from the concept of religion as a state and community matter to religion as an individual commitment. He further discusses that a Christian society gradually transitions into a society with dedicated Christian members. Consequently, personal attachments to formal religions decline. In favour of the notion of secularity, Bruce (1995) expresses that all the surveys show that the measurable factors of religiosity, such as size, influence, and popularity of the churches have been dramatically decreased (Bruce, 1995, p. 426). Bruce (2000) seriously believes that modernization essentially altered the place and spirit of religious beliefs, practices, and organizations in order to reduce their relevance to whole aspects of modern societies.

Bruce defends the ideas of secularization (Bruce, 1992). However, he disagrees with the way through which the main theories change in social science and believes that this process is nothing but an intellectual fashion. He thinks that ignoring religion and rejecting it in the academic world became a gesture for academics to prove their intellectuality (Bruce, 2005).

According to Bruce (2000), modernization made the church form of religion unfeasible and churches became denominations. Regarding religiosity, he is sceptical not about the religion itself, but because of the style of religiosity. He (Bruce, 2000) argues it became clear that no particular religion was found to be able to establish unity and harmony in modern society at the very beginning of the twentieth century. He suggests that religiosity at the end of the twentieth century resembles “pick-and-mix” box of sweets in which people create a box from the collection of their favourite sweets. Similarly, Voas (2007) refers to this condition as

“Sheilaism”. Bruce (2000) concludes that belief in the supernatural has not vanished. He asserts that the forms of believing in the supernatural have become so personal and so diffuse that there are few specific social consequences. He continues to say that currently, religiosity is expressed in new sects and cults, which are very scattered and personal. As highlighted by Weber (1965) these sects and cults are in such disharmony with each other, and are so different, that they cannot produce a melody, in order to rouse the masses (Bruce, 2000).

Peter Berger: If Berger were well known for only one idea, it would be for his notions of secularization and then de-secularization (Nelsen, et al., 2011; Gearon, 2012). Despite his earlier perspective about the modern secular world, in which modernity necessarily led to secularization, recently Berger (2001) took an orthodox stance towards secularization and religiosity of the modern world. He stresses that according to the evidence, the world, with some exceptions, “is as religious as it has ever been, and in some places is more religious than ever” (2001, p. 445).

Berger (2001) emphasises that this does not mean that there are not any secularization situations in the modern world. It merely means that secularization is in no way the straight and unavoidable consequence of modernity. It is a vital mission for the sociology of religion to “map the phenomenon of secularization” as one situation among others.

Furthermore, for Berger (2001) the key question is “is Europe religiously different, and if so why?” (Berger, 2001, p. 446). Berger (2001) calculates two exceptions for the modern world that propagate a secular attitude towards religion. First, there exists a narrow, but very powerful, layer of intellectuals and highly distinct people with “Western-style higher education”, particularly in the humanities and social sciences. Secondly, there is a geographical exemption in the modern world, as can be seen in Western and Central Europe. This is, in his opinion, the only main section of the world in which the old secularization theory is still empirically acceptable. In short, Berger (2001) believes that Europe is an

exception to the entire modern and traditional world regarding secularization. Therefore, he has already accepted that the pattern of Europe, regarding religiosity, is secularization.

Additionally, Aldridge (2013) writes that from Berger's point of view, there are three dimensions of secularization: social-structural, cultural, and the level of individual consciousness. He claims that nowadays the only dimension that has remained secular is some parts of social-structural dimension, especially in the European Protestant world. He emphasises that from Berger's viewpoint even in Europe, the situation is ambiguous and uncertain: formal membership and active participation have fallen, but religious institutions and symbols continue to play an important part in social, cultural, and political life.

Overall, Berger (Berger, et al., 2008) asserts that most of the world is effectively influenced and passionate about religious movements, with Europe being an exception. It seems that he is trying to replace secularism with pluralism (Berger, et al., 2008) as his new approach and conception to the whole modern world. He is still looking for a modern world-covering theory or at least a theoretical concept (Aldridge, 2013). Berger suggests that despite the difference between Europe and the United States, they both have pluralism in common. He states religion is no longer taken for granted, but it is "the object of reflection and decision" (Berger, et al., 2008, p. 13). He goes on to say that while they are similar, in the United States people mainly buy religiosity, and in Europe, people mostly buy secularity from the "religious market" (Berger, et al., 2008, p. 13). However, he suggests that "the powerful effect of pluralism" is similar in the modern world (meaning the United States, Europe, and Australia) (Berger, et al., 2008, p. 13). Linda Woodhead (2001) argues that the social construction of religion leads to religious pluralism and that pluralism directly and inevitably leads to secularism. She continues to stress that in Berger's point of view, pluralism is the link between modernization and secularization. Woodhead (Berger, 2001) clarifies that Berger's insight (1967) provides the missing link between modernization and secularization

that is pluralism. Berger (1967) suggests that the world is secularized because of religious pluralization. Exposure to alternative religious or epistemological systems can lead to rejection of their original belief system. As a result, some people become more open to secular social systems that are more liberal and less controlling (Berger, 1967).

Jens Köhrsen (2012) debates against the recent discourses of a “myth of post-secularity”.

They make people believe that there has been a secular phase in the modern world, in which religion was not permitted to take action in the public and political sphere of societies, and now the situation has changed, and religion is back again (Köhrsen, 2012, p. 273).

Luckmann (1967) suggests religion and culture are virtually synonymous. Luckmann (1967) refers to Durkheim and Weber and argues that while it seems that people were secular after World War II (in that they were not attending church and not practising religion), religion is still the key to understanding society and the place of the individual in society (Bowker, 1997). In fact, every aspect of human social life has been deeply influenced by religiousness to such a degree that it cannot be neglected just because church attendance in the Western world declined (Prandi, 2005). In general, religion is still at work to create crucial meanings for humans as the main component of culture and is vital enough to be considered as the culture (Luckmann, 1967).

Voas (2007) declares that the difference between “secular” and “secularism” is noticeable. By comparison, “secular” is the opposite of “religious,” and only signifies a lack of religious inspiration or content, while “secularism” is an ideology that is against religious advantage, and it is often the religion itself. British people are known to be non-religious rather than anti-religious. Many people are, therefore, secular, and very few tend to be secularists (Voas & Day, 2007).

Peter Berger was a major contributor to the sociology of religion through his idea of secularization. However, after 40 years, he had significantly changed his assessment as the data in the United States showed that there had always been religiosity among Americans (Davie, 2013).

1.2. THE CHALLENGES DERIVED FROM PLURALISM

Since Berger (Berger, et al., 2008) declared his misunderstanding of the situation of religiosity and replaced his secularization theory with the notion of pluralism, this section will provide a link between Berger's idea of pluralism, relativism, and social constructionism in his perspectives. Along with Voas's Sheilaism (Voas & Day, 2007) as well as Bruce's "pick-and-mix" (Bruce, 2005), Berger also suggests pluralism instead of secularization as the general situation in the modern world (Berger, 2001; Berger, 2008).

There is a social psychological approach to pluralism (LaFountain, 2012) which is concerned with the stress that individuals face in the modern and plural world (of religiosity). Philip LaFountain (2012) explains that from Berger's point of view, pluralism and choice make theology are highly relative. That means religion is put in a social context in which many other religious options are possible, and that in turn, makes people confused and scared.

LaFountain (2012) continues to discuss how modern pluralism may create anxieties and tensions within human consciousness. Individuals need social support for their beliefs, which Berger (Berger, 1967) identifies as "plausibility structures". They keep that belief stable and trustworthy in human consciousness. Modernity pluralizes the cognitive alternatives for individuals to construct religious identities and also relativizes all plausibility structures.

Peter Berger (2001) admits that he was wrong about secularization, but right about pluralism. He argues that pluralism does not necessarily lead to secularism. Pluralism undermines all taken-for-granted beliefs, in religion as well as other aspects of life. He suggests that

pluralism affects the *how* of religion and not necessarily the *what*. People can stay religious without taking their beliefs for granted (2001, p. 194).

Nancy Ammerman (2010) reveals that Peter Berger (1967) outlined an influential argument about how religion works. She continues to explain that religion shapes a sacred cosmos in which humans act meaningfully. This cosmos is continued by the plausible construction of everyday interaction; in which it is taken for granted. Facing modern pluralism, a single system could not be taken for granted anymore. Berger assumed that religion could not only accommodate but also retreat into sheltering groups. Although Berger no longer believes that religion is inevitably denied, he still seems to claim that there has been a shift from similarity to diversity. He stresses that this shift has extreme consequences. Nevertheless, he confesses, religious groups seem incredibly flexible and are able to face a world of plural alternatives without becoming marginal or secular (Berger, 2001).

Based on Berger's intention on exploring "the how of religious belief" (2001, p. 194), next section will explain his paradigm of the sociology of religion starting with the social construction of reality.

1.3. A NEW PARADIGM IN SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

Davie (2003) discusses the second generations of sociologists of religion after the classics and suggests during the 1950s Parsons became the first significant scholar who studied religion in a functionalist manner. Davie (2003) suggests that during that period, the idea that social order could be attainable through religious values was widely acceptable. However, during the 1960s, the idea of social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) remarkably influenced the main theme in the sociology of religion. Other scholars, such as Colin (1997) believe *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966) to be the most distinguished text in the social constructionist tradition.

According to Davie (2003), the idea of the social construction of reality inverted Parsons's models of social order. According to Parsons, the values of religion can and will produce social structures that define and determine people's actions and manners. However, Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that even though social order exists, it is constructed from below (Davie, 2003). Berger and Luckmann suggest that few people are engaged in theorizing the ideas, while almost all the people in a given society are somehow participating in its knowledge, then this knowledge has to be the centre of sociology. Berger and Luckmann (1966) put together two statements; one from Weber: "subjective meaning-complex of action" and the other from Durkheim: "consider social facts as things". They made their main theoretical question: "How is it possible that subjective meanings become objective facticities" (Kelly, 1983, p.52)?

Berger and Luckmann produced a "well-constructed synthesis" of the opinions of the classics in the sociology of knowledge (Shaw, 1973) to present a productive theoretical understanding of "how knowledge systems are constructed in general" (McKinley, 1971). According to their view, social forms and meanings develop through a dialectic process of interaction between man and other people, man and himself, and man and his products. In accordance with Durkheim, they consider "social reality" as the subject of the sociology of knowledge. This subject suggests that the subjective reality acquires relative objectivity through a collective understanding of it (McKinley, 1971). They suggest that social reality is the product of constant human actions and interactions. They propose that once social reality is created by human interactions, it starts to act back on human activities, and therefore, influences on the course of its subsequent formation (McKinley, 1971). This is the dialectic nature of social reality that Berger maintains (Berger, 1967). That is, while the individual is highly influenced by their society (Mead, 1934), because of this dialogue between the individual and the society, they are not determined by the society. In fact, the individual still

can develop new patterns of activities, and from that place new social forms (McKinley, 1971). Accordingly, social reality is constantly under construction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Since Peter Berger belongs to the tradition of phenomenology (Andrews, 2012), his concern is in how social cognition is a product of other certain social factors such as class, culture, level and type of education, the power structure of a community or group (Collin, 1997). Phenomenology is the sociology of everyday life, which is concerned with what ordinary people think.

As Berger (1967) suggests, society is not only an outcome of culture but is a necessary condition for it. Human beings are social creatures, and they construct their culture collectively (1967). According to Berger (1967), all cultural factors are subjectively produced in an individual's mind. Once they are constructed and realised by society, they must be regarded as objective realities. Humans create language and find themselves guided by it. Through speech and thought, we produce values and feel guilty when we betray them (Berger, 1967, p. 21). *The Social Reality of Religion* (1967) is an acknowledgement of the function of religion in the activity of social construction. It has provided sociologists with a theoretical framework to explore the status of religion in the contemporary world. According to Berger, religion constructs and maintains the human world (1967).

1.4. CHALLENGE OF THE DEFINITION OF RELIGION

Sociologists (Davie, 2008) define religion in two main ways: substantive (Weber, 1920; Bruce, 2005) and functional (Durkheim, 1975; Berger, 1967; Besecke, 2005; Luckmann, 1967; Berger, 1974). The first approach is interested in what religion *is* and the second approach is concerned with what religion *does* and how it affects a given society. The conflict between these two definitions has existed since the classical period of sociology. The

substantive approach exclusively draws a clear line between religion and non-religion. For example, Weber (1920) defines religion as a belief system in a supernatural power that cannot be explained scientifically. Functional approach, on the other hand, defines religion considering social or psychological functions for individuals and societies. Durkheim (1975), for instance, considers religion the reason for social solidarity.

Substantive definitions limit the theme to beliefs or activities that include supernatural beings. Such a limitation is advantageous because the borders are more easily distinguished, and an initial investigation will disclose the remarkable variety of forms that supernatural power can take in human society. Specifically, non-Western forms of the supernatural are often assembled uneasily within the particular frames, which derive from Western culture. In fact, the strongest critique of substantive definition is proposed from the sociologists who argue that the presence of the supernatural power should not be the defining feature of religion (Davie, 2008). Similarly, Bruce (2000) accepts that the substantial definition is closer to the norm of Westerners than the functional one.

Luckmann's (1967) functional definition of religion is cultural, which seems to be noticeably banal. On the one hand, everyone knows that religion is a cultural phenomenon; on the other hand, no one knows exactly what a particular thinker might mean by culture. According to Luckmann (1967), religion cannot be mainly an institute, a social form, or a social relationship. It primarily means a system of symbols that guide people in their everyday life and directs them to a sphere of significance that transcends their lives (Besecke, 2005, p. 6).

Peter Berger (1974) while rejecting the idea of the substantial definition of religion criticized the usual functional approach too. He argues that the definition of religion is too broad and does not fit the usual people's narrow definition of religion. He adds that the functional definition lacks the Weberian *Verstehen* (Understanding) and inner understanding of the meaning that people give to religion (1974). Berger (1974) suggests since, in his definition of

religion in *The Sacred Canopy* (1967), he became “militant” in his “opposition” to functional definitions (Berger, 1974, p. 127). Berger suggests that functionalist definition makes sense for inquiries on social-psychological mechanisms by which a particular perspective is maintained as plausible, but it is not sufficient for *Verstehen* in the area of religion. Berger (1974) suggests that the substantive approach better explains usual religious consciousness while the functionalist perspective better explains the secularism. He is concerned with the scientific way of studying religion. Berger does not want that scientific study of religion to be blinded to any aspects of religion, substantively or functionally (Berger, 1974).

Craig Martin (2009) argues that asking about what religion is, might be similar to asking about the meaning of religion when no one uses it, outside of any particular context. He debates that instead of what religion “really is”, the important thing is how different contexts refer to religion, and how particular people have used the word religion (Martin, 2009).

In contrast to Martin (2009), Grossman (1975) criticises Berger's attitude towards the definition of religion. He debates that Berger is concerned with the dichotomies between secular opponents and religious ones. He also comments that Berger defines religion as something transcendental and insists on this feature for any definition of it. Grossman (1975) challenges that Berger is not satisfied with most definitions because they are reductionist. However, his definition is also reductionist in some significant ways. He (1975) argues that the transcendental experience of religiosity in everyday life is universal. Berger (2001), on the other hand, asserts that his approach is not reductionist as he does not reduce religion to an epiphenomenon; meaning it is nothing but a reflection of underlying social forces. He claims that in this approach, he is still an orthodox Weberian.

There is another approach that can be added to the two distinct approaches; that is social constructionist definition. It is an interpretivist way concerning how the members of society define religion. This approach is also interested in how definitions are constructed. They do

not suggest that there is one universal definition of religion (Aldridge, 2013). Since this approach is interpretivist, it allows sociologists to identify people's meanings for religion *Verstehen*. However, the constructionist approach does not let sociologists generalize the nature of religion since there are various definitions among people about what can be regarded as a religion (Lease, 1994).

Martin (2009) criticises Gary Lease's (1994) notion that since there is no religion, hence, there is no history of religion. He accepts that through the social constructionist point of view, there is no religion in and of itself. Martin (2009) asserts that if social constructionism is correct, then there are always specific uses of religion that depend on the purpose of the use and the context.

1.5. COMMUNITY-BUILDING

Sociology has the potential to study the function of religion in the community-building activities of human beings. In fact, the first serious discussion and analysis of the role of religion in the endeavours of social construction emerged during the first decades of the twentieth century by Durkheim (1912) and Weber (1920). However, for a long time before Peter Berger and Tomas Luckmann (1966), there was no significant study in this area. Since 1967, when Berger published his crucial theory of social reality of religion about the role of religion in the world-building activities, there have been no sufficient studies in this area.

Accordingly, what we know about the role of religion in the world-building enterprise is largely based upon Berger's theoretical study that interprets religion as a socially constructed reality (Berger, 1967). While "it is Berger who has contributed the most to the study of religion at the level of what might be called meta-theory" (Berger, 2001, p. 1), there are disadvantages to his approach. The main disadvantage of his study is that it is not supported by a practical investigation.

Although Woodhead (2001) might be right, using phrases such as “the older paradigm” in description of his theory, and identifying his point of view as one which “is still cited by a great many researchers” (Warner, 1993) twenty years ago, shows to what extent it is neglected and considered an old-fashioned idea today. Nevertheless, Warner (1993) advises that for researchers who are interested in studying aspects of the phenomenology of religious life, it is “still” useful to apply the “older paradigm” of Berger (1967). On the other hand, he asserts that the researchers who use the “older paradigm” will face serious problems regarding interpretation. Warner (1983) argues that religion in American society is not a matter of the whole culture, and therefore, Berger’s theory is not sufficient to explain and interpret different aspects of it. He supports the paradigms that identify religious life as a matter of subcultures and group life. Considering the limits of Berger’s theory (1967), this study aims to build upon it by studying the Bahá’í community as a subculture in the UK. This study will not only support Berger’s theory by an experimental study, but it also supplements it by adding practical conceptions to the de-construction role of religion in a particular society. This study will update the social reality of religion (Berger, 1967) and demonstrates how an objective, concrete community is constructed by subjective meanings and interpretations of the followers of a Faith.

2. SOCIOLOGICAL STUDIES OF THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

Bahá'ís have been in the United Kingdom since 1898. Weller (2008) suggests that the most Bahá'ís in the UK are of indigenous ethnic origin, converted from other religions, or even from humanism and atheism. However, he (Weller, 2008) believes that there are Bahá'ís from other ethnicities, in particular, those who have come from Iran following the Islamic revolution of 1979. UK census documents from 2011 reveal that 5021 Bahá'ís are living in England and Wales (UK Government, 2012). For this section, sociological studies on the Bahá'í Faith are selected to review. Unfortunately, there are small numbers of academic studies of the Bahá'í Faith¹⁰, and the sociological studies are even fewer.

According to this study, the common conceptual framework in the most of the sources that have been reviewed is derived from Max Weber's sociology (Weber, 1968), that is "routinization of charisma". In his rationalized manner, and to explain the development, Weber believed that history was a process of rationalization (Stark, 1965). The charismatic authority that has been introduced by Weber has been a very popular concept in social science. Charismatic authority is a transitional situation between traditional and rational authorities (Weber, 1968). Accordingly, the problem of the "routinization of charisma" is how to transfer it smoothly. The solution is central to most of the sociologists of religion who base their studies on Weber's theory, such as Peter Berger (1954).

Regarding sociological studies of the Bahá'í Faith and Bahá'í Community, this theme has passed through three phases during the last decades. Firstly, it was developed by Peter Berger in his PhD thesis (Berger, 1954). He wrote about the history of the Bahá'í Faith and how the Weberian concept of "charisma" evolved through the course of the Bahá'í history from the very beginning until Shoghi Effendi's succession period. Most of the studies in the 1980s

¹⁰ Such as: (Badee, 2015), (McGlenn, 2005), (Talai, 2001), (Buck, 2012), (Buck, 1999)

discuss Weberian concepts of the sect and the church (Weber, 1920). Bahá'í scholars try to prove that the Bahá'í Faith is not a sect of Islam but is instead a world religion (Schaefer, 1988; Smith, 1987). Elsewhere, other sociologists are interested in the history of the Faith that seemingly started from an Islamic sect, and eventually became a church (Berger, 1954). In the second phase, sociological studies of the Bahá'í Faith evolved from the Weberian conceptual framework. This is based on the “routinization of charisma” into the firmly institutionalized Bahá'í community and linked it to the concept of globalization during the 1990s and the beginning of the twenty-first century (McMullen, 2000). Most of the studies from that period are about globalization and different aspects of the Bahá'í Faith, in particular, the Bahá'í Administrative Order (McMullen, 2000; Warburg, 1999; Echevarria, 2005; Hoonard, 2005; Lundberg, 2005; McGlenn, 2005; Stockman, 2005; Warburg, 2005; Momen, 2005; Momen, 2005). The third phase of the academic studies mainly refers to a shift in the Bahá'í approach towards the community-building, from more institutional and international efforts into individual and local activities (Lample, 2009; Palmer, 2012; Lample, 2004).

2.1. FROM THE SECT TO THE WORLD RELIGION

In this section, Peter Berger (1954-6), and Peter Smith (1987) are studied, and their perspectives on the Bahá'í Faith, in its historical evolution, are discussed. There are numerous works in the field of sociology of religion that have focused on the sect versus church discussion (Swedberg & Agevall, 2005), including Berger's unpublished (Fozdar, 2015) PhD thesis on the Bahá'í Faith (Berger, 1954).

It is believed that the church-sect theory might be the most important middle-ranged theory that the sociology of religion offers (Swatos & Kivisto, 1999). Berger (1958) suggests that the sociology of religion has mainly focused on the classical typology of sect-church, developed by Weber. He also maintains that “the analysis of the social differences between

sect and church” has been one of the most effective improvements in the sociology of religion (Berger, 1958). While people become the members of a church through birth, they need to choose their membership to a sect (Swedberg & Agevall, 2005; Berger, 1954).

Berger (1958) follows Weber’s (Weber, 1968) idea that during the process of “routinization of charisma”, the sect may develop into a church. While a sect is dynamic, after the “routinization of charisma”, a social structure makes the church static (Berger, 1958). The church demands a universal impact, while the sect is characterised by its local influence (Berger, 1958). According to the structural characteristic of the church, it is expected to be highly hierarchical (Berger, 1984).

Another concept that Berger starts applying in his study, and advises others to use, is “the religious motif” (Berger, 1954, 1958, 1984). He suggests that the concept of the religious motif can be applied in any phenomenological approach to religion. While the concepts of sect-church are more suitable for Christian tradition, he believes that the concept of the religious motif is applicable both inside and outside of Christian tradition (Berger, 1984).

Berger admits that such conceptualization is not exactly the reality of religion, at best, it is an abstraction of it, yet it is the only way of a scientific approach to religion.

According to Berger, a religious motif is a particular pattern of religious practice and experience that can be followed through the historical development of the religion (Berger, 1954). He defines three types of religious motifs. The first is the enthusiastic motif, which is an experience to be lived and is divided into two types: world saving and the world avoiding. Secondly, the prophetic motif is a message to be proclaimed and is also divided into two types meaning the chiliastic as well as the legalistic. The chiliastic motif is concerned with a “the Lord is coming” attitude and the legalistic is concerned with new order. Third, the gnostic motif is a secret to be divulged. During his study of the Bahá’í history, he applies two motifs; prophetic and gnostic (Berger, 1954).

Of those three motifs, his works on the prophetic motif are the most relevant motif to this study, because it concerns the emergence of a new order in society. He starts with the chiliastic type: an immediate spirituality and full agency that is centred on charismatic leaders including the Báb, Baháulláh, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. This is followed by the legalistic motif, which starts with the legitimation of succession in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament (1990). Therefore, the Bahá’í Faith, which began as a sect, ends up as a church with routinized charisma and religious structure. That is the medium of spirituality, and it is ultimately known as the Bahá’í Administrative Order in Shoghi Effendi’s *the Dispensation of Baháulláh* (1994).

Berger (1984) states that during the Charismatic period of the Báb, Baháulláh, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Bahá’í community can be considered a sect, while during the succession of Shoghi Effendi, it turned into a church. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament (1990) legitimizes the charisma of Shoghi Effendi and the phenomenon of “routinization of charisma” occurs. Therefore, the Bahá’í Faith evolves from an Islamic sect into a church.

Berger was aware that the concept of the church belongs to the tradition of Christianity, but he supposed that while the Bábi movement started in Iran, within an Islamic tradition, the Bahá’í Faith no longer exists only in Iran. It had entirely changed and is an American religious movement, which can be considered as a Western tradition under the category of Christianity (Berger, 1954). During the 1980s many Bahá’í scholars tried to criticise Berger and whoever else suggested that the Bahá’í Faith was a sect derived from Islam, or a church related to the tradition of Christianity. They even criticized the term “the Bahá’í movement” demanding it to be called the Bahá’í Faith (Schaefer, 1988).

Udo Schaefer (1988) argues the concepts of the church, as well as the sect, is not applicable to the Bahá’í Faith. He maintains that the “churchification” of the Bahá’í Faith happens quite independently from the Bahá’í community, which is governed by its legal institutions and “is

fundamentally different in nature and structure from an ecclesiastical body of the church type” (Schaefer, 1988). He suggests that the definition of “churchness” is related to the Sacrament; without Sacrament, there is no church. Moreover, he emphasises that sociologists must be very cautious about the criteria for application of the term “sect” (Schaefer, 1988). He suggests that the most obvious criterion for a sect is that it wants to return to the pure teachings of the early periods. However, the Báb wanted to move Islam forwards, toward a new order of “Him whom God shall manifest”: the Baháulláh. Accordingly, the terms “church”, as well as “sect”, should not be applied to the Bahá’í Faith and community (Schaefer, 1988).

Peter Smith emphasises his intention to describe the “original and changing context of the Bábí and Bahá’í religions” and to provide an explanation of the development of these twin religious movements. To achieve this goal, he suggests some motifs on which the Bábí and Bahá’í communities are based (Smith, 1987, pp. 2-3). Smith suggests that these motifs might be seen as part of a process of developing from a “messianic Islamic sect (Bábí) into a world religion (Bahá’í)” (Smith, 1987, p. 3), instead of applying the Christian dualism of sect-church.

Smith (1987, p. 72) explains that the Bahá’í Faith is more “scriptural” than the previous religions. The Bahá’í Faith is based mainly on the writings of the founder and his successors. It is partially important to explain why the motifs derived from those writings are the sources of transformation from a sect into a world religion.

Smith (1987) derives eight motifs from the Bahá’í scriptures. They include legalism, esotericism, universalism, liberalism, polar (charismatic leadership), millenarian expectation, social reform, and holy war. Smith (1987) is concerned with the establishment of the Bahá’í Faith, from the emergence of the Bábí movement from the Sheykhism, a Shi’a Islamic sect. His main concerns in his narration of Bábí-Bahá’í history are mainly the five interconnected

motifs of legalism, liberalism, millenarianism, social-reconstructionism, polar, and esotericism (Smith, 1987, p. 107).

Smith discusses the prophecies of the Faith and explains the attitude of Bahá'ís towards it. He starts his narrative from the soil of Iran and continues with the development of the Bahá'í Faith in the United States of America. Smith states that early American Bahá'í literature is mainly about the fulfilment of the millennial prophecies; about the “Day of God” when the “Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of Man” would become true on Earth (Smith, 1987, p. 107). Shortly after that, the Bahá'ís decided those prophecies would not completely come true. Thus, under Shoghi Effendi's directions, they settled down to work hard and patiently through the institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order (Smith, 1987).

Under the motif of liberalism, Smith (Smith, 1987) explains that ‘Abdu'l-Bahá argues that “The Bahá'í movement is not an organization. You can never organize the Bahá'í Cause (Smith, 1987, p. 109)”. In accordance with this quote, structuring the Faith did not seem acceptable, and therefore, when Shoghi Effendi introduced the Bahá'í Administrative Order to the Bahá'ís, some of the older and more conservative members protested and did not accept the administration of the Faith (Smith, 1987). Previous to the administrative order, membership in the Faith was simply achieved through serving all of the humanity. It changed into a formal declaration and registration, as well as serving the Faith and the humanity through the institutions of the administrative order. Bahá'ís turned from individuals into institutional members regarding being Bahá'í as well as serving the world and the Faith. Developing institutions of the Bahá'í Administrative Order changed the mechanical solidarity of the Bahá'í community into the organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1893). Mechanical solidarity unites the community based on the similarities of the members, while the organic solidarity relates the members of a modern community based on their differences according to the division of labour (Durkheim, 1893). Smith suggests that the Formative Age is characterized

by the institutionalization of the Faith and its worldwide expansion. However, the polar motif, which is the motif of devotion and obedience, was very strong and powerful among all Bahá'ís. Therefore, Smith (1987) suggests liberalism and authoritarianism coexisted within the same community in the Bahá'í Faith.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's charisma as the Lord and the Master earned devotion among both Western and Iranian Bahá'ís. To his followers, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was regarded as central to their devotion and was seen as an authority figure. Accordingly, they managed to accept his authority and obey him. They remained liberal, and no organization limited their agency. Moreover, the process of routinization of charisma had started within 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament (Smith 1987). The routinization of charisma was manifested through the depersonalization of authority (Weber, 1968) and became institutionalized under 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament (Smith 1987).

The Heroic age only lasted from 1844 until 1921, at which point the Formative Age started following 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ascendance, and Shoghi Effendi's succession. This was a time of institutionalization for the Faith. In fact, the creation of the Bahá'í Administrative Order is loaned to Shoghi Effendi's translations, interpretations and communications with the National Spiritual Assemblies, particularly, the American National Spiritual Assembly (Smith, 1987). Under this Bahá'í Administrative Order, liberalism disappeared (Smith, 1987). The development of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, by Shoghi Effendi, led to some of them, including Ahmad Sohrab¹¹ and Ruth White, attacking the Administrative Order and the institution of the Guardianship (Berger, 1984).

For the Bahá'ís who believed this to be a glorious movement, due to the perceived universality and liberating characteristics of it, organization implied a loss of this universalism and liberalism (Smith 1987). However, the majority of Bahá'ís adapted to these

¹¹ This person introduced the Faith to Peter Berger.

changes. However, in Germany and the United States, a minority of Bahá'ís followed the anti-organisational activist Ruth White.

In Bahá'í writings, there is an emphasis on both pure obedience and rationality. It seems that the intellectual life of the Bahá'í community depends on how these two kinds of emphasises are combined (Smith 1987). These differences in Bahá'í writings are not necessarily divisive; that mostly depends on dynamics and on-going changes within the Bahá'í community. Unity in leadership and written succession, also known as the firm Covenant, has kept the Bahá'í community united and flexible in the face of ongoing changes (Smith 1987). Bahá'ís have accepted the changing nature of their religion and interpret it as a progressive process (Smith, 1987). In fact, Bahá'ís unconditionally obey the charismatic or routinized authority of the successors of Baháulláh (Smith, 1987).

According to Shoghi Effendi, serving in the Bahá'í Administrative Order is the most certain way to save humanity from great disaster, war, or any other catastrophes which might threaten peace and unity on Earth (Smith 1987). At that time, as a world religion or a church, as Berger would suggest (Berger, 1958); two principles guide the Bahá'í Faith: firstly, Bahá'ís should be tolerant in their attitude towards other religions, and secondly, the Bahá'í Faith is the fulfilment of all religions. Bahá'ís believe that the only way to solve the world's current economic, social, political, and cultural problems is through reconstruction (Smith 1987). In fact, Bahá'ís began reconstruction within their community through the establishment of the Bahá'í Administrative Order (Smith 1987).

2.2. A GLOBALIZED FAITH

This section will study the second phase of the sociological studies of the Bahá'í Faith. The main theme of the studies on the Bahá'í Faith during the 1990s was globalization, Bahá'í scholars claim that the Bahá'í Faith has globalization as a central theme throughout its history

(Momen, 2005; Stockman, 2005), Momen (2005) claims that the Bahá'ís in Iran had a more globalized perspective than most of the other Iranians. During the twentieth century, the Bahá'í Administrative Order was developing international institutions; this was regarded as the most significant sign of globalization in the Bahá'í Faith (Momen, 2005; Echevarria, 2005). One of the main sociological publications of that period is Michel McMullen's work *The Bahá'í: the religious construction of a global identity* (2000) that built on ideas put forth by Margit Warburg (1999) in *Bahá'í: A Religious Approach to Globalization*.

Margit Warburg (1999) demonstrated how globalization leads to the increasing relativization of religious principles between different communities. She argues that religious communities, through the relativization of their values, tend to become either more liberal or conservative. Conservatives discard pluralism and strive for the political domination of their moral codes. Liberals, on the other hand, undertake religious pluralism as an outcome of globalization. Warburg (1999) studied the Bahá'í community in Denmark and suggested that they have taken a "liberal and cosmopolitan" position. They are advancing worldwide citizenship in their movement (Warburg, 1999; Warburg, 2006). She stresses that Bahá'ís got a broader perspective on globalization because of the message of "world citizenship" (Effendi, 1991, p. 163) and their concern for human rights (Warburg, 2005, p. 167).

McMullen (2000) performs a quantitative survey of the American Bahá'í community in Atlanta. His work draws heavily on Ronald Robertson's work on the correlation between religion and globalization (Robertson, 1992). There are other studies on the Bahá'í Faith based on Robertson's globalization theory including Warburg's (Warburg, 2005) as well as Lynn Echevarria's (Echevarria, 2005). Warburg believes among the sociological studies of globalization, Robertson's theory is the most significant one on studying religion and globalization (Warburg, 2005).

McMullen's (2000) main interest is the global identity of the Bahá'ís that stems from the Bahá'í Administrative Order. While he is interested in the authority and the content of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, this current study is concerned with the formation of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. Similar to Smith (Smith, 1987) and Berger (1954), McMullen (2000) refers to the "routinization of charisma" (Weber, 1968). However, unlike their study, he is not interested in the process of the "routinization of charisma". He is mainly concerned with the ways the Administrative Order provides Bahá'ís with a global identity through "collective consciousness" (Durkheim, 1893). A global identity is, in a general sense, the consciousness of the whole world (Echevarria, 2005). McMullen (2000) explains how different aspects of modern life deal with chaos and different ideologies. He explains that his book is about how Bahá'ís meet global, cultural challenges, and confront rapid social change, through participation in local community life. He pays particular attention to Bahá'ís global identity as "world citizens" in this matter (McMullen, 2000, p. 2).

He suggests that the Bahá'í identity is an example of what Robertson (1992) terms: "think globally but act locally" (McMullen, 2000, p. 10). McMullen (2000) believes that through studying religious movements, like Bahá'ís', the ways through which local and global institutions are being "actively created, connected, and ordered through social and theological mechanisms" will become clear (McMullen, 2000, pp. 11-12). McMullen (2000) believes that Bahá'ís are aware that Bahá'ís all around the world are doing the same thing as they are doing: "erecting their version of the Kingdom of God" (McMullen, 2000, p. 12).

McMullen (2000) starts his analysis of Bahá'í identity by outlining Bahá'í principles, which explain the nature of their universal character. He introduces the Bahá'í concept of "the progressive revelation" that informs the Bahá'ís approach to global unity and their pluralist views towards other religions. They believe that all of the world's major religions are part of the evolutionary stages of God's plan to unify the world. They also believe that the essence

and the aims of all the religions are the same while only one religion can create unity. This can be understood as a belief in longitudinal pluralism, rather than transverse pluralism. Peter Berger (1967) argues that one of the main functions of religion's social maintenance is that it provides us with an unavoidable infrastructure that maintains the solidarity of the entire society. However, in a plural society, religion loses its monopoly over belief because there are other alternatives. Farida Fozdar (2015), McMullen (2000), and Echevarria (2005) suggest that the Bahá'í principle of the "progressive revelation" can solve this problem because the Bahá'ís are global pluralists, but at the same time only one religion is functional and valid, while the rest are concluded (McMullen, 2000).

McMullen (2000) discusses the Bahá'ís development of a total system in which every Bahá'í can gain a universal identity for which other scholars agree (Echevarria, 2005; Momen, 2005). He maintains that the Bahá'í Administrative Order links local individuals and institutes into a larger organization in which the universal theology exists and grows (McMullen, 2000). Accordingly, mechanical solidarity turns into organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1893) through the institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. Echevarria (2005) has got the same conclusion from her research on the Canadian Bahá'ís. Accordingly, Bahá'ís can participate in various activities at their local feasts while knowing that the Bahá'ís across the globe do the same things (McMullen, 2000).

McMullen (2000) explains that Bahá'ís try to establish a model for an ideal social life through the Bahá'í Administrative Order. They tend to believe that the old world order is problematic and corrupt, so they try to establish a new order by following a local, ideal model of social life. Despite all their efforts to make a united global world, Bahá'ís face their challenges. According to McMullen (2000), teaching was a challenge for the Bahá'ís during the 1990s. McMullen (2000) suggests that teaching has two functions for the Bahá'í community. Firstly, it is a way to spread the Faith, and secondly, it creates internal cohesion.

He argues that teaching the Faith is socially constructed as a sacred duty for all Bahá'ís. The main discussion among Bahá'ís at the time of McMullen's research was “how to prepare for and facilitate entry by troops, without repeating the failures of an earlier period of large-scale growth” (McMullen, 2000, p. 132). McMullen's research reveals that there are three major concerns regarding teaching the Faith: “1) fears about who were then becoming Bahá'ís; 2) a lack of follow-up in nurturing the recruits; and 3) unpreparedness and immaturity of Bahá'í Institutions” (McMullen, 2000, p. 134). They admitted that “most of the mass-taught believers dropped out”. McMullen's research reveals that while there was agreement among Bahá'ís about the necessity of teaching the Faith, there was significant disagreement over the method by which it should be done. McMullen states that teaching was the source of the greatest conflicts among Bahá'ís in Atlanta.

2.3. GLOCALIZATION

Following the challenges that Bahá'ís faced in the second half of the twentieth century, they started to change their approach towards the teaching of their faith. David Palmer explores the causes and the effects of this major shift (2012). In this current study, the process of hybridization of local efforts and global goals is termed “glocalization” (Roudometof, 2014). Palmer (2012) states his study demonstrates the localization of a global religion in three different communities: China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. He states that during the 1990s, Bahá'í institutions faced a challenge in consolidating large numbers of new Bahá'ís into sustainable communities; in response, they presented a new pattern of practices to sustain and support community-building efforts (2012).

Palmer explains the context of his study by referring to the first quote from Bahá'u'lláh in the first *Ruhi* book, which states the aim of the study circles. The quote reads: “The betterment of the world can be accomplished through pure and goodly deeds, through commendable and seemly conduct” (Bahá'u'lláh, 1990, p. 93). Palmer describes the study circle, the children's

class, and devotional meetings, as the new focus of Bahá'í community-building around the world in the twenty-first century. These activities, as he characterizes them, are “non-hierarchical, self-initiated, self-organized small groups engaged in study, teaching, and action, they are held in tens of thousands of localities on all the continents” (Palmer, 2012).

Referring to Smith (1987), Palmer explains that the number of Bahá'ís increased from a few hundred thousand people, mainly residing in Iran, to millions of followers internationally.

However, Bahá'í institutions were not able to integrate all of the newcomers, and as a result, the growth in the number of newcomers rapidly decreased to half of what it was at its peak.

Palmer (2012) describes the institutional Bahá'í community as a global “congregational” that shifted into small, local groups who were active and focused on community-building. He argues: “The desired universal participation in religious citizenship-that is what he calls the previous institutional life of Bahá'í community-seemed to be an elusive goal. Thus in 1986, less than one-fifth of the 32,854 Local Spiritual Assemblies (LSA) worldwide were actively functioning” (Palmer, 2012). He (2012) declares that the small groups of community builders were the solution to the challenges that the overall with which the community was faced.

These local groups tried “building capacity to participate at the grassroots levels” (UHJ, 2010a). These groups have a Twofold Moral Purpose: the spiritual growth of individuals and spiritual growth of both the Bahá'í community and the community at large. They have localized all the efforts were previously globalized, changed the focus of the community, and study circles and other core activities replaced the Administrative Order.

