THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY OF ACRE[1]

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(1) *Introduction*

The sociological study of sectarianism has been largely confined to Christian sects.[2] Studies of sects within other religions are relatively rare. Though a voluminous literature exists dealing with the history and theology of Islamic sects,[3] sociological analyses are few. Owing to a lack of comparative material, it is as yet difficult to answer one of the most intriguing problems in the sociology of sectarianism: whether the process, as discovered in Christian sects, is a general one, or largely restricted to the sphere of Christianity. This paper, though it does not presume to formulate an answer to this general problem, is intended to contribute towards its resolution, through a minute analysis of the dynamics of one important Islamic sect — the Bahá'ís.

The Bahá'ís are one of several "reformist" sects which emerged from traditional Islam during the nineteenth century, when the first Western influences started to be felt in the stagnant societies of the Middle East. The early history of the Bahá'ís and their predecessors, the Bābis, is well known. We

1 This paper is based on field work conducted in Acre, Israel, in 1966 and 1971; the study was financed by grants from the Eliezer Kaplan School and the Eshkol Institute, both of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. I am indebted for part of the material to my student, Miss Dina Morag, who interviewed some of the Bahá'ís in Acre and wrote a seminary paper on them. Of the many people in Acre who assisted me in my work, special thanks are due to Mr. Samih Irani, one of the members of the family of the Founder of the Faith.

2 For a recent general survey see B.R. Wilson: *Religious Sects,* World Universities Library, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1970; see also B.R. Wilson (ed.): *Patterns of Sectarianism,* Heinemann, London, 1967, Ch. 1: B.R. Wilson: An Analysis of Sect Development.

3 For surveys of Islamic sects see e.g.: I. Goldziher: *Vorlesungen über den Islam,* Ch. V; F. Rahman: *Islam,* Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1966, Ch. 10; A. Guillaume: *Islam,* Penguin Books, Harmondworth, 1954, Ch. 6.

shall hence restrict ourselves only to those events which are of direct concern to our theme.[4]

In 1884 Mirza 'Ali Muhammad, a follower of the Shi'ite Shaykhī sect, from the city of Shiraz in Persia proclaimed himself the Bāb or Gate, e.g. the one through whom communication with the Hidden Imam, whose return is expected by the Shi'ites, has been reopened. Though he later went beyond this claim and declared himself the Qā'im (i.e. the Imam himself) or even the Nugta (i.e. Point, an appellation of God himself), in the later Bahá'í tradition he was considered as a forerunner of the Manifestation of Bahá-'u'lláh, whose Advent he is supposed to have prophesied.

Before his martyrdom in 1850, the Bāb designated as his successor a young man called Mirza Yahya Buzurg, the son of a noble Irani family, who was given the title of Subḥ-i-Azal (Dawn of Eternity). The actual leadership of the Bābis, however, passed very soon into the hands of Subḥ-i-Azal's elder half-brother, Mirza Husayn 'Ali, better known as Bahá'u'lláh (The Glory of God). After much persecution and a prolonged exile in Bagdad, the half-brothers and their closest followers reached Adrianople (modern Edirna) in 1864. There Bahá'u'lláh formally declared himself to be the Manifestation prophesied by the Bāb. This announcement precipitated the final breach between the half-brothers, in the wake of which the Azalis (followers of Subḥ-i-Azal) separated from the Bahá-ís (followers of Bahá 'u'lláh). The conflict led to violence, in the wake of which the Turkish authorities separated the factions: Subḥ-i-Azal and his followers were sent to Famagusta in Cyprus, where they fell into oblivion. They gained the support of only very few Bābis in Iran. Bahá'u'lláh, whom most of the Bābis supported, and his followers were exiled to Acre in Palestine. Bahá'u'lláh died here in 1892. Until the closing years of the Ottoman Empire the sect led a precarious existence in Acre. The gradual weakening of the Ottoman Empire and the advent of the British removed political control and left the Bahá'ís free to propagate their faith in other countries. In the process, however, the sect split again, owing to a feud between the sons of the Founder. The two emergent factions developed in radically different directions: the more "progressive" one turned to

4 The foremost first-hand authority on the early history of the Bahá'ís is E.G. Browne. His main works dealing with the subject are: E.G. Browne (ed.): *A Traveller's Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bāb*, Cambridge Un. Press, Cambridge, 1891; E.G. Browne (ed.): *The Tarikh-i-Jadid or New History of Mirza 'Ali Muhammad the Bāb*, Cambridge Un. Press, Cambridge, 1893; E.G. Browne (ed.): *Materials for the Study of the Bābi Religion*, Cambridge Un. Press, Cambridge, 1918; a short history of the sect is contained in E.G. Browne's article: "Bāb, Bābism", in Hasting's *Enc. of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. II, pp. 299-308. See also: H.M. Balyuzi: *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith*, G. Ronald, London, 1970.

the West and dissociated itself gradually from Islam while the more traditional one strove to preserve its separateness within the confines of the mother-religion. The divergent dynamics of development of the two factions of Bahá'ism will be the central subject of this paper. We shall, however, concern ourselves particularly with the more traditional faction, based in Acre, whose fate is less well known and who nowadays represent a rarely discussed religious type: though small and of sectarian origin they cannot properly speaking be called a sect any more, but represent what I shall term a 'residual religious community".

Though a voluminous literature on Bahá'ísm exists,[5] sociological studies of the sect are very few. The most incisive analysis is probably contained in P. Berger's article,[6] which reviews the process of the gradually diminishing charisma of religious leadership in the mainstream of Bahá'ísm. I have drawn heavily on Berger's analysis, though my focus was different from his. My analysis deals preponderantly with that faction of the Bahá'ís which failed to "take off"; while Berger discusses the reasons for its failure, he does not analyse in detail its further development. My paper, then, is intended largely to complement and extend Berger's analysis.

(2) *Historical Background*

Bahá'u'lláh was confined by the Ottoman government to the fortress of Acre in 1868. He came accompanied by his family and several followers or 'Companions'; with their children, the group numbered about eighty persons.[7] Judging from oral traditions as well as the names of some Bahá'í families living in Acre, it appears that the group included some members of Bahá'u'lláh's personal household staff, while the rest were believers who attached themselves to the Founder of the faith. Most members of the Bahá'í community living in Acre nowadays are the direct descendants of this group of early Bahá'is. The Acre community is tiny — it numbers only several scores of people. Its importance lies in the fact that it is descended from the original Bahá'í community and includes members of the family of the Founder.