Palmer (2012) reveals that since capacity-building is nurturing the community from a grassroots level, the core activities are ruling the focused activities of the community. Some cross-functionality between the institutions of the Bahá'í Administrative Order and the core activities has taken place. For example, as many of the participants in the core activities have neither declared their faith nor registered as Bahá'ís, they are not allowed to attend the

Nineteen-Day Feasts. As a solution to this challenge, the local feasts parallel the administrative Feasts by taking place on the same day. Since these feasts are not related to the Local Spiritual Assemblies (LSA), the role of LSAs is unclear in those communities (Palmer, 2012). However, Palmer is not interested in the concept of “routinization of charisma”. It seems that within his research that charisma is shifting from the elected wing of the Bahá’í Administrative Order to the appointed wing. While LSAs are becoming less vital to community-building efforts, the Counsellors, and the Auxiliary board members are becoming more functionally important (Palmer, 2012). Thus, Palmer’s article demonstrates a radical shift amongst the Bahá’í and their approach to community-building since 1996. This includes a shift in both their goals and the means by which they try to achieve them.

CONCLUSION

This chapter introduced the sociology of religion and its concerns, as well as the sociological studies on the Bahá’í Faith. It also explored current approaches to the sociology of religion, particularly as it relates to secular British society and Britons’ attitude towards religion. This study seeks to explain the influence of religion on community-building efforts in modern societies, such as the UK using the theory of the social construction of reality (1966) and the British context; i.e. a non-traditional religious community (See Davie 2008).

The discussions about the links between modernity and secularism lead to the associations between secularism, pluralism, and relativism. Berger suggests that he has given up his idea of secularization as an inevitable outcome of modernity; instead, he emphasises pluralism in this context. Pluralism and relativism are associated with the concept of the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). According to the literature, the function of religion is not at the centre of the sociology of religion, within the British context. British

sociologists are mainly concerned with the status of religiosity. Moreover, the main studies do not demonstrate what the ordinary people think.

This chapter has also discussed the three phases of the sociological study of the Bahá'í Faith during the last 60 years. The Weberian concept of "routinization of charisma" was identified as the main theme that was argued in the different studies. Regarding sociological studies on the Bahá'í Faith, this chapter started with Peter Berger's PhD thesis (1954) about the evolution of the Bahá'í Faith from an Islamic sect, into a global church. This shift followed the charismatic authority of Baháulláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá into the legitimized and routinized authority of Shoghi Effendi after 'Abdu'l-Bahá died in 1921. This study continued with the work of Peter Smith (1987) in which he explains the routinization of the charisma, and how it developed from the period of establishment of the Universal House of Justice and eventually to the Bahá'í Administrative Order. Bahá'ís served the administrative system in pursuing universal goals. Through the structures of the administrative order, Bahá'ís lost their liberalism and agency to the structured, modern, routinized authority of the Bahá'í administrative institutions (Smith, 1987). McMullen (2000) studied the Bahá'í Faith during its structural era. His main aim was to explore how Bahá'ís earn a global identity within the institutions of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. McMullen (2000) suggested that Bahá'ís try to develop a local model of social life to further the creation of a new world order. By serving within their local administrative institutions, they link their community to their global institutions. McMullen refers to the challenges that the Bahá'ís face regarding teaching their faith through the administrative system. This study ended with Palmer's study of three eastern communities (Palmer, 2012). Palmer explains the shift from the routinized authority within the elective wing of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, into the appointed wing. He reveals that the Bahá'í community started localizing their community-building efforts and

decreased the role of the institutions of the administrative order, in particular, LSAs. This caused some confusion in some of the vital institutions such as the Nineteen-Day Feast.

Studying the Bahá'í Faith will be considered as a lived experience that can contribute to current knowledge about the role of religion in constructing a society. This study, therefore, is going to explore the development of the Bahá'í Administrative Order through the Bahá'í main scriptures using Peter Berger's conceptual framework (Berger, 1967) instead of Weber's (Weber, 1968). The present research is concerned with the construction of the objective and concrete reality of the Bahá'í Faith through the community-building activities, which can be observed in everyday life of Bahá'ís in Sheffield.

4. PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS, METHODOLOGY, AND METHODS

1. PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION

This section will provide the research with ontological, epistemological, and methodological bases. There are fundamental questions regarding ontology and epistemology that should be considered. Are all realities actual and tangible existents? Are they essentially objects of human cognition that exist detached from their minds as phenomena? (Hofweber, 2011) “What are the necessary and sufficient conditions of knowledge? What are its sources? What is its structure and what are its limits?” (Steup, 2005)?

Stated plainly, ontology discusses what really exists (Bullock, et al., 1999). There are two major debates between two key ontological perspectives (Crotty, 2007). First, realism states that there is a real world independent of our perception (Crotty, 2007). Secondly, idealism suggests the real world does not exist; only mind and mental status really exist (Bullock, et al., 1999). On the other hand, epistemology is concerned with what we can know (Crotty, 2007). There are also two main approaches to epistemology. The first is objectivism, which believes that we can perform an unbiased, impersonal, accurate, based on independent reality perception of the world (Kolbel, 2002). The second approach is constructionism, which suggests that our knowledge is not an accurate image of the external world, but it is our meaning of the world (Crotty, 2007). Meaning is not discovered, it is constructed (Crotty, 2007).

Positivism is a theoretical perspective (Crotty, 2007) that is ontologically realist and epistemologically objectivist. In the real, external world, science can attain an objective,

accurate, unbiased perception of the real world that is detached and independent from our minds (Delanty & Strydom, 2003). In contrast, constructionism emphasises an ideal world which can only be interpreted, rather than be accurately understood (Crotty, 2007).

Constructionism states people construct the meanings as they engage with the world they are interpreting (Crotty, 2007, p. 43). In social science, positivism is deeply rooted in the French tradition, particularly Durkheim's sociology (Dancy & Sosa, 2000), while constructionism is rooted in German social science and philosophical approaches, specifically, Max Weber's *Verstehen* (Ringer, 2000; Crotty, 2007).

Max Weber provides sociologists with a specific method that he names *Verstehen*. From a constructionist view, research is fundamentally case-oriented. People and their motivations, activities, and experiences are fundamental, instead of variables (Bazeley, 2013).

Understanding people and their motivations, meanings, and the context of their lives require particular methods and strategies to be realized. Weber (Weber, 1921) argues that interpretative sociology is based on understanding meaning, and this is a capacity all social beings are given. Therefore, the reality is not a universal general fact, but unique meanings, feelings and motivations that exist in people's mind are behind their actions. Weber declares his mission in sociology to understand "the characteristic uniqueness of the reality" (Weber, 1949, p. 72).

For Ian Hacking (2000) as well as Vivien Burr (2003), constructionism, which is about the relativity of knowledge and reality, is the opposite of essentialism. Hence, Hacking (2000) and Burr (2003), in addition to Andrews (2012), agree that it is about not taking for granted the "knowledge" of a given "reality". Andrews (2012) emphasises that social constructionism is an anti-realist approach that means constructionists believe humans should take a "critical distance from the taken-for-granted knowledge" (Burr, 2003, p. 3). That is people should always consider that there can be another aspect of what they believe is a reality, or/and

another interpretation of it. Constructionists argue that there is not a true, objective, or valid interpretation of reality, but there are useful and practical ones. People do not obtain knowledge as an object; people create it while they interact with each other and with their social and cultural locations (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

In contrast to Gergen Alvesson (2009), Andrews (2012) believes that social constructionism agrees that there is an objective reality, but people interpret the reality in various ways and gain different knowledge about the same reality. Andrews (2012) seems to be epistemologically constructionist, while ontologically realist. Social constructionism can accept that there is an objective reality, the spotlight of social constructionism is on the epistemological aspect and how knowledge is constructed and understood. Therefore, for constructionism, the epistemological perspective matters not the ontological viewpoint (Andrews, 2012). Andrews, believing in an objective reality, suggests that social constructionism is engaged with how this objective reality is socially conceptualized, and then established (Andrews, 2012). Therefore, there are two components of social construction: first, social reality influences the conceptual construction of the world, and second, social reality influences the practical construction of a world. This division leads to two different aspects of social reality: conceptual and practical. This research is concerned with both aspects of reality-constructing in the Bahá'í community; the conceptual and the practical. The conceptual aspect of their constructed reality is studied within the Bahá'í scripture, and the practical aspect is studied within a Bahá'í community. Berger (1967) suggests people act based on their understandings and interpretations of the constructed reality. Therefore, to construct their desired community Bahá'ís translate the word of God that is the conceptual reality in their scriptures into practice that is based on their subjective understanding of the scriptures.

For Andrews (2012), relativism supports multiple interpretations of the existing reality. There is not, therefore, one version of reality that is considered superior to another. Overall, any social construction possesses at least two main sets of characters: first, evolving, relative, intended, actor-based processes; and secondly, manageable, reasonable, predictable, non-inevitable processes. The next sections will explain and justify the methods and strategies for both the conceptual and practical aspects of this project.

METHOD

In this research, I use qualitative methods that are best adapted to constructionism (Lock & Strong, 2011). The methods used by qualitative researchers provide deeper understandings of social phenomena over what could be obtained from purely quantitative data (Silverman, 2006; O'Leary, 2017). Qualitative methods are compatible with constructionism that provides researchers with the meanings, motivations, and ideas of the subjects. Hence, qualitative methods can illuminate the researcher's perception of integrational links. Qualitative studies discover new paths and explore phenomena that are little appreciated. Qualitative method contributes to knowledge by adding new concepts or conceptual frameworks to a specific area (O'Leary, 2017). The quantitative method makes it possible to test a specific theory, while the qualitative method enables the researcher to produce a theory (Bryman, 2016).

Different intentions and purposes require different types of methods; for example, McMullen (2000) works as a participant observer for his study on the Atlanta Bahá'í community of the 1990s. He applies mixed-method participant observation, archival research, survey questionnaires, and in-depth interviews. He undertakes part of his research during the Feast, but his concern is not Bahá'ís interactions during the Feast. His concern is with urban Bahá'í communities and their global identity. Consequently, his method of approaching the Feast is not relevant to this study. Moreover, he does not go into great detail about his approach and access to the Feasts in Atlanta.

In his doctoral thesis on the American Bahá'í community (Berger, 1954), Berger mostly uses interviews, rather than observation. Believing that the Bahá'í community is more scriptural than older religions, Peter Smith (Smith, 1978) suggests that the Bahá'í Faith is mainly based on the writings of the founder and his successors. It is important to explain why the motifs derived from those writings are the sources of transformation from a sect into a world religion. The availability of those scriptures provides an effective means to do so (Smith, 1978, p. 72). Smith takes a historical approach to the Bahá'í community and bases his study on the literature of the American Bahá'í community. In this project, I study the constructionist nature of the social activity, namely the mind-set of the Bahá'ís as it relates to their community-building activities, is, therefore, best conducted using qualitative research methods.

2. INTERPRETATION OF THE BAHÁ'Í SCRIPTURES

Silverman (2006) suggests that theory works like a kaleidoscope; it defines our perspective and is the starting point for research (Silverman, 2006). Accordingly, relating to Berger and Luckmann's social construction of reality (1966) puts this project in the field of constructionism which necessitates interpretation of socially constructed realities that are captured through qualitative research (Lock & Strong, 2011). In my research, theory plays a crucial role in the study of the Bahá'í scriptures. Interpretation of the process of the emerging Bahá'í Administrative Order, as a social construction of reality, is advantageous. Without doing so there is no suitable framework to realize and explain different periods during the emergence of the Bahá'í Administrative Order from the Bahá'í sacred writings.

In fact, the role of the theory does not end after finishing the interpretation of the Bahá'í scriptures. The theory helps to set up the process of all the research. It is not only crucial during the conceptualization of the study (Chapters five to nine), but is also vital regarding

data collection. Without Berger's theory, the nature of the data is not defined, and therefore, the methods for data collection are not determined. It is the theory that defines the nature of the data as a social construction and determines the interpretative nature of it. It is clear that the methods for data collection should be qualitative. The theory suggests that the subculture of Bahá'ís in Sheffield is valuable to be observed during the Feast (Silverman, 2006) and that attention to the organization and the use of the scriptures are worthwhile. The theory strengthens the idea that the personal experience of the Bahá'ís is important for the research, and therefore it is crucial to conduct the interviews (Silverman, 2006). On the other hand, the fieldwork (Chapter 10), as well as the study of Bahá'í scriptures (Chapters five to nine), demonstrates that the theory needs to be reassessed and improved.

According to the aforementioned constructivist two sets of characteristics, this study has two separate, but related data: first, data from the Bahá'í scriptures relevant to the community-building that reveals the concepts and ideas that exist within the Bahá'ís sacred writing as the source for their interpretations. Secondly, data from the fieldwork studying Bahá'ís in Sheffield that demonstrates the translation of Bahá'ís' interpretations of the scriptures into practice. The data in the analysis chapter is organized inductively with no assumptions or hypothesis (Bryman, 2016). In fact, some conceptual frameworks are built grounded in the data analysis. That is the reason that the data from the scriptures are organized differently than the analytical chapter. The former is organized according to Berger's theory (1966), while the latter is organized according to the induction framework derived from data.

Berger believes that society is an enterprise to construct the world, and religion plays a special role in this process (Berger, 1967). Hence, Berger's notion fits the aim of this section, which is discovering the way through which Bahá'ís try to construct a new community. The second concern of the data from the scriptures is how the Bahá'í Administrative Order may lead to the development of the Unity of Humanity, as Bahá'í literature asserts. The nature of

this part of the data is the interpreted Bahá'í scripture using conceptual frameworks from Berger and Luckmann's theory of the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The conceptual data are gathered from Kitáb-i-Aqdas (The Most Holy Book) (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992), 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990), Shoghi Effendi's the Dispensation of Baháulláh (Effendi, 1994), and general letters from the Universal House of Justice (UHJ, 1963-2017). Bahá'u'lláh's *Most Holy Book* (1992) is the first scripture in the Bahá'í Faith in which the administrative order is mentioned, it is Bahá'u'lláh's Mother Book and is also described as the "charter of the future world civilization" (Effendi, 1994, p. 213). 'Abdu'l-Bahá is Bahá'u'lláh's elder son, and his authorised interpreter and successor. His Will and Testament (1990) is known as the charter for the Bahá'í Administrative Order (Effendi, 1994). Therefore, it is chosen as one of the scriptures to study. Shoghi Effendi is 'Abdu'l-Bahá's grandson as well as his successor is the second authorised interpreter for Bahá'u'lláh's writings. In his book, *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* (Effendi, 1994), Shoghi Effendi, called the Bahá'í administrative system the Bahá'í Administrative Order for the first time. *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* is also considered as Shoghi Effendi's Will (Nakhjavani, 2004). The Institute of the Universal House of Justice is Bahá'u'lláh's successor, in terms of authorising new rules and regulations which are not mentioned in Bahá'u'lláh's scriptures. The Universal House of Justice issues regular letters and messages, including directions and regulations about all Bahá'í affairs and concerns. Almost all the issued messages to the Bahá'í community, since the establishment of this institute in 1963, to the current date, are explored.

I study Kitáb-i-Aqdas both in Arabic and English, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament both in Persian and English to make sure that the concepts are well understood. Shoghi Effendi's the Dispensation of Baháulláh as well as the letters from the Universal House of Justice are also originally in English. I studied them all during my Bachelor degree, so I have

a good knowledge about what their contents are, but I need to re-read them and understand them in a sociological framework. Using Berger and Luckmann's conceptual framework, I reconstruct the scriptures to be able to understand them differently.

Regarding the theoretical framework, Berger (1967, p. 13) considers society as a dialectic phenomenon, which means society and the members are constantly in non-linear correlations. Hence, although society is nothing but a product of people, it reproduces its creators.

Respectively, there are reciprocal interactions between humans and their society. This interaction has three steps: externalization, objectivation, and internalization. As Berger and Luckmann suggest (1966), externalization involves humans in creating a society in a conceptual form. Through objectivation, society becomes a concrete reality. Through internalization, it is humans that become a product of society.

The most important point is that as Berger explains, community-building is a dialectic process which means this process is not linear and the stages do not come in linear order one after another, but at the same time all of the stages can be at work. These stages are considered as ideal types (Weber, 1949) both in Berger's theory (1967) and in this study.

Avoiding the risk of subjectivity and slipping in psychological approaches and also to be able to generalize the results (Weber, 1921) and to be able to see the total picture of cultural background (Weber, 1904- 1933) we need to use a methodological tool, namely, ideal types without which objective understanding of subjective meaning would be impossible.

Approximating to prior concepts and categories in Kant's epistemology, ideal types are methodological tools in Weber's interpretation. An ideal type is a designed term by a one-sided emphasis on the specific aspects of the matter to be used as methodological means and tools through which understanding, generalizing, and objectivity are relatively accessible (Weber, 1904- 1933; Weber, 1921). Accordingly, this study captures a snapshot of the

Bahá'ís' community-building efforts using the ideal types derived from Berger and Luckmann's theory.

I carefully study the highlighted scriptures above to explore the approach of the Bahá'í scriptures to community-building. The main components of the Bahá'í Administrative Order are tracked while studying these scriptures including the Nineteen-Day Feast, the Covenant, and the Houses of Justice. A Bergerian conceptual framework is utilized as a set of ideal types to interpret and categorize the concepts in different stages of community-building, namely externalization, objectivation, and internalization. Consequently, the approach of these key Bahá'í scriptures towards community-building based on my interpretation and in the conceptual framework of Berger and Luckmann's theory (1966) is formulated and summarized.

The history of the Administrative Order and how it is constructed through the Bahá'í writings can be understood and illuminated through the creative use of sociology of Peter Berger (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). A Bergerian Analysis shows that during successive periods of Bahá'í history, the social world which the Bahá'ís are creating has moved through stages in accordance with Berger's theories about social world construction. Moreover, it is clear, both to insiders and outsiders, that the attainment of "unity of humanity" or even the building of Bahá'í social order is on-going. Using this connection, the fieldwork will show how Bahá'ís continue to take part in that process.

3. THE FIELDWORK

Fetterman (2010) suggests, "Fieldwork is the hallmark of research" (Fetterman, 2010, p. 33). He also believes that fieldwork and observing people in their natural and real world is in many ways more difficult than laboratory study (Fetterman, 2010, p. 33). Among the

different methods and techniques of data collection, this project has benefited from participant observation, as well as from in-depth interviews. As the current research is based on observation during the Nineteenth-Day Feasts within the Bahá'í community in Sheffield, it can be categorized as ethnography. Ethnography is defined as research “based on observational work in particular settings” (Silverman, 2006, p. 37). At least three terms merge with ethnography (Silverman, 2011), “participant observation”, “fieldwork”, and “case study”. Fieldwork is the persistent presence of the researcher in the field (Silverman, 2011). Participant observation is the state of living within the population and among the participants for at least six months (Fetterman, 2010). A case study is a research on a particular space-time situation, that is fixed in a particular sociological or cultural context (Silverman, 2011). All three of these methods are relevant to this study. Since, this study is about the Bahá'í community of Sheffield, on the particular situation of community-building efforts, it is a case study. I had been living among the participants for two years before the fieldwork started, so the participant observation criterion is met. Also, the fieldwork lasted nine months in the same community, so, the fieldwork criterion is also met. Before the discussion about methods of data collection, it is helpful to explore the sampling methods for this research.

3.1. SAMPLING

As Fetterman (2011) suggests, the research question is shaped by the selection of the place and the people to be studied. As the research question of this study is concerned with how Bahá'ís contribute to the Unity of Humankind, finding a Bahá'í community that practices the Nineteenth-Day Feast is necessary to start the study. McMullen (2000) suggests that Bahá'ís around the world are engaged in the same activities, as they are “erecting their version of the Kingdom of God” (McMullen, 2000, p. 12). They attend the Nineteen-Day Feast on the same evening and discuss similar topics and goals from the same teaching plans. Their goals, means, and terminology are uniform across the globe. Therefore, the outcomes of the

research on the Bahá'í community of Sheffield are very relevant to other local Bahá'í communities. Since Bahá'ís around the world practise the Feast in the same manner (McMullen, 2000), research focusing solely on the Bahá'í community of Sheffield is relevant to a greater understanding of how Bahá'ís contribute to the Unity of Humankind.

The Bahá'í community of Sheffield consists of 47 adult members of at least 21 years of age. Approximately 25 of them are active Bahá'ís and attend the Feast regularly; 23 consenting members participated in this study and formed the sample group, 20 agreed to be interviewed.

3.2. SETTING AND PARTICIPANTS

The fieldwork takes place in the Bahá'í community in Sheffield, in the United Kingdom, from 08.09.2014 to 05.06.2015. Observation occurs during the Nineteen-Day Feasts inside Bahá'í community in Sheffield. All the interviews take place at my residence. The participants are adult Bahá'ís, aged 21 and older, who are eligible to elect and to be elected to the Bahá'í administrative institutes. All of them sign forms consenting to the interview process.

From the outset, the chair of the Nineteen-Day Feast informs all members about the research, including the fact that I will be conducting a months-long project, involving observation during the Nineteen-Day Feast. The chair communicates that I will be approaching people to seek participation in in-depth interviews. Informed consent to participate in both the fieldwork and the interviews is sought. Nora, a member of Sheffield Local Spiritual Assembly, and the person who is familiar with the research introduces the project to the attendees of the Feast on the 27th of September 2014. She is not completely accurate in presenting the aims of the study and the methodology, so the participants' rights are further explained by myself. During the next two Feasts, the same process is applied. I explain the purpose of the research and manage to collect consent from 23 members. All the adult

Bahá'ís (aged 21 years and older) in Sheffield are asked personally, during the Feast, if they mind being interviewed. The research is briefly explained to them, and then if they are willing to be interviewed, a date is fixed to sign the consent form and to participate in the interview.

The participants of the project constitute 15 women and 8 men. At the time of the fieldwork, the range of the participants' age is from 21 to 74. Bahá'í communities all around the world except for in Iran are the international and multicultural communities with members from different parts of the world. In Sheffield, there are Bahá'ís from Iran, India, Congo, Ireland, Iraq, Kuwait, and England; the participants consist of Iran seven, Congolese four, India one, Ireland one, Iraq one, Kuwait one, England eight among which three are half-Persian who are born and raised in the UK. Except for one of the men, the rest of the participants have higher education degrees. Three Iranian participants are more comfortable to speak Farsi during the interviews, the rest of them are fine with English, and the Congolese participants are not comfortable with the interview, so they withdraw from the interview. One of the participants is the Auxiliary Board member from the appointed branch of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, and eight participants were the members of the Local Spiritual Assembly (LSA) of Sheffield at the time of the fieldwork. Eight participants were active in the core activities at the time of the study including the Board member and four members of the LSA.

3.3. DATA COLLECTION

Data collection for this research takes place in two different ways: observation and in-depth interviews. Observation data are collected through note taking, and all interviews the audio from the interviews are recorded digitally. Following each session of observation, the notes are transferred to a separate OneNote page, and all the interviews are saved in a password-protected folder in my Dropbox.

This research examines Bahá'ís religious action as a community-building enterprise, in the context of the Nineteen-Day Feast, so it is necessary to observe behaviours. It is also important to be aware of Bahá'ís' conceptions and interpretations of their contribution to the Unity of Humankind. Since, according to this study, the stages of externalization and objectivation (See chapters six and seven) are already established, the fieldwork concerns with the internalization (chapter eight) and deconstruction (chapter nine). Observation supports research, regarding behaviours, it supports the data from the interview and mostly is applied for triangulation, while in-depth interview serves to illuminate the meanings and motivations. Because the Feast is a religious ritual, and people are not comfortable being recorded during their religious practice, this study relies only on the field notes. The participants are not interrupted by me during the Feast.

3.3.1. OBSERVATION

While I previously attended the Nineteen-Day Feast as a member of the Bahá'í community, I attended the Nineteen-Day Feast for nine months as a researcher. All the members in attendance were made aware that I was taking notes and conducting fieldwork. I carried a small notebook to each Feast. One of the concerns is that note taking might distract the members. However, after a short time, they did not pay attention to my notebook and me. The entire report and the full version of it are written in the dedicated OneNote page immediately after each Feast. The readings from the devotional part of the Feasts are also collected and saved in a folder to be able to make sense of the discussions and the reflections on them. Sometimes the readings are provided directly from the books, so taking photos of those readings is necessary. Most of the time, the hosts print the readings specifically for the Feast, so it is easy to collect them. They are all saved in a special folder in my Dropbox along with the date and the details of the Feast.

The Feasts mainly took place in the homes of various hosts. If the host's house were too small, the Feast takes place in the house of one of the members whose house is big enough to accommodate all the members.

According to the aims of the research, some significant aspects of the community and concepts are supposed to be considered during the observation of the Feasts. Greeting and welcoming part of the Feast are very important regarding their friendship, oneness, and solidarity, so I should always be there before everybody else arrives. The presence and absence of the members are also considered during the observation regarding their commitment to and participation in their community. Another highlight for observation is chairing the Feast by the LSA members that can demonstrate their management skills and attitudes. The three different sections of the Feast are distinctly important. The Spiritual section is important regarding the devotional and reading materials if they are related to the Unity of Humankind and the community-building. Considering Berger's perspective, it is important what they read and how they interpret those readings. The Administrative section is significantly notable for all the contributions, plannings, brainstormings, deepenings, sharing experiences, reflections, and reports happen during this period. Last but not the least the Social section of the Feast is vital for the study because during which the participants' connections and communication could be observed. Even though there are specific parts of the Feast that I observe, I have to be ready to take notes of various unpredicted situations and events during the Feasts. All the notes are recorded right after the Feast while the notes and my memory are fresh.

Participant observation methods are used in this study to capture an extended period of interaction between Bahá'ís in the Nineteen-Day Feast, to obtain a deep understanding of their meanings, motivations, and the way they try to contribute to the Unity of Humankind.

In-depth interviews record Bahá'ís' personal experiences and contribution to the Unity of Humankind.

Fetterman says “participant observation is immersion in a culture” (Fetterman, 2010, p. 37).

The researcher lives within the target culture for at least six months, and this long-term residence helps the researcher to understand the participants' hopes, fears, belief systems, experiences, expectations, meanings, and motivations (Fetterman, 2010). During the participant observation, the ethnographer gathers first-hand, qualitative data that can be used to analyse the cultural aspects of the given population and community. Participant observation is a cyclical technique (Fetterman, 2010; Spradley, 1980); it starts with a microscopic view of the details and then the focus spreads out to form a bigger picture.

Observation gives the researcher first-hand information; it shows us what people really do, not just what they claim. It provides “direct evidence of the eye to witness events first-hand” (Denscombe, 2005, p. 192). There are two types of observations; a systematic observation, which is normally applied in quantitative research, and participant observation, which is mainly used in qualitative studies to understand the culture, motivations, and meanings of the groups (Denscombe, 2005). This study can be characterised as fieldwork, as well as participant observation because I am a member of the Bahá'í Community in Sheffield and normally attend the Feast as a Bahá'í herself (Denscombe, 2005). Being a participant observer makes it possible to “emphasise in depth rather than breadth of data” (Denscombe, 2005, p. 202). As a member of the community, I can easily reflect the detail, culture, and complexity of different events. It is also possible to distinguish significant events from less important ones. Being a member of the Bahá'í community gives me access to rare and extraordinary events, and permission to participate and observe the participants up close. Attendance at the Feasts and the election sessions would not be possible if I were not a member of the community. I would not recognise the key members of the community, nor be

privy to sensitive events during the fieldwork. My role as a participant observer was not a secret during the fieldwork. In fact, my role as the researcher was explained three times, in three different Feasts, so that everybody would understand and be able to choose if he or she wanted to participate in the research.

3.3.2. INTERVIEW

The semi-structured interviews started on March 9, 2015, and concluded on August 20, 2015. All the participants who agreed to the interview came to my home. They have already signed the consent forms. They are asked a broad, introductory question about their contribution to the process of the Unity of Humankind and community-building. The participants are asked follow-up questions when required to elaborate their answers such as their experience of attending the Feast, how often they study Bahá'í scriptures and which ones, and if they are involved in community-building activities. The entire interview is recorded.

The interview is known as the most important data-gathering technique in ethnography (Fetterman, 2010). According to the research aims and objectives, the perceptions, interpretations, and understanding of Bahá'ís about the Administrative Order, the core activities, and the Unity of Humankind, along with the correlation between these concepts is vital to this project. Therefore, interviews are conducted to collect data on the participants' experience and ideas. Alan Bryman (2016, pp. 478-479) argues that the idea of an interview guide for qualitative research mostly refers to a "brief list of memory prompts of areas to be covered". Bryman suggests while preparing a qualitative interview questionnaire for each of the research questions, it is useful to ask, "What do I need to know in order to answer each of the research questions I am interested in?" (Bryman, 2016, p. 470). According to Bryman (2016), this approach helps us to understand what the participants see as significant and important in each of our research topics. Interviews are also the best method for obtaining detailed information from a small number of participants. (Denscombe, 2005).

3.4. DATA PROCESSING AND ANALYSING

The data provided by observation, as well as from interviews and readings, can work together as triangulation for the validity of the outcomes. Due to my tinnitus condition, someone else is hired to transcribe most of the interviews. However, I listen to the interviews several times during the process of data analysis. After all, “the ethnographer is a human instrument” (Fetterman, 2010, p. 33). The field notes are not just descriptive; they contain the reflections and analysis as called by Fetterman (2010) “the cycle of observations”. As a result, both the primary, detailed-oriented reflections, as well as the larger picture perspective of the final, collected data are considered the subject to an analytical process, whereby the data is given meaning (Fetterman, 2010; Spradley, 1980). Therefore, the process of data analysis in this project is, according to Bazeley (2013) intense, challenging, non-linear, and contextual. In fact, a long, challenging dialogue takes place with me as the researcher and the data, during which data went from totally raw to well-processed and thematised (Sullivan, 2012).

Ever since the data is collected, reflections on each session of observation and the interviews are being made. At the end of the data collection process, the field notes and the transcripts of the interviews were entered into the Nvivo10, qualitative data analysis software. Memos are written on each interview transcript and observation notes. Reflection occurs throughout the data analysis stage of this study. Nvivo employed within the case analysis as well as cross-case analysis. The data summarized and categorized regarding the different “nodes” or codes given to each part of the participants’ answers. Then, these different nodes join and form broader themes, which form each chapter of this analysis. This stage is done based on the “thematic analysis” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Smith & Firth, 2011), in Nvivo, which categorizes the large amounts of information in a manageable layout enabling the researcher to grasp the patterns, similarities and differences discussed by the participants in each theme.

The thematic framework like other analysis tools is used to categorize and organize data consistent with the main themes, models, concepts and evolving categories (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Thematic analysis, also adds more clarity to the researcher's interpretation of the participants' answers, clear account of the processes that conduct the systematic analysis, and allows catching various features of the subject (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Smith & Firth, 2011). Through the thematic analysis in Nvivo, the codes and nodes produce within each theme linked to the most relevant information of the participants, such as their position (LSA members, Board member), their age, their ethnicity, and gender. This link assists the perception of the participants' experiences and facilitates grasping the bigger picture (Holliday, 2016). The construction of this research is one of the many possible constructions that the researcher could build or apply (Holliday, 2016).

Entering the data into the software, and coding all the generated data, as well as manual coding, (Saldaña, 2013) helps to develop a map (Bazeley, 2013) for the conceptual framework that gradually appears through the data analysis. This map is a visualizing conceptual framework that demonstrates the correlations between the data and helps to identify a list of relevant concepts. As the analysis improves and the individual perspectives and single events join, a clear and more holistic picture of the Bahá'í community appears through the notes and reflections.

Of course, the codes and the map improve gradually following several periods of reflection and revision. During data collection, codes and themes are generated from different perspectives to be applied to data analysis. The codes come from the study of the scriptures; from the literature, both research studies and theories, and from other studies in the field of interest (Bazeley, 2013). A substantial list of codes is produced before the software is applied. The way the data is ordered and arranged under thematic headings are my organized construction.

The sense of data sufficiency that comes from grouping the codes and themes, and constant reflection on them, leads to the completion of the fieldwork, regarding the observation. The interviews take place until every member of the community who has signed the consent forms is interviewed. Accordingly, data sufficiency in this research comes out of thematic organizing of the data, rather than the determined time for data collection. I am free to continue collecting data or stop the compilation of data after nine months of participant observation, but the data sufficiency requires discontinuation of data collection (Leavy, 2014). Data collected from the scriptures, observations and the interviews are used together to make sure that the interpretations and analysis are relevant and integrated.

At this stage, the raw data is processed, and a clear picture emerges, consistent with my construction (Holliday, 2016). The story and narrative of this research are different from the social reality from which it is taken. The theory and idea behind converting the raw data into the narrated story in this research come from the social construction of reality of Berger and Luckmann (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

The main instrument for efficient data analysis is Nvivo10 software that is downloaded from the university software downloads and licensing web page (UoS, 2017). There are different tools to assist the researcher in analysing the data, such as MAXQDA, ATLAS.TI, CAT., CATMA, and ELAN from which Nvivo as well as ATLAS.TI are more popular among the researchers, universities, institutions, and companies than other applications (QSR, 2017; ATLAS.TI, 2017). Even though the researchers describe ATLAS.TI great for pure content/thematic analysis, and regarding coding, it seems faster and more focused, Nvivo seems more feature-rich and interactive, and most importantly more user-friendly (QSR, 2006). ATLAS.TI seems to be more reliable for visual model building, and mind mapping while Nvivo supports text format data better than ATLAS.TI (Vanhoben, 2016). Furthermore, there are practical reasons behind employing Nvivo including training sessions for the

postgraduate researchers from Doctoral Development Program (DDP) training the students to use Nvivo (DDP, 2017) and the fact that ATLAS.TI cannot be downloaded and licensed through the university software downloads and licensing web page (UoS, 2017). Attending two training sessions on Nvivo is crucial to me to understand how it can be applied to qualitative data analysis. It does not do the analysis work for the researcher; it is merely a tool that increases the efficiency and accuracy of the analysis. It has the capacity for recording, sorting, categorizing, matching, and linking the data together (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013).

3.5. CRITICAL REFLECTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

3.5.1. *VALIDITY*

There is always the temptation for a qualitative researcher to select only particular data that supports their thesis, instead of using all the data for interpretation. There is also the problem of validity based on an anecdotal approach to the use of data (Bryman, 2016). One way to fix or avoid the problem of validity is triangulation (Bryman, 2016; Silverman, 2006).

Triangulation is trying to get the truth using more than one method of looking at the findings. In this research, data are produced from the same community through observation, as well as an interview. Each method supplements each other, thus increasing triangulation and validity. However, this method has analytical limitations; different data collection methods will produce different versions of data that might not be compatible with each other. Fortunately, in this research, the interview and the observation are both concerned with the same subject, but from different perspectives. Both are looking to the Bahá'ís' contribution to the Unity of Humankind and their community-building efforts. The observation looks at them closely within the Feast, and the interview seeks their personal experiences, from their perspective.

Another way that is suggested for increasing validity is through the respondents' validation (Bryman, 2016; Silverman, 2006). Three sessions took place during two annual conferences of academic Bahá'í studies. In these sessions, some of the interview participants, and some of the Bahá'í scholars heard the results of the study and gave useful feedback to the semi-final version of the analysis. These presentations improve the validity of the research. Moreover, all the chapters of this thesis are constantly presented to two different groups of peers, to check the validity of the findings and the outcomes. The members of one of these groups have the same background as mine (meaning a background in the study of sociology as well as Bahá'í studies), while the second comprises various backgrounds including psychology, history, and philosophy.

3.5.2. RELIABILITY

Reliability refers to the degrees of consistency in outcomes. That means different researchers making observations on the same behaviour would assign the data to the same categories (Silverman, 2006). David Silverman suggests two ways to avoid the problem of the variable reliability of field notes, namely "field note conventions" and "inter-coder agreement" (Silverman, 2006, p. 186). Spending enough time in the field and increasing the familiarity of the researcher with the concepts and culture of the participants are practical ways to lessen the problem of reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) these methods are applied to this study. I lived in the community for two years before I start the fieldwork. I am a Bahá'í, so I am completely familiar with the Bahá'ís' rules, norms, mind-set, and religious meanings. Living among the participants, as a fellow Bahá'í, before starting the field work also adds to this familiarity and makes me confident in the field notes, as well as in the interpretations of them. Bryman (2016) identifies two types of reliability, external reliability and internal reliability. Internal reliability is what Silverman also calls reliability. External reliability, however, means the degree to which the study can be replicated (Bryman, 2016). He explains that it is

difficult in qualitative research to meet the reliability criteria because it is impossible for the researcher to freeze the social setting for the next researchers to replicate the study in the same social setting (Bryman, 2016). He suggests that if a qualitative researcher adopts the similar social role as the original researcher, the replica can be very similar to the original research (Bryman, 2016). In the case of this study, the social setting is a Bahá'í community which according to McMullen (2000) the same as every other Bahá'í community. Therefore, any ethnographer in any Bahá'í community can replicate this project only by adopting the role of the researcher as a participant observer.

3.5.3. OVER-IDENTIFICATION AND IDEOLOGICALLY BIASED

Lofland et al. (2006) emphasise the danger of over-identification for researchers who spend much time amongst the community they are studying. There can be a tendency to identify the setting and subject of study positively, and they cannot keep a critical distance from it. Since this study was conducted by a researcher who is a Bahá'í, lives within the Bahá'í community, and practices the Bahá'í Faith, the risk of over-identification is high. Self-awareness and taking a self-reflexive approach during the entire research period helps me to lessen the danger of over-identification. I check the critical distance with my supervisors, as well as with other critical articles and publications on the subject. Presenting the findings and interpretations for different audiences during the data analysis, coupled with documenting the discussions that arise, helps to make sure that the risk of over-identification is kept to a minimum. Two groups of Bahá'í scholars, with different perspectives, heard entire chapters on a weekly basis. Their opinions, critical perspectives, suggestions, and comments are applied to avoid this risk as much as possible. The findings were also presented at two different conferences during the research period. Additionally, two articles based on the findings were published in peer-reviewed journals.

One of the best-known limitations of all social research is the lack of objectivity and bias that arises from the researcher's belief systems (Ringer, 2000). In this study, I am a Bahá'í who believes in the Bahá'í Faith and is an active member of the community. Therefore, the risk of ideological bias can be high. However, constant self-reflection and justifying the definitions, and comparing the results with critical publication on the subject, can decrease the risk. Despite these efforts, this study is not as entirely neutral as other sociological studies (Ringer, 2000).

4. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Regarding how this research is designed and carried out, ethical principles are respected and considered. The University of Sheffield Ethical Review Committee approved this research within the first year of study. In this section, issues relating to the safety of the participants and the researcher, confidentiality, and informed consent are discussed (Bulmer, 2001).

The participants are all adults, and the research takes place during the Feast and at my house, so the locations are safe. The questions do not upset people; they are about their opinions about the Nineteen-Day Feast. The observation takes place during the Feast by a participant observer (me) who is a member of the community, and therefore familiar with the ceremony and the conditions. It is not recorded, so it does not cause disruption, harm, or danger. The participants are all fellow members of the Bahá'í community, so the personal risks are minimal. There are no other people involved in the research, other than the participants and me.

Participants are reassured that their privacy would not be violated and that they can control the amount of information shared. Each participant's details are coded, and all the data is assigned to that code during the gathering and analysis periods. The code sheet of names is

not saved on the same laptop as the data. Both laptops are password protected. The original interview files are deleted right after transcription is completed.

The participants' real names are not used in the write-up. Raw data is not shared outside of the confidential correspondence between the researcher and supervisors. However, Sheffield is not a very big city, and the Bahá'í community is not very large. Therefore, there is the possibility for the participants of being identified. The participants are informed about this possibility and asked whether they still want to participate.

Regarding consenting (Bulmer, 2001), an appointment is made during the Feast, and the research, its aims, and the procedure are explained. Each member of the Feast is then given a consent form to sign and are assured that their information would be kept safe and confidential. They are also informed that they can withdraw from the research at any time with no consequences.

For the interviews, every participant is asked to sign a consent form (Bulmer, 2001) in which it is clearly explained that the interview would be recorded, coded, and analysed by me during the research period. It is kept safe and saved confidentially on a password-protected laptop. Following of the transcription of the interviews, the files will be deleted.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, philosophical foundations, methods, and methodology of this project have been sketched out. Regarding the research question, the methods of fieldwork in this project were re-told. The methodology is related to the ontology, epistemology, and qualitative, ethnographic methods, including participant observation and in-depth. The philosophical approach was explained, and the field work was illuminated. At each section, a critical reflection on the methodology was applied referring to the main textbooks. The chapter

concludes by connecting the ethical issues and challenges are discussed, and the solutions to them were explained.

5. THE FAITH AND WORLD-CONSTRUCTION

Conscious of their high calling, confident in the society-building power which their Faith possesses, they press forward, undeterred and undismayed, in their efforts to fashion and perfect the necessary instruments wherein the embryonic World Order of Bahá'u'lláh can mature and develop. It is this building process, slow and unobtrusive, to which the life of the worldwide Bahá'í Community is wholly consecrated, that constitutes the one hope of a stricken society. For this process is actuated by the generating influence of God's changeless Purpose and is evolving within the framework of the Administrative Order of His Faith (Effendi, 1991, p. 195).

INTRODUCTION

“Every human society is an enterprise of world-building; religion occupies a distinctive place in this enterprise” (Berger, 1967, p. 13). This chapter defines nomos and “cosmic frame of reference” as the central religious mechanisms in the world-building activities (Berger, 1967). According to Berger religion bestows upon each social institution a sacred and “cosmic frame of reference” (Berger, 1967, p. 42). “The cosmic frame of reference” is a divine, ideal order and the desired community that is a replication of the Kingdom on earth. Nomization is the process of establishing this cosmic order in any given society (Berger, 1967, p. 43), and nomos is the path and sacred order towards the desired order. Through interpretation of Bahá'í writings and in Shoghi Effendi's letters (Effendi, 1991), the concepts of nomos and the cosmic frame of reference will be applied in the Bahá'í Faith world-building enterprise, to build up Berger's conception from theory into practice. In this chapter, the Bahá'í Administrative Order will be considered as the nomos and the structure of this sacred system. The Unity of Humankind will be regarded as the “cosmic frame of reference,” which is the desired community for the Bahá'ís.

1. PETER BERGER'S CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, two significant components of world-building that religion produces are discussed: the “cosmic frame of reference” and the nomos. Berger (1967) starts his explanation of the relationship between religions and world-building by emphasizing that unlike other animal species, humans do not have developed instinctual behavioural patterns. This means that in any given situation, people have various options and ways of responding. Therefore, humans need to choose their interaction with the world consistently. In Berger's term, people must choose how to “externalize” themselves by forming a view of the world and interacting with it. He suggests that with each externalization, humans change the world, and that leads to deal with a new set of choices. He is, therefore, concerned with humans’ “off balance” situation, which occurs because of the perpetually changing world. Berger (1967) suggests humans need to have a permanent, balanced order in their lives so that they can predict both the world and their chosen responses to it. In fact, human needs this stable order to compensate for their lack of instinctual, patterned behaviours.

Berger (1967) concludes that the main endeavour of society is to produce this sense of balanced, predictable order, and to make everybody take it for granted. Society performs this project by “objectivation” which means teaching the members to make the same choice repeatedly while they externalize themselves. In fact, society wants its members to believe those habitual choices are not really choices. That is, society wants its members to take those choices for granted, and act as if they are inevitable and objective realities that no one can change. As a result, a relatively stable and predictable order will be established within the members' minds and then outwards into society. It is this order and stability that Woodhead believes is at the Centre of Berger’s concerns about society (Woodhead, et al., 2001). Berger tries to avoid the chaos and is looking for stability and solidity of society; in fact, social order is Berger’s focal concern (1967).

Furthermore, society demands that the members believe in all the roles they play, whether it is a student, teacher, mother, father, or husband. Society is not typically interested in alternative orders. Members learn the roles and their demands and requirements in a process called “socialization” (1967). Berger (1967) emphasises in order for socialization to work efficiently, the members must feel that their inner identity depends on playing those roles. They must “internalize” the so-called objective realities that society enforces on them. They must believe that their inner sense of “rightness” depends on obeying the rules and ways of undertaking their roles. Therefore, it is vital for a society that the members carry out their roles and tasks the same way that they have been taught to do (Berger, 1967).

Berger (1967) defines the set of the established behavioural patterns as “nomos”. Nomos is established in accordance with the acknowledged worldview of society, as well as its ethical system. The nomos is produced through a persistent sequence of similar human choices, all of which could have been made in different ways. However, society, through the process of socialization, tries to convince members that this nomos is objectively authentic, and thus unalterable. Society demands the nomos be taken for granted and accepted as the norm. Lack of the instinctual behavioural pattern makes the members of a society related to their parents and other social systems. These systems teach them how to respond to the stimuli of the world. The members usually trust the nomos and do their roles and task the way they are taught. Therefore, nomos is followed as a set of determined behavioural prototypes (Berger, 1967).

Religion emphasises the particular nomos of a given society is not merely one choice among many other nomos options. Even though individuals are socialized by the education system of their society, and particularly by their parents, they are unconsciously aware that they are, at some level, free to act contrary to the nomos (Berger, 1967). Eventually, individuals confront other cultures with different nomoi working for the people in that new culture, so

they probably realize the nomos they follow is not unique and there are alternatives. Individuals, therefore, may start questioning the reality and objectivity of their own nomos. This sceptical attitude can shake the foundations of the nomos in the members' minds, so in extreme situations, the society may end up without a nomos or with a shaky nomos. This situation of a weak nomos, or the contrast of alternative nomos, is what Berger (1967) calls anomie or chaos. Since anomie is always a possible situation, society seeks to confirm the nomos as something that is as rigid and strong as possible (Berger, 1967). Religion plays a crucial role in the society at this point because it has the means, as well as the influence, to convince individuals that the particular nomos is not just an option among other possible options. Religion presents the nomos as the best, even unique nomos to the believers.

Religion creates solidarity and acts as a form of social maintenance by claiming that the nomos is rooted and based on the cosmos (the universe). The Cosmos is the well-ordered universe, seen as a whole, that cannot be observed, and only can be referred to (Taliaferro, 2013). According to Berger, nomization is the primary function of religion in society (Berger, 1967, p. 31). It is a process through which a social system is developed and consolidated. The human world and the sacred "cosmic frame of reference" of religiosity are therefore built simultaneously. Hence, the same human activity, which makes a society, develops religion too (Berger, 1967). Berger suggests religion bestows upon the society "an ultimately valid ontological status" which puts society within a "sacred" and "cosmic" framework.

Consequently, religion's sacred cosmology emphasises that "everything here below" has its analogue "up above" (Berger, 1967, p. 43). Thus, it is the particular cosmology of religion, which offers solidarity to a given society. Therefore, since the cosmos is eternal and sacred, the nomos, which mirrors the pattern of the cosmos, is sacred and eternal too. Religion persuades the believers that the universe (cosmos), the individuals, and the society in the universe, are all based on the same unique, irreplaceable sacred pattern. Believing in this

sacred order can secure the solidarity of society. Accordingly, by promoting a particular sacred “cosmic frame of reference” (cosmization) and a unique holy nomos based on that cosmos (nomization) can simultaneously construct the world and maintain it.

In the next section, the case of the Bahá’í Faith will be explored regarding Berger’s (1967) theory on the role of religion in the community-building.

2. THE BAHÁ’Í FAITH AND WORLD-BUILDING

In this section, “cosmic frame of reference” and nomos, from Berger’s theory of the social reality of religion, will be applied to interpret Bahá’í scriptures and world-building activities.

In this regard, Bahá’í “cosmic frame of reference” is the Unity of Humankind, and the nomos leading towards it is the Bahá’í Administrative Order.

Sacred writings suggest that the Bahá’í Faith has come to fulfil the objectives of previous religions towards the Unity of Humankind. According to Bahá’ís, this is the last stage of social development on Earth (Buck, 2012). The unity of families, tribes, and nation-states were previously established under the religions of Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The Bahá’í Faith intends to construct a world based on the teachings and doctrines of Baháulláh (Effendi, 1991).

2.1. BAHÁ’Í COSMIZATION

As Berger suggests, religion provides a given society with a holy “cosmic frame of reference” that is their desired society, and the justification for the sacred order of this desired community. According to Shoghi Effendi’s letters, for Bahá’ís, the desired society is called the New World Order of Baháulláh. The sacred path toward it flows through the Bahá’í Administrative Order. The sacred cosmology of the Bahá’í Faith consists of two main components; first, the unity of the three realms of being (the realm of God, the realm of the

manifestations, and the realm of the creatures). Secondly, it consists of the universal cycle, which is a religious explanation of history.

2.1.1. UNITY OF THE THREE REALMS OF BEING

Cosmology for Bahá'ís is divided into three primary realities, and the three realms of beings. First, God is unknowable, unknown, pre-existent, and the creator of all creatures. Secondly, the Manifestations of God, or the messengers of God, are the first creature given the attributes of God. These attributes include beauty, knowledge, justice, and whatever has been attributed to God in previous religions. Third, it is the realm of all created things ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1908).

According to the Bahá'í scriptures ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1908), the essence of God is unmanifested, and there are no divisions in the realm of God. God is the absolute unknown and is the pure and absolute oneness ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1979). The Manifestations of God are the reflections of the Logos that appeared in the physical world. Logos in Bahá'í literature is the logic of God's creation; it is God's wisdom ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1908). Logos is God's wisdom; the essence of the Manifestations is oneness, too. However, their appearance in the material world is related to the place and the time in which they appear. The essence is the Logos, and the appearance that is the manifestation is different. Accordingly, for Bahá'ís, the Manifestations have two statuses. Firstly, there is the state of oneness, which is related to their essence, or Logos. Secondly, the state of differentiation, which is related to their appearance in the material world, in different times and places. Therefore, the essence of Moses, Jesus, and Mohammad is the same as Logos, and their appearances are different based on their personal contexts. The realm of the creature is the world of all beings, except for God and His Manifestations. It is subdivided into the human, animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1908). Since they are all created by the essence of being, there is also oneness in the realm of the creatures, even if they are different in attributes. Like

mirrors, they reflect the attributes of the Manifestations of God. Among them, the human kingdom is the shiniest and the most reflective mirror; it reflects the most attributes of the Manifestations of God. Thus, the human kingdom is the closest to the realm of the Manifestations. There is no difference between humankind, regarding the capability of reflecting the attributes of the Manifestations, so the main feature of the human kingdom is also oneness ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1979). However, living in the material world made them far removed from their essential oneness. The closer they get to the Manifestation's teaching, the closer they get towards their essential unity and oneness. Bahá'ís believe that the mission of each Manifestation has been to take humanity closer to the essential, original oneness and unity, both morally and socially (Momen, 1988). The concern of this study is the social unity in the kingdom of humanity, which according to Shoghi Effendi, has already been fulfilled in families, tribes, and nation-states. The Unity of Humankind is not just a moral principle of love, friendship, and equality; it is a social system, similar to family, tribes, and the nation-state. It is related to a particular interpretation of the history, or "universal cycles", in Bahá'í cosmology (Effendi, 1991).

2.1.2. THE UNIVERSAL CYCLES

According to the cosmology derived from the Bahá'í scriptures, the world and the history of humanity, particularly the history of religions, is periodical and passes through progressive cycles. Each one of the Manifestations has a particular cycle of its own, during which its commands and rules are applied and practiced. A new cycle starts when the previous one is completed and expires. In short, cycles begin, are renewed, and eventually, end after some catastrophic event has occurred, such as the start of the Ice Age. Consequently, all signs of the earlier period are completely eradicated, after which a new universal cycle starts and arises in the world. Thus, the Bahá'í scriptures treat the universe as having neither a beginning nor end ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1908), rather; it is evolving in periodic cycles.

Bahá'í scriptures suggest that a universal cycle will endure for a very long time. During this extended cycle, other Manifestations will appear under God's canopy. These Manifestations will renew some commandments and rules, according to the requirements of the time, yet they will remain under his shelter and authority. The cycle, which started with Adam and finished with Mohammad, ended after 6000 years. A new cycle has recently started, and Bahá'ís call it the Cycle of Bahá'u'lláh. According to the Bahá'í writings, the supreme Manifestation of the new cycle is Bahá'u'lláh, and it is going to last for 100,000 years or longer. They do not believe that Bahá'u'lláh will be the last or the only manifestation of this cycle. Bahá'ís believe that as humans grow socially and intellectually, they need new manifestations to guide their spiritual growth. Therefore, there will be manifestations of God under the shadow of Bahá'u'lláh during this long cycle.

Bahá'í scriptures also suggest a periodical cycle for the evolution of the Bahá'í Faith. Shoghi Effendi divides the history of the Bahá'í faith into three ages:

- The heroic or apostolic age that started from the declaration of the Faith in 1844 and ended with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ascendancy in 1921.
- The formative age, which is the age of developing and formation of the Bahá'í Administrative Order (1921-?).
- The golden age, which is the age of the New World Order of Bahá'u'lláh and the Unity of Humankind.

According to Shoghi Effendi, the formative age is divided into different epochs. Epochs are the periods of time in which a significant growth happens within the Bahá'í Administrative Order. The length of the formative age and the numbers of its epochs are unknown (Effendi, 1944). At present, Bahá'ís consider themselves in the fifth epoch of the formative age (UHI, 2016).

The universal cycle is a philosophical perspective of history that provides Bahá'ís with ultimate, sacred meaning for the entire world, including their social institutions. Religion, according to Berger (Berger, 1967), grants an ideal and ultimate meaning to social institutions. This position puts the institutes within a “sacred” and “cosmic” order. For Bahá'ís, cosmization includes a substantial historical viewpoint, named the “Universal Cycles” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1908). It makes their social institutes meaningful, and a part of universal evolution. Bahá'ís interpret the universe through this perspective, which enables them to celebrate, appreciate, and organize their community-building efforts, in accordance with their cosmological order.

2.1.3. THE UNITY OF HUMANKIND

The Unity of Humankind is not just a belief in solidarity among the members of a community; in accordance with the Bahá'í scriptures, the Unity of Humankind is a new world order and a new system to establish and operate a universally united society (Effendi, 1938). Bahá'ís propose a new system that will rely on the unity of humankind and will not resemble the present world. They describe the current world systems as being out-dated (Effendi, 1991), and aim for a new world order based on Baháulláh's teachings. Shoghi Effendi argues that the Unity of Humankind is different from moral principles of brotherhood and love among individual human beings. It is a social order targeting the highest level of governing the entire world.

Let there be no mistake. The principle of the Oneness of Mankind—the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve—is no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope. Its appeal is not to be merely identified with a reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood and good-will among men, nor does it aim solely at the fostering of harmonious cooperation among individual peoples and nations... It does not constitute merely the enunciation of an ideal but stands inseparably associated with an institution adequate to embody its truth, demonstrate its validity, and perpetuate its influence. It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced... (Effendi, 1991, pp. 42-43).

Bahá'í teachings suggest that since the entire realm of creatures emanates from the manifestations of God, the universe also emanates from the manifestations and forms united “cosmic frame of reference” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1908). The united “cosmic frame of reference” leads to a universal order in Bahá'í scriptures. Consequently, Bahá'í cosmology eventually leads to a universal civilization, which is called the New World Order of Baháulláh (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1979). For the Bahá'ís, the Unity of Humankind will be established in the future, during the final stage of the fulfilment of Baháulláh's promises. During this “Golden age of Bahá'í”, the application of Bahá'í doctrines on Earth will mirror the heavenly order (Effendi, 1938). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

In every station, there is a specialized capacity. Therefore we must be hopeful that through the bounty and favour of God, this spirit of life infusing all created things shall quicken humanity and from its bestowals the human world become a divine world, this earthly kingdom the mirror of the realm of divinity, the virtues, and perfections of the world of humanity become unveiled and the image and likeness of God be reflected from this temple (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1979, p. 103).

Berger suggests that the “cosmic frame of reference” is the interpretation of world-building activity, as a sacred order, that religion bestows upon society. He continues to suggest that the “cosmic frame of reference” proposes, “Everything here below” has its analogue “up above” (Berger, 1967, p. 103). That means religion provides a sacred plan for believers to build a heavenly community on Earth, which reflects heavenly attributes. In the same way, Bahá'í scriptures introduce the Unity of Humankind as a sacred “cosmic frame of reference”, which will establish the heavenly order on Earth (Effendi, 1938). According to Shoghi Effendi's descriptions about the New World Order of Baháulláh (Effendi, 1991), this unity is organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1893) that includes universal institutes that govern the entire world. Bahá'í doctrines also suggest that the unity is the core feature of the entire three realms of the existence (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1908). Bahá'í cosmology bestows a unifying perspective upon the Bahá'ís' understanding of history, acknowledged as the “universal cycles”.

2.2. BAHÁ'Í NOMIZATION

Nomization for Berger and Luckmann (1966) is the process to establish a nomos, or sacred order, to keep society united and directed to a higher state of cosmic evolution. According to Shoghi Effendi's letters, the Bahá'í Administrative Order is the nomos that maintains the solidarity of the Bahá'í community and directs it towards the New World Order and the Unity of Humankind. Shoghi Effendi defines "the Twofold Process" to explain the procedure of changing the entire current world system into the New World Order and the desired cosmological order, namely, the Unity of Humankind (Effendi, 1991).

2.2.1. THE TWOFOLD PROCESS

According to Bahá'í writings, true civilization is an outcome of both "disruptive" and "integrating" processes (Effendi, 1938, p. 170). The disruptive process is the natural growth and development of human societies towards unity and solidarity. It will eventually lead to universal political unity, which in Bahá'í terminology is called the "Lesser Peace". Trial and effort are the nature of the disruptive, non-linear process. In fact, humans will achieve higher levels of unity and solidarity in their history, though there will be risks and dangers along the way. When humanity has achieved the unity of families, tribes, cities, and nations, and it will be time for us to forge ahead with universal, political peace. Bahá'ís believe that the humans' society has grown during human history as an embryo grows in a mother's womb.

Eventually, at the end of the disruptive process, society will have matured like a baby ready to be born, but only the material body will be wholly developed; the soul remains incomplete. Humans do not need spiritual interventions to get to "the Lesser Peace" (Effendi, 1934).

The "integrative process" is the process that bestows the soul unto the body of the world. In the Bahá'í scriptures, this is called the "Most Great Peace". The "integrative process" involves working through the Bahá'í Administrative Order, which sets the pattern for the

future world order. Through the “integrative process”, mechanical solidarity turns into organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1893) and individual Bahá’ís become members of different institutes of the Bahá’í Administrative Order. For Bahá’ís, the “Most Great Peace” is a true civilization that is a balanced combination of material and spiritual development in the universal community. Bahá’ís are constructing their community as a model of the promised New World Order (Effendi, 1934). The “Lesser peace” happens without intervention from Bahá’ís, as humans go through this stage of unity as a result of their inevitable growth, even if the process is rife with troubles and challenges. The “Most Great Peace”, on the other hand, requires Bahá’ís effort and spirituality to be accomplished. The “Most Great Peace” is the universal spiritual unity that is the Unity of Humankind (Effendi, 1936; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1979).

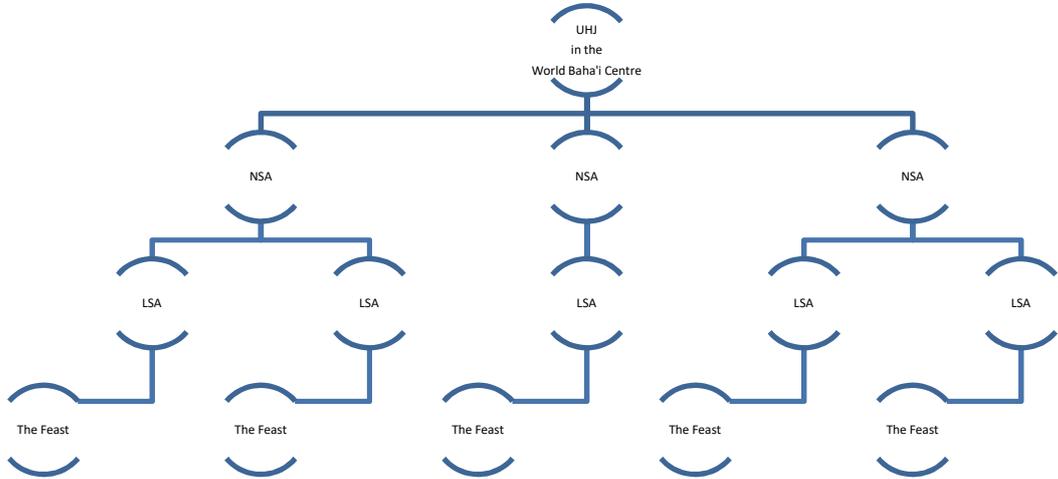
2.2.2. THE BAHÁ’Í ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER

Towards their ultimate goal, Bahá’ís’ efforts are focused on constructing a world community, or universal federation, called the Bahá’í Administrative Order. It is an internal social order, through which Bahá’ís establish their community. It is also considered the main nomos for the ultimate “cosmic frame of reference” of the New World Order of Bahá’ulláh (Effendi, 1934). The Bahá’í Administrative Order is the sacred pathway towards the Unity of Humankind (Effendi, 1936). The Bahá’í Administrative Order gathers the individual Bahá’ís in hierarchical institutions that connect small, local Bahá’í communities to the Bahá’í World Centre. Any local area with at least nine adult Bahá’ís (from the age of 21 and more), establish the Local Spiritual Assembly, and at this stage, those individuals are considered a community. The leading institutions of any Bahá’í community are the Local Spiritual Assembly (LSA) and the Nineteen-Day Feast (the Feast). Therefore, to have a Bahá’í community, it is necessary to have at least nine individual adult Bahá’ís along with the two institutions. Through their National Spiritual Assemblies (NSA) Bahá’í local communities

are connected to the Bahá'í World Community, and therefore, a Bahá'í universal federation is constructed. Establishment of the Bahá'í Administrative Order is a very good example of changing mechanical solidarity into organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1893) in a religious community, or as Berger suggested routinization of Charisma (Berger, 1954).

(See the figure below)

Figure 5.1



Nomos, as Berger (1967) defines it, is a set of established order and behavioural patterns that constructs and maintains a given community on the right path towards the accepted cosmology. For Berger (1967), nomos is synonymous with social order, or a set of social norms and regulations, the lack of which creates the state of “anomie” or “chaos” (Berger, 1967, p. 36). Accordingly, he emphasises “the most important function of society is nomization” (Berger, 1967). The Bahá'í Administrative Order is a divine social order that will lead to the Unity of Humankind and hence, it might be regarded as the nomos for the Bahá'í community.

Peter Berger (1967) suggests that the same human activity that builds a society develops religion as well. Shoghi Effendi, who is considered the only Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith and the authorized interpreter of the Bahá'í scripture, states that the Bahá'í Administrative Order is the model for the desired social order, as well as the preferred order for the current Bahá'í community (Effendi, 1934). He asserted that it was the best path towards the Unity of Humankind (Effendi, 1934). The above figure shows the idea of the Bahá'í world community and the Bahá'í Administrative Order. It demonstrates that, according to Shoghi Effendi's letters, the Bahá'í community (which is the outcome of the community-building activity) and the Bahá'í Administrative Order (a religious nomos) are coextensive. This means that they are different in conceptual meaning, but they coexist in the same institutions; the Bahá'í community is equal to the Bahá'í Administrative Order. Accordingly, the community-building and the nomization are engaged in the equivalent process and produce the same reality. This can be seen as an example of how the community and religion are built through the same process.

CONCLUSION

In this section, the aim was to discover the role religion plays in world construction from Berger's point of view (1967). From Berger's theorizing, he has defined the concepts of "cosmic frame of reference" and nomos, and their derivatives, such as cosmization, nomization, and cosmology (1967). This chapter demonstrated how they could be usefully applied to the interpretation of the Bahá'í scriptures as they relate to world-building efforts.

This chapter has identified the Unity of Humankind as the "cosmic frame of reference" of the Bahá'í Faith. It is related to the Universal Cycle as a historical system of meaning and the Twofold Process. The Bahá'í Administrative Order is the nomos, and through the integrative course of the Twofold Process, directs the community into the "Most Great Peace" found in

the Unity of Humankind. Illuminating the role of the Bahá'í Administrative Order as the nomos of the Bahá'í community, the section made it clear that according to the scriptures, the Bahá'í community and the Bahá'í Administrative Order are equivalent.

The next four chapters will apply Berger and Luckmann's approach (1966) towards a suitable interpretation of the world construction process in the Bahá'í community regarding the erection of the Bahá'í Administrative Order that is considered nomization in this study.

6. EXTERNALIZATION

INTRODUCTION

In this section, using the theory of the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), the first stage of community-building (externalization and its components) will be outlined. Berger (1967, p. 13) states that society is a dialectic phenomenon; society and the members have a constant and nonlinear correlation. Therefore, while society is nothing but a product of its people, it constantly reproduces its creators. He explains that humans produce a society through their actions, as well as through their consciousness. Correspondingly, there are mutual interactions between humans and their society to such an extent that there cannot be humans apart from their society. This interaction has three steps: externalization, objectivation, and internalization. Explicitly, externalization involves humans projecting society. Through objectivation, society becomes a reality in and of itself. Through internalization, humans become a product of society (Berger, 1967). This chapter studies externalization as the first stage of nomization in which the key components of the Bahá'í Administrative Order conceptually appear and externalize such as the Feast, the House of Justice, and the Covenant in Kitáb-i-Aqdas (The Most Holy Book). Kitáb-i-Aqdas (The Most Holy Book) is the most important Bahá'í scripture and was written by the founder, Bahá'u'lláh (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992).

1. SOCIOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Unlike animals, our existence is defined by culture, and externalization is the primary way by which we project our physical and intellectual activities into the world (Berger, 1967).

Externalization is a collective activity through which humans create elements such as tools,

values, norms, and language (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Externalization is the first stage of community-building through which the components of the world are conceptualized into the social stock of knowledge, using language as the medium (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). “The social stock of knowledge” is a common bank of knowledge, which is available to every member of a particular community and contains knowledge of the human situation and its limits (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In the process of constructing social reality, religion is being formed and constructed. World-building at this stage is conceptual, and therefore, understanding the role of language as it creates, transfers, and carries the religion’s concepts is key to understanding the entire stage of externalization.

According to Berger and Luckmann, language plays a crucial role in both creating and maintaining social realities (Kelly, 1983). The externalizing reality is not an absolute cognitive and individual procedure, but emerges from the communication, conversation, and interaction between people. In this way, language is essential because it can transcend the subjective, and the “here and now” experiences. It is capable of transcending everyday life as a whole. Language originates from everyday life experiences and has been abstracted in mind. However, it is also possible that abstract meanings and concepts can exist in the real and concrete world. Creative thoughts come into existence in accordance with conceptual meanings from people’s minds (Berger, 1967). Religion and philosophy, along with mysticism and theosophy, are some examples of abstraction and detachments from everyday life.

Thus, with each meaning and word that originates in religion, it is possible to establish a visualization and embodiment in the objective, real world. Even though language symbols are detached from everyday life, they are still very important to understand, interpret, and manage everyday life experiences (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Berger states that the meanings and purpose of our lives are created and categorized by specific language. He

believes language also directs the social reality that reflects the structures and arrangements of our lives. In fact, everything that is added to the social stock of knowledge is carried by language (Kelly, 1983) and “an understanding of language is thus essential for any understanding of the reality of everyday life” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 37).

1. EXTERNALIZATION IN THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

In this section, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book) (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992) is studied, and the concepts that are related to the Bahá'í Administrative Order are considered. Baháulláh aimed to establish a social order attached to a particular cosmology through which the “mirror of the earth may become the mirror of the Kingdom, reflecting the ideal virtues of heaven”.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1993, p. 88). From a Bergerian perspective, this endeavour is considered cosmization. Regarding religious cosmization, Berger suggests “everything ‘here below’ has its analogue ‘up above’” (Berger, 1967, p. 43). This is also viewed as evidence of the significant role of religion in the world-building enterprise from Berger’s perspective (Berger, 1967), which dictates that religion provides a sacred cosmology for the believers in which the desired world is introduced as their cosmic frame of reference.

In Berger’s opinion, *nomos* is made up of a system of norms and values to establish a particular world-view (Berger, 1967). Like the previous manifestations, Baháulláh tries not only to propose, but also to establish his promised society (cosmic frame of reference) as the best alternative to the current world order (Effendi, 1991). Baháulláh wants to replace the current, damaged system with his new world order:

The world’s equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind’s ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992, p. 88).

Bahá'u'lláh projected certain words and terms in *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992) to establish a new world order. In fact, by creating the new words, he conceptually created the components of his new world order as well as the Bahá'í Administrative Order in his holy book. Bahá'u'lláh influenced the terminology and the language and the thoughts of his followers by introducing these terms and words and thereby attempted to influence their consciousness. He formed a community of believers who used the same language in their thoughts and practice. Baha'u'llah asks his followers to recognize him as the Manifestation of God and to take his words seriously; accept their reality, legitimacy and the rightfulness of his commandments; apply his teachings; and obey his rules for the love of his Beauty (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992, p. 21). Baháulláh hoped this change in terminology would extend to the whole world after passing through its maturation stages, and represent itself as the body of the New World Order of Bahá'u'lláh (Esslemont, 1980).

This new terminology feasibly influenced the consciousness of the Bahá'ís, and thereby a new version of the social system and culture emerged among them. The community was scattered around Iran, Iraq, and the Ottoman Empire (Berger, 1954; Zarandi, 1932). Despite the proximate difference, they started communicating with each other, reflecting on the scriptures, and practising the Faith with the same set of terminology and behaviours. They were consciously distinguished and independent from the dominant Islamic social system, which surrounded them (Berger, 1954; Zarandi, 1932). In fact, they possessed their own social system, even though it was still in its conceptual phase, and did not yet exist in the real world.

In accordance with Berger and Luckmann's theory, developing new terms, as well as altering the old meanings and applications of the terminology, is a significant stage of externalization. Berger and Luckmann define externalization as an intentional conceptualization for which language is a central and significant tool (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Therefore, a

significant shift in this vital tool may lead to a critical step in projecting a new conscious social system and culture. The main components of the Bahá'í Administrative Order in Kitáb-i-Aqdas are the Universal House of Justice, the Nineteen-Day Feast, and the Covenant. Below, these three terms are introduced in the way they are acknowledged in Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992).

1.1. THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

The Universal House of Justice is an elected assembly of nine Bahá'ís who are at the head of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, as conceptually established in Kitáb-i-Aqdas. The Universal House of Justice has an evolutionary story, which will be told in this chapter and the next two chapters. Bahá'u'lláh proposed the general term of the House of Justice in Kitáb-i-Aqdas (UHJ, 1991). Bahá'u'lláh talks about a local elective system, that has to take into account the interests of the people of Bahá in their local communities. He even determines the number of members of this assembly as nine people and outlines their duties and responsibilities to the people and God. In different parts of Kitáb-i-Aqdas (1992), Bahá'u'lláh determines the main duties of the local House of Justice including responsibilities towards the poor, orphans and widows (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992, pp. 27-29); supervision of education for all the children in the community (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992, p. 38); financial responsibility, including atonement and penalties (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992, p. 38); and Guardianship of the people of Bahá (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992, p. 39).

In Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992), the characteristics and duties of the Universal House of Justice are very briefly mentioned, and there are few differences between it and the local Houses of Justice. The local Houses are now called the Local Spiritual Assemblies and are supposed to be elected by local cities or communities. Bahá'ís started using this term and tried to apply it to their newly established local communities. Nevertheless, for some years, it was merely an addition to their new and ever-growing “social stock of knowledge”.

Over the course of the Bahá'í history, this usage and meaning of this term increased through Bahá'í writings. Gradually, the Universal House of Justice became the most important institute of the Bahá'í Administrative Order and was regarded as Bahá'u'lláh's successor. Its messages are now considered sacred writings and its rules, orders, and regulations are respected and obeyed within the Bahá'í community internationally (Nakhjavani, 2004).

The features of the Universal House of Justice have developed through the process of reality-building; it has happened simultaneously in a conceptual, general version in Kitáb-i-Aqdas, as a legitimate institute in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testaments, and finally, as an actual assembly in 1963. Paul Lample (2009) explains this process of reality construction that starts with a conception of the word of God and then is translated into concrete elements of the desired community and highlights the role of language in understanding and receiving the word of God:

Collectively, we receive the gift of the Word of God, and through its application we are to raise the Kingdom of God on earth; that is, we are to gradually contribute to the building of a new social order that is shaped by the truths of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh (Lample, 2009, p. 3).

Berger and Luckmann (1966) trace the evolution from a conceptual reality in a language, into knowledge and social interaction in the stage of externalization, into an established practical reality in the stage of objectivation and eventually into the stage of internalization in which the social reality that defines and determines people's actions. This is a social construction of reality which is compatible with the history of the construction of the Universal House of Justice in the Bahá'í Faith. The story started with the text in the Most Holy Book, and then it was received by the believers who understood it in its conceptual version and started to build an institute based on their conception. This institute that was established and produced by Bahá'ís now rules over them and defines their actions and interactions.

1.2. THE NINETEEN-DAY FEAST

The Nineteen-Day Feast was introduced in *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* as a regular gathering for Bahá'ís to strengthen their love and friendship for each other: “Verily, it is enjoined upon you to offer a feast, once in every month, though only water be served; for God hath purposed to bind hearts together, albeit through both earthly and heavenly means” (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992, p. 40). However, during the development phase of the religion, the Feast became the foundation of the Bahá'í Administrative Order (Effendi, 1934). The Nineteen-Day Feast is now a monthly (Each Bahá'í month has nineteen days) gathering which has three main aspects: the spiritual, or devotional, the administrative, and the social. Every individual Bahá'í must attend the Feast to communicate with the other fellow Bahá'ís, but also to contribute to, and engage in consultations about the different Bahá'í affairs within the administrative order (Effendi, 1934).

Individuals' engagement with the community plays a significant role in the process of nomization or community-building. Introducing the “Nineteen-Day Feast” to the Bahá'í vocabulary enriched the Bahá'í “social stock of knowledge”. In *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Bahá'u'lláh lays out a tradition for monthly gatherings to facilitate interactions that create greater unity and communication amongst Bahá'ís. The conceptual Feast (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992) later became the actual foundation of the growing Administrative Order (Effendi, 1934). At that time, no one would have anticipated that this idea would eventually develop into one of the most important institutions of the Order. Attending the Feast can be a channel that connects individual Bahá'ís with the upper echelons of their administrative system in the Universal House of Justice. Andrews (2012) suggests that social constructionism stands for the notion that every individual in a society is involved in constructing social reality through a cognitive process. For the Bahá'ís, the Feast is the embodiment of that cognitive process. Therefore, by attending the Feast, individual Bahá'ís turn into active world citizens who raise their

consciousness of their global community (McMullen, 2000; Echevarria, 2005). Within the Feast, they are not individual Bahá'ís anymore; they take responsibility for community affairs, participate in conversations and consultations, and demonstrate a belonging (Davie, 2015) to a community as members, rather than as merely individual believers (McMullen, 2000).

1.3. THE COVENANT

The Covenant is a significant component of Bahá'í community-building that maintains internal social solidarity. The Covenant represents the state of unconditional obedience towards Baháulláh's successors ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990). Initially, it seemed to be simply a new meaning added to the Bahá'í mind-set in Kitáb-i-Aqdas. However, it is strictly related to the unity and solidarity of the Bahá'í community. The Covenant, in this sense, is a solemn oath to be faithful to Bahá'u'lláh's successors. Bahá'u'lláh assigns two kinds of successors: a personal successor, who is the authorized interpreter of his writings, and an institute, which is supposed to manage the affairs of the community after his departure. Bahá'u'lláh clarifies that his elder son is his successor following his death. Later he explains that the duty of his son is to interpret the difficult meanings of his writings (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992, p.83). He explains the role of his personal successor as the authorised interpreter of his writings. It is important because it demonstrates that the Covenant is taken from the Bahá'ís in clearly-written scriptures. Bahá'u'lláh's second successor is the Institute of the Universal House of Justice, which is supposed to protect people and stand for justice among them (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992). The Covenant in the Bahá'í Faith is written and authorized by the founder. This feature makes it a significant concept in Bahá'í terminology. Thus, Bahá'ís believe it serves to keep the community united and prevents division, unlike previous religions ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990). The Covenant is, therefore, another means and principle that is supposed to lead to unity.

CONCLUSION

This chapter explained the first stage of the establishment of the Bahá'í Administrative Order according to Berger's theory of the social construction of reality. Externalization in Kitáb-i-Aqdas is based on the central concepts of nomization and community-building. Nomization, in particular, reflects the role of religion in the world-building efforts. Introducing the Bahá'í Faith as an evolving religious effort for society-building, this chapter demonstrated that the founder of the movement, in his central book, had developed the fundamental modules of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. In Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the main elements of the evolving administrative order, including the House of Justice, the Nineteen-Day Feast, and the Covenant are formulated. Berger intends to show how social reality is constructed (1966). The preliminary findings of this study suggest that in written versions of society-building enterprises, and through religious scriptures, it is possible to externalize primary constituents of a society or nomos.

7. OBJECTIVATION

INTRODUCTION

Objectivation is the second stage of community-building. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), objectivation brings social reality from the conceptual form into the instituted form. Objectivation consists of two steps: institutionalization and legitimation, which this research examines them through ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s *Will and Testament* (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1990) and Shoghi Effendi’s *The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh* (Effendi, 1994).

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s *Will and Testament* (1990) is considered a link between the spiritual aspects of the Bahá’í Faith, and the world order that the Faith is eventually intended to establish (Hofman, 1940-1944). Shoghi Effendi describes it as the charter of the “New World Order of Bahá’u’lláh” (Effendi, 1994). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s *Will and Testament* (1990) is written in three sections, the first of which was probably written in 1906. The other two parts were written years later and emphasise the new violence of the Covenant and the importance of protecting the Faith from division and disintegration (Effendi, 1944). Additionally, the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice are thoroughly emphasized in each part.

The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh (Effendi, 1994) is considered as “the *ne plus ultra*” of Shoghi Effendi’s writings (McLean, 2008). It is also regarded as his last will (Nakhjavani, 2007). *The Dispensation* consists of four parts: the first three sections contain the status of three central figures of the Bahá’í Faith, namely, The Báb¹², the forerunner of Bahá’u’lláh; Bahá’u’lláh the founder; and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the successor and the centre of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant. The fourth part illuminates the administrative and political aspects of the Bahá’í

¹² <http://www.bahai.org/the-bab/>

governance and management system (McLean, 2008), and is considered a supplement to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s *Will and Testament* (Nakhjavani, 2007).

In short, this chapter applies Berger and Luckmann’s conceptual framework (1966) to interpret the emergence of the Bahá’í Administrative Order institutes in the real world as an important nomos for the Bahá’í cosmic frame of reference of the Unity of Humankind.

1. SOCIOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

During objectivation, externalized concepts and terms materialize and concretely emerge in the world (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). For the Administrative Order, this stage of objectivation is when social order emerges from the version of the sacred word through to the externalization into the material world. Through externalization, religion proposes the conceptual version of the components of this order within the sacred writings. While through objectivation, the institutions of a sacred order emerge out of the believers’ interactions. The stage of objectivation consists of two mechanisms: institutionalization and legitimation.

1.1. INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Institutionalization is a phase during which social order is constructed through people’s repeated interactions. Institutionalization happens through those human interactions that are repeated and replicated frequently enough to be considered habits (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In fact, the essence of institutionalization is “habitualization”. It means that any action that is repeatedly performed becomes an archetype for future actions. Habitualization makes a particular activation as a routine for the entire community (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Institutionalization happens whenever actors feel comfortable in interacting through those habitualized actions. When these habitualized actions settle and firmly take place in actors’ interactions, they start controlling human action by offering pre-defined patterns of actions;

these patterns direct the actions into a particular way out of many other possibilities (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Therefore, through institutionalization, the personal chaos of different possible choices turns into the predefined habits of social order (Pina-Cabral, 2011). An institution, therefore, is to be understood as a “reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors” (Pina-Cabral, 2011, p. 488). Pina-Cebral explains, “For them, the coming into existence of institutions (institutionalization) is an instance of the exercise of habit (habitualization)” (Pina-Cabral, 2011, p. 488).

Institutions, therefore, are considered as objective social realities. However, they are nothing but the outcome of reciprocal habitualized patterns of interactions in a given society (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Over time, and as new generations emerge, these typified actions and roles are taken for granted and considered as if they have always existed. Therefore, new generations confront these habitualized actions, as objective, necessary, and unavoidable routines. Hence, the institutionalized world is the objectivized humans' actions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Over time, institutions become more controlling. Since the institutionalization happens via the process of typifying the habitualized interactions of the members of a given society, it has meanings that are more subjective and with less control over the actions of the first generation of the community. Systematically, when the habituated rules are transferred to the next generations, they become more controlling, inflexible and objective regulations (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Moreover, while making institutions is a time-consuming procedure, if someone becomes familiar with the historicity of the institutions, they can manage a more flexible interpretation of them (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This is because they are capable of not taking them for granted. Institutes regulate members of the community by providing predefined patterns of behaviour and conduct (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

1.2. LEGITIMATION

As the second step towards objectivation, legitimation is the process through which the next generations of a given society will understand and take the institutions for granted.