After they had been confined for about two years to the fortress, where

5 Of the many histories of and introductions to the Bahá'í faith, the best known is J.E. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, Bahá'í Publishing Committee, Wilmotte, Ill., 1950. The early history of the Bahá'í movement is most thoroughly described in the various works of E.G. Browne cited above. See also H. Roemer: *Die Bābi-Bahá'í*, Deutsche Orient Mission, Potsdam, 1912. A general bibliography of Bahá'í publications and of publications on Bahá'ísm is regularly published in *Bahá'í World*, a bi-annual of the Bahá'í Movement.

6 P. Berger: "Motif messianique et processus social dans le Bahá'ísme", *Archives de Sociologie de Religion*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 1957,pp. 93-107.

7 Esslemont, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-42.

some apparently died of malaria and other illnesses, the group was moved to more agreeable surroundings: they were confined to a local *caravanserai*, called Han-el 'Umdan.[8] Gradually and informally the Bahá'ís shed some of the restrictions imposed upon them by the authorities, and, in spite of periodic relapses into imprisonment, achieved a limited freedom of movement in the city and its surroundings. After living for seven years within the confines of the walled city, Bahá'u'lláh moved out, first to a country house and then to a mansion called Bahjí Palace, both in the vicinity of Acre. Even during Bahá'u'lláh's lifetime Acre became a place of pilgrimage for the faithful from Iran, and many streamed to his abode. Though technically still a prisoner in exile, Bahá'u'lláh in his last years at Bahjí virtually presided over a court in the traditional fashion of Islamic holy men.[9] The gifts he received from the faithful formed the basis of the wealth of the family of the Founder, later to become a subject of much controversy between his descendants.

Bahá'u'lláh died at Bahjí in 1892 and was buried in the grounds of the mansion. His grave at Bahjí, the mansion and the adjacent gardens, the country house on the outskirts of Acre, and the house within the walls of the old city where Bahá'u'lláh lived, are now holy places of the Bahá'í faith, owned and managed by the Bahá'í Center in Haifa.

The period of Bahá'u'lláh's sojourn in Acre appears to have been one of relative religious ferment in the otherwise stagnant society of this city. Bahá'u'lláh's influence and renown among local Arabs was apparently considerable; however, they did not embrace the new creed. Nowadays there is not a single Bahá'í family of Arab origin in Acre. Local Arabs explain that at the time of Bahá'u'lláh's sojourn in Acre, the Sufi Shaḍliya order enjoyed considerable influence in Acre; in the competition between the Bahá'ís and the Shaḍliya, the latter predominated. Until now, Acre is a centre of the Shaḍliya: the tombs of the two North African Shaḍlis who founded the sect in Palestine are located in Old Acre, and there is a courtyard around them, where the Shaḍlis still live, though nowadays they show very little religious fervor.

After the death of the Founder in 1892, his son Abbas Effendi, known as Abd'ul Bahá (the Slave of Bahá) ascended to the leadership of the faith, in accordance with the will of his father. He was to be succeeded by his half-brother, Muhammad 'Ali. After their rule, the faith was to be directed by a body called "The Universal House of Justice".

The circumstances surrounding Abd'ul Bahá's succession to Bahá'u'lláh precipitated a major split among the members of the Founder's family and

8 Esslemont, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

9 Berger, *op. cit.*, p. 99; see also the description in Esslemont, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-50

his companions. As a result of it, two rival Bahá'í factions appeared: one led by Abd'ul Bahá from which the mainstream of contemporary Bahá'ísm developed, and a dissident one, led by Muhammad 'Ali, which called itself "Unitarians",[10] while Abd'ul Bahá's supporters refer to it as "Breakers of the Covenant" (that is, those who went against the will of Bahá'u'lláh).

The precise events which led to the split are difficult to ascertain, since the rival factions present widely differing versions. The split led to a bitter fraternal strife as a result of which a voluminous polemic literature appeared, containing mutual accusations and recriminations. A deep rift occurred in the emergent Bahá'í communities in the Middle East and even in the United States. The strife became particularly intensive in 1898, but continued to simmer afterwards.[11] It became so bitter that in the last years of the Ottoman Empire Muhammad 'Ali was even accused by his adversaries of denouncing Abd'ul Bahá to the Turkish authorities, thus causing his arrest. The feud continued to flare up occasionally and has in fact been maintained to the present day.

Abd'ul Bahá and his supporters claimed that Muhammad 'Ali and his faction refused to accept the will of the Founder, who stipulated Abd'ul Bahá's succession to the leadership of the faith; instead they wanted to make Muhammad 'Ali the leader, and thereby they "broke the Covenant".[12] The dissident faction claimed, however, that it recognised the will, but accused Abd'ul Bahá of purposely concealing part of it from the rest of the family and followers of the Founder.[13] They also accused Abd'ul Bahá personally of assuming the power and religious stature of Bahá'u'lláh himself, an act which contradicts the claim of the latter that no major prophet will appear after him for at least a thousand years.[14] Abd'ul Bahá has thereby compromised himself, they claimed, and the leadership of the faith should pass to Muhammad 'Ali. Abd'ul Bahá claimed in his defence that he was not a major, but only a secondary prophet, and hence his behavior did not contradict the prophecy of his father.[15]

10 This term is used by E.G. Browne, *Materials for the Study of the Bābi Religion*, *op. cit.*, p. IX, who takes it from an Arabic treatise by Muhammad Jawad, defending the dissident position, which is translated in full in the same volume (*ibid.*, p. 81; "Unitarian" is a translation of the Arabic "Ahlut Tawkid" or "Muwahlidun"). The term apparently fell into disuse with time, while the appellation "Breakers of the Covenant" stuck to the dissident group. See also Berger, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

11 E.G. Browne: "Bāb, Bābism", *op. cit.*

12 This is the official version as presented, for example, by the spokesman of the Haifa World Bahá'í Center.

13 Muhammad Jawad in Browne, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 77; also, Berger, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-102.

15 Berger, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

The split in the Bahá'í movement had at its start all the familiar characteristics of a fraternal feud. On the face of it, the movement split into two homologous factions, each led by one of the half-brothers: it appears that at the very start of the schism the factions were of relatively equal strength.[16] In actual fact, the factions were not homologous, nor did their relative strength remain equal for long. Most of the members of the Founder's family and many of his closest Companions lent their support to Muhammad 'Ali; for example, two of Muhammad 'Ali's brothers, Badi'u'lláh and the early deceased Mirza Ziya'u'lláh, the members of the family of the Founder's brother Mirza Mousa and the Founder's secretary, supported Muhammad 'Ali and opposed Abd'ul Bahá. Abd'ul Bahá apparently enjoyed the support of the less important Bahá'ís in Acre and of the majority of the members of the faith outside the town. In spite of this formidable opposition, Abd'ul Bahá succeeded in a short time to establish his hegemony over the movement and to become the undisputed leader of mainstream Bahá'ísm,[17] not only in Palestine but also in the other Middle Eastern countries and in the U.S.