Legitimation is the process during which the new meanings are created to justify the institutionalization for new generations. Since the new generations cannot understand the meanings of the institutions through memory, it is necessary that those meanings be interpreted for them through different justifying formulations (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Accordingly, legitimation is not necessary for the first generation of a given society since the institutional order is just a first-hand experience. At this stage, everybody can still remember the rationale and the history of the habitualized and reified interactions that characterize the institutions. Legitimation is the process of “explanation” and “justification” of the institutions for the next generations (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). For the first generation, the social reality is more subjective; legitimation makes the subjective reality objective for the next generations (Shaw, 1973).

Indeed, legitimation guarantees the maintenance of the social solidarity of a given society over the course of its history. Objectivation is the process of producing a social order; institutionalization produces the institutions and legitimation extends the authority of the institutions into the future (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). As a result, the totality of the institutionalized system will have the same meaning to all social actors and members of the society, including older and newer generations. In other words, both the new and older generations have to be able to live within the same social order (nomos) to be able to move forward to the same goal of the social solidarity (cosmic frame of reference). However, the older generation is the producer of the institutions and subjectively understands them, while the new generations are the products of them and recognize them as objective entities.

Furthermore, legitimation happens both cognitively and normatively. Justification explains the institutionalized order by its cognitive aspects, such as myths, instructive narratives, religious symbols, and moral proverbs. Furthermore, justification facilitates the legitimation of the institutionalized order by giving a normative aspect to its traditions, rituals, orders, and demands for the next generations. Legitimation, therefore, constitutes both cognitive and normative dimensions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Legitimation not only orders and commands what to do, and what not to do, but it also explains and justifies why things are the way they are (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

2. OBJECTIVATION IN THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

This section aims to demonstrate how the conceptual entities in Kitáb-i-Aqdas appeared in the concrete world as institutions of a sacred order, and within the context of scriptures during Bahá'í history. Following the death of Bahá'u'lláh, and during the period of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's succession, Bahá'u'lláh's message and Faith spread beyond the borders of Iran and the Middle East (Effendi, 1944; Berger, 1954). Many followers of Bahá'u'lláh's Faith had gone to the West as pioneers and invited Western people into the Faith (Effendi, 1944; Berger, 1954). 'Abdu'l-Bahá travelled to many Western countries and made a large number of presentations to scientific, civil, and religious communities. During his trips, he met many significant people, including scientific, religious, and political leaders (Effendi, 1944; Smith, 1987). During 'Abdu'l-Bahá's leadership, the Bahá'í community developed strong ties to the West (Smith, 1987). 'Abdu'l-Bahá's effort during the last years of his life brought a closer connection between the Western and Eastern Bahá'í communities (Effendi, 1944; Smith, 1987).

The Bahá'í community grew and became more institutionalized and organized (Smith, 1987). The first consultation assemblies were established in different communities in the East and

West during this period. At that time, the largest Bahá'í community in the East was in Iran, and in the West, it was in the United States (Effendi, 1944). The Bahá'í community of Iran faced restrictions and limitations and was persecuted and executed for their beliefs. However, the Master of the Bahá'ís encouraged them to establish the first consultation board of the Bahá'í world community in Tehran (Effendi, 1944). At that time, this advisory board was not called a "Spiritual Assembly", and most importantly, it was not elective. However, it was responsible for the affairs of the Bahá'í community (Effendi, 1944). Gradually, with the growth and maturation of the Bahá'í community in Iran, this appointed body turned into the Spiritual Assembly that managed the affairs of the community, both in Tehran and at the national level (Effendi, 1944). Nine years later, the first western consultation centre in Chicago was established to manage the construction of Bahá'í House of Worship in Chicago. By the time 'Abdu'l-Bahá' passed away, more than thirty Local Spiritual Assemblies in Iran, forty local Assemblies in America, and dozens of other local assemblies were formed around the world (Effendi, 1944). In 1934, the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran was formed, while the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States had officially been formed by 1925, according to the election rules that Shoghi Effendi had imposed (Effendi, 1944). By 1925, other national assemblies in Great Britain, Germany, Austria, India, Burma, Egypt, and Sudan were formed (UHJ, 2001c). This rapid pace, as Berger mentions in his doctoral dissertation (1954), meant moving from a community with charismatic leadership to a society with a rational leadership (Berger, 1958).

Berger (1954) suggests that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was worried about his young successor, Shoghi Effendi, and knew that he could not continue to lead the growing community through charismatic leadership. Firstly, he knew that Shoghi would face challenges in leading elder and veteran Bahá'ís that had much more experience than him. Secondly, the community was growing very fast and was establishing various consultation committees in the East and the

West, so charismatic leadership was not an option to lead the constant organizing community anymore. Moreover, a growing number of Western people were joining the community, and they would not follow a charismatic leader in the modern era (Berger, 1958).

Western communities and their experiences in rationality and the establishment and perpetuation of the Bahá'í institutions could be more influential than Eastern Bahá'ís and their orientation in mysticism. Berger (1958) believes that 'Abdu'l-Bahá' consciously led the administration systems in the Bahá'í community from charismatic into the rational, democratic Western-oriented order, to guarantee the solidarity and unity of the community. Berger (1958) adds that 'Abdu'l-Bahá' knew that the charismatic influence and authority of the successors decreases after each replacement. Therefore, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament (1990) is considered the constitution of the future Bahá'í social order (Berger, 1958).

Below is a sociological expression of the growth and development of the Bahá'í Administrative Order.

2.1. 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S WILL AND TESTAMENT

'Abdu'l-Bahá assigns two main missions for himself in his Will and Testament (1990), which taken together, is "the Covenant":

1. Rejecting the Covenant-breakers' claims about the succession of Bahá'u'lláh
2. Establishing a solid foundation for succession to Bahá'u'lláh

Through his Will and Testament, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is trying to build a social world. He emphasises unity more than anything and assigns every objective of the religious institutes towards strengthening it among the Bahá'ís. Due to the importance and urgency of the unity, 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes a Covenant through his Will and Testament, and this strict Covenant could lead to the desired unity. It could also lead to a controlling, ruling religious system, in

which the individual might be restricted. Berger and Luckmann (1966) also suggest that social institutes are the tools for controlling the members through defining special roles and designated behaviours for each role. Berger (1954) would say this system of institutions had provided a rational order for succession after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

2.1.1. THE COVENANT

From the Bahá’ís perspective, the Covenant represents unconditional obedience towards Baháulláh’s successors. Abdu’l-Bahá makes the Covenant the heart of his Will and Testament (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1990), and he takes a strict and rigid attitude towards the Covenant-breakers. He asks his followers to avoid these people, and to not communicate with them because he believes they destroy the foundation of the unity among the believers (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1990, p. 21). As Berger would say, the unity as the main component and foundation of the Bahá’ís’ cosmology is not negotiable, even with other Bahá’ís. In fact, the main source of solidarity in the Bahá’í community, and specifically in the administrative order, is the power of the Covenant. The Covenant is also a major source of legitimacy for its authority. Within ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament the Covenant legitimates the authority, both cognitively and normatively (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1990).

By giving a short history of the life of the leaders of the Covenant-breakers (Mirza Yahya¹³ and Mirza Muhammad Ali¹⁴), ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1990) tries to expose how their efforts jeopardize the unity of the Bahá’í community in the memories of the new generations. This historical recitation is the cognitive aspect of the legitimation. In this way, the next generations are assured and convinced that the community needs to be protected against the Covenant-breakers to protect the unity among the loyally faithful. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1990) also lists the deviations of the leaders of the Covenant-breakers to explain and justify the necessity

¹³ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/651237/Mirza-Yahya-Sobh-e-Azal>

¹⁴ http://bahaikipedia.org/M%C3%ADrz%C3%A1_Muhammad_%E2%80%98A1%C3%AD

and urgency of their excommunication. He cites some of the Bahá'í original references to explain and justify how Mirza Muhammad Ali (his younger brother from a different mother) is neither a successor of Bahá'u'lláh nor a Bahá'í anymore. In the Bergerian sense the process of explanation and justification which takes place in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament (1990), is legitimation. Once legitimation occurs, authority is consented to, and religious solidarity is safeguarded.

The Covenant is also the source of the unity through normative legitimation. Berger (1954) states that although 'Abdu'l-Bahá had been under pressure from the Covenant-breakers his whole life, his charisma kept the Bahá'ís united. Nonetheless, he was worried about his young successor, Shoghi Effendi. Therefore, he prescribed strict rules towards how Covenant-breakers should be dealt with, to protect the unity among Bahá'ís after his period of leadership.

The Covenant is also the foundation of the obedience that is expected from the followers towards the Bahá'í Administrative Order. Believing in the Universal House of Justice as the highest seat of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, Bahá'ís are expected to obey not only the decisions of the Universal House of Justice but any other institution in the Bahá'í Administrative Order. The Bahá'í Administrative Order is the channel that passes the divine power to the followers. It is also as the embryonic version of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. The Covenant maintains the authority of the Bahá'í Administrative Order ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990).

Moreover, Berger suggests 'Abdu'l-Bahá has tried to develop the Bahá'í community from a charismatic leadership system to a rational authority (Berger, 1954). Hence, 'Abdu'l-Bahá determines the roles of the different components of the evolving society through his Will and Testament (Effendi, 1991, p. 78). One of the themes of the Will and Testament (1990) is defining the roles and the duties of each group of the Bahá'ís, such as the holy family

members, the Hands of the Cause of God, and all Bahá'í individuals, which form a normative legitimation. Consequently, 'Abdu'l-Bahá stratifies the community and adds new typified roles and routines to the social stock of knowledge of the young and vulnerable Bahá'í community. The social stock of knowledge is the common conceptual and cultural reality among the members of a given community (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Appointing designated roles for particular functions is a part of institutionalization (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The role of institutes is to control the behaviours and identities of individuals (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). That is to say, after the Will and Testament ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990), Bahá'ís' social order turned from a charismatic authority into a rational system (Berger, 1954), that is in Durkheim's terminology, from mechanical solidarity into organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1893).

2.1.2. SUCCESSION

'Abdu'l-Bahá names two successors to his followers: one was his grandson, Shoghi Effendi, who was to be the "Guardian". The other was the Universal House of Justice. In fact, he introduced two different institutions to the Bahá'í community: first, the Guardianship, and second, the legislation ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990). Neither of them was clear to the followers from Kitáb-i-Aqdas, per se (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992). As previously mentioned, the "Houses of Justice" in Kitáb-i-Aqdas was not hitherto identified as the Universal House of Justice.

2.1.2.1. Guardianship

According to Berger (1967), nomos has two main features, it serves the social order, and it is taken for granted by the members. Berger and Luckmann (1966) emphasise designating social roles as a significant part of the process of institutionalization. In fact, the Guardianship in the Bahá'í Faith plays two significant roles, both of which are determined in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament (1990). The Guardian is the authorized interpreter of the scriptures, as well as the chair of the Universal House of Justice. Due to these two

responsibilities, the Institute of Guardianship can protect the Bahá'í community from disunity.

The Guardian protects the Faith from disunity and maintains the solidarity of the community as the only authorized interpreter of the scriptures. Berger (1967) argues that people act in accordance with their interpretations and understandings of the situation. Therefore, to act according to the Bahá'í scriptures, they first need to interpret and understand them and then translate them into actions. However, people do not interpret the same scriptures in the same way so that they may act differently. Bahá'ís believe that the source of disunity among the followers of the previous religious movements has been the difference in interpretations that led to different actions, and eventually different values and norms (Bahá'u'lláh, 1862).

Defining the Institute of Guardianship ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990), 'Abdu'l-Bahá tries to unify the people of Bahá in mind and action through institutionalizing interpretation. Indicating one, and only one authorized interpreter of the Bahá'í scriptures, 'Abdu'l-Bahá tries to avoid disunity among the followers.

Moreover, the Guardian keeps the Bahá'í community united because of his role as the chair of the Universal House of Justice. The Universal House of Justice should consider the guidance in the holy writings before starting the process of making decisions, and they have to make sure that their decisions are in accordance with the scriptures, and not opposed to the sacred texts. In this case, the role of the Guardian is the president of the Universal House of Justice, and therefore, deviation from the authorized interpretation will not happen. Hence, the Guardian has already controlled whatever passes as law by the House. Therefore, it is not only obeyed and binding but is accurate and free from error, because it is approved by the infallible authority ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990). Accordingly, the institution of Guardianship serves the unity of the community by guarding the decisions of the House against deviation from the scriptures, before and after the process of decision-making. As a result, the institution of the

Guardianship safeguards the unity of the community's thoughts, but it also maintains the unity as the chair of the Universal House of Justice's actions.

The Institution of the Guardianship is firmly legitimized by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In the first part of his Will and Testament (1990) 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to Shoghi Effendi as "the ablest and sacred bough that hath branched out from the Twin Holy Trees. Well is it with him that seeketh the shelter of his shade that shadoweth all humanity". Using such characteristics, 'Abdu'l-Bahá tried to establish a strong status for his very young successor over his veteran and experienced followers. In doing so, he could be assured that everyone would obey him and there would be unity among the followers. 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to Shoghi Effendi as the Guardian very clearly, without any ambiguity ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990). In the last part of his Will and Testament, he shows more concern about the attitude of all his followers, particularly the veterans.

Accordingly, he asks the followers to respect Shoghi Effendi and avoid anything that may make him displeased and disappointed to be regarded as faithful to his Covenant ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990). Absolute obedience and pure respect are expected, and any disobedience is not acceptable. He has to be obeyed and respected because this obedience and respect is regarded as obedience and respect to the Cause of God. He explains the reason for this obedience as being necessary for the unity amongst believers and justifies his position by assigning his status to the sacred family while emphasizing his glory as a distinguished branch of the holy tree.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's effort to introduce and justify the status of his successor can be considered legitimation. Legitimation has two forms: cognitive legitimation and normative legitimation. Cognitive legitimation happens by explaining and justifying the position and authority of a given institution by explaining the functions and vitality of it for the community. Normative legitimation happens through "sacralization" and defining sacred roots and origins for the

particular institution, and demands respect and obedience (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Consequently, explaining the function of the Guardian as the authorized interpreter of the scriptures is considered cognitive legitimation, and identifying the roots and origins of the Guardian as the “First-born” of the sacred family is the normative legitimation in the Bergerian sense (1966).

Accordingly, the Institute of the Guardianship is strongly legitimized in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament (1990). Berger (1958) asserts, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tries to rationalize and legitimize his succession to avoid the damage that the lack of charismatic leadership after his death might cause.

2.1.2.2. Legislation

There is a firm Covenant for the Universal House of Justice as Shoghi Effendi’s, which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá takes from his followers. Any rebelliousness and disobedience are not acceptable, and he emphasizes that the House of Justice is also under the protection of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh and insists on the infallibility of this institution. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá turns the House of Justice into a sacred legitimated Institute, which expects only loyalty and obedience (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1990, pp. 11-12).

According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament (1990), the main role of the Universal House of Justice is continuity of legislation, through which the requirements of a changing world are met, and the sacredness of the rules and commands is protected and secured. Furthermore, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá noticeably introduces two kinds of houses of justice: first, the Universal House of Justice and second, the Secondary House of Justice (future NSAs). Both are elective and have to make decisions through the process of consultation. The members of both Houses must be pure in mind and deeds (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1990). Assigning and characterizing the roles and functions of a signified institution is also according to Berger’s theory, normative legitimation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

In 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament (1990), the twin institutes of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice are legitimized cognitively and normatively; it is cognitive regarding their function to secure the unity and normative regarding their sacredness and infallibility. 'Abdu'l-Bahá compares the Universal House of Justice to the legislature, and the Guardian to the executive part of the government, both of which have to support each other ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990). In Bergerian terms, specialization and signification lead to a more organized and ordered community in which members can concentrate on their roles that is organic solidarity according to Durkheim (Durkheim, 1893). Subsequently, they can interact with the predefined roles that have been objectified in the social stock of knowledge in their society (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). 'Abdu'l-Bahá very strictly asks his followers to "seek guidance and turn unto the Centre of the Cause and the House of Justice. Moreover, he that turneth unto whatsoever else is indeed in grievous error" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990, p. 26).

The authority of the Covenant reproduces and empowers itself in the twin institutes of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament (1990). Since 'Abdu'l-Bahá is at the centre of the Covenant, he provides the sacredness for both of his successors equally. Hence, they can fulfil their assigned roles and functions independently. The Guardian can interpret the Holy Scriptures without being the chair of the Universal House of Justice because his authority and infallibility are not related to the presence of the Universal House of Justice, and his interpretations are considered the final word and are obeyed. Similarly, the infallibility of the Universal House of Justice is not related to the presence of the Guardian. It is still obeyed if the Guardian does not exist, because rationally, this characteristic of the Universal House of Justice is necessary for the sake of unity in an elective, consultative, and fallible religious hierarchy, to avoid disagreement and disunity at the top of the hierarchy of authority. The infallibility of the Universal House of Justice is not related to the presence of the Guardian but is under the

protection of the main source of sacredness in the Bahá'í Faith, namely the twin manifestations, the Báb and Baháulláh ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990). Overall, the infallibility of the Universal House of Justice, as well as the Guardian, is not negotiable and unquestioned, because it is normatively legitimated, and the Covenant supports and secures their authority, and demands respect and obedience.

2.2. SHOGHI EFFENDI'S THE DISPENSATION OF BAHÁULLÁH

Berger and Luckmann (1966, p. 110) suggest legitimation is best described as a “second order” objectivation of meaning. Legitimation adds new meanings to the institutional process, which is the “first-order” objectivation. While legitimation is not necessary and vital in the first phase of institutionalization, in the second phase, it is required regarding “explanation” and “justification”. Legitimation happens in both a cognitive and normative way. The outcome of legitimation should be akin to taking the institution for granted so that the members of the community will obey its rules and roles. This way, the objectivation stage will be completed since the social order is established (institutionalization) and maintained (legitimation). In fact, it was in *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* (Effendi, 1994) that Shoghi Effendi for the first time introduced the Bahá'í administrative system as the Bahá'í Administrative Order (Nakhjavani, 2007).

From a Bergerian perspective, *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* (Effendi, 1994) attempts to deliver the sacred nomos of the Bahá'í community, which is the Bahá'í Administrative Order. To achieve this goal, Shoghi Effendi legitimizes the twin institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. At the very beginning of *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* (1994), Shoghi Effendi emphasizes the high status of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He reminds the believers of his position as the centre of the Covenant and the central role played by his Will and Testament (1990) among Bahá'í writing. He also draws attention to the contents of the Will and

Testament (1990) and identifies it as the charter of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, which is the child of the Covenant and the Faith (Effendi, 1991). He concludes that:

The Administrative Order, which ever since 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ascension has evolved and is taking shape under our very eyes in no fewer than forty countries of the world, may be considered as the framework of the Will and Testament itself, the inviolable stronghold wherein this new-born child is being nurtured and developed (Effendi, 1991, p. 145).

Shoghi Effendi not only explains the historical and traditional roots of the Bahá'í Administrative Order to legitimize it, but he also justifies the status of the Bahá'í Administrative Order by pointing out its future outcomes. "It will, as its component parts, its organic institutions, begin to function with efficiency and vigour, assert its claim and demonstrate its capacity to be regarded 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 humanity" (Effendi, 1991, p. 79).

As Berger and Luckmann (1966) suggest, it is through cosmization that humans externalize, objectify, and recognize their meaning of the world. At the same time, the human is creating these meanings (Berger, 1967). Using a large number of quotations of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi (1991), in a relatively long part of *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh*, tries to develop a coherent worldview and cosmology which leads to the last and the most important section, the "Administrative Order" (Effendi, 1991). As a result, Shoghi Effendi's *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* (Effendi, 1994) is the official acknowledgement of the emergence of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* (Effendi, 1994) justifies and explains the roots and origins of the Bahá'í Administrative Order in the original scriptures of Bahá'u'lláh. So, Bahá'ís could take it for granted and believe that it is not only the most important part of the life of their community, but it is also inevitable and obvious which is in Bergerian term, the outcome of legitimation.

2.2.1. SIGNIFICATION IN LEGITIMATION

Berger and Luckmann (1966) state that “signification”, the process by which we make “signs”, is a very important task of “objectivation”. There are two kinds of objectivation and therefore, two types of sign making. There are signs that originally and intentionally are implied by an object, and there are signs that are gradually and indirectly interpreted to refer to a particular object. Signs are first made for subjective implications and are intended for “here and now” occasions, but they are “detachable” from the particular situation, and from the subject that had intended them for a face-to-face case. Thus, little by little, they can become objective sign systems.

In fact, Shoghi Effendi did not use the term the “Bahá’í Administrative Order” before 1934. Hence, in the Dispensation (1934), it seems that one of the most considerable significations is happening when Shoghi Effendi uses two passages from the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh to establish the term the “Bahá’í Administrative Order”. In these two pieces, the word “Order” wasn't used to refer to such an order necessarily. However, as the authorized interpreter of the Bahá’í writings, he has the right to establish a new meaning and make it a new sign for the Bahá’í Administrative system. He quotes this passage from Bahá’u’lláh:

The world’s equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Humanity’s ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed (Bahá’u’lláh, 1992, p. 172).

He also quotes the Báb:

Well is it with him who fixeth his gaze upon the Order of Bahá’u’lláh and rendereth thanks unto his Lord! For, He will assuredly be made manifest. God hath indeed irrevocably ordained it in the Bayán¹⁵ (Effendi, 1994, p. 15).

Before Shoghi Effendi interpreted both of these writings, no one had identified any significant implications for them. With this interpretation, Effendi not only referred to the

¹⁵ The Bab’s most holy book

“Bahá’í Administrative Order”, but also embodied and delivered it into the canon of Bahá’í writings. This kind of signification happened indirectly, gradually, and through interpretation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p.50).

According to Smith (1987), at that time, a small number of Bahá’ís started doubting the institutionalization of the Faith based on their understanding from one of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s quotes regarding not to organize the Faith (See chapter three). However, their small group did not gain many followers. In fact, most of the Bahá’ís accepted the change and obeyed the authority of Shoghi Effendi (Smith, 1987).

Signification is to assign a distinguished meaning for an existing word or fashion a new word or terminology as a sign to objectify the subjective meaning and distinguish it from other objective implications (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). It mainly happens on the stage of externalization. However, in this case, Shoghi Effendi tries to justify and legitimate the Bahá’í Administrative Order by interpreting a new meaning and signifying a distinguished implication for the old terms and quotes that had already existed in Bahá’í scriptures.

Through these quotations, he also relates the Covenant to the Bahá’í Administrative Order and explains how, as he has mentioned (Effendi, 1991), the Bahá’í Administrative Order is the child of the Faith and the Covenant. He calls both Kitáb-i-Aqdas (the Faith) and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament (the Covenant) the “Charter of the future world civilization” (Effendi, 1994, pp. 214, 328).

Moreover, it seems that Shoghi Effendi also tried to legitimate this newly developed order by revealing its roots and origins in Bahá’u’lláh and Báb’s writings. He uses several long quotations to provide such signification. By emphasising the foundations and implications of the newborn Bahá’í Administrative Order in the holiest scriptures, Shoghi Effendi tries to justify (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 111) the whole system for the conservative Bahá’ís

who were accustomed to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s charismatic leadership (Berger, 1954; Smith, 1987) and attached to their conception of a non-organized movement (Effendi, 1938). He also targeted the next generations of Bahá’ís to make the Institutes of the Bahá’í Administrative Order habitualized and eventually institutionalized it for all of the Faith. He essentially makes the history, and the sacred background of the Bahá’í Administrative Order cemented in the common memory of the Bahá’í community, which from a Bergerian perspective would be called “the social stock of knowledge” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 82).

Through the process of institutionalization and legitimation, Bahá’í leadership turns into a rational institution instead of the charismatic system at the time of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. According to the literature, this is what Berger (Berger, 1954) meant by routinization of charisma in his PhD thesis about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s effort to establish the twin institutes as Bahá’u’lláh’s successors. Routinization of charisma is a Weberian term (Weber, 1968), that refers to the process in which the followers are provided with rational and institutional leadership through routinization and habitualization. Shoghi Effendi continued his grandfather’s task to objectify, and in Weberian terms, routinize the leadership and management system in the Bahá’í Faith.

2.2.2. HABITUALIZATION IN LEGITIMATION

This section will explore the way Shoghi Effendi habitualized the newly established Bahá’í Administrative Order. In his writing, he highlights the roles of the twin pillars of the Bahá’í Administrative Order: the institution of Guardianship, and the Universal House of Justice. Shoghi Effendi's main concern in *The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh* (1994) is to explain, justify, and typify the twin institutes which had already been established by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in his Will and Testament. He writes, “My present intention is to elaborate certain salient features of this scheme which, however, close we may stand to its colossal structure, are already so clearly defined that we find it inexcusable to either misconceive or ignore”

(Effendi, 1991, p. 148). Shoghi Effendi (1991) refers to a list of interactive roles and types of actors in the Order which are mentioned in Bahá'í writings, particularly 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament.

Referring to the already defined and established roles and components of the Bahá'í Administrative system, he tried to redefine them, and accommodate them in a system that he was preparing to launch. These components had yet to be meaningfully related to the others. Explaining and emphasising the origin and the functions of the twin institutes, Shoghi Effendi tried to typify their roles and demonstrate their relationship, borders, and boundaries towards each other. He shows how they work together, how each manages its particular function without any interference from the other, and how they also are “complementary in their aim and purpose” (Effendi, 1991, p. 149). This is also a good example of organic solidarity in the modern world (Durkheim, 1893).

He identifies with the relatively detailed language the functions and duties of each “pillar of the administrative order” (Effendi, 1991, p. 148) and starts with what he initiates to call “the Institute of Guardianship” (Effendi, 1991, p. 149). He explains that the Guardian's main duty is to interpret the Bahá'í writings. He also emphasises and establishes that the Guardian is the permanent head of the Universal House of Justice. However, “he cannot override the decision of the majority of his fellow-members but is bound to insist upon a reconsideration by them of any enactment he conscientiously believes to conflict with the meaning and to depart from the spirit of Baha'u'llah's revealed utterances” (Effendi, 1991, p. 151).

Furthermore, Shoghi Effendi specializes the “administrative system” and simultaneously describes the strict separation between the roles of the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice. From a Bergerian point of view, the first origins of the social roles, as well as the roots of institutions, exist in the exact process of habitualization. Consequently, any institutional behaviour requires the predefined roles (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Organizing

the various components of the Bahá'í system in a hierarchy with two pillars of Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice, Shoghi Effendi's effort may well enable Bahá'ís to have a globally united community. This community is governed as a universal federation that comprises two separate pillars and two separate hierarchical lines, now known as the “Learned and the Rulers” (Effendi, 1934).

In *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Shoghi Effendi defines serious obedient attitudes and behaviour towards the institutions of the newly born “Bahá'í Administrative Order”. The Bahá'í system used to be more flexible in the apostolic age because of two different reasons; ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's Charismatic management, rather than rational authority in the Bahá'í Administrative Order, and subjective, undefined roles, and flexible restrictions instead of predefined objective roles in the Order. This is the limitation of the Bahá'ís agency under ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's Charismatic leadership. This was caused by the structure of the Order (Berger, 1958; Berger, 1954; McMullen, 2000; Smith, 1987; Palmer, 2012). The literature suggests the Bahá'í community was more liberal during ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's Charismatic succession than it was from Shoghi Effendi's period and onwards, as the Order predefined the services and activities within the Bahá'í community. Gradually, when the habituated rules transfer to a new generation, the institutionalized religiosity becomes more controlling and inflexible (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued for the objectivation in the context of two Bahá'í scriptures and discovered the role of the Covenant as the main source of authority in the Bahá'í community, within the two main components of the objectivation: institutionalization and legitimation. Objectivation in the Bahá'í community is a matter of the emergence of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, which is recognised as *nomos* for Bahá'í cosmology. Through the

stage of institutionalization, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá develops two significant institutes of the Bahá’í Administrative Order: Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice. Also, applying the authority of the Covenant, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tries to reproduce strict Covenant for those two institutes in the stage of legitimation. Using both cognitive and normative legitimation, he provides the Bahá’í community with two pillars of the Bahá’í social order that maintain unity among the Bahá’ís. *The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh* (Effendi, 1994), Shoghi Effendi delivers the Order that is the nomos of the Bahá’í community. For the Bahá’í Administrative Order to be the nomos, it is necessary to be both unifying and obeyed. Hence, Effendi (1994) legitimated the Order in *The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh* (Effendi, 1994), both cognitively and normatively. Cognitive legitimation provides the basis for unity in the thoughts and actions of the followers, and normative legitimation makes the object be obeyed and taken for granted. Hence, the Covenant reproduces itself through the stage of objectivation.

Objectivation in this project, in a Bergerian sense, is an analogue for the Weberian term, the “routinization of charisma”, that is used in Berger’s PhD thesis to demonstrate ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s effort to establish twin institutes of successorship for the Faith: Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice in his Will and Testaments (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 1990). By erecting the Bahá’í Administrative Order in 1934, Shoghi Effendi provided the Bahá’í community with a structure that predefined and habitualized the best service and actions for Bahá’ís. It is vastly believed that it limited the agency of the believers by the structure of the Bahá’í Administrative Order (Berger, 1954; Berger, 1958; Smith, 1987; McMullen, 2000; Palmer, 2012).

8. INTERNALIZATION

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines internalization (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) in the Bahá'í community by studying the letters of the Universal House of Justice. Since the individual is not born socialized and capable of living in a particular society, internalization is the process through which the society makes the members accept its rules and systems of control consciously. It is not enough that the individual thinks of the social order as useful; they have to think of it as inevitable, or as a part of the “nature of the things” (Berger, 1967). The more the members of society take their society and culture for granted, the more it may be said that the process of internalization is successful (Berger, 1967).

Socialization is the process through which new members of a given community learn the norms, skills, habits, and the other requirements of participation (Bales & Parson, 2007).

Exploring the messages and letters of the Universal House of Justice, this chapter aims to investigate internalization during the more recent stage of the history of the Bahá'í Administrative Order.

1. SOCIALIZATION

Socialization is the process through which humans become a product of society. Socialization is defined as the “comprehensive and consistent induction of an individual into the objective world of a society or a sector of it” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 150). Through socialization, an individual becomes a member of a particular society. This is considered a significant part of an individual's development. Berger believes that socialization is considered a “learning process” (Berger, 1967, p. 25). Through the learning process of

socialization, an individual internalizes and subjectivizes any objective reality, which the society presents in their minds (Berger, 1967). Therefore, “the success of socialization depends upon the establishment of symmetry between the objective world of society and the subjective world of the individual”. This means that a hypothetical, perfectly-socialized individual possesses is an analogue of every single objective meaning that exists in the society in his or her consciousness (Berger, 1967, p. 25). Berger suggests that a simple division of social work, in addition to the minimum distribution of social knowledge, may lead to socialization that is more successful (Berger, 1967).

As a learning process, socialization has two main levels: primary and secondary. Primary socialization is the first socialization undertaken during an individual’s childhood (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Primary socialization is the process of learning about the self and the world. Primary socialization ends when the concept of generalized others (parents and primary carers) is established successfully in an individual’s consciousness, and the individual can distinguish his or herself from his or her world.

Secondary socialization is any following process through which an already socialized individual subjectivizes a new version of objective society (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Secondary socialization is the process of learning the norms and functions of social institutions. That is, through secondary socialization, an individual internalizes the institutions of a “sub-world” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 158). While Primary socialization cannot take place without an emotional attachment and circumstance, secondary socialization can happen only through mutual communication and cognitive identification (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In primary socialization children do not comprehend their significant others as “institutional functionaries”, but as “mediators of reality”. In other words, their parents’ world is *the world* for them (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 161).

However, in secondary socialization, it is the institutional context that is typically appreciated

(Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The teachers, who are mainly responsible for secondary socialization, do not need to be emotionally attached to the children. They do not need to be significant others, as they are largely regarded as “institutional functionaries” with a formal task of transferring certain knowledge to the prospective members of the community (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 162).

Consequently, while learning through secondary socialization is much less subjective than primary socialization, and therefore much easier to be altered, the subjective world of primary socialization takes a lot more shocks to be disintegrated or bracketed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

2. INTERNALIZATION WITHIN THE BAHÁ'Í SCRIPTURES

This section will analyse the process of internalization in the context of the Bahá'í history through the letters from the Universal House of Justice. This part employs the Bahá'ís periodic history to explain the stage in more comprehensible segments.

2.1. EPOCHS OF THE FORMATIVE AGE

Bahá'ís divide the dispensation of their Faith into three distinguished periods: the heroic age (from the declaration of the Báb-Bahá'u'lláh's annunciator in 1844 to the ascendance of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá' in 1921), the formative age (Shoghi Effendi's Guardianship in 1921-?), and the Golden Age (unknown). Bahá'ís believe that the “promised one of all ages” is Bahá'u'lláh. Hence, the promises that all previous religions made, known as the Millennium utopia, will be fulfilled during the Bahá'í era. It is believed that Bahá'u'lláh's world order is establishing the heavenly kingdom on earth. Bahá'u'lláh declares: “soon will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead (Bahá'u'lláh, 1990, p. IV). Bahá'ís believe the new order will lead to the ultimate goal of the religious movement, namely the unity of

humanity. Bahá'ís believe this earthly heaven will be established by the efforts of people who work for the Unity of Humankind. This heaven is the New World Order of Bahá'u'lláh that according to Bahá'í writings is intended, planned, evolving, and depends on the extension of human efforts (Effendi, 1991).

Bahá'ís suggest the path towards their sacred world order passes through a two-fold process working in the current world; it is “an integrating” and a “disruptive” process (Effendi, 1991, p. 170). The integrative process, as he explains, is working through the Bahá'í Administrative Order and is considered as the *nomos* for the community-building, in accordance with Berger's theory of social reality of religion (1967). Hence, the characteristics of the “formative age” are the construction of the Administrative Order in the Bahá'í world community. Formative age is supposed to be followed by the “Golden Age” when the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh will be thoroughly established, and the Unity of Humankind will be acknowledged on Earth (Effendi, 1991).

Indeed, from a Bergerian perspective, the formative age is the internalization period within the Bahá'í era, during which the New World Order of Bahá'u'lláh (cosmic frame of reference) maintains its evolving, constructing, examining, and reforming inside the Bahá'í community in its embryonic period, called the Bahá'í Administrative Order (*nomos*). From a Bergerian perspective, the process of evolution, which constitutes establishing a particular version of the order within the social and everyday lives of the members is called internalization.

Through this process, individuals accept the societal order consistently and regularly (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

The formative age is divided into different epochs underlining, the “progressive stages in the evolution of the organic Bahá'í community and signal the maturation of its institutions, thus enabling the Faith to operate at new levels and to initiate new functions” (Effendi, 1953). The first epoch of the formative age started on the very day of the ascendance of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá’

when the Guardianship began in the Bahá'í era in 1921 and ended in 1946 (Effendi, 1944). It is highlighted, with the creation of the Bahá'í Administrative Order in 1934 (Effendi, 1944) that is the summit of objectivation in the process of reality-building. The second epoch started in 1946 and ended in 1963 at the end of the ten-year crusade and the establishment of the Universal House of Justice. The first and second epochs were under the Guardianship of Shoghi Effendi. Bahá'ís spread their Faith beyond the Western hemisphere during this period. During the third epoch (1963-1986), they believed that the Faith had emerged from obscurity and initiated social and economic development plans. The fourth epoch (1986-2001) was when national Bahá'í communities grew to take on the responsibility for their developments. During the international conference of the Counsellors and auxiliary board members in 2001, the Bahá'í world community was announced it had grown to become the fifth epoch of the formative age (UHJ, 2001b). Bahá'ís believe that the Counsellors and auxiliary board members from all boards while working as individuals reached unity in thought and mind (UHJ, 2001a). To this point, five epochs of the formative age are acknowledged, and no one knows when another epoch will be announced, or how many more epochs will be acknowledged. These are related to the speed and stages of the development of the Bahá'í Administrative Order.

2.2. INTERNALIZATION DURING THE THIRD EPOCH OF THE FORMATIVE AGE (1963-1986)

At this stage in the history of the Bahá'í Faith, the Bahá'í Administrative Order had been established, and by the election of the Universal House of Justice in 1963, as its supreme body, the institutionalization was undertaken. The third epoch of the Bahá'ís formative age started under the direction of the Universal House of Justice, and that process of society building can be identified as internalization, from a Bergerian perspective. More than 450 general letters were released during the third epoch of the formative age to give directions to

the Bahá'í community during the establishment of the Bahá'í Administrative Order (UHJ, 1963-2017).

The process of producing the Bahá'í Administrative Order, namely the stages of externalization and objectivation, was linked to the stage of internalization. It was time for the Bahá'í Administrative Order, and on the top of it, the Universal House of Justice to produce members of the community through the socialization process. Secondary socialization, therefore, happened within the institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order for Bahá'ís.

The focus of the Universal House of Justice during the third epoch of the formative age was on living the Bahá'í life. Living the Bahá'í life means that Bahá'ís should live different aspects of their lives in accordance with spiritual and moral teachings and principles of the Faith. The institutions of the Bahá'í Administrative Order were responsible for making sure this would happen. Therefore, by a Bergerian interpretation, practising the “Bahá'í life” is the main way of socialization during the third epoch of the formative age. Socialization is a learning process and that by accessing the “special knowledge” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 158), individuals construct an analogue of the real world in their minds. The main components of socialization in the third epoch of the formative age were mentioned in the message of October 1964:

- 1- “Constant study of the life-giving Word”.
- 2- “Deepen in spiritual understanding”.
- 3- “Show to the world a mature, responsible, fundamentally assured and happy way of life, far removed from the passions, prejudices and distractions of present-day society” (UHJ, 1964b).

Therefore, from Berger and Luckmann's analysis, the Universal House of Justice tries to socialize individuals through a three-stage process. Firstly, by reading and studying the Bahá'í writings; secondly, through the interpretation of the scriptures, and finally, practising them in their service to the Faith. This process leads to possessing a significant type of life that is known as the "Bahá'í life" in the letter from the Universal House of Justice (UHJ, 1974). "Bahá'í life" might be regarded as the criterion for assessing how far Bahá'ís are from perfect socialization. Perfect socialization would be a complete symmetry between objective social meanings and personal subjective understanding and interpretation of them in the way that they can be taken for granted (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In this context, Bahá'í life is a spiritual interpretation of the social meanings, followed by the translating of them into observable actions of service through the interactions of their "everyday life", such as (UHJ, 1964a):

- 1- Prayer
- 2- Making their "own lives mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendour of those eternal principles proclaimed by Baha'u'llah"
- 3- Contribution to the Bahá'í Fund

The Universal House of Justice tried different methods to make sure that everybody was busy serving the Faith through the Bahá'í Administrative Order and the teaching activities, which were running by the local and national institutes (UHJ, April 1964). The Universal House of Justice seems concerned with improving the most admired way of making decisions in the Bahá'í writings, namely consultation. Therefore, the Universal House of Justice attempted to encourage the National and Local Spiritual Assemblies to arrange consultation conventions with the individuals about different aspects of Bahá'í life (UHJ, April 1964).

Moreover, the Universal House of Justice released more than twenty compilations of the Bahá'í scriptures about the various aspects of the Bahá'í life during the third epoch, which

may show the importance of the knowledge about scriptures and study at that point. These compilations contain topics such as family life, the role of music in spiritual life, Bahá'í schools and institutes, women, children, youth, and the Feast (UHJ, 1963-2017).

Consequently, the perfect socialization, by Berger and Luckmann's theory (1966) in the third epoch of the formative age is analogue with the "Bahá'í life" in the Universal House of Justice literature. This process is a learning process (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) that concerns the everyday lives of individual Bahá'ís and is regarded as one of the Bahá'í Administrative Order's institutes to initiate ways to establish, maintain, and improve the "Bahá'í life" among the members of their community. The focus in this period is in the Bahá'í life, along with service to the Unity of Humankind, through taking part in the Administrative Order institutes. In this epoch, the more Bahá'ís served the Faith through Bahá'í Administrative Order as well as trying to live a Bahá'í life, the more they might be socialized (UHJ, 1963-1986).

2.3. INTERNALIZATION DURING THE FOURTH EPOCH OF THE FORMATIVE AGE (1986-2001)

This section will demonstrate that the fourth epoch of the formative age is divided into two distinguished characteristics, regarding the Bahá'ís community-building efforts, from 1986 to 1996, and from 1996 to 2001. In fact, a considerable shift in goals and means has effectively changed Bahá'ís' community-building efforts since 1996.

The growth of the national institutes is regarded as the most significant feature of the first decade of the fourth epoch of the formative age. The fourth epoch of the formative age was declared because of "the organic growth in the maturity of the institutions of the Cause" (UHJ, 1986a). In the fourth epoch, Bahá'í World Community decided to collaborate in world-building, particularly with the United Nations, through the efforts of the National

Spiritual Assemblies (UHJ, 1986a; UHJ, 1987; UHJ, 1988). The main idea in the letters of the Universal House of Justice at the beginning of the fourth epoch is that the Bahá'í Administrative Order can make individual Bahá'ís' efforts collective and systematic, to be able to contribute to other activities, such as working towards world peace. In fact, mechanical solidarity turned entirely into organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1893). At the beginning of the fourth epoch, Bahá'ís worked towards making the Administrative Order the channel through which all individual efforts turn into collective, institutional ones. Moreover, the Bahá'í Administrative Order, after the process of institutionalization, became the skeleton around which the Bahá'í world community was shaped. At this stage, Bahá'ís had already established the Bahá'í world Community, composed of individuals, institutes and local communities (UHJ, 1996a). The functional institutes of this were the National Spiritual Assemblies that could communicate with the national and international organizations to contribute to the world-building efforts (UHJ, 1988).

In fact, the first decade of the fourth epoch of the formative age (1986-1996) has been dedicated to the growth of the elective wing of the Bahá'í Administrative Order (UHJ, 1963-2017). From a Bergerian perspective (Berger, 1967), individual Bahá'ís should possess a precise comprehension of their community, in their minds, to provide the symmetry between the subjective world of the members, and the objective reality of their community. By doing so, socialization would be accomplished in their society. According to the letters from the Universal House of Justice in this period, for a long time, the Bahá'í Administrative Order was responsible for this symmetric perception (UHJ, 1963-1986). The Universal House of Justice designated the Administrative Order as the most crucial medium for different Bahá'í activities concerning the ultimate goal of the Unity of Humankind (UHJ, 1992b). At this period, Bahá'ís attempted to improve their capacities for community-building activities through their services within the Administrative institutes, as well as by improving their

contribution to world society-building activities through these institutes (UHJ, 1986b). The Bahá'í Administrative Order served the integrative process and was supposed to lead to the Most Great Peace and the New World Order, while the disruptive process was supposed to lead to the Lesser Peace by humanity itself, without active help from the Bahá'í community (Effendi, 1991). Therefore, Berger's stage of socialization in the fourth epoch of the formative age is happening mainly through the Bahá'í Administrative Order.

2.3.1.1. SECONDARY SOCIALIZATION MEANS AND MEDIATORS

While primary socialization happens within the emotional environment of the family, the secondary socialization takes place through social institutions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). According to the letters from the Universal House of Justice (UHJ, 1963-1986), there are several methods for socialization to take place during the fourth epoch of the formative age.

2.3.1.1.1. Bahá'í Administrative Order Institutions

The Universal House of Justice tried to empower the National Spiritual Assemblies to centralize them towards community-building activities and the Unity of Humankind. In October 1986, the Universal House of Justice suggested that Bahá'ís around the world should contribute to the different organizations of the United Nations, using the “pertinent instruments of the Bahá'í Administration” (UHJ, 1986b). All Bahá'ís are encouraged to make their best efforts through the Bahá'í Administrative Order and try to make National Spiritual Assemblies stronger.

According to the Universal House of Justice (UHJ, 1992b), Bahá'í institutions should direct the affairs of the Bahá'í community and be concerned with its activities. They should also motivate individuals to accomplish their spiritual responsibilities and commitments. These institutions not only have to teach the Faith, but they also commit to disseminating education to wider society, both spiritually and academically. Everything inside and outside the

community happened through the Bahá'í Administrative Order (UHJ, 1990). In fact, during this period, Bahá'ís had been very involved in the institutes of their Administrative Order. Bahá'ís firm commitment to the Covenant and the ultimate goal of the Unity of Humankind made the Bahá'í Administrative Order sacred. Thus, it cannot be compared with any other social order of any kind (Effendi, 1991). The Covenant is considered the strongest link that can keep individuals steadfastly related to the entire community through the Bahá'í Administrative Order institutes (Effendi, 1991).

2.3.1.1.2. Bahá'í Life

This emphasis on institutional and family spiritual support emerges out of the primary concern of the previous. As serving the Faith through Bahá'í Administrative Order was an important component of what the Community considers to be “living a Bahá'í life”, a part of every seminar and conferences-along with books and guidebooks-became dedicated to the issue of raising children to serve in the Bahá'í Administrative Order (UHJ, 1963-1986). In this way, the secondary socialization is reinforced by the primary socialization.

2.3.1.1.3. Nineteen-Day Feasts

During the first decade of the fourth epoch, the Nineteen-Day Feast became an assembly point where individuals and the Local Spiritual Assembly could meet and unify their efforts (UHJ, 1988). NSAs began to ask LSAs to introduce the requirements of making contributions to building the society. As a result, the National and Local Spiritual Assemblies encouraged individuals to dedicate their time, labour, and money and even their lives, in the case of Iran, for the ultimate goal of the Unity of Humankind, towards which all efforts and activities were directed. As a result, the Nineteen-Day Feast became the foundation in which individual efforts developed into collective, systematic activities (McMullen, 2000).

Indeed, the Nineteen-Day Feast represents an intersection between individual and community. The Feast is regarded as the foundation for the Bahá'í Administrative order;

community interaction reaffirms the everyday lives of individuals at a time when the Bahá'í community was struggling with meeting its aims, such as building the Lesser Peace, inspiring international organizations using the teachings of Baháulláh, and improving the Bahá'í Administrative Order. In this point, the Feasts became increasingly vital to these efforts and goals, since individual communities function as microcosmic representations of the global situation. As such, the Universal House of Justice suggested introducing the Feasts as an institution of the Bahá'í Administrative Order along with the Local and National Spiritual Assemblies to create “a symphony, in three movements” (UHJ, 1988).

The role of the Feast in the process of socialization is crucial: attending the Feast requires being officially registered as Bahá'í and in the Feast registered Bahá'ís gather as members of a community and consult on the significant topics about various community affairs, they make decisions and suggestions to their Local or National Spiritual Assemblies. Accordingly, attending the Feast transforms individual Bahá'ís into the members of the Bahá'í community (McMullen, 2000). The Universal House of Justice creates an explicit link between the Feasts and socialization activities like children's classes, establishing a direct trajectory into the Local Assembly (UHJ, 1989). The Nineteen-Day Feast, therefore, combines Bahá'í community construction with scriptural engagement with family-level primary socialization.

2.3.1.1.4. Different offices of the Bahá'í International Community in New York

Beyond the family and national level, socialization also takes place internationally. Using the social teachings of Baháulláh, the offices of the Bahá'í International Community work globally (BIC, 1995).

Socialization in the fourth epoch yielded the creation of the Office for the Advancement of Women in addition to the other offices of the Bahá'í International Community in New York. These offices were supposed to update the application of Bahá'í teachings and were intended

to work alongside international associations and NGOs related to each teaching, as well as with the United Nations in areas such as human rights, refugees' affairs, the environment, advancement of women, and education (BIC, 1995). At this stage, Bahá'í International Community (BIC) became proactive in progressing the Unity of Humankind on an international level.

2.3.1.1.5. English translation of Kitáb-i-Aqdas

Another significant step towards socialization during the first decade of the fourth epoch of the formative age was releasing an authorized English translation of Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992). Since socialization is a learning process (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), studying and understanding the norms and rules of the Bahá'í community directly from Kitáb-i-Aqdas was an important step towards socialization. This translation would enable greater access to a wider range of people to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Kitáb-i-Aqdas is originally issued in Arabic, and Shoghi Effendi as the authorized interpreter of the Bahá'í scriptures started to translate it. His translations are also considered authorized interpretations of the Bahá'í scriptures. In 1992, the Universal House of Justice published the final translation of Kitáb-i-Aqdas along with some other supplements that would help Bahá'ís to read and understand it on their own (UHJ, 1992a). Since Kitáb-i-Aqdas is the soil in which the roots of the Bahá'í Administrative Order grew, the translation can be regarded as an attempt to a big step towards shaping a subjective meaning of the Bahá'í Administrative Order in all Bahá'ís minds. According to Berger (1967), perfect socialization happened when the symmetry between subjective and objective reality establishes. Studying Kitáb-i-Aqdas and being able to understand it, Bahá'ís could build their desired community according to their understanding of it.

2.4. POPULATION ISSUE

The Universal House of Justice in April 1990 stated that since 1988 almost one million people had “entered the Cause”, yet these numbers were still insufficient for the goals of the House. The number of the Bahá’ís was still too small to be able to demonstrate the capacities and possibilities of the Bahá’í system to the world and convince them to take it seriously; the Bahá’í community further identified a need for more members in a greater variety of careers and specialties (UHJ, 1990). The Universal House of Justice recognized recruitment at a local and national level as crucial to developing the Lesser Peace. From a Bergerian perspective division of labour is one of the indicators that determine the success of socialization; (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Given the focus on local and individual community-building thus far, the wider institution faced a challenge in maintaining a consistent focus on the larger goals of the Bahá’í Administrative Order. In Bergerian terms, the focus on compartmentalising efforts into different sectors—a division of labour (Berger & Luckmann, 1966)—made it difficult for the Bahá’í community to socialize its population in a way that they could work in the different institutions of the Administrative Order.

The solution identified by the Bahá’í Administrative Order was to increase member volume; teaching new people to serve in the Bahá’í Administrative Order was determined to be quicker and more practical than training the existing members for the new requirements of the Administrative Order. Shoghi Effendi coined the Qur’anic (110:2) phrase “entry by troops” to describe the process (Effendi, 1980a, p. 117). The context of this upsurge in recruitment efforts is one of crisis. In April 1992, the Universal House of Justice described societal changes as happening at a phenomenal speed (UHJ, 1992a). The Bahá’í community was confronting “an acute challenge of the utmost urgency” Shoghi Effendi had anticipated the extensive development of the Bahá’í Administrative Order during the second century of the Faith (UHJ, 1992a). The primary challenge introduced at the beginning of this letter

(UHJ, 1992a) was staffing the Bahá'í Administrative Order and developing it to be capable of well demonstrating the capacities and potentials of the New Order of Bahá'u'lláh through its embryonic version, namely the Bahá'í Administrative Order.

The Universal House of Justice in the document of *Century of Light* (UHJ, 2001c) lists some issues that emerged in the way towards the attempts of the integrative process and growth of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. This list includes that the new believers were not as was expected educated enough to contribute to the teaching plans and take over the Bahá'í Administer Order increasing responsibilities (UHJ, 2001c). Another issue is that by only working through the Bahá'í Administrative Order towards the goals of the integrative process, the Bahá'í community is not involved in the life of the wider society in which they live (UHJ, 2001c). The document also argues that people have been just observers during the human history so far, there should be a way to involve everybody in their everyday life to the community-building activities (UHJ, 2001c). McMullen explains that Bahá'ís had a major disagreement at the time over whom to teach the Faith and how to teach them (McMullen, 2000). All of these issues along with the requirements of the rapidly changing world as the House was concerned about (UHJ, 1992a) led to changing the strategy and the entire plan of community-building and teaching the Faith that was not guided by Shoghi Effendi's directions and the Twofold Process anymore (UHJ, 2001c).

The process of entry by troops once introduced merely as the solution to the challenge of staffing the Administrative Order. However, it soon developed into the next stage in the evolution of the Divine Plan¹⁶. In April 1993, a “special effort to attract people of capacity to the Faith” was still the priority of the Order. However, providing human resources and staffing the Administrative institutes were soon considered two different aims. The mission

¹⁶ A collection of 14 Tablets written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá' during World War I and addressed to the Baha'is in the United States and Canada encouraging them to serve as pioneers and teachers to establish the Faith throughout the planet (<http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/TDP/>).

of Local and National Spiritual Assemblies at this point was “to involve as many individuals as possible in the work of the Cause”, shifting the priority to increasing the number of qualified staff and refocusing to engage currently passive members in the “work of the Cause” (UHJ, 1993). Very soon, the initial goal of staffing the Administrative Order fell by the wayside. Entry by troops turned out to be the central aim of all teaching activities (UHJ, 1995a). Much later the Universal House of Justice explained that the speed of growth was incompatible with the unification of community-level activities and beliefs (UHJ, 2010b).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown that during the beginning of the third epoch of the formative age, the consistency in the formative age was maintained up until the end of the fourth epoch in 1996. However, since 1996 radical changes have happened in the Bahá’í community, concerning the goals and the means of the community-building. Socialization was happening through constant studying of the Bahá’í scriptures, living a Bahá’í life in accordance with the scriptures, and serving the Faith through the institutes of the Bahá’í Administrative Order. The primary objective, the Unity of Humankind, was served through the “integrative process” via international connections with governmental and non-governmental agencies, and in particular, the United Nations. Bahá’ís were subjectifying the objective world through the institutions of the Bahá’í Administrative Order. Next chapter will demonstrate the huge shift in the community-building activities and goals and means of it in the Bahá’í community. This shift makes it challenging to apply Berger’s theory of social reality of religion to interpret Bahá’ís’ activities.

9. DECONSTRUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This section will demonstrate that since 1996 the Bahá'í community faced a significant change regarding the process of socialization which, from a Bergerian perspective, should be described as having affected Bahá'ís' community-building activities concerning both cosmic frame of reference and the nomos. The nonlinear nature of the three Bergerian stages is more likely to be demonstrated in this part, while the Bahá'í community experienced a radical shift from collective and organizational community-building into more individual activities from 1996 onwards. This chapter will introduce the concept of deconstruction which will compensate for the Berger's conceptual framework (1967) to cover the situation in the Bahá'í community, in particular from 1996 to 2001. It is neither chaos nor normal social order; it is the condition between the two different strategies of nomization or community-building.

1. FROM AN INSTITUTIONAL FAITH TOWARDS AN INDIVIDUAL MOVEMENT

According to Smith (Smith, 1987), Bahá'í scriptures outline individual rather than communal duties and responsibilities (Smith, 1987, p. 109). In fact, before the Bahá'í Administrative Order was established during the process of objectivation, every service was performed by individuals as individuals. This was the result of institutionalization (Berger 1967) that individuals within the institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order played a particular role within the larger system. As such, the Bahá'í Administrative Order represents a means of converting the individual efforts into the collective activities (McMullen, 2000), which in this case is expanded to global Bahá'í socialization. In another word, mechanical solidarity turned

into organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1893) during the institutionalization. Moreover, hitherto the advancement of the Bahá'í institutes and the growth of the Bahá'í Administrative Order had been the goal of the different epochs of the formative age. At that period, teaching plans were considered as a significant way for staffing the institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order (UHJ, 1990). April 1996 signifies a turning point not only in the fourth epoch of the formative age but also in the entire formative age.

At this point, the Universal House of Justice announced that the maturity of the Spiritual Assembly must not only be reflected in the consistency of its appointments and the effectiveness of its activities, but also by the stability of the development of individuals' involvement. Individuals became the primary focus of the institution, including keeping tabs on the efficiency of the interaction between the Assembly and the individual members, the excellence of the spiritual and social life of the community, and the liveliness of a community in the process of self-motivated, constantly-evolving growth (UHJ, 1996a). The Bahá'í community that started the Four-Year Plan in 1996 was very different from the enthusiastic but inexperienced community that in 1964 (UHJ, 2001c). At this point, an effective interruption occurs within the Bergerian interpretation.

The socialization that was occurring after 1996 focused on individuality rather than the institution. This contradicts the model of socialization from Bergerian perspective (Berger, 1967) which is symmetry between subjective and objective realities. The Universal House of Justice emphasised this alteration would involve modification in the mind of every individual which in turn might cause asymmetry between the existing subjective meanings and new objective concepts that the Universal House of Justice was trying to establish (UHJ, 1996). The House suggests it is only the individual, who can study the scriptures, understand the teachings, and then serve the community-building activities according to their understanding.

The individual is in the centre and the heart of every progress because it is the individual who has the executive faculty (UHJ, 1996).

Parallel to the shift in the level of the community-building from institutional into individual, there was a shift from the elective institutions of the Bahá'í Administrative Order into the appointed Learned (UHJ, 2000) which likewise altered Bahá'ís socialization. The Counsellors and the auxiliary board members, namely the appointed wing of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, were responsible for consulting and assisting individuals within the local Bahá'í communities to make sure the teaching plans were achieving their goals (UHJ, 2010b).

2. NEW GOALS AND MEANS FOR COMMUNITY-BUILDING

According to the message of 28 December 2010, Bahá'ís had already changed their approach and attitude towards the general community-building. This means that instead of following the model of the desired New World Order of Bahá'u'lláh; and instead of focusing their efforts on the integrative process, the Bahá'ís decided to contribute to the current activities of the community-building that was already processed in the world (UHJ, 2010b). This shift made their contribution to the Lesser Peace, which is in the disruptive process. As the House declared in the *Century of Light* (2001), their efforts and goals and plans for the community-building were not in line with the guidance of Shoghi Effendi anymore. Accordingly, the Twofold Process the way was explained by Shoghi Effendi was no longer relevant to the Bahá'í cosmology. According to the message 28 December 2010, the means for this new goal was not the Bahá'í Administrative Order anymore, but the Ruhi Institute¹⁷ (BITC, 1996) and this new system for training the human resources were considered as “an instrument of limitless potentialities” (UHJ, 2010b). Ruhi Institute is a training institution that aims to build

¹⁷ <http://www.ruhi.org/>

individual Bahá'ís capacities towards teaching the Faith and the community-building efforts (BWC, 2016 b). The aims and goals are at this point the betterment of the world started in the local areas and the neighbourhoods (UHJ, 2017).

In fact, a ground-breaking change happened with the goal of the teaching plans in 1996. The Four-Year Plan declared in April 1996 shifted the target from growth of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, which was regarded as the ultimate goal of the formative age, to the significant growth of the “entry to the Faith by troops” (UHJ, 1996a). Before this innovatory plan, the entry by troops considered as a spontaneous outcome of all Bahá'í efforts such as living the Bahá'í life, teaching plans, and growth of the Bahá'í Administrative Order.

Formerly teaching plans were targeted into staffing the Bahá'í Administrative Order, while “entry to the Faith by troops” was considered as a sequel to these efforts; it was not an object for teaching plans per se. However, since April 1996 (UHJ, 1996a) the Bahá'í world has rapidly changed, as if “entry by troops” is a goal as such. This point of view has radically influenced all aspects of the Bahá'í world. Later (UHJ, 1996b) the Universal House of Justice called it was an evolving process and described it as “the advancement of this process that is the goal of the Four-Year Plan”. It was for the first time that the Universal House of Justice issued eight supplementary messages for the Ridván message of 1996 to elaborate it for the Bahá'ís all around the world. Releasing this message revolutionized both the task and the responsible of the teaching plans and many other aspects of the Bahá'í life (UHJ, 1996a).

Importantly, terms such as “growth”, “institute”, “training courses”, “core activities”, “systematic growth”, “systematic learning”, “deep Bahá'ís”, “clusters” and “deepening in learning the teachings of the Faith” are added to the terminology of the messages of the House, and to the social stock of knowledge of the entire community (UHJ, 1996-2017). This process switches the terminology of the Bahá'í Administrative Order into that of the Ruhi Institute. This shift in the language leads to the transformation in the social stock of

knowledge and is related to the process of externalization; changing the terms and meanings of the community leads to a change in the process of community-building (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

From Berger's view, this shift in terminology and approach shattered the symmetry between the objective and subjective world (Berger, 1967) and the process of socialization was derailed. New organizations eventually replaced existing programmes; the "Ruhi Institute", for example, launched tutoring courses for Bahá'ís to develop into trained teachers and it had officially been replaced by any other training programs regarding teaching the Faith (UHJ, 1996a). Then gradually every other educating institute and in some communities, every other institute was halted (UHJ, 2006).

Accordingly, considering all the mentioned changes, a Bergerian interpretation concludes that the nomos and the cosmology of the Bahá'í community were radically altered by this institutional-level shift of 1996. Next section will discuss the challenge of Berger's theory to explain the situation of the Bahá'í community in 1996.

3. BERGERIAN CHALLENGE OF INTERPRETATION

This section addresses Peter Berger's theory of social reality of religion (1967) as applied to major shifts in nomos and cosmology within the Bahá'í community emerging from the interruption in the stage of socialization which was the direct consequences of 1996 structural and terminological shifts within the Bahá'í community.

Berger's theory (1967) does not explain this significant alteration in language as well as in the "social stock of knowledge". However, adding a new term to Berger's theory (1967) may facilitate to continue the interpretation from his perspective. This is one solution to the limitation of the theory (Berger, 1967) to explain the situation of the Bahá'í community in

1996. That is since Berger believes the reality-building process is dialectical (Berger, 1967, p. 13), then these shifts, changes, and rolling-backs might cause “deconstruction” of the entire community-building efforts. Berger has not directly acknowledged the possibility of “deconstruction” within his theory, but his explanation about the dialectical characteristics of the process of reality-building allows it to be improved by adding a more illustrative term to the whole set.

The dialectical nature of community-building may save the interpretation of the Bahá’í community-building process from the disruption caused by the revolutionary change in the Bahá’í cosmology. Since the nomos and the cosmic frame of reference for the community-building have been changed, the process is not simply the same process, with a dialectical shifting in the three stages. In fact, a new process has started while the previous one was still in progress. This is the reason that Berger’s theory needs to be upgraded to a new concept to be able to explain the situation that is a deconstruction. Eventually, deconstruction of the stage of socialization of the Bahá’í Administrative Order was followed by the externalization of the Ruhi Institute and its various components within the Bahá’í community. It seems that a Bergerian interpretation can be applied, even if the given community changes its primitive way of society-building. Berger believes that his explanation about constructing social reality is capable of explaining dialectical social entities (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This means that the role of religion is to prevent the chaos, and in the case of the Bahá’í community, at worse, it can be tagged as deconstruction which is a passage towards the reconstruction that Smith (Smith, 1987) mentioned in his study.

4. DECONSTRUCTION AT THE END OF THE FOURTH EPOCH

Since the changes happened in the Bahá'ís' community-building activities without distinct prior notice to the Bahá'ís, Counsellors started to take a significant position in the community, in terms of clarifying these changes to national and local communities, in addition to the establishment and maintenance of the Ruhi institutes all around the world (UHJ, 2015). Overall, any new concept in the messages since 1996 has been teaching-based and Ruhi-oriented. Furthermore, the appointed arm of the Bahá'í Administrative Order started to re-socialize Bahá'ís regarding the Ruhi Institute terminology (UHJ, 2010b), which could be considered a contribution to the new social stock of knowledge in a sociological approach (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In fact, the meanings and objects of our lives are fashioned and classified by particular language, and social reality. It manifests the organizations and arrangements of these lives and is guided by language (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). As stated by Berger and Luckmann, what is added to the social stock of knowledge is stored and transmitted by language (Kelly, 1983). Therefore, these changes in the language of the Bahá'í community could lead to the change in their entire lifestyle. The Universal House of Justice proclaims:

The culture of the Bahá'í community experienced a change. This change is noticeable in the expanded capability, the methodical pattern of functioning and the consequent depth of confidence of the three constituent participants in the Plan—the individual, the institutions and the local community (UHJ, 2000).

At least this significant change happened in the programs, priorities, plans, and agenda of the Universal House of Justice (UHJ, 1996-2017). Berger argues that the cultural world is not only produced collectively but must also be collectively recognized to be real (Berger, 1967). Berger suggests that in building his own world, man completed his own sense of being simultaneous. Culture, as his second nature, has to be produced and constantly reproduced (Berger, 1967). The Universal House of Justice (UHJ, 2000) asserts that “the central theme of the Four-Year Plan—that of advancing the process of “entry by troops”—produced a high

degree of integration of thought and action. It focused attention on a major stage in the evolution of the Bahá'í community. In fact, the “high degree” of “integration of thought and action” (UHJ, 2000) could not be justified except for those who were attending the Ruhi study circles. The Circles helped many involved in core activities accept the changes as more meaningful and gradual, leading to an overall change in culture (Momen, 2007). However, the position of the Bahá'ís who did not attend the study circles is not acknowledged in the messages of the House. This situation, even though, is not chaos within the Bahá'í community (Palmer, 2012), in this project is called deconstruction.

5. RECONSTRUCTION, THE FIFTH EPOCH OF THE FORMATIVE AGE (2001-?)

The situation in the fifth epoch is more organized than the last years of the fourth epoch. Overall, the Universal House of Justice had started a new plan for the process of community-building. This new version of community-building included changes in language and different interpretations of writings that led to a new formation of Bahá'í culture. The fifth epoch is not just an epoch of the formative age; it is a new era in the Bahá'í Faith, and the extent of the changes might even affect the “constituents of a single entity” (Effendi, 1944, p. xvi).

In addition to considerable changes in language and terminology, which began during the last five years of the fourth epoch, some other changes happened at the very beginning of the fifth epoch that was revolutionary and fundamental, regarding the status and position of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. This change and alteration required a re-socialization for all the members of the community. Currently, this is happening through two channels: the letters of the Universal House of Justice as well as the study circles (UHJ, 1996-2017). The Learned

part of the Bahá'í Administrative Order is a central agent to fulfil this essential stage, in particular through the core activities (UHJ, 2010b).

5.1. SIGNIFICANT ALTERATIONS FOR SECONDARY SOCIALIZATION

During the third and fourth epoch, the symmetric state between the objective and subjective reality was theoretically disrupted. In the fifth epoch, the Universal House of Justice started to validate new objective realities by their letters. Significant changes were applied to different aspects of the Bahá'í community to establish the desired symmetry between objective and subjective reality, which is considered socialization from Berger's point of view (Berger, 1967).

5.1.1. THE DEFINITION AND SIGNS OF THE EPOCHS

The epochs of the formative age are indicators of significant developments in the Bahá'í Administrative Order (Effendi, 1994). Correspondingly, according to Shoghi Effendi's notions, the major thrust of the formative age is the organization, growth, and strengthening of the "institutions of the Faith" (Effendi, 1944). He insists that the "hallmark" of the formative age "is the rise and establishment of the Administrative Order, based on the execution of the provisions of Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament" (Effendi, 1991, p. 156). However, in the message of April 2001, in which the beginning of the fifth epoch is announced, the Universal House of Justice proclaims that the fifth epoch of formative age started because the signs of the "entry by troops" had been obvious.

5.1.2. THE TWOFOLD PROCESSES

The Twofold Process constitutes two separate, but related processes. Through the disruptive process, the world will get to the point of social maturity through trial and error. However, through the constructive process, Bahá'ís will add spirituality to the outcome of the disruptive process. This spirituality will reach out to the world via the channels of the Bahá'í

Administrative Order institutes, in particular, the national institutes (Effendi, 1991).

Accordingly, only Bahá'ís through the institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order contributed to the integrative process towards the Unity of Humankind.

However, the goal and the means were switched to the core activities that were supposed to serve the target of the “entry by troops” (UHJ, 1996-2017). The Universal House of Justice refers to the “integration and disintegration processes”, and simply concludes that everybody can see “the rise in receptivity to the Faith in all parts of the globe and the failings of the world's systems”, and emphasises that “such receptivity will increase as the agonies of humanity deepen certain” (UHJ, 2008). The House states that the Bahá'ís are not the only group of people who desire to establish a new world order. Many other groups and organizations have been indirectly inspired by Bahá'u'lláh's teaching of the unity of humanity, and the contributions to “the civilization destined to emerge out of the welter and chaos of present-day society” (UHJ, 2010a). It can imply that distinguishing between the Twofold Process is no longer valid, and the Bahá'í community has changed its approach and views towards the desired civilization, and the New World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

5.1.3. THE LEVEL OF THE COMMUNITY-BUILDING

The Bahá'í community has international, national, and local institutes. Therefore, the Bahá'í community is divided into three levels in accordance with the institutes of in the Bahá'í Administrative Order. Before 1996, the community-building activities were recognized by their spiritual assemblies and through the institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order (UHJ, 1986a).

However, since 1996 there has been a new system for defining the areas of service. The Spiritual Assemblies (National or Local) are no longer identified as the areas of service. Clusters are now considered the areas of services. Clusters are a geographical division of

each country or territory for teaching purposes. To define these areas, different criteria such as the languages spoken, and transport links should be considered. Each cluster is the area within which the Ruhi institution, the individual Bahá'ís, and the Bahá'í community would work together in a more coherent way (UHJ, 2001a).

The Universal House of Justice acknowledged that in each “national community”, “Ruhi institutes” divide their countries into different “clusters”, independent from the Local Spiritual Assemblies, in the service of the Faith, in which the “core activities” are better manageable, under the supervisions of the Counsellors and Auxiliary board members instead of National Spiritual Assemblies (UHJ, 2002). The three (by gradually developing junior youth classes, four) core activities are managed to be launched within the clusters, by Ruhi tutors and the coordinators who work in each cluster to organize activities. Counsellors, auxiliary board members, and coordinators, along with the tutors are the hierarchy of the “institute” from the continental to the local level. Accordingly, the Ruhi system is more highlighted than the Bahá'í Administrative Order during the Five-Year Plans. The House calls the Ruhi Institute “instrument of limitless potentialities” (UHJ, 2010a). While previous versions of community-building efforts happened mostly through national and international institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order that contributed to organizations in order to serve the unity of humanity, current efforts focus on the betterment and prosperity of the local communities (UHJ, 2010b). Recent efforts happen at the level of the neighbourhoods (UHJ, 2017) where the core activities are conducting by individual Bahá'ís towards teaching the Faith as well as socio-economic developments (UHJ, 1996-2017). That is called the Twofold Moral Purpose, which means the growth of the individual and their neighbourhood (BIC, 2012).

5.1.4. THE BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER

With the shift away from the Bahá'í Administrative Order into the Ruhi core activities, locality, as well as individuality, are the characteristics of the new series of teaching plans.

The explanation of the Universal House of Justice is quite clear about this shift:

The core activities of study circles, children's classes, and devotional meetings have become essential aspects and mutually enhancing achievements lending greater vigour and success to all the other elements of The Bahá'í community life. Human resources are being augmented, and Local Spiritual Assemblies are responding to the fresh demands of this rising vitality (UHJ, 2004).

The House defined the maturity of the Local Spiritual Assemblies in diffusing the Word of God to activate the dynamism of Bahá'ís and to establish a spiritually enriching atmosphere (UHJ, 2010a).

While Bahá'í Administrative Order converts individual activities into institutional ones (McMullen, 2000), to contribute to universal society-building activities, “the Institute” manages to activate individuals in systematic local teaching activities to achieve “a significant advance in the process of entry by troops” (UHJ, 1992a). The Bahá'í Administrative Order is in operation, yet “the Institute” as well as the “entry by troops” is the main priority of the Bahá'í World Community. This priority has also changed the direction of growth within the Bahá'í Administrative Order. Recent activities depend on the Learned part of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, which is appointed, with a hierarchical authority consisting of Counsellors, auxiliary board members, and coordinators (UHJ, 1996-2017), while the emphasis used to be on the elected part with its hierarchical authority, including local and national assemblies (UHJ, 1989).

5.1.5. THE RULERS AND THE LEARNED

Since the Bahá'í Administrative Order Ruler institutes are not initially involved in the core activities, they are respected as a support system for individuals (UHJ, 2001a; UHJ, 2010a).

During the fifth epoch of the formative age, the primary role is fulfilled by the Learned who

are responsible for establishing the Ruhi Institute, training the tutors, interpreting the messages of the Universal House of Justice for Bahá'í communities and stimulate individuals to contribute to the core activities (UHJ, 2017).

The Universal House of Justice believes that the local communities are the best foundations for the efforts of community-building (UHJ, 2010b). Therefore, the Universal House of Justice asks the Counsellors, as well as the Auxiliary board members, to help local communities establish their Local Spiritual Assemblies. If they already have their LSA, they are asked to improve and develop it to fit the requirements of the new programs of growth. The Learned part of the Administrative Order is directly responsible for reconstruction in the Bahá'í community (UHJ, 2010b) and the individuals (UHJ, 2000). The Universal House of Justice believes: “Parallel to the establishment of mechanisms to support the institute process other administrative structures are gradually taking shape” (UHJ, 2010b).

5.1.6. THE FEAST

The importance of the Feasts, as well as the role of consultation, is still emphasized: “Consultation at the Nineteen-Day Feast creates a space for the growing social consciousness of the community to find the constructive expression” (UHJ, 2010b). Social consciousness in socialization can be defined as the complete, coherent, and constant training, and orientation for an individual, about the objective realm of a society or a part of it (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 150). Therefore, an essential part of socialization is still happening during the Feasts. The Feast is, accordingly a station for consciousness.

5.2. THE CONCERN OF THE BAHÁ'Í WORLD COMMUNITY

This section concerns the goal and the means to achieve it within the Bahá'í community after the dominance of the Ruhi Institute. The Bahá'í community still is thinking about establishing a divine civilization on Earth. However, they do not indicate whether this

civilization is supposed to be constructed through the efforts of the Bahá'í Administrative Order's institutes. Moreover, they do not suggest that they are exclusively the constructors of such civilization. The Universal House of Justice states, "the civilization that beckons humanity will not be attained through the efforts of the Bahá'í community alone" (UHJ, 2010a). The Universal House of Justice declared that "a tempo has been attained that impresses ever more deeply the effects of institutional and individual effort on both the internal development of the community and the community's collaboration with others" (UHJ, 2008) regarding social and economic development, that is called the betterment of the world (UHJ, 2017). Now, the Bahá'í community is trying to collaborate with others to establish the desired civilization. They are now keen to inspire governmental and non-governmental organization by the spirit of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh through individual efforts, rather than Bahá'í Administrative Order institutes (UHJ, 2010a).

The inclusion of core activities by the Ruhi Institute is a system for socialization. Berger suggests (Berger, 1967, pp. 24-25) "socialization can, of course, be described psychologically as a learning process". The Universal House of Justice emphasizes that the Bahá'í community is now shifting to a learning culture and calls all the Bahá'ís into the grassroots learning process through the Ruhi Institute and the core activities. Despite the destruction from the previous socialization during the fourth epoch (deconstruction), it seems that the process of socialization is in progress through the new version of community-building efforts within the core activities and using the "instrument of limitless potentialities", namely the Ruhi Institute (reconstruction) (UHJ, 2010b) towards the betterment of the world and prosperity of humanity (UHJ, 1996-2017).

The Universal House of Justice still hopes that as more people join the community, and share their capacities, talents, and skills with those already participating in the global enterprise, the development and growth of the efforts of individuals, institutes, and the community will be

faster and constant (UHJ, 2010b; UHJ, 2013). According to Berger and Luckmann, socialization indicates that there is the possibility of alteration in subjective reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Being in a society requires a constant change in subjective reality in accordance with the objective reality.

CONCLUSION

The aim, the means, and the responsibility for the plans have changed since April of 1996. In fact, in April of 1996, during the fourth epoch of the formative age, the Universal House of Justice introduced to the Bahá'í community the Ruhi Institute. It brought radical change to community-building activities. The change started with the change in the goal of the Four-Year Plan, from teaching to staffing the Bahá'í Administrative Order, into the "entry to the Faith by troops". Gradually the sacred means (nomos) towards the goal had been changed from the Bahá'í Administrative Order into the core activities. The appointed wing of the Administrative Order started helping Bahá'ís to understand the very technical messages related to the Ruhi Institute and the core activities. Instead of the institutes of the Administrative Order, under the Four-Year Plan, individual Bahá'ís, the Ruhi Institute, and local communities were responsible for achieving the goal of the significant growth, and entry into the Faith by troops. Eventually, the fifth epoch started with the core activities as the central service to the Faith and ended with the core activities as the means (nomos) and the betterment of the world as their goal. Socialization is once more employed within the Bahá'í community at a local level and Bahá'ís started subjectifying the objective local world through the core activities to contribute to the betterment and prosperity of the world.

10. THE FIELDWORK FINDINGS

This chapter will present the data gathered through observation as well as the interviews. The data will be narrated using a thematic framework, which includes three main themes with their related themes links them together and produces three relative sections in an integrated chapter. The main themes according to the literature and the data from the scriptures are the Unity of Humankind, The Bahá'í Administrative Order, and the Ruhi Institute, respectively.

1. THE UNITY OF HUMANKIND

The “Unity of Humankind” is the pivotal teaching of Baháulláh (Effendi, 1936). Yet, during the 9 months of observation of the Feasts, there were no scriptures or discussion of the “Unity of Humankind”, or of related terms such as, the “Lesser Peace”, “the Most Great Peace”, the “Twofold Process”, the “New World Order of Baháulláh”, and the “Golden Age”(See chapter five). Hence, it might be fair to conclude that the participants would answer this question according to their personal and individual readings and interpretations, rather than from what they had learned within the context of the Feast.

1.1. WHAT IS THE MAIN MESSAGE OF BAHÁULLÁH

While few participants were able to answer when asked about the main mission of Baháulláh quickly, most of them struggled with the answer and changed their minds several times.

Sonja, an LSA member, referred to the detachment as the main message of Baháulláh because as she explained, she had just finished reading Baháulláh's book, *The Seven Valleys*, and determined that to be the main theme. While Saeed believed that Baháulláh had come to educate people and turn people into real human beings, and Cynthia referred to the justice, some of the participants answered quickly and without going into precise detail. Juley

mentioned “unity in religion”, while Margaret and Mona spoke about “unity of religions” in a plural sense. Mona also mentioned the “unity of God”, as well as the “unity of humankind”. Matthew suggested “unity in diversity” as the main teaching of Baháulláh, and as the source of his particular belief system. The answers to the question about the main message of Baháulláh are quite relevant to the personal experience and knowledge of the interviewees. Matthew, a PhD in Psychology, explains his own research on the main features of the Faith. He suggests that the Faith has three main characteristics. Firstly, inclusivity that is the closest opinion to the unity in his perspective. Inclusivity is the feature of every teaching of the Faith; they include all humanity and do not leave anyone out. The Faith, according to him, is not exclusive like Islam that says only the believers of brothers, or Christianity that asks to love your neighbour. However, Baháulláh asks his followers to love humanity and consider themselves as one tribe, one nation, and one family. Therefore, according to Mathew, inclusivity serves the Unity of Humanity in every aspect. The second characteristic that Mathew suggests is the feature of the Faith is relativity. Relativity is also a feature that serves toleration, and friendship. Everybody has their own perspective and personal differences, so they understand and interpret the Faith and the entire world, different from the others. Therefore, the Faith is relative regarding the believers’ interpretations of it. This feature also serves the Unity of Humanity regarding toleration and acceptance and therefore leads to the unity in diversity. The third feature is progressiveness. Matthew suggests that the Faith is not a finished entity. It is an ongoing progressive revelation. As it was also mentioned in the literature review (Fozdar, 2015; Smith, 1987) the Faith is a progressive revelation and this way the Bahá’ís believe in the unity of the religions. Therefore, in short, for Matthew, the main message of Baháulláh is threefold, and altogether they serve the Unity of Humanity.

I can answer this question very easily, because I have been working with this concept last 30 years, and I believe that the whole message of Baha’u’llah in all books, prayers, writings, all have three characteristics, yes and these three characteristics applies really to the whole

message of Baha'u'llah which I call them, you know my son-in-law is an Irish. Have you heard of the IRA?

... I stand for Inclusivity. It is the teaching all of the Faith without exception even when it comes to prayers, even the Feast etc., etc. everything you do is based on that Inclusivity. All teachings have these characters. They are inclusive in what he says. Let's say unity of mankind. Let's say unity of Iranian and the British, yeah everything is inclusive. R stands for Relativity. Everything of the Faith I find says that all the writings are all relative... and finally absent of finality. There is nothing that is final. Everything is progressive. So there is Inclusive, Relative and Progressive. These are three fundamental teaching of the Faith. Everything you read about the Faith, you write about the Faith has to follow this.