Though Abd'ul Bahá emerged victorious from the struggle, Muhammad 'Ali's stronghold remained in Acre, where most members of the Founder's family and his Companions and their descendants continued to live. Many petty conflicts continuously strained the relations between the factions.[18] Abd'ul Bahá apparently found Acre less than congenial for his activities and hence, at the beginning of the century, started to encourage his followers to leave Acre and to move to Haifa.[19] He transferred the seat of Bahá'ísm to that city, where, on the slopes of Mount Carmel, he established the Shrine of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh's forerunner. The mountain, called by Bahá'u'lláh the Mountain of God, became the central holy place of Bahá'ism. The process by which Bahá'ísm became focused on Haifa and Mt. Carmel culminated after Abd'ul Bahá's death in the establishment of the International Bahá'í

16 Browne: "Báb, Bábism", *op. cit.*, p. 304.

17 Berger, interpreting the split in religious-sociological terms, claims that 'Abd'ul Bahá's position led to a course of gradual attenuation of the religious charisma of Bahá'u'lláh in his successors, until its complete routinization which will take place only with the establishment of the House of Universal Justice, (an event which actually took place only after Berger's paper had been published); while the course Muhammad 'Ali advocated would lead to premature routinization, which would be religiously untenable; hence, he was bound to be the loser in the contest, whatever the validity of his claims. Berger, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

18 See the description of these relationships in Muhammad Jawad's treatise in Browne: *Materials..., op. cit.*

19 Esslemont, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

Center on the slopes of Mount Carmel, around the Sepulchre of the Báb and the tomb of Abd'ul Bahá.[20]

From Haifa, Abd'ul Bahá engaged in a vigorous campaign to disseminate the new faith, which led to his well-known trips to Europe and the United States. Groups of followers proliferated in Western countries. Even before Abd'ul Bahá's death, Bahá'ísm started to acquire that cosmopolitan character which is nowadays one of its hallmarks.

Abd'ul Bahá died in 1921 without leaving a male heir. However, instead of establishing, as expected, the Universal House of Justice to take over the leadership of the faith, he surprised many of his followers by designating the young son of his eldest daughter, Shogi Effendi, as his successor, creating for him the title of the Guardian of the Faith,[21] which was not provided for in Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant.

Shogi Effendi was the Guardian of the Faith for more than thirty-six years, from 1921 until his death in 1957. Though his spiritual standing upon accession was much lower than that of his illustrious predecessor, the "aura of his (the latter's) sanctity"[22] fell upon him, and he gradually established himself in a position of absolute and occasionally despotic authority over the world Bahá'í movement. His rule covered a period of radical changes both in the movement itself and in Palestine, bridging, as it were, the British Mandate, the Israeli-Arab War of 1948, and the establishment of the State of Israel. Here we can only touch upon those points in Shogi Effendi's career which had a direct bearing upon our subject.

Shogi Effendi's central concern was with the dissemination, and universalisation, of the new faith. He received a Western education, he had a Canadian wife, and his outlook was much more Western than that of his predecessor. Abd'ul Bahá had already began the movement away from the Iranian and Islamic origins of the Bahá'í faith. This tendency was much intensified by Shogi Effendi and he pursued it deliberately and energetically. His rule signifies the definite break with Islam and the establishment of Bahá'ísm as an independent Western-oriented world-religion. This break was also symbolised by the fact that the Bahá'ís of Haifa gradually instituted their own religious services, independent of those of the Muslim community. They conducted their own marriage ceremonies and they buried their dead separately. But

20 On the development of the Haifa Center see: "Events Connected with the Holy Land and the Growth of the International Center", *The Bahá'í World*, Vol. 12, 1950/54, pp. 32-69.

21 On the Institution of Guardianship, see Berger, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 106.

they did not receive from the British Mandate an official recognition as a separate religious community.[23]

Shogi Effendi also effected a radical transformation of the organisational structure of Bahá'ísm. His main effort was directed towards the establishment of a strong organisational framework for the new religion, focused upon the International Center in Haifa. He lent additional emphasis to the religious significance of Mount Carmel.[24] In order to give adequate visual expression to this significance, he constructed an imposing complex of edifices and gardens on the slope of Mount Carmel, culminating in the gold-domed Sepulchre of the Báb, which was completed in 1953.[25] The International Center became the executive and administrative focus of the Bahá'í Movement, and scores of Bahá'í officials from all parts of the world came to work there.

For his work, Shogi Effendi employed mainly Westerners, particularly Americans, who came to staff the various administrative and executive offices in the International Center in Haifa. He turned away completely from the traditional Irani Bahá'ís, the descendants of the original Companions of Bahá'u'lláh; he even estranged himself from his closest kin, his own mother, who was the daughter of Abd'ul Bahá himself, as well as from his brothers.

The original group of Irani Bahá'ís of Acre, even those who did not break with Abd'ul Bahá, did not approve of Shogi Effendi's succession to the leadership of the faith. He seemed too young and inexperienced for the lofty office to which he was appointed by Abd'ul Bahá. Also, other sons of Bahá'u'lláh were still alive when Abdul Bahá died; foremost among them was Muhammad 'Ali, who, according to the will of the Founder, should have succeeded Abd'ul Bahá. Some Bahá'í families of Acre left the mainstream of the faith in dissent upon Shogi Effendi's accession. Others, including members of Shogi's family, like his own mother and two brothers, were excommunicated by him, owing to their unwillingness to follow what they considered to be arbitrary or haughty orders. Excommunication of various Bahá'í families of Acre started in 1921 and continued until 1963, several years after Shogi Effendi's death. As the ranks of excommunicated Iranis, in

23 This right to conduct marriages was legally sanctioned by a Mandatory regulation of 1939, referring to those religious communities which do not enjoy an officially recognized status. See: A. Rubinstein: *Hamishpat Hakonstitucioni Bemedinat Israel* (The Constitutional Law in the State of Israel), Schocken, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 1969, p. 70 (in Hebrew).

24 See, for example, Shogi Effendi's, "The Spiritual Potencies of that Consecrated Spot", *The Bahá'í World*, Vol. 8, 1938/40, written on the occasion of the transfer of the remains of the brother and mother of Abd'ul Bahá to Mount Carmel.

25 The article, "Events Connected...", *op. cit.*, gives an extensive description of the process of construction of the Haifa Center.

Acre and elsewhere, gradually grew, a new category of Bahá'ís outside the mainstream of Bahá'ísm emerged, known by the term "Ex-communicated". The "Ex-communicated" and the original "Covenant-Breakers" came gradually to include almost all the Irani Bahá'ís of Acre, and indeed of Palestine.