Zarrin emphasises "Well, usually the first answer is the "Unity of Mankind", which is, of course, right, and I think this main goal can be divided into two important aims; meaning individual and social development, or maybe the individual and the societal happiness". So, her answer is basically, based on the Twofold Moral Purpose promoted by Ruhi Institute (See chapter nine).

Natalia believes that the main message of Baháulláh is unity and peace for the entire world. Her answer does not contain any idea of changing the entire world system but avoiding war and being united like brothers and sisters. She suggests spirituality will bring unity. She regrets that for the last two or three years, the spirituality and therefore the unity and peace do not exist in the community. Margaret suggests, "Calling unity in the world. Unite all religions, all races, wherever there has been a prejudice before all that will be eradicated. We are now in an age where this could physically take place which we have not been before".

Chris, on the other hand, advises: "I guess just what jumps into my mind is this phrase of Baha'u'llah that the earth is but one country and humankind its citizens".

David believes

Unity in one word which is a very popular word in my head, but I would say one word does not suffice. If I can give you...If I want to say a message, it should be one sentence or one paragraph, and I would say to people that the whole purpose of Faith is for you to be honest, for you to love each other and to live together in harmony

The participants do not use the term the "Unity of Humankind" the way is explained in the scripture, in particular, Shoghi Effendi's writings. The participants use the term the unity and the unity of humanity in a general sense. However, during the observation, none of these two

terms heard during the devotional and the administrative part of the Feast. By answering the questions about the “Unity of Humankind”, the participants try to extend their meaning of unity to friendship, love, and similarity to the entire world. This may indicate that they do not have a social meaning for it in their collective terminology, or within their social stock of knowledge. Chris, however, quotes from Baháulláh, in which the citizenship of the world is cited in his definition of the “Unity of Humankind”. However, he does not clarify it socially and simply repeats, “The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens”. For Chris, the “Unity of Humankind” is not worldly citizenship; he alternates between using the “Unity of Humankind” with the “betterment of the world” quickly. When asked how he would contribute to the “Unity of Humankind”, he states, “I am contributing to the betterment of the world; to the unity of mankind”.

Consequently, unity, in general, is a more known and familiar term for the participants than the “Unity of Humankind”, which is a rather complex and technical phrase. They mainly refer to unity as the main message of Baháulláh, and even then, some of them respond very quickly, while a few struggle. David rapidly answers the question: “unity, in one word which is a very popular word in my head”. Chris states: “I guess just what jumps into my mind is this phrase of Baha’u’llah that the earth is about one country and a kind of citizens”. Zarrin referring to the “Unity of Humankind” asserts: “Well, usually the first answer is the “Unity of Humankind”, which is of course right...”.

On the one hand, unity, rather than the “Unity of Humankind”, is mentioned by the participants. Despite this, they do not have a clear idea about it, and they just seem only to be thinking about it for the first time when asked. Consequently, it seems that the concept of unity is taken for granted by the participants. The “Unity of Humankind” is not a term that they use normally, and when they are asked about it, they extend the domain of their meanings for unity to all of the humanity. In fact, their conception of the “Unity of Humankind” is

quite literal. Sonja defines the “Unity of Humankind” this way: “to unite all the religions, all the peoples, all the races”. David suggests “for you to love each other and to live together in harmony”.

Furthermore, unity for the participants is an individual, moral principle (Effendi, 1991, pp. 42-43), not a social project or goal (See chapter five). For some of them, it is a collective endeavour as in mechanical solidarity can happen (Durkheim, 1893), but not a social project or enterprise which leads to organic institutional solidarity (Durkheim, 1893). It is the extension of the circle of love and friendship into as many people as possible, and not the establishment of an institutional system that serves unity among the humanity.

David suggests “but anyway, in theory, the Bahá’í is all that community or person or the whole universe is required to reach that unity. It is pretty simple. As I have mentioned the attributes, for example, honesty, love, very simple...”

Individuality is merged, both in the definition of the “Unity of Humankind”, and in the application methods, which is most common among the participants and is the teaching of the Faith. For the participants, the expansion of the circle of Bahá’í moral and humanitarian teachings at an international level is equivocal to the “Unity of Humankind”.

Participants define unity in a largely similar fashion. Margaret, a rather elder Bahá’í, and Mona, a young, well-educated Bahá’í, suggests that unity is thinking the same and acting the same. Nora believes people can have different opinions and they can still be united. Alice argues that people can have different ideas, yet be united, as long as they act the same way.

Pluralism along with tolerance is also another explanation for the unity among the participants. Matthew believes in inclusivity and relativity, as well as progressiveness of Baháulláh’s main teachings. George believes that one of the signs of the unity in the Feast is “communication with different people from different background”, and Nora refers to

tolerance as well as pluralism when she says that “people can have different opinions and they still be united”. Matt also introduces “unity in diversity” as the message of Baháulláh.

On the other hand, Alice, who is a board member, argues that people can have different ideas yet still be united, as long as they act the same way. Accordingly, another interpretation of the unity among the participants might be unity in action.

Among the research participants, the most frequent conception was a different kind of unity among the Bahá’ís and not the “Unity of Humankind”. The “Unity of Humankind” happens, according to the participants, after the expansion of the teachings of Baháulláh and teaching the Bahá’í Faith to people around the world, because many of the participants report that the main message of Baháulláh is the “unity of religions”, and even “unity in religion” (Juley). However, the others invoke the “unity in religion” while defining their conception of the unity and referring to teaching the Faith as their contribution to the “Unity of Humankind”. They believe that the main principle and goal of their Faith is unity and oneness of humanity, so becoming a Bahá’í means promoting unity which is another outcome of teaching the Faith. They also suggest that when everybody follows one common Faith, there will not be disunity, and this lack of disunity, in essence, is unity. Zarrin speaks of the lack of disunity and contention among Bahá’ís. So, contributions to the unity of humankind can be seen as avoiding disharmony and estrangement in a small Bahá’í community, which can become an example for the larger non-Bahá’í community. She also considers living the Bahá’í life a contribution to the “Unity of Humankind”.

Additionally, solidarity can be considered as another interpretation of unity among the participants. David also believes that in previous dispensations, asking questions about the teachings might have led to disintegration, however in this Faith, because of the structure of the Administrative Order, asking a question does not lead to disunity because there is one authorized Institution to answer the questions. Accordingly, the Administrative Order

establishes unity among the members of the community. In his interpretation, the Order does not establish a particular social system but keeps the individual members of an existing community united. Referring to the Order, Matthew spoke about "...a tremendous impact with the unity of the community". Zarrin thought, "Contribution in the "Unity of Humankind" is avoiding contention and estrangement in a small community to become an example for the bigger community". Therefore, according to her conception, this kind of unity in the community is different from the unity of communities; her idea of unity is unity among the members of a given (Bahá'ís) community which can be translated into friendship, tolerance, and peace among the members of the community rather than a particular social system and social order. Sonja divides everybody's contribution in the "Unity of Humankind" into two perspectives: a current perspective, in which unity solely happens inside the Bahá'í community through good deeds and kind behaviour towards each other, and a future perspective. Of the latter, she said she does not know what will happen and how it is going to be taken place. It seems like a utopian ideal for her. Nora also suggests:

I think the first aspect is creating unity among the community because the practice of that unity is what brings. If that community is not united, nobody is going to respect the unity that we would be offering. I think the main task is to be able to enable. That will go along with the type of institute activities. For example, the Feast needs to be a space for everybody to participate and involved.

Overall, the participants tend to use the term "unity" in general, rather than the "Unity of Humankind".

In fact, for the participants, unity is mainly a moral value of oneness instead of social order or social achievement. The participants use the term "unity" to connote a variety of meanings, such as friendship, love, peace, similarity, pluralism, inclusivity, relativism, tolerance, unity in diversity, unity in the community, and unity in religion. Accordingly, their idea of the unity and the "Unity of Humankind" is more individualistic and based on the mechanical

solidarity (Durkheim, 1893), rather than institutional (see chapter seven) and based on the organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1893).

1.2. PARTICIPANTS' CONTRIBUTIONS IN THE "UNITY OF HUMANKIND"

The participants are asked if they think they are participating in the "Unity of Humankind", and what their contribution is.

Without exception, all of them start thinking about it when they are asked; it is obvious that they have never thought about it before. After a short hesitation, the interviewees answer that they have been participating, but they considered their share negligible. Gradually, they start to respond to the question more specifically. These responses can be divided into three patterns:

- 1- Living the Bahá'í life
- 2- Teaching the Faith
- 3- Other means

1.2.1. LIVING THE BAHÁ'Í LIFE

The main way that most of the participants talked about how they contribute is by living their lives in accordance with Baha'u'llah's teachings. Susan believes that this way she can become an example for others and contribute to unity. She also believes that by following Bahau'llah's teaching she will love more and be less prejudiced, and this is what improves unity. Applying ethics and Bahá'í morality during their work is another pattern among the participants.

The response to the fulfilment of the "Unity of Humankind" through living the Bahá'í life is twofold: directly, and by causing the Faith to be promoted. Most of them, even Zarrin, who is a very young member of the community and is not expected to remember living the Bahá'í life as a contribution to the unity from the 1980s (See chapter eight), believes that living Bahá'í life is their way of contributing. They normally do not explain the process

spontaneously, but when they are asked directly, they explain that living Bahá'í life is the way to be kind and concerned about others, and also it will attract people's attention to their lifestyle and increase unity.

Being a Bahá'í helps the unity because people will be united with other believers. Expanding the numbers of Bahá'ís is seen as a contribution to unity. Being a Bahá'í also means that people apply Baháulláh's teaching in their lives, which are all about love and unity.

However, when they are asked about the contribution, they barely explain the process. Some of them start with serving in the Ruhi system, in particular, or teaching the Faith in general. They have to be asked about the relation between Ruhi and unity, or the Feast and the unity, to start thinking about it. Living a Bahá'í life seems to be an easier and better-established answer in their mind. Even though many of the participants are not old enough to remember the situation prior to 1996, they still believe they have to contribute the same way. Their conscious contribution is mainly through following Baháulláh's rules and living a Bahá'í life every day. This is unforgettable for them. Members believe the supreme example of the Bahá'í life is 'Abdu'l-Bahá, so Susan says that reading the writings and prayer help her to become more connected to the example of a true Bahá'í. David, as well as the rest of the participants, thinks of personal and individual life immediately. The Bahá'í life is the first thing that they naturally mention. It is the most conscious and immediate pattern of which they are thinking.

Susan believes:

We are a noble soul and that we have to try to improve ourselves but also, you know, that is one expense of our purpose but also that to serve others and to contribute to the betterment of the world and they both you know they both there's an interplay there between the two of them.

Susan easily replaced the "Unity of Humankind" with the "betterment of the world" and implied no difference. She uses the conception of the Twofold Moral Purpose (the growth of

the individual and the local world) to answer the question. The same answers come from Alice and Zarrin.

Matthew believes that by educating their children in accordance with the principles of Baháulláh's message (namely inclusivity, relativity, and progressivity), participation in the realization of the "Unity of Humankind" is fulfilled and everyone must do the same thing to participate in the unity.

Sonja divides everybody's contribution in the "Unity of Humankind" into two perspectives: in the current perspective, in which unity solely happens inside the Bahá'í community through good deeds and kind behaviour towards each other; and in the future perspective, of which she is uncertain of when or how it will happen.

Zarrin thinks of the Bahá'í life with the same logic as everybody else. While she deals with the Twofold Moral Purpose, at the same time she suggests that if the Bahá'í community becomes the example of the unity and love among its members, other communities will follow it, and unity will become widespread.

1.2.2. TEACHING THE FAITH

For Kathrin, the easiest way to participate in the "Unity of Humankind" is by teaching the Faith, although she thinks the Administration is solely responsible for teaching. She considers some correlations between the "Unity of Humankind", and the Bahá'í Administrative Order cannot be explained.

Alice, a board member, immediately points to teaching, and during her response, links her argument to the Twofold Moral Purpose in the Ruhi system. She relates personal prosperity to the prosperity of the world and accordingly passes from the "Unity of Humankind" to the "betterment of the world" with delicate consideration.

My contributing. The first idea that actually we are like teaching Bahá'í like really revolve around this. Teachings of unity and oneness and the development of humankind and progression in the society. And so, by understanding that those teaching exist is really a key aspect. It's like a blueprint for understanding how like in my eyes I will build unity in the creative better world... To within ourselves, this idea of unity is actually how we conduct ourself. What does it mean to transform toward into daily action? What does it mean to go out, be able to work with them is to be able to build a community and how that impacts us? But then outwardly the second one is the transformation of society, so as a Bahá'í trying to see how the teachings that we are understanding and reflect upon as they translate into action.

Nora argues that before the Ruhi system, participation in the “Unity of Humankind” had not been through teaching the Faith, but she does not know what it had been. David believes that the Ruhi Institute is an educational system which teaches the Bahá'í mind-set, and through promoting this, it will be possible to achieve the unity and uniformity.

There is an education system to me, so they are promoting the Bahá'í mind-set... But anyway, in theory, the Bahá'í is all that community or person or the whole universe is required to reach that unity. It's pretty simple... They are a kind of education, but while they are teaching the Faith, okay I did that. The relevant issue I think is promoting this mind-set, educating people to practice this framework somehow.

It seems that teaching is taken for granted by Bahá'ís. On the one hand, they know very little about its reasons and the relation between the teaching and other principles, including the “Unity of Humankind”, and on the other hand, they try to relate it to everything else, since they somehow consider it a matter of great importance.

1.2.3. OTHER WAYS

Kathrin suggests that one way to serve the “Unity of Humankind” is through communication with the leaders of the world, and she believes that National Spiritual Assemblies should be in contact with them. She thinks that the world leaders sometimes use the terms that demonstrate that they have been reading Bahá'í writings and are familiar with the concepts. She is the only person who refers to the role of NSAs in the “Unity of Humankind”.

Chris believes that the realization of the “Unity of Humankind” will be through mysterious ways and that his prayers will help to make it happen. Juley also believes the same. Zarrin speaks of passive unity, meaning a lack of disunity and contention among Bahá'ís. So, contribution in the “Unity of Humankind” is avoiding contention and estrangement in a small

community, to become an example for the bigger community. She also considers living the Bahá'í life her contribution to the “Unity of Humankind”. Finally, Natalia thinks that in Sheffield, people are not doing anything in particular towards the unity of humankind.

1.3. THE CORRELATION BETWEEN THE FEAST AND THE “UNITY OF HUMANKIND”

Through the scriptures, there is a firm correlation between the Feast as a significant part of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, and therefore to the “Unity of Humankind”. However, the participants do not suggest a clear association between the Feast and the “Unity of Humankind” on their own. Although, when they are directly asked about their connection, they just start thinking and trying to find a link between the Feast and the “Unity of Humankind” which mainly lead to the below answers.

1.3.1. ASSIMILATION

Some of the participants state that attending the Feast every nineteen days, at the same time as the entire Bahá'í world, along with the same structure, the same letters from the Universal House of Justice, and the same core activities can lead to the unity among all the Bahá'ís around the world.

Shabnam asserts:

At the same day all around the world, the Feast is held, even in Iran in the dangerous situation in which any time you would expect to be arrested. Under any situation and all dressed up and ready to go. People schedule their business trips with the Feast. It is more important than anything else. When they buy or rent a house they consider its capacity for hosting the Feast, this is unity among all Bahá'ís around the world, happening in such a significant event every 19th day.

1.3.2. DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION OF THE FRIENDSHIP

During the Feast, particularly during the social part, there are plenty of opportunities for Bahá'ís to meet each other, to catch up, to make new friends and to communicate with each other. This is especially true in Western communities such as the one in Sheffield. People are

busy all week and do not bother visiting each other during the week. Weekends are often dedicated to family members, and so the social part of the Feast is a place for promoting the friendship between the members of the community.

Matthew comparing Iran and the UK suggests:

In Iran, it was more intimate. Intimate that people used to get together, seeing each other and extending that socialization to the outside of the community but here you just, it's just behind the closed door. So here you're in the Feast when you're finished, you go home. It doesn't mean that I see you in the Feast, not necessarily I'll see you tomorrow, and you'll come to our house for dinner tomorrow, yeah. But in Iran, that will happen. It was a place of arrangement for extension of relationship outside of a Feast environment, but here both ceased after the Feast. You have to wait another 19 days to see anybody. It's in the nature of the Western civilization.

1.3.3. UNITY AND SOLIDARITY AMONG THE MEMBERS OF THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY

According to the above perspectives, it seems that the “Unity of Humankind” as an institutional (see chapter seven) organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1893) is reduced to unity and friendship among the members of the Bahá'í community as in mechanical solidarity (Durkheim, 1893). The Nineteen-Day Feast can form a unity in a limited circle of Bahá'ís at the local community level. The participants barely know the role of the Feast of the Bahá'í Administrative Order and the association between the Bahá'í Administrative Order and the “Unity of Humankind”. Alice, a board member, has a blurred idea of the position of the Feast and the covenant in the Bahá'í Administrative Order. She cannot connect them to the “Unity of Humankind”; she believes it is obligatory to attend the Feast, which can form friendship within the Bahá'í community.

Actually, we have a sense of duty and responsibility to be obedient to this institutional and to have to follow that guidance that actually the world remains. The Bahá'í world remains united. So actually by participating at a level of the Feast is actually that really that meeting that's very enteral to actually express your love for that assembly. Your obedience and your contribution are to strengthen that assembly by being present. Because the more you're there. You're actually strengthening the Bahá'í community; you're strengthening the ties of fellowship, ties of love and so I guess with the covenant, is the expression is that how an understanding of the assembly and what guidance they can give us. But also attending the Feast is a central part of really being a Bahá'í as well. So you're really following the Bahá'ís injunctions about how to live a community life, be a part of the community that is healthy, and that is active.

For the participants, the concept of the “Unity of Humankind” and the Feast does not have a universal meaning; they can only see the local role they play in their lives. At no point, either before, or during the interview did they refer to the universal and institutional meanings of the “Unity of Humankind” in relation to the Feast. This was also true of both board members and the members of the LSA alike. Their conception of the community does not include an institutional community (See chapter seven) that is a community with organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1893). For them, the community is a group of similar people with mechanical solidarity (Durkheim, 1893) working individually through the core activities towards the betterment of their locality.

1.4. UNITY WITHIN THE BAHÁ’Í COMMUNITY IN SHEFFIELD

WE-THEY (NATIONALITIES)

The main meaning of the unity of humanity for the participants is the unity and solidarity, and loving unity among the members of the Bahá’í community through which they aim to promote the unity of humanity. Hence, it is important to study their communication and correlation in the Bahá’í community of Sheffield. There are three main nationalities in the Bahá’í community of Sheffield: British, Iranian, and Congolese. The Congolese members do not attend the Feast as frequently as the others do. Observation suggests that they are friendly and happy with each other, but not fully integrated into the community. Observations from the fieldwork show that both the British and the Iranian members tend to communicate with themselves more than they communicate with each other. George, an LSA member, argues plurality in numbers and cultures has made it challenging to manage the current Sheffield Bahá’í community. For LSA members, more variety and greater numbers lead to more “uncertainty”.

There seems to be a tendency amongst British members to think that Iranian Bahá'ís are more knowledgeable than they are. During the Feast, having been questioned about one of the quotes from Abdul-Baha, Margaret thinks that maybe Iranian Bahá'ís have more insight into it. First, she distinguishes between Iranian and British Bahá'ís, and second of all, she thinks that the Persians may have more insight or knowledge. She thinks Persian Bahá'ís read much more. This is a quite common notion among all of the participants.

Shabnam states:

In Iran, people in the rest of 19 days thought about the community affairs and prepared suggestions and even write them down to suggest them in the Feast, but here people do not think through the community affairs and just discuss things initially and spontaneously. The principles of the Bahá'í Administrative Order are not regarded and applied here, they just talk. We have learned the principles of the Bahá'í Administrative Order and Bahá'í consultation within the Feast

She is worried about her child where she is going to learn these principles.

As previously mentioned, according to observation, during the events, such as the Feast, the Iranians tend to communicate with other Iranian friends, and the same is true of the British members. Margaret also states, “British friends make jokes about Iranian friends”. George indicates the current efforts of preparing more food for the Feast, especially by Persian members of the community. There is a perception that they are mainly concerned with preparing food, rather than doing the readings. Shabnam said that if she did not have Iranian friends in the community, she would never attend the Feast. Matthew suggests:

The main difference between Iran and the UK is a cultural difference regarding people interaction with each other...Iranian Bahá'ís have more experience in the Faith, so they have more in their Feasts. They have more experience in their Faith. They are motivated by their Faith. The gathering usually is bigger than here, and they are more close to each other.

While not attending the Feast regularly, the Congolese Bahá'ís are sometimes the subject of the reports about the core activities. According to Alice, they are crucial for the core activities. They are asylum seekers and have connections with many other African asylum

seekers who look for social support and networking, and they also trust their fellow Congolese. Therefore, the Bahá'í Congolese can easily implement core activities.

In the Feast of 30.12.2014, Alice asks Tom, a Congolese Bahá'í, to share his experiences because he has many Christian and Muslim friends to whom he teaches the Faith. Alice tells the assembly that Tom always has got someone at home teaching the Faith, as well.

Meanwhile, Tom does not feel comfortable. He seems shy and does not want to talk.

Someone mentions that his English might not be good enough and Alice replies that it was good enough to explain these things. At any rate, Tom makes sounds but does not say a word.

The Congolese family used to attend the Feast more often, but now they do so less frequently. Sometimes the children attend, along with their father. Sometimes Alice picks up the children and brings them to the Feast without their parents. When the Congolese children and Alice are at the Feast at the same time, the focus of the Feast is to the children. For the Feast of 12.12.2014, the Congolese members of the community were the hosts. Hence, Alice was so keen to invite everybody to the Feast personally and ask them to help each other attending the Feast. As the board member, Alice is very supportive and protective towards them.

1.5. THE CORRELATION BETWEEN RUHI INSTITUTE AND THE “UNITY OF HUMANKIND”

The association between the Ruhi Institute and the “Unity of Humankind” can be referred to three general views held among the participants: first, the unity among the followers of the Faith; second, their individuality; and third, their education.

1.5.1. THE GROWTH OF THE NUMBER OF THE FOLLOWERS

Ruhi Institute is designed to promote the Faith and to develop human resources. Its officially declared aims are the systematic growth of the numbers of the members of the Bahá'í community and accomplishing the promise of the “entry to the Faith by troops” (See chapter nine). Consequently, the participants are influenced by the teachings of the Ruhi Institute about the growth of the numbers of the Bahá'ís as the conventional goal. Majority of the participants define the “Unity of Humankind” as the unity among Bahá'ís. Hence, the growth of the numbers of the Bahá'ís is equal to the growth of the circle of unity among people around the world.

David notes:

I think in Bahá'í Faith, that's definitely the practice of unity because at the end of the day, what is unity? Unity means that I don't know, this might be off the target but part of unity might be to, for the people for example, 50 million people are living in the country to talk to each other, understand each other, being able to express their views, receive other views, think about them and all came to the conclusion agreement, a kind of wide practice of consultation.

According to David, unity happens when a group of Bahá'ís live together in peace and brotherhood based on the teaching of Bahá'u'lláh. The unity of humanity is, therefore, increasing the number of the Bahá'ís.

1.5.2. A GOLDEN COMMUNITY CONSISTS OF GOLDEN INDIVIDUALS

One of the highlighted points derived from nine months of fieldwork is that participant's views, and perspectives are individually based, which is in accordance with the training of Ruhi Institute. The Institute is entirely focused on individual activities and the vital role of the individual in the series of the Five-year plans. Thus, a community for them is a group of similar people who are trained by the Institute (UHJ, 1996a). Therefore, the more individual Bahá'ís are trained by the Institute, the more successful the community will be in bringing about the worldwide unity that consists of people who are trained to think and act the same

that is called the “high degree” of “integration of thought and action” (UHJ, 2000). Hence, the more popular the core activities get, the more people learn these moral teachings, and therefore, the unity, and love and peace will be closer and more likely to occur.

David reasons:

There is an education system to me, so they are promoting the Bahá'í mind-set, and Bahá'í mind-set is a mind-set...They are a kind of education, but while they are teaching the Faith... The relevant issue I think is promoting this mind-set, educating people to practice this framework somehow.

Nora explains:

I try to communicate with people around me if people are interested in knowing more about the Faith, or in the discussions, if something like generally most of my ideas comes from the Faith. If there is a discussion going on, and I'm contributing, it gets connected to that. I generally mention where this is coming from. It's not that I'm a genius. That's the idea that I'm getting from here. This is how I see it. At many points, I talk about them. Sometimes people want to know more about the Faith. Sometimes people want to know more about the opinion, so we'll discuss that in respective manners. Sometimes people would like to come to the devotional or the meeting, any Bahá'í meeting or something, so they are invited there. Sometimes they are not much interested. For instance, we try to have a children class for Tim [her kid] and the other children. So, we try to educate children from a young age.

Nataly expresses that the Ruhi Institute has been useful not only for non-Bahá'ís but also for Bahá'ís themselves. It helps to add to their knowledge, as well as improving communication and people's behaviours.

1.5.3. DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

Although, some participants believe there is no association between the core activities and the “Unity of Humankind”, there are some that believe that the core activities have ruined the unity among the members of the Bahá'í community.

George suggests that the Ruhi Institute did not make any real difference in teaching the Faith. He also adds “I'm sure lots of people who would want to strike towards unity and they've never heard of the Bahá'í Faith”. Kathrin believes that the Ruhi does not participate in the “Unity of Humankind”; it is a marketing ploy to sell the Faith.

Shabnam argues:

Ruhi cannot participate in the unity of humanity, maybe in Iran. People do not know how to establish the “Unity of Mankind”. In Sheffield, I know lots of Bahá’ís are not happy with that. I know in Malaysia...it is different from Iran. In Iran and in Sheffield people are divided into two groups agree and disagree with Ruhi, in Iran, we had lost our friendship because of that, it made a gap between Bahá’ís.

Matthew describes Ruhi this way: “It hasn't been inclusive to some people”. Furthermore, some of the participants see both advantages and disadvantages of the core activities, regarding the “Unity of Humankind”. Nora argues: “I would say, the aspect of unity has widened, but it is not wide enough yet. We still got a lot of people who are excluded because they can't be part of any of the current types of activities”.

Because of the characteristics of individuality in the Ruhi Institute, the type of unity that it can promote cannot be a social order to bring about “the Unity of Humankind” that is organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1893). Sonja asserts, “Core activities and its effects on the consultation part [of the Feast] has brought people more together, made them more involved. People have come together and joyfully, and it is the only way they can come together joyfully”. Also, some of the participants refer to the bond of friendship that is the result of performing the same act for a rather long time. Sonja suggests, “It has brought the members together as building bonds of friendship and unity”.

George argues:

It (Ruhi) didn't change anything like readings or anything the only difference possibly is not in the Feast but in their holy days people will take an extract from the Ruhi books to read it at the Feast. But I don't think it's made any difference. I think the only difference the main difference which isn't what you're looking for, but I think the Ruhi books may come 1, 2, 3 half a dozen people come together to study them, and those people might go to the Feast the former much closer group together they do they do the bus together so at the Feast so you know that person at the group I think that's pretty good idea think that's the only influence on the Feast.

Cynthia reasons, “Ruhi contributes in unity, you read books together, and it is a bond; reading Ruhi you learn scriptures and do your tasks; you live a Bahá’í life and get guidance”.

Due to the participants' answers, the "Unity of Humankind" is neither the goal of the Ruhi system nor is it promoted through the Ruhi books and core activities. Hence, no matter how hard the participants try to connect the "Unity of Humankind" to the core activities and Ruhi teachings, their effort ultimately leads to the "betterment of the world" as their goal.

Susan expresses her contribution to the "Unity of Humankind":

Probably more important for me than for anybody else. Like, it's the way it's why we've been created. You know is to... honour this, that we are a noble soul and that we have to try to improve ourselves but also you know that's one expense of our purpose but also that to serve others and to contribute to the betterment of the world and they both you know they both there's an interplay there between the two of them.

She continues to express her definition of the "Unity of Humankind" as a shift away from competition in society, and towards greater cooperation:

Yeah, I mean like I always think about like how rife certain things are in the world like competition for example. Huge, you know like it's just everywhere. So that's why it's hard to imagine because in the future I believe that part of the transformation of the world is that competition won't exist like it does today. It'll be all about cooperation.

David suggests:

People are at least in word, appreciating love, honesty and they admit that these are the requirements to kind of being in a better world and many, many, many of the people are practicing this in as sort of activity to reach that, so it's kind of a general concession on these attributes and everyone agree on that.

Accordingly, active Bahá'ís (a term that refers to the active Bahá'ís in core activities) are people of action, and the scope of their action is the local community. They hope that by working towards the betterment of their society, change will spread outwards and become widespread. Mona reasons: "core activities are serving unity at the moment on a very small stage, it is not causing the significant effect, but it exists...If everyone feels a responsibility, then these small effects will add up to big ones and may cause the unity".

1.6. TWO TYPES OF THE “UNITY OF HUMANKIND”

According to the participants, the “Unity of Humankind” starts with individuals and then local communities, and eventually leads to the “Unity of Humankind”. This kind of unity which starts from the components and spreads to the whole can be called the inductive unity of humankind or the unity of humankind as a process of the betterment of the world.

Although in the Ruhi system, the “Unity of Humankind” is not a goal. This concept of the inductive unity of humankind is what can be drawn from the research participants’ perspectives.

There is another way to establish the “Unity of Humankind” which spreads from the whole to the components through the Bahá’í Administrative Order that was found within the letter of Shoghi Effendi. This type of the “Unity of Humankind” can be called the deductive “Unity of Humankind” or the Unity of Humankind as a complex of a universal desired order, that is the World Order of Baháulláh.

2. THE BAHÁ’Í ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER

The Bahá’í Administrative Order manages and directs Bahá’í affairs at the local, national, and international level. The Bahá’í Administrative Order has two wings: the elected and the appointed. The Order governs Bahá’í affairs but is also the embryonic version of the New World Order of Baháulláh and the path towards it (Effendi, 1938). The Order is the sacred order and the channel that links the Bahá’ís from the spiritual momentum that had been released from Baháulláh and the Báb in the Heroic Age to the Unity of Humankind, namely the New World Order of Baháulláh that will be established in the Golden age of the Bahá’í Faith. Currently, Bahá’ís serve and live in the formative age of the Bahá’í Administrative Order (Smith, 1987). According to the Bahá’í scriptures, the Administrative Order is a nomos that leads to the promised day of their cosmology (See chapter five).

2.1. OVERVIEW OF ANALYSIS

Overall, the data shows that for the participants of this study, the Bahá'í Administrative Order mainly consists of the Local Spiritual Assembly (LSA) and the Nineteen-Day Feast. This means their constructed meaning of it is as a local management system; the Institute of the National Spiritual Assembly (NSA) is not foremost in their minds (except for one), and most of them did not mention the Universal House of Justice in their responses to the questions.

Looking at the background of the participants demonstrates that 20 participants out of 23 have experienced membership in different institutions of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. 14 participants have been members of the LSA, one of whom was also a member of a National Spiritual Assembly (NSA). This means the participants' perspectives on the Administrative Order are beneficial to understanding the constructed meaning of it. They made their perceptions through their everyday life experiences. Thus, the Administrative Order is not an abstract concept for them; they have actually worked within its institutions and developed their conception of it through their first-hand experiences.

2.2. THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

The Universal House of Justice is the supreme body at the top of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. Bahá'ís consider it infallible, and along with the institution of the Guardianship, it is considered Baháulláh's successor. The Universal House of Justice is responsible for legislation, while the Guardian is the authorized interpreter of the Bahá'í scriptures. The research participants consider the Universal House of Justice the centre for making the most important decisions that are considered absolute and must be unconditionally obeyed.

According to the data from the observation, the letters from the Universal House of Justice have been read in the Feasts during the nine months of data collection on three separate

occasions; two letters were about the new efforts to build local Bahá'í houses of worship and their roles in the community-building activities as “silent teachers”. The third letter from the Universal House of Justice was the Ridván message, which is issued every year at the beginning of Ridván holidays (April 21 to May 2). Interestingly, the Ridván letter was also about the role of the Bahá'í houses of worship in community-building activities.

Accordingly, the participants have read the letters from the Universal House of Justice three times in nine months, within the Nineteen-Day Feasts that occurred during the data collection period. They receive directions from the Universal House of Justice about community-building activities and in particular, the role of the local houses of worship. These three letters directly address individual Bahá'ís all around the world and encourage them in their community-building activities. The most important message of each year is the Ridván message. The House invites every single Bahá'í around the world to contribute to the core activities and extend the numbers of the communities to 5000 clusters. In this letter, Bahá'ís are called upon to save their fellow human from the “wretched condition of the world” (UHJ, 2015). The point is that since Bahá'ís consider the UHJ unconditionally obeyed, they receive courage and directions from it, contribute to the core activities, and consider it their calling.

The Universal House of Justice is mentioned as the centre of the Covenant by the research participants. The Covenant, for Bahá'ís, means the unconditional obedience to the decisions made by Baháulláh's successors, one of which is the Universal House of Justice. The other one is the Guardian, who passed away. There is no other Guardian within the Bahá'í community. During the interviews, five participants mentioned the Universal House of Justice in their answers. The main theme of all the answers was about the obedience to it. Nora, an Iranian participant, believes that the consultation is an important part of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, the outcome of which should be obeyed by everybody in the community. She refers to Abdu'l-Bahá's quote; he says that if the LSA ordered him to do

something, he would obey, even if he knew they were wrong. Then she mentions the hierarchy of the Bahá'í Administrative Order and suggests that the entire body of it works together and that the NSA guides the LSA. The Universal House of Justice guides the NSA, and they have close contact with one another. The Universal House of Justice sends specific messages to every LSA, along with the international messages, and they are in contact with every community. She states that is essential for the unity. She believes “that means this community is all working together where ever they are going, which I think is the sense”. According to Nora, the Universal House of Justice, as the supreme body of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, guides the system, directs it, and puts an end to every controversy.

David, Nora's husband, also believes that the Universal House of Justice controls the Ruhi system and has the capability to push it forward. Nora considers the Universal House of Justice as the top of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, while David suggests that the Universal House of Justice is behind the core activities. Alice, the board member, also states that the Universal House of Justice is the centre of the Covenant and therefore, it should be unconditionally obeyed and the directions should be devotedly followed. These interviews show that those who refer to the Universal House of Justice in their answers draw a universal body and hierarchy for the Bahá'í Administrative Order, while the rest of the participants' perspective on the Bahá'í Administrative Order mainly includes local levels consisting of the Feast and the LSA.

Two answers refer to the role of the Universal House of Justice in the core activities as the director and obeyed authority. However, there are three levels of attitudes towards the core activities among the research participants. On one level, Shabnam, an Iranian participant, hopes that the Universal House of Justice will eventually decide that the Ruhi system needs to be stopped and “everything will be back to normal” because she believes only the House is capable of making this decision and is obeyed. Other participants, who are not involved in

the core activities, such as Margaret, are more neutral. She believes that she has a vague conception of the core activities and their function. She cannot remember the term “core activities”, but she hopes that since all answers come from the Universal House of Justice, everything is fine, especially since she sees that other people are going through the process. She suggests that all the Bahá’ís are doing the same thing and the Universal House of Justice is a source of all unity. The third attitude is revealed through the responses given by the rest of the participants, such as Alice, David, and Nora, who believe that the House is directing the core activities, and they have to contribute to it and support the Ruhi system because of that. The Universal House of Justice is the obeyed conductor and the refuge of all. David, Nora, and Alice are willing to contribute to the core activities because they believe the Universal House of Justice is infallible. Shabnam hopes the House will soon stop it, because the House is infallible, and Margaret states that she does not understand the core activities, but she trusts the House and her fellow Bahá’ís’ belief in the House because it is infallible. These different attitudes demonstrate different aspects of the participants’ conceptions of the covenant and the House as the centre of the covenant.

All the participants who mention the Universal House of Justice consider it infallible and unconditionally obeyed, and they believe that the House is responsible for making the most significant decisions within the Bahá’í community. However, their expectations and definitions of the Universal House of Justice are influenced by their own understandings, as well as their attitude towards the different affairs. This means that the Universal House of Justice is a constructed concept for the participants according to their different attitudes, and experiences of the core activities.

2.3. NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY (NSA)

National Spiritual Assemblies are Bahá’ís elected groups of nine adults (21 years and older) who direct and manage Bahá’í affairs within their nation-states. NSAs are at the forefront of

Bahá'í community contact with governments, and other national and international organizations, to contribute to the Unity of Humankind. Accordingly, NSAs are important components of the Bahá'í nomos that is the Bahá'í Administrative Order. In general, three of the elder participants suggest the NSA should directly communicate with the Bahá'ís more frequently, as they have previously. The younger participants do not mention NSA in their interviews at all.

Kathrin, a middle-aged participant, suggests that one way to serve the unity of humankind is through communication with the leaders of the world, and she believes that NSAs should be in contact with them. Other participants do not mention this role for the NSAs, which means the administrative system as the pathway towards the Unity of Humankind is not highlighted in their minds, and they do not have contact and consistent experiences of correlation with the NSA.

Observations demonstrate that the communication between the Bahá'ís in Sheffield and the NSA is rare, and usually not mutual. That means they receive some letters from the NSA, but they do not need to respond to them, or they do not need to send a letter to the NSA because everything they need is guided and directed by either the LSA, or the board member and Ruhi coordinators. If they need to know more, there are always different websites filled with the scriptures, as well as stratified directions. However, the UK NSA communicates with the LSAs several times a year regarding regular, common, and special events. The NSA also sends letters addressing all the followers in the UK to some events, some of which are about the elections. The NSA sends out letters and communicates with the community, in general, before each election period. In 2015, the NSA emphasised two elements; first, the improvement of the capacity of the Ruhi tutors, and secondly, Huququ'llah (God's right), that is a religious order to donate 19% of their spare money when it reaches to a certain amount (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992). Another important letter that the NSA sent addressing all the followers

in the UK was about the house of worship in Africa. It encouraged every community to form regular devotional sessions and emphasize prayer and service in the Bahá'í Faith are not separable. Overall, the UK NSA sent five letters to the LSA during the observation period. They were not read in the Feast, but the secretary of the LSA informed the members about the contents. This information helps to understand why the elder regretted the older times when they were more frequently in contact with the NSA. This also justifies why most of the research participants mention local institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, but not the national and international institutes. That is important for this research because it shows how the role of the entire body of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, as the channel and the pathway towards the Unity of Humankind, is getting smaller. Instead, the local institutes are still working and are at the forefront of the research participants' minds as they are working as a local and internal management system, rather than as a part of a sacred body that will save all of the human one day.

Juley, who has been a Bahá'í and a member of the LSA since the 1970s, emphasizes the correlation between the NSA and Bahá'í communities. She thinks the communication with NSA and with the whole Bahá'í world today is less than before. She says that in the past, they would be aware of national events and affairs through the letters addressed to all the members of the community. Now, because of the internet, email, and social media, they do not send out those letters. She argues the function of those newsletters was not merely broadcasting the news and information, but communication between the individual members of the local community and the NSA. Through these communications, the individuals felt more like a member of a community. Therefore, reading those letters within the Feast helped to make the group of individuals into a collective. Juley says:

The fact that there is a spiritual assembly element, that there is a connection with the national assembly and all the other Bahá'í administration. I think it adds to it [the Feast] because we can't really function as individuals without community and we should be interested, and we should know about the why in the Bahá'í community, and we get inspiration from other

communities around the countries, what they're doing. The fact that we're all interconnected as Bahá'ís enriches our lives, so, therefore, we want to know about it. I think it would be less if there wasn't that element there because otherwise, it would probably be just like a devotional meeting, or a deepening which is not the same, to me. It's a different thing. It misses, it loses that extra part, and it's an obligation. It's an obligation to go the Feasts; it makes it a bit more special. You don't have to go to the deepening or the devotionals, but you should go to the Feasts.

This idea is similar to that of McMullen, who suggests individual Bahá'ís turn into the members of a universally intuitional community during the Feast (McMullen, 2000, p. 34).

This means that the community is going to be more individual-based with mechanical solidarity consisting of similar members (Durkheim, 1893) rather than an institutional-based community with organic solidarity based on the differences among the members (Durkheim, 1893). George, who has been a Bahá'í and a member of LSA since the 1970s, argues that closer direction and supervision from the NSA was one of the reasons that they had better-organized Feasts in the past. This directions and supervisions are not that close anymore.