The Covenant Breakers and the Ex-communicated, though few in number, counted among their ranks some of the most distinguished members of the traditional Irani Bahá'í elite, including all the surviving members of the family of the Founder. They were opposed to Shogi's policy of Westernization and of turning away from Islam. However, they did not present any vigorous opposition to Shogi's rule. In 1950, they organised the Bahá'í World Federation, presided over by the last living grandson of the Founder, Amin Effendi; but this organisation was mainly intended to defend the interests of the old-time Bahá'ís and was apparently not really conceived as a world-wide alternative to the mainstream Bahá'í organisation, the Bahá'í Spiritual Assemblies. In any case, it never seriously threatened Shogi's hegemony over the world organisation and not even his standing with the Israeli authorities. The Bahá'ís of Acre claim that after their experience with the mainstream organisation they are wary of authority and do not wish to build up a strong and centralised movement.

Shogi Effendi continued and even intensified the feud with the "Breakers of the Covenant". He published vitriolic attacks on Muhammad 'Ali and his surviving brother Badi'u'lláh, and rejoiced at the death of his opponents.[26] Shogi's struggle with the "Covenant-Breakers" was motivated by some concrete goals, the most important of which were to wring out of the hands of the surviving members of the Founder's family, the remains of those of the deceased members of Bahá'u'lláh's family who did not "break the Covenant" [27] and to gain control over the Bahá'í holy places in Acre which remained in the hands of the Founder's family throughout Abd'ul Bahá's reign. After prolonged litigation, which continued until after the establishment of the State of Israel, Shogi's struggle ended in his almost complete victory. He succeeded in restoring to the Haifa Center control over all the Bahá'í holy places in Acre as well as the Mansion of Bahjí.[28] The authorities of the British Man-

26 See, for example, his attack upon Badi'u'lláh in his "The Spiritual Potencies...", *op. cit.*, where he calls him "...brother and lieutenant of the Focal Center of sedition and Archbreaker of the Covenant, the deceased Muhammad 'Ali". (p. 247); see also "Events Connected...", where the Guardian announces that "God's avenging wrath" had removed another of his opponents in 1952; referring to the death of three other opponents in Persia in 1953, he states that they were "blinded in their perversity". (p. 68).

27 See "The Spiritual Potencies...", *op. cit.*

28 J.R. Gaver, *The Bahá'í Faith: Dawn of a New Day*, Hawthorne Books, New York, 1967, p. 114.

date, and later the State of Israel, assented to Shogi Effendi's claims almost without exception. The dissenting Bahá'ís succeeded only, in an agreement reached in 1952, to secure for themselves limited access to Bahá'u'lláh's tomb, but lost all their rights to the other holy places and cannot even enter them freely. His victory over his opponents signified for Shogi their reduction to complete insignificance.[29]

In addition to his struggle with the "Covenant Breakers" over concrete disputed claims, it seems that Shogi Effendi also pursued a more general policy towards all the Irani Bahá'ís in Palestine and later in Israel, dissenters and supporters alike; this policy was intended to reduce their visibility and, if possible, to lead to their expulsion from the country. His actions in respect of the Irani Bahá'ís lead one to assume that he was trying to repatriate them to Iran or at least to induce or force them to leave the country. To achieve that aim, he used both inducements and threats. He helped some Irani Bahá'í families to dispose of their property and leave the country. He forbade Irani Bahá'ís to marry within the country, and instead attempted to send them to other countries to get married there. Those who refused his orders were excommunicated. It is difficult to detect the precise reasons for this policy, but it might be assumed that it had to do with his aim of separating Bahá'ísm from its Irani and Islamic origins. He strove to present a progressive, forward-looking image to the many foreign Bahá'í visitors who came on pilgrimage to the holy places. The traditional Irani Bahá'ís, so closely related to the Founder and to the origins of the faith, were reminders of a world and life-style from which he strove to separate the new faith. Hence he was determined to get them out of the way.

In 1951, Shogi Effendi appointed a body called 'Hands of the Cause of God', composed of twelve members of diverse national origin, in accordance with Bahá'u'lláh's directives. He named no successor to himself when he died in 1957. In 1963, the Universal House of Justice finally came into being. The Bahá'í faith was now completely separated from any remaining ties with the family of its Founder. In 1971 it received official recognition from the State of Israel as an autonomous religious community. Thereby, its vestigial ties with the Islamic faith were formally and finally cut.

(3) *The Social Structure of the Bahá'í Community of Acre*

The vigorous development of the world Bahá'í Movement left the Acre Bahá'í community completely untouched. The flow of pilgrims who came to visit Bahá'u'lláh in Acre abated after his son, Abd'ul Bahá, moved to Haifa. The Irani Bahá'ís who remained in Acre were gradually cut off from the

29 See, for example, "Events Connected...", pp. 66-69.

mainstream of Bahá'í life as well as from their homeland. They have survived until today as a small group of families known by the appellation of "Irani", which now serves as their actual surname. Most of these families are descendants of the family of the Founder or one of his Companions and attendants. For more than three-quarters of a century, this group has lived in Acre, a congeries of a few families, clearly separated from the rest of the local society. The social structure of this group and the difficulties which it has encountered in maintaining its identity will be the subject of this section.

While Bahá'u'lláh and his family left the inner city even during the former's lifetime and moved to the mansion of Bahjí, the other Bahá'ís remained within the confines of the walled city. After their prolonged imprisonment ended, they started to work in the city, predominantly, it seems, as shopkeepers. The stream of pilgrims to Acre brought a constant flow of presents and the economic situation of the Bahá'ís, particularly of the family of the Founder, gradually improved.

The decisive turn of events, however, came with the British conquest of Palestine in the First World War. The Bahá'ís eagerly awaited the arrival of the British, and there was much rejoicing.[30] The Bahá'í leadership had apparently been in touch with the British during the last years of Turkish rule. After the War, many Bahá'ís in Acre received from the British Mandatory Government grants of land in the vicinity of Acre "for services rendered". The nature of these services was not made explicit in the grants.

Many of the Bahá'í families now became landowners; foremost among these were the members of the Family of the Founder, several of whom owned land in different parts of the country.

During the Mandate, most of the Acre Bahá'ís abandoned the walled city and established themselves in mansions on the outskirts of the city. They built spacious houses amidst orchards and gardens, surrounded by high stone walls.

Judging by their life-style and values, the Irani Bahá'ís of Acre attempted to re-establish in their new surroundings a traditional way of life, which they had been used to, or aspired to, in their homeland. Landed property played a particularly important role as a basis for social status in that life-style, and continues to be an important status criterion among the older generation and the more traditional families, until the present.