George says that it cannot be because they do not need them because he thinks they really do, but maybe because the NSA decides that there are more urgent jobs that need to be done than arranging direct communication with the members of local communities. This means the NSA is not present in the minds of the participants, and it is not necessary for their activities. Most of the participants did not mention or even refer to it and its functions and roles when they were asked about the Bahá'í Administrative Order and the Unity of Humankind. The rest of the elder participants are not happy with the amount of communication the NSA has with local Bahá'ís. As a result, the NSA is becoming invisible to the participants.

It is very significant for this project that the role of NSA is getting smaller in the participants' experiences of practising the Faith. The NSA is the national institution of the Bahá'í Administrative Order and a very important part of it; if the NSA becomes less significant in the participants' mind and experiences, it means that the community is working, and the participants are practising their Faith successfully without the NSA. They are active in the core activities and the community-building efforts without the presence of the National

Spiritual Assembly. This means that a very important part of the Bahá'í Administrative Order is not necessary for the community-building activities to take place. The NSA used to be a key part of the community-building from the 60s to the mid-90s, and the elder participants remember it as such. Nowadays, the role of the national level of the Bahá'í Administrative Order is not well-defined for the participants anymore. According to the participants, the community is working without its national level institutions.

2.4. LOCAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY (LSA)

The Local Spiritual Assembly is a locally elected group of nine adult Bahá'ís (21 years and older) that direct local affairs of every Bahá'í community and maintains a connection to the National Spiritual Assembly. Data from the interviews, as well as insight gained from observations, show that the best-known part of the Bahá'í Administrative Order in Sheffield is the LSA. Interviews demonstrate that the most effortless way for the participants to talk about and refer to the Bahá'í Administrative Order is to talk about the LSA.

George, who has been a member of the LSA for 46 years at the time of the interview, generally defines the Bahá'í Administrative Order as the LSA, the Feast, and the correlation between the two. He states the easier this communication, the better. Juley, his wife and another 46-year member of the Sheffield LSA, argues the Feast is distinct and has its own functions beyond its correlation with the Bahá'í Administrative Order. In fact, according to Juley, the Feast can work without any connection to the Bahá'í Administrative Order. In this situation, they simply would not need to read the letters from LSA and NSA during the Feast, nothing else would change. Unlike Juley, Chris believes that the system in Sheffield does work and the relationship between the LSA and the community does exist and makes the community more effective. According to him, the relationship between the LSA and the community in Sheffield and Ireland, his homeland, are very similar. He characterizes it as a loving relationship between the Bahá'ís and their LSA. He does not refer to the Feast and its

function in the Bahá'í Administrative Order. According to the interview with these three members of the Sheffield LSA, at least three perspectives can be recognized. Firstly, the Bahá'í Administrative Order consists of the LSA, the Feast, and the correlation between them; secondly, the Feast is highlighted, and the main communication is between the Feast and the members of the community, and thirdly, the LSA and its correlation with the members of the community is very important and takes place during the Feast. The common theme between these three perspectives is that they highlight the local components of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. This means that the entire international body of the Order is not constructed in their perceptions of the Bahá'í Administrative Order because their experience of it is mainly based on the interaction with the local institutions of the Feast, as well as the LSA.

There is another common theme among Chris, Nora, and Matt's answers that suggest the LSA has a pastoral responsibility towards active and inactive members of the community.

Nora suggests:

We have a lot of times; we have a lot of people which I think one of the main responsibilities of the LSA is to make sure everybody is taken care of and looked after. Sometimes people don't have; we have some people who don't have the opportunity to be able to be present at the Feast Two years ago, we prepared an Excel sheet to record who is there, so that after few sessions if see somebody, not being at the Feast. We can go and visit them and see what's happening. But that stopped at some point, I think when the LSA changed, but anyway...it's been on and off, and the plans change, but it's been a focus. I think it's good to be a specific focus for the LSA to develop.

Therefore, for Nora, Chris, and Matt the LSA has a responsibility that has been neglected, and it is taking care of the less active members of the community. Matt also refers to the responsibilities of a community towards the individuals. Individuals must feel they are loved and supported and the community should be aware of these people. According to Matt, some of the responsibilities of the LSA towards the members of the community are to visit them and to be concerned about them but do not push them to go to the Feast. Attending, or not attending, the Feast is a sign of a lack of love and unity among the members of a given community, so the LSA should act upon it. The Observations reveal that two families who

had not been active in core activities stopped attending the Feast. Matt is a member of one of these two families. He argues that being a Bahá'í, meaning going or not going to the Feast, is not an individual problem; it is more of a community challenge which does not lessen people's belief in the Faith. He suggests that the LSA should be concerned with members' attendance of the Feast and support them to maintain their membership in the community. People can remain Bahá'ís individually, but they should be supported to be Bahá'ís within the community as well as individually. This demonstrates that although the research participants view the LSA as a most important part of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, they expect the LSA to fulfil all of its responsibilities by supporting every member of the community and not just those who are active in the core activities.

The significance of this point for the project is that the LSA has been focusing on supporting the members who are working through the core activities. The concentration of the Feasts is on them, and other members are neglected, so the community is losing the sense of belonging (Davie, 1994) from some of the members. This can lead Sheffield Bahá'í community to the general situation in the UK regarding religiosity that is “believing without belonging”, the way Davie (1994) suggests. This means the solidarity and entirety of the community are in danger. The Bahá'í community is on the bridge between two different versions of community-building. The institutional community-building, as it was common before 1996, was based on the institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. The House used to ask everybody to be involved in different institutions of the Order to feel a sense of belonging and to identify themselves through the institutions of the Order, after 1996, the House asked everybody to join the core activities and to feel the sense of belonging and identify themselves through them. The participants who are not involved in the core activities have lost their sense of belonging, and they criticise the current situation. Additionally, at the end

of the observation period, some of the participants, such as Matt and Kathrin, Natalia, Shabnam, and Saeed, do not attend the Feast as regularly as they used to.

2.5. THE FEAST

The significance of the Feast for this project is that it is the base of the everyday life of the Bahá'ís within the Bahá'í Administrative Order. It is here that they meet each other, discuss different subjects, consult about the community affairs, and communicate with each other and with other institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order at a national and international level. Normally everybody should take part in the Feast, host it, participate in the consultations, and socialize and communicate with other Bahá'í members. Almost half of the Bahá'ís in Sheffield attend the Feast regularly. There is a common idea among the participants that attending the Feast can and will lead to the unity. For instance, for Kathrin, the Feast is a sample of the diversity of people from various backgrounds, who are united and work together with love and harmony. The Feast is an exercise for the unity of humankind because everybody from every race and class and culture attends it. Matthew also believes that the Feast is an important institution and attending is necessary and improves the unity in the community. He states that it is a calling and duty of every Bahá'í to attend the Feast unless they have reasonable excuses, such as travelling or illness. A very common opinion about the correlation between the Feast and the unity is that all the research participants mentioned are their attendance and communication with people from different backgrounds in the Feast will be a practice for the unity of all the members of the community. In this sense, the participants consider the Feast as a spiritual gathering, the function of which is developing and maintaining the unity and love among the members of a given community. Disregarding the evolving construction of the Feast as a part of the Bahá'í Administrative Order during Bahá'í history. Their opinion is directly related to Baháulláh's order in Kitáb-i-Aqdas: "Verily, it is enjoined upon you to offer a Feast, once in every month, though only water be served; for

God hath purposed to bind hearts together, albeit through both earthly and heavenly means” (Bahá’u’lláh, 1992, p. 40).

For most of the participants, the Feast is considered as a situation in which a diverse community that can become united. The participants’ experiences and perceptions of the Feast do not include the entirety of the Bahá’í Administrative Order and the position of the Feast within the hierarchy of it.

The universality of the Feast is another theme that various research participants brought up. Susan, an active Bahá’í (in the core activities) and a member of the LSA for seven years, thinks the Feast is a universal opportunity. She thinks of many individuals all around the world doing the same thing at the same time, thinking and acting the same as each other. This is what McMullen also found out in his research (McMullen, 2000, p. 12). Matthew suggests the Feast has different social roles besides being a place for communicating and contribution to the community affairs. David believes that the significance of the Feast is that it is the best channel for Bahá’ís to be synced to the entire Bahá’í world. Matt uses the term “Bahá’í world” about the Feast: “it doesn't matter where you go, the Feast is the Feast”. As Juley answers when she is asked, “you also mentioned that we are not individuals. We are a community; you said that yes? What did you mean by that?” Why are we not individuals?

She says

Because we are individuals, but we’re more than that. [laughing] I can’t imagine. I know there are Bahá’ís that never come out to any meetings, but I’m not that kind of Bahá’í. I can’t imagine being an isolated Bahá’í or not going to events whether it’s with the Bahá’ís because to me, that’s not fulfilling what Bahá’u’lláh has told us. He’s told us that we are all members of a family. Well, how can you have a family if you don’t meet together and talk and, you know, help each other and I think it’s not really what Bahá’u’lláh wants. He wants us to be meeting together, working together. I mean, when we go abroad, we even try to go to Feasts and meet other Bahá’ís, because it’s just like being with Bahá’ís.

Unity and universality are two main features of the Feast, so attending the Feast can lead to universal unity among Bahá’ís. Therefore, from the research participants’ viewpoint, with only having the Feast in the picture, and without the rest of the components of the

Administrative Order body, there would be unity and harmony among the Bahá'ís. The fieldwork does not demonstrate the presence of the entirety of the Bahá'í Administrative Order body in the participants' perception of it. It is important that with all the changes the Bahá'í community has been through, the Feast is still a significant part of the community for the participants. However, by changing the significance of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, the role of the Feast in community-building activities has changed. It is not the only place to discuss community-building affairs anymore, but it is still a place for Bahá'ís to communicate and meet each other and feel like a family.

3. THE RUHI INSTITUTE AND THE CORE ACTIVITIES

Ruhi Institute is an institute that works under the direction of the National Spiritual Assembly of Colombia. Since 1996, it has aimed to develop human resources for the spiritual, social, and cultural development of the people in Colombia, and eventually the rest of the world (Administration, 2017 b). The Ruhi Institute was introduced to the Bahá'í world as a capacity building system to prepare Bahá'ís for their duty of teaching the Faith and fulfilling the promised event of the “entry by troops” (UHJ, 1996).

The Ruhi System for teaching and promoting the Bahá'í Faith works through “core activities”. The term “core activities” has been popular among Bahá'ís ever since the series of Five-year plans launched in the early years of the twenty-first century (Administration, 2015). Core activities consist of:

- 1- Study circles that are a series of courses based on workbooks of Ruhi curriculum designed to help individuals contribute their service to community-building (Administration, 2017 a).

- 2- Children's classes that are provided to educate children from the ages 5 to 11. It is based on the third book in the Ruhi curriculum that includes teaching plans for children's classes and instructions for teachers (Administration, 2017 b).
- 3- Junior youth spiritual empowerment programs are provided for youth between the ages of 12 to 15. They are focused at the neighbourhood level to educate and train the junior youth to develop their skills in dynamic small groups based on workbooks developed by Ruhi Institutes and other organizations (Administration, 2017 b).
- 4- Devotional meetings are open to all to share prayers and readings from the sacred scripture (Administration, 2015).

There are two wings in the Bahá'í Administrative Order: the elective wing and the appointed wing. Since one of the main responsibilities of the appointed wing is promoting the Faith, they have become the most highlighted aspect of the Bahá'í Administrative Order since 1996. The directions for the Ruhi system comes from the Universal House of Justice through the Continent Counsellors and their Auxiliary board members at international and national levels of the appointed wing of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, and from there to the coordinators at the local level (Administration, 2017 b).

3.1. OVERVIEW OF ANALYSIS

The participants can be divided into four categories, regarding their relation to the Ruhi Institution; active-inactive, and agree-disagree. According to the data, the active participants are mainly younger than the inactive participants. There is hardly an agreement among the participants regarding their attitude towards the Ruhi Institute and its effectiveness. Almost all of the participants describe the Institute as a system for teaching the Faith, but they are on a spectrum regarding their assessments of its efficiency; nine participants believe it works effectively, seven participants think it is partly effective, one participant argues that it does not work, and three participants state that it has done some damages.

One common pattern of thought among the participants who believe the Ruhi system works is that they believe it gave the Bahá'ís a system for teaching and they suggest that having a system is better than not having it. For David, one of the youngest of the inactive in the core activities, the Ruhi system is effective. He states, "I know for sure that if there was no system, we were nowhere near where we are at the moment". Nora, David's wife, argues that the Ruhi has enabled people to serve the Faith, and by serving the Faith, she means the core activities; she believes that before the Ruhi, people did not serve the Faith. Nora also suggests that not everybody is involved with the core activities. Nora refers to knowledge and knowledgeable people who are less involved in the Ruhi system. She says:

I think it has because it's created a system and environment that enables everybody to join. Like previously, before the Ruhi Institute, like a group of knowledgeable Bahá'ís who would transfer their knowledge to everybody else. I would say that was a lot of... First of all, not everybody could do that. Second of all, it was at the level of knowledge. It was about knowledge to be transferred. I think with this because Ruhi Institute started to develop their code of service among people as well. In some groups, it's more practised, in some groups, it's not, depending on the nature of the group. Anyway, but it is focused on services as well. If I finish book one, I start to do my devotionals. Getting involved in the activities of the Faith in whatever aspect, in whatever dimension, or whatever side, enables people, as I see. They become active learners as well. Although, studying is not happening as much as it used to before.

Mona suggests that before, serving the Faith was confusing, but Ruhi has provided a framework both for teaching and reading the Bahá'í writings:

Well, the Ruhi Institute has provided a framework for the community to serve. So before people they didn't have the framework which they could contribute to as very much haphazard, there was just one thing they used too often fear of activities which would not interlinked for one else in the community. They did not build on each other. So, I remember as a child they've just used to be one of the activities like planting bay trees or having tours about Bahá'í Faith fair or something like that so they weren't linked to each other and it was difficult for people to develop their contact and interest to the Faith. Well, the Ruhi Institute provides a framework for the Bahá'ís and their friends to study the writings and to develop skills and then apply them in a systematic way through the study of books that build on each other.

Firstly, they suggest that the service to the Faith is teaching, and secondly, the teaching was not systematic and sometimes even impossible. Therefore, serving the Faith through teaching is now systematically possible through the core activities. The point derived from these perspectives related to the project is that the legitimation has been very successfully applied

and the new generation of the Bahá'ís has taken it for granted and considers it as a “permanent solution to a permanent problem” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 87). The participants’ opinion is: the only service to the Faith is teaching (taking it for granted). Previously, there was no systematic teaching plan, but now there is one.

Cynthia, Nora and David suggest that participating in Ruhi is not about learning anymore; it is about practicality. Cynthia says, “I think some people are not so happy with it but on the other hand, we don’t have anything else. I think it’s better than what we had, definitely”.

Chris emphasizes that Ruhi uses everybody's contribution, not just the most talented, knowledgeable, and charismatic people. Chris adds Ruhi is more inclusive than the previous system. Unlike Nora and Mona, Chris states that there had been other systems for teaching the Faith before Ruhi, but Ruhi is more inclusive and effective than any of them. This means that for most of the participants, having a system is better than not having one, and Ruhi is preferable compared to the previous system. They prefer Ruhi because it is systematic; it is practical; it has its own training system, and includes everybody with talent and potential and enables them to serve the community-building. Nora suggests that previously, teaching was a matter of knowledge that did not necessarily lead to practice the Faith and active members of the community, but Ruhi is a training system and produces the trained Bahá'ís who are active in core activities.

Matthew is one of the participants who believe that the Ruhi system partially works. He says:

This is how I look at it. I’m not saying it’s fantastic. It's superb. I wouldn't say that it has affected, but I would say that at least in a certain part of the world, it has been effective. That’s the only way to do it, but no I wouldn’t say that Ruhi has any significant, but I don't know about Iran. Iran is a different world, totally different world.

Matthew suggests that Ruhi is a system that particularly helps Western believers; he compares Ruhi with a nursery for knowledgeable Bahá'ís, especially in Iran. Similarly, to David, Matthew argues that having a system is better than not having one. However, unlike David, Matthew believes that the Ruhi system works for the Westerners and not for the

Iranians because Iranians are more knowledgeable about the Faith than their fellow Westerners. This means that despite Nora and Chris, for Matthew, the Ruhi system is another education system that educates people about the Faith.

Saeed believes that the Ruhi system is partially working. He has his version of working in mind when he suggests many people joined the Ruhi system, just because they always follow the mainstream path. He adds that Ruhi has not changed teaching the Faith, but it has definitely added to the active number of people within the community. Saeed's idea that Ruhi has added to the number of active Bahá'ís can also confirm Chris's point on the inclusiveness of Ruhi, which is that it applies to everybody with any talent and skill, and not just talented and well-educated people. However, as the interviews and observations reveal, not everybody is involved in the core activities as it was planned. Twelve of the forty-seven community members were active in the core activities at the time of the fieldwork.

George is the participant who believes that Ruhi system has not made a difference in teaching the Faith. George, along with his wife Juley, argues that to be an active Bahá'í you do not need to be involved in the Ruhi system and the core activities. For instance, George considers himself an active Bahá'í because he is a member of the LSA, is a religious advisor at one of the universities, plays music in recitals, and hosts sessions called "Care and Share" at his house, and invites both Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'í friends. Juley, on the other hand, is an active member in the core activities. George and Juley both suggested that the Ruhi system has made no difference in service to the Faith. George does not see any difference within the Feast, either before or after the Ruhi system. George states that when a group of people enter the Feast at the same time and begin talking together using the special terminology, you can say that they have been in a study circle together, and other than that, you cannot see any difference. For George and Juley who have been LSA members for almost 40 years, Ruhi has

not made any difference in teaching the Faith in particular, and in serving the Faith in general.

Among the participants, three people believe that the Ruhi system does not work for teaching the Faith and that it has also ruined previous achievements and systems. Matt, his wife Katherine, and Shabnam argue that teaching the Faith, as the Ruhi system promotes it, is insulting and dishonest. Katherine suggests that people have forgotten that their parents became Bahá'ís through the firesides. Firesides are the sessions specifically designed for teaching the Bahá'í Faith by well-educated and knowledgeable Bahá'ís. They announce the time and venue of the firesides and everybody who is interested can go there, listen to the speech, participate in the conversations, and ask questions. In fact, most of the Bahá'ís who have declared their Faith during the period of the 50s to the 90s became Bahá'í by attending the firesides. Katherine adds that people within the Ruhi system behave like puppets; they do not think; they just do the same thing that they are told to do. More so, there are participants who not only do not see the Ruhi system as helpful, but rather hurtful. However, this difference among the participants' attitudes and points of view demonstrates that the meaning, the function, the role, and the requirement of the Ruhi system are not strongly established among the participants.

3.2. CORE ACTIVITIES AND THE FEAST

Everything in the Feast revolves around the Ruhi System and the core activities related to it. Mona, who is an active participant, believes that in the UK, the Feast is affected and influenced by the Ruhi system. The observation also confirms the opinion that the Feast is dominated by the core activities and the members who are active in those activities. In fact, a major event that was frequently discussed within the Feast, during the fieldwork, other than the discussions about the core activities, was a fundraising event. The fundraiser was for raising enough money to support the core activities in a neighbourhood in Sheffield. In this

case, it was to support Daniel and Patrick with their activities and to send people to the intense study circles in other clusters. This means that the role and the function of the Feast have changed; it is less a part of the Administrative Order hierarchy, and more a gathering of active individuals to discuss and plan local events related to the core activities.

The Feast is entirely in the service of the Ruhi system and is dominated by the core activities that are the appointed wing's responsibility. According to the observations, in every session that Alice, the Auxiliary board member had been present, she had dominated the Feast and practically taken over the chair of the LSA for directing the consultations. Alice took a long time at the Feast of 12.12.2014 explaining her experience of introducing the Faith to a friend of hers and encouraged people to tell their stories in this manner. During the Feast 30.12.2014, Alice also took a long time to encourage people to listen to the Congolese Bahá'ís about their experience of teaching the Faith. They were not able to speak English fluently and were reluctant to talk, and eventually, they did not. During the Feast 05.06.2014, Alice was practically chairing the Feast and did not let the chair take part in directing the conversations.

Core activities provide the Feast with subjects to discuss and make suggestions to the LSA. Since Daniel and Patrick had just started their one year of service in Sheffield during the period of data collection, their report of their activities, as well as the ways to support them were the main agenda of every Feast. For one year, the LSA was supporting Daniel and Patrick to serve in core activities, and the administrative part of the Feast was mostly about their activities, reports, and other related issues and subjects. Their year of service officially started at the Feast 15.10.2014. Daniel lists their services as being comprised of "devotional meetings, studying Ruhi materials, making friends in the neighbourhood, and children's class and junior youth class in their neighbourhood". During the Feast of 12.12.2014, Daniel reports that they have weekly devotional sessions every Saturday in their flat, where

everybody is welcome to attend. They have started their first children's class in Broom Hill. They have started Book One with some of the community members, such as Zarrin, Alice, Chris, and Daniel. Core activities even shape their everyday life; in the Feast 15.10.2014, Daniel reports that for that week their routine has been devotion and studying in the mornings and making friends and becoming familiar with their neighbours in the afternoons. They hope to be able to conduct children's class and junior youth class in their neighbourhood very soon. They attracted the attention of the LSA and the board member for the entire year. They managed to simultaneously encourage the younger members of the community to participate in the core activities. Observation suggests this focus eventually isolated the older ones from participating and even attending the Feast. Margaret along with Matt, Katherine, and Matthew became less and less active in the Feast and eventually stopped attending frequently.

Observations during the fieldwork suggest that the Feast is dominated by the Ruhi system and the core activities, not only regarding the subjects for the discussion but also regarding the reading materials. A document from the Universal House of Justice (Reflection of Growth, October 2006) was read and discussed during the administrative part of the Feast of 08.09.2014. The Ridván message of the Universal House of Justice (April 2015), which is all about the core activities and encouraging people to apply them, is studied during the Feast of 28.04.2015. Advice from the NSA that discussed the local houses of worship also discussed teaching the Faith through home visits, as well as in the local houses of worship. This means the participants not only discuss core activities and their individual experiences, but they also hear the readings, documents, and letters from the House and the NSA about the core activities, community-building, and the betterment of the world.

Core activities in Sheffield at the time of data collection:

Activity	April 2014	Participants
Children's Classes	1	2
Junior Youth Groups	1	5
Study Circles	2	8
Devotional Meetings	2	Unknown

Table 10.1

The activities, in particular, the children's classes, as well as the junior youth groups, have been more of a concern and have been discussed during the Feast since Daniel and Patrick moved to Sheffield to fulfil their one year of service as very well-trained tutors (study circle facilitators), and animators (junior youth groups facilitators). The two popular activities of the children's classes, as well as the junior youth groups, are more designed for and suitable for young people. Elder participants are not only left out of these activities in practice, but they are also left out within the Feast during the discussion of these activities. Accordingly, an age gap is observed among the participants, regarding the core activities in the community within the Feast.

David suggests that the core activities are promoting a Bahá'í mind-set and a set of attributes, rather than purely teaching the Faith. He feels the core activities are more than just a framework for teaching the Faith; they complete the cosmology and the current Bahá'í mind-set, as the Ruhi system promotes it. According to David, it should be clear that is why the participants, especially those who are active in the core activities, use the same terminology and discuss the issues in the same way.

Regardless of what that mind-set is, it is separating elder and younger participants into two groups. The youth are talking about the events and activities in which the elders are not participating. The youth also use terminology that is not familiar to the elders. For instance, Margaret says that she is quite vague about what the youth say or what they do, and George

realizes that the group of young Bahá'ís who come together to the Feast and talk with a particular terminology have come from one of the core activities. Accordingly, the Feast is not only dominated by the core activities; the youth also dominate it.

3.3. COMMUNITY-BUILDING

Berger (1967, p.13) states: “Every human society is an enterprise of world-building. Religion occupies a distinctive place in this enterprise”. The enterprise of world-building that is the establishment of the desired community within the Bahá'í scriptures was studied in this project. The concept of “community-building” became more and more popular among the Bahá'ís after 1996. The Universal House of Justice asks all the Bahá'ís all around the world to dedicate their efforts, talents, times and financial sources to the community-building activities through the Ruhi Institute (UHI, 1996a). The purpose of community-building is “to promote the welfare and wellbeing of the whole” (Administration, 2017 c).

3.3.1. THE MEANING OF THE COMMUNITY-BUILDING

Community-building is the enterprise towards a better world, or as the UK NSA calls it, the path “towards a better future”. In the Feast of 27.09.2014, a new letter from NSA was received which emphasized a newly produced video about community-building activity titled: “Towards a better future”. The participants use the term community-building, as well as the betterment of the world, during the Feasts and in interviews, to refer to the outcome of the core activities. However, using the term the “betterment of the world” as their goal does not clarify the meaning and the direction of the community-building.

Largely, the participants do not have a clear opinion about the position of the “community-building”. Margaret suggests that community-building means building a Bahá'í community. She adds “community-building is not a term that you hear from individual Bahá'ís normally; you hear that in the Feast conversations”. Her next comment suggests that she finds

community-building a religious teaching-based activity. She asserts, “This community-building that we say is not quite honest because people do not get anything religious out of it”. Susan asserts, “Community-building is the focus of consultation in the Feast currently”. According to the data, the main meaning of community-building for the participants is building a Bahá’í community.

Prosperity and development are related to community-building for the research participants. Nora starts to explain it after the letter from NSA about Mashriqol Adkar (the Bahá’ís house of worship). It is also called the silent teacher in the Bahá’í Faith. Nora states that the community-building activity is not exclusively related to teaching activities; it also includes lots of social wealth activities, such as taking care of older adults, maintaining the library, the hospital, and so on. She suggests that these features make the Bahá’ís' House of Worship distinguished from other religious temples, which are exclusively for prayer.

3.3.2. THE BETTERMENT OF THE WORLD

Bahá'u'lláh says, “The betterment of the world can be accomplished through pure and goodly deeds and through commendable and seemly conduct” (Bahá’u’lláh, 1990, p. 93). It is the very first quote from the very first book in the Ruhi system. The “betterment of the world” is a popular term that is used in different interviews as the goal for community-building activities. Since the Unity of Humankind is the cosmos for community-building, according to the interpretations of this study of the Bahá’í scripture, the betterment of the world is a very significant concept. It alters the Unity of Humankind among the participants, and it is considered the main goal of current community-building activities among the participants.

For Susan, the goal is the “betterment of the world”. When she is asked how she contributes to the Unity of Humankind, she replies using the term “betterment of the world”, as she thinks it is an alternative or another word for the “Unity of Humankind”. A better world for

Susan is, what she has learned from the Ruhi books, which is a world without competition, and it is possible through the moral education of children. Moreover, she uses the very first quote from the Ruhi book to answer the question:

I guess the only way that I know is it will have a positive effect because we're told, you know, that the betterment of the world could be accomplished through pure and goodly deeds and can only for see good conduct so I see it as contributing to the betterment of the world not necessarily I'm helping this person back. You know, and the act and the moment are wonderful to be able to see it context of the humanity as a whole I think everyone should feel that, that they're contributing to that...I always think about like how certain things are in the world like competition for example. Huge, you know like it's just everywhere. So that's why it's hard to imagine because in the future I believe that part of the transformation of the world is that competition won't exist like it does today. It'll be all about cooperation. Like, and how do you start to imagine how that affects things? It would totally change everything, like... Political systems, like as a starting point and the way the materialistic world works like... but then even like I look at my nephew like at the age of 2 he starting to think about: "I want to win." You know, it's somehow, it's ingrained in all of us like this relates to the ego wanting to do better than other people. But imagine if that was all, you know you can see that that's part of children's classes is that you're always trying to get them to think about the whole. How to work together. No, to think about, "I'm better than anybody else." To remove the sense of ego, like You can see that like that these glimmerings, that imagining like ten generations time, how is that going to affect the, you know the What are we going to be like as human beings then? You know? Cooperation instead of competition and to remove the sense of ego, they are what they teach in the children's classes, and when these children grow up, then the world will change and become a better world.

While Susan does not have the answer for what the betterment of the world exactly is, Cynthia believes justice is what people can get after unity happens. She knows and has read or heard that unity is the ultimate goal for the Bahá'ís. Although she believes that justice is the most important achievement for humanity, when she is asked how she contributes to the unity, she unwillingly answers: "...then you get unity through justice as well, it's a two-way thing".

Susan, Zarrin, Chris, Nora, and Alice use "the betterment of the world" instead of the Unity of Humankind. This shows that they think of the "betterment of the world" as an alternative or a synonym for the "Unity of Humankind". In fact, the participants are more familiar with the term "betterment of the world" than the "Unity of Humankind". This is an important point for the project because it reveals that the goal for the community-building activities for the participants is in fact, the "betterment of the world", not the Unity of Humankind.

However, this concept, as well as community-building, is an unclear concept for the participants.

3.3.3. COMMUNITY-BUILDING AND THE UNITY OF HUMANKIND

While the observation during the fieldwork reveals that the participants discuss community-building, there is nothing discussed or read in the Feasts during the nine months of the fieldwork to say that the outcome of the community-building is the Unity of Humankind. In fact, the result of “community-building” is a better future society based on justice and love; there is nothing about the unity of humanity in the letter from the House (such as Reflection of Growth. October 2006). Moreover, what the Bahá’ís read in the Feast are mainly focused on “home visits”, core activities, and “community-building”. However, in the interviews, some of the participants had notions about the relationship between the “Unity of Humankind” and “community-building”. For instance, according to David, “at the end of the day, community-building is unity among Bahá’ís”. This means that building community is establishing unity among the Bahá’ís. Unity of humankind for them is a claimed goal of the Faith, and most of them know it and mention it when they are asked about the ultimate goal of the Faith. However, when they are asked to explain their understanding of it, most of them refer to the betterment of the world. They also know that the goal of the Faith is unity, so they assume two things: both the unity and the betterment of the world are the same, or one of them is the effect of the other one.

For Juley, contribution to the Unity of Humankind is: “Working for charities and social benefits”. Cynthia prefers to stick to justice as the ultimate goal, and when she is asked about the unity, she starts to say that “well I think you get more justice through unity”. Eventually, she discusses that: “... You get unity through justice as well; it’s a two-way thing”. She believes that justice is the main message of Bahá'u'lláh. By justice, she means a balance between the material and spiritual aspects of the world. Her view is that for a better society,

you need justice, unity, and love. Unity is “the only basis on which the Faith and society and humankind can develop”.

As a board member, Alice explains her contribution to the unity of humanity this way: “I will build unity in the creative better world, but then also the practical application”.

Chris, a previous NSA member from Ireland, uses the unity of humanity and the betterment of the world as synonyms: “this is also something that I find useful to bring myself to account. To what, in what way am I contributing to the betterment of the world; to the unity of humankind? Which necessary, this thought doesn’t necessarily mean that I always am”.

Alice, Nora, and Mona suggest that the Bahá’ís can be united as long as they do the same activities. Accordingly, the unity that comes out of the community-building and the core activities is more uniformity than unity. The data from the interviews demonstrate that the unity of humanity is uniting people under the shadow of similar thoughts and actions that are currently promoted by the Ruhi system as a mind-set (ITC, 2003). For Susan, unity is unifying individuals in mind and action in a community-building process. By the community, she means a group of similar individuals who conduct the same core activities in the same way (that they are taught in the study circles). She describes:

On one level the community would lead to the teaching more often children's classes and junior youth at the moment, all related to... all building unity on the level of community I mean obviously at the moment we are very small stages of building unity among very, very small amount of people, so we can't say that we are causing the significant effect. My personal effect on building unity in the word is very very small, but it is, that exists which is why we do it the way it is.

She relates unity to the core activities, which are individual activities, that is, teaching the Faith by individuals to individuals. Therefore, for her, unity does not have a social meaning that is institutional. Instead, it is unifying individuals in mind and action, through the community-building process. However, it can unify the Bahá’ís by directing them to the same process to do the same activities in the same ways all over the world. Hence, the unity

of the participants is mostly the uniformity of thoughts and actions, which is the outcome of the Ruhi courses and the core activities.

3.4. INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE

According to the data from the scriptures, the Unity of Humankind, or the goal of community-building activities, is a spiritual, universal social order. The pathway towards it passes through the institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order that promotes a societal vision towards community-building activities. According to the data from the fieldwork, on the other hand, the goal of the community-building activities is the “betterment of the world”, and the pathway towards it passes through the core activities promoted by the Ruhi Institute to empower individuals.

The superior role of the individual in the community-building compared with the institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order was first emphasized in the message from the House in Ridván 1996. The Universal House of Justice in the revolutionary Ridván letter of 1996 states: “the role of the individual is of unique importance in the work of the Cause. It is the individual, who manifests the vitality of Faith upon which the success of the teaching work and the development of the community depend on” (UHJ, 1996a). Bahá'u'lláh's command to each believer to teach his Faith confers an inescapable responsibility, which cannot be transferred to, or assumed by, any institution of the Cause. The individual alone can exercise those capacities, which include the ability to take initiative, to seize opportunities, to form friendships, to interact personally with others, to build relationships, to win the cooperation of others in common service to the Faith and society, and to convert into action the decisions made by consultative bodies. It is the individual's duty to “consider every avenue of approach which he might utilize in his personal attempts to capture the attention, maintain the interest, and deepen the Faith, of those whom he seeks to bring into the fold of his Faith” (UHJ, 1996a). Therefore, the shift from the institutional-based efforts into the significance of the

individuals since 1996 has influenced the participants' religious practice. This change has happened through the core activities. The data from the fieldwork supports and confirms this change of the perspective among the participants.

Shabnam's perspective raises the idea that within the Bahá'í Administrative Order, Bahá'ís are collective and community, and without it, they are individuals. She states:

One important thing is the Bahá'í Administrative Order, in Iran Bahá'ís are organized because of long time applying for the Bahá'í Administrative Order, but here people are not aware of the Bahá'í Administrative Order and do not apply it properly. While in Iran after Ruhi system the Bahá'í Administrative Order became less concerned, we had troubles among Bahá'ís we were individuals who could even hurt each other and lose our solidarity.

This means for Shabnam, the institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order can maintain the unity and solidarity of the community without which they were individuals left with a minimum amount of unity. This suggests that the current dominant perspective, underestimating the institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, is based on similar individual as well as mechanical solidarity (Durkheim, 1893), rather than institutional-based organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1893).

Susan's idea of the Bahá'í community is a large number of individual Bahá'ís. She looks at the Feast as a gathering that is related to the community. She thinks the Feast is a universal opportunity, but she does not identify an image of a universal, united community. However, she thinks of the universal number of individuals doing the same thing, namely thinking and acting the same as each other, this means that she declares a global identity for the Bahá'ís as was mentioned by McMullen (McMullen, 2000). She does not say anything about the “Lesser and the Most Great Peace”, and the New World Order, and other institutional aspects. Instead, she talks about the moral and ethical changes, which are more individual in nature, rather than collective. Alice, the board member, states

About Ruhi and difference in serving the Faith: it actually seeks to be able to develop one's capacity to serve. In the reflection meetings, we are collective in the teaching field individuals. This idea gives us the space in which we can understand how as a community we contribute to the betterment of the society.

This means that the individual Bahá'ís act in the field of the core activities as individuals, then they come together to the Feast and become a collective. According to the data from the fieldwork, for the participants, collective means together; they do not show evidence of institutional activities. For instance, in the Feast of 28.02.2015, Alice says, “Let's think collectively about holidays, especially NawRuz and Ayyam-i-Ha”. These are two important events and holidays for the Bahá'ís. The significance of this point for the current research is that according to their individual-based perspectives, the role and position of the Feast are related to the core activities and not the Bahá'í Administrative institutional-based.

Accordingly, the Feast for the participants is a gathering comprised of individuals that carries out the core activities and the community-building objectives, not an institute on the base of the Bahá'í Administrative Order pyramid.

Zarrin explains one of her experiences of attending the Feast. She explains it as if this ice of anxiety and stress comes from individuality, and the minute she enters the Feast, feels like a member of a community, and forgets her individuality, it disappears. However, it is not this simple; it is not like this at every single Feast. She explains that in different Feasts, you will lose your individuality differently. She believes it depends on your own preparations “in order to break the ice. Sometimes, it is even difficult to concentrate on the meaning of the prayers, and you are just waiting for the Feast to end so that you can go back home to your individuality”. This means there is anxiety in leaving her individuality and coming to the collective situation. She does not feel like a member of the Feast, and she finds herself lonely and anxious among other individuals. For Zarrin, the Feast is a gathering that is not always warm and welcoming.

Margaret, who declared her Faith in the 1980s, has a clear idea of individuality and the collective that comes from comparing Christianity and the Bahá'í Faith:

Christianity is more individual and Bahá'í Faith is both individual and collective and both could be worldwide religions, but today it is possible and in the past, it simply was not possible [to have a world religion]...How do you think Bahá'í Faith, in particular, goes from individual Faith to a more worldwide Faith? Where do you think it happens? It has to happen in your mind first. You have to be fully acquainted with the intent of that Faith to go around the world and to read about it in the writings. It can take a while when you come from another Faith, even though the disciples of Jesus were told to go far and wide and teach the Gospel. Yet, this Faith, in particular, is based on that.

In short, the participants' perspective on community-building activities is mainly individual and based on the mechanical solidarity (Durkheim, 1893), but not societal and institutional related to the organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1893), as the data from the scripture suggests.

CONCLUSION

Interviews demonstrate that the majority of the participants are aware that the main theme of the message of Bahá'u'lláh is unity. However, they rarely mention the term “the Unity of Humankind” as his mission, and when they do, they do not use it to refer to universal spiritual order. Instead, they refer to moral principles such as love, oneness, equality, and friendship among all the human beings all over the world. They extend the dominance of those values from one person and their family, tribe, ethnic group, and nationality, towards the entire world and the humankind. They are not clear about their participation in the Unity of Humankind. The participants easily replace the Unity of Humankind with the betterment of the world. The Twofold Process and the Most Great Peace as well as the Lesser Peace were not mentioned in their answers or were not brought up within the Feast during the fieldwork.

According to the data, the Bahá'í Administrative Order is mainly working as an internal management system for the Bahá'ís in Sheffield, and the main part of it that is better-known by the participants is the Universal House of Justice, the Local Spiritual Assembly, and the Nineteen-Day Feast. The Universal House of Justice is linked with the concept of covenant, or unconditional obedience of participants. The Local Spiritual Assembly is related to the

pastoral care for most of the participants; either they believe it is successful on this responsibility or not. The Feast is considered a regular gathering in which they can communicate, meet and show their love and friendship to each other. The Feast has also lost most of its administrative role for the participants. The National Spiritual Assembly is not highlighted in the participants' minds and does not make a contribution to the members of the community within the Nineteen-Day Feasts.

There is no agreement among the participants regarding their attitude towards the Ruhi Institute and its efficiency. Almost all of the participants describe it as a system for teaching the Faith, some of them think it works, and some argue that it does not, and few believe it is harmful.

The betterment of the world is the effect and the result of the community-building activities, mainly are also known as the core activities. Therefore, the betterment of the world instead of the Unity of Humankind is now practically the cosmos and the ultimate goal of the Bahá'ís of Sheffield; they seek it even without the unity. It is tightly related to the core activities, so core activities are considered *nomoi*. While through Abdu'l-Bahá's writings unity is the ultimate goal, and through Shoghi Effendi's letters the Bahá'í Administrative Order is the path towards it, through Ruhi system, the goal is the betterment of the world, and the core activities are the path towards it.

11. DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will link the theoretical exploration of the Bahá'í scriptures with the practical findings of the local Bahá'í community. This research is neither concerned with the religiosity of the Bahá'ís nor is looking for a definition of religion. However, among the approaches that were studied within the literature review, this research took a constructionist and an interpretivist approach (Berger, 2001) towards the study of the Bahá'ís' community-building activities.

This chapter restates the key findings from the Bahá'í scriptures about the Unity of Humankind, as well as the Bahá'í Administrative Order. These are the two main components of the community-building within the Bahá'í community according to the Bahá'í scriptures. Secondly, it discusses the participants' perspectives of the Unity of Humankind compared with the findings in chapter five. Thirdly, differences and similarities between the Bahá'í Administrative Order for the participants and the Bahá'í scriptures are compared. Additionally, by returning to the explorations of chapter nine of the Ruhi Institute, the possibility of the replacement of the Bahá'í Administrative Order as the nomos will be discussed. Finally, the implications of the “routinization of charisma” that is the main focus of the literature review, will be discussed by the findings of this study wherever relevant.

This study contributes to the existing knowledge by the application of Berger's theory of social reality of religion to the lived experience of the Bahá'í community in Sheffield and adds another concept to this theory to cover a new stage in the community-building activity of the Bahá'ís.

1. THE UNITY OF HUMANKIND

The unity of Humankind, according to data from the scriptures, and in particular, Shoghi Effendi's letters and the letters from the Universal House of Justice up to 1996, are the main components of the Bahá'í cosmology. It is rooted in the foundation of the Bahá'í doctrine that is the unity of the realm of God, the unity of the realm of the manifestations, and eventually, the unity of the realm of the creatures ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1908). According to the Bahá'í scriptures, the Unity of Humankind is a universal sacred social order that is supposed to establish heaven on Earth at an unknown time after a long period in which the earthly social orders that have made Earth, like Hell and proved their dysfunctions (Effendi, 1934). They believe that during the "disruptive process", the world will grow to its social maturity, simultaneously creating the lesser peace and political unity among all the nations and countries (Effendi, 1938). However, after the lesser peace, they need to be ready to insufflate the spirit to the body of the united world through the institutions of the Bahá'í Administrative Order during the "integrating process" that will lead to the Most Great Peace or the Unity of Humankind. Accordingly, the Unity of Humankind is established through the interventions of the institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order at the international level (Effendi, 1934).

In accordance with Peter Berger, a religious motif is a model of the religious system that can be applied to the course of the growth of religion (Berger, 1954). Berger determines three religious motifs; the first motif is enthusiastic, that is, divided into two kinds of world-saving and the world avoiding. The second motif is prophetic, that is, a statement to be announced and is divided into two sorts of chiliastic and legalistic; the chiliastic motif is concerned with "the Lord is coming" attitude, and the legalistic is concerned with "new order". The third motif is the gnostic, which is a mystery to be revealed. As it can be said from Shoghi Effendi's letters, we can apply the idea that the Unity of Humankind as a new world order can be considered as the legalistic motif. It also can be considered as the enthusiastic motif of

world-saving, since the Unity of Humankind and the New World Order of Baháulláh are alternatives to the current world systems. In fact, there are two types of the unity of humanity one of which is a moral principle of friendship, love and humanity among all the humankind, and another that falls into the motif of enthusiastic world saving. The second meaning is equivalent to the New World Order of Baháulláh that is highlighted in Shoghi Effendi's writings, which is a prophetic legalistic motif. He wants his followers to not confuse and reduce it to the first meaning of the unity and oneness of humanity in Bahá'í scriptures (Effendi, 1991).

One of the significant findings of this study is that the meaning of the Unity of Humankind for the participants differs from what is revealed by a study of the Bahá'í scriptures related to the emergence and growth of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. The participants do not generally refer to the spiritual and universal nature of the Unity of Humankind that is emphasized in Shoghi Effendi's writings (Effendi, 1991). In accordance with the data, the participants are more familiar with a general sense of love and friendship among all humanity. This unity is also found in Bahá'í scriptures ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982b). However, this is not what Shoghi Effendi's writings highlight.

Data from observation, as well as from the interviews, demonstrate that the participants do not hear or read the scriptures about the Unity of Humankind as a particular term that refers to a universal spiritual, social order. The participants' reading pattern does not include Shoghi Effendi's letters; this means they are not familiar with the cosmological meaning of the Unity of Humankind as it appears there, and they also do not hear anything about it during the Feast. As data suggests, the participants prefer to use oneness, friendship, plurality, peace, love, and the betterment of the world as a synonym for the Unity of Humankind.

In accordance with the data from the scriptures, the New World Order is the desired community for Bahá'ís, and the Unity of Humankind is the ultimate goal of the Bahá'í Faith. It should not be unexpected that Bahá'ís mention it during their conversations about their community-building efforts, and particularly, in their experience of attending the Feast. However, the fieldwork suggests otherwise. The term the New World Order is not mentioned in any of the interviews, nor is it mentioned at the observed Feasts.

In fact, for the participants, the Unity of Humankind, as it is described in chapter five, is not the ultimate goal; by unity, they mean love, peace, friendship, and equality for all humankind. The cosmic frame of reference is a sacred universal desired society in Berger's theory of the social reality of religion (1967). Therefore, unity as friendship, love, and brotherhood as individual moral principles, is not the cosmic frame of reference, in a Bergerian sense. The participants did not describe the Unity of Humankind as a spiritual universal social order, the way it is explained in Shoghi Effendi's letters (Effendi, 1991). Therefore, it is not surprising that they did not refer to the Twofold Process (See chapter five) (Effendi, 1934), as well as the institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, as the path towards it (See chapter five).

Moreover, some of the participants tend to alternate between using the term "the Unity of Humankind" with the "betterment of the world" and assume they are the same thing. However, the Unity of Humankind is a revolutionary and radical change in the current system of the world (Effendi, 1991). The "betterment of the world" is changing some perceived undesirable aspects of the current system to supposedly better ones and reforming the world system rather than altering it with an entire New World Order (BIC, 1995).

In fact, the betterment of the world, along with some other Ruhi terminology, such as the core activities, deep Bahá'ís, and clusters, has effectively influenced the participants' answers. They do not usually study Shoghi Effendi's letter, nor do they read Abdu'l-Bahá's

Will and Testaments, or his talks, regularly enough to be familiar with the Unity of Humankind as it is mentioned in those scriptures. Instead, they are very well-socialized with the new terminology externalized (introduced) and objectified (established) by Ruhi Institute since 1996.

1.1. CONTRIBUTION TO THE UNITY OF HUMANKIND

According to the data from the scriptures in chapter eight, besides serving through the institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, there is a clear pattern in participants' opinions about contribution to the Unity of Humankind, living a Bahá'í life and teaching the Faith. Living the Bahá'í life eventually will lead to teaching the Faith gradually and indirectly.

1.1.1. LIVING A BAHÁ'Í LIFE

Even though the scriptures show living a Bahá'í life was a part of the Universal House of Justice teaching plans during the third and fourth epoch of the formative age (UHJ, 1964b) (See chapter eight), it is still in the participants' mind-set. It demonstrates that this is a very well-established approach towards serving the Faith. Even for the young participants who were not born during the 1970s and 1980s to be socialized with this concept, they still consider the living of the Bahá'í life to be their chief contribution to the Unity of Humankind. Unity is the goal of the Faith in which the participants contribute through their everyday life. It seems that the socialization on this subject is still a work in progress; the participants' subjective reality of the Bahá'í life still has an objective functional reality within the Bahá'í community which is a definition of socialization for Berger (1967).

Living a Bahá'í life has a twofold purpose. Firstly, by living in accordance with Bahá'í virtues, such as honesty, loyalty, modesty, and chastity, the world would become a mirror of the heaven. Secondly, living a Bahá'í life and applying those virtues, Bahá'ís will promote the Faith and more people will be attracted to it, and thus, the unity will take place among the

people who have become Bahá'ís. Eventually, living a Bahá'í life will lead to teaching and promoting the Faith and will bring about the unity.

Accordingly, the mind-set of the participants is largely based on the teaching of the Faith. This makes teaching the centre of all the activities that contribute to the Unity of Humankind, and the Bahá'í Administrative Order is either altered or forgotten altogether.

1.1.2. TEACHING THE FAITH

According to the data, teaching is taken for granted by the participants. On the one hand, they know very little about its purpose and the relation between the teaching and other principles of the Faith, including the “Unity of Humankind”, and on the other hand, they try to relate it to everything else during the interviews, since they somehow consider it a matter of great importance. For the participants, the relation between the teaching of the Faith and the Unity of Humankind is bringing more people to the circle of the Bahá'í friends. Therefore, everybody will be Bahá'í and this may contribute to the Unity of Humankind in three ways: Bahá'ís will be united together because they are all Bahá'ís, Bahá'ís follow the rules and teachings of Baháulláh about unity and peace, and Bahá'ís will behave in accordance with Bahá'í virtues that makes Earth the mirror of the Kingdom.

1.2. RUHI INSTITUTE AND THE UNITY OF HUMANKIND

According to the participants, the correlation between the Institute of Ruhi and the Unity of Humankind is threefold:

- 1- The unity of the believers
- 2- Individuality
- 3- Training

1.2.1. THE UNITY OF THE BELIEVERS

The data suggest that participants mainly consider the Unity of Humankind, the unity among the believers. The Unity of Humankind for the participants is, accordingly, the extension of the numbers of the believers. Therefore, teaching the Faith in an efficient way will significantly help the Unity of Humankind. Hence, the growth of the numbers of the Bahá'ís is equal to the growth of the circle of unity among more people around the world, which, in their perspective, is the “Unity of Humankind”. The Ruhi Institute is designed to promote the Faith and develop human resources, and its officially declared aims are the systematic growth of the numbers of the members of the Bahá'í community and accomplishing the promise of the “entry to the Faith by troops” (UHJ, 1996a). Consequently, the participants influenced by the teachings of the Ruhi Institute about the growth of the numbers of the Bahá'ís as the conventional goal, define the “Unity of Humankind” as the unity among Bahá'ís.

1.2.2. GOLDEN INDIVIDUALS BUILD GOLDEN COMMUNITY: INDIVIDUALITY

One of the most prominent insights derived from the nine months of fieldwork is that participants' views and perspectives are individually-based in accordance with the training of the Ruhi Institute, which is entirely centred on individual activities and the vital role of the individuals in the series of the Five-Year Plans. Accordingly, it seems that for these research participants, the “Unity of Humankind” is the unity of as many individuals around the world. Thus, for the participants, a community is some individuals who are involved in the core activities and teaching the Faith (UHJ, 1996a). Therefore, the more individual Bahá'ís, the more advances in community-building, the bigger the community worldwide, and the bigger the domain of the “Unity of Humankind” will get. So, through the core activities, individuals teach each other to become trained in the teaching of the Faith, aiming for “entry to the Faith by troops”, as well as building a better world that is made up of better individuals.

1.2.3. TRAINING AND THE UNITY: UNIFORMITY

The Ruhi Institute is a training system that promotes Bahá'í teachings to train the faithful to be able to produce more trained individuals. Therefore, for the participants, core activities lead to learning about the Bahá'í teachings on love, peace, and the unity. The more popular the core activities get, the more people learn these teachings, and therefore, the unity, love and peace will be possible. Training new members within the educational system who can train more individuals is a reproductive system that furthers the community-building process. The resulting aim is uniformity of thoughts and actions, according to the data collected during the interviews and observations made during the Feasts. The participants believe that they should all do the same thing and the Universal House of Justice aims for the unity of thoughts and actions (ITC, 2003). Hence, the outcome of the Ruhi system is the uniformity of thoughts and actions and not necessarily the Unity of Humankind, as it was introduced by Shoghi Effendi (Effendi, 1991).

1.3. AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE UNITY OF HUMANKIND

According to the findings, the participants are more familiar and concerned with “the betterment of the world” rather than with the Unity of Humankind (UHJ, 1996a). However, they use the two terms interchangeably. The way they want to get to their goal is through teaching the Faith through the core activities. This is radically different from the international efforts made by the institutions of the Bahá'í Administrative Order (Effendi, 1934).

The “Unity of Humankind” neither is the goal of the Ruhi system nor is it promoted through the Ruhi books and the core activities. Hence, during the interviews, no matter how hard the research participants tried to connect the “Unity of Humankind” to the core activities and Ruhi teachings, their effort ultimately led to the “betterment of the world” as the final goal, and the uniformity as the meaning of the unity of humanity.

Accordingly, Ruhi bestows upon the active Bahá'ís a local, rather than universal, perspective. Active Bahá'ís (a term refers to the active Bahá'ís in core activities) are people of action, and their scope of action is limited to local communities and even their neighbourhoods. They try for the betterment of the local communities and neighbourhoods, in the hope that it will eventually lead to the betterment of the entire world, while the number of these reformed local areas grows (UHJ, 2010b; Palmer, 2012).

1.4. TWO TYPES OF THE UNITY OF HUMANKIND

This research suggests the idea of the unity of humanity in the Bahá'í Faith is divided into two types: individual-based, or unity as a process, and institutional-based, or unity as a complex.

According to the data from the scriptures, in particular, Shoghi Effendi's letters (Effendi, 1991), the institutional-based Unity of Humankind is considered the Bahá'í cosmic frame of reference and is the ultimate goal of all their community-building efforts. It is a universal sacred order. It spread through the institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order at an international level. This type of the Unity of Humankind is the outcome of the constructive process that is studied in this research, as is the final version of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. This type of the Unity of Humankind is supposed to appear at a designated time, with particular characteristics, and as a universal spiritual federation ruled by the Universal House of Justice and Bahá'í teachings. It will spread justice and well-being from the universal institutes towards individuals (Effendi, 1936). By breaking the current order of the world, the Unity of Humankind will replace it (Effendi, 1991).

On the other hand, there is another meaning for the unity of humanity as a process which is more popular among the research participants. It starts with individuals and then local communities and eventually leads to the unity among all humanity. The individual-based

meaning of the unity of humanity is mainly love, peace, friendship, and the equality of humanity. According to the participants' interpretation, in the Ruhi system, the unity does not have the same attributes as the Unity of Humankind on the Bahá'í scriptures (See chapter five). Yet, it is mostly a moral quality and one of the highlighted teachings of Baháulláh. The unity of humanity as a process is an on-going process towards the betterment and well-being of the individuals, as well as their local communities.

1.5. SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE UNITY OF HUMANKIND

Social constructionism suggests that the reality is not an objective fact that exists outside our minds that should be discovered; it is subjective and socially constructed meanings, feelings, and motivations that should be explained. Social constructionism is very much related to people's interpretations and their intersubjective world. The world is constructed through people's interactions. The world does not exist independently of people's actions. For Berger and Luckmann (1966), the essence of the constructive reality is peoples' evolving interpretation of reality.

According to a Bergerian interpretation of the Bahá'í scriptures, the Unity of Humankind as a socially constructed reality is based on the participants' interpretations of their scriptures, as well as their intersubjective world (Lample, 2009). If they do not interpret and construct the Unity of Humankind within their intersubjective world as a universal spiritual order, then it is not a universal spiritual order any more. It can show that the Unity of Humankind does not exist within the Bahá'ís mind-set, and the existing reality of the unity of humanity is the individually-based moral quality of unity and peace among the Bahá'ís. The existence of the Unity of Humankind is not ontologically proved, but it is epistemologically defined, and that fits with Berger and Luckmann's constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

2. THE BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER

This section is concerned with the perspectives and understandings of the Bahá'ís in Sheffield in regard to the Bahá'í Administrative Order. They recognize the Bahá'í Administrative Order as an internal management system, while the interpretation of the scriptures suggests the Bahá'í Administrative Order is a nomos towards a universal system that is the Unity of Humankind. Literature suggests that Berger (1954), who considers Bahá'ís' practice in three motifs, explains that the process of the "routinization of charisma" starts with a chiliastic motif of an absolute spirituality and full agency related to the charismatic leaders, the Báb, Baháulláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This situation leads to the legalistic motif which begins with the legitimation of succession in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament (1990), which Berger calls the "routinization of charisma" (Berger, 1954; Smith, 1987). Consequently, the Bahá'í Faith, that was declared a sect, ended up as a church with the routinized charisma and a strict structure that is the channel for spirituality (Berger, 1954; Schaefer, 1988). It was eventually called the Bahá'í Administrative Order in Shoghi Effendi's the Dispensation of Baháulláh (1994). The Bahá'í Administrative Order for Berger (1954), is the structure that changed the nature of the Bahá'í Faith from an Islamic sect into a world church. Both Smith (Smith, 1987) and Berger (Berger, 1954) agree on that the agency of the individual Bahá'ís has been replaced with the structure of the Bahá'í Administrative Order institutes. Smith suggests that the liberal Bahá'í community became an organized modernized community during the formative age.

McMullen (2000) who had studied the Bahá'í community of Atlanta during the 1980s suggested that Bahá'ís have a global identity that comes out of their attendance in the Feast every nineteen days and knowing that they are doing the same thing that other Bahá'ís are doing worldwide. The Feast is the foundation of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, in which individuals find their own institutional global identity (McMullen, 2000). Palmer (2012), on

the other hand, portrays the institutional Bahá'í community as a global “congregational” that transferred into small clusters of local Bahá'ís who were focused only on community-building. Palmer suggests that “the desired universal participation in religious citizenship”, that is what he calls the previous institutional life of Bahá'í community, “seemed to be an elusive goal. Thus in 1986, less than one-fifth of the 32,854 LSAs worldwide were actively functioning” (Palmer, 2012).

In fact, Palmer (2012) explains the current status of the Bahá'í community and states that the local groups were the solution to the challenges that the Bahá'í community was faced with, regarding teaching the Faith. Palmer's research (2012) in China demonstrates that the unit of the Bahá'í community-building activities is not nationally-based anymore. Despite the structure of the Bahá'í Administrative Order that is nationally-based, the current unit of the core activities is a cluster that is governed and defined by the appointed wing of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, instead of the elective wing. The cluster groups of community-building included the Bahá'ís who tried “building capacity to participate at the grassroots levels” (UHJ, 2010a). Accordingly, changing the system of the teaching of the Faith has led to the significant changes in the entire Bahá'í system. They have localized all the efforts that used to be globalized and changed the focus of the community. Additionally, regarding the nomos for the community-building, the Administrative Order was replaced by the core activities.

Consequently, it is not surprising that the participants did not mention the Bahá'í Administrative Order during their interviews initially, except when they were directly asked about it and the role of it in the Unity of Humankind. The observation, as well as interviews, demonstrated that their conception of the Bahá'í Administrative Order is that it is mainly local and includes the Local Spiritual Assembly in general. For small numbers of them, the Feast is considered as a part of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. The international role of the

Bahá'í Administrative Order is not clear for the participants. The correlations between the institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order are vague for them as well. They do not describe the relationship between the Bahá'í Administrative Order and the Unity of Humankind as it is explained in their scriptures. The role and significance of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, the way it is explained in Shoghi Effendi's letters, is not at the forefront of their consciousness and awareness. In fact, for the participants, the Bahá'í Administrative Order is a local management system.

2.1. THE FEAST

The Feast is the most physical and visible part of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. They are mostly willing to attend the Feast and appreciate it as a regular gathering and a part of the practice of their Faith. The Feast is a relevant place to research the Bahá'í community because of its multifunctional purposes. Bahá'ís had had the Nineteen-Day Feasts even before the Bahá'í Administrative Order was officially established. It is one of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh in *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992). The participants' opinion on the link between the Feast and the Unity of Humankind is the classic and basic answer derived from *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*: "Verily, it is enjoined upon you to offer a Feast, once in every month, though only water is served; for God hath purposed to bind hearts together, albeit through both earthly and heavenly means" (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992, p. 40). Their understanding of the Feast is not related to the Feast as the fundamental institution of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, as is institutionalized by Abdu'l-Bahá, and later, by Shoghi Effendi ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1990; Effendi, 1994).

'Abdu'l-Bahá emphasised the importance of the spiritual and devotional character of these gatherings. Shoghi Effendi, besides further elaborating the devotional and social aspects of the Feast, has developed the administrative element of such gatherings and, in systematically instituting the Feast, has provided for a period of consultation on the affairs of the Bahá'í

community, including sharing news and messages from the Bahá'í World Centre (Effendi, 1934).

Moreover, nine months of observation within the Feast also suggests that it is dominated by those members of the community who are active in the core activities. The rest of the members do not attend the Feast as regularly, do not host the Feast willingly, and do not participate in the conversations while attending. The role of the board member is more highlighted than the role of the members of the LSA. Moreover, the conversations, activities, readings, workshops, and consultations are entirely teaching related and are directly linked to the core activities. For most of the participants, it was the first time that they thought of the correlation between the Feast and the Unity of Humankind.

2.2. SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER

This study addressed the Bahá'í Administrative Order as a social construction of reality according to Berger and Luckmann's (1966) theory. The Bahá'í Administrative Order can be interpreted as a socially constructed reality. The changing nature of meaning, purpose, and role of the various institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, such as the Feast, the LSA, and the NSA, during Bahá'í history, is an indication that the Order can be considered as a social construction of reality.

Moreover, this study demonstrates that for the participants, the Bahá'í Administrative Order is not considered as the *nomos* of the community-building activities anymore. Thus, even though the Bahá'í Administrative Order exists among the Bahá'ís, it does not have the same meaning and status that it used to have, from 1934 to 1996.

3. RUHI INSTITUTE AND THE UNITY OF HUMANKIND

Despite all their endeavours to build a united universal world, the Bahá'ís faced challenges during the 1990s (McMullen, 2000). McMullen (2000) describes teaching with at least two purposes; firstly, it is to spread the Faith and secondly, to build internal solidity. He believes that teaching the Faith is socially constructed as a calling for every Bahá'í. However, the main concern for the Bahá'ís during the 1980s and the 1990s was “how to prepare for and facilitate entry by troops, without repeating the failures of an earlier period of large-scale growth” (McMullen, 2000, p. 132). McMullen states that there were three major concerns about teaching the Faith: “1) fears about who were then becoming Bahá'ís; 2) a lack of follow-up in nurturing the new recruits; and 3) unpreparedness and immaturity of Bahá'í Institutions” (McMullen, 2000, p. 134). As a result of this unpreparedness to accommodate the new believers, Bahá'ís acknowledged that “most of the mass-taught believers dropped out” (McMullen, 2000, p. 134). McMullen explains that although Bahá'ís believed in the requirement of teaching the Faith, they significantly disagreed on the methods of teaching. McMullen reveals that teaching was the cause for a huge disagreement among the Bahá'ís.

Overcoming the challenges of teaching the Faith in the second half of the twentieth century, Bahá'ís started to modify their approach and that, eventually, led to an immense modification in the Faith entirely (Palmer, 2012). Palmer (2012) states that during the 1990s, Bahá'í institutions faced challenges in consolidating large numbers of new members into sustainable communities; they presented a new pattern of practices to sustain and support Bahá'ís efforts of community-building which is the Ruhi Institute and the core activities.

3.1. COMMUNITY-BUILDING

According to the fieldwork, the participants are vague about the meaning of community-building. However, most of them believe it means constructing a Bahá'í community, and some of them believe they are contributing to the betterment of the world in general.

The participants have difficulties in relating the community-building and the core activities to the unity. They easily replace the unity with the betterment of the world. For those of them who have grown with the core activities and Ruhi books, the community is comprised of active individuals, as well as the core activities.

3.2. THE BETTERMENT OF THE WORLD AS THE GOAL

For most of the participants, the main goal of the Faith is the betterment of the world. That is because everything they know about the Faith comes from the Ruhi books. However, through the messages from the Universal House of Justice during this period, for example, the message dated 26. 11. 2003 to Iranian Bahá'ís, the meaning of the better world is a balanced combination of material and spiritual civilization (UHJ, 1963-2016). Palmer (2012) explains that the study circle, the children's class, and devotional meetings are the new focus of the Bahá'í community-building around the world since the start of the twenty-first century.

These activities, as he characterizes them, are “non-hierarchical, self-initiated, self-organized small groups engaged in study, teaching, and action that are held in tens of thousands of localities on all the continents” (Palmer, 2012). Palmer derives his statement based on the quote from Baháulláh that is the first quote in the Ruhi book one, and it constitutes the aim of the study circles, “The betterment of the world can be accomplished through pure and goodly deeds, through commendable and seemly conduct” (Bahá'u'lláh, 1990).

Moreover, the concept of the Twofold Process and the role of the institutions of the Order and the concept of the Unity of Humankind are missed within the participants' conversations

within the Feasts and during the interviews. Instead, they all try to work and serve the Faith, through the core activities, and work towards the betterment of the world.

So, the Unity of Humankind has been replaced by the betterment of human kind's life, and oneness of the humankind is a by-product of it. The betterment of the world is the effect and the result of core community-building activities. Therefore, according to Berger's theory of social reality of religion (Berger, 1967) the activities direct towards a goal that religion bestows upon it, which for the research participants, is the "betterment of the world".

The cosmic frame of reference for Berger (1967) is a desired social order that is the ultimate goal of the community-building enterprise. The Unity of Humankind, as it is defined in the Bahá'í scriptures (See chapter five) fits in this definition. However, the betterment of the world as the new goal of the community-building is not exactly an ultimate desired community. The betterment of the world is a step-by-step process of development in the current society. Therefore, even though, it is the aim of the community-building enterprise of the Bahá'ís, does not exactly fall within the definition of the cosmic frame of reference. In fact, it seems that Berger's theory (1967) is more applicable for the Unity of Humankind that is a complex entity, rather than the betterment of the world that is a process.

3.3. THE CORE ACTIVITIES AS THE NOMOS

Core activities firstly referred to devotional meetings, children's classes, and study circles, and later junior youth classes were added to them. Bahá'ís are asked to devote all their resources and efforts to these activities to teach their Faith (UHJ, 1996a) through the "instrument of limitless potentialities" (UHJ, 2010b). Naming these activities as core activities is a very clear sign that they should be considered the main and most important activities to serve the Faith. Core activities are the system that has been introduced to the community by the Ruhi Institute to help individuals to teach the Faith to which the

participants refer. Core activities are reproductive training systems for producing individuals who care about both their own growth and the growth of their community. According to the Universal House of Justice, growth for them is both material and spiritual growth or true prosperity. The true prosperity, or a balanced combination of spiritual and material civilization, is the goal of their community-building. However, the research participants did not mention any of these meanings. Therefore, according to Berger's definition of nomos, the core activities are the nomos for the current Bahá'í community, which can lead it to the "betterment of the world", or the true prosperity.

3.4. INDIVIDUALITY

Another important finding was the decreasing role of the institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order in community-building activities and within the series of the Five-year plans, lead to the state in which the participants' sense of sociality is less influential than their sense of individuality. This means that they identify themselves as individual Bahá'ís, and not members of institutes, despite what McMullen (2000) had found in his research during the 1990s. In Sheffield, the participants are thinking about their individual tasks and services to the Faith. The situation in the Bahá'í community of Sheffield is very close to what Bruce (1995) explains about religiosity in Britain. Bruce (1995) suggests that there has been an alteration of the perception of religion as a state and community matter to religion as an individual dedication. He believes that a Christian society increasingly shifts to a society with committed Christian members.

The participants have been involved in the core activities and the Ruhi system for 20 years; that is an individual-based system (UHJ, 2010a), working with individuals to train individuals. Even when their main roles within the Ruhi system are as Continent Counsellors and as Auxiliary board members, it is very obvious the participants are individually-oriented and not institutionally-oriented actors. In fact, the community has become a community with

dedicated similarly trained individual Bahá'ís (UHJ, 2010b) with mechanical solidarity (Durkheim, 1893).

4. DECONSTRUCTION

Berger (Berger, 1967) provides sociologists with the role of religion in the community-building activities. However, this project demonstrated the dynamic role of the Bahá'í Faith in the community-building process. According to the data from the scriptures, as well as from the fieldwork, it is clear that the Bahá'ís had already started their community-building activities a long time ago in their history to get to the ultimate goal of the Unity of Humankind. The Twofold Process that Shoghi Effendi had defined was supposed to get the world to the lesser peace through the disruptive process by the year 2000. The Bahá'í Administrative Order, from the integrative process, was also supposed to reach its maturity by the year 2000, in order to begin the Lesser Peace and the establishment of the New World Order of Baháulláh, and eventually reach the Unity of Humankind (Effendi, 1991). But, by the end of the 1980s, it was clear that Bahá'ís were not able to meet the deadline of the year 2000, so the Universal House of Justice started looking for a solution and alternative system. The Universal House of Justice decided to launch the new teaching plan according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Tablets of Divine Plan* ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1993).

The Ruhi Institute that was already working in Colombia provided an alternative solution. The Ruhi worked in local areas training individuals using Bahá'í teachings to meet the needs of their local communities, regarding the definition of true prosperity. Palmer (2012) states that the local groups of community-builders were the key to the challenges faced by the Bahá'í community at the time. These local units of community-builders focused on “building capacity to participate at the grassroots levels” (UHJ, April 2010). Therefore, the Bahá'í system altered entirely, and this alteration was not only in teaching the Faith. Bahá'ís have

localized all the activities that used to be globalized and replaced the focus of the community. Most importantly, the Administrative Order was supplanted by the core activities. He explains that Bahá'ís are localizing their efforts of community-building and decreasing the significance of the role of the institutions of the Order. Palmer calls this shift “from congregations”, that he describes, “As the world citizenship into small group community-building” (Palmer, 2012). In current theses, the process of the linking of the same activities of the entire local communities around the world, coupled with the uniformity of thoughts and actions, is called “glocalization” (Roudometof, 2014).

Hence, Bahá'ís community-building has been reversed from producing “golden individuals” out of “golden communities”, into producing “golden communities” out of “golden individuals”, or from institutional-based Unity of Humankind (or Durkheim’s organic solidarity) to the individual-based oneness of humanity (or Durkheim’s mechanical solidarity). In other words, Bahá'ís used to aim for the establishment of a new civilization on Earth based on Baháulláh’s teachings and through their sacred system of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. Now their aim, at least for the foreseeable future, is to develop the current civilization towards true prosperity (a balanced combination of the material and spiritual wealth) through the core activities, along with other selfless people who aim for the betterment of the entire world. This demonstrates the dynamic role of the religion in the community-building, which is called ‘deconstruction’ in this project.

CONCLUSION

The “betterment of the world”, instead of the Unity of Humankind is now practically the cosmos and the ultimate goal of the Bahá'ís; they seek it even without the unity. It is tightly related to the core activities, so core activities are considered *nomoi*. While through Abdu'l-Bahá's writings, unity is the ultimate goal. Through Shoghi Effendi's letters, the Bahá'í

Administrative Order is the path towards it, and through the Ruhi system, the goal is the betterment of the world, and the core activities are the path towards it.

In fact, community-building through core activities is quite different from community-building from the Bahá'í Administrative Order. They lead to two different kinds of communities with different structures and functions. Community-building through the Order is developing and growing the institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order at the local, national, and international level. However, community-building, according to the Ruhi system, is a local attempt through the core activities for the betterment of the world fulfilled by individuals Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í.

Unity of Humankind is not the same as humankind's betterment in life. They may eventually reach the same point, but their nature is not necessarily the same. That is to say; a new Bahá'í community is coming out of the older Bahá'í community for which the goal is the betterment of the world and nomos is the core activities.

12. CONCLUSION

In this study, I have provided an answer to the question how the Bahá'ís translate the word of God into practice and construct their social reality of the Faith. In other words, how their subjective interpretation of the Faith can turn into a tangible community. I have demonstrated the dynamic role of the Bahá'í Faith in motivating, directing, and maintaining the process of the community-building. The reality of the Faith is the outcome of their evolving interpretation of it. In fact, in the case of the Bahá'í Faith, the evolving community is correlated with the progressive Faith. Bahá'ís are an interesting group for the sociology of religion. They build their social reality of the Faith based on their subjective understanding of the scriptures. Bahá'í scriptures have been issued since 1844. Bahá'ís read their holy writings and construct the social reality of their Faith in accordance with their understanding of the scriptures. Therefore, their Faith, as well as their community, is based on their perceptions of the scriptures.

However, reviewing the literature revealed there had been very little sociological studies on the Bahá'ís community. The literature is found to be lacking in both its study of the Bahá'í scriptures and the lived experience of Bahá'í communities. I therefore set out this study with the aim of exploring Bahá'ís community-building efforts through their scriptures, as well as their lived experience of construction of the social reality of the Faith. Therefore, the data for this research has come from two sources, Bahá'í scriptures as well as the qualitative fieldwork. The evolving nature of the Bahá'í Faith (Smith, 1987; Berger, 1958; Lample, 2009) required a constructionist perspective on this study (Berger, 1967; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Berger's theory of social reality of religion (1967) was applied to studying the Bahá'í scriptures. The fieldwork was conducted in the Bahá'í community of Sheffield.

The data collection strategies were the semi-structured interview as well as the participant observation.

According to my study of the scriptures, the Faith has, firstly, provided the believers with the ultimate goal of their community-building as well as the means to gain that goal. Secondly, after decades of construction of a community based on the given goal and means, the Faith deconstructed the community and introduced new goals and means towards a new community-building affair. Thirdly, a major shift in the goals and the means of the community-building happened, that is a reconstruction period for the Bahá'ís. As a result of this transition, the reality of the Bahá'í community shifted from an institutional-based, highly organized Faith (See chapter seven) into an individual-centred one (See chapter nine). The mind-set and activities of the participants are mostly formed and directed by the new version of their community-building goals and means. However, the rest of the participants are mostly isolated from the community-building activities as well as the key meetings and affairs.

According to Berger (1967), religion provides any community-building with two key elements: The “cosmic frame of reference” and the nomos. The “cosmic frame of reference” is the desired community or sacred cosmic order, and the nomos is the pathway and order towards the “cosmic frame of reference”. I have recognized the Unity of Humankind as the “cosmic frame of reference” of the Bahá'í Faith (Effendi, 1991). It is the ultimate goal of the Faith, which is a universal institutional federation, the alternative for the current social order. According to my interpretations of the Bahá'í scriptures, the Bahá'í Administrative Order is the nomos, which directs the community towards the Unity of Humankind (Effendi, 1991). Building on the conceptual framework of Berger (1967), I have suggested that the establishment of the Bahá'í Administrative Order can be explained through the Bergerian concept of nomization and has passed through the three stages of externalization,

objectivation, and internalization (Berger, 1967). In the stage of externalization, the conceptual version of the main components of the Bahá'í Administrative Order was generated. Objectivation, in this study, is related to the establishment of the institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. Shoghi Effendi (Effendi, 1994) officially introduced the Administrative Order to the Bahá'í World. For the Bahá'í Administrative Order to be the *nomos*, it is essential to be unifying as well as obeyed and internalized. The Covenant provides authority for the institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. Objectivation, in a Bergerian sense, and according to this project, is an equivalent for the Weberian phrase “routinization of charisma”. According to the literature (Berger, 1954; Berger, 1958; Smith, 1987; McMullen, 2000; Palmer, 2012), through the “routinization of charisma”, the structure of the Bahá'í Administrative Order reduced the freedom of the believers. Regarding internalization, this project has posited that the stability in the formative age was sustained up until 1996. The Bahá'í community was highly institutionalized at this stage and struggled with staffing the increasing responsibilities of the Bahá'í Administrative Order (Palmer, 2012). At that time, the Bahá'ís also had disagreements about how to teach their Faith and to whom to teach the Faith (McMullen, 2000).

Since 1996, important alterations have happened in the Bahá'í community, regarding the aims and the methods of community-building. The Unity of Humankind is understood among the participants as moral principles of love, brotherhood, and friendship instead of a spiritual universal social order. The notion of “the betterment of the world” altered the Unity of Humankind as the goal of community-building, and the core activities replaced the Bahá'í Administrative Order. This change made it difficult to apply Berger's stages of community-building to interpret Bahá'ís activities since 1996 because Berger (1967) did not anticipate the disruption of the constructed social order by religion itself. As a result, the notion of “deconstruction” was employed to explain the new state in the Bahá'í community concerning

community-building activities. Deconstruction, based on this project, lasted from 1996 to 2001 when the fifth epoch of the formative age was announced and the House acknowledged that a new culture had been formed among the Bahá'ís. During this period (1996-2001), according to the letters from the Universal House of Justice, the community was experiencing a huge transition that leads to the process of reconstruction of the Faith, with a new cosmic frame of reference and nomos. The Ruhi Institute and the Learned helped the Faith and the Bahá'ís through this transition (See chapter nine). The weight of the appointed wing of the Order is much higher than the elected wing from this point onwards (See chapter nine).

The fieldwork confirms that the “betterment of the world”, that is, the prosperity of humanity, is currently the frame of reference for the participants and the contemporary purpose of their activities. It is strongly linked to the core activities, which in this study was recognized as the current nomos for the participants. The fieldwork suggests that Bahá'ís shifted their strategy of community-building from the establishment of the New World Order through the national and international institutes of the Order, towards a process of improving the current world system starting from their neighbourhood. The local institutes of the Order are more highlighted, and the role of the LSA is mainly reduced taking care of the community which is also neglected. Instead, the role of the Board member and the Ruhi coordinators are highlighted and appreciated.

In particular, core activities construct a quite different community from the community that the Bahá'í Administrative Order would build. The Bahá'í Administrative Order would construct, according to this research, a federation of the hierarchy of the institutes of the New World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Nevertheless, the Ruhi system directs the individual Bahá'ís to the local endeavour through the core activities towards the betterment of the world.

Moreover, the Unity of Humankind is a complex entity that can be considered as an ultimate goal as the end-point of a process. However, the betterment of the world is a gradually

evolving process and not an ultimate goal and does not have an end-point, which means it is achieved through everybody's efforts towards the betterment of the current situation day by day. In addition, the Unity of Humankind would be attained through the Twofold Process of disruption and integration (See chapter five), while the betterment of the world is achievable through the Twofold Moral Purpose of the growth of the individuals and growth of their neighbourhood (See chapter nine). The Twofold Process was supposed to work through the institutes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order to change the entire system of the world into the New World Order of Baháulláh only by the Bahá'ís. However, the Twofold Moral Purpose is supposed to reform the local areas by individuals' commitment to "pure and goodly deeds" (Bahá'u'lláh, 1990, p. 93) and commendable and seemly conduct of Bahá'ís or non-Bahá'ís (See chapter nine and ten).

This shift leads to the fundamental change in the Bahá'ís community-building activities. The Bahá'ís are changing their Faith by changing their community-building goals and methods. To be precise, a new Bahá'í community is emerging out of the older Bahá'í community for which the "cosmic frame of reference" is the betterment of the world and *nomos* is the core activities.

Additionally, I have demonstrated that the key element in the Bahá'í community, to maintain social solidarity, is the Covenant. Bahá'ís religiously follow the leads of the Universal House of Justice, even though they are not exactly aware of the different aspects of the process of community-building and the radical changes that had happened in this process which altered the entire nature of their goals and means. These changes are big enough to change the nature of their entire Faith. Therefore, the changes in the community-building activity eventually lead to the changes in the construction of the religion. Yet, the majority of the Bahá'ís follow the change enthusiastically. They take the changes and the Ruhi system for granted, which means the socialization process is quite successful. Some Bahá'ís disagree with the shifts and

alterations, but they also respect the Covenant and do not act against the new system, except for becoming passive and isolated.

Overall, through this study, I have contributed to knowledge in three ways. Firstly, this project investigated how subjective understanding of Bahá'ís turns into social reality of Bahá'í community. Secondly, it expanded Berger's conceptual framework and added the idea of “deconstruction” to the theory of social reality of religion, which contributes to the literature on the functional studies of religion. Thirdly, this research contributes to the experimental literature by adding a lived experience of community-building among Bahá'ís.

The literature has revealed that there is relatively little research that builds on Berger's social reality of religion (Berger, 1967). Collin (1997) believes that the most celebrated text in the social constructionist tradition is Berger and Luckmann's (1966). He also emphasizes that *Social Construction of Reality* (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) is the Bible for social constructionists. Nonetheless, there are few works in the field related to his theory per se. I, however, aimed to employ Berger's theory (1967) to identify the role of the Bahá'í Faith in community-building in Sheffield and to work towards filling this gap in the current literature.

Moreover, most of the sociological studies of the Bahá'í Faith were related to Weber's concept of the “routinization of charisma” (Berger, 1954; McMullen, 2000; Smith, 1987; Palmer, 2012), that is, about the transition of the Bahá'í community from a sect into a church (with different terminologies in different studies). In particular, the literature has identified that the Bahá'í community has shifted from an unorganized community with a mechanical solidarity (Durkheim, 1893), charismatic leadership (Berger, 1954), segregation situation (Palmer, 2012), and an Islamic sect (Berger, 1954; Smith, 1987) into a community with an organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1893), routinized charisma (Berger, 1954), world citizenship (Palmer, 2012), and world religion (Berger, 1954; Smith, 1987). This project has concluded

that the Bahá'í community has passed through different stages of construction to the stage of deconstruction and, then, to reconstruction.

In this study, I had the opportunity to focus on the role of the Faith in community-building activities and did not have the chance to demonstrate how changes in the community-building enterprise would change the Faith. There is considerable potential for the further study of this dynamic relationship. A supplementary study is suggested to explore the role that changes in society plays in transforming the Faith.

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