During the Mandatory period, the Bahá'ís of Acre, though considered a sect, remained firmly within the confines of Islam. Abd'ul Bahá himself, before he left Acre during the last years of the Ottoman rule, had the use of a separate room in the central mosque of Acre and on some occasions led the prayers in the mosque. The last direct descendant of the Founder is until

30 Esslemont, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

the present day a frequent visitor at the mosque, where he meets socially with the few remaining elder observant, mosque-centered Muslims of the city.

The Bahá'ís also received, and continue to receive, religious services from the official Muslim establishment in the city. After a private ceremony, their marriages are formally contracted before the Muslim Kaddi; their dead are buried in the local Muslim cemetery.

The Bahá'ís of Acre were not much affected by the Israeli-Arab War of 1948. Most of them left the country during the actual fighting; but, unlike the Arabs who fled the country, they were permitted re-entry after the war and their possessions were returned to them. However, the context of their existence changed quite radically: before the 1948 War, Acre was a purely Arab city. The turmoil of the War and its aftermath led to the abandonment of the city by most of the Arab population, and especially by the traditional elite. The Arabs who remained were concentrated in the old city, far from the area where the Bahá'ís lived. The newer part of the Mandatory Arab city was now settled by Jews; large new housing schemes sprang up around the older urban nucleus. Jews now comprise about 3/4 of a total of about 35,000 inhabitants. The rest are Arabs; among the latter the Muslims constitute around 80 per cent, while the rest are Christians.

The Bahá'ís of Acre are a very small group. They comprise elements of only six extended families, three of which are concentrated in Acre proper, while two moved to a compound on the outskirts of the nearby town of Nahariya. Most of the males of these families continue to work in Acre. In Acre also lives the last direct descendant of the Founder, the only surviving member of the Founder's family in Israel. Altogether the Bahá'í group numbers only a few scores of adults and their offspring. In addition, a few Irani Bahá'ís belonging to the dissenting faction live in Haifa; other members of the Acre families live dispersed in various Middle Eastern countries and in the West. We shall not deal with these in this paper.

The changes in their surroundings profoundly affected the social and economic conditions of the life of the remaining Bahá'ís in Acre. They found themselves socially and ecologically isolated — a remnant of a traditional world in modern or modernizing surroundings. Outwardly, however, no great change occurred in their way of life. The Acre families continued to live in the same locations to which they had moved during the Turkish and Mandate periods; some members of the Founder's family live in a house adjacent to the Bahjí mansion — they are in fact the family which litigated with the Haifa Center over the expansion of the Bahjí gardens into their lands in 1952. The other Bahá'í families live in close proximity to each other on the margins of the Mandatory city. With the recent rapid expansion of the city, its center

moved further and further away from the older parts of the city; the area where the Bahá'ís live, hence, came to be close to the new urban center. The value of their lands rose precipitously. This ecological change is one factor which causes a change in their style of life. One man has already taken advantage of the new situation and put his land, for compensation, at the disposal of a builder, who built the tallest and most modern building in Acre on the site. The owner of the land now lives in a flat in this building. He is the only Bahá'í of Acre who thus moved completely away from the traditional style of dwelling of the Bahá'ís. Since the other Bahá'ís in a similar location are probably experiencing the same ecological pressures, it is to be expected that in time they will follow suit.

Ecological pressures are only one of the factors which are changing the Bahá'ís traditional way of life. Turning now to the economic structure of the Bahá'í community, we find that a few families and individuals are still landowners of the traditional type occupied mainly or solely with the management of their estates. Several other members of the older generation of Bahá'ís are in business — as e.g. wholesalers of groceries and wines. They too, then, are active in the traditional sector of the economy. In the younger generation, there are some beginnings of change. Several younger Bahá'ís are professionals; for example, one is a doctor and two others are social workers. Not a single Bahá'í, however, works in a technical occupation or has studied for a technical degree. The move towards more modern occupations, then, has not been an abrupt one; the majority of the Bahá'ís are still located in the more traditional sector of the economy of the city. Their occupational position seems to be similar to that of the higher strata of the local Arab society prior to the 1948 war. Since this traditional Arab elite abandoned the city during the war, the Bahá'ís of Acre are one of the few remaining elite groups in the non-Jewish population. One of their number, indeed, is considered to be the richest non-Jewish inhabitant of the city. Though they are not deeply involved in local Arab social life, but rather keep to themselves, the Bahá'ís are still enjoying a high traditional social status in the community.

The Bahá'ís are also not involved in the turbulent political life of the community. Therefore it came as a surprise to me to find one of the most prominent members of the community as a candidate for the local elections in the last place on the minority list attached to one of the Jewish religious parties. This list caters to Arabs and receives some support from Muslim religious officials. The last place on the slate of candidates is considered honorary; since it is obvious that the incumbent cannot possibly be elected, it is often reserved for large contributors to party funds and other persons held in high esteem. My informant explained, in response to my astonished inquiry, that "we do not have Mr. X (a secretary of the Haifa Center of foreign origin)

to look after our interests" (and hence they are left to their own devices to look for political access). Their alignment with an Orthodox Jewish religious party becomes more easily understandable if one remembers that this party controls the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which deals among other things with the affairs of the Bahá'í community in Israel.

Culturally, the Bahá'ís of Acre still follow their tradition: their background is strictly traditional, as can easily be seen from reading any description of the way Bahá'u'lláh's or even Abd'ul Bahá's households were managed. While the official Bahá'í faith under Shogi Effendi broke away from Oriental tradition and became Westernized, the Acre Bahá'ís, since they broke with Haifa, did not experience a thorough-going Westernization. The older generation still behaves much as the traditional Middle-Eastern land-owning class used to do; the younger generation, though outwardly modern, also still entertains basically traditional notions concerning family loyalty, family honour and the importance of wealth as a basis of status.

The Bahá'ís of Acre do not live a life oriented predominantly, or even primarily, towards religion, as could be expected of a group descended from the Founder of the faith and his closest Companions. Outwardly, they do not manifest any signs of specific Bahá'í religiosity: they did not form a local "spiritual assembly", nor do they possess their own place for religious observances. As they explain it, religion is for them an individual and personal matter. Some of my informants claimed that Bahá'ísm is not really a religion, but a way of life, something one carries in one's heart; outside manifestations of religiosity are hence unimportant. A person remains a Bahá'í, in this sense, even if he marries into another faith. However little they manifest their faith outwardly, the Bahá'ís assured me that they remained steadfastly attached to their Bahá'í identity.

Considering the similarity in their social, cultural and religious background, and the fact that they are a very small group cut-off from their homeland as well as from the mainstream of their faith, one would expect the Bahá'ís of Acre to be a cohesive closely-knit community. In actual fact this is not the case. Rather, there is a great deal of estrangement between the several Bahá'í families and almost no socializing. Though there are no overt conflicts, every family keeps to itself and does not interact much with the others. The Bahá'ís of Acre are socially more of a congeries of individual families than a structural group.

The mutual isolation of the Bahá'í families can also be observed in their marriage patterns. There is almost no intermarriage between the Bahá'í families of Acre. In the younger generation, intermarriage is practically non-existent, in spite of the availability of marriageable grooms and brides. Hence, no ties of kinship relate the various extended families to each other.

The Bahá'ís explain their lack of cohesion by saying that their faith does not necessarily encourage them to associate or intermarry with each other. They do not express distress over the isolation of the Bahá'ís from each other.

The deeper reasons for this mutual isolation are not easy to assess. Apparently, they are rooted in the history of the Bahá'ís in Acre. Though the original Bahá'ís who accompanied Bahá'u'lláh to Acre shared a common destiny, they were apparently not a socially homogeneous group. Rather, they were socially differentiated into several categories, depending upon their closeness to the Founder. Muhammad Jawad, for example, mentions five such categories in his report on the Bahá'ís who assembled for the reading of Bahá'u'lláh's will: "... the *Aghsans*, (sons of Bahá'u'lláh), *Afnan* (kinsmen of the Báb), *Muhajirin* (exiles), *Mujawirin* (settlers in Akka) and *Musafirin* (temporary visitors)".[31]

Though these traditional distinctions have long been obliterated, the family of the Founder still keeps somewhat apart from the other Bahá'ís. The rest of the Bahá'í families are also not of equal status — some of the families consider themselves of higher status since they claim to be directly descended from personal attendants of the Founder.

In addition to this initial status difference, past developments in the faith have sown disunity among the Acre adherents. Though nowadays none of them belong to the Haifa Center, they left the mainstream of the faith at different periods and under varying circumstances; some, like the members of the Founder's family, are "Covenant-breakers", that is, they were separated from the mainstream already upon Abd'ul Bahá's ascension or during his reign. Others left when Shogi Effendi succeeded Abd'ul Bahá, while the rest were excommunicated by the former. During prolonged periods there was intense infighting between the feuding factions within the tiny community. Though the causes of that infighting are by now a thing of the past, the estrangement to which they led between the families did not completely disappear. We shall return to the reasons for this perpetuation of the impact of past conflicts on present relationships in our concluding analysis.

(4) *The Relationship of the Bahá'ís of Acre to the Haifa Center, the State of Israel and Islam*

One of the chief points of dissent between the Bahá'ís of Acre and Abd'ul Bahá, was the latter's tendency to universalize the Bahá'í faith; the former were intent on preserving their links with Islam and continued to consider their faith as the highest manifestation of Islam and not as a new religion.

31 Browne, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

They therefore opposed and resented the religious policies of Abd'ul Bahá and even more those of his successor, Shogi Effendi.

The Western-oriented policy of Abd'ul Bahá and Shogi led to the gradual transfer of the chief offices of the faith to Western officials who nowadays manage the Haifa Center. The resentment of the Bahá'ís of Acre, which was originally directed against Abd'ul Bahá and later Shogi Effendi, has now become a general resentment against the foreigners or "Americans", who dominate the faith and even manage the Bahá'í holy places in Acre. Some of my informants talked derisively of these people, who, according to them, have been Bahá'ís for only a few years and do not even know the history of the faith, and yet want to deny to the very descendants of the Founder and his Companions the right to call themselves Bahá'ís. This resentment against foreigners is sometimes expressed in terms which remind one of the attitudes of "oppressed peoples" towards imperialists or invaders. While for Abd'ul Bahá and Shogi the universalization of the faith was a virtue, the Acre Bahá'ís conceive of it rather as a sell-out to the West.

Though vehemently opposed to Haifa in their verbal utterances, the Bahá'ís of Acre are by and large resigned to their inferior position in relation to Haifa. They recognize their failure to sway the Bahá'í world movement in their direction. The feud between Acre and Haifa has not flared up again since 1952. There is not much fighting spirit left after eighty years of conflict and most of the Bahá'ís of Acre mind their own affairs and do not pay much attention to the feud in their daily lives. Since there exists no burning unresolved issue between Acre and Haifa, there is little incentive to rekindle the feud. This may be one of the reasons why the Acre community is socially disjointed — there is nothing left to fight for, so there is no incentive to unite forces. Even the organization of the dissenting faction, the Bahá'í World Federation, is a marginal affair; intent in the main on protecting the interests of the dissenters, it does not seriously challenge the Haifa Center, or provide an alternative to its leadership of the world Bahá'í movement.

On its part, the Haifa Center simply ignores the Acre group and maintains that there are no Irani Bahá'ís in Israel, but only people "who call themselves Bahá'ís".[32] The leaders of the Haifa Center, nowadays mostly Westerners with little personal involvement in the feuds of the past, find it most expedient coolly to disregard the existence of the dissenting Bahá'ís in Acre. There is absolutely no interaction whatever between the two factions of the faith. The guardians of the Bahá'í Holy Places in Acre, representing the Haifa Center, are under strict orders not to allow entrance to any local Bahá'í; an exception is made of the tomb of the Founder, as agreed in 1952.

32 Quotation from interview with representative of the International Center in Haifa.

The resentment which the Bahá'ís of Acre feel towards the Haifa Center also affects the attitude of the Acre Bahá'ís towards the Israeli authorities. As Iranis, they do not take sides in the Jewish-Arab conflict. They take up a neutral stance on all questions relating to the conflict, whether on the general, national or local level. However, they resent what looks to them like discrimination against the Acre Bahá'ís in favour of the Haifa Center, which has in the past consistently enjoyed the support of the authorities.

The Israeli authorities have no ideological reasons for prefering one Bahá'í faction to the other. The preference given to the Bahá'í Center of Haifa is largely a matter of convenience. The Haifa Center represents a well-known international faith, with communities of believers in many Western countries. The Acre Bahá'ís, on the other hand, are just a congeries of a few families. The Haifa Center is led and managed by Westerners and has detached itself from traditional Islam. The Bahá'ís of Acre are in many respects close to Islam and the Arab community. The Israeli authorities find it generally politically expedient to support the smaller minorities against the largest Arab-Muslim minority. Accordingly, they prefer to support the Haifa Center. An agreement was reached with the Haifa Center, according to which the Bahá'ís will enjoy religious freedom in Israel, but will desist from proselytizing in the country, among Jews and Arabs alike. This agreement is strictly adhered to by the Haifa Center. It is a sign of the good mutual relations between the Haifa Center and the Israeli authorities that the Bahá'ís recently achieved official recognition as a separate religious community. It is characteristic that in the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs, Bahá'í affairs are dealt with not by the Department for Muslim and Druse Affairs, but by the Department for Christian Affairs. This arrangement was made at the request of the Bahá'ís themselves.

The Bahá'ís of Acre regard the Israeli authorities as allied with the "foreigners" of Haifa. On their part, the authorities recognize, in principle, the existence of the Bahá'í families in Acre; but their precise status has not yet been formally defined. The recent formal recognition of the Bahá'ís as a separate "religious community" in Israel has created a delicate situation: the recognition did not expressly exclude the Bahá'ís of Acre; their status remained somewhat obscure. The problem of their precise status has not cropped up until now, because they have not yet attempted to avail themselves of the rights which go with the recognition of the Bahá'ís as a separate religious community. When they will eventually do so, the Israeli authorities might find themselves in a difficult impasse, since the Haifa Center will probably fight any attempt to extend recognition to the Acre faction, while the Government will hardly be able to show legal cause why it should not accord to it such recognition.

The constellation of circumstances surrounding the Bahá'ís of Acre has driven them to ally themselves more and more closely with the local Arab, particularly Muslim, population. It is true that in the past the Bahá'ís, as a heterodox Muslim sect, suffered from religious persecution. But the salience of the religious factor has much declined in recent years, and there is no animosity among the Muslims of Acre towards the Bahá'ís. Many local Muslims in fact still consider them members of the Islamic faith. Indeed, as mentioned before, the Bahá'ís of Acre never dissociated themselves fully from Islam. In the first Israeli census in 1948, the Bahá'ís of Acre declared themselves to be "Bahá'ís-Muslims". Their relationship with the Muslims has, however, become much closer in recent years through a growing number of intermarriages between Bahá'í girls and Muslim men. Indeed, almost all the marriages of the Bahá'ís of Acre in the last decade have been of this type. The opposite kind of intermarriage, however, has not yet taken place: none of the local Bahá'í men has married a Muslim girl; though there are several cases of intermarriage with Jewish and Christian girls. There are also a few adult Bahá'í males who are still bachelors. Several others are married to Bahá'í women (pertaining to the dissenting faction) from abroad, mainly from Iran.

The explanation given for the fact that Bahá'í males do not marry Muslim girls is usually that Muslim fathers are still reluctant to give their daughters in marriage to Bahá'ís.[33] This state of things indicates a still somewhat ambiguous position of the Bahá'ís in relationship to Islam: though they are referred to as Muslims and use Muslim religious services, they are not yet fully accepted back into the Muslim community; while they themselves are reluctant to remove the remaining partitions which separate them from the Muslim community and thereby lose their Bahá'í identity.

It seems, however, that under the present circumstances the Bahá'ís of Acre will not be able to continue to exist as a distinct religious group for more than one or at most two generations. Owing to the high incidence of intermarriage, particularly of Bahá'í females with Muslim males, the present generation of Bahá'ís will leave few Bahá'í offsprings. There is every chance that in the generation thereafter their number will decline even further or that they will disappear completely. The informants I talked to about this contingency were not much disturbed by it; to their mind, since Bahá'ísm is something a man bears in his heart, the continued existence of a distinct

33 The situation in this respect is very similar to that existing in the area of Jewish-Moslem intermarriage: there were about a dozen cases in which Moslem men married Jewish girls, but there was no case of a Moslem girl marrying a Jew. See E. Cohen: "Mixed Marriages in an Israeli Town", *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 11, No. 7, 1969, pp. 41-50.

Bahá'í community is unimportant. Our evidence, then, points to the conclusion that the Bahá'ís of Acre are gradually being re-absorbed by Islam owing to external isolation from the larger Bahá'í community and to lack of internal cohesion.

(5) *Discussion*

The purpose of this paper was to examine a case of sectarian development in Islam, with reference to the general problem of similarities vs. peculiarities of sectarianism in different religious settings. In the course of this paper, we followed the differential developmental dynamics of the two religious factions which arose after the death of the Founder of Bahá'ísm. The one, led by the Founder's successor, Abd'ul Bahá, and based in Haifa, gradually moved away from the origins of the faith in Iranian Shi'ite Islam and became a new and autonomous world religion which expressly repudiated its Islamic origins and the believers in which are predominantly Westerners. The other faction, based in Acre, was led by Abd'ul Bahá's half-brother, Muhammad 'Ali, and counted in its ranks many of the original Bahá'ís who accompanied the Founder to Acre; this faction maintained its allegiance to Islam. In fact, in Acre it is at present threatened with disappearance as a separate group through re-absorption into the Muslim community. In the struggle between the two factions, the Haifa branch came out victorious: oriented to the West and affiliating itself with the Mandatory powers and later with Israeli authorities, it succeeded in overpowering its rivals both in Palestine and abroad and finally reduced them to a small and uninfluential splinter group. The more tradition-oriented Acre faction was unable to cope with the forces of modernity which came to the Middle East with the demise of the Ottoman Empire; it was close to the traditional Muslim society in its outlook and style of life, and experienced a similar decline.

Other writers have already noted some of the striking similarities between the split between Abd'ul Bahá and Muhammad 'Ali and the earlier split between Bahá'u'lláh and Subḥ-i-Azal.[34] In both cases, the split occurred between two half-brothers; in both cases, there was a more "progressive" and a more "traditional" faction — the first intent on the universalization of the new faith, the second attached to its Islamic origins. Browne says of the difference between Subḥ-i-Azal and Bahá'u'lláh that it resembled that between St. Peter and St. Paul: "it concerned the question whether Christianity was to be a Jewish sect or a new 'World-religion'".[35] The same divergence of opinion existed between Muhammad 'Ali and Abd'ul Bahá.

34 The first to draw attention to the similarity was E.G. Browne; see: "Bāb, Bābism", *op. cit.*, p. 304; see also Berger, *op. cit*, p. 102.

35 Browne: "Bāb, Bābism", *op. cit*, p. 303.

The more traditional faction lost out in both cases: the Azalis quickly sank into oblivion. The supporters of Muhammad 'Ali, though they still exist, have been reduced by their adversaries to relative insignificance. In Israel at least they are threatened with extinction.

Finally, there is in both cases an interesting sociological correlative to the ideological difference between the factions: the more traditional one enjoyed the support of the majority of the prominent followers of the deceased leader of the sect: Subḥ-i-Azal, according to Browne, enjoyed the support of some of the surviving original disciples of the Bāb — the so-called "Letters of the living";[36] while Muhammad 'Ali enjoyed the support of the members of Bahá'u'lláh's family as well as that of many of his companions. The more progressive leader, then, had to build up his following from the newer and more marginal membership of the faith, against the opposition of the "establishment".

No comprehensive attempt to ascertain the sociological causes of the success of the progressive faction and the failure of the traditional one will be made within the scope of this paper.[37] This outcome had obviously to do with the beginnings of broader processes of social upheaval and modernization which started to transform traditional Middle Eastern society at the end of the 19th century and made orthodox religious practices less and less satisfactory for the religious seeker. It has also to do with the new receptivity of Western Christians for Oriental religious ideas. It is interesting to note in this connection the complete failure of the Bahá'ís in the stagnant society of Acre to which they were exiled, as well as the later adaptation to that society of the more traditional faction — the followers of Muhammad 'Ali.

The phenomenon of internal rifts and divisions is a common one in sectarian movements. Though such divisions are usually clad in theological terms, they often express rivalries between competing leaders, each of whom becomes the head of an independent new group after the split.[38] Among modern Christian and particularly Protestant sects, the factions emerging out of a schism often compete with each other as to which will be more radical or extremist in the interpretation of the original doctrine;[39] they share basically the same theo-

36 *Ibid., p.* 302.

37 P. Berger's attempt to explain this phenomenon in religious-sociological terms has been mentioned before (note 17). But he deals only with the endogenic factors in the situation; a complementary analysis of the exogenic factors — relating to the general societal conditions which made other Muslims receptive to progressive ideas — is called for.

38 Such processes of fission of sectarian movements were, in recent times, particularly conspicuous among the Pentecostals; see: B.R. Wilson: *Religious Sects...*, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

39 See B.R. Wilson: An Analysis of Sect Development, in B.R. Wilson (ed.): *Patterns*

logical position and compete for the allegiance of essentially the same religious public.

The schism in the Bahá'í movement — and I suspect this applies to most sectarian schisms in traditional or modernizing societies — is characterized by an essentially different religious dynamics: the sect grew originally within the confines of a stagnant society and a rigid, doctrinaire religious establishment; it was feared and persecuted not only because of its heretical doctrine — i.e. the denial of the Islamic dogma that Muhammad is the last Prophet — but also because it threatened the established religious and social order. The feuding factions emerging from the two successive schisms within the sect in fact represent conflicting attitudes to the problem of the relationship of the new sect to the world and the surrounding social and religious order: whereas the more traditional factions, first the Azalis and later the adherents of Muhammad 'Ali, were of a more quietist disposition and actually sought accommodation[40] within the existing order, the more progressive factions — Bahá'u'lláh's and later Abd'ul Bahá's — were of a more activist and revolutionary disposition; they sought to usher in a New Era and thus, by implication, destroy the old order. The schism started, in both cases, as a traditional fraternal feud over inheritance of the leadership of the sect; but the factions quickly adopted opposing doctrinal positions. The more conservative faction was in each case supported by the older sectarian "establishment", which apparently had a greater stake in the system than the more peripheral rank-and-file. It is important to note, also, that the more progressive faction turned in both cases to a radically different public than the traditional one — it sought its adherents outside the fold of Islam. This in turn brought forth the universalization of the faith and its separation from the mother religion.

P. Berger, in his analysis of the historical dynamics of the Bahá'í movement, claims that the faction led by Muhammad 'Ali pressed for premature "legal-rational routinization", whereas the one led by Abd'ul Bahá experienced a gradual reduction of charisma from one leader of the faith to another.[41] In the long run, however, the Haifa faction, rather than that of Acre,

of Sectarianism, op. cit., p. 36. This phenomenon of sectarian schism should not be confused with the tendency of radical sects to split off from more conservative churches or denominations, which do not satisfy the religious needs of the adherents.

40 On the importance of "accommodation" as a factor which reduces the intensity of sectarianism, see W. Muelder: From Sect to Church, in: J.M. Yinger: *Religion, Society and the Individual*, Macmillan, New York, 1957, pp. 480-488.

41 Berger, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

became the more "legally-rationally" routinized one, as attested by its complex and formal organizational structure; while the Acre faction, though small in number and thus outwardly resembling a sect, sunk into a kind of ossification. I did not find in the literature an adequate term to describe the social structure of such a group; since I came across other groups with a similar structure, I propose a special term to describe this generic type of religious organization: "a residual religious community". Such a community is either a remnant of a sect which was side-tracked by its rivals, or a once important religious organization, such as a church or a denomination, which has gradually been reduced to relative insignificance. The Bahá'ís of Acre are an example of the former. The Samaritans are a good example of the latter and others could probably easily be found among some of the old Eastern Christian churches and other remnants of once widespread religions in the Middle East. In spite of their diverse origins, such groups have several characteristics in common: they generally entertain a defensive attitude—they strive to protect their right to exist and their interests within the broader society; but they do not attempt to spread their belief. We have seen that the Bahá'ís of Acre established an organization mainly for the purpose of defending the interests of the dissenters against encroachment from Haifa. Their leadership admits its failure in the conflict with Haifa and has in fact given up hope of any radical changes in the future which could catapult it into world leadership of the Bahá'ís.

The defensive attitude of the "residual religious community" is often caused by its rather vague status within the broader society. Being a small group, it does not enjoy a clearly recognized separate religious status, and the danger of encroachment by a larger group always exists. Thus, the Bahá'ís of Acre are not officially recognized either as Muslims or as Bahá'ís. The Samaritans, though a distinct religious group, also have not been officially recognized as a separate religious community. Their precise relationship to the Jewish community remains vague.

Turning now to their internal structure, we find that such communities, rather than forming a solidary, unified group, are internally sharply divided. Such a division might be of old standing, but it continues to determine the relationship within the community: we have seen that the internal division of the Bahá'ís of Acre represents, so to speak, an ossified accumulation of the conflicts of the past. The Samaritans are also rigidly subdivided.[42]

42 The Samaritans are divided into five extended families which relate directly to three tribes of Israel; their traditional social structure is organized in accordance with the relative status of these tribes among Jacob's descendants. The author has studied the social structure of the Samaritans, but the results have not yet been published.

It is remarkable that some residual religious communities, in spite of small size, ossification and loss of religious élan, often remain preserved for centuries; the Samaritans are an extreme example of such a case. The Bahá'ís of Acre, however, are threatened with extinction. The difference between these two cases is related to their different ability to maintain their "social boundaries",[43] i.e. to preserve a distinct identity, clearly circumscribed membership and a separate institutional system. I assume that this ability depends on the background of such communities. Those communities which are descended from past denominations or churches, like the Samaritans, would tend to preserve their social boundaries rigidly, while those which are remnants of sects which failed to "take-off", like the Acre Bahá'ís, would keep less rigid boundaries and hence will more easily become assimilated or absorbed by the surrounding society.

I would still like to point out, in conclusion, that the fate of the Bahá'ís of Acre is by no means sealed. Whether they will accept the prospect of their demise stoically, or whether the full realization of that contingency will jolt them into an act of social and religious realignment and reunification, remains for the future to decide.

43 For the concept of "social boundaries", see Y. Cohen: Social Boundary Systems. *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1969; F. Barth (ed.): *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. George Allen and Unwin, London, 1969